

Contemporary trends in Central Asian literature

Preserving traditions and adapting to globalisation

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The purpose of this study is to analyse the ways of integrating epic and folklore into modern literature to transmit the values of the past, address contemporary issues, and strengthen cultural continuity. The research methodology was based on a comparative analysis of selected Central Asian literary works that exemplify the transformation of traditional motifs and narrative structures. The study examined the use of folklore imagery, epic composition, and their adaptation within modern genres such as magic realism, postmodernism, and science fiction, interpreting these elements through the lens of cultural and literary studies. The findings revealed that contemporary literature of Central Asia effectively combines traditional elements of the epic with modern literary forms, creating works that reflect national identity and respond to the challenges of the modern world. This synthesis demonstrates the enduring potential of folklore heritage to convey moral and philosophical ideas, preserve historical memory, and reinterpret cultural traditions in the context of social change.

Keywords: literary forms, folklore, heritage, social changes.

1. Introduction¹

Central Asian literature has played a key role in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, while staying flexible and capable of adapting to global challenges. The problem of the interaction between traditions and literary trends of the 21st century has become particularly relevant in the context of growing globalisation, which has both stimulated cultural exchange and threatened the loss of identity. The study of late 20th and early 21st century Central Asian literature, especially focusing on its ability to integrate traditional elements into the current cultural context, was a major step

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towards understanding the unique way of preserving cultural heritage and reinterpreting it within the framework of contemporary processes.

The literary heritage of Central Asia was originally based on oral traditions, such as epics and folklore, which reflected cultural values, norms, and generational memory (Zhang 2023, Altay *et al.* 2015). The literature of Kazakhstan demonstrated a unique combination of traditional motifs with innovative genre forms. Postmodernist techniques, magic realism, and science fiction became part of the national literary canon. The work of Abai Kunanbayev and his followers inspired the literary process in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, thanks to its profound philosophical content, humanistic ideas, and aspiration to enlightenment. His works contributed to the preservation of national identity, recalling the cultural values of the Kazakh people against the background of globalisation.

Abdigapbarova (2022) and Adayeva (2023) investigated gender issues in Kazakh literature of the early 20th century. Abdigapbarova focused on the specific features of the reflection of female images and social roles in the works of that time. The researcher identified cultural and historical prerequisites for the development of gender stereotypes, emphasising their influence on the literary heritage. The study contributed to the understanding of the evolution of gender issues in the context of national literature. Adayeva analysed gender aspects of the study of Kazakh literature, paying special attention to the interpretation of gender roles and their reflection in literary texts. The researcher analysed the influence of social and cultural factors on the perception of literary works, stressing the significance of the gender approach in philological research.

Beyer and Finke (2019) investigated traditionalisation in Central Asia, focusing on its socio-cultural aspects. Local communities adapt traditional norms to modern conditions by selectively retaining or reinventing practices, embedding them in everyday life, and reframing them through cultural models, authority, and global discourses. In this way, tradition becomes a flexible tool for legitimising identities, managing social change, and negotiating power relations.

Gaibullaev (2023) analysed the development of linguistic and philosophical attitudes in Central Asia, paying special attention to their historical and cultural aspects. The researcher examined the influence of socio-political factors on the formation and evolution of philosophical ideas in the region. The study emphasised the significance of cultural interaction and integration for the development of linguistic and philosophical traditions. Imangazinov *et al.* (2024) investigated analogous motifs in the works of Kunanbaev and Homer, highlighting cultural and historical parallels. The researchers analysed the literary and philosophical concepts of both authors, identifying overlapping themes such as human nature, morality, and the search for truth. The study highlighted the universality of these

motifs and their value for intercultural dialogue. Kasbayeva (2020) investigated the world heritage in the works of Kunanbaev, considering it as the basis of Kazakh spirituality. The study analysed Abai's ideas reflecting universal human values and their connection with Kazakh cultural identity. The researcher stressed the significance of Abai's work in shaping national consciousness and strengthening cultural dialogue.

Kordabay (2020) investigated the reflection of the modern era in Kazakh poetry of the 21st century, focusing on its socio-cultural aspects. The study highlighted the main themes, including the transformation of social values and their impact on the artistic perception of reality. The researcher noted that poetic texts of this period reflect profound changes in national identity and worldview. Magazbekov and Çınar (2021) analysed national being and character in Abai's poetry, emphasising its role in the development of Kazakh identity. The researchers identified key aspects related to the philosophical and cultural foundations of the works that contributed to the preservation of national values. The study showed that Abai's poetry was a significant source for the study of Kazakh spirituality and identity.

While gender, identity, and socio-political issues in Kazakh literature have been extensively studied, the mechanisms of synthesis between epic traditions and modern literary forms in the context of globalisation remain underexplored. Specifically, there is a gap in understanding how contemporary authors blend traditional folklore with genres like magic realism, postmodernism, and science fiction, while also addressing the complexities of cultural preservation and adaptation in an increasingly globalized world.

The purpose of the present study was to analyse contemporary literary trends in Central Asia related to the preservation and adaptation of traditions. To fulfil the purpose, the following tasks were solved: to investigate the role of folklore and epic in the development of modern Kazakh literature; to analyse the effects of globalisation on the genre and thematic diversity of Kazakh literature; to identify the mechanisms of synthesis of traditions and innovations in the literature of Central Asia.

This study contributes by systematically mapping how epic motifs, such as blood feud, clan obligations, and ancestral veneration, are reinterpreted in modern genres like postmodernism, magical realism, and science fiction. While existing research has explored folklore and epic traditions in Kazakh literature, this article highlights the unique adaptation of these motifs to address contemporary global issues, including cultural preservation and identity. By examining the synthesis of traditional and modern forms, it provides new insights into how Central Asian literature engages with globalisation and blends the past with the present.

2. Materials and methods

To ensure the systematic nature of the analysis, the study analysed literary works from both the classical heritage of Kazakhstan and contemporary ones, which helped to consider the evolution of Kazakh literature in its historical and cultural context. The analysis was based on classical Kazakh epics, including *Kobylandy Batyr* (Kumisbaev 2014) and *Male Targy* (Satybaldiev 2017), *Poetry of Poets and Akyns* (Zhanaidarov 2009). The works of Kazakh writers and poets were studied: Kudaiberdiev's saga *Kalkaman—May* (2015), Auezov's *Abai's Path* (2012), Kunanbaev's *Words of Edification: Ghaqliya* (2022), Sultanbekov's *Blue Meridian Alashore Attila* (2013), Auezov's play-tragedy *Enlik-Kebek* (2023).

The study also examined the works of Magauin's *Blue Doves* (1979), Aimauytov's *Akbilek* (2013), Zhakyp's novel *Karaultobe* (2023), Zhurtbay's essay *Beynet Drink* (2016), and a scientific overview of the work of Kunanbaev by Zhurtbay, *Comparatively Insignificant* (2021). Additionally, the study examined Kemelbaeva's publication *Forerunner of the 'Damned Days'* (2022). Special attention was paid to the works of the founders of the Abai Museum in Semey and Lonon: Mukhamedkhanov's *Fate and Karlag* (2008), *Letters Speak* (2016) and Seisenbayev's *The Return of Kazybek* (1984) and *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (2019).

The authors and research's selected for this study were chosen for their canonical status, representativeness of specific historical periods, and relevance to the integration of folklore motifs in Kazakh literature. Writers such as Auezov, Kunanbaev, and Kudaiberdiev are central figures in the literary canon of Kazakhstan, whose works have significantly influenced the development of Kazakh literature, both in terms of preserving traditional cultural values and addressing modern socio-political issues.

Moreover, these authors were selected for their role in bridging traditional Kazakh oral literature with the modern literary canon. For instance, Auezov's *Abai's Path* (2012) and Kudaiberdiev's *Kalkaman—May* (2015) represent works where the synthesis of oral traditions with modern narrative forms (such as psychological depth and historical realism) can be clearly observed. Kunanbaev's *Words of Edification: Ghaqliya* (2022) was included for its exploration of moral and philosophical themes embedded in folklore, and its significant impact on the development of Kazakh national identity.

The study was of cultural-historical and literary science nature, covering the period from the end of the 19th century to the second decade of the 21st century. This diversity allows for examining the continuity and adaptation of cultural traditions in response to modernity and globalisation. The works were also chosen for their relevance to the integration of folklore, mythological motifs, and epic structures in contemporary genres such as postmodernism, magical realism, and science fiction,

highlighting how traditional Kazakh narratives address modern issues while preserving cultural continuity.

The historical-genetic method was employed to investigate the origin and evolution of folklore plots and their integration into literary works. For example, the analysis of the epic *Kobylandy Batyr* (Kumisbaev 2014) traced the connection between oral traditions and their literary interpretation in the works of modern authors. This method was also used to identify the role of mythological motifs in the works of Kudaiberdiev, particularly in *Kalkaman–May* (2015), where folklore elements were reinterpreted within a contemporary narrative framework.

The comparative-historical method was applied to compare Kazakh epic traditions with literary samples from neighboring regions, such as the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* (Karalaev 2010). This allowed for the identification of common narrative structures and thematic elements, enriching the understanding of Kazakh epic traditions in a broader Central Asian context. Hermeneutic analysis was used to decode philosophical and cultural meanings embedded in literary texts. In Auezov's *Abai's Path* (2012), this method helped to uncover how traditional elements, such as oral narration and rhythm, were employed to recreate the historical context and convey deep philosophical ideas related to national identity and moral development.

For biographical research, the focus was on Mukhamedkhanov's works, such as *Fate and Karlag* (2008) and *Letters Speak* (2016). This method contextualised his literary choices within his personal experiences of repression, exploring how his life shaped his portrayal of historical trauma and his commitment to preserving cultural memory. The literary-comparative method was applied to analyse the prose of Seisenbayev, especially in *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (2019), where his artistic techniques were compared with global literary traditions. This comparison revealed the intertextual connections between Kazakh literature and world literary movements, highlighting Seisenbayev's unique approach to storytelling.

Sultanbekov's works, such as *Blue Meridian Alashore Attila* (2013), were analysed using the historical-artistic approach. This method helped to examine how Sultanbekov reconstructed historical events artistically, focusing on the formation of key images of Kazakh history and the representation of significant national figures. Narrative analysis was employed to study plot structures and their relationship to folklore motifs in the works under review. This method enabled a detailed examination of how oral traditions were adapted in modern narratives, helping to reveal how traditional elements are transformed into new literary aesthetics.

3. Results

3.1. Preservation of traditions in the literature of Central Asia

The literature of Kazakhstan had a rich and multilayered history, going back to the era of the birth of writing in Central Asia. This process developed through epics, folk tales, and legends, such as *Kobylandy Batyr* (Kumisbaev 2014) and *Male Targy* (Satybaldiev 2017). These works preserve the crucial traditions of the Kazakh people. They present the customs of hospitality (*qonaqjylılıq*), the essence of which is a special respect and honour for guests, manifested in generous treats and shelter for travellers. Additionally, reflected are elements of Kazakh folk dress, such as chapanes and camisoles, traditional clothing, distinguished by colourful patterns and symbols expressing the social status and clan affiliation of the heroes. Calendar rituals associated with holidays, such as Nauryz, where special national dishes are traditionally prepared to symbolise the renewal of nature and the beginning of a new life cycle, are presented separately. Thus, epics, reflecting oral traditions, had a decisive influence on the development of written literature of Kazakhstan and the preservation of the cultural identity of the people (Bakhyt 2020).

In the 13th–15th centuries, with the development of Islamic culture and writing, the literature of Kazakhstan acquired new forms and vectors. During this period, religious treatises, philosophical texts, and works reflecting Sufi teachings became valuable literary sources. One example was the legacy of Yasavi, whose work *Divan e Hikmat* (2018) became the most significant monument of medieval literature. Yasavi's texts reflected the traditions of Sufi spiritual practices, such as *zikr* (ritual repetition of the names of God), which contributed to the preservation of the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Kazakh people. The author's works also recorded the traditions of moral education, emphasising values such as mercy, modesty, and spiritual purification.

