ABSTRACT

to the dissertation by Berik Alpysbayevich Kuketov

"National Identity in Kazakh Choreography: Continuity of Tradition in the Context of Innovation"

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational programme 8D02197 – Choreography

General Description of the Study

This dissertation provides a comprehensive examination of the formation, preservation, renewal, and artistic transformation of national identity in Kazakh choreography. Kazakh dance is approached as a cultural and symbolic system that communicates the historical memory, worldview, social experience, and aesthetic values of the people through movement. The principal research focus is on identifying the primary semantic layer of traditional dance movements, revealing their relationship to the national code, and assessing their transformation within contemporary stage and digital environments.

Relevance of the Research Topic

In the context of globalisation and digitalisation, preserving the distinctiveness of national culture and renewing it through contemporary artistic language have become important scholarly and social objectives. Although the vocabulary of Kazakh dance is widely employed in contemporary productions, its historical and cultural content, semantic foundations, and role in conveying national identity have not yet been sufficiently examined as an integrated whole. The transformation of traditional movements in accordance with each choreographer's artistic vision necessitates an analysis of the continuity between their original meanings and contemporary stage interpretations. It is therefore important to study Kazakh dance not merely as a performance form, but as a choreographic text that preserves cultural memory, embodies the national worldview, and is continually reinterpreted under new cultural conditions.

Object of the study – Kazakh choreography of the contemporary period.

Subject of the study – the semantic and kinetic code of Kazakh dance and the manifestation of national identity within contemporary cultural and artistic processes.

Aim of the study – to examine the formation, preservation, transformation, and development of national identity in Kazakh choreography within the continuity of tradition and innovation.

Research Objectives

– to systematise methodological approaches to the study of national identity in Kazakh dance within the contemporary continuity of tradition and innovation;
– to elucidate the theoretical meaning of national identity and determine its cultural and social quintessence;
– to analyse traditional Kazakh dances using metachoreographic, anthropological, and ontological approaches;

– to identify the artistic-symbolic and communicative functions of non-verbal emotional expression in Kazakh dance;
– to examine manifestations of national identity in the direction and staging of contemporary Kazakh choreography;
– to determine the cultural and artistic transformation of Kazakh dance and the new reality of national movement language in the context of innovative processes.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Study

The theoretical foundation of the study comprises concepts of national identity, cultural code, historical memory, metalanguage, cultural semiotics, and metamodernism. Its methodological framework integrates philosophical, cultural, art-historical, semiotic, comparative-historical, anthropological, ontological, and empirical approaches. In interpreting national identity, primordialism reveals its enduring ethnocultural core; constructivism explains its formation and transformation within historical and social contexts; and instrumentalism clarifies the functions of national markers in contemporary social and artistic spaces. The integration of these three perspectives forms the basis of a triadic model for examining national identity in Kazakh dance through the interrelation of continuity, historical change, and cultural function.

A metachoreographic method is substantiated for analysing traditional dance as a semantic, semiotic, and cultural structure. Its descriptive level records and characterises movements and gestures; its analytical level identifies structural relationships among movement units; its normative level systematises performance principles and established conventions; and its reflexive level interprets the historical and cultural meaning, national code, and contemporary interpretation of dance. This method enables the study to progress from describing outward movement to understanding its underlying cultural meaning.

The empirical corpus comprises four interviews, twelve dance productions, four video recordings from archival collections, eight videos published on YouTube, and fourteen videos from the BiCod TikTok account. Comparing video materials from different periods made it possible to identify the traditional kinetic core and changes in the forms of its stage representation.

Main Research Findings

Chapter One systematises the theoretical and methodological foundations of national identity from an interdisciplinary perspective. Metamodern thought is considered through the mutually non-exclusive relationship between tradition and innovation, as well as stability and change. A triadic model that explains national identity through the interrelation of primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism is proposed and linked to the metachoreographic method.

Chapter Two tests the proposed model and method using specific examples of traditional dances. “Aigolek” and “Balbyrauyn” are analysed as cultural-plastic texts that preserve the unity of musical, social, and kinetic components. The interrelationship among shoulder, joint, and leg movements in “Kara Zhorga” and “Buyn Bi” is examined in connection with the nomadic way of life and the rhythm

of the kui. Certain similar movements found in the dances of other peoples are interpreted not as evidence of direct ownership or origin, but as possible manifestations of historical and cultural interaction across the Silk Road.

The ontological analysis of "Kamazhai" demonstrates that the dance constitutes a form of cultural heritage embodying the upbringing of young women, etiquette, and inner composure. The study establishes Mustafa Segiz Seri as the author of the song "Kamazhai"; the concepts of qamdanu (preparation) and zhailanu (settling into calmness and inner balance) are interpreted as semantic foundations that illuminate the dance's refined character and a young woman's readiness for social life. A six-element scheme comprising style, symbolism, music, attributes, poses, and ritual enables a comprehensive analysis of the dance's historical and cultural content and its relationship to the national worldview.

The study establishes that rhythmic vocal exclamations used in conjunction with movement intensify the emotional and expressive impact of Kazakh dance. They convey the character of the dance, the performer's emotional state, and national distinctiveness, while also functioning as an artistic and communicative device that establishes a direct emotional connection between performer and audience. This finding demonstrates that bodily movement, voice, rhythm, and audience reception form an integrated semantic system in Kazakh dance.

Chapter Three examines transformations in Kazakh choreography during the metamodern period. Drawing on the principle of oscillation described by T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker, the relationship between tradition and innovation is interpreted as a continuous artistic movement between past and present. Although the traditional kinetic code is preserved, the means of communicating it are renewed through music, lighting, video projection, digital technologies, and emotion-expressing gestures. Comparison of archival and contemporary video materials demonstrates that Kazakh neo-choreography has developed into a distinct artistic direction that adopts new stage forms while retaining its national cultural foundations. Analysis of TikTok materials further shows that digital space not only expands the circulation of dance but also reshapes its meaning through audience support, critical evaluation, and interpretation.

Scientific Novelty of the Study

– metachoreography, grounded in the descriptive, analytical, normative, and reflexive functions of metalanguage, is proposed as a comprehensive method for studying traditional dance as a semantic, semiotic, and cultural structure;
– a triadic model integrating primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism is developed to interpret national identity in Kazakh dance as an enduring ethnocultural core, a historically formed artistic structure, and a system functioning within contemporary cultural relations;
– "Aigolek" and "Balbyrauyn" are characterised as cultural-plastic texts, while the historical-cultural and kinetic continuity of "Kara Zhorga" and "Buyn Bi" is identified through an anthropological approach;
– a six-element scheme of ontological analysis is developed to reveal the existential structure of the dance "Kamazhai";

– the emotional, artistic-symbolic, and communicative functions of rhythmic vocal exclamations accompanying movement and connecