

ABSTRACT

**to the dissertation by Nabiolla Nassikhat prepared on the topic
“Legendary prose of Kazakhs in China (myth, story, fable, legend)” for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational program
“8D02304 – Literary Studies”**

General Description of the Work. It is an axiomatically established fact that Kazakh folklore has, from time immemorial, served as the primary spiritual sustenance and the foundational bedrock of our nation's cultural identity. Within the paradigm of national folkloristics, this multifaceted and rich cultural treasury has been systematically and continuously investigated by successive generations of scholars. However, it cannot be asserted that this scholarly inquiry has reached a definitive or conclusive resolution regarding the ethnic Kazakh population residing within the geopolitical boundaries of China – a community structurally separated from their ancestral homeland and situated in a distinct geographic enclave.

Manifestly, their spiritual and cultural heritage draws its fundamental sustenance from the shared roots of the core Kazakh nation. Nevertheless, this specific body of folklore is by no means devoid of its own idiosyncratic and distinct characteristics. The traditional nomadic lifestyle, which was meticulously preserved among this population until relatively recent historical periods, exerted a profound and transformative influence on the evolutionary trajectory of their oral literature. Consequently, an existence spent predominantly in transit—metaphorically described as "upon the mane of the horse and the hump of the camel"—conditioned the collective consciousness of the people to internalize the profound mysteries of human existence and accustomed them to the practices of oral transmission. This historical reality catalyzed the development of agile intellectual faculties and a highly structured, eloquent rhetorical tradition. Thus, in strict alignment with their socio-communal and socio-economic realities, the populace generated an expansive corpus of myths, legends, epic narratives, proverbs, sayings, and aphoristic oratorical wisdom, preserving them meticulously for posterity through oral transmission from generation to generation.

When evaluated from this analytical perspective, the region demonstrates the preservation of virtually all classical genres of folk literature, while simultaneously witnessing the genesis and development of innovative, contemporary forms of creative heritage. However, the genre of myth, which is universally acknowledged as the primordial wellspring of the verbal arts – specifically defined here as mythological and legendary prose – has not been comprehensively or systematically investigated as a discrete, independent genre to this day, with the exception of occasional, fragmentary references (such as a singular volume authored by N. Mynzhani). Therefore, conceptualizing the non-fairy-tale prose of this regional population (comprising myths, demonological narratives/byliches, legends, and historical-religious tales) as an autonomous literary genre, and executing a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of their ideological-thematic dimensions, structural plot configurations, and specific evolutionary dynamics, constitutes one of the paramount imperatives of contemporary national folkloristics.

It is discernible that ethnic Kazakh researchers operating within the region

have occasionally addressed isolated genres of folk prose. Nonetheless, a holistic, all-encompassing, and systematic examination of mythological prose in its entirety has hitherto remained unaccomplished. Naturally, in order to effectively realize this research objective, we have avoided treating this cultural heritage as an isolated or insular phenomenon; instead, we have directed particular analytical attention to its typological parameters by contextualizing and cross-referencing it with the mythological prose traditions of the broader Turkic-Mongolian peoples.

Relevance of the Research: After gaining independence, the Kazakh people began to reinterpret their own history from a new perspective. This created an opportunity to consider the cultural and literary heritage of compatriots living abroad as an integral part of the common Kazakh spiritual culture. One of the main regions where Kazakhs, separated from their historical homeland and having experienced a difficult fate, live compactly is the People's Republic of China.

The spiritual heritage of Kazakhs living in this region had previously been discussed only fragmentarily. In most cases, studies focused on written literary heritage and the works of poets and writers, which were examined in collective monographs or separate scholarly works. However, a significant part of the national heritage – folklore prose – remained outside the scope of fundamental research. In this regard, the present dissertation is the first comprehensive study devoted specifically to prose genres of folklore. The introduction of previously unexplored prose texts into academic circulation and their comprehensive analysis determine the scholarly significance and relevance of this work.

Moreover, one of the major tasks of folklore studies is the classification of the prose heritage of a people formed within a particular region according to its functions and content, the identification of genre characteristics and connections with other folklore genres, as well as the determination of the origins of historical and toponymic names. The relevance of this study is obьсловед precisely by this scholarly necessity.

Purpose of the Research: There are several reasons for the insufficient study of folk prose, especially legendary prose, among the Kazakhs of China. First, the prolonged nomadic way of life and cattle breeding led to the late development of culture and education. Second, during the ten-year “Cultural Revolution,” not only was the collection and dissemination of folklore prohibited, but many ancient cultural monuments were also destroyed. Even in later studies, the term “folk prose” was rarely used, and distinctions between fairy tales and legends were often ignored. For example, in the work of folklorist Ä. Qaliuly *On Kazakh Oral Folk Literature* (1985), legendary and fairy-tale prose were discussed without genre differentiation. Considering these gaps, the purpose of this dissertation is the specialized study of folk prose.