The founder of Kazakh written literature, poet and philosopher Abai Kunanbaev (1845–1904) also influenced the literature of the entire Central Asia with his works (Zhumataeva 2022). His ideas about enlightenment and cultural renewal inspired generations of Abai authors to experiment with new forms and genres while maintaining attention to national identity (Table 1). Kunanbaev was the first to synthesise traditional Kazakh oral poetry with philosophical and enlightenment ideas, bringing both Western and Eastern concepts into his poetry. His work *Words of Edification* (Kunanbaev 2022) reflected the traditions of moral education, which were expressed in the preaching of virtues such as honesty, diligence, and respect for elders. Abay's writings also presented family and social customs of the Kazakh people, such as respect for the older generation and care for the younger, which were viewed as the cornerstone of social and spiritual unity of the people. Through these traditions Kunanbaev asserted

the value of knowledge and education as the basis for the spiritual growth and advancement of the nation.

<i>Key ideas of Kunanbaev</i>	<i>Main point of the idea</i>	<i>Reflection in the works</i>	<i>Significance for society</i>
Humanity and mercy	Philanthropy, compassion, respect for others	Exhortations to charity, appeals to humanism	Fostering kindness, societal unity
Enlightenment and education	Necessity of knowledge and learning for personal and social development	Calls for education, criticism of ignorance	Development of literacy and cultural growth
Self-discovery and self-improvement	Awareness of inner peace, continuous spiritual and moral development	Reflections on human nature and purpose	Encouraging people to be more responsible for their actions
Criticism of social ills	Condemnation of sloth, ignorance, corruption, greed	Satirical poetry and social criticism	Call for social justice and morality
Hard work ethic	Respect and necessity of labour, honest earnings	Poetry on the value of labour and condemnation of sloth	Fostering work ethic and self-reliance
National identity and unity	Preservation of traditions, language, and culture of the Kazakh people	Poems about homeland, language, and national unity	Shaping national consciousness, patriotism
Harmony with nature	Realisation of the connection between human and nature, unity with it	Landscape lyrics, admiration of nature	Fostering respect for the environment

Table 1. Key ideas and philosophical views of Kunanbaev and their significance for society (compiled by the authors on the basis of Adilova and Kaukerbekova 2020).

In the saga *Kalkaman—May* (2015), Kudaiberdiev described the traditions of love and marriage customs common among Kazakh clans. Specifically, he detailed the tradition of the prohibition of marriages between close relatives and members of the same clan, which was a way to prevent incest and inbreeding, while also contributing to social stability by preventing conflicts within the same clan and expanding alliances between clans. Additionally, the poem touched upon the tradition of blood feud, the essence of which was the obligatory retribution for the spilled blood of a close relative. Through the conflict of the heroes, the traditional notions of honour and duty to family and clan were covered, as well as moral dilemmas arising in Kazakh society at that time.

In the 20th century, during the Soviet period, Kazakh literature underwent significant changes, being subjected to state censorship, and writers were subjected to mass repression (Issakova *et al.* 2021, Ismailova and Duishenbieva 2024). Despite this, the traditions of oral folk poetry were not completely lost. Aimauytov in his novel *Akbilek* (2013) detailed the changes in the Kazakh society of the 20th century, emphasising the interaction between traditional patterns and new realities of the era. The author reflected the tradition of hospitality, which consisted in generous reception of guests and obligatory provision of shelter and food. In addition, the tradition of family honour was described, connected with the obligation of each family member to maintain the reputation and moral purity of the family. The work showed the problem of contradictions between women's individual aspirations and patriarchal norms, where traditional female roles—obedient daughter, wife, and mother—were reinterpreted in the context of changing living conditions.

Epics and folk tales continued to serve as valuable sources of inspiration for authors. In his book *Abai's Path* (2012), Auezov not only explored the life and intellectual development of the great thinker, but also recreated the atmosphere of the 19th century, where Kazakh culture was developing. In Auezov's novel *Abai's Path*, elements of traditional Kazakh epic played a central role, including the rhythm of oral poetry, which was actively used by the author to create a unique atmosphere and convey profound ideas (Pirali and Kurmanbayeva 2022). An example is the scene where Kunanbaev reflects on the meaning of life and inner development. This section of the novel is written using what can be described as an epic rhythm, a characteristic feature of folk poetry. This rhythm is akin to the oral formulaic style found in ancient traditions, such as the Homeric hexameter, where the flow of language follows a predictable, rhythmic pattern. It includes a singsong quality, with harmonious sounds and a structured meter, which serves to give the hero's speech a unique emotional intensity and philosophical depth. This rhythm, rooted in oral tradition, helps convey profound ideas in a way that resonates deeply with the audience, much like the epic poetry of ancient Greece. Such an approach to rhythm and form helped Auezov not only to keep the connection with oral folk art, but also to

present innovative ideas, which in traditional Kazakh epic could be expressed only within a limited framework. The use of oral poetry helped him to make the thoughts and feelings of the characters more accessible and understandable to a wider audience, combining folk motifs with problems relevant to modern society. The use of epic rhythm contributed to the harmonious synthesis of tradition and innovation in the work of Auezov, which allowed presenting new philosophical concepts such as the search for inner freedom, the responsibility of the individual to society and the development of national culture in the conditions of change (Toxambayeva 2022).

In the drama *Enlik-Kebek* (2023), Auezov turned to the motif of tragic love, analogous to *Kalkaman–May* (Kudaiberdiev 2015). The author detailed the traditions of choosing spouses, which involved coordinating marriage between clans considering the lineage, which played a major role in preventing blood kinship and strengthening inter-clan relations. The work also revealed clan customs and the influence of elders on the personal decisions of young people, and stressed the value of honour and morality, which entailed respecting obligations to the clan and strict adherence to established customs. Despite the major influence of the Soviet period on the literature of Kazakhstan, Auezov continued to appeal to the national heritage, contributing to the preservation and understanding of the cultural identity of the people.

