

**SCTMG 2021****International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»****ALIMENTARY CULTURE OF THE ASTRAKHAN REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION**

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**Abstract**

The article presents an analysis of the alimentary culture of the Astrakhan region as an example of successful interaction of representatives of different peoples and religious confessions in a multicultural region. Ethnic alimentation patterns are formed under the influence of many factors. In this case, we can talk about the geographical, natural and climatic conditions of habitation, social and economic structure, religious beliefs. In traditional cultures, food customs and traditions were carefully preserved; they are passed on from generation to generation. This is how our daily eating habits were born. They fixed the key cultural codes underlying ethnic and national cultures. Food patterns changed slightly with the change of habitat, mode of economic activity and under the influence of neighboring peoples. In fact, an ethnos “delegates” its qualities to food, ethnos fixes information about itself in it. Thus, we say that through food, through a symbolic exchange of products, through an invitation to the table, through participation in joint meals, the process of interaction of cultures takes place. This is a special case of communication, which allows overcoming the fear of the Outsider, to make it understandable. To make someone else's own means to contribute to the development of a society without conflicts. In the region, which is home to many nationalities, traditions of peaceful existence have been developing for centuries. The alimentary culture played an important role in this process. Through it, the Outsider is included in the cultural tradition and the system of cultural security.

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## 1. Introduction

For a long time, the task of interaction between different dissimilar cultures, a different way of life has been being solved at the interstate level. In the modern world, the situation has changed dramatically, which is associated, among other things, with the intensified migration processes within countries. In these conditions, one of the main problems is the problem of perception of the Outsider living nearby. In the process of globalization, representatives of different ethnic groups and cultures are converging, but the very fact of this convergence – often in many respects “mechanical” and territorial – does not facilitate understanding between the participants in this process, who do not automatically become “insiders” just by themselves. Therefore, the inclusion of the figure of the Stranger into “insiders” system of cultural security is an important task that must be solved both in the process of everyday practices and at the state level. In the course of intercultural interaction, many ways of accepting the Outsider are formed. One of the most effective special cases of overcoming fear of the Outsider, involving him in the cultural tradition and, therefore, understanding him, is the joint consumption of food. This tradition employs deep, archaic mechanisms not only to “recognize” the Outsider as such, but also to “recode” his status into a friendlier one. Food habits of ethnic groups and nations are one of the most stable traditions, since they contain information about preferred foods and dishes and related prohibitions and restrictions; therefore, it can be argued that they contain cultural codes embedded at the level of national identity, on which the rest of the elements of culture are based. It is in this understanding that the term “alimentary culture” is used that was introduced into scientific circulation by Yakushenkov and Sun (2015).

## 2. Problem Statement

In the modern world, against the background of the crises generated by globalization, there is a gradual blurring of boundaries between national cultures and loss of their identity. The natural result of these processes is efforts to compensate for this damage, which is manifested, among other things, in relation to alimentary culture as one of the most effective ways of constructive communication. An example of this kind of interaction is the Astrakhan region, inhabited by representatives of many nationalities and religious confessions. The variety of participants in the dialogue determines the difficulties that arise at different stages and in the entire range of dialogue between them: from everyday contacts to government tasks.

## 3. Research Questions

Palatkin (2019) characterizes alimentary culture as

*the culture of consumption and production of food – the basic part of ethnic or national culture, functioning in society through a system of food codes that include general principles that determine the variety of options for the food system (cooking and consumption of food), and also determine the mechanisms of meaning generation in the sphere of food consumption. (p. 88)*

And in this context, we can talk about alimentary culture as an important component of cultural self-identification, primarily national and confessional. The English-speaking scientific tradition interprets the term “alimentary” as the process of food consumption (Hymen, 2009), and also denotes metaphorical parallels of food culture that bring it closer to other spheres of culture, such as gender, sex, and the picture of the world (Schoenfeldt, 1999).

The alimentary culture of the Astrakhan region is unique in nature, since it reflects the entire centuries-old history of this region, the peculiarities of the life and worldview of its inhabitants.

