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# The phenomenon of spirituality in the Kazakh art songs

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## Abstract

The given work presents the results of the analysis of the main traditions existing in Kazakh singing art. The article was written in the framework of the project “Study, preservation and popularization of the cultural heritage of Sary-Arka” (Project identifier: BR05236868). The purpose of this study is to shed light on the spiritual nature of the Kazakh folklore and art songs. The object of this study is Kazakh traditional song, since song is the foundation of the musical culture of each ethnic group. The revival of a song always coincides with the beginning of folk musical self-knowledge, folk self-consciousness.

**Keywords:** Tradition, Kazakh history, Instrumental music, Folklore, Symbolism.

# El fenómeno de la espiritualidad en las canciones de arte kazajo

## Resumen

El trabajo presentado muestra los resultados del análisis de las principales tradiciones existentes en el arte del canto kazajo. El artículo fue escrito en el marco del proyecto "Estudio, preservación y divulgación del patrimonio cultural de Sary-Arka" (Identificador del proyecto: BR05236868). El propósito de este estudio es arrojar luz sobre la naturaleza espiritual del folklore kazajo y las canciones de arte. El objeto de este estudio es la canción tradicional kazaja, ya que la canción es la base de la cultura musical de cada grupo étnico. El renacimiento de una canción siempre coincide con el comienzo del autoconocimiento musical popular, la autoconciencia popular.

**Palabras clave:** Tradición, Historia kazaja, Música instrumental, Folklore, Simbolismo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The proper self-identification of the people is impossible without reference to the spiritual heritage of the past, its inclusion in the modern worldview. The full functioning of ethnic self-consciousness outside of its historical past is neither impossible. Nor it is possible to study deeply the heritage of popular thinkers outside and independently of contemporary public inquiry and context. The ethnic world picture is a kind of universe that has integrity and identity, within which the individual dissolves and adapts to the surrounding social and natural environment and reproducing it in culture and language (AYAZBEKOVA, 1999). In this regard, this question is relevant not only from the perspective of the formation of spirituality

and worldview of the people of Kazakhstan, where education by history becomes important, but also from a purely scientific perspective, due to the new paradigm-like study of the history, culture and philosophy of the Kazakh people.

The study of the history of the spiritual life of an ethnic group is an effective way of its actualization and adaptation in the public consciousness - through the creation of a discussion space that promotes in-depth discussion and understanding of the most important components of national consciousness, which is the legacy of the past.

To remember and know the events that define the faces of epochs, the lives of significant personalities means to be attached to the spiritual culture, to preserve and pass on from generation to generation the poetic history of the people as was noted by NURLANOVA (1987).

After Kazakhstan achieved independence, interest in traditional artifacts of history, life and culture of the people increases every year more. Many researchers-humanitarians can't ignore the question of religion and mythology, as only in these forms of human knowledge are important components, which open world outlook, and are substantial aspect of traditional culture.

Spirituality occupies a special place in the Kazakh culture. A person acquires a spiritual appearance through familiarizing with universal human meanings contained in universally significant spiritual symbols and images. Therefore, the spiritual symbol can be defined as a connecting link, mediating the relationship between

spirituality as universal and human spirituality as individual, special. Outside of this connection, the individual's consciousness is not filled with universally human meanings, and therefore is not spiritualized. Mediating the connection between spirituality as universal and the individual as an individual, special one, the symbol thereby removes their identity, establishing identity between them and thereby contributing to the removal of contradictions between them, realizing their mutual transition.

The latter consists in the fact that spirituality as a general at the level of a person passes to the level of individual spirituality; a person, joining the collective spiritual experience and the human universal meanings, enriches them, gives them a new sound, thereby realizing the transition from the individual to the universal level. Thus, within spirituality as a whole, there is a dialectical relationship and identity between the universal and the individual, the special, as its components, which is the possibility of using in this study the dialectical method of transition from the particular to the general. Folklore, including traditional song art, acts as the basic spiritual value of the Kazakh people and is an important factor in the preservation and development of the artistic national Kazakh style; the richness of traditional culture is evidence of self-sufficiency of the ethnic group, an indicator of the maturity of the ethnic community.