In his collection *Blue Doves* (1979), Magauin used traditional images of nomadic life, demonstrating the preservation of essential elements of Kazakh culture. He detailed the traditions of the nomadic way of life, which included seasonal migrations, the essence of which was annual migration from summer pastures to winter camps, ensuring survival and adaptation to natural conditions. The author emphasised the traditions of respect for the older generation, expressed in the recognition of the authority of elders, their role in the transmission of life experience and knowledge. By weaving elements of oral folk art, such as epic motifs and mythological plots into the texts, Magauin emphasised the connection of Kazakh literature with traditional narrative forms. Through the fates of Magauin's characters, moral quests, and conflicts arising in the conditions of the collision of the traditional way of life with new social and historical realities were uncovered, thus contributing to the preservation and comprehension of Kazakh cultural identity.

Modern Kazakh literature continues to draw inspiration from the rich heritage of epic and folklore, updating them to meet the challenges of the time (Sabirova *et al.* 2020, Doszhan 2023b). The authors' works often intertwine traditional motifs with themes of globalisation, migration, social justice, and cultural survival. Sultanbekov's novel *Blue Meridian Alashore Attila* (2013) explored historical events related to the Alash movement and ancient traditions of Kazakh statehood. The work detailed the traditional forms of governance, including the institution of people's assemblies (*quriltay*), where

the critical issues related to the life and governance of the people were decided. The author addressed the value system of the Alash era, based on the principles of collective responsibility, respect for elders, and mutual support within the clan. The author also emphasised the role of ancestors in preserving the tradition of intergenerational continuity, which consisted in the transmission of historical memory, moral and social norms through oral tales and family trees. Thus, the novel reflected the significance of these traditions for the development and preservation of national identity and their influence on modern processes of national revival.

In the novel *Karaultobe* (2023), Zhakyp reflected Kazakh beliefs related to the veneration of ancestral spirits, which consisted in the belief that deceased ancestors continued to influence the fate of the living. The work also detailed the role of aksakals, traditionally manifested in passing on wisdom and life experience to the next generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural and social norms. Zhurtbay's essay *Beynet Drink* (2016) raised the issues of historical memory, actively using folklore motifs. In the text, the author turned to ancient legends and legends, emphasising the significance of sacred places such as holy graves and ancient monuments revered by Kazakhs as centres of spiritual power and symbols of national unity. The symbolism present in the novel had a profound cultural meaning, reflecting traditional Kazakh ideas about the world and society.

In the biographical works of Mukhamedkhanov *Fate and Karlag* (2008) and *Letters Speak* (2016), the traditions of documentary prose and archival heritage are revealed, the significance of preserving the voices of the past was emphasised. In *Letters Speak*, the author emphasised the tradition of writing as a mode of communication, where each letter became not merely a means of transmitting information, but a sacred document that preserved the emotions, thoughts, and life stories of ancestors. Archival materials, memoirs, and private messages were used here, which allowed restoring a living link with history and convey the spirit of bygone eras. The written tradition in this context acted as a bridge between generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural memory.

In *Fate and Karlag* (2008), Mukhamedkhanov turned to traditions associated with fate and trials, reflecting complex historical processes and dramatic turns in the fate of the people. Here, the author used elements of chronicle and documentary narrative techniques to show how personal tragedies and collective trials fit into a broader historical context. Traditions such as oral folklore, folkloric motifs, and recollections of key moments of historical memory became the basis for the creation of images that convey the struggle for identity and the desire for liberation from the shackles of the past.

Seisenbayev's novel *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (2019), written in 1991, was a philosophical parable where traditional images of Kazakh folklore were intertwined with reflections on the fate of human in an era of change. The author used mythological motifs, desert and caravan symbols,

reflecting traditional Kazakh ideas about the path of life, the search for spiritual truth, and the inevitability of historical cycles. The symbolism of the desert served as a metaphor for human destiny and trials, and the image of the caravan conveyed the idea of life's journey and the continuity of generations moving from the past to the future, preserving cultural traditions.

Thus, the literature of Kazakhstan, from ancient epic and folk tales to the works of 20th–21st centuries, continues to develop, preserving and adapting the traditions of oral folk poetry. The influence of such authors as Kunanbaev, Kudaiberdiev, Auezov, continues to inspire writers. These authors have become links between the past and the present, between oral traditions and modern literary forms, preserving cultural heritage and addressing current issues of society (Mashakova 2023). The preservation of traditions and their adaptation in new literary forms demonstrate the lively and dynamic nature of Kazakh literature. The interaction between folklore and modern literature continues to influence the cultural identity of the Kazakh people, confirming its sustainability and ability to transform in a changing world.

3.2. Adaptation to globalisation in Central Asian literature

Central Asian literature has undergone considerable changes in response to globalisation, incorporating new genres and themes, experimenting with form and raising issues of global significance. These changes have been a significant stage in the evolution of a cultural heritage that links tradition with contemporary challenges. Globalisation prompted authors from Kazakhstan to turn to genres and themes that have traditionally been absent from the region's literary canon (Table 2). Genres such as postmodernism, magical realism, and science fiction emerged as writers sought to respond to contemporary challenges and expand the scope of their narratives.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Prevailing genres</i>	<i>Characteristic features</i>	<i>Well-known representatives</i>
Ancient period (up to the 12th century)	Epic, myths, legends	Oral tradition, heroic plots, connection with nomadic way of life, elements of mythology.	<i>Kobylandy Batyr</i> (Kumisbaev 2014), <i>Male Targy</i> (Satybaldiev 2017)
Golden Horde (13th–15th centuries)	Poetry, philosophical treatises	Religious and moral themes, orientation towards oriental literature, use of Arabic and Persian.	<i>Divan e Hikmat</i> (Yasavi 2018)

