

## Kazakh Traditional Musical Culture: Worldview Universals

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**Abstract:** The paper gives comprehensive understanding of traditional Kazakh musical culture from the modern humanities viewpoint, explanation of the concept of “Kazakh traditional musical culture”, which is defined as a complex, hierarchical self-developing system, which is ethnogenetically based on the spiritual and philosophical beliefs of the nomadic society; as well as a timeless cultural value, capable of preserving and reproducing its meaning for future generations. These provisions are based on the material of historically established ideological universals of traditional culture, which mean authentic constants of Kazakh objective reality.

**Key words:** Un • Saz • Muyiz • Konyr • Music • Kui • Konil-kui

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### INTRODUCTION

Modern processes of social development and moving forward of the states to join the global civilization and cultural space are accompanied by activation of spontaneous, sometimes uncontrolled cultural borrowings, which have both positive and negative impact. It is manifested through a wide range of modern contexts of cultural diffusion expressed in a growing number of contacts of state and social institutions, as well as migration of people from different cultures and countries, which may lead to a certain uniformity and unification of cultures in future.

Today one of characteristics of modern environment of Kazakh culture is determined by the dynamics of social and cultural modernization: emergence of new methods and forms of human existence as a result of revolutionary changes in capabilities of communication technology to transmit information that can be described as an expansion of virtual version of culture, characterized by “mosaic structure” [1]. Under these conditions topical issue is to appeal to the cultural tradition as a timeless value that is capable today to contribute to preservation of cultural identity.

**Traditional Musical Culture as a Subject of Philosophical Analysis:** The demand to study the problem under consideration arose due to the fact that, in

spite of the existing studies on various aspects of traditional culture, the conceptual approaches especially to the musical traditions remain ambiguous. Firstly, there is still an opinion about traditional music as a relic or the raw material for modern professionals. Secondly, most scientific studies on traditional music have a special musicological nature. As for philosophical studies, they are based on the following alternative positions: traditional culture as a self-sufficient phenomenon; the standpoint known as bi-culture expressing the worldview of break-up and recognizing Western culture as the dominant. This trend is grounded as having a historically objective character, therefore, as universal for modern humanity. The tendency of recognizing traditional culture viability in modern social and cultural environment is more clearly shown as an important factor of cultural and national identity. Common to all three trends is the typological approach “East - West”, reflecting the situation existing in the current global cultural and historical process. We propose an alternative research viewpoint, the formula of which may be presented as a correlation of tradition and modernization. And it is not the opposition in the sense of either tradition or modernization, but an interrelated and interacting integrity. Correlation of “tradition – modernization” is considered to be a single process having a universal character. It is another matter that its manifestations in different parts of the world are different, but it takes place

both in the West and in the East with its regional peculiarities. In the context of modernization, the role of omnivorous and eclectic popular culture increases; it pleases the crowd distributing poor quality products for commercial purposes, integrating into society through technology rather than using the ideas, that makes especially acute the role of cultural traditions, spiritual values of society, mentality and symbolic structures ensuring the identity of the society. Due to the tradition as a phenomenon of social communication the cultural experience is passed from one generation to other generations. In this sense, the Kazakh musical tradition, being the most functional and universal factor in the development of traditional culture and as a cultural and spiritual power of nomadic civilization, has earlier performed the "world-modeling functions" in the traditional culture and now has more a "...world-presenting role" [ 2, p. 9-11]. Perhaps that is why musical tradition, like music in general, is today involved in the context of social and cultural modernization more than other branches of art. In light of the above it becomes clear that traditional oral culture, embodied in the undivided syncretism of music and word, accumulating vast cosmic energy is rich in content and exceptional in the force of impact. Ascertainment of the origin of music is therefore not only of highly specialized interest. This is the problem, which is closely related to many broader questions, since music "is so universal form of human spirit expression that we can not even hope to understand its nature and its functions without a thorough study of music in its relationship with the process of mankind formation as a whole" [3].