*The diversity of national cultures of the Lower Volga region, the historical neighborhood and mixing of different peoples and ethnic groups, as well as geographical, agro-climatic and historical features have allowed the formation of a special cultural phenomenon, such as the Astrakhan cuisine. (Karabaeva & Lukyanchenko, 2014, p. 65)*

It has become an integral part of the culture of the Astrakhan Territory, it reflects the history of the region, life and worldview of local residents.

The territory of the Northern Caspian region, where representatives of different linguistic groups, ethnic groups and religions live together, can be characterized as a crossroads of cultures; respectively, there is a mixture and mutual influence of national traditions in food, which formed the unity of the alimentary code. Since nutritional priorities are represented here by both European and Asian traditions, we can talk about the complementarity of nutritional codes.

The food culture of the Astrakhan people was influenced by the cuisines of various nations. Many ethnic and folk traditions have been preserved, passed down from generation to generation. We are talking about the products used, and about the composition and methods of preparing dishes, either everyday or festive or ceremonial ones, about the rules of etiquette, etc. Astrakhan cuisine was formed as a result of mixing various national cuisines. But it was the existing wealth of the Volga region that determined its key features. Nomadic tribes, even during the transition to a sedentary lifestyle, retained their love for meat and dairy products (Journey to the Caspian capital).

Of course, one of the defining facts that have a significant impact on the alimentary culture of this land is its geographical position. The climatic conditions are quite severe, the climate of the Astrakhan region is sharply continental: high temperatures in summer and low temperatures in winter. It is the climatic conditions that have had a significant impact on the methods of cooking, consumption and storage of food: it is prepared so that it is preserved for a long time, therefore, traditionally food was steamed, dried or boiled. This feature is present in all national cuisines of Astrakhan. For example, the main dish of fish, which quickly deteriorates in the Astrakhan heat, is “balyk”, dried fish. It became the basis for national fish dishes among the Tatars, Russians, Nogais, Kazakhs and other peoples of Astrakhan. The climatic conditions of Astrakhan also influenced the popularity of the drink, the recipe of which was borrowed from the Kalmyks (one of the peoples inhabiting the region). This is “Kalmyk” tea. It is prepared on the basis of green tea and added milk, salt, oil and interior fat. Traditional Russian cuisine has also contributed to the formation of the alimentary culture of the region, for example, all residents are especially fond of pies stuffed with minced fish stewed with onions and fresh cabbage.

The alimentary culture of the Astrakhan land is the result of the mutual influence and interpenetration of traditional recipes and dishes of various peoples, the recipes of which are distinguished by their originality and sophistication of tastes.

“The intercultural dialogue in Astrakhan has always been structured in such a way that it took into account the specifics of the multinational region. ... While the holiday of Kurban-Bairam, just like Easter, Shrovetide, Nauryz, is citywide and is celebrated by all polyethnic population” (Romanova & Topchiev, 2013, p. 16). It is the folk holidays that are regularly held in the Astrakhan region that become the place where all Astrakhan residents, regardless of age, nation or gender, get to know the traditions of their neighbors through their traditional national dishes, the so-called “delicious acquaintances”.

For instance, Maslenitsa is always widely and cheerfully celebrated. This is a holiday of the Eastern Slavs and begins history from pagan times. During this time, a lot of traditions and customs appeared, and pancakes became its main symbol only in the 19th century. Rosy and oily pancakes, of course, similar to the hot and spring Sun, are present on the tables of all Astrakhan residents.

Navruz is one of the brightest and oldest holidays celebrated in Astrakhan all over the world. It presents the national cuisine of the Tatar, Kazakh, Nogai, Uzbek, Azerbaijani, Tajik, Turkmen, Turkish, Chechen, Ingush societies, the peoples of Dagestan and the representative office of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, the Astrakhan Tatars possess recipes for making jam from various vegetables. This is one of the few nationalities that has developed and mastered the recipe for making jam from tomatoes or walnuts. If we talk about the modern alimentary culture of the Tatars, then we see a strong influence of the Russian national tradition, for example, many Tatars liked the Russian version of Olivier salad and pies with various fillings. Great attention is paid to the dough when making pies. At the same time, housewives strive to learn the secrets of delicious dough in various national cuisines, for example, from Jews, Kalmyks, Germans, Armenians.

