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The Psychocultural Transformation of Kazakh Song Poetry in the 20th Century: Cultural Identity, Collective Consciousness, and Historical Change

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine how selected Kazakh song-poetry passages are interpreted in relation to Soviet cultural policy between 1920 and 1950, without treating literary imagery as direct evidence of individual psychology or collective mental states.

Methods and Materials: This is a bounded historical-cultural and hermeneutic reading of identifiable passages quoted from volumes 99 and 100 of the Babalar sözi anthology. The analytic sample consists of excerpts attributed to A, qalqa-au; A, shirkin, zhanai-au; and two numbered Abaykok variants, alongside separately identified editorial and historical contextual materials. A transparent text-level coding rubric classifies imagery, affective address, work-oriented vocabulary, ethical propositions, and performance context. Because no original exhaustive song list, complete transcription audit, or independent coder records were available, neither comprehensive sampling nor intercoder agreement is claimed.

Findings: The cited examples display love and landscape imagery, ethical maxims, and a contrasting passage combining an inherited separation refrain with collective-work vocabulary. This juxtaposition is consistent with ideological reframing as an interpretive possibility but does not independently establish the dating, authorship, censorship, or political insertion of particular stanzas. Historical studies contextualize institutional changes in song collection and performance.

Conclusion: The study provides a qualified case-based interpretation of textual continuity and possible semantic adaptation; it does not measure psychological transformation or establish population-wide shifts in Kazakh cultural consciousness.

Keywords: Kazakh Song Poetry, Soviet Cultural Policy, Cultural History, Folkloristics, Textual Evidence.

Introduction

Kazakh song poetry has historically circulated in environments in which verse, melody, performance, and social occasion were closely connected. Its documentation in the twentieth century created a durable written record while also altering the relation between an oral performance and a fixed text. The song-poem collections published as Babalar sözi, volumes 99 and 100, provide a useful entry point into this problem, but a modern anthology cannot itself be assumed to represent the distribution of all song practices in any one historical decade (Babalar sözi, 2013a; Babalar sözi, 2013b; Ong, 1982).

Between 1920 and 1950, Soviet Kazakhstan experienced major changes in land use, institutional administration, and cultural production. Soviet nationalities policy combined recognition of nominally national forms with the management of ideological content; cultural activity was increasingly mediated through state institutions and standardized forms of circulation (Martin, 2001; Slezkine, 1994; Ramsay, 2021). Earlier imperial disruption of pastoral landholding and migration routes provides a further antecedent to this historical transition (Teğin, 2024). These processes are essential historical context, but they cannot automatically be read from any undated lyric containing communal vocabulary.

Postcolonial and cultural-historical approaches suggest several possible readings of such cultural formations. Bhabha's account of hybridity encourages attention to coexistence, negotiation, and ambiguity instead of an uncomplicated story of cultural loss or resistance (Bhabha, 1994). Althusser's model of ideological institutions foregrounds mechanisms of official cultural production, whereas research on Soviet Kazakhstan points to historically specific dynamics that cannot be reduced to one theoretical template (Althusser, 1971; Kudaibergenova, 2016).

Kazakh-focused scholarship has examined the relationship between musical objects, oral forms, and national narratives (Rancier, 2014; Yerlanova, 2025). A recent historical study also discusses the recovery of Turkic-Kazakh poetic heritage from Soviet suppression, providing a closely related account of archive and cultural memory, though it does not settle the provenance of the song passages considered here (Manapbayev, 2026). Language and identity histories offer a complementary but different level of analysis (Dave, 2007).

The present article makes a narrower contribution by explicitly distinguishing what the accessible quotations say, what the historical literature suggests, and what remains unverified.

The research question is therefore: What formal and semantic contrasts can be documented in the specific Kazakh song-poetry excerpts reproduced in the available record, and how cautiously may those contrasts be interpreted alongside scholarship on Soviet cultural administration? The goal is a traceable interpretation of a small illustrative set, not psychological measurement, a representative statistical analysis, or a reconstruction of the entire history of Kazakh song.

Methods and Materials

Design, evidence levels, and chronological boundaries

The design is qualitative, documentary, and hermeneutic. The central study period is 1920–1950, when Soviet cultural reorganization provides the historical problem to be examined. Earlier nomadic repertoires function only as a historical and generic point of comparison. Developments after Kazakh independence are not treated as analyzed results because no post-1991 song corpus was sampled for this study. Claims about post-independence resurgence therefore remain outside the study's evidentiary scope.

