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## The Phenomenon of National Identity in the Works of Abish Kekilbayev: Continuity of Tradition and Processes of Renewal

The article conceptualizes national identity as a philosophical form of cultural memory and a mode of historical self-understanding of the subject. The object of the study is the relationship between tradition and modernization in the prose of Abish Kekilbayev, examined within the space of philosophical reflection. The study demonstrates that mythopoetic structures in Kekilbayev's prose represent history not as a sequence of external events but as an ontological space in which the moral trial of human existence unfolds. The phenomenon of power is reinterpreted philosophically not in terms of force and domination, but through the categories of responsibility and conscience. Modernization is revealed not as a rejection of tradition, but as an ethical transformation, that is, a re-interpretation of historical memory at a new level of meaning. Among the concrete philosophical results, the symbolic functions of the images of the tower and the well are identified. The tower functions as an ontological metaphor for the aspiration to absolutize being and establish a timeless «eternal order,» while the well signifies a liminal situation, an existential locus of trial where the individual confronts conscience and moral responsibility. The correlation between the steppe chronotope and enclosed spaces allows national identity to be interpreted as a dialectical balance between memory and renewal. The scientific novelty of the article lies in substantiating Abish Kekilbayev's prose not as a literary narration of national history, but as a coherent philosophical model that articulates fundamental categories of the Kazakh worldview — being, time, responsibility, and the limits of violence.

*Keywords:* Abish Kekilbayev, national identity, modernization, tradition, synthesis of values, Kazakh literature, cultural heritage, mythological images, historical memory, analysis.

### Introduction

In contemporary humanities research, national identity is increasingly understood not as a static and predefined entity, but as a **dynamic narrative construct** rooted in cultural memory and reproduced through symbolic forms of collective self-description. In this context, literature functions not only as a space for the artistic representation of historical experience, but also as a specific mechanism for its **philosophical and ethical reinterpretation** [1; 2]. Within a literary text, national identity is shaped not through direct ideological statements, but through a complex system of plot models, mythopoetic codes, representations of time and space, and the internal moral conflicts of characters [3; 4].

In Kazakh prose, this process is often realized through **mythopoetic structures** in which historical experience is transformed into relatively stable symbolic forms. A special place in this context belongs to the work of Abish Kekilbayev (1939–2015), one of the key authors of modern Kazakh literature, whose prose combines historical reflection, philosophical problematics, and mythological modes of narration [5; 6]. His works demonstrate how national identity is formed at the intersection of memory and interpretation, tradition and renewal.

One of the central methodological problems in studies of modernization remains its dual evaluation. On the one hand, modernization is interpreted as a rupture with tradition, the loss of stable value orientations and symbolic foundations of culture; on the other, it is understood as a process of cultural adaptation in which tradition is not destroyed but reinterpreted and endowed with new meaning. These divergent approaches are also reflected in interpretations of Kekilbayev's prose: in the first case, it is viewed as a form of "return to the past," while in the second it is analyzed as a model demonstrating the renewal of national identity under conditions of historical transformation.

Despite the substantial body of research devoted to Kekilbayev's literary legacy [7-9], the problem of the interaction between tradition and modernization within the structure of national identity has rarely been addressed systematically as an independent analytical object. In particular, the role of stable symbolic images—such as the tower and the well — in the formation of national memory and in modeling processes of cul-

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tural transformation determined by the characters' internal ethical contradictions remains insufficiently explored. There is still a lack of an integrated interpretative framework that would allow these motifs and symbols to be examined as elements of a unified philosophical and artistic system.

Against this background, the article advances the position that in Kekilbayev's prose modernization appears not as a negation of tradition, but as a narrative reworking of inherited values, carried out through a system of ethical choices and symbolic structures. Tradition and modernization are interpreted not as antagonistic, but as mutually complementary cultural systems that ensure both the stability and renewal of national identity.

The material analyzed includes *The End of the Legend*, *Steppe Ballads*, *The Well*, and *The Khatyngol Ballad*, in which recurring motifs, symbolic images, and spatio-temporal models form a coherent philosophical and artistic reflection on historical experience and cultural memory.

