

## ABSTRACT

**of the thesis on the topic «Wedding Ritual Folklore in Modern Kazakh Society: Genre Nature, Historical Evolution and Transformation» performed by Mukhan Aktoty Zhansultankyzy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational program «8D02304 – Philology»**

**General description of the Research.** Kazakh wedding ritual folklore constitutes a significant branch of the broader system of family ritual folklore. It reflects the complex interconnection between traditional worldviews and national culture, intertwining familial values with ceremonial customs. This folklore domain is rich in poetic and musical expression, underscoring its intricate and aesthetically developed nature. Accordingly, its scholarly investigation demands a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, making it a highly relevant topic in contemporary folkloristics.

Throughout the course of human social development, the institution of family and marriage has held profound significance. In the early stages of human consciousness, during the primitive communal era, the collective need for cohabitation gave rise to the formation of marriage and family structures. Naturally, this process evolved in tandem with the people's traditional belief systems. The practices surrounding pair-bonding were marked by specific customs, rituals, and celebratory elements—components that laid the foundation for ritual folklore.

Emerging from this historical necessity, family ritual folklore evolved into a syncretic cultural phenomenon deeply rooted in daily life, traditions, customs, festivities, and ancient religious-mythological beliefs. It became closely linked to the spiritual culture of the people, encapsulating their worldview and values in ritualized forms.

In the field of folkloristics, the academic exploration of familial values through ritual practices began in the 19th century and eventually developed into a distinct area of study. However, during the Soviet period, national traditions were suppressed through ideological policies, which obscured the cultural significance of many traditional practices. As a result, there was limited opportunity for the comprehensive and systematic study of Kazakh family ritual folklore during that era.

It is well known that each custom associated with the formation of a family—the foundation of society—carries deep symbolic and cultural significance. However, during the Soviet era, such national traditions were considered incompatible with the ideological project of establishing a “Soviet way of life.” As a result, traditional folklore with national characteristics was marginalized and overshadowed by slogans promoting internationalist customs and values.

Only in the years following Kazakhstan's independence did Kazakh family ritual folklore—and in particular, wedding ceremonies and bridal departure (*kyz uzatu*)—experience a revival. Many previously concealed practices have reentered public life, and their national importance has been reassessed and reaffirmed.

Kazakh ritual folklore shares deep historical roots with that of other Turkic peoples. The evolution of family ritual systems has followed a path common to many cultures, from group marriage to endogamous and exogamous unions. These

developments reflect not only stages in human cultural evolution but also a growing collective responsibility for lineage continuity. This led to the establishment of a highly structured system of matchmaking and bride selection. The contemporary form of the wedding ritual complex emerged gradually over many centuries. Its structure (composition), thematic content, and genre diversity—including the symbolic and artistic dimensions of the associated folklore—were shaped by the traditional worldview, material culture, and historical context of the Kazakh people. Since the early 20th century, the development and characteristics of this complex system have attracted scholarly attention within folkloristics.

Indeed, early research on Kazakh wedding customs was generally embedded within the broader context of family rituals. These works focused on the collection, classification, and initial interpretation of ritual texts. Many were based on historical written records and reflected the academic standards of their time.

As a result, a substantial body of material has been compiled on the traditional structure of Kazakh wedding folklore. In recent years, global folkloristics has also made significant methodological advancements in the analysis of national folklore. For Kazakh humanities to integrate more fully into international scholarship, a reassessment of these traditions through contemporary theoretical frameworks is imperative. In this regard, a deep, multifaceted examination of Kazakh wedding ritual folklore—as a distinct cultural phenomenon—is a timely and pressing research need. There is a clear scholarly demand to analyze it in accordance with the requirements of modern folkloristics. For instance, the integration of ethnographic, dramatic, and poetic perspectives within traditional wedding rituals, and a comparative analysis of modern vs. traditional forms, has not yet been addressed in Kazakh folkloristics. Neither have the regional characteristics of such rituals or their parallels with the traditions of Turkic and global cultures. In the post-independence era, as the nation reembraced its cultural heritage, wedding ritual folklore has reemerged as a vibrant and actively practiced tradition. Examining its current role and transformation within contemporary society has therefore become a highly relevant topic.

Moreover, the fact that today's wedding rituals can vary not only between regions but even from one household to another adds further complexity to the study. Thus, alongside identifying common traditions, it is essential to uncover and understand localized variations. This requires interdisciplinary attention, involving ethnography, musicology, art history, philosophy, pedagogy, and psychology. It is also critical to analyze the intercultural influences between Kazakh wedding rituals and those of other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, which remains an important task for folklorists.

During the course of this research, family ritual folklore has been treated as a unified phenomenon. Its development across different historical stages—genetic, historical, and cultural-historical—has been investigated. Common elements with other Turkic and world cultures have been identified, and national specificities have been highlighted. Materials on Kazakh family ritual folklore have been systematically collected, enabling not only an analysis rooted in national identity but also a comparative typological approach.

Finally, by exploring the conceptual links between ancient beliefs about birth, marriage, and death and their practical manifestations in traditional life, the study reveals the enduring role of these rituals in shaping national consciousness and cultural values.

**The Relevance of the Topic.** Since the attainment of independence, Kazakh folkloristics has embarked on a new developmental trajectory within the framework of global scholarly discourse. In everyday life, ancient customs have been revived and reinterpreted in new forms. Rituals that were once restricted or marginalized—such as *kiz uzatu* (bridal departure), *betashar* (veil unveiling), *syngsy* (bridal lament), and *zhar-zhar* (antiphonal wedding song)—have resurfaced and undergone adaptive transformation in response to modern cultural dynamics. Previously unpublished traditional texts have become publicly available, and new lyrical compositions have emerged to reflect the sentiments and aspirations of younger generations. These shifts highlight the pressing need for a comprehensive and updated scholarly reevaluation of the topic. There is now a clear necessity to investigate the origins, historical development, and contemporary adaptation of these traditions through a holistic academic lens.

It is well established in folkloristics that the foundational function of ritual folklore lies in its connection to the era of magic and sacred practices. A thorough understanding of contemporary Kazakh folk songs and their historical roots can only be achieved by integrating them with ethnographic evidence. This implies that the origins and developmental stages of Kazakh wedding folklore are inseparably tied to traditional lifestyles and worldview. Moreover, the shared structures (invariants) and distinctive features of Kazakh ritual folklore—when viewed alongside the wedding folklore of other Turkic and world cultures—demand comparative and typological analysis. These factors affirm and reinforce the topical and scholarly relevance of the research presented in this dissertation.

The traditional customs of Turkic peoples associated with life-cycle rituals—birth, coming of age and marriage, and burial—are grounded in shared ancient belief systems, which have shaped common ceremonial practices. These similarities are rooted in historical-genetic kinship and the cultural and cognitive parallels found in the everyday lives and worldviews of these peoples. This phenomenon reveals the underlying unity of human thought and perception across civilizations. The universality of birth and death rituals across world cultures reflects the existence of a shared cosmological understanding. In traditional belief systems, the birth of a child is seen as a descent from the upper world to the middle world; the departure of a bride as a transition from one clan or tribe to another; and death as a return to eternal life in the lower world. In the popular imagination, human life stages are perceived as transitions between three realms—upper, middle, and lower.

This concept of transitional or “rite of passage” rituals (as articulated by Arnold van Gennep) is especially prominent in wedding folklore. For example, the rituals surrounding a bride’s departure from her family and her entry into a new household are performed in accordance with this transitional logic. While the structure of these rites may vary by culture, they are consistently and intimately linked to the traditional lifestyles and customs of the people. Unpacking these

underlying patterns within Kazakh wedding ritual folklore substantiates the scholarly relevance of this research and highlights its importance in the study of traditional culture and identity.

