

# Cultural Adaptation of Kazakh Oral Traditions in Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis Across Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China

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**Abstract:** Oral traditions play a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and conveying historical memory, particularly within diasporic populations encountering international pressures. This research aims to indicate the parallels and contrasts in the oral traditions of Turkic-Mongolian ethnic groups, specifically examining Kazakh narratives and their evolution resulting from migration and cultural interaction. The study analyses myths, legends and epics using comparative historical, content, intertextual and genealogical methodologies to track alterations across various cultural settings. The findings indicate that Kazakh oral traditions maintained among diaspora populations preserve ancient aspects while incorporating new themes shaped by local cultures. In Mongolia, Kazakh oral heritage integrates shamanic and Buddhist components, but in Uzbekistan, Islamic themes transform conventional storytelling. Kazakh stories in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate significant intertextual connections with the Manas epic, highlighting themes of communal identity and struggle. In China, cosmogonic narratives concerning natural spirits and sacred sites demonstrate the impact of agricultural and religious traditions, resulting in modifications in their structure and themes. Despite these changes, these oral traditions remain essential tools for cultural transmission and identity maintenance. These findings enhance comprehension of how folklore evolves through migration and intercultural contact, offering insights into cultural resilience within diasporic contexts.

**Keywords:** ethnic identity, folklore, non-fabulous prose, traditional narratives

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The oral traditions of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples are a key element of their cultural heritage, encompassing myths, legends, epics and folk narratives reflecting ancient beliefs, traditions and worldview concepts. These narratives function as manifestations of communal memory, instruments of cultural transmission and indicators of ethnic identity. In the modern age, when globalisation and migration have heightened international connections, the examination of these traditions has gained fresh significance. Comprehending the evolution, transformation and persistence of Kazakh oral traditions across diaspora populations offers significant insight into the processes of cultural adaptation, identity preservation and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Kazakh folklore includes mythology, heroic epics, historical stories and folk tales, each fulfilling unique cultural roles. Myths typically elucidate cosmology, natural occurrences and the origins of cultural traditions, whereas epics document acts of courage and legends offer semi-historical narratives of notable persons. The study of these narrative forms must expand beyond mythology to include the whole range of Kazakh folklore and oral tradition as it is conveyed in various diasporic contexts.

Investigating Turkic–Mongolian folklore, particularly Kazakh oral traditions, poses very substantial methodological difficulties. Many narratives have been maintained only by oral transmission, rendering them particularly vulnerable to alteration throughout time. In some instances, the oldest documented versions of these narratives emerged long after their alterations, complicating the reconstruction of their initial forms. Moreover, geographical disparities within the same ethnic group result in several iterations of the same narrative, varying according to location, cultural influences and degrees of assimilation (Kelmendi 2024).

In diaspora contexts, oral traditions are especially susceptible to degradation from linguistic and cultural assimilation. As subsequent generations become more assimilated into the prevailing cultural and linguistic structures of their host nations, the transmission of traditional narratives becomes disjointed or recontextualised. This poses a significant barrier for academics striving to document and study these traditions in their true or original forms. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating anthropology, ethnography, linguistics and cultural studies, is necessary to attain a thorough knowledge of how Kazakh oral traditions are perpetuated, adapted, or modified in various cultural contexts.

S. A. Seralimova (2023) examined the key features of myth and the mechanisms of mythologisation in literary texts. The study emphasises the relevance of the study of mythological plots in fiction and the need for a more detailed analysis of them. The scientist analysed the work of Kazakh writers and folklorists, including Akhmet Baitursynov, Mukhtar Auezov, Shokan Valikhanov, and Alkei Margulan, who laid the foundations of the mythological school of Kazakh literary studies. Particular attention was devoted to how Kazakh authors, starting in the mid-20th century, used mythological stories to describe historical events and the most important moments of Kazakh history. Sharustam Shamusarov and Dilafruz Atakhanova (2020) studied the origin and evolution of the mythological heritage of Turkic ethnic groups in Central Asia. The study describes the concept of myth in the context of science and literature and describes the key stages of its development. The role of myth as a means of expressing the emotional attitude of primitive man to the surrounding reality is analysed. The authors focused on the significance of myth in the life of ancient societies and its constant influence on literature, including the formation of new genres and their integration into works.

Anbar Buranov and Karlygash Nurmukhametova (2023) analysed axiological themes in Kazakh and Uzbek folklore, investigating the common cultural values, customs and traditions of the Turkic peoples. Their research specifically highlighted the significance of national characteristics, aphoristic poetry and ritual behaviours in fostering moral stability and reinforcing cultural identity. The components originating from the nomadic lifestyle persist in shaping the worldview and self-identification of Turkic cultures today. Zhuldyz Zanadil

(2024) addressed the mythological role of Korkyt Ata in Kazakh culture and various ethnic contexts, revealing complex symbolism and universal elements. Korkyt Ata had many mythological nuances associated with heroism, fate and spiritual wisdom. Comparative studies have shown that this image had different connotations in Turkish, Azerbaijani and Kazakh mythologies, acting as a spiritual mentor and warrior hero.

Yerkezhan Seitkazy et al. (2024) examined Kazakh literary works from postmodern and neo-mythological viewpoints, demonstrating the adaptation of traditional folklore in modern writing. The research uncovered variances in genre and style within Kazakh prose, emphasising the recontextualization of historical, biblical and folkloric material in contemporary narratives. Gulimat Bieken and Zhanna Alashbaeva (2023) conducted an in-depth study on the analysis of mythological plots in Kazakh oral literature, considering them not only as elements of ancient legends but also as dynamic forms that continue to exist and evolve in the literature of a later period. They addressed how these stories have adapted to changing cultural and historical conditions while retaining their original significance for national identity. The researchers emphasised that mythological images and motifs that originated in the oral tradition continue to be important components of Kazakh literature, influencing its genre and thematic diversity.