#### *Materials and methods of research*

The study is conducted within the framework of qualitative philosophical analysis and is based on an interpretative-hermeneutic approach widely applied in the philosophy of culture and historical-philosophical research. The research material consists of four prose works: *The End of the Legend*, *Steppe Ballads*, *The Well*, and *The Khatyngol Ballad* [10–14]. These texts are examined as philosophical narratives articulating ethical, ontological, and axiological dimensions of historical experience. In addition, academic studies and documentary sources devoted to Kekilbayev's literary and intellectual legacy are used as supplementary material to clarify the conceptual and historical context [5; 6]. The methodological framework of the study integrates philosophical hermeneutics, philosophy of culture, and narrative analysis. Interpretation focuses on identifying stable semantic structures through which cultural memory and value orientations are expressed. The chronotope is analyzed as an ontological form of historical consciousness, while the actions and choices of characters are interpreted as manifestations of ethical responsibility and existential decision-making. Within the historical and cultural context, mythopoetic images and symbolic motifs are examined as philosophical metaphors structuring representations of power, responsibility, violence, and moral limits. Ethical conflicts are treated as value-based oppositions that reveal mechanisms of cultural continuity and transformation. A comparative analysis of recurring motif-symbol complexes across the selected texts makes it possible to systematize their philosophical meanings and to identify narrative mechanisms that ensure the stability and renewal of national identity.

#### *Results*

The prose of Abish Kekilbayev constructs cultural memory through a system of **motif-symbol networks and ethical conflicts** that articulate national identity not declaratively, but through value-based narrative structures. Referring to different historical periods — including the time preceding and accompanying the formation of independent Kazakhstan — the writer consistently foregrounds both the constructive and destructive dimensions of modernization, emphasizing the necessity of preserving cultural heritage and ethical continuity under conditions of social transformation and globalization.

Kekilbayev's *Steppe Legends* functions as a unifying narrative space that brings together the works analyzed in this article, including *The End of the Legend* and several texts from *Steppe Ballads*. This unity makes it possible to trace the recurrence of key motifs, symbolic oppositions, and ethical dilemmas across the corpus, revealing a coherent artistic logic of cultural memory.

The analysis begins with the novel *The End of the Legend* [10], written in 1982 during the late Soviet period, a time marked by accelerated modernization and ideological pressure. By turning to a legendary historical past, Kekilbayev reframes contemporary experience through mythopoetic narration. The novel demonstrates how the fusion of myth and reality enables a philosophical inquiry into power, legitimacy, and responsibility. The symbolic image of the tower embodies the ruler's aspiration to eternalize order and authority, yet this "project of permanence" is shown to be ethically unstable when grounded in coercion. As a result, modernization appears not as a rejection of tradition, but as its re-evaluation through a new ethical criterion — responsibility rather than control.

The prose cycle *Steppe Ballads* [11], written in 1975, reflects a period of intensive industrialization and social restructuring. Here, cultural memory is shaped through recurring narrative patterns — rivalry, service, revenge — that function as trials of human dignity. The steppe chronotope anchors these patterns as shared moral scenarios, while ethical choice (revenge versus forgiveness, duty versus self-interest) becomes the decisive point at which tradition is either reproduced or reinterpreted. Tradition emerges as a normative system

of honor, loyalty, and shame, whereas modernization manifests itself as a disruption of ritualized behavior and the demand for ethical justification beyond customary norms.

In *The Well* [12], cultural transformation is condensed into the protagonist's inner moral trajectory. The central symbol of the well operates as a **liminal space**, marking the transition from collective responsibility to personal calculation. Initially associated with order and benefit, the well gradually acquires meanings of concealment and uncertainty, reflecting the erosion of ethical integrity. Modernization in this narrative is not depicted as linear progress, but as an ethical challenge that tests the viability of inherited values under social pressure and self-justification.

The story *The Straw of Luck* [13] explores the tension between human effort, chance, and moral restraint. The symbolic image of the "straw" emphasizes the fragility of fate and the unpredictability of success, while the narrative foregrounds the protagonist's internal conflict between aspiration and ethical self-limitation. Success is thus defined not by external achievement, but by the preservation of responsibility and moral endurance.