**Purpose of the research.** Wedding ritual folklore is a deeply rooted and enduring cultural phenomenon that has accompanied humanity across centuries. In contemporary society, it continues to evolve and remains actively practiced. Especially in the post-independence period, rituals such as matchmaking, bridal departure (*kız uzatı*), antiphonal wedding songs (*zhar-zhar*), unveiling ceremonies (*betashar*), and the wedding celebration itself have been revived and adapted, gaining renewed significance among the public. Therefore, the principal aim of this study is to determine the genre-specific nature of wedding ritual folklore in modern Kazakh society, to trace its historical evolution, and to examine the forms through which it has been transformed in contemporary cultural life. To achieve the stated aim, the following **objectives** are pursued:

- to determine the genre-specific nature of Kazakh wedding ritual folklore and to review its evolutionary trajectory, while identifying both its commonalities with the folklore of Turkic and world cultures and its distinctive national characteristics;

- to analyze the interrelationship between rituals performed during matchmaking, betrothal, bridal departure, and the wedding ceremony, and the songs traditionally associated with these events, from the perspective of the “folklore–ritual” dynamic;

- to examine the ethnographic parallels in wedding rituals shared with related Turkic peoples;

- to conduct a comparative analysis of key genres of wedding ritual folklore—such as *syngsy*, *zhar-zhar*, *betashar*, and *toybastar*—with corresponding genres in other Turkic traditions, identifying their origins and features of contemporary usage;

- to analyze the symbolic and figurative similarities and distinctions present within Kazakh wedding ritual folklore.

- to examine the ways in which ceremonial practices within family ritual folklore have evolved and adapted in response to modern societal changes, and to identify the formal modifications within their structure;

- to compare traditional folklore texts with their contemporary counterparts, highlighting key distinctions;

- to assess the relationship between ritual and folklore, tracing the development of artistic expression and considering how it reflects the living conditions and cultural dynamics of each community;

- to analyze the contemporary characteristics of wedding ritual folklore and provide a scholarly justification of its practical relevance in today’s society.

**Object of the Research:** The genre composition, poetics, and transformation of Kazakh wedding ritual folklore.

**Subject of the Research:** The genre characteristics, historical formation, socio-cultural functions, and contemporary transformation processes of wedding ritual folklore in modern Kazakh society.

**The theoretical and methodological basis** of the research draws upon a broad spectrum of scholarly works. Initial academic reflections on the significance of familial customs and rituals in Kazakhstan date back to the 19th century. Prominent thinkers and educators such as Sh. Ualikhanov, Y. Altynsarin, and B. Dauylbaev laid important groundwork by offering insightful commentaries on traditional practices. Later, the subject was further developed in the works of A. Baitursynov, M. Auezov, S. Seifullin, H. Arginbaev, S. Qasqabasov, B. Uaqatov, S. Azhigali, A. Toleubaev, Sh. Ibraev, B. Abylkasymov, K. Matyzhanov, A. Pangereev, and Sh. Kerim. Their contributions provided a systematic and scholarly foundation for understanding the nature and transformation of family traditions.

In addition to domestic scholarship, the study incorporates insights from Russian and international ethnographic research that has examined the content and transformation of familial traditions from multiple perspectives. Notable among these are the works of N.A. Kislyakov, S.M. Abramzon, G.P. Snesev, G.A. Sukhareva, T.A. Zhdanko, N.P. Lobacheva, G.P. Vasilieva, L.F. Monogarova, A.K. Baiburin, V.I. Eremina, and R.A. Sultangareeva, whose theoretical contributions and empirical data have been extensively used in this dissertation.