Historically, in the territory of Kazakhstan the traditional culture functions as a true legacy. In the understanding of traditional bearers and researchers, it is a significant phenomenon relevant to contemporary society. In this case, the definition "traditional culture" refers to a nomadic (horse-nomadic) society that absorbed the history of nomadic civilizations of the Huns, Turks and Kazakhs. This is highlighted in the paper for considering the role of nomadic mentality in the Kazakh traditional musical culture, considered as a flexible system, the viability of which is provided by the ability to adapt to variability of social and cultural environment and mechanisms of transformation.

#### **Authentic Constants of Kazakh Traditional Music:**

Traditional culture is syncretic and indivisible phenomenon in which all human activities constitute an integral monolith. With respect to the traditional music it

is evident from the fact that it goes back to the ancient syncretism as the unity of all parts of spiritual, material and production aspects of social life: signal – magic – dance - and labor complexes. Relics of the antiquity can be found implicitly in various manifestations of contemporary cultural practice that enables reconstruction of its cultural and historical evolution. Being a holistic phenomenon they retain their nature and contain a variety of meanings in their immensity. This style of thinking of the oral culture is embodied in authentic constants expressed in an adequate figurative form of the integral relationship with the whole cosmic world. One of the worldview universals implying comprehension of the cosmic world and oneself in it, in a complex multiple-meaning visual and sound image, is deep philosophical and aesthetic understanding of "un": Un zhinadym tynys aluga – picking up of the sounds, the voice of the universe to live in the rhythm of the universe breath; Un zhinadym tynystanuga - picking up of the sounds, the voice of the universe to feel unified and solid physically and spiritually; Un zhinadym tynysuga – picking up of the sounds of Heaven and Earth to feel blissful and reposeful (K. Nurlanova). It is clearly evinces the authentic nature of the constants that in each case highlight a particular meaning retaining at the same time their inexhaustibility. "Un" (sound - voice) - "is not just images of disclosing heavens and earth to man, but also a form of a man's appeal to himself, for he is a whole too in this great inter-involved wholeness. "Un" is an acoustic and auditory image of the Universe, comprehended by the nomad in a sensible and contemplative attitude... This sound of the world provided the basis for the Kazakh traditional music and received an amazingly mysterious definition "konyr", "konyr un": the sound of a deep, low, noble tone, slow, penetrating and salutiferous. Probably this is what the sound must be: as life-breath of the Universe" [4, p. 38]. Kazakh scientists' analysis shows that "konyr" is a comprehensive universal of Kazakh life and used widely from simple physical phenomena to the elusive state of life and their emotional distress. Semantics of this innermost word is broad: in everyday life "konyr" means brown color, associated with the "hub of the universe". "Kyzyl konyr" is redish- brown and "konyr ala" means mixed with white, not dark. "Konyr kuren" means dark brown, "konyr koskyl tusti" means thickening twilight with all shades of brown from red to black. It is a gradual transition from the color of life to the color of death; in Kazakh culture it symbolizes "life passing into nothingness" [5]. "Konyr un" is the first sound that preceded the creation of the world. It is one of

the basic concepts of traditional musical culture of Kazakhs: 1. "Konyr" is a genre of song and instrumental culture. Songs, dombra and kobyz kui could be called simply "Konyr", or "Konyrzhai", "Zhaikonyr", "Nazkonyr" and "Asemkonyr", expressing the state of deep meditation, serious, concentrated reflection about life in all its various, sometimes complex manifestations. 2. "Konyrau" (bell) is a musical instrument that was used to accompany songs and kuis. This instrument was used by musicians – kylkobyz, dombra and shankobyz players and baksy (shamans), attaching "konyrau" to the head, neck, or inside the body of the musical instrument. 3. "Konyr" is a concept adequate to the term "tonality" in European music. It is divided into two large groups: "konyr" and "alkonyr" corresponding to the minor and major; 4. In singing culture the term "konyr" serves to express certain emotional connotations: soft, serene, beautiful voice, ambient song and smooth melody. 5. "Konyr dauys" is calm, deep voice rich in overtones. "Konyr" implies a deep inner meaning, ideal for both hearing and sight, as well as for soul and mind of a man "... but all what is contemplated and perceived by the man is at the same time an Ideal that wanes. It may be worshiped, but it was not created by human being, so he cannot hold it up. Hence the bright elegy conveyed by "Konyr". <... > During upheavals, radical changes with obscure perspective, not created by itself, the word "konyr" attained the meaning of mood symbol, of course, melancholic, but containing the will and aspiration to overcome hard times. Creators of these moods were first of all poets, thinkers and public figures" [5].