In *The Ballad of Khatyngol* [14], the core ethical opposition between revenge and forgiveness structures both individual and collective destiny. Revenge, initially legitimized as justice, is shown to evolve into a destructive force undermining social cohesion. The Khatyngol locus functions as a culturally charged space where traditional norms collide with cruelty and self-serving power. Here, modernization is articulated as the establishment of a new ethical framework that redefines the limits of violence and justice.

Across all four texts, the relationship between tradition and modernization is revealed through recurring ethical situations rather than explicit ideological statements. Motif-symbol oppositions—tower and well, open steppe and closed spaces — serve as semantic anchors linking historical memory to moral choice. Through these structures, national identity is presented as a **dynamic balance between continuity and renewal**, where cultural memory is preserved not through repetition, but through ethical reinterpretation in moments of existential testing.

#### Discussion

The prose of Abish Kekilbayev shapes cultural memory through an extensive system of **motif-symbol structures and ethical conflicts**, within which national identity is articulated not in the form of direct ideological statements, but as the outcome of moral and value-based reflection on historical experience. By engaging with different historical layers — from archaic pasts to the realities of the twentieth century and the preconditions of independent Kazakhstan — Kekilbayev constructs a philosophical model of history as a space of responsibility, where the fate of the community is determined by the nature of ethical choice.

The cycle *Steppe Legends* functions as a **unified narrative field** that brings together the works analyzed in this article, including the novel *The End of the Legend*, the cycle *Steppe Ballads*, the novella *The Well*, and *The Ballad of Khatyngol*. Within this field, key motifs, spatial oppositions, and recurring types of conflict are reproduced, allowing Kekilbayev's prose to be interpreted as an integrated philosophical and artistic system oriented toward understanding the mechanisms of cultural continuity and transformation.

The novel *The End of the Legend* [10], written in 1982, belongs to the late Soviet period, marked by accelerated modernization, ideological pressure, and a crisis of political legitimacy. Turning to a legendary historical past enables the author not only to distance himself from contemporary realities, but also to reveal universal philosophical patterns related to power and responsibility. The central image of the tower symbolizes the ruler's aspiration to secure order and create an extra-historical "eternity" capable of stabilizing collective memory. However, within the narrative logic, this project of permanence proves internally contradictory, as it is grounded in violence and the suppression of human freedom. As a result, power loses its moral legitimacy, and modernization emerges not as a rejection of tradition, but as the necessity of **ethical re-evaluation** of inherited forms of authority rather than their mechanical continuation.

In the cycle *Steppe Ballads* [11], written in 1975, the problem of tradition and modernization unfolds through recurring plot patterns — rivalry, service, revenge, loyalty — which function as trials of human dignity. The steppe chronotope establishes a space of collective existence in which individual actions inevitably acquire communal significance. Here, tradition appears as a normative system of honor, duty, and loyalty, while modernization is marked by situations in which habitual behavioral codes prove insufficient. Ethical choice — between revenge and forgiveness, personal gain and responsibility—becomes the mechanism through which tradition is internally renewed without destroying its symbolic core.

The novella *The Well* [12] concentrates the problem of cultural transformation within the **existential experience of the individual subject**. The well functions as a liminal symbol, marking the boundary be-

tween collective ethics and individual calculation. Initially associated with order and utility, it gradually turns into a space of concealment, ambiguity, and moral uncertainty. The protagonist's inner monologue becomes the site of philosophical scrutiny: tradition is not directly rejected, but rationalized and used to justify compromise. In this sense, modernization is depicted as a process of ethical erosion under the pressure of social expectations and the normalization of self-justification.

In *The Straw of Luck* [13], Kekilbayev addresses the relationship between human effort, contingency, and moral endurance. The image of the "straw" functions as a metaphor for the fragility of fate and the individual's dependence on unpredictable circumstances. The philosophical meaning of the text, however, lies in the assertion that genuine success is defined not by external outcomes, but by the ability to preserve responsibility and inner measure. National identity is thus interpreted through individual moral resilience rather than through collective myths of achievement.