The primary textual reference points are the two published song-poetry volumes (Babalar sözi, 2013a; Babalar sözi, 2013b). The analysis is limited to the identifiable song lines and paratextual passages accompanied by page locators in the published volumes. These selections do not amount to a full extraction of either volume: an exhaustive document list, full screening counts, and secure dates for each recorded variant are unavailable for this bounded study. Accordingly, this article does not describe the anthology's several hundred songs as having been systematically coded.

Case identification and bounded selection

An auditable inclusion rule was applied to the quoted textual record: a unit was eligible when it had an identifiable song title or numbered variant, a volume/page locator, and wording usable for examining symbolic or ideological language. The eligible units are A, qalqa-au (volume 100, p. 12), A, shirkin, zhanai-au (p. 14), and the third and fourth Abaykok variants (pp. 17–18). The present unit of analysis

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is the cited excerpt, not the whole song and not its unobserved performance. Editorial commentary and observer testimony from volume 99 were marked as paratext and not counted as song lyrics. Table 1 records these distinctions.

Table 1.

Traceable inventory of included textual units and contextual material

Evidence unit	Locator	Reason for inclusion / inferential limit
A, qalqa-au (song excerpt)	Babalar sözi, vol. 100, p. 12	Love address and intergenerational appeal; excerpt only, no dated performance.
A, shirkin, zhanai-au (song excerpt)	Babalar sözi, vol. 100, p. 14	Natural analogy (hare / snow) in an intimate lyric; figurative function may be context-dependent.
Abaykok, variant 3 (excerpt)	Babalar sözi, vol. 100, p. 17	Separation refrain alongside community and labour wording; date and editing history not demonstrated.
Abaykok, variant 4 (excerpt)	Babalar sözi, vol. 100, p. 18	Ethical statements about friendship and conduct; no simple ideological period assignment.
Editorial notes and observer testimony (paratext)	Babalar sözi, vol. 99, pp. 6, 9–11	Context for variability and performance; testimony, not direct evidence of song-wide thematic prevalence.

Note. Page locators refer to the published anthologies. Full Kazakh transcriptions and translation decisions require bilingual source verification.

Coding rubric and interpretive credibility

Coding in this article is a transparent descriptive classification of the passages above. Postcolonial source criticism also cautions against treating institutional archives as unfiltered voices of their subjects (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1999). A coding unit is one quoted lyric passage or a separately identified paratextual extract. Each unit is assigned an observable-feature tag before a possible historical interpretation is proposed; a competing non-ideological reading is retained whenever the words permit one. The categories and decision rules are specified in Table 2. These labels are intended to make the presented reading inspectable and are not described as a previously registered protocol or independently replicated content analysis.

Table 2.

Descriptive coding framework and checks against overinterpretation

Code	Observable inclusion rule	Application / boundary
AFF: Affective address	Explicit lexicon of love, beloved, separation, longing.	A, qalqa-au; Abaykok refrain. Such wording does not identify a particular historical ideology.
NAT: Landscape or animal analogy	Explicit mention of animals, seasons, terrain, or weather in a figurative relation.	Hare and snow in A, shirkin, zhanai-au; no count of its frequency across the anthology.
COL: Collective-work idiom	Lexical reference to shared prosperity, people or labour; mark literal wording before attribution.	Abaykok variant 3. Compatible with Soviet public discourse; provenance/censorship remains unproved.
ETH: Ethical proposition	Generalized statements about moral worth, trust, friendship, or conduct.	Abaykok variant 4. May coexist with several ideological systems.
PAR: Paratext/performance context	Editorial preface, recording note, or a witness account rather than a song verse.	Volume 99 notes. Cannot support claims about measured listener reactions.

Note. Coding is qualitative and non-frequency-based. No independent coder calibration or quantitative agreement statistic was undertaken or claimed.

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Interpretive credibility rests on source-location specificity, a visible code-to-excerpt mapping, explicit consideration of alternative readings, and separation of quotation from hypothesis. For example, a reference to collective labour is evidence of a lexical choice; identifying it as an intentional Soviet insertion requires corroborating dating, variant genealogy, or editorial records. Where such evidence is absent, the article uses "may be read as" rather than "demonstrates". No second coding, disagreement adjudication, or validated translation comparison was undertaken in this study. Consequently, intercoder agreement or translation equivalence cannot be quantified.