Kazakh Khanate (15th–18th centuries)	Aytıs, epic, tolgau	Oral poetry of Akyns, philosophical reflections, glorification of heroism, the value of national self-consciousness.	<i>Poetry of Poets and Akyns</i> (Zhanaidarov 2009)
19th century	Poetry, aytıs, akyn literature	Transition to written literature, criticism of social problems, patriotic and philosophical themes, and the birth of national consciousness.	Kunanbaev <i>Words of Edification: Ghaqliya</i> (2022), Kudaiberdiev <i>Kalkaman—May</i> (2015)
Early 20th century	Realism, journalism, drama	Social and political satire, enlightenment, struggle for national identity, the birth of Kazakh journalism.	Aimauytov <i>Akbilek</i> (2013), Auezov <i>Enlik-Kebek</i> (2023)
Soviet period (1920–1980)	Socialist realism, prose, poetry, drama	Ideologisation of literature, themes of heroism, socialist construction, descriptions of the lives of ordinary people, often under the control of censorship.	Auezov <i>Abai's Path</i> (2012)
Perestroika (1980s)	Prose, poetry, essays	Comprehension of historical traumas (repressions, collectivisation), search for national identity, freer expression of thoughts and feelings.	Seisenbayev <i>The Return of Kazybek</i> (1984), <i>The Dead Wander in the Desert</i> (2019), Magauin <i>Blue Doves</i> (1979)
Modernity (1990–present)	Prose, fiction, historical romance, poetry, postmodernism, magic realism, science fiction	Themes of national identity, globalisation, social change, ecology. Expansion of genres, influence of world literature.	Zhurtbay <i>Beynet Drink</i> (2016), Zhakyp <i>Karaultobe</i> (2023)

Table 2. Evolution of genres and thematic areas in the literature of Kazakhstan by historical periods (compiled by the authors on the basis of Oskembay et al. 2018, Toksambayeva et al. 2024).

Mukhamedkhanov's work clearly demonstrated the process of adaptation of Kazakh literature to the conditions of globalisation. In his works, he not only preserved elements of traditional Kazakh culture, but also integrated modern literary forms, expanding the boundaries of national literature and addressing universal themes understandable to an international audience. One of the key aspects of adaptation to globalisation in the works of Mukhamedkhanov was the integration of modern literary forms. Mukhamedkhanov's work was his appeal to themes that mattered not only for Kazakh history, but also for the entire world. In the historical-documentary work *Fate and Karlag* (Mukhamedkhanov 2008), the author addressed the theme of political repression and totalitarianism, which made his text relevant in the context of global historical memory. This aspect allowed the work to transcend the national narrative and become part of the global debate on the fate of victims of repression and authoritarian regimes. It analysed the mechanisms of oppression, the consequences of repression for society and the individual, and drew parallels with analogous historical processes in other countries. This approach facilitated the perception of the Kazakh historical experience in a global context.

Another prominent element of adaptation was the use of innovative forms of narrative. Mukhamedkhanov combined documentary and fiction elements, applied polyphony of voices and metanarrative techniques. This approach brought his work closer to global postmodernist trends, making it understandable and in demand among a wider audience. In *Letters Speak* (Mukhamedkhanov 2016), the epistolary form became not only a way of conveying individual experiences, but also a tool for creating a multi-layered narrative, which was in line with global literary trends. The use of letters allowed not only recording personal emotions but also demonstrating the influence of historical processes on individual destinies, thus creating a complex network of interconnected meanings. This approach emphasised the subjectivity of historical perception, which is also inherent in the postmodern approach in literature.

Globalisation was also reflected in the genre diversity of Mukhamedkhanov's works. The author used elements of documentary literature, fiction novel, journalism, and epistolary genre, creating a complex multi-layered text structure. This combination of traditional and modern forms was in line with the global trend towards interdisciplinarity and flexibility of genre boundaries. The author endeavoured to reflect not only national identity, but also its interaction with global processes, which made his works part of the global literary space. His style was characterised by a synthesis of folklore motifs and modern narrative techniques, which allowed him to appeal to both traditional Kazakh readers and a wide international audience. The influence of world literary traditions on the work of Mukhamedkhanov also played a significant role in this process. In his works, one can find references to Western European, Russian, and Oriental literature, which testifies to his awareness and meaningful

dialogue with world culture. This dialogue was manifested both in the themes of the works and in the choice of artistic means. For example, the use of polyphony and complex time structures allows comparing his works with those of modernist and postmodernist writers.

Literary experiments based on the synthesis of oral and written traditions strengthened the cultural code of the region. Magical realism was developed in the literature of Kazakhstan. This genre enabled Kazakh writers to incorporate the region's mystical traditions into narratives that explored questions of identity and modernity. Furthermore, science fiction was becoming popular among younger generations of authors (Ananyeva and Kalieva 2023, Bazarbayeva et al. 2024).

Experiments with literary form were a distinctive feature of Kazakhstan literature's adaptation to the challenges of the time. The postmodernist approach, characterised by narrative fragmentation and metafictional devices, manifested itself in the works of writers such as Seisenbayev. In his novel *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (Seisenbayev 2019), ancient nomadic traditions were juxtaposed with contemporary existential dilemmas, illustrating the tension between past and present. Such works emphasised the value of preserving the memory of cultural roots even in the face of rapid social change.

Mukhamedkhanov explored the interaction of tradition and modernity in his works. Other authors of the 21st century, such as Kudaiberdiev and Seisenbayev, continued Abai's legacy by combining historical themes with modern narratives. Mukhamedkhanov played a key role in combining national themes with the demands of the globalised literary landscape. As a literary scholar and writer, he preserved and revitalised Kazakh oral traditions, transforming them into written works that resonated with contemporary audiences. His work was an example of how to preserve national identity while embracing global literary trends. His research into Abai's legacy was the basis for the cultural revival of the region. In the late 20th and early 21st century, Mukhamedkhanov created such significant works that were published after his death, *Fate and Karlag* (2008) and *Letters Speak* (2016). These works clearly demonstrate how the author connects Kazakh national themes with the globalised literary landscape. In *Fate and Karlag*, Mukhamedkhanov used a documentary style, exploring repression and camps, which allowed him to place Kazakh history in a broader global context related to human rights violations and totalitarian regimes. In *Letters Speak*, the author applied the epistolary genre, combining personal letters with historical context, making the work universal, addressing universal issues.