The analysis confirms that such definitions as "traditional culture" and "traditional musical culture" are equivalent to some extent. The above can be proved by the fact that the philosophical universals in Kazakh society have multiple meaning extrapolated to all aspects of nomadic life and culture.

### **Saz and Muyiz:**

**Algorithms of Development:** The following universal is "saz", an international constant, which stands for music in general in the East. For Kazakhs it is the cosmos oriented essence of ethnos in its universal peace constructive destiny. It is central object of Kazakh culture, major intermediary between generations, providing harmonized relationship between Human being and Cosmos and representing this world in accordance with the laws of beauty. To prove the above let's turn to the analysis of musical instruments. It should be noted that typological unity of a number of traditional instruments

can be subdivided into two categories (according to characteristics of natural materials they are made of). First category may be conditionally described as "saz" (which means clay in Turkic). "Saz" is a special emotional state of human spirit, which is survived in history of human culture in myths about origin of a man from clay. Here the eternal spirit presides over perishable matter and therefore the main thing in "saz" is a soft, mellifluous ideal of sound, cultivating psychological and emotional comfort, spiritual and emotional balance. Transformation of word leads to understanding of aesthetic properties of clay and transfers to sensible world of human being by way of softening and satisfying the soul. Hence, "saz" in Kazakh language means tune, melody, music. The original natural material, which is clay survived also in the name of "saz syrnai", Kazakh national musical instrument. Nations of the East engaged in agriculture such as Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Afghans used to make "saz" (saaz) of wood. The sound ideal of "saz" is also inherent to the Kazakh zhetygen, Khakassian chathan, Belarusian zimbala and Russian gusli, which are characterized by mild timbre and low dynamics. This allows to study a huge layer of traditional instrumental music based on the comparative material of different nations.

The second category of traditional musical instruments can be defined as sound-symbols of the animal life, that is, birds and animals, a vivid illustration of conglomerate of syncretic manifestations associated with practice of life and culture of ancient antiquarians, hunters, cattle breeders and farmers. Spiritual basis of such layer is animism, i.e. granting soul to the Nature, zootheism and cult of flora. Echoes of zootheism survived in the name of a group of traditional musical instruments such as "okarina" (which means gosling in Italian). In organology this group includes all forms of instruments made in the form of thousand and one birds and animals existing in the world. It should be noted that the same names appear also in a variety of genres and artistic images. For example, "Bul-bul" (nightingale) is a Georgian folk instrument and there is "kui" with the same name, it is one of the genres of Kazakh dombra instrumental music with lyrics from Eastern and West European poetry. As a result, the image of a Nightingale embodying aesthetics of the beauty has transformed into artistic phenomenon, the image of singer, poet blessed by the divine Muse.

Natural material dating back to the sound-symbols of the animal life which became widespread in the traditional musical culture is "horn". For a nomad Kazakh "muyiz" (horn) stands for meaningful and shape-generating

material for various forms of traditional culture: folk musical instrument “muyiz syrmai”, an abundance of ornamental motifs (“koshkar muyiz”, “kos muyiz”, “synyk muyiz”). There are a few more words to attribute to this group such as “Orteke” (mountain goat) - Kazakh national kui-dance, Puppet Theater, special method of playing dombra; “arkhar” - (mountain goat) from a hat of Saka king (“The Golden Man” from the Issyk barrow located in the vicinity of Almaty). In Armenian, Uzbek and Tajik languages the word “koch” means goat; popular Armenian folk dance of shepherds - “kochari”, the Uzbeks and Tajiks have a musical instrument “koshnai”. Russian folk instrument made of horn has the same name and was subdivided into hunting, shepherd's horn as well as post horn that became popular in many European countries. Lithuanians had a folk instrument “ozhragis” and the dance “ozhjalis” (goatling). The genesis of the word “tragedy” (“tragos” means goat, the base “rag”) goes back as is well known to the symbol of the animal life - image of goat. It is commonly known that this ritual has been officiated in the ancient Greece every spring when the priests dressed as goats chanted ritual songs symbolizing the awakening of nature and revival of vitality. Subsequently ritual was performed at the ancient theater and through the ages has emerged as a distinct genre [6]. Thus, national musical instruments provide the opportunity to trace the evolution from the natural to the social being and, therefore, the evolution of man's inner world. The importance of traditional culture is determined not only by a status of historical monument, but by the fact that it is an inexhaustible spring that feeds our contemporary reality. For us it is important that observing the nature and learning from it, a man learned to develop different emotional states and get inspiration from its materials: gentleness, emotional sensitiveness, responsiveness, sometimes power, self-assertion and energy in other circumstances. If “saz” or clay cultivates inwardness in a man, the “horn” is a symbol of physical strength, dignity and power. Such interpretation suggests that the above mentioned cultures “saz” and “muyiz” express two sides of human nature, namely, Yang and Yin. An example of the musical form, developed in the culture of “saz” is slumber songs characterized as universal genre of world culture.