The aspect of spirituality in studying the traditional culture of a nation is successfully developing in musicology as well. For example, the system description of the mythological vision of the world is

possible to find in the fundamental work “The traditional worldview of Turks of Southern Siberia” (SAGALAEV & OKTYABRSKAYA, 1990). This study considered the social status of shaman in the inextricable link with the superstitions and beliefs of the different Turkic peoples. This worldview also had a huge influence on traditional music. For example, in this geographic region, specific shaman’s singing-talking is well-preserved till present time. Evolution of this singing was traced functionally in L. Haltaeva’s dissertation work (1991) about traditional bourdon double-voices. Kazakh ancient totemic beliefs and cults, connected with funeral-commemorial ceremonialism, dualistic representations about afterlife and a ceremony of initiation, made substantial semantics of ancient kyui-legends about lame and sacred animals (RAIYMBERGENOVA, 1993; OMAROVA, 2009).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This work aims at the analysis of the spiritual nature of Kazakh traditional folklore, in particular, Kazakh song art. The article was written in the framework of the project “Study, preservation and popularization of the cultural heritage of Sary-Arka” (Project identifier: BR05236868). As methodological base of this analysis served general scientific methods, such as theoretical-logical and systematic analysis, historical and comparative analysis, and musical-theoretical analysis, musical-poetic analysis, that made it possible to generalize and systematize the views of the domestic researchers on

the problem under study. An important contribution to historical and literary foundations of the study are the literary works of AMIROVA (1994), BERDIBAY (1997), TURSUNOV (1974), ELEMANOVA (2000), BALABEKOV (2000), ERZAKOVICH (2000), AKHMETOVA (1984), MUKANOV (2005), UAKHATOV (1974), SHAKHANOVA (1998), KASYMOVA (2008), TOKHTABAEVA (2005), ERGALI (2003).

Mythological layer of the Kazakh ancient folklore lyric poets was investigated by AMIROVA (2003). Her study is the attempt to look into the world and life of that time, recreates the shape of ancient sound-ideal, which comprises basic sound-imitations. Therefore, assumptions of BERDIBAY'S (1997), about the need to consider a refrain as the most archaic form of singing soundly, because refrain occurs rudimentary and to this day in a lexical form. During that time, the song refrain – *kaiyrma* (“*kaitu*”, “*kaitty*” – “has returned”, “has come back”) proves the existence of belief in reincarnation in the Kazakh environment.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The features of the national artistic style in the modern art of Kazakhstan are determined by the attitude to tradition as a fundamental value of the national Kazakh heritage. Appeal to mythopoetic images, motives, plots, metaphor, symbolism, ornamentation, contemplation, sacredness, spiritualization of mother

nature, the theorization of the human image, the use of folklore tradition on the basis of variability - these are the main features of the Kazakh national art style, determined by the continuity of folklore traditions of the Kazakh people. Integration processes, which involve almost all modern civilizations, often lead to the disappearance of unique, distinctive cultures that are closely related to a particular place.

The system of ancient mythological representations about music can be revealed when studying narrative sources and a poetic basis of a song. In texts of folk lyric, domestic and folk-professional songs, the phenomenon of singing is exposed in its entirety. In texts, the process of extraction of sound, melodious motion, development and quality of song is “analysed” as the artistic phenomenon. The analysis of poetic texts showed that the special importance in a folk-professional environment was attached to melodies of flight that are difficult to achieve by amateur voice. A height and virtuosity of melodies are imprinted by folk determinations: “*aeletu*”, “*kokke orletu*”, “*aspandap a schirkau*” (meaning “sing, flying up in sky”). There are special terms that denote the specific subtleties of the extractions of sound, related to the various receptions of singing: “*enteletu*” (“singing with an assertive sound”), “*bulkuldetu*” (“seething, vibrating”), “*komei bulpuldaidy*”, “*dausty izgitip aidau*” (“singing with a buzzing”), and “*dau sirganau*” (“singing with sliding sound”). The wide range of such songs is denoted by metaphors: “*tasu*” (to spread), “*aeletip a schirkau*” (“rocketing high into the air song”), “*askak an*” (“elevated song”), “*orletu*”, “*schariktatu*” (“highly soaring song”). Soft sounds of high vocal register compared to character of swan: “*Akkudai*

aspandagi a kosuschi em" ("When the question is about the song, I hiber high in the sky, like a swan") and on the sounds of middle register, coinciding with a former traditional line-up of dombra – "konir kazdin dausindai".

In antiquity, singing was aimed to indulge spirits. Maybe, that explains the origin of the lengthy beginning of the songs, aimed to help, support the ancestors. The structure of the oral-professional musical culture of Kazakhs was dual: akyn – listener, singer – listener, kuishi – listener. Through the efforts of poets, this system began to turn into the threefold one: the composer-performer-listener, in which the improvisational changes of the invariant at the level of melody and rhythm are not intended.

One of the purposes of music, according to folk aesthetics is to appease the listener's soul. Condition of spiritual harmony, mental and physical relaxation after the hearing convey metaphors of melting, dissolving, softened condition. In the folk philosophy of life, the concept of "көңіл" ("konil") occupied a huge place; it was understood as a special spiritual and mental state, a special condition of the inner world of man. It is an attribute of various forms of communication, the basis of which is the sensitivity, respect for each other, resulting from the realization that you are a guest in this world. Folk understanding of the purpose of art is focused in the phrase "konil koteru" ("uplifting the spirit"), which emphasized the importance of spiritual communication in the people's life. Listening to music resulting in elation is a remedy from the stagnation of the soul. In its highly artistic manifestation,

music contributes to the heat of passion, openness of soul, catharsis, when the soul and the thought acquire balance and the line between the world and man is blurred.

The interrelation between music performances and poetry, as well as the original sanctification of creative activities resulted in metaphorical definition of the concept of folk music. The fundamental importance of the religious consciousness that the ancestors had, which was the ideological basis of all spheres of creativity of Kazakh people, determined the attitude to music, the purpose and status of a traditional musician.

The poetic texts disclosed the topical problems in music and music-making. Traditional poetry highlights the importance of knowing the rules established in the tradition of performance: “Өлеңді жақсы айтады жайды білген” (“Good song could be performed by someone who knows the rules of its performance”). According to the poetic texts, as in all traditional cultures, existence of music is based on the preservation of the artistic experience of previous generations, which is often implemented through the mechanism of inheritance of family continuity in the profession.

Each music performance was preceded by the excited state of the singer, which signaled the beginning of the "contact" with the ancestors. This condition is associated with a word-term “arka”. Similar to other folk terms, it has metaphorical and polysemantic nature. The literal meaning of this word is “back”. The parties of the

world in the Turkic universe were designated in relation to the body of a man standing in the center of the world. His face was directed to the south, his left hand was directed to the east, right - to the west, his back was directed toward the north. According to the ancient Turkic beliefs, north was the upside down world, the point where the souls of ancestors departed. Coming into contact with the living, the spirits of the ancestors went from the north, meaning from the back. Therefore, if a musician had a special talent, people say about him: “arkasy bar” (“he's got a back”), implying that he is supported by the ancestors, bestowing him a special power. It is the highest praise for the musician. However, this expression captures the conviction that without the support of ancestors the person cannot become a real musician.

The ancestors worship defined the spatial dominant in the music development. One of these manifestations is an improvisation. Improvisational nature of vocal music and music-making characteristics in the Kazakh aesthetics are identified by the words “zhel”, “agyn”, “tasu”, “sel” that compares the singing with the wind, snow and dust storm or uncontrollable water flow.

The intermediate position of the genre in the formation of a professional song is very important. Being a professional song, the *kara olen* relates to the type of individual creativity, but it also contains the earlier mythological ideas about music.

A huge place in the texts of traditional songs is occupied by characteristic techniques of sound. Singing is often compared with water or birdsong, and fluency, fluidity, continuity of melodic

deployment is compared with a mild wind gust. Different characteristics of soft, gently pouring warm sounds, which, depending on the localization of the register, are separated by the soft sounds of the upper register and by the sounds of the middle register, are coincided with the traditional tune of *dombra*.

Thus, the tradition has developed as a system of symbols and concepts of music performance. Traditional aesthetics shortly outlined the status of the artist, the various aspects of creative communication, and the typical mechanisms of traditional ethnic musical thinking. A recess in the area of traditional ideas of music will confirm the presence of a stable artistic and aesthetic cultural universals.