In the era of globalisation, the genres and themes of Kazakh literature changed, reflecting new challenges and cultural trends (Zhetessova et al. 2025, Doszhan 2023a). Traditional historical and philosophical works were supplemented by the genres of science fiction, the psychological novel and

social drama, which signalled a broadening of the literary horizon. Seisenbayev addressed philosophical and social issues in his works, raising themes of existential crisis and the search for the meaning of life, as manifested in his novel *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (Seisenbayev 2019, Jin 2023). At the same time, there was an increasing interest in environmental issues in literature, which was reflected in the works of writers from the Abai region exploring the impact of industrialisation on nature and humans. Considerable attention was paid to the genre of journalism, wherein the authors analysed historical and social processes through the lens of comparative analysis.

Zhurtbay's book *Comparatively Insignificant* (2021) addressed the issues of national identity, traditional values, and their transformation under the influence of globalisation processes. The author emphasised that unique cultural features shaped by historical experience, language, rituals, and traditions served as the basis of national identity. Traditional family and social values, expressed in mutual support, respect, and collectivism, also played a significant role in shaping the social structure. Additionally, the work notes that ethics and spiritual foundations, such as honesty and justice, were valuable components of cultural heritage that shaped the behaviour and worldview of ancestors. In the context of globalisation, traditional values were reinterpreted, adapted, and preserved through integration with modern cultural practices and technologies (Efremov 2025, Jiao 2024).

The adaptation of Kazakhstan's literature to globalisation was manifested in the development of new genres such as postmodernism, magic realism, and science fiction. The works *Karaultobe* (2023) by Zhakyp, *Letters Speak* (2016) by Mukhamedkhanov reflected changes in the form of literary works, considered global issues, and demonstrated their connection with national traditions. *Karaultobe* traced the blending of genres including poetry, ballad, and prose, which indicated the development of literary forms. This reflected the trend towards the integration of fiction and documentary narrative, which contributed to a better understanding of historical memory and cultural heritage. *Letters Speak* was a collection of letters, which gave it the status of not only a literary work, but also a historical document that recorded the worldview of people of the past (Ananyeva *et al.* 2023).

These works raised global issues such as historical justice, preservation of cultural identity, the influence of time on traditions and social values. For example, in *Letters Speak*, letters reflected the experiences of people in different historical periods, which touched upon universal themes of generational continuity, loss, and memory. The connection between global issues and national traditions was manifested through the lens of Kazakh culture. In *Karaultobe*, historical memory and poetic perception of the world were expressed through epic motifs close to folk folklore. These works showed how Kazakh literature has adapted to changing forms of expression while staying a carrier of national memory and traditions. Translations and participation in international literary festivals

expanded the sphere of influence of Kazakh literature, ensuring its continued relevance in the global literary landscape. The literature of the region continued to play the role of a bridge between tradition and modernity.

3.3. Synthesis of traditions and innovations in Central Asian literature

Central Asian literature has historically been a dynamic synthesis of tradition and innovation, reflecting the diverse cultural and historical influences of the region. This interaction is particularly evident in the way in which national identity and modern approaches come together in literary works. The integration of national identity with modern literary techniques in Central Asia emerged as a reaction to socio-political and cultural transformations in the region (Sabirova *et al.* 2020).

The work *Abai's Path* (2012) by Auezov was a panoramic overview of the transition period in Kazakh society in the 19th and early 20th century. The novel organically combined the motifs of oral folk art, such as images of Akyns, folk wisdom, and epic forms of narration, with psychological depth and complex composition inherent in modern literature. The characters' dialogues often resembled folk aytıs, and the storyline reflected both historical events and the inner world of the characters, which gave the work a multi-layered nature. The complexity of conveying characters and setting in the novel *Abai's Path* stemmed from the profound psychologism and detailed depiction of Kazakh society of the 19th–early 20th century.

Auezov created a multifaceted protagonist whose inner development reflected the contradictions of the epoch. In contrast to traditional folklore characters, Kunanbaev was not a static image, but a personality who underwent a complex path of development, comprehension of the surrounding reality, and the struggle between traditional patterns and new ideas. The author conveyed his experiences, doubts, and aspirations with special artistic precision, which made the novel innovative for Kazakh literature. Auezov used detailed descriptions of nature, everyday life, customs and social conflicts, creating a convincing picture of the life of the Kazakh people. Attention to detail helped only to recreate the historical era, but also to show its internal dynamics—the collision of established traditions with new trends that gradually transformed social relations. The novel was innovative in combining traditional elements of the Kazakh epic with a realistic and modernist approach. The author organically wove folklore motifs, folk wisdom, and images of Akyns into the narrative, but at the same time built a complex, psychologically accurate drama, characteristic of Western realistic prose. Thus, the Abai district, named in honour of the famous poet and cultural figure Kunanbaev, became a cornerstone of Kazakhstan's literary development (Toktarbekuly and Saishanhuli 2023, Wang 2023).

Promoting intellectual growth, cultural introspection, and moral philosophy, Abai's legacy served as an inspiration for subsequent generations of writers. In the digital age, the dissemination of Abai's works through online platforms enabled his ideas to reach a global audience. This accessibility allowed contemporary authors to reinterpret Abai's themes in new contexts. In Kyrgyzstan, Chingiz Aitmatov's novel *A Day Lasts Over a Hundred Years* analogously combined traditional Kyrgyz narrative with contemporary existential themes. These parallels emphasised a unifying Central Asian commitment to the synthesis of tradition and innovation in literature.

Central Asian literature in the 21st century has been characterised by a combination of traditional heritage and responses to the challenges of globalisation. In *Forerunner of the 'Damned Days'* (Kemelbaeva 2022), the author reflected not only a symbolic understanding of social and cultural change but also demonstrated a special attention to the internal contradictions that emerged in a rapidly changing world. The stylistic features of the text included vivid imagery and metaphorical constructions that strengthened the sense of impending changes. The author, while retaining traditional motifs characteristic of Kazakh literature, emphasised the significance of the spiritual component and national cultural codes, stressing that globalisation did not abolish ethno-cultural specificity, but only complicated the process of adaptation. Therewith, the central aspect of the publication was the realisation of new forms of identity that emerged at the intersection of traditional culture and external influences. Kemelbaeva created a contrast between inherited norms and emerging ideas associated with global discourse. Through this, the author revealed the dynamics of the perception of modernity, showing how the collective consciousness had to transform so as not to lose the historical heritage.

The evolution of Central Asian literature reflected the balance between the preservation of cultural traditions and the adoption of modern innovations. The works of Kudaiberdiev, Auezov exemplified this synthesis, while Abai's rich literary heritage continued to inspire contemporary authors. In the digital age, Kazakh authors of Abai region actively used the latest technologies to reinterpret cultural motifs and adapt them to the global reader. In their works, they addressed traditional themes, such as the philosophical heritage of Kunanbaev, the Kazakh steppe epic and mythological images, interpreting them in the context of universal humanistic values. Literary strategies included the use of elements of magical realism, historical narrative, and philosophical essayism, which contributed to the accessibility and understanding of Kazakh culture outside the region. Writers integrated folkloric motifs into contemporary texts, transforming them through the lens of global literary trends. The dissemination of these ideas took place through digital platforms, including online publications, literary blogs, and social media, providing broad international access to Kazakh cultural heritage. In this way, Abai authors contributed to the representation of national

culture on the global literary stage. As new authors gained international recognition, Central Asian literature became a testament to the enduring vitality of its traditions and the creative potential of contemporary approaches.

4. Discussion

One of the key aspects was the study of the synthesis of traditional oral poetry with philosophical and enlightenment ideas, pioneered by Kunanbaev. His contribution to Kazakh literature was viewed as a point of transition from oral tradition to written literature with an emphasis on profound philosophical reflections. In this context, his work *Words of Edification: Ghaqliya* (Kunanbaev 2022), which analysed moral, educational, and social issues, deserved special attention. This transition played a significant role in the further development of Kazakh literature, laying the foundations for a deeper understanding of national identity and social development. Analyses of 20th-century literature demonstrated the complex interplay between ideological control, state censorship, and the preservation of folk traditions. Despite the rigid framework of socialist realism, writers such as Auezov kept in touch with the oral tradition, using epic rhythm and folk motifs. His novel *Abai's Path* (Auezov 2012) was not only a work of fiction, but also a historical study of the cultural transformations of the 19th century. Auezov's stylistic techniques, including the use of the rhythmic structure of folk poetry, helped to assert that his work was a successful example of synthesis of tradition and innovation.

Adilova and Kaukerbekova (2020) noted the significance of Abai Kunanbaev's work as a key element in the development of modern Kazakh literature, which agreed with the earlier study. However, the authors emphasised the focus on the aesthetic and artistic aspects of the texts, whereas the analysis presented focused on the integration of folkloric elements in the context of national identity. This difference was explained by different research objectives: Adilova and Kaukerbekova focused on the interpretation of art, while the study of trends in Central Asian literature focused on the influence of historical and cultural continuity. Furthermore, the present study aligns with Adilova and Kaukerbekova's conclusion about the value of preserving cultural traditions but suggested that this process is accompanied by a deeper transformation in the context of globalisation. Thus, the studies complemented each other, offering different perspectives for assessing the role of Abai's work in contemporary literature.

Ananyeva and Kalieva (2023) examined the transition from socialist realism to magic realism in contemporary Central Asian literature, noting that this process contributed to the expansion of artistic language and the strengthening of global trends in regional literature. The study confirmed the significance of adapting traditional plots and motifs to new forms of narrative, which was in line with

the conclusions presented in *Modern Trends in Central Asian Literature*. However, in contrast to the study by Ananyeva and Kalieva, where the emphasis was on the influence of magic realism, the present study analysed contemporary trends in Central Asian literature and revealed the preservation of realist traditions and their transformation under the influence of social and cultural changes. Specifically, the study showed that 21st century authors continue to address historical memory and national identity through realist forms rather than through the allusions and symbolism inherent in magic realism. The difference in the interpretation of these tendencies was explained by distinct methodological approaches. While Ananyeva and Kalieva focused on stylistic changes, the present study emphasised the meaningful evolution of literary works in the context of globalisation.

Botokanova *et al.* (2024) analysed the changes in the consciousness of post-nomads under the influence of globalisation, which was partly in agreement with the findings of the present study. The researchers agreed that globalisation stimulated a rethinking of cultural values and traditions, which supported the conclusions about the transformation of cultural narratives in contemporary art in Kazakhstan. However, their study focused on changing social identities through the lens of global processes, while the study of trends in Central Asian literature focused on artistic texts as a mechanism for preserving and adapting cultural heritage. Furthermore, Botokanova *et al.* highlighted the economic aspects of globalisation as key factors of change, which differed from the approach taken in the present study, which considered the cultural-symbolic means of transformation. These differences were due to explained by distinct research objectives: the reviewed study explored the consciousness of post-nomads in a broad social context, while the presented analysis of Kazakh art emphasised local features of artistic expression. Despite the divergences, both studies emphasised the significance of preserving cultural identity in the face of global challenges, which testified to the complementary nature of the research.

Nabiyeva *et al.* (2022) explored Abai's philosophical heritage as a basis for the development of patriotism in the youth of Kazakhstan. The researchers' approaches echo the ideas presented in the present study, especially in recognising Abai's philosophy as a valuable tool for fostering national consciousness and strengthening cultural identity. Both studies emphasised the significance of Abai as a symbol of unity and a spiritual reference point for young people. However, the studies differed in their emphasis on the application of Abai's legacy. Nabiyeva *et al.* addressed the educational aspects, linking Abai's philosophy with patriotic education through formal and informal educational practices. At the same time, the study of trends in Central Asian literature focused on artistic and textual analyses of works as ways of cultural transmission of his ideas. This distinction was substantiated by the contexts of heritage application: the cited study considered a pedagogical approach, while the present

study is a culturological one. Still, both studies agree that Abai's legacy continues to be a fundamental element for building a sustainable future for Kazakhstan.