This literature review emphasises that, although current studies provide significant insights into Turkic and Kazakh folklore, addressing axiological notions, genre variety in prose and the evolution of oral and written traditions, gaps remain. There is a necessity for more investigation of regional disparities within Kazakh oral traditions, their adaptation among diaspora populations and the evolution of these traditions as a result of migration, cultural assimilation and transnational identity development. Additional examination is essential to comprehend the impact of globalisation on the preservation, transformation and reinterpretation of folklore within Kazakh diasporas, particularly regarding the influence of cultural exchanges, linguistic changes and digital media on narrative traditions and identity.

This research investigates the evolution of Kazakh oral traditions, encompassing myths, legends and epic narratives, across Kazakh populations beyond their native territory. It examines the adaptation of these traditions to new cultural contexts, illustrating changes in identity, historical memory and socio-cultural factors. This research aims to systematise and conduct a comparative analysis of traditional and diaspora Kazakh narratives; examine external cultural and social factors influencing their transformation; analyse changes in genre and thematic structures; and assess their role in preserving national identity amid migration and globalisation.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research was aimed at identifying differences and similarities in the features of oral traditions among Turkic–Mongolian ethnic groups, emphasising Kazakh narratives in the context of their cultural adaptation and preservation due to migration and intercultural interaction. The study included the analysis of the folklore related to figures such as Kokbori, Er-Toshtuk, Zhelmaya, Zhettygen, Koraysh Batyr, Manas, Master of Water, Master of Wind, Orman Baba, Master of Mountains, War of the Pine and Saxauls, Dykhan Baba, Orman Baba, “Right Mountain”, “Kokshe Baba”, “Bohemian Ancestor”, “Mud Batyr”, “Sacred Poplar”, “Sacred Baiterek”, “Kok Ugiz”, “Guest of the Soul”, as well as the epics “Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu”, “Alpamys Batyr”, “Er-Targyn”, “Abylai Khan” (Zhanaidarov 2008).

A comparative analysis was employed to investigate the regional variations in oral narratives among Kazakh diasporas in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China, considering their adaptation to various cultural, religious and social influences. The comparative historical method was utilised to examine the development of oral traditions, highlighting their conservation and alteration across various historical and cultural settings. The research methodically compared historical documents, oral folklore and literary adaptations to investigate how historical events, including conquests, migrations, religious shifts and cultural exchanges, shaped the genesis, alteration and evolution of myths among the Turkic–Mongol peoples. The methodology was implemented in two phases. The process was executed in two steps. Initially, early oral texts and traditions were analysed to explain their original forms and functions within Turkic–Mongolian culture. The following phase examined later alterations, especially within diasporic contexts, when these traditions adapted to foreign cultural influences, including Mongolian shamanism, Islamic traditions in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and animistic beliefs in China.

Content analysis was used for a detailed study of oral narrative texts, identifying the main genre features and their variations depending on the cultural context. This method identified the main elements and structure of oral narratives, as well as their transformation in different cultural settings. The use of content analysis involved several key stages. First, the text was analysed to identify recurring themes, motifs and plot elements that are characteristic of the oral traditions of a particular people. This analysis identified key aspects of the genre characteristics, such as their form, structure, main characters and storylines. This method was then used to study how these genre elements vary depending on the cultural context. This included the study of how stories and characters adapt and change depending on cultural and historical factors, such as the influence of neighbouring peoples and changing religious and social conditions.

The intertextual analysis revealed the interrelationships between the narratives of different communities and the influence of local cultural traditions on them. This approach has contributed to the study of how oral traditions of Turkic-Mongolian peoples intersect with mythological and cultural elements of other communities and how they adapt to new cultural conditions. The intertextual analysis also assessed mutual influences and borrowings between oral texts, as well as the analysis of how elements of one tradition can be adapted or transformed in the context of another culture. This approach revealed how the narratives of the Turkic-Mongol peoples may have interacted with those of neighbouring peoples such as the Chinese and how these interactions contributed to changes and integration of cultural elements.

The genealogical method was used to trace the historical development of motifs, plots and characters, revealing their changes in response to cultural and historical events. It included an analysis of how oral narratives adapted to new social conditions and cultural interactions, thereby clarifying the broader cultural processes that influenced these traditions.

### 3. RESULTS

Folklore is an extensive category of oral traditions, including tales, songs, legends, epics, proverbs and rituals that embody the collective consciousness of people. In folklore, myths represent a distinct genre: they are holy or symbolic narratives that elucidate essential elements of existence, including cosmology, creation and supernatural forces. In contrast to legends, which are semi-historical and based on real events, or epics, which emphasise bravery and national identity, myths predominantly function to reinforce worldviews and provide cosmological interpretations. Myths develop based on oral traditions, legends and stories that are passed down through generations. They are substantial in maintaining cultural continuity by reinforcing the key values, norms and attitudes of a particular ethnic or cultural group. Myths also serve as explanations for complex natural and social phenomena, helping people to make sense of their experiences, historical events and spiritual traditions (Bazaluk 2017).

Myth, being one of the leading categories of culture, has a significant impact on shaping the worldview and identity of various communities. It not only reflects deep views on the world and the role of humans in it but also serves as a mechanism for transmitting cultural values, norms and beliefs across generations. Mythological stories and images that emerged at the dawn of civilisation continue to have a significant impact on contemporary cultural processes, including literature, art and public life (Clarke & Wake 2021; Mizin & Petrov 2021).