The origin of ideas about the magical function of singing and speech in hunting magic rituals in the early stages of primitive culture has influenced the formation of the additions to the refrains of ritual songs, such as *zhar-zhar*, *uki-ay*, *badik*, *kulyapsan*. Early totemic representations are embodied in the mythological content of ancient *kyuis*-legends about the lame and the sacred animals. In the understanding of the Kazakhs, sacred animals were wolf, horse, camel, ox, mountain goat-*Teke*, owl, swan, goose, golden eagles and other.

The uniqueness and identity of every nation are characterized by the national folklore, proverbs and traditions, which rooted deep in history. Family traditions of Kazakh people can be considered not only as a relic we received from the previous generations, but also as a continuously developing phenomenon that exists both in folk culture

and in professional art penetrating into the culture processes. The traditional Kazakh worldview is a single system of stable views, values, customs and ideas about the world picture of a certain national community. Its basic principles, developed as a result of a specific historical destiny, geographical environment and the specifics of the native nature, the psychological set of the ethnic group, the characteristics of the nomadic lifestyle, rooted in a single social context, and today constitute the spiritual core of national culture.

Traditional Kazakh culture was characterized by high continuity related to the moral education of the younger generation, spiritual improvement of an individual. Oral folk art was the means of communication between the generations, it comprised the function of an institute of spirituality and morality, and it was a means of national education (ABDIGALIYEVA, 2011). When discussing the modern art of any nation, it is possible to discover that it is coming from the national code of the folklore (mythology, oral literature) and rituals. For every nation, it is very important to save oral literature and rituals and to pass them to the next generations.

In the Kazakh traditional society, each gender and age clan had a corresponding set of musical instruments and genres, repertoire and performance forms. Children had fun playing wind instruments made from clay - saz syrnai, tastauk, uskirik, which in hands of the master or the child acquired bizarre shapes of animals, birds, fish, many-headed horses, brightly painted and covered with sparkling glaze. Through the performance of children's songs and music games, a mother's lullaby

and songs-teachings from the adult men (osiet olen), children learned the world around them and became full members of their socio-cultural community. Further independent life gave new artistic knowledge and experience through participation in youth games and entertainment with the obligatory participation of music kayym-aitys, tartys, dialogic singing of daily life songs Kara olen.

The repertoire of "young years" was enriched with love lyrics and various songs and rituals of colorful Kazakh wedding with mournful farewell cries of brides and cheerful youth zhar-zhar, signal battle of drums – dabyl, dauylpaz, or shyndauyl on the hunt for an animal or during a military campaign. In this regard, "maturity", comprising balance and experience, was called for the accomplishment of great state and public affairs, protection of the interests of the tribe in inter-tribal song and poetry competitions – aitys. "Ageing" and "wisdom" were accompanied by musical and poetic instructions to the young, singing philosophical songs-reflections on the meaning of life and gone youth, about the sweet time that has quickly passed, when you are only twenty-five. This was the eternal musical and life cycle of the Kazakh nomad, which was always reproduced from year to year, from generation to generation, ensuring the full functioning of various folk musical traditions.

All the spiritual wealth of the nation has been developing up to the beginning of the twentieth century in a non-written form and passed "from mouth to mouth" from father to son, from teacher to student, from the past to the future. Nomadic and semi-nomadic type

of economy predetermined the originality of folk instruments and musical traditions, their "embedding" in the life of the Kazakh society and inseparability from other forms of artistic creativity - verbal and poetic.

At an early stage of development, music was entirely subordinate to the service of the utilitarian needs of the ancient nomadic society and accompanied the most important religious and domestic ceremonies. The large epic tales – Zhyr – that arose during the formation of the Kazakh ethnic group, were performed by Zhyrau (carriers of the epic tradition), and were initially associated with the performance of rituals of battlefield magic and the cult of ancestors. More than a hundred tales have been preserved in people's memory, each of which contains thousands of poetic lines, performed with accompaniment of a Kyl-kobyz – a bowed musical instrument with two hair strings or a plucked instrument – dombra. Being one of the most favorite genres of folk art, heroic and lyrical-everyday epic tales "Koblandy", "Alpamys", "Er-Targyn", "Kambar", "Kyz Zhibek", "Kozy-Korpesh and Bayan-Sulu", "Enlik and Kebek" and many others in the legendary, mythologized form brought to posterity the real historical events of pre-Kazakh and Kazakh history.

