

On the path to reviving lost heritage

Nurjan Sartbekova

Cultural identity connects people to their surroundings in an invisible way. It stains our minds and hearts and does not leave us wherever we go. It is a canvas that has been painted and repainted over time, influenced by the past, by tradition, by heritage. In a globalized environment, the question of who we are no longer becomes an individual concern but a collective story. This issue explores cultural identity and how it gets constructed, dismantled, and rebuilt in today's age.

Identity is private and public. The force of national identity galvanizes communities and shapes the past, present, and future (Bektenova *et al.* 2025; Gerchanivska 2021). It is more than a symbol; it is safety, even in the most tenuous of post-national trauma communities.

Central Asia is a striking example of a region that has lost its national identity and is now trying to re-establish it. Soviet rule transformed Central Asia's cultural identity into a blank canvas for individual expression (Polese and Sheranova 2024). One Soviet narrative replaced languages, customs, and history. Russian became the dominant language, forcing native tongues into the shadows, while Soviet ideology redefined what was 'acceptable' in culture, erasing much of the region's heritage (Liddicoat, 2025; Sultanbayeva *et al.* 2013). The Soviets wanted their form of unification above all else, and they succeeded, but only at the expense of community disintegration and taking away the cultural identities and shared histories of diverse nations (Kokaisl and Hejzlarová 2023).

The fledgling republics faced a monumental task following the collapse of the Soviet Empire. To heal and rebuild.

The continued influence of the Soviet Union's rule over the region is still evident not just in the political and social aspects of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but also in their cultural aspects (Osmonova *et al.* 2025; Sartbekova *et al.* 2024). In each of these nations, there has been an effort to re-establish a national identity that existed before Russia came to the region. This effort is reflected in relearning native languages, and the establishment of symbols of the nation that recognize the existence of a national history (Gamaliia and Artemenko 2023; Shaukenova *et al.* 2014). This is not an easy path to modernize and recognize how modern events influence the significance of localized practices and culture.

Certain issues of the modern period in relation to the reconstruction of national identity in Central Asia are remain. The role of the Russian language and the emergence of English in the

education and government systems pose obstacles to the language revival efforts (Asanov and Bazarkulova 2024; Chaika 2022). The nations efforts to rediscover elements like artifacts, monuments, and symbols are obstructed by the influence of the foreign countries whose cultures remain, through mass media, deeply integrated into everyday life. Variables like these contribute to the contemporary issues that make the reclamation of a clear national identity difficult (Sharipova 2019; Ahn and Smagulova 2021).

This thematic issue of *Kervan* investigates the meaning of Central Asian identities as manifested in literature, languages, culture and history. These contributions expose the unique facets of this rich mosaic and show how the region is re-creating itself in the present. With these contributions, we hope to illuminate and expand the perspectives of our readers and researchers to give them the opportunity to engage with and appreciate the vibrant culture of Central Asia and its evolution over time.

We decided to divide our issue into the following thematic sections:

Cultural identity in literature

The first section of this issue explores the intricate relationship between literature and national identity, focusing on how Central Asian literature serves as a platform for the preservation and evolution of cultural identity. The article “The distinctiveness of the Kazakh national character in English literary translations” analyzes how Kazakh national identity is represented in English translations of fiction. By examining the role of the translator in conveying cultural nuances, the study emphasizes the delicate balance between linguistic and cultural fidelity. The translator’s creativity is crucial in maintaining the essence of national identity while ensuring that the translation remains accessible to foreign audiences.

The study “Contemporary trends in Central Asian literature: Preserving traditions and adapting to globalisation” sheds light on how modern Central Asian writers navigate the challenges of preserving traditional values while adapting to the forces of globalization. This synthesis of folklore and modern literary techniques allows Central Asian literature to remain relevant in the contemporary world, while still reflecting the national identity of the past. Through the lens of magic realism and postmodernism, these literary works reimagine traditional narratives and reinforce the importance of cultural heritage in shaping the future.

“Kyrgyz diaspora literature in China and Canada: Identity, memory, and cultural adaptation” takes a comparative approach, examining the themes of migration, cultural memory, and national identity through the works of Kyrgyz writers and their counterparts in China and Canada. The study highlights

the transnational nature of identity, showing how literature from diaspora communities reflects both the preservation of cultural heritage and the complex negotiation of identity in a globalized world.

The section concludes with “Images of family roles and authority in literature: Kyrgyz cultural-historical aspects,” which explores the depiction of family roles in Kyrgyz literature, both traditional and modern. This analysis reveals how literature functions as a tool for discussing social progress and the evolving understanding of authority, particularly within the context of a society transitioning from a collectivist ideology to one more influenced by global social dynamics.

Language and cognition

The second section addresses the relationship between language and cultural identity, providing insights into how linguistic choices contribute to the construction of identity. “Linguacultural concept of invective lexicon on the basis of Chinese, Russian, and English” examines how invective language functions as a means of cultural identification in English, Chinese, and Russian. The study highlights the differences in the invective lexicons of these languages, reflecting the cultural values and social norms of their respective societies.

“Cognitive strategies in the creation and interpretation of folklore: A comparative analysis of Kazakh and Western literary traditions” compares the cognitive processes that shape folklore in Kazakhstan and the English-speaking world. The study identifies how metaphorical strategies play a key role in conveying cultural values and emphasizes the uniqueness of Kazakh folklore in terms of its emotional and cultural expression. The findings illustrate how folklore can be adapted to modern conditions, ensuring its continued relevance in a changing world.

“Ethnosemantic foundations of number names in a cross-border toposystem” focuses on the ethnosemantic characteristics of toponyms in Kazakhstan’s border regions, particularly those adjacent to Russia. By analysing the cultural meanings embedded in place names, the study underscores the importance of toponyms in expressing cultural identity, as well as the challenges of preserving these meanings in the face of cross-border influences.

Mysticism and symbolism

The final section explores the symbolic and mystical dimensions of Central Asian identity, which are deeply intertwined with the spiritual and philosophical traditions of the region. The study “Literary heritage of poets and writers of the Urals-Caspian region: Current research and poetic features” offers a historical and literary analysis of poets and writers from this region, showing how their works reflect

both traditional Kazakh culture and the modern transformations occurring in the country. The study highlights the role of local literary traditions in maintaining cultural continuity, particularly in times of societal change.

“Exploring mystical motifs in literature as a reflection of human consciousness” examines the mystical elements in Kazakh literature, drawing comparisons with British and Irish literary traditions. The study explores how mystical motifs, such as the symbolism of the steppe and sky, are used to reflect the spiritual and philosophical values of Kazakh culture, while also engaging with universal themes of morality and spiritual redemption. This comparison illustrates the dynamic interplay between national and universal elements in the construction of identity through literature.

The authors have worked tirelessly on this issue for nearly a year, and while the process has been long and demanding, it has also been an inspiring and rewarding experience. The collaboration and constant interaction have yielded excellent results, and we sincerely hope that this issue will be engaging and valuable to you, our readers.

As the guest editor, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the chief editor, Mauro Tosco, with whom we worked closely throughout the entire process. His support and professionalism were key to bringing this project to life, and I am deeply thankful for his commitment to realizing my idea.

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Nurjan Sartbekova is a Professor and Full Doctor at Kyrgyz State University named after I. Arabaev, where she also serves as the Director of the Sh. Kadyrova World Languages and International Relations Institute in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. Her research interests cover a wide range of topics, including the evolution of music education, the role of gender in political discourse, and the development of educational systems, particularly in vocational and technical education. She also studies folklore, mythology, and the cultural significance of music, with a focus on Central Asian traditions and their influence on modern society.

Nurjan can be contacted by email at sartbek_nurja@outlook.com