Objectives of the Research. The dissertation addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine and systematize the collection, publication, and study of the folklore heritage of Kazakhs in the region; to collect and provide a scholarly description of legendary prose texts published in the collection *Four Collections*, the series *Words of Ancestors*, and editions preserved in the National Library; and to analyze the works of Kazakh and Chinese researchers on this subject.
2. To determine the nature and genre characteristics of legendary prose.

3. To compare myths and hikaya widespread among the Kazakhs of the region with variants published in Kazakhstan and identify their specific features and differences.

4. To introduce previously unpublished texts of historical and toponymic legends into academic circulation, reveal their regional specificity, and analyze them based on the principles of Kazakh folklore studies.

5. To compare the genre of äpsana-hikayat widespread in the region with variants known in Kazakhstan and identify their similarities and differences.

Object of the Research. The research materials include:

- the *Legends and Tales* series from the collection *Four Collections* (1991–1999), gathered from different regions of China;
- N. Mynzhani's works *Mythical Legends of the Kazakhs* and volumes 13–14 of the 25-volume edition *Treasury of Kazakh Oral Literature*, devoted to legends and tales;
- texts of legends and tales of the region's Kazakhs published in volumes 73–87 of the 100-volume series *Words of Ancestors*, issued by the Institute of Literature and Art;
- samples of folk prose collected during expeditions of the M.O. Auezov Institute of Literature and Art;
- texts preserved in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Fund of the National Library;
- materials published in the journals *Mura*, *Shalğyn*, *Altai Ayasy*, *Tarbagatai*, *Ile Aidyny*, and *Social Sciences of Xinjiang*.

Subject of the Research: The legendary prose of the Kazakhs of China (myth, hikaya, legend, äpsana-hikayat) in a comparative-typological aspect.

Research Methods: The dissertation employs methods of analysis, systematization, comparative-typological and comprehensive research, as well as techniques of scholarly description.

Scientific Novelty of the Research: For the first time, the legendary prose of the Kazakhs of the People's Republic of China has become an independent object of comprehensive scholarly research. Samples of folk prose collected in this region were systematized in accordance with academic requirements and classified into genres: myth, hikaya, legend, and äpsana-hikayat.

It was established that the studied folklore texts had not previously been specifically researched, despite their rich thematic, plot, and genre diversity. These materials constitute an important source for studying the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Kazakhs of China.

The study provides a detailed analysis of the plot structure and genre characteristics of folklore texts, while the main motifs and system of characters are compared with variants widespread in Kazakhstan. Comparative analysis made it possible to identify both common and regional features.

In addition, non-fairy-tale folk prose was examined comprehensively, and a scholarly analysis of its content and structural characteristics was conducted. Special attention was paid to the genre features of myth and hikaya, legend, and äpsana-hikayat. Based on previously understudied texts, new scholarly conclusions were proposed, contributing to the development of Kazakh folklore studies.

Thus, the research significantly expands the source base of Kazakh folklore studies and makes an important contribution to the study of folk prose from the

perspective of regional specificity.

Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research: The study is based on the main scholarly concepts, theoretical provisions, and methodological approaches developed by domestic researchers of Kazakh folk prose. During the research, the genre, content-related, and artistic features of the legendary prose of the Kazakhs were comprehensively analyzed with consideration of regional specificity. Particular attention was given to defining the distinctive features of the genres of myth, hikaya, legend, and äpsana-hikayat, as well as their place within the system of Kazakh folklore.

The research results make it possible to compare different variants of legendary prose, identify their similarities and differences, and evaluate regional folklore materials within the context of national folklore. In this respect, the study represents a significant contribution to the development of the theoretical foundations of Kazakh folklore studies.

The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of using the obtained scholarly conclusions and materials in specialized folklore courses at higher educational institutions, as well as in seminars and practical classes. The research materials may be useful for teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, and doctoral candidates in educational, methodological, and research activities. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a basis for future studies of Kazakh folk prose.

Main Provisions Submitted for Defense:

1. Despite spiritual contacts and cultural interactions between the Kazakhs of China and other peoples, many genres of Kazakh folklore in the region have been preserved to the present day.

2. The legendary prose of the region's Kazakhs – myths, hikaya, legends (historical and toponymic), and äpsana-hikayat – has been enriched with new motifs and episodes, acquiring new textual forms.

3. Based on the analysis of non-fairy-tale legendary prose, it was established that many works published in Kazakhstan have regional variants among the Kazakhs of China.

4. The study attempts to systematize the plots and motifs of folk prose based on the international motif index.

5. The legendary prose of the Kazakhs of China constitutes an integral part of the national folklore heritage.

Approbation and Publication of Research Results: Twelve scholarly works have been published on the topic of the research:

- 1 article in an international journal indexed in Scopus;
- 5 articles in journals recommended by the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- 5 publications in the proceedings of international scientific and theoretical conferences;
- 1 publication in the proceedings of a national conference.

Structure of the Dissertation: The dissertation was completed in accordance with established academic requirements and consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. The total length of the dissertation is 219 pages.