In the context of Kazakh culture, myths are relevant in the formation and maintenance of national identity. They are not only archaic evidence of ancient ideas about the world but also serve as the most important means of transmitting cultural codes, moral norms and socially important attitudes. The

myths integrated into the structure of Kazakh folklore, epic and folk traditions demonstrate the deep interconnectedness of the Kazakh people with their historical heritage, natural environment and way of life (Kaskabasov 2010). The peculiarity of Kazakh myths is their close connection with real life and the natural environment in which nomadic tribes lived. Myths often feature images of animals, sacred mountains, rivers and celestial bodies that are personified and endowed with supernatural qualities. These images not only symbolise natural forces but also serve as intermediaries between man and the divine. They are also a source of inspiration for Kazakh literature, music and art, and contribute to the strengthening and development of the cultural heritage. The myths embody the life experience of the Kazakh people and their ideas about nature, society and man, and remain relevant in the world.

In the context of globalisation and migration, when many Kazakhs were far from their historical homeland, myths acquired new relevance (Aigle 2015). They are becoming an important means of preserving ethnic identity in a foreign language and different cultural environment. However, the myths do not remain unchanged: they are adapting to new cultural and social conditions, reflecting changes in the minds and perceptions of the Kazakhs themselves. These transformations can be manifested in a change of emphasis, reinterpretation of old stories, the emergence of new characters.

For instance, Kazakh diasporas living in other countries often face the need to integrate into a foreign cultural environment while maintaining their ethnic roots. In this context, myths not only preserve traditions but also adapt, help establish links between historical heritage and modernity and introduce Kazakh culture into the cultural context of the host country. Mythological images and stories can be used to express new meanings and identities, allowing cultural heritage to be preserved in a changing environment (Bazaluk 2018). Thus, Kazakh myths remain an important element of ethnic identity. They continue to perform their function as an element connecting the past and the present, ensuring the continuity of cultural tradition and maintaining collective identity. Myths, despite their ancient nature, demonstrate a unique ability to adapt and transform, maintaining their vitality and relevance in a dynamically changing world (Sahoo 2023: 307–316). Their study opens new perspectives for understanding how cultural traditions can be preserved and developed in the context of globalisation and migration and how myths continue to be fundamental in the formation and preservation of national identity.

The study of Kazakh myths in the context of foreign diasporas opens new perspectives for understanding how these ancient cultural forms continue to live and develop in modern conditions. This can be used to trace how mythological motifs are integrated into a new cultural environment, change under the influence of other traditions, and continue to fulfil their function in maintaining national identity and cultural distinctiveness. Kazakh myths, preserved and developed among Kazakhs living abroad in countries such as Mongolia,

Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, have unique features that reflect their adaptation to new cultural and social conditions, as well as interaction with local traditions.

Kazakhs living in Mongolia, especially in the Bayan Ulgii region, have preserved many elements of their mythological traditions, which are closely intertwined with local culture (Montgomery 2022). The influence of Mongolian shamanistic and Buddhist beliefs is manifested in syncretism, where Kazakh myths are enriched with new motifs associated with natural spirits and rituals. For instance, the myth of the Kokbori (Heavenly Wolf), a symbol of protection and ancestral connection in Kazakh folklore, has gained further attributes. The story of Kokbori (Heavenly Wolf), originating from ancient Turkic beliefs, was initially documented by 19th-century Orientalist academics. Kokbori was regarded in Mongolia as both the patron saint of the Kazakh people and a guardian spirit linked to certain sacred places in the mountainous areas, embodying elements of Mongolian shamanism. Mongolian Kazakhs maintain an alternate understanding of Kokbori as a protective spirit of holy terrains, including aspects of Mongolian shamanism. Conversely, in China's Altai area, interpretations of the story highlight agricultural plenty, associating the wolf's direction with harvest cycles – an indication of sinicised modifications. Kokbori is the Celestial Wolf that descended from the heavens, and the term *kök* in the Kazakh language (as well as in other Turkic languages) signifies the sky. The paramount totem shared across all Turkic peoples is the Blue Wolf (Kokbori) (Toyshanuly 2009).

Another example is the epic about Er-Toshtuk, a hero who travels between worlds in search of a bride. In the Mongolian diaspora, this story was enriched with elements of Buddhist cosmology, where the worlds became more detailed and connected to Buddhist ideas of rebirth and karma. The interpretation of the folklore's characters has also changed: traditional Kazakh nature spirits, such as "Zhelmaya" (magic camel), in Mongolia, acquired features associated with local shamanic guardian spirits, reflecting the fusion of Kazakh and Mongolian beliefs. Here, narratives often include elements related to sacred places and patron spirits, which is indicative of the deep belief in the power of nature and spirits in Mongolian culture. The heroic epic Er-Toshtuk has Mongolian shamanistic themes. The original Kazakh version emphasises supernatural challenges and individual bravery, while Mongolian variations incorporate guardian spirits and aspects of Buddhist cosmology.