All traditional national dishes of the Tatars and Bashkirs are presented at the annual folk festival of the end of spring field work at the “Plow Festival” (Sabantuy). Traditional Tatar dishes are shurpa, beshbarmak, azu, balish, chak-chak. All Tatar dishes, from soups and stews to pastries and sweet desserts, convey the people's attachment to simple and nutritious food, which is mainly made from meat, potatoes and dough, always in huge quantities, with the aim of satisfying and tasty feeding as many people as possible.

Kazakh national holidays are widely celebrated in the Astrakhan region: “Zhailau toi” (the holiday of transition to summer pastures) and “Zholdastyk-toi” (the holiday of friends). Kazakh national dishes are traditionally based on meat and dairy products. Meat dishes of camel, lamb, horse meat and beef predominate. Fish and vegetable dishes are typical of Kazakhs living in the Astrakhan region. As a rule, yurts are set up where guests are treated to Kazakh cuisine: beshbarmak, manty, kuyrdak, sorpa, boursak. Beshbarmak is prepared for receiving important and dear guests or for big holidays. Beshbarmak is a combination of boiled meat and noodles. According to tradition, meat should be finely chopped. Large pieces in the dish are considered as a sign of disrespect for the guest or as a lack of cooking skills for this national Kazakh dish. The noodles, in turn, should be in the form of small rectangles. Beshbarmak is translated as “five fingers”, because it is customary to eat the dish without using cutlery. The name “manty is translated from Turkic as “stuffed head”. Manti are minced meat wrapped in thinly rolled

dough that are steamed. A multi-tiered wooden tray is installed on a cauldron in which water is boiling. The design is called a manty cooker. Most often, lamb is used for minced meat in combination with fat tail or interior fat. Variations of the filling are different. The meat is combined with pumpkin, potatoes or onions. Kuyrdak is a traditional roast of giblets with potatoes and onions. For kuyrdak, slices of liver, lungs, spleen, kidneys, intestines, liver and other by-products are most often used. Traditionally, the dish is served to guests in front of beshbarmak. Sorpa is cooked from beef, but traditionally it is made from lamb. On cold evenings, scalding hot, aromatic and hearty soup is the best dinner. Boursak, as a rule, is made from unleavened or yeast dough in the form of small donuts (diamond-shaped or round), prepared by deep-frying in a cauldron. There are also recipes for curd boursaks. They are usually served as an addition, for example, to shurpa or tea. Traditional Kazakh drinks made from milk are popular among different peoples of the Astrakhan region, they are kumys, ayran and kurt.

An important issue of the development of alimentary culture in the Astrakhan region is the issue of prohibitions and restrictions related to nutrition. As you know, all religions include, along with a set of dogmas of faith, a complex of rituals, moral and behavioral norms and rules that every believer must adhere to. By establishing norms and rules of behavior, all religious systems, one way or another, regulate a person's life, defining attitudes towards essential things and phenomena. Therefore, it is no coincidence that a lot of attention is paid to such an important aspect as the culture of human nutrition. For a long time, religion was probably the main factor that shaped the food system, defining what was forbidden and what was allowed in it. It was religion that began to view eating as a meaningful activity.

All three world religions – Christianity, Islam and Buddhism – are represented on the territory of the Astrakhan region. Christianity is represented mainly in the form of Orthodoxy, although there are Catholic and Protestant communities, Buddhism is represented by Lamaism and Islam is represented by Sunni Islam. Uniting about two billion believers, one of the most widespread in the world is the Christian religion. It originated in Palestine in the first century AD and is based on the belief that God came into the world two thousand years ago to redeem humanity and change its fate. The task of every Christian is to save the soul and transform oneself by fulfilling the commandments of God. Believing a person to be a triune being (body, soul and spirit), Orthodoxy, for example, speaks in sufficient detail about bodily life, and, accordingly, about the characteristics of a Christian's diet. The Astrakhan region has long-standing Orthodox traditions, although the independent Astrakhan and Terek diocese was formed in 1602. In Orthodox Christianity, as well as in Catholicism, there are no absolute prohibitions on the use of certain products and their division into approved and prohibited. During the fasting period, there are instructions for abstaining from certain types of food. More than 200 days are occupied by fasts in the Orthodox calendar, which prescribe abstinence from forbidden food. Hence the abundance of all kinds of cereals, vegetables (cabbage, radish, beets, cucumbers, turnips), mushroom and fish dishes is present in the diet of believers. If the fast allows eating fish, a stodgy ukha or fried carp, bream, roach is always present on the tables of the Astrakhan people. The favorite dish of the Russian people is borscht, which can also be fast. For Astrakhan residents, cooking vegetable dishes has never been a problem. Vegetable growing and melon growing have always been traditional for our region, and there was even a time when Astrakhan was famous for its gardens and vineyards. There are one-day and multi-day fasts. The most important and strict fast in terms of food prescriptions is Great Lent. It lasts seven weeks before Easter. The weekly fast

