

## Typological Features of the Kazakh Ethnic Picture of the World

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the problems of self-identification of the Kazakh ethnic group in the post-totalitarian period, which are based on the values of traditional nomadic life of Kazakhs. The research shows the mechanisms of evolution of the ethnic group's worldview paradigms and their typology. The purpose of the research is to investigate the national image of Kazakhs' world through the structure of their artistic thinking, based on the assumption that art plays a significant role in the formation of an ethnic group's worldview. The research found that the significant factors in the structure of the ethnic worldview are traditional art, mythopoetic notions, language, and peculiarities of the national psychology and ethics. The features of mythopoetic reflection of reality in the artistic and spiritual practice of the nation, which are recorded in monuments of national art, were studied in detail. The research analyzed the typical features of the worldview of Ancient Turks as a prototype of the ethnic worldview of Kazakhs, which had a considerable effect on the structure of the Kazakh space-and-time continuum; the cults of ancestor, life and, death worshiping, which are relevant for the Kazakh mentality, were investigated. Special attention was paid to the main worldview cult of Ancient Turks - Tengri, which has numerous manifestation in the Kazakh culture: in cosmology, artistic thinking, ornamental, music, and epic art. The analysis allowed defining the ethnic worldview and concluding that the modern Kazakh culture is a synthesis of numerous elements of various cultures, which predetermines the exogenous nature of the traditional Kazakh worldview.

### KEYWORDS

Worldview of an ethnic group, mythopoetic model, image of the universe, artistic thinking, Kazakh ethnic group

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## Introduction

The reconsideration of the importance of nomadic cultures for the spiritual life of Eurasia is one of the most relevant and intriguing aspects of modern science. At the current stage of sociocultural progress, the various manifestations of the influence of eastern cultures on the universal historical processes become more apparent. Therefore, studying various aspects of the life of nomadic civilizations, including the Kazakh civilization, in the context of their genetic link with modern cultural processes is an important activity that covers a wide range of sciences, such as philosophy, history of culture, ethnography, art history, sociology, music studies, etc. The complex and multilevel dynamic

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processes of the Kazakh society are determined by growing interest in the past, the reconsideration of social values and the rich historical experience of the nation, the return of traditional philosophical and cultural guidelines, and the search for further prospects for the development of national art in the context of the general human culture.

The twentieth century made adjustments to the history of Kazakhstan, which was reflected in the establishment of the spiritual life of the society. This is related primarily to the Europeanization of the crucial components of artistic thinking. Despite the fact that many types and forms of traditional culture have continued to function successfully, the official cultural policy is aimed at implementing European standards of artistic reality. The liberation from totalitarianism was accompanied by a series of complex contradictions that emerged during the radical transformation of the public order. This was caused by a number of factors, including the establishment of ethnic independence in combination with the need for integration. The acknowledgement of global human unity in cultural interaction showed the uniqueness and significance of each ethnic philosophy of art.

The ethnic identification of the culture in any society is determined by the worldview that is formed by this ethnic group. How is the ethnic worldview formed? According to M.B. Omuraliyev (1995), the most sustainable factor that unites people into a certain conscientious entity, one ethnic group, is the traditional core of the ancient ethnic group's culture, which is expressed in the stereotypes of behavior, communication, language, values, and standards (Omuraliyev, 1995). This core determines the originality of the culture. Despite the fact that the cultural component is constantly evolving and changing under the influence of various historical, social, and philosophical factors, traditional cultures feature carefully preserved foundations of social, including cultural, life – so-called ethnic archetypes. These archetypes predetermine the uniqueness and originality of any traditional culture, while simultaneously providing for continuous and logical sociocultural processes. The evolution of value orientations in culture is directly related to the crucial historic events in the centuries-old life of the people. For instance, virtually all significant ages in the history of Kazakhs are reflected in the monuments of traditional culture. Thus, the life of the nation is the history of its traditional culture (Ayazbekova, 1999a).

The national worldview is a map or chart of interaction of the main space and time categories. The relations between these categories within a society and their relation to the outside objective world predetermines the ethnic specificity. However, despite the relative completeness and logic of various interpretations ontological and axiological issues of the universe, each national worldview has a unique vision of reality through its own culture. According to C. Levi-Strauss (1985), the set of customs of one nation is always marked with a certain style; they form systems (Levi-Strauss, 1985). This means that the uniqueness of each ethnic worldview is based on a conscientious perception of the model of the universe, which is impossible without an intellectual and emotional component of the worldview.

Conscientious interaction between the person and the world creates in the world perception of each individual unique experience, which forms a complete and logically reasonable image of the surrounding reality. Consequently, the world models of the representatives of various cultures or representatives of the

same culture but from different historical periods differ. This factor in the study of the past cultural heritage makes especially important the investigation of the cultural phenomenon of the Kazakh “ethnic worldview”, which emphasizes the principles of harmonious existence through the images of Music and Poet-Singer that are familiar to the Kazakh mentality and embody the functions of cosmogenesis and culture genesis.

### Literature Review

At the turn of millennia, when the new paradigm of sociocultural development, dubbed the “age of Postmodernism” is developed and new worldviews are formed, philosophers, sociologists, and cultural experts turn to fundamental archetypical foundations of the human culture in an attempt to see the outlines of the forming worldview structures. It is no coincidence that modern researchers are interested in the very phenomenon of “worldview”, since its specific forms are determined by ethnic originality.

The phenomenology of the “worldview” concept was studied by, R. Yu. Rakhmatullin & D.Z. Khamzina (2013). A. Smith investigated the problems of ethnic identity. The features of the Kazakh worldview were examined in the works of, S.Sh. Ayazbekova (1999a).

The diversity of aspects and contexts of studying the phenomenon of ethnic mythmaking is reflected in the diversity of approaches to and interpretations of this problem. In the nineteenth century, mythology was of scientific interest only from the perspective of ethnography; however, in the twentieth century, researchers became interested in mythology as a space of different reality. This is largely related to the golden age of the modernism as an attempt to escape reality. New aspects in the development of the problem and the role of myths in the history of humankind in the twentieth century were set forth by J. Frazer (2001). This era saw the emergence of the theories of Lucien Levy-Bruhl (2012) – prelogism, collective representations L. Levy-Bruhl (2012) and C. Levi-Strauss (1985) – structural analysis. These theories, despite their fundamentality and versatility, represent different and sometimes contradicting concepts of myth genesis and the role of myths in the conscientious human activity. The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was accompanied with growing interest in concrete mythologemes and archetypes based on the theories developed in the twentieth century. For instance, , L. Egorova (2013) investigated in detail the components of the ethnic worldview of Ancient Turks – the direct ancestors of the Kazakh ethnic group.

### *Aim of the Study*

To study the ethnic worldview of Kazakhs and its features.

### *Research questions*

1. To study the ancient mythologemes and archetypes as a foundation and origin of the ethnic worldview of Kazakhs.
2. To analyze the prototype of the ethnic worldview of Kazakhs – the culture of Ancient Turks.
3. To discover the space and time coordinates of the Kazakh ethnic worldview.

## Methods

Text analysis and the descriptive method were used to study the research object – the Kazakh ethnic worldview – based on the material of Kazakh ethnography and mythopoetic heritage. The phenomenological analysis was used to analyze comprehensively the various aspects of the “ethnic worldview” phenomenon, describe the universal features of the traditional worldview, and to outline the distinguishing features of the Kazakh ethnic worldview.

Methods of deconstruction and typing allowed determining the archetypal basic elements of the worldview of Ancient Turks and tracing their manifestation in the Kazakh ethnic worldview, as well as their evolution and various manifestations in different historical and cultural periods.

Systems analysis gave this research continuity, since it allowed determining the internal and external links and dependencies of the ethnic worldview components.

## Results

The core of the ethnic worldview consists of ancient archetypes and mythopoetic ideas. They constituted the first attempts to substantiate the creation of the Universe; they were the first human steps in the philosophical and artistic comprehension of the world. The universals inherent in various types of mythologies are generally related to the ethnic group’s understanding of the main worldview categories – time and space. The stories of myths in various cultures are similar, which allows regarding the myth as a storage of hidden metalinguistic information about the world, as a bearer of ontology that does not depend on the conceptual schemes set by the language semantics. When answering the questions of origin, meaning, and value, the individual relies on the realities that surround him or her; consequently, each nation answers these questions differently. This creates an ethnic model of world perception.

**Totemic** representations play a significant role in the formation of the Kazakh ethnic worldview. In Asian cultures, totemism is often encountered as a prism of world perception.

In the Kazakh worldview, it has the form of a complete system that emerged from the mythopoetic comprehension of the origin of the world and the human being. A totem depicting an animal or beast was an item of a religious cult.

The concepts of Creation and Maker are widely represented in the myths of various nations and cultures: Brahma in Indian mythology, Orz mud and Ahriman in Iranian mythology, Gaea and Uranus in Ancient Greek mythology, Ra in Egyptian mythology, etc. (Bierlien, 1997). The ethnic notions of Kazakhs regarding the Prime-Creation differ from those of other mythologies in that the Kazakh mythology does not feature the concept of primal Chaos. Kazakh myths do not mention the chaos of nonexistence that preceded the creation of the world. Harmony and Nature – Tengri – are primal. The uniqueness of the Kazakh model of world creation lies in the emphasis of Harmony, similar to music harmony. Music embodies the foundation of absolute harmony of not only existence, the source of which, according to myths, are the Maker and Music, but also pre-existence, denoted with the image of Cosmos-Tengri.

Many rituals and customs that have been preserved in the modern life of Kazakhs are a reflection of the Tengrian worldview. In the Ancient Turkic worldview, the binary opposition of Father-Sky Tengri was Goddess-Mother Umay – the giver of life on earth: not only human life, but also the life of all living things.

The core of the Tengrian worldview created the Kazakh ethnic worldview in the form of a “world tree”. In the Kazakh culture, not only a high mountain, but also a separately standing tree was named Tengri. Furthermore, the meaning of the tree as a symbol of the world was emphasized by the fact that all sacrifices were made near a tree. The custom of tying ribbons around the branches of trees that stand near holy or sacred places, which comes from the Tengrian set of rites, has stood the test of time. Archeological diggings found an image of a shaman with a blossoming branch in hand. The worship of nature as a supreme entity manifested in cosmocentric thinking, where the world is imagined as an infinite holistic Universe. Tengrianism considered human life endless, as life was endless in nature; death was regarded as a temporary sleep, similar to hibernation or as a transition to a different state, return of the soul to where it came from. This is why Turkic nations traditionally say “returned” – “кайтты керті” – instead of “died”. This is also the reason why the tombs of Tengrians had belongings, weapons, and clothes required in the next life.

Besides the prevalence of the spiritual over the material in the nomadic way of life, nomads also have peculiar relationships with the categories of space and time.

According to S.Sh. Ayazbekova (1999a), the categories of time and space, life and death contain crucial ontological and epistemological factors of the ethnic world perception of Kazakhs. In traditional cultures, the world is a structured entity with a center of the world, four corners of the world, categories of depth, horizontal, and vertical in the spatial perception of the world. The change from night to day, measurement of time in days, weeks, months, years, ages, etc. are a reflection of time perception. The worldview is created by the human consciousness; the categories of time and space reflect the metaphoric, generalized, and universal nature of world perception (Tatsumura, 1991).

As mentioned above, the “vegetative” model that manifests in the image of the “World tree” played a significant role in the Kazakh worldview.

The World tree is a phenomenon with multiple contexts that contains:

1. the cosmic context reflected in the Cosmos-reality-unknowable triad;
2. the spatial context – sky-earth-underworld;
3. the time context – past-present-future;
4. historical and anthropological context – ancestors – current generation – descendants;
5. etiological context – good-neutral-negative (Sokolov, 1996).

The World tree in the Kazakh culture is also represented by the image of Music – the kobyz (made of wood). As the axis and center of the world, the Tree gives Music the high existential status of a defining space-and-time factor. S.Sh. Ayazbekova (1999b) made a comprehensive cultural and philosophical analysis of this problem and argued that the fundamental feature of the cosmocentrism of the Kazakh worldview, namely, the World Harmony, is defined by Music

Harmony, where Music has a unique role: the structuring core of Culture, the mental core of Society, and the harmonizing core of the Universe. This multifunctionality allows regarding Music not only as a musical message in culture with artistic value that satisfies purely esthetic needs of the ethnic group, but also as a key world-modeling elements, capable of independently and significantly determining the worldview (Ayazbekova, 1999b).

The artistic notions in various worldview are dissimilar, since they are formed by an entire set of factors that differ on a case-by-case basis. Bearers of essentially different models are unable to perceive this or that work of art similarly, since any artistic act includes two aspects – the text and its perception. Any ethnic community has its distinguishing culture and, consequently, worldview. Each group of people has its own unique communication tools that reflect its originality and specificity of world perception. Art is a special and specific language that different nations can understand. Only the language of art is an effective factor of cultural stratification both at the level of subcultures within one culture and at the level of ethnic groups and even superethnoses.

The images of time in traditional cultures are related to annual cycles. They emphasize not only the change of seasons, but also the holidays, the semantic specificity of the morning and the evening, night and day, etc. In nomadic cultures, the image of time is syncretically related to space that should be covered; this sequence determines the content of the worldview of nomadic civilizations. Traditional cultures generally unite space and time into a single system. Space and time are intertwined; one word is often used to express both concepts. As with time, the content is what determines space (Mbiti, 1969). In the Kazakh culture, the concept of “жол” – “path” – is such a syncretic concept.

Time is the greatest value for nomads. It is no coincidence that people who lived to a great age were venerable. Knowledge and experience, wisdom and vision – all this is related to the age of a person. Another crucial value is the experience of ancestors, whose greatest deeds were forever recorded in the consciousness of the nation. This focus on the past in the traditional Kazakh worldview marks the features of traditional culture.

The cult of the past in the traditional Kazakh worldview includes the cult of ancestors – aruaks. According to beliefs, the observance of all the rituals related to the remembrance of all who passed away guaranteed the protection of aruaks, otherwise the spirits of the ancestors left their descendants to their fate (Walikhanov, 1968). Many factors of the traditional world perception have stood the test of time. In particular, even nowadays Kazakhs still ask for the ancestors' help in their prayers in times of need. Ethnic memory serves as a guarantee of a stable present. In this situation, the words of S. Walikhanov (1986) have sacred meaning: there is no memorable event, no significant person... the memories whereof are not recorded in the national memory. The cult of heroes of the past is accumulated in traditional thinking in the image of a Batyr – a generalized mythological character that embodied courage and protection. Children were named after batyrs; legends were written about batyrs.

In conclusion, the crucial component of the worldview, from the perspective of preservation of its fundamentals, is the artistic thinking, which allows concentrating and preserving the general conventional aspects of world

perception. On the other hand, art also plays a role in the evolution of the ethnic worldview, since the artistic life of society, by representing the ethnic image of reality, affects the changes in its components, which ultimately affects the holistic model in the consciousness.

The national specificity includes absolutely everything that distinguishes this community from another one – appearance, behavioral standards, language, peculiarities of communication, rituals, customs, life, psychological originality, and art. Esthetic standards of an ethnic group's artistic self-fulfillment form under the influence of a set of various aspects of life. For instance, when it comes to Central Asian cultures, it is worth noting the powerful influence of Islam, which is reflected in the lack of visual arts – sculpture and painting in the European meaning, since Islam does not allow depicting living creatures (Yeremeyev, 1990). At the same time, Eastern cultures saw an active development and high mastery of improvisers-musicians, poets-storytellers, and ornamental art.

The worldview is constantly evolving, which is related to the accumulation of information acquired from scientific discoveries. Despite the diversity of worldviews, which is caused by evolution, the existing and active archetypical notions make it so the worldviews remain fundamentally holistic constructions. The human being is a social creature; therefore, despite the fact that there are as many worldviews as there are people in the world, they all are similar at least at the level of the ethnic group, subethnos, religion, etc.

Changes in the worldview paradigms in the history of humankind generally had religious or scientific reasons. Paganism was replaced by monotheistic religions. On the other hand, the formation of non-religious worldviews enabled scientific discoveries that had a considerable impact on the expansion of ideas and notions of the world. However, the worldview is a sustainable holistic phenomenon with a nuclear structure. The emergence of any external factors beyond the scope of the accepted system is unable to destroy it. The traditional worldview gradually and naturally absorbs these factors, subjects them to its laws and principles of existence. The crucial functions of the ethnic worldview are the culture-stabilizing and culture-forming functions.

Thus, *the ethnic worldview is a multilevel structure that is formed based on objective conditions of the ethnic group's existence, which interprets reality with a view to stabilizing the society, synthesizes the entire spiritual and practical experience of world comprehension, and represents the resulting model in cultural and material activity.*

In terms of the Kazakh worldview, it is necessary to distinguish a number of specific features that determine its uniqueness and originality:

- high level of the artistic factor in the perception and reflection of the world;
- religious worldview that synthesizes the concepts of Islam and Tengrianism;
- ethnographic features of life that determined the specificity of the cultural understanding of the world and generated a number of special archetypes and worldview constants;

– nomadism is the defining component of the traditional Kazakh worldview, which manifests in the mental constructions of the ethnic group, the system of spiritual values, and realities of life.

### Discussions and Conclusions

The concept of “ethnic” has not been scientifically defined yet. The results of this research described the term “ethnos” found in literature, which is regarded from different aspects:

– Dictionaries define this term as a sustainable inter-generational community of people with common features of culture, language, life, psyche, and self-consciousness, which established historically in a certain territory (Zherebilo, 2011).

– Ethnography regards ethnos super-tribal cultural communities related to a certain environment – ethnic territory (Zherebilo, 2011).

– V.A. Tishkov (2010) considers ethnos an integrative social function of a certain category of people in the global political and economic system and cultural cosmos (Lvova et al., 1989).

– L.M. Gumilyov (1990) defined ethnos as a naturally established, based on an original stereotype, behavior of a community of people, which exists as a structure that opposes itself to other communities (Gumilyov, 1990).

Most researchers of the “ethnos” phenomenon emphasize the cultural component as the fundamental one. Besides geographic, racial, historical, and anthropological factors, spiritual values that are accepted in a community define this community as a holistic organism that is organized according to laws accepted in the group – an ethnos. It is no coincidence that one of the most effective characteristics that denotes a group an ethnos is “ethnic self-consciousness”, which forms the phenomenon of ethnic identity. *Thus, the ethnic aspect in the worldview phenomenon is generally defined as a community of cultural notions, formed by a group of people with common historical experience.*

Based on the phenomenon of ethnic identity, S.M. Dzhakupov & N.V. Nigay (2005) defined the *ethnic worldview* as a subjective individual reflection of the opinions of the representatives of a specific ethnic community onto the surrounding reality, which manifests in matching external and behavioral components of activity, defined by a common cognitive orientation in the sphere of life (Dzhakupov & Nigay, 2005).

An ethnic worldview is a cohesive and logically reasonable notion of existence, shared by members of a certain group, reflected in mythology, literature, art, philosophy, and ideology. This or that ethnic group is characterized by stereotypes – simplified generally accepted notions, behavior and thinking patterns. Ethnic stereotypes in the context of national world perception have been studied extensively. For instance, G.U. Soldatova (1998) clearly distinguished three crucial components of a stereotype: content, orientation as a general dimension of favorableness, and degree of favorableness (Soldatova, 1998). In other words, the most effective and significant components of stereotypes are related mostly to the emotional side of perception, which stresses the importance of nonmaterial but immanently present components of an ethnic worldview.



There are numerous methods and methodologies for typing worldviews by various attributes. The sociocultural aspect is an important attribute. The orientation of world perception and world relation depends on the priorities of consciousness in the comprehension of the world, on the center of the world perception – the dominating focus of perception: the Human being, the Cosmos, Nature, God, Society, etc. Based on these theories, the following types of worldview are distinguished in science nowadays: anthropocentric, comsocentric, ecocentric, theocentric, sociocentric, etc. This classification does not imply the isolated existence of the distinguished types; rather, they are closely related complementary components of a holistic system of opinions. Each of the mentioned types of world perception can be presented in pure form in any given culture or some types can actively interact within one culture, while their aggregate forms the general human image of the universe.