The theoretical standpoint foregrounds Soviet power and cultural negotiation; this orientation can incline the reader to detect ideological pressure in ambiguous language. To reduce that bias, each proposed political reading is assessed against a rival explanation, including the possibility that collective, ethical, or patriotic terms are not unique to the Soviet era. Comparisons with studies of cultural psychology should likewise avoid converting literary themes into observed mental or behavioral outcomes (Seyed Alitabar, 2023).

Findings and Results

Affective and landscape imagery in cited song excerpts

The lines attributed to A, qalqa-au address a beloved and characterize love as recognizable "to old and young alike" (Babalar sözi, 2013b, p. 12). The directly observable feature is an intergenerational generalization within a love lyric (AFF). It would be unwarranted to infer the actual attitudes of young or older Kazakh listeners from these lines. The passage does, however, illustrate how a concise lyric can enlarge a personal address into a conventional statement about human experience.

The A, shirkin, zhanai-au excerpt compares the beloved to "a hare racing across white snow" (Babalar sözi, 2013b, p. 14). The observable NAT feature is an animal-and-landscape analogy. In a historical reading this imagery can be placed alongside nomadic landscape conventions, yet the quoted line alone does not establish a shared national psychological trait or a stable symbol whose meaning was identical across regions and performances.

Semantic juxtaposition within Abaykok variants

In the third variant of Abaykok, the recurring separation line about a distant homeland appears beside words translated as "shared prosperity" and "labour" (Babalar sözi, 2013b, p. 17). The co-occurrence of AFF and COL codes is the main direct observation. Given the historical prominence of collectivist labour discourse during the Soviet period, one plausible interpretation is that an inherited song frame could accommodate publicly valued ideological language (Martin, 2001; Clark, 1981). This remains a contextual hypothesis: neither the date of the wording nor evidence of state-directed interpolation is established by this passage alone.

The fourth Abaykok variant, by contrast, contains an ethical comparison of good and bad friends and stresses interpersonal conduct (Babalar sözi, 2013b, p. 18). Its ETH code complicates a linear narrative in which all later-looking lyrics necessarily adopt Soviet industrial vocabulary. Importantly, the coexistence of lyric variants does not itself identify which version came first, which was more widespread, or which was actually performed between 1920 and 1950. Variant genealogy would require a comparative apparatus of manuscript witnesses, recording dates, and collector notes.

Institutional and performative context

The anthology's prefatory discussion acknowledges variability under oral transmission (Babalar sözi, 2013a, p. 6). This paratext supports a limited claim that song textualization interacts with a changing performance tradition; it does not support a simple opposition between a wholly "free" past and a wholly "standardized" Soviet present. Ethnomusicological research emphasizes that material instruments and performance practices can mediate multiple national historical interpretations (Rancier, 2014; Levin, 1996).

Evidence from Soviet cultural history identifies expanded institutions, cultural campaigns, and organized performance opportunities (Ramsay, 2021; Kudaibergenova, 2016). These

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sources contextualize a possible shift in channels through which songs circulated. They do not establish that each song in the present sample was censored, rearranged, or moved to a concert stage. The distinction between institutional context and direct textual proof is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

Historical comparison calibrated to the evidence actually examined

Dimension	Textually documented in the cited excerpts	Historical interpretation / untested proposition
Imagery and address	Love appeal, hare/snow analogy, homeland separation (AFF, NAT).	These fit known oral-song conventions; their overall prevalence was not counted.
Work-oriented wording	Shared prosperity and labour vocabulary in one Abaykok excerpt (COL).	Potential alignment with Soviet idiom; intentional rewriting not independently dated.
Ethical repertoire	Friendship and conduct in another Abaykok variant (ETH).	Shows semantic heterogeneity; neither pure resistance nor purity of a pre-Soviet value system follows.
Transmission / performance	Volume 99 editorial preface and observer testimony (PAR).	Institutions and performance formats changed in Soviet Kazakhstan, but no complete before/after performance dataset was studied.
After 1991	No sampled post-independence songs.	Outside the analytic period; cannot support an empirical trend of semantic recovery.

Note. Comparative statements are qualitative and illustrative; this is not a period-stratified corpus survey.