It should be noted that the analogy of “saz” culture with Yin and, relatively, of the “muyiz” culture with Yang is very relevant. It should not be understood and accepted directly in the literal sense. This is well demonstrated by the ideal sound “muyiz”, which, as we believe, is not only a reflection of physical strength as Yang, but has broader cultural and philosophical

perspective. “Muyiz” is an emotional and image-bearing sphere that built also spiritual strength and this conception is as important for the ancient people as cultivation of physical strength. No wonder that the first professionals in the ancient world were the shamans, baksy, kamy, sal and seri, zhyrau and akyn [7]. They were the true leaders, spiritual teachers who, no doubt, naturally had physical and spiritual strength. Apparently, it was an imperative of that severe era when human existence was possible only if he had spiritual strength that helped to survive in the extreme living conditions. It appears that such mental attitudes are vital for modern society and living in imitation of the ancient people in similar cases would significantly contribute to its health improvement.

Authentic constants: kui, konil-kui. Study of Kazakh mentality in the social and philosophical context using myth and poetical, cultural, historical, artistic, ethno-linguistic and other sources shows that the most distinctive universals, steadily preserved constants of the traditional worldview that determine mental characteristics of proto-Kazakhs is a three-level world view, which includes the Upper World, the Middle World, the Underworld and related to them concepts of Tengri and Zher-Su-Umai deities, spirits of the ancestors (aruakh), which are imbedded in “collective unconscious” [8] of the people, strengthening a sense of belonging to a certain ethnic group, its traditions, customs and worldviews. Kazakhs’ mentality is largely based on those views and affirmations common to all Turkic peoples, which are manifested in the art forms. Thus, Kazakh ritual songs are often devoted to such topics (categories) as “kok-ava” (blue sky, the air) or celestials “kustar” (birds) personifying deities and the upper world of Tengri. The words “zherim-ai”, “elim-ai” occurring in refrains of the farewell songs of brides “synsu”, “koshtasu”, “korisu” are an echo of worship to the object of the Middle World, in particular Zher-Su deity [9, p. 34]. Images of trees “baiterek”, “karagay”, “arsh” occurring in poetic metaphors of the same genre are modifications of the world tree symbols. The world tree is well-known to all Turkic peoples as the worship object of the middle world. The reference in “synsu” and “zhoktau” (a song of lamentation) to “ozen”, “kol”, “kara su” (river, lake, pond, melt water) and all that is related to the water symbolizes the underworld. In the ancient Turkic mythology the river means also the border between the living and the dead.

The “kui” has been studied by Kazakh researchers rather comprehensively. To date there has been formed an interdisciplinary research field - kui studies, arousing keen

interest of musicologists, philosophers and cultural studies scholars. In many of the Turkic and Mongol languages the word “kui” means music in general. In Kazakh culture it means: 1) the mood and the state; 2) Kazakh national instrumental music. In Kyrgyz and Turkmen languages “kui” also means an instrumental piece, which is close to Kazakh version. In Tatar and Bashkir languages “kui” is both a song and an instrumental piece, with Altai and Khakass peoples “kay” means an epic saga. As we can see, in terms of history and genetics the term “kui” has a universal origin. In the nomadic culture of Kazakh people, this phenomenon occupies a special place: “When Kazakhs listen to their kui in the infinite space of kui they perceive, feel and see their vast land with their spiritual vision irrespective where they are and even if they turn out to be in the endmost lands of the earth. This capability to feel and perceive the space of the earth as a whole was developed by spiritual and practical experience of nomadic life, by way of communal land use, where every inch of ground was welcomed and passed through repeatedly” [10, p. 5-6].