History of culture clearly differentiates between the concepts of culture and subculture. Each subculture creates its unique “clusters of consciousness” that reflect the worldview and have certain external manifestations. The originality of these “clusters of consciousness” determines the specificity of the worldview and the crucial components of the life concept.

The fullest definition of the ethnic worldview was given by S.Sh. Ayazbekova (1999a) – a holistic and originally interpreted Universe, in which the ethnic “Self”, while adapting to the surrounding natural and social environment, recreates it in its activity, practice, and language (Ayazbekova, 1999a).

Despite the variety of national cultures and the worldviews created by them, the foundation of any worldview is a cultural core, which is based on deep general human value orientations called universals. The core is the representation of accepted within a set group. It is a clearly organized set of knowledge, convictions, and values, instilled by the society from childhood through special institutions – ideological, educational, family, clan, informational, etc. The universals of a society are denoted and established in monuments of culture, oral speech, written speech, activity standards, and worldview canons. The core, or cultural archetype, gives a culture stability, which is supported by the abovementioned social institutions, ritual systems, and political and social laws. Nevertheless, the spiritual component of ethnic life is a living and evolving substance, which is determined by the interaction of individual worldviews within a community, subcultures within a culture, new trends and stable archetypes. *In this case, the core of the ethnic worldview guarantees the integrity of generally accepted foundations of world perception.*

According to A. Smith (1991), the cultural, economic, territorial, and legal (political) components of an ethnos are a multidimensional and complex phenomenon. These components form the ethnic or national identity by acting as important characteristics of ethnic communities (Smith, 1991).

The formation of an ethnic worldview during ethnogenesis is a constant and universal process, which is proven by the fact that ethnic world perception cannot be a complete and unchangeable entity.

World perception itself and each of its components directly depend on multiple factors – historical, social, natural, contextual, etc. Hence, ethnicity as a phenomenon is subject to transformations. The history of humankind shows many factors of outside influence on the ethnic self-consciousness of various

religions. In addition, national world perception actively reacts to historical and sociocultural changes and turmoil. Ethnic self-identification is not a self-sufficient phenomenon; it directly depends on objective factors, but preserves its archetypical core.

### Implications and Recommendations

Determining the peculiarities of customs of Kazakhs, their ideas of the world, and their worldview was an important stage. The peculiarity of the Kazakh worldview that brings it closer to other eastern models is that besides spatial characteristics represented in the objective world, a holistic Cosmos includes transcendent invisible spaces, which creates another coordinate – vertical-spiritual, which manifests in the worshipping of spirits, aruaqs. This world has a significant impact on all aspects of life, which is reflected not only in the system of customs and rituals, but also in the moral and ethical component, the specificity of social institutions, and the interaction with nature, society, and the cosmos.

The study of the Kazakh ethnic worldview in the context of its organic connection with twentieth-century art draws attention to the origins and the period of establishment of the Turkic Khanate, since the ethnic notions of Turks, the ancestors of Kazakhs, were formed during that period. While studying the image of the universe in Turkic culture, E. Lvova et al. (1989) stressed the dominating influence of nomadic attributes, which is reflected in the high status of oral culture and low demand for material values (Lvova et al., 1989).

Through synthesis and objectification in the worldview, the visible and invisible interact and create a unique and original cultural space, the defining factors in which are absolute balance, objectivity, and regard of the human being, society, and the world from the perspective of the Universe. The world in and of itself is a value, the integrity whereof is sacred. Therefore, the traditional Kazakh art is a reflection of the beauty of the objective world and the harmony of the human existence therein. This determines the most important esthetic principles of the traditional Kazakh worldview, which are expressed in works of art, especially in music and ornamental art (the ornament is often called “still music”).

The research and its results allow delving deeper into the Kazakh ethnos and going to its very roots. This research analyzed the origins that nowadays form the unified Kazakh ethnos. Modern features and their changes over the course of centuries require further research.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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