In conducting comparative analysis of the wedding folklore of Turkic peoples, the following works were utilized: «Karakalpak Folklore» (Tazhimuratov A.), «Kyrgyz Folk Songs» (Tokambaeva A., Kebekova B.), «Nogai Folk Songs», «Uzbek Folk Creativity», «Popular Lyrics of Uzbekistan» (1959), Ortabaeva R.A. «Karachay-Balkar Folk Songs: Traditional Heritage», «Abkhazian Folk Poetry», Khashba M.M. «Genres of Abkhazian Folk Song», «From Tajik Folk Poetry» (1964), Baboev S.S. «Oral Poetry in the Wedding Rituals of the Bukhara Tajiks», Bakhul Abulla «Azerbaijani Ritual Folklore and Its Poetics», «Uyghur Folk Laments» (Iskandarev I., Musaev Zh.), «Turkmen Folk Creativity», Sultangareeva R.A. «Family and Domestic Ritual Folklore of the Bashkir People».

**Sources of the study.** In addition to theoretical literature on ritual folklore, the research draws upon several primary data sources. These include the results of an online survey conducted via the Google Forms platform, based on examples of *syngsy*, *betashar*, and *toybastar* (with 1,202 respondents); expedition materials from the rare manuscripts collection of the M.O. Auezov Institute of Literature and Art; as well as video and audio recordings related to ritual folklore collected from social media platforms. These sources were used as key empirical foundations for the dissertation.

**Research methods.** The following methodologies were employed in the course of the research: general scientific methods such as observation, description, analysis, synthesis, and generalization, as well as historical-genetic and historical-typological approaches within the framework of comparative typology. Upon completion of the survey, the collected data were processed quantitatively and analyzed using diagrammatic techniques. The distribution of responses to individual questions was calculated as percentages and visualized using pie charts. Microsoft Excel was used for constructing the diagrams and presenting the data in a clear and

accessible format. This approach enabled the results of the study to be represented both comprehensively and scientifically.

**Scientific Novelty of the Research:** This dissertation is the first to comprehensively examine Kazakh wedding ritual folklore as an independent and coherent genre category within the broader framework of family ritual folklore. The principal contributions of the research are reflected in the following key findings:

- Oral texts previously unrecorded in academic literature and collected from the field have been introduced and analyzed as primary research material;

- The genre structure of traditional wedding ritual folklore has been systematically examined, and its evolutionary development and contemporary transformation processes have been investigated for the first time at the level of a scholarly dissertation;

- The typology of ethnographic connections in wedding ritual poetry has been explored at the doctoral level for the first time;

- Contemporary achievements in folkloristics, ethnography, and anthropology have been extensively applied to support the analysis;

- Kazakh wedding ritual folklore has been studied in relation to the people's religious and mythological worldview, and new scholarly conclusions have been drawn regarding its influence on the public consciousness in the modern era.

- The enduring cultural significance of wedding rituals, preserved across centuries, has been identified and contextualized within the socio-cultural fabric of contemporary Kazakh society;

- An analysis of modern matchmaking practices has made it possible to distinguish the ethnographic components and folkloric functions embedded within these rituals, thereby enabling a comparative assessment of traditional and modern national features;

- Particular attention has been given to the revival and renewed application of national customs in the post-independence era, with a focus on how wedding rituals have been reinterpreted in current practice;

- Within the context of globalization, the revitalization of folk traditions has been shown to enrich the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of wedding customs, highlighting new directions and identifying key challenges;

- The present-day functions of wedding rituals and their role in shaping national identity in modern Kazakh society have been critically evaluated.

**Practical Significance of the Research.** The findings of this dissertation can be effectively utilized in the study of various genres of folklore. They are also applicable in the development and delivery of specialized courses and seminar sessions on folkloristics for university students. Furthermore, the research outcomes may serve as a valuable theoretical and practical resource for folklorists, university faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and doctoral researchers engaged in the fields of folklore, cultural studies, and ethnography.

**The main Propositions for Defense.** Based on the research findings, the following conclusions are proposed for defense:

1. Wedding ritual folklore represents a deep-rooted and complex domain within Kazakh folklore. It embodies centuries of traditional worldview and is

integrally connected with everyday life, ancient mythological beliefs, customs, and celebratory practices, forming a syncretic genre.

2. As its name suggests, wedding ritual folklore encompasses two closely interconnected dimensions: ritual and artistic. These two aspects function in close conjunction, with folklore often serving a performative and supportive role within the ritual context. In this regard, it constitutes a core element of traditional Kazakh culture.