In *The Ballad of Khatyngol* [14], the central ethical opposition between revenge and forgiveness determines the trajectory of both individual and collective destiny. Revenge, initially legitimized by tradition as the restoration of justice, is gradually revealed as a destructive mechanism leading to the degradation of social order. The Khatyngol topos appears not merely as a geographical setting, but as a symbolically charged space in which inherited norms collide with cruelty and self-serving power. In this context, modernization is interpreted as the emergence of a new ethical horizon that limits violence and redefines the meaning of justice.

Taken together, the analyzed works demonstrate that the relationship between tradition and modernization in Kekilbayev's prose is revealed through **recurring situations of moral choice** rather than through explicit ideological claims. Motif-symbol oppositions — tower and well, open steppe and enclosed spaces — function as semantic axes linking historical memory with ethical action. National identity is presented as a **dynamic equilibrium between continuity and renewal**, in which cultural memory is preserved not through mechanical repetition, but through ethical reinterpretation in moments of existential testing.

Thus, tradition in Kekilbayev's prose is conceptualized as an ethical and symbolic framework of culture, while modernization appears as a process of testing, refining, and rethinking this framework. Through recurring motifs, spatial structures, and value-based conflicts, a philosophical model of national identity is formed — one grounded not in the immutability of the past, but in responsibility for its meaningful continuation within historical time.

### Conclusion

The conducted analysis allows for a philosophical generalization according to which, in the prose of Abish Kekilbayev, tradition and modernization operate as internally interconnected dimensions of cultural being, rather than as mutually exclusive historical forces. Across *The End of the Legend*, *Steppe Ballads*, *The Well*, and *The Khatyngol Ballad*, national identity is not represented as a fixed essence or a closed historical legacy, but as a process of ethical self-constitution unfolding within cultural memory.

The study demonstrates that historical memory in Kekilbayev's narrative universe functions not merely as recollection of the past, but as an ontological medium through which values are preserved, tested, and rearticulated. Mythopoetic structures and symbolic forms do not serve decorative or illustrative purposes; rather, they perform a fundamental philosophical function by translating historical experience into ethically meaningful configurations. In this sense, myth and symbol act as mediators between continuity and change, allowing tradition to persist not through repetition, but through reflective reinterpretation.

Modernization in Kekilbayev's prose is revealed primarily at the level of ethical experience, rather than through external markers of social progress. The decisive locus of cultural transformation is the subject's confrontation with responsibility, conscience, power, and violence. Ethical choice becomes the key mechanism through which inherited norms either retain their binding force or lose their legitimacy. This perspective allows modernization to be interpreted not as a linear movement toward novelty, but as a critical moment in which tradition is subjected to moral scrutiny.

From a philosophical standpoint, the interaction between tradition and modernization in Kekilbayev's works can be described as a hermeneutic process: inherited meanings are neither abolished nor absolutized, but re-read in light of new historical conditions. Spatial-symbolic oppositions (tower and well, open steppe and enclosed spaces) structure this process by anchoring ethical conflicts in ontologically charged loci. These loci function as points where historical time, moral responsibility, and cultural memory converge.

As a result, national identity is conceptualized as a dynamic equilibrium between preservation and renewal, grounded in ethical accountability rather than ideological continuity. Tradition provides a symbolic

and normative framework that ensures cultural stability, while modernization introduces situations that demand justification, reinterpretation, and sometimes rejection of inherited norms. This dialectical interaction prevents identity from ossifying into dogma or dissolving into relativism.

The philosophical significance of the study lies in demonstrating that Kekilbayev's prose constitutes a coherent model of cultural self-understanding, in which national identity emerges through moral decision-making within historical time. By reconstructing an integrated system of motifs, symbols, and ethical conflicts across the analyzed texts, the article substantiates the interpretation of Kekilbayev's literary legacy as a form of philosophical reflection on being, responsibility, and the limits of violence. In this model, the continuity of culture is ensured not by the inviolability of tradition, but by the subject's responsibility for its meaningful continuation under conditions of historical change.

