

INTRODUCTION

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The special issue¹ of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* is a collection of scholarly works from and about Kazakhstan. The idea for the issue was born in a discussion with the editors of the journal after Aimar Ventsel's first visit to Kazakhstan. During that discussion the journal editors decided to compile a special issue reflecting the variety of topics scholars in Kazakhstan are engaged with.

Kazakhstan is a dynamically developing country and invests considerable funds into education and science. The initial idea of the special issue was to reflect the current state of affairs in Kazakh academia, and demonstrate to the English speaking audience the variety of topics and research methods existing there. With the exception of two contributors, all of the authors in the volume are from universities in Kazakhstan. After the initial call for papers we received several abstracts from scholars of disciplines willing to contribute to the volume. Unfortunately, some of these authors were unable to complete and submit the final version of their articles. Therefore, for example, legal studies are not represented in this special issue, although the original line up also included one paper from this field. We announced another call for papers and later added a few more papers.

After reading and editing the articles, some common threads in the works of contributors can be highlighted. As is typical of academia in the former Soviet Union, scholars in Kazakhstan overwhelmingly focus their studies on subjects from their own country. The variety of topics represented in this special issue ranges from the analysis of the language politics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, via discussing particularities of the traditional calendar, to a semi-biographic article about the 'ethnographic' writing of a Kazakh writer, Gabit Musrepov. There are several reasons for such 'home research', and these will be discussed in more detail in a concluding chapter. This tendency, however, offers the reader a unique possibility to get a glimpse inside the academia of Kazakhstan, and learn about the relevant topics and approaches. A beginner

in the studies of Central Asian academia is often confronted by the fact that the English language writing on the region offers an analysis through the eyes and methodology of Western scholars. As long as the student is unable to read regional languages and Russian, or has difficulties in finding such literature, he or she lacks the understanding of how local scholars view their culture, region, and meaning thereof in a wider political context. It is not to deny that the view from the 'other side' is helpful in constructing a bigger picture. This bigger picture is useful when preparing oneself for fieldwork in Kazakhstan, or cooperation with scholars from the region. Another reason for compiling the special issue is to acknowledge the different traditions of academic writing. Therefore, the publication of non-Western scholars writing in a style different than in Western journals serves as an example of the multitude of different academic styles and traditions. As scholars who have considerable experience with the academic writing in the former Soviet Union, and especially with scientific writing in Russian, we could argue that the approach of the scholars from Kazakhstan differs significantly from the style of Soviet academic writing, but also from the styles practiced by Russian scholars today. It could be said that Kazakh scholars have their own poetic way of writing, demonstrated by the majority of papers in this journal's special issue. In order to give a voice to that tradition, texts were not edited with the aim to force them to conform to the Western way of argumentation, as it often happens with other academic journals. We did everything to maintain the original style and argumentation of the authors. Through the publication of this collection of articles we intend to contribute to a global academic dialogue between various countries, national traditions, and research methods.

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