days are Wednesday and Friday. But, speaking of fasts, the Orthodox Church focuses not so much on abstinence from this or that food, as, above all, on spiritual abstinence. “Not food is evil, but gluttony,” says Saint Maximus the Confessor.

For lay Buddhists, food, one might say, is practically not regulated in any way. There is an idea that a saint eats once a day, a layman eats twice a day, and an animal eats three times a day. The founder of Buddhism in matters of nutrition himself recommended adhering to the golden mean: to eat without excesses, but at the same time not to torture yourself excessively with the practices of low nutrition and fasting. On the territory of the Astrakhan Territory, Buddhism is predominantly practiced by the Kalmyk population. Basically, the food of the Kalmyks consists of meat products. Although it is worth noting, there are disagreements in Buddhism on the issue of eating meat: someone considers eating meat unacceptable, since it is associated with harm to living beings. The use of onions, garlic and mushrooms is not encouraged. Cereals, vegetables and milk are indispensable ingredients of the Buddhist diet. Traditional Kalmyk tea, which is made from milk with the addition of nutmeg and salt, is very popular in Astrakhan.

For Muslims, pork and alcoholic beverages are forbidden products. There is a version that in antiquity, trichinosis, a fatal disease transmitted to humans through pork, was very common, and that is why the ancient inhabitants of the Middle East imposed a ban on this type of meat. Astrakhan Muslims observe a strict fast for one month a year, the essence of which is not refusal of any food, but complete abstinence from drinking and eating during daylight hours. Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the pillars of Islam. It is assumed that the elderly, the sick, travelers, pregnant women, and all those for whom fasting is a burden, may postpone it until a more appropriate time. Now in the Astrakhan markets and in supermarkets you can find products with the halal brand – permitted products for Muslims. This mainly applies to meat, which is obtained as a result of the application of special methods of slaughtering livestock. Traditionally in Astrakhan they make good belyashi and kainars with meat filling.

Pan-European cuisine and Pan-Asian cuisine are presented on the territory of the Astrakhan region. European cuisine is a term used to refer to the Western food tradition that encompasses the various cuisines of Europe and the influenced and spread food traditions of both the Americas and Australia.

Despite notable differences, European cuisine has a common mainland origin and common food preferences. Namely, they are the secondary importance of all kinds of spices, seasonings and sauces; a variety of products and dishes made from wheat flour (sweet and salty pastries with meat, cheese, vegetables and fruits); the widespread use of meat, eggs, vegetables and dishes from these products, especially hot and cold soups; the use of high-quality alcoholic beverages that enhance appetite and improve digestion.

The convergence and interaction of food preferences in continental European cuisine has occurred over the centuries, forming the unity of the alimentary code of culture, despite some geographical factors that are of secondary importance. We are talking, for example, about the use of fish and fish dishes and their more or less in the range of Western European, Eastern European or South European cuisine. Again, these differences are very conditional depending on the type of fish and seafood of the place of residence.

The existence of different versions of cold soups on different soup bases in European and similar food culture is also interesting specificity. We are talking about okroshka and its analogues, for example, such as: tyurya, botvinya, kholodnik, tarator, South European gazpacho, Azerbaijani dogram, Uzbek chalop, etc.

Pan-Asian cuisine has united all the cuisines and food preferences of the Far and Middle East. Asian cuisine is a term we use to denote an oriental food tradition, which includes various cuisines of East, Southeast and South Asia, influenced and spread by the food traditions of China, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan and other peoples of the Asia-Pacific region. Except, perhaps, India, which food traditions are quite unique. We are talking about an extremely excessive amount of spices and seasonings in the food culture of the peoples of the Indian subcontinent, not only Indians, but also representatives of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, close to them in origin.