Soilemez and Atesh (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of the works of two outstanding poets, focusing on their spiritual and moral values reflected in the texts. The study echoed the points made in the presented study in questions about the significance of Abai's ideas for contemporary culture and society. Both studies agreed that Abai's work plays a key role in the development of national consciousness and spiritual heritage of Kazakhstan. However, the studies showed differences in approaches. Soilemez and Atesh focused on the comparison of Abai with Mehmet Akif, which allowed covering the universality of his ideas in the context of global literary heritage. At the same time, the present study focused on local aspects of Abai's influence, emphasising his role in contemporary Kazakh art and culture. The differences in approaches were explained by the research objectives: the cited study sought to demonstrate the universality of Abai's ideas, while the present study—their cultural and artistic significance for Kazakhstan. However, both approaches confirmed the relevance and versatility of Abai's legacy in different contexts.

Toksambayeva *et al.* (2024) focused on the study of works reflecting philosophical and cultural concepts of independence formed in the literature of Abai and his followers, as well as in the Abai region. The study confirmed the value of Abai's legacy in the global context, which echoed the theses presented in the present study, especially in terms of Abai's significance as a carrier of national spirit and its connection with modernity. Therewith, Toksambayeva *et al.* concluded that Abai's literary heritage largely determined the concept of independence in Kazakh literature, while the findings of the present study showed that in the conditions of globalisation, contemporary Central Asian literature uses Abai's heritage not only as a symbol of independence, but also as a basis for the synthesis of traditions and new artistic forms. Specifically, if Toksambayeva *et al.* proved that Abai's works became the ideological basis for national self-identification, the present study revealed that contemporary authors, relying on Abai's philosophy, adapt it to new social and cultural realities, creating new forms of expression of the national spirit. Additionally, Toksambayeva *et al.* emphasised the sustainability of traditional genres in the literature of independent Kazakhstan, while the findings of the present study demonstrated that these genres are undergoing active transformation under the influence of global trends.

The summarised findings showed the key role of the work of Kunanbaev as an essential element of cultural heritage and national identity of Kazakhstan. The studies confirmed its significance for the development of literary tradition, philosophical thinking, and patriotic education, emphasising the relevance of Abai's ideas in both local and global contexts. Various studies have focused on specific

aspects, such as the integration of folklore motifs, artistic analysis, pedagogical significance, and the impact of globalisation, which testified to the versatility and universality of Abai's legacy. The approaches ranged from public policy studies to textual analyses, creating a complementary picture of his cultural and social contributions.

5. Conclusions

One of the key aspects of the originality of the presented study is the analysis of the relationship between traditional oral forms and modern literary genres, which helped to identify the mechanisms of literary evolution of Kazakhstan. The study found that the literary heritage of Kunanbaev, his philosophical views and artistic techniques had a profound influence on the writers of 20th and 21st centuries. This influence is manifested both in the preservation of epic traditions and in their adaptation to new conditions through the inclusion of elements of modernism, postmodernism, and magic realism.

The integration of epic motifs into genres like science fiction and magical realism not only demonstrates how Kazakh literature preserves its cultural identity but also highlights its ability to adapt to contemporary global challenges. By blending traditional folklore with modern literary forms, Kazakh writers create narratives that resonate with both local and global audiences, ensuring the survival and relevance of cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world. This synthesis offers valuable insights for other small literatures facing similar pressures of globalisation, suggesting that the preservation of national identity through literature is not only possible but also essential in maintaining cultural diversity in the global literary landscape. The ongoing evolution of Kazakh literature can serve as a model for how literary traditions can be revitalised, ensuring that even in an age of global interconnectedness, unique cultural voices continue to thrive and contribute to broader cultural conversations.

The findings of the study revealed that during the Soviet period, despite severe ideological restrictions, the traditions of oral folk poetry continued to be preserved and transformed. Special attention in the analysis was paid to the work of Auezov, who managed to organically combine the epic rhythm of Kazakh oral poetry with new literary approaches, thus creating a unique literary atmosphere in the work "Abai's Path". In this context, the study identified the elements of traditional epic rhythm used to convey philosophical and ethical ideas, which emphasised the significance of preserving folklore motifs in Kazakh literature.

Further evolution of Kazakh literature in the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries demonstrated an even greater degree of integration of national traditions with global literary trends.

The study revealed that the literature of this period actively mastered new genre forms, including science fiction, magic realism, and postmodernism, which contributed to the creation of new literary meanings. For instance, Mukhamedkhanov used elements of documentary prose and meta-narrative, which enabled him to combine historical and personal contexts in his works, *Fate and Karlag* and *Letters Speak*. His work illustrates the process of adaptation of national literature to new literary forms, reflecting both historical memory and contemporary philosophical concepts.

Globalisation significantly influenced the development of Kazakh literature, sparking an interest in genre experimentation and internationalisation of themes. Analyses of the works of 21st century authors, Seisenbayev and Zhakyp, revealed that their works continued the tradition of critical reflection on national history and identity, but at the same time they use global literary forms. For example, Seisenbayev's novel *The Dead Wander in the Desert* combines elements of traditional Kazakh epic with postmodern narrative strategies, which makes his work multi-layered and universally comprehensible. In turn, Zhakyp's *Karaultobe* was an experiment in literary form, combining poetry, ballad, and prose, which reflects the tendency to synthesise different narrative structures.

Kazakh literature continued to develop in dialogue with tradition, while adapting to the challenges of the time. This confirmed the hypothesis that the preservation of cultural identity is possible even in the face of global change if tradition is adapted rather than rejected. A limitation of the present study was the limited availability of archival materials and texts due to the recent start of their digitisation and the influence of the ideological framework of the Soviet period on the interpretation of traditions. Future research could focus on the impact of digital technologies on the preservation of oral and written traditions in Central Asia, comparative analyses of regional literature, and the study of environmental and social themes in cultural narratives.

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