Discussion and Conclusion

The strongest defensible finding is a bounded textual contrast: different quoted songs and variants combine love-oriented, natural, ethical, and collective-work vocabularies. The contrast is compatible with accounts of Soviet cultural negotiation, yet lexical compatibility is weaker evidence than documented authorship, dated performance, or archival censorship. Bhabha's framework of hybridity permits a description of such coexistence without presuming a complete displacement or complete preservation of earlier meanings (Bhabha, 1994).

A historically informed discussion should also separate institutional policy from participant-level experience. Cultural governance and forms of public representation can be investigated through administrative records, published texts, and archival collections (Hirsch, 2000; Martin, 2001). Assertions about an entire people's collective consciousness, psychological adaptation, or identity change require different evidence: interviews, contemporaneous reception records, well-designed surveys, or other participant-level observations. The present article includes none of these, so its terminology remains textual and historical rather than psychological.

The significance of the Soviet context is better framed as a set of competing historical pressures than as universal semantic replacement. Official sponsorship of national forms could coexist with ideological regulation; distinct audiences and local practices may have responded differently to that tension (Slezkine, 1994; Kandiyoti, 2007). The historical literature documents pressure and reform, while the available quotations provide only illustrative lyric-level material. Research on Kazakh aitys and Soviet-era poetic heritage underscores this complexity and helps situate the cases within a larger literary history (Yerlanova, 2025; Manapbayev, 2026).

A related danger is romanticizing oral culture as unchanging and treating notation or staged performance as necessarily destructive. Transcription can preserve otherwise ephemeral material, and oral traditions themselves vary across occasion, performer, and collector (Ong, 1982; Rancier, 2014). Oral-history research on the memory of the Kazakh famine exemplifies an evidence base distinct from the excerpt-only analysis here (Dukeyev, 2025). Likewise, a phrase such as "my people" need not be uniquely Soviet, while a phrase such as "labour" becomes politically meaningful only when contextual evidence supports its ideological use. The interpretive matrix therefore preserves uncertainty rather than classifying every contrast as a confirmed historical transformation.

Finally, although scholarship on cultural belief systems may investigate relationships with psychosocial outcomes, such inference requires a research design that actually measures

or documents those outcomes. A review of cultural beliefs and family well-being provides one example of a distinct, psychology-oriented evidentiary domain, not a substitute for psychological observations here (Seyed Alitabar, 2023). The present case is most appropriately located within Kazakh literary studies, folklore, cultural history, ethnomusicology, and Soviet/postcolonial studies.

Limitations and research transparency

First, the sampled evidence is restricted to four excerpt-level song/variant units identified through their anthology titles and page locators, plus supplementary editorial quotations. It is purposive and demonstrative, not a systematic or representative sample of the hundreds of songs in the anthology. Second, the selected Abaykok variants are not independently dated to 1920–1950, and the original Kazakh-language versions, textual transmission chains, and translation choices were not revalidated against complete source witnesses. Thus intentional ideological insertion cannot be inferred as a confirmed fact. Third, no independent coding, multi-analyst reconciliation, or complete frequency analysis was undertaken. The explicit codebook defines the present descriptive procedure but does not create an estimate of reliability. Fourth, no individual participants, psychometric measurements, reception surveys, or behavioral data were obtained. Psychological mechanisms, cultural resilience at the population level, and collective mental changes are therefore outside the empirical conclusions. Finally, the absence of a longitudinal, period-stratified song archive precludes claims of prevalence or change rates between historical eras.

A historically situated reading of a small set of named Kazakh song-poetry excerpts reveals coexisting lyric registers: affective address, natural imagery, interpersonal ethics, and collective-work language. The third Abaykok variant illustrates how traditional-looking forms could contain wording resonant with Soviet public discourse, whereas a further variant shows a different ethical register. Read with research on Soviet cultural institutions, these examples open a plausible inquiry into semantic adaptation, but they do not prove the date or cause of particular alterations. The study contributes an explicit evidentiary boundary and a reproducible presentation framework for quoted texts, not a completed comprehensive coding of Kazakh song or a psychological explanation of national consciousness. Future research should use dated original-language song variants, transparent extraction criteria, translation checks, independent coding where appropriate, and Soviet-era archival evidence to test the historical hypotheses suggested by this analysis.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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