3. The ritual practices related to birth and death across world cultures reflect universal patterns embedded in human consciousness. Within traditional Kazakh cosmology, the birth of a child is viewed as a descent from the upper world to the middle world; the departure of a bride is seen as a transition from one clan to another; and death signifies a passage to the eternal life, or lower world. Thus, each stage of human life is perceived as a transitional phase between the three realms—upper, middle, and lower—illustrating a shared conceptual framework across cultures.

4. The poetic system of wedding ritual folklore originates from mythological consciousness. The poetics of ritual folklore is closely linked to the typology of ethnographic connections. Genres such as *syngsy*, *betashar*, and *zhar-zhar* clearly reflect traces of this ancient ritual worldview in their artistic essence.

5. *Syngsy* is a genre that has preserved its vitality without severing ties with ancient tradition. However, analysis of the materials examined in this study reveals clear signs of change in the genre's developmental dynamics. In contemporary use, *syngsy* demonstrates a blend of tradition and innovation, with both its form and performance adapted to modern social contexts. Moreover, *syngsy* now exists as a transformed form of folklore actively used on social media platforms.

6. While *betashar* has retained its core content, it has shed much of its ritual function and evolved into an artistic performance. Its contemporary texts have acquired entirely new characteristics.

7. Although the Kazakh wedding ritual is a historically deep-rooted and syncretic genre that developed in close kinship with the folklore of other Turkic peoples, it continues to function meaningfully in modern Kazakh society. It plays an active role in the lives of contemporary youth as a bearer of national values. Based on empirical methods, the study also conducted an experimental analysis using data from a Google Forms survey involving 1,202 respondents. The results of this survey confirmed that wedding ritual folklore remains a living and unbroken tradition in contemporary society.

**Approbation of the research.** The results of the dissertation were presented and discussed at domestic and international research institutions and universities. These included the “Scientific-Cognitive Friday” seminar for doctoral students at the Department of Kazakh Philology, Faculty of Philology, K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University (2021), and the traditional online scientific seminar titled “Topical Issues in Turkic Philology” held at M. Akmulla Bashkir State Pedagogical University (2022). Furthermore, an online survey was conducted via the Google Forms platform (500 respondents) to identify the contemporary transformation and public reception of the *betashar* and *syngsy* genres. Participating institutions included: K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, «Aktobe-Daryn» Regional

Scientific-Practical Center for Supplementary Education, Secondary School No. 7 Togys, Aktobe Multidisciplinary Tarlan College, I. Urgenisbaev Secondary School, T. Zharmagambetov Secondary School (Baiganin District, Aktobe Region), Aktobe Higher Polytechnic College, Karauilkeldi Secondary School No. 2. Additionally, an electronic survey related to the revitalization and renewal of the *syngsy* genre was disseminated across several regions of Kazakhstan—Atyrau, Kyzylorda, Shymkent, Turkistan, Astana, Almaty, Oral, Kostanay, East Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Taldykorgan, and Karaganda—garnering responses from 702 participants. The core findings and conclusions of the research were delivered in oral presentations at the following academic conferences: The XIX International Scientific Conference “Youth, Science and Innovation” (Aktobe, April 12, 2023), The Scientific-Practical Conference “Contemporary Problems in Teaching the Bashkir Language in the Republic of Bashkortostan and Other Regions of the Russian Federation” (Ufa, Russia, February 14, 2020), The International Scientific Conference “Kazakh Literary Studies: Tradition and Continuity” (Oral, November 24, 2023). In addition, research related to the dissertation topic was conducted during a research internship at the Institute of History, Language, and Literature of the Ufa Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ufa, Russia, February 10 – March 10, 2020).

**Publications and Approval of the Research.** Based on the theoretical issues and scholarly conclusions of the dissertation, a total of 10 academic articles have been published. Among these, 1 article appeared in a foreign journal indexed in the Scopus database; 4 articles were published in philological journals recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan; and 5 papers were included in international conference proceedings.

*Publications in Journals Indexed in the Scopus Database:*

1. “The Wedding Ceremony in Kazakh Folklore: Yesterday and Today.” *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 95, pp. 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2025.95.kazakh>

*Publications in Journals Recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan:*

1. “The Symbolism of Ritual Prohibitions in the Wedding Tradition.” *Science and Life of Kazakhstan (International Scientific Journal)*, No. 9, 2020, pp. 228–231.

2. “Folkloric Foundations of Contemporary Wedding Rituals.” *Bulletin of Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Series: Philology*, No. 4, 2019, pp. 310–315.

<https://bulletin-philology.kaznpu.kz/index.php/ped/issue/view/27/41>

3. “The Poetics of Wedding Ritual Folklore.” *Bulletin of Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University*, No. 3, 2019, pp. 251–255.

<https://vestnik.kgu.kz/index.php/kufil/issue/view/23/24>

4. “Ethnographic Origins of Kazakh Marriage Folklore.” *Keruen Scientific Journal*, No. 2, 2024, Vol. 83, pp. 17–27.

<https://keruenjournal.kz/main/issue/view/26/53>

*Publications in International Conference Proceedings*

1. “Common Features of Kazakh and Bashkir Wedding Customs.” Proceedings of the 5th All-Russian Conference “Contemporary Issues in Teaching the Bashkir Language in the Republic of Bashkortostan and Other Regions of the Russian Federation.” Ufa, 2020, pp. 322–327.

2. “Typological Features of the Cosmic Tree in Family Ritual Folklore.” Proceedings of the National Scientific-Practical Conference “Kazakh Literary Studies: Tradition and Continuity” dedicated to the 70th anniversary of literary scholar Prof. A.M. Musaev, within the framework of the “Spiritual Modernization” program. Aktobe, 2018, pp. 235–240.

3. “Parallels between Kazakh Wedding Customs and World Traditions.” Proceedings of the International Scientific-Practical Conference “Global Culture and National Stage Art: Dialogue and Integration.” Almaty: Print Express, 2023, pp. 298–303.

4. “The Motif of the Belt in Family Ritual Folklore.” Proceedings of the International Theoretical Conference “Kazakh Literary Studies: Tradition and Continuity.” Oral, 2023, pp. 109–113.

5. “On the Typology of the ‘Syngsy’ Genre (Based on Kazakh and Bashkir Folklore).” Proceedings of the 19th International Scientific Conference “Youth, Science, and Innovation” for young researchers, PhD students, master’s students, and undergraduates. Aktobe, 2023, pp. 96–99.

**Structure and Volume of the Research.** The dissertation consists of an introduction, two main chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, a glossary, and appendices. The total length of the scholarly work is 179 pages.

This dissertation is based on the academic standards and normative frameworks established in Kazakhstan for research in the fields of folkloristics and literary studies. It also reflects the strategic priorities of the national policy on preserving and promoting the country’s spiritual and cultural heritage. The research aligns with the following official documents: “The Seven Facets of the Great Steppe” policy article (Section I: “Space and Time in National History,” dated November 21, 2018); The State Program for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2025 (Resolution No. 726, October 12, 2021); The Concept for the Implementation of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029 (Resolution No. 914, October 16, 2023); The National Project “Spiritual Revival” (Resolution No. 724, October 12, 2021).

**The Doctoral Candidate’s Contribution to the Research Publications.** The author of this dissertation independently systematized the theoretical approaches for a comprehensive study of the chosen topic, conducted empirical research, and formulated substantiated conclusions, which led to the preparation of scholarly publications. The doctoral candidate independently developed the full structure of the dissertation, selected the appropriate research methods, identified and addressed the research objectives, and prepared all related publications. Tasks corresponding to the research theme and the interpretation of the results were carried out in collaboration with academic supervisors. The published materials may be used within academic settings, particularly in research related to literary studies and folkloristics.