Only by the 19th century Kazakh music was freed from the chains of religion and ritual and began to develop as a valuable artistic creation. This period was a truly spiritual Renaissance of the nation, which gave rise to the main musical traditions of the people – instrumental, singing, akyn. Various local professional composing and

performing schools are being formed on the vast territory of Kazakhstan, and each region offers a kind of "specialization" in the development of specific traditions. Thus, the territory of Western Kazakhstan became the Central zone in the development of dombra kyui – “Tokpe”, and the area of Sary-Arka (Central Kazakhstan) became the epicenter of professional song, the South-Western region (Karmakchi district) has preserved and developed the richest traditions of epic storytelling, and Zhetysu – traditions of aitys, a competitive art of akyns-improvisers.

The names of Kurmangazy, Dauletkerey, Tattimbet, Kazangap, Dina, Birzhan, Akhan, Zhayau Musa, Estay, Ibray, Nartay, Madi, Mukhit, Abay, Kenen Azerbayev have entered the history of not only Kazakh but also world music culture. Their works are characterized by bright style individuality, original imagery structure and arsenal of musical-expressive means, is a source of pride, a classic of Kazakh musical culture. Creating high art and introducing ordinary people to the "divine sacrament" – music, they earned great love and respect in society during their lifetime and were always in the center of everyone's attention. The people assigned high titles – Salov and Sera – to the best and most talented figures. The creative activity of professional musicians of the 19th century, as a rule, was not limited only to the performing or composing sphere, but included all the variety of artistic forms – poetic improvisation, oratory, polished vocal technique, virtuoso possession of a musical instrument, elements of theatrical and circus performance, which in many ways brought

together Kazakh steppe artists with medieval musicians of Western Europe – jugglers, troubadours, trouveres, Meister and Minnie-zingers.

Kazakh people inherited the traditional spiritual values from their ancient ancestors, which original layers of culture are presented separately, mainly in archaeological materials. Judging by the content of the drawings on the stones, it is possible to assume that the population of Kazakhstan in the Stone Age worshipped the sun, honored animals, probably as totems-ancestors. The domestication of animals was accompanied by the improvement of trade tools. There was a slow but irreversible transition from stone to metal tools, especially in the pale metallic-rich regions of Central Kazakhstan.

Kyui art is one of the leading genres of Kazakh musical culture. Kyui is a mature, highly developed art that has absorbed the entire ethnicity of the nation, and is the main witness of its glorious history. Kazakhs also perceive it as a sacred letter of their ancestors, expressed in musical form. Even in the tragic years of repression, when many folk songs were banned, kyui continued to be performed, because, fortunately, the colonizers were not able to understand this high art. To them, the kyuis were just a set of sounds that did not pose a threat to Imperial ideology. Thanks to this, the ancient art of kyui escaped censorship. Sometimes the story that accompanies the performance of kyui is not directly related to the content of the music, it states: when, where, from whom the dombra player took kyui or under what circumstances composed it. Such stories can be set up to expect music of a certain character, but they do not carry a program function

(MUKHAMBETOVA, 1990). MUKHAMBETOVA (2002) emphasizes that connection of the kyui with the word, not with a poetic one, but with a prose, starting from the myth, legend, ending with engine as a genre of modern life narration is very important.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Folklore traditions are transmitted into professional art, performing protective and creative functions in the formation of artistic national style as an expression of national identity. Traditions are similar, they cover all spheres of functioning; each nation has traditions that convey the "spirit of the people", forming the foundation of its culture, forming the inner support of a person - a representative of an ethnic community, expressing the general direction of national culture.

The results of this study demonstrate that spirituality plays a special role in traditional Kazakh culture and song art, in particular. Spirituality is an element underpinning the traditional folklore of the Kazakh people, without which it is impossible to imagine the Kazakh culture. In theoretical and methodological terms, new conceptual ideas, deep constructive concepts and scientific results of historical and philosophical research contained in such research projects are of crucial importance for the spiritual, cultural and social development of modern Kazakhstan for the next decade and for the future. Thus, this small resort to the history of one of the important aspects of songs has

proved the deep communication of its elements with all the most ancient traditional culture of Kazakhs.

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