In Uzbekistan, where the Kazakh population is concentrated in Karakalpakstan and the Tashkent region, Kazakh mythological traditions have also undergone significant changes. The influence of Uzbek and Karakalpak cultures was reflected in the integration of Islamic elements, which led to the interpretation of some myths through the prism of Islamic values and beliefs. The legend about the "Zhetygen" (seven-stringed lyre), which in traditional Kazakh culture is associated with spiritual search and musical inspiration, has been reinterpreted in Uzbekistan in the light of Islamic traditions (Erkoç 2019). The

legends of “Zhetygen” began to include motifs related to the veneration of Allah and the saints, where music becomes not just a way of self-expression but also a way of spiritual perfection and glorification of the divine. The influence of Islam gave new symbolic meanings to this narrative, emphasising the religious component of musical art. Numerous Kazakh folktales documented herein incorporate Islamic moral themes. The legend of Zhetygen transitions from a secular narrative of loss and resistance to one in which music serves as a heavenly instrument for spiritual cleansing.

The legend of “Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu”, a Kazakh version of a tragic love story, has evolved over time, with the earliest written records dating back to 19th-century Russian ethnographic expeditions. In the Uzbek context, this legend has received an Islamised interpretation, where the characters are often portrayed as righteous Muslims whose love is sanctified by religious norms and moral principles. In the narratives that retain links to Islam, their fate is perceived as a test of faith, and the tragic outcome is seen as divine predestination, reflecting the influence of Uzbek culture on the reinterpretation of traditional Kazakh stories. In addition, the story of Koraysh Batyr, which in Kazakh folklore symbolises valour and defence of the native land, has come to contain elements related to religious wars and the defence of Islam under the influence of Uzbek and Karakalpak traditions (Ahearn 2023). Koraysh Batyr is now presented not only as a defender of the Kazakh people but also as a hero fighting to protect the Islamic faith, reflecting the integration of Islamic warrior ideals into the Kazakh epic. A comparative analysis of the versions from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan reveals notable thematic divergences. While the Kazakh version stresses ancestral responsibility and honour, the Uzbek adaptation incorporates Islamic moral teachings, along with further verses on divine justice.

In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakh myths have retained a strong connection with epic traditions that are common to the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. This is especially evident in the retellings of epics about heroes and batyrs, such as “Er-Targyn”. In Kyrgyz’s interpretations, this hero not only fights for the honour and freedom of his people but also becomes a symbol of collective resistance against external threats. Elements of the Manas epic added epic proportions to the Er-Targyn epic, emphasising his role as a leader capable of uniting different tribes and peoples in the struggle for justice.

The epic of Alpamys Batyr, a heroic narrative maintained throughout several Turkic-speaking populations, was recorded in Soviet-era compilations of Kazakh folklore and has variants noted among Uzbek and Kyrgyz oral narrators. The primary distinctions are alterations in Alpamys’ characterisation: in Kazakh renditions, he represents the archetypal warrior protecting his territory, while in the Uzbek interpretation, religious motifs are highlighted, depicting him as a celestial guardian of religion. Kyrgyz interpretations also use ideas from the Manas epic, emphasising themes of tribal togetherness and struggle.

As a result of the interaction of cultures, Alpamys was perceived not only as a protector of his people but also as a figure uniting Turkic people in the fight against common enemies (Saginadin 2019). Retellings of this myth in Kyrgyzstan pay more attention to the themes of brotherhood and mutual aid, reflecting the influence of the “Manas” epic, where these motifs are central (Reichl 2019). These changes reflected the strengthening of collective ideals in the myths of the Kazakhs living in Kyrgyzstan. There is a significant interpenetration of cultures here, leading to new interpretations of traditional Kazakh myths. The interaction with Kyrgyz culture is also reflected in the special importance given to the themes of brotherhood and collective resistance in the myths.

In China, the Kazakhs are dominated by cosmogonic myths related to natural phenomena such as wind, water and mountains: “Master of the Water”, “Master of the Wind”, “Orman Baba”, “Master of the Mountains”. Stories about water and plant creatures often describe their miraculous powers, such as reviving the dead or watering the desert, which underlines their importance in Kazakh life. For instance, the story of the “Master of the Wind” describes a spirit that controls the wind, which comes from a cave on Mount Orkachar. Following the narrative, the wind from this cave can be very destructive. Such stories illustrate attempts to explain the origin of natural phenomena and their impact on the environment. Cosmogonic stories like Master of Water and Master of Wind exhibit syncretic influences from Chinese animistic and agricultural mythology. The narrative of Sacred Baiterek, which traditionally depicts a world tree linking several worlds, has been discovered in iterations where Taoist cosmology and Confucian principles are integrated into its framework. Another myth, “The War of the Pine and the Saxaul”, dwells on a battle between two types of trees, symbolising their struggle for survival in different environments, which explains why some trees grow in the desert and others in the mountains. These myths demonstrate how Kazakh legends have adapted to their new environment, maintaining links with natural phenomena and cultural traditions, while they have also been distorted and adapted in the process of preservation. These elements of folklore show a common historical and cultural heritage similar to that of other Turkic-Mongolian peoples (Ouyang 2021).

Among the ancient myths of the Kazakhs living in China is the legend of “Dykhan Baba”, the sacred guardian of plants. According to this myth, when people became new beings, Father Heaven and Mother Earth gave them flour, from which Dikhan Baba annually produced barley and wheat instead of rain and snow. These plants absorbed the properties of the land on which they grew, and people could harvest without sharing. The myth also describes how Dikhan Baba taught people to respect food and showed that hunger can be eliminated only by properly using rainwater for irrigation. The second myth, “Orman Baba”, dwells on a forest spirit who causes rain and preserves the forest. These myths reflect early ideas about the world when natural phenomena were explained through the images of mythical creatures. Kazakhs in China

honour the “Pravaia gora” (Mother Mountain) as a sacred place symbolising homeland and ancestors. In this context, the stories about “Kokshe Baba” in eastern Urumqi and similar Uyghur conceptions of the sky show how mythology reflects early conceptions of nature and sacred places. Myths about natural phenomena and their divine guardians demonstrate how Kazakhs sought to explain and define the world around them, giving natural phenomena human qualities and meanings.