Similar to the above constants “konyr” and “un”, “kui” correlates with other words that fill up and emphasize the original meaning. One of them is “konil”, which means mood, state of mind of a person. Accordingly, the derivative universal is “konil-kui”. Its genesis goes back to the mythopoetic era, as evidenced in the following “anyz-kui” (kui-legend): “There was nothing at the beginning. Then there was advent of the whole universe. Baksy, performers of magical cults reproducing fore-sound reactivated the birth of the universe every day” [11, p. 9]. This “anyz kui” refers to the ritual practice of baksy (shaman) and zhyrau (narrator), who used an ancient musical instrument “kyl-kobyz” during their exercises. Ancient myths and legends assert that “kyl-kobyz” was created by Korkyt, the first musician and protector of Baksy-shamans. “Kyl-kobyz” is a specific musical instrument, which preserved its archaic features until the mid of the XXth century. The shape of the instrument and its position when it is played on represents three-membered structure of the Universe – the gods and all creatures with wings are the habitants of the Upper World, Middle World is the abode of man and haematherms and the Underworld is the habitation of evil spirits and those who crawl and swim: fish, snakes and lizards” [11, p. 209]. In other words, “konil-kui”, “saz”, “un”, “kui” are equivalents by their semantic meaning. They are united by the fact that being

philosophically important for the society, they at the same time are situational and aimed at disclosing the inner world of each and everyone.

Viability of the Kazakh national musical culture is proved by the growing awareness of its value, conscious desire not only to preserve this precious asset, but also to understand it. Such attitude is characteristic to Abai’s and Shakarim’s creative activity, which played a crucial role in the spiritual life of Kazakhs and has become a turning point in the development of religious, philosophical and social thinking, formation of written poetry and new musical style. Innovative creativity of Abay and Shakarim was based on the reflections and critical re-evaluation of their time. Their aesthetic platform is systematically and holistically expressed in such categories as “annin zhayi”, “onerdin zhayi”, which means the basis of the song, art / Abai /, “annin mani” - the meaning of the song that is a key to understanding music making process, listening, writing” /Shakarim/ [12, p. 6]. Abay for the first time introduced the concept of “oily kui” (thoughtful kui) that proclaimed art perfect in form and profound in content and became the categorial substantiation for a new musical style. Logical turning to the new song style, adequately reflecting the difficulties of the time with its crisis of nomadic way of life, was Abay’s “esti an” (conscious song), product of rational creativity “that is for the first time based on the separation of composing and performing arts... New style has grown on the soil of native culture, it is strongly linked with previous Kazakh musical traditions established by the mid-nineteenth century: Abay’s and Shakarim’s lyrical themes reflected the spiritual environment of native culture, its ethical mood, pathos of high generalizations and wisdom of philosophical observations. Philosophy of the “zhyrau” poetry has taken on a new lease of life in the biographical songs, songs-edifications and farewell songs of Abay and Shakarim. Abay strengthened and developed the elements of previously existing traditions. Their consistent and intentional use in the context of “esti an” acquired a status of innovative tool” [12, p. 16].

## CONCLUSION

Brief analysis of some of worldview universals allow to make the following conclusions:

Kazakh musical tradition is a dynamic cultural and historical system, an invaluable spiritual heritage of nomadic culture, viability of which is provided by the opportunity to adapt to the variability of socio-cultural environment and mechanisms of transformation;

The scientific significance of the study is to highlight national musical culture of Kazakh nomads not only as a relic but primarily as existing phenomenon;

Discovered principles of the national musical culture are aimed at the development of criteria of ideological and cultural identity and identification of internal cultural integrity links;

Theoretical conclusions of the study can be used for a new understanding of logic of development of national culture and its interaction with innovative components of cultural life.

Modern life brings to the agenda the awareness and reactivation of the innermost integrity of the national culture vision universals, which we tried to analyze on the material of Kazakh national musical culture.

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