Despite a number of differences, Pan-Asian cuisine has the same food preferences. Namely: the special significance of all kinds of spices, seasonings and marinades; widespread use of rice and soy products and dishes; an abundance of foods (including insects) fried in a large amount of oil; widespread use of poultry meat, eggs, vegetables and seafood.

A classic example of the Pan-Asian character of Oriental cuisine is a soup based on concentrated beef broth (other options for a broth base are possible) with large pieces of meat, plus noodles that are universal for all countries, bean and bamboo sprouts and other shoots. We are talking about such national traditional hot spicy soups as Thai Tom Yam, Vietnamese Pho Bo and Boon Bo, Chinese (and later Japanese and Korean) Ramen (in Central Asia it is Lagman), Korean Kimchi chige and other variations (Karabaeva and Lukyanchenko, 2014). Interestingly, all these hot stews do not contain vegetable components added to traditional European hot soups (potatoes, cabbage, beets, tomatoes), which are ground and then roasted before adding to the broth.

In the 19th century, the ethnic composition of the population of the Northern Caspian Sea was finally formed. Four successively replacing each other in history, waves of representatives of different linguistic, ethnic and confessional groups settled here: Iranian-speaking Caucasoid nomads, then Turkic-speaking, then large masses of Russians in the 16th century and Kazakhs in the 19th century.

In the process of interaction of various ethnic groups, as a result of cultural contacts in the unity of the spatio-temporal development of history by the twentieth century, a unique phenomenon of the fusion of European and Asian food traditions has developed in the Lower Volga region. This is clearly manifested, for example, in the commemorative practice of various ethnocultural communities of the population of Astrakhan. As a result of intercultural dialogue on the territory of Astrakhan, a hybrid alimentary culture – "transcultural form" – was formed. The uniqueness of the Astrakhan region as a "hybrid space" is pointed out by Meshcheryakov and Yakushenkova (2017): "The main characteristic of the Lower Volga region is cultural hybridity, which is the result of long-term mutual influence of various ethnic groups" (p. 57). Clarifying the features of everyday commemorative practice and food preferences, a variety of rice dishes (as in the Far Eastern cuisine) – sushi, rolls and exotic (by the standards of the Astrakhan region in the European region, from the point of view of geography and demography, parts of the cultural space) – products appeared on the tables of the urban population of Astrakhan appeared,

which was inappropriate some 20 years ago. Of course, this is the result not only of intercultural interaction, but also of an open economic space.

The alimentary culture of the Astrakhan region was formed and continues to form under the influence of all peoples inhabiting the territory of this region. National traditions and tastes of Russian, Kazakh, Tatar, Armenian, Jewish and other peoples inhabiting the Astrakhan region, formed the basis of the alimentary culture of this region. Alimentary culture makes it possible to understand the cultural values and meanings of the national culture. At the same time, the food traditions inherent in different peoples and confessions of the region are being modified under the influence of neighboring cultures. And the exchange of food, joint meals are becoming a prerequisite for the existence of ethnic groups in the region, based on mutual respect and trust.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to try to define alimentary culture as a prerequisite for constructive dialogue, which unfolds within the framework of the strategy of interaction between different ethnic groups and religious confessions on the territory of the Astrakhan region, as well as to analyze existing studies on alimentary culture, taking into account the regional aspect.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The phenomenon of alimentarism is considered using the phenomenological method. Structural-functional, descriptive, comparative methods were used to analyze the alimentary culture of ethnic groups in the Astrakhan region.

#### **6. Findings**

The result of the study can be considered the identification of a number of behavioral (alimentary) models, through which self-regulation of intercultural interactions is carried out for a long time and under changing political and social conditions on the territory of the Astrakhan region, which occurs with minimal involvement of state structures.

#### **7. Conclusion**

The conclusions obtained in the course of this study indicate that the complexity of the described problem lies primarily in the fact that it is actually a special case of another dilemma, namely, the intercultural interaction of the Insider and the Outsider, considered at the level of food habits and traditions of the Astrakhan region. Alimentary practices are a prerequisite for successful communication, which is associated with their simplicity, accessibility, continuous renewal and the lack of requirements necessary for other forms of communication (for example, proficiency in a foreign language).



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