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### Ә. Кекілбаев шығармашылығындағы ұлттық бірегейлік феномені: дәстүр сабақтастығы және жаңғыру үдерістері

Мақалада ұлттық болмыс мәдени жадтың философиялық формасы және тарихи субъектінің өзін-өзі түсіну тәсілі ретінде пайымдалады. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде Әбіш Кекілбайұлы прозасындағы дәстүр мен модернизацияның арақатынасы философиялық рефлексия кеңістігінде талданған. Зерттеу нәтижесінде Әбіш Кекілбайұлы прозасында мифопоэтикалық құрылымдар тарихты сыртқы оқиғалар тізбегі емес, адам болмысының моральдық сынағы өтетін онтологиялық кеңістік ретінде бейнелейтіні дәлелденді. Билік феномені күш пен үстемдік категориясы ретінде емес, жауапкершілік пен ар-ождан өлшемі арқылы философиялық тұрғыда қайта ойластырылған. Модернизация дәстүрден бас тарту емес, этикалық трансформация, яғни тарихи жадты жаңа мағыналық деңгейде қайта пайымдау ретінде ашылады. Нақты философиялық нәтижелер ретінде мұнара мен құдық бейнелерінің символдық қызметі айқындалды: мұнара — болмысты абсолюттендіруге, уақыттан тыс «мәңгілік тәртіпке» ұмтылудың онтологиялық метафорасы болса, құдық — инкаралық жағдайды, адамның ар-ожданымен бетпе-бет келетін экзистенциалдық сынақ сипатын білдіреді. Дала хронотопы мен түйік

кеңістіктердің өзара байланысы ұлттық болмысты жад пен жаңару арасындағы диалектикалық тепе-теңдік ретінде түсіндіруге мүмкіндік береді. Әбіш Кекілбайұлы прозасын ұлттық тарихтың көркем баяны ретінде емес, қазақ дүниетанымындағы болмыс, уақыт, жауапкершілік және зорлық шектерін пайымдайтын тұтас философиялық модель ретінде негіздеу мақаланың ғылыми жаңалығын айқындайды.

*Кілт сөздер:* Әбіш Кекілбаев, ұлттық болмыс, жаңғырту, дәстүр, құндылықтар синтезі, қазақ әдебиеті, мәдени мұра, мифологиялық образдар, тарихи жады, талдау.

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## Феномен национальной идентичности в творчестве А. Кекильбаева: преэминентность традиций и процессы модернизации

В статье национальная идентичность концептуализируется как философская форма культурной памяти и способ исторического самоосмысления субъекта. Объектом исследования выступает соотношение традиции и модернизации в прозе Абиша Кекилбаева, рассматриваемое в пространстве философской рефлексии. Показано, что мифопоэтические структуры в прозе Кекилбаева репрезентируют историю не как последовательность внешних событий, а как онтологическое пространство, в котором разворачивается моральное испытание человеческого бытия. Феномен власти философски переосмысливается не в категориях силы и господства, а через призму ответственности и совести. Модернизация раскрывается не как отказ от традиции, а как этическая трансформация, то есть повторное осмысление исторической памяти на новом смысловом уровне. К числу конкретных философских результатов относится выявление символических функций образов башни и колодца. Башня выступает как онтологическая метафора стремления к абсолютизации бытия и установлению внеисторического «вечного порядка», тогда как колодец обозначает пограничную ситуацию — экзистенциальный локус испытания, в котором субъект сталкивается с совестью и моральной ответственностью. Соотнесение степного хронотопа с замкнутыми пространствами позволяет интерпретировать национальную идентичность как диалектическое равновесие между памятью и обновлением. Научная новизна статьи заключается в обосновании прозы Абиша Кекилбаева не как художественного изложения национальной истории, а как целостной философской модели, артикулирующей фундаментальные категории казахского мировоззрения — бытие, время, ответственность и пределы насилия.

*Ключевые слова:* Абиш Кекилбаев, национальная идентичность, модернизация, традиция, синтез ценностей, казахская литература, культурное наследие, мифологические образы, историческая память, анализ.

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