The mythology of the Kazakhs living in China has undergone significant changes compared to its original form in their homeland due to adaptation to local cultural and religious conditions. One of the ancient myths, for example, about “Dyhan Baba”, the sacred guardian of plants, was adapted to reflect Chinese ideas about agriculture, the main character reflecting the increased importance of agriculture in Chinese culture.

The key focus is on the stories of the birth of the human race. The myth, “Bohemian Ancestor”, describes how a primitive woman created children out of clay who became the founders of new nations. This myth emphasises the connection between humans and nature, where clay and cow’s milk are central to the creation of life (Ucan 2024). There is also the “Mud Batyr” myth, which is associated with mountain caves and natural disasters. In the myth, a batyr is a creature whose body is made of clay, symbolising a close connection with the earth and natural forces. The Mud Batyr is a protector who saves the country and its property from the dangers associated with natural disasters. In the myth, the Mud Batyr can prevent landslides and other disasters, but the clay body sooner or later collapses. This aspect of the myth emphasises the fragility of human nature and the importance of connection with natural forces.

In Kazakh myths preserved in China, the key myths related to natural phenomena reflecting ancient ideas about the world and its structure – the narrative “Sacred Topol” which connects heaven, earth and the underworld – stand out. Each leaf on this tree symbolises a person’s soul, and when a person dies, their leaf falls to the ground. This tree is not only sacred but also important in shamanic traditions, acting as a link between worlds. The myth of the “Sacred Baiterek” presents Baiterek as a colossal world tree with a Samruk bird nesting at its top, symbolising the unity of the three cosmic realms – the sky, the earth and the underworld. This tree, considered sacred, was revered by the ancient Kazakhs, and its symbolism has been preserved in their traditions and beliefs. The tree was a place of worship, and people brought sacrifices there to show respect. The narrative of the “Kok Ugiz” (blue bull) is a key element in representations of the creation and sustenance of the earth. According to it, the earth was formed and is held on the back of a blue bull. In this mythical image, the bull acts as a support for the earth, and its movement or ageing causes earthquakes. When a blue bull dies, this event represents the end of one world and the beginning of a new one. This myth is not limited to Kazakh folklore; it is also found among other Turkic-speaking peoples and has parallels in Islamic

mythology (Lee 2024). In Mongolian mythology, there is a similar image, but instead of a bull, the earth is supported by a giant turtle.

The study investigated the adaptation of Kazakh oral traditions within the framework of migration and the settlement of Kazakh diasporas in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. The research indicated that Kazakh oral traditions retained in these nations have seen substantial alterations due to the impact of local cultural and religious practices. Nevertheless, essential components of Kazakh cultural legacy, including symbols representing the relationship among humanity, nature and spiritual forces, persist unaltered. This illustrates the capacity of oral traditions to evolve within new cultural contexts while preserving their essential elements.

The incorporation of Islamic themes in Uzbekistan is seen in narratives like *Zhetygen* and *Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu*. Within the Uzbek framework, *Zhetygen*, historically linked to musical and spiritual inspiration, has been redefined to highlight devotion and heavenly direction, including aspects of Sufi mysticism. Likewise, *Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu*, a renowned epic of tragic love, exist in several iterations throughout Central Asian Turkic civilisations; but, in Uzbekistan, it has been modified to conform to Islamic moral principles. This rendition depicts the protagonists as virtuous individuals who traverse their destiny in alignment with divine intent, emphasising Islamic principles of predestination and moral obligation. These alterations underscore the assimilation of Islamic influences within Uzbekistan's oral traditions, hence enhancing religious elements in storytelling.

The adoption of Kazakh heroic epics in Mongolia illustrates the heightened significance of nature spirits and shamanic components. The *Kokbori* (Heavenly Wolf) tale, historically emblematic of protection and ancestral guidance, has assimilated other characteristics associated with Mongolian shamanistic beliefs, depicting the wolf as a guardian spirit connected to sacred areas. This growth exemplifies the syncretic amalgamation of Kazakh and Mongolian spiritual traditions. Kazakh heroic epics in Kyrgyzstan, particularly *Er-Targyn*, demonstrate notable intertextual relationships with the *Manas* epic, highlighting themes of community identity and resistance. The Kyrgyz adaptation of these epics often integrates ideas of solidarity among Turkic tribes, strengthening a collective historical awareness that aligns with the patriotic themes found in Kyrgyz oral traditions.

In China, cosmogonic legends regarding natural spirits and sacred locations have been shaped by agricultural and animistic traditions. Narratives like *Master of the Wind* and *Master of the Water* illustrate a heightened emphasis on nature as a divine entity influencing human destiny. This adaptation corresponds with traditional Chinese cosmology, which prioritises harmony between mankind and the natural environment. Notwithstanding these regional changes, Kazakh oral traditions remain an essential connection between generations, bolstering the cultural identity of Kazakh diasporas. These traditions have not only

adjusted to new contexts but have also been enhanced with new symbols and narratives, underscoring their durability and ability to shift (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Genre features of Kazakh oral traditions abroad

Country	Genre category	Main themes and motifs	Elements of genre adaptation
<i>China</i>	Cosmogonic legends; ancestral narratives	The creation of the world, the confrontation between the forces of order and chaos, the unity of heaven and earth. Stories about ancestors, connection with the past, the origin of peoples	Adaptation to Chinese cosmogonic concepts, increasing the importance of agricultural motifs
	Totemic legends	Worship of nature spirits and totem animals	Influence of Chinese shamanic traditions, integration of Buddhist elements
<i>Mongolia</i>	Heroic epics	Heroes defending the people and the land from enemies, fighting natural and supernatural forces.	Increasing the importance of nature spirits and guardians, integrating Mongolian shamanic elements
	Totemic legends; eschatological narratives	Mythical animals, patron spirits, and the relationship between humans and nature. Apocalypse, destruction of the world, rebirth and the cyclical nature of time	Influence of Mongolian shamanic beliefs, adaptation to local totemic traditions
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	Heroic epics (batyr narratives); religious legends	Heroes' deeds in the fight against enemies, defence of their native land, justice and courage. Stories of saints, spiritual guidance	Integration of Islamic elements, strengthening of religious motives
	Cosmogonic legends	Creation of the world, the connection between heaven and earth, symbols of light and darkness	Influence of Islamic cosmogonic ideas
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	Heroic epics (batyr narratives)	Striving for freedom and independence, feats of war, defence of the people	Reflection of the epic Manas

The ideas of the soul and its journey after death play a significant role in mythology. Stories such as “Soul Guest” describe the soul separating from the body and travelling to heaven. These ideas have been preserved in folklore, for example, in dastans, where the soul of the hero ascends to heaven after his death. The folklore of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples is characterised by cosmogonic concepts based on animism and totemism. An important place in these narratives is occupied by Tengyr, who is perceived as the Supreme God, the ruler of heaven and earth. The belief in Tengyra reflects ancient ideas

about the cosmos, where the sky is perceived as the father and the earth as the mother. Despite the penetration and spread of Islam, this concept retains its significance in folk beliefs and traditions.

The image of Umai, the mythological mother earth and protector of children and home, significantly contributes to preserving life and procreation (Biran & Kim 2024). She is associated with birth and destiny, and her cult persists even after Islamisation, which is evidence of the deep roots of this image in the mythological consciousness of the Kazakhs. Myths related to the origin of the earth often depict the earth as a living being raised by mythical beings, reflecting ancient ideas about the opposition between the forces of order and chaos. Totem myths are also an important part of mythology, where certain animals, such as the wolf or the bear, are revered as sacred and of special significance to the people (Prychepii 2022). Comparing Kazakh myths in Kazakhstan and abroad, it is possible to note that in the native environment, mythology has undergone significant transformations under the influence of Islam. The image of Tengyr was gradually replaced by God, and many mythological characters lost their original functions. Whereas in foreign diasporas, especially where Islam has not become the dominant religion, these myths have preserved more archaic forms, where natural phenomena and totem animals play a central role.

The mythology of the Kazakh people has a story that reflects their ideas about the creation of the world and is an integral part of their cultural heritage. This myth tells of an ancient creator who, with his creative skill, breathed life into clay, divided chaos into light and darkness, and created the earth and sky. The myth is based on the concept of the world as an arena where the forces of order prevail over chaos, creating an ordered space out of the original pathlessness and darkness. The central figure in this myth is the creator, known as Ilkiata (or Demirug), who is the creative hero who creates all things on earth. His role reflects the Kazakh belief that the world was formed through the intelligent actions of higher powers that gave rise to the heavens, earth, light and darkness (May & Hope 2022). The myth mentions two key stages: the separation of heaven and earth and the transformation of chaos into space, which is an important aspect of the Kazakh mythological system of thought.

This myth is also associated with the ancient beliefs about the ancestors of mankind – Adam Ata and Au Apa, who, according to legend, were created from clay and breathed life through the efforts of the creator. These figures symbolise the origin of human life and the union of earth and sky, light and darkness. Mythology emphasises the importance of light as a symbol of order and warmth, as opposed to the darkness of chaos. Also, the mythical image of the creator remained in people’s memory even after the advent of Islam, which is expressed using the concepts of “Tanir, who created”, “God, who created”, “Allah, who created”. This indicates that ancient myths continue to influence the religious and cultural worldview of Kazakhs, preserving elements of archaic thinking (Atwood 2021). Consequently, this mythical narrative explains not

only the creation of the world but also reflects the worldview and conceptual system of the Kazakh people, linking it to universal themes of creation and the struggle for order against chaos. When collecting and analysing such myths, especially in the context of the Kazakh diaspora, it is important to consider their cultural significance and influence on modern society.

The non-fabulous prose of the Turkic peoples, including Kazakhs, Turks, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and other ethnic groups, represents an important layer of oral folklore that demonstrates the historical, cultural and religious characteristics of these peoples (Hasanova & Najafova 2025). In each of these societies, non-fabulous prose is central to the transmission of cultural traditions, moral values and collective experience, and includes such genres as myths, legends, traditions, epics and tales (Stepanenko 2020). Kazakh non-fairy tale prose is rich in myths, epics and legends about batyrs (heroes) such as Alpamys, Koblandy, Er-Targyn and Abylai Khan, who personify the ideals of courage, justice and defence of the native land. These myths and epics are closely intertwined with historical events, such as the struggle of the Kazakhs against invaders, and often contain elements of spiritual guidance, reflecting shamanic beliefs and respect for the spirits of nature.

Turkish non-fairy tale prose includes myths and legends that are often linked to Ottoman heritage and Islamic culture. For example, the myths of Turkish heroes such as Koroğlu describe the pursuit of justice and the defence of the oppressed. Legends of saints and righteous people, such as Hacı Bektash Veli, integrate Islamic values and elements of Sufism, which underscores the deep connection of the Turkish people to religious traditions. Non-fabulous prose in Kyrgyzstan is characterised by epic narratives, the most prominent example of which is the epic *Manas* (Imankulov et al. 2024). This epic, which is one of the largest in the world, is dedicated to the struggle of the Kyrgyz people for freedom and independence. In addition to *Manas*, Kyrgyz non-fairy tale prose includes legends and traditions in which the central themes are kinship, the fight against enemies and the spiritual trials of heroes, reflecting the importance of unity and brotherhood. Uzbek prose is also rich in myths and legends, which are often intertwined with Islamic beliefs. Legends about heroes such as Tumaris and Jaloliddin Manguberd emphasise the resilience and courage of the Uzbek people. Uzbek myths also include stories related to Sufi saints, reflecting the significant influence of Islam on Uzbekistan's cultural heritage.

A common feature of the non-fairy tale prose of all Turkic peoples is syncretism, where mythological and historical elements are intertwined with religious and ethnic ideas (Gamaliia & Artemenko 2023). These works not only tell the story of the past but also serve as a way of transmitting moral and cultural values, educating new generations through stories of exploits, spiritual quests and struggles for justice (Favereau 2021). In different regions, Turkic folklore may be adapted to local conditions, but it invariably retains themes of unity,

resistance and connection to the native land, making non-fairy tale prose a powerful means of preserving and strengthening cultural identity.

The analysis of Kazakh myths across various locations underscores the dynamic interplay between traditional folklore and local cultural influences while preserving the strong connection to national identity. In Mongolia, Kazakh myths have integrated aspects of Mongolian shamanistic and Buddhist beliefs, enhancing hero narratives with supplementary spiritual qualities. In Uzbekistan, Islamic narratives have transformed mythical themes by incorporating religious values and reinterpreting ancient elements from an Islamic perspective. In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakh myths have merged with the epic traditions of the Kyrgyz, resulting in common heroic narratives that highlight collective struggle and solidarity. In China, Kazakh myths have maintained their ancient cosmogonic frameworks, including animistic and totemic components that mirror early Turkic-Mongolian beliefs. Despite these regional differences, the fundamental purpose of Kazakh myths – preserving cultural heritage, reinforcing identity and transmitting values – persists unaltered. The adaptation of myths in many circumstances illustrates their persistence and ongoing significance in influencing ethnic identity and cultural memory, especially during globalisation and migration. Kazakh myths, through these changes, function as a bridge between the past and present, preserving national traditions while permitting contextual reinterpretations that reflect changing social and cultural realities.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study has significance for both theoretical and practical fields. From a theoretical point of view, it contributes significantly to the understanding of the adaptation of Kazakh myths in the diaspora, offering new models for studying the transformation of cultural narratives and complementing existing theories on the preservation of cultural elements. Practically, the results of the study can provide recommendations for the preservation of cultural heritage, which is useful for cultural organisations and educational institutions, and facilitate the integration of cultural narratives in new social contexts. Socially, the study helps to strengthen public awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and promotes respect for cultural traditions, thereby supporting the formation and preservation of national identity in the context of globalisation.

Kazakh myths are crucial in maintaining the cultural heritage and strengthening the national identity of the Kazakh people. These myths not only transmit ancient traditions, beliefs and worldviews but also contain important moral and spiritual values that have had a significant impact on the development of Kazakh society over the centuries. They fulfil the role of an integrator between historical heritage and current realities, maintaining the link between the modern generation and its ancestors, and ensuring the continuity of cultural practices and customs. Jon Mills (2020) investigated myth

as a complex phenomenon in terms of its origins, meanings and functions in human society. The study addressed myth from different angles, including its sources, power of influence, form of expression, object and purpose, drawing on archaic ontology. The study emphasises that mythology is not just a set of ancient stories but a key element in the cultural and social fabric of a society. Thus, the study defined myth as an important form of inner perception that contributes to an understanding of the world and one's place in it.

Kazakh myths, being outside their homeland, have undergone considerable adaptation depending on the specific cultural and religious factors of the countries of residence. This adaptation includes the integration of local traditions and religious elements, which leads to a change in the interpretation and function of myths. As a result, Kazakh myths not only retain some of their original features but are also enriched with new meanings and forms, reflecting the influence of local cultures and socio-political realities. Amina Urpekova (2022) investigated how diaspora influences the social, political and economic development of their countries of origin and host countries. The study also examined the role of diaspora knowledge, experience and skills in contributing to the social and cultural development of their countries of origin. Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) is particularly emphasised, where countries are developing relations with diasporas and compatriots, considering migration flows. This is due to the way mythological and cultural narratives are preserved and adapted in new contexts, which contributed to a deeper understanding of the processes of preservation and adaptation of Kazakh myths and cultural themes in the diaspora. The analysis of these processes has provided important insights into the dynamics of cultural identities and their change in the context of globalisation and cultural exchange.

Mythology is an important source of historical information, providing unique insights into ancient societies and their worldview (Osanova et al. 2024). It not only demonstrates the social and cultural characteristics of ancient peoples but also helps define their values, beliefs and worldviews. Cem Algul (2021) considered mythology as a key source for understanding early forms of civilisation, arguing that myths provide valuable information about the social structures, religious beliefs and cultural practices of the time, thus emphasising their importance for studying the historical context. The study examined how myths contributed to the formation of the concept of peace, social norms and moral values and historical identities among the Turkic-Mongol peoples, as well as their influence in strengthening the collective memory of heritage. Cem Algul emphasised that myths acted as a means of transmitting knowledge and traditions from generation to generation, helping to preserve the historical continuity and cultural identity of peoples.

Kazakh myths are fundamental in preserving cultural identity, even in the face of cultural interaction and migration. Mythological narratives about the creation of the world, spiritual entities and heroic deeds remain important and

are being adapted to new cultural and religious conditions (Buldybai et al. 2015). Ismail Küpeli (2023) provided valuable insights into how nationalist myths and mythological and cultural narratives are shaped and reflected in specific cultural and historical contexts. This study is comparable to the analysis of how Kazakh myths are preserved and adapted in the diaspora, allowing for a deeper exploration of the influence of mythology on cultural identity and national narratives. Gabriel McGuire (2021) analysed how mythological elements are integrated into Kazakh oral literature to form and strengthen cultural identity. In an analysis of the epic *Qız Jibek*, the author explored how mythological themes and symbols are used to reflect the political and social structures of Kazakh society. The study of the genre and political aspects of the epic has shown that myths transmit moral and ethical norms, strengthening the sense of community and maintaining a connection with cultural roots. Thus, the author's research emphasises the importance of myths in the preservation and adaptation of cultural narratives.

The importance of preserving and adapting mythological and cultural themes was highlighted, emphasising that these processes not only help to maintain cultural heritage and identity but also contribute to the integration and transformation of cultural narratives in new social and historical contexts. Holly R. Barcus and Cynthia Werner (2015) studied identity and migration dynamics among Kazakhs living in Mongolia in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states in the 1990s. The focus was on how cultural factors, such as kinship, religiosity and linguistic universality influence the decision to stay in Mongolia or return to Kazakhstan. Based on life stories, observations and questionnaires, the authors emphasise that Mongolian Kazakhs actively use cultural narratives to reconstruct and redefine their identity in another country, as well as to redefine their community and identity. Adam Knobler (2017) examined how mythological narratives and perceptions of allies influenced political and diplomatic strategies in Central Asia. The author analysed how mythology was used to create and maintain political alliances, as well as to legitimise power and strengthen diplomatic relations between different states and cultures. Adam Knobler emphasised that mythological representations have been fundamental in shaping political strategies and diplomatic agreements, reflecting the importance of myths in governance and strengthening interstate relations.

This work complements the authors' current research by providing new data on the preservation and adaptation of Kazakh myths in the diaspora. Unlike existing studies that consider myths in a historical and cultural context, this paper delves into the process of adapting mythological heritage outside the homeland, which opens new perspectives for understanding the transformation of cultural narratives. The results of the analysis confirm the importance of studying the topic of adaptation and preservation of Kazakh myths in the diaspora. The contribution to academic literature, the sustainability of cultural

heritage, social and political relevance and the impact on educational and cultural practices underline the importance and relevance of the study, demonstrating its significance for scientific debate, cultural development and social inclusion.

This study's findings may be effectively employed in educational contexts to instruct about cultural heritage and identity by integrating mythical narratives into history, literature and ethnography curricula. Through the examination of the evolution and adaptation of Kazakh myths in various places, students may attain a profound comprehension of how cultural legacy is conserved, modified and transferred through generations. Interactive techniques, including story-telling workshops, digital archives and comparative assessments of myths from diverse Turkic groups, can enhance involvement and critical thinking around cultural continuity and identity development. Motivating students to investigate their cultural narratives through creative writing, dramatic presentations and multimedia endeavours can enhance their connection to their heritage.

Comprehending the adaptive characteristics of Kazakh tales offers insights into the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Recording these alterations aids in formulating methods to preserve folklore in both its conventional and altered forms, maintaining its significance for future generations. Incorporating myths into education, literature and internet platforms enhances cultural identification among scattered Kazakh populations and aids diaspora groups in preserving their history while acclimatizing to new surroundings. This study underscores the significance of cultural diplomacy, interregional cooperation and novel techniques such as digital storytelling to conserve and revitalise Kazakh folklore in a globalised context. This version consolidates the essential concepts into a succinct format.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study investigated the adaptation of Kazakh oral traditions within the framework of migration and the settlement of Kazakh diasporas in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. The research indicated that Kazakh oral traditions maintained in these nations have seen substantial alterations due to the impact of local cultural and religious customs. Nevertheless, essential components of Kazakh cultural legacy, including symbols representing the relationship between humanity, nature and spiritual forces, persist unaltered. This illustrates the capacity of oral traditions to adjust to different cultural situations while preserving their fundamental elements.

Qualitative analysis revealed distinct modifications in narratives, such as the incorporation of Islamic elements in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the increased significance of natural spirits and protective deities in Mongolia and the adaptation of narratives to align with Chinese agricultural and cosmogonic concepts.

The study revealed that in certain locations, notable elements of ancient traditions, like shamanic activities and totemic beliefs, endure, but in others,

there is a more marked assimilation of contemporary cultural influences. Notwithstanding these alterations, Kazakh oral traditions remain an essential connection between generations, fortifying the cultural identity of Kazakh diasporas. These traditions have not only adjusted to new contexts but have also been enhanced with novel symbols and narratives, underscoring their durability and ability to shift.

Further studies should investigate the impact of various religious systems on the evolution of Kazakh mythology and do comparative analyses with other Turkic myths. This will improve comprehension of cultural adaptation and heritage conservation. Addressing the limitations of limited field data necessitates the augmentation of empirical databases throughout Kazakh diaspora regions and the engagement of cultural custodians to uncover novel adaptation strategies. Meanwhile, examining the effects of globalisation and digitalisation on myth preservation will clarify the formation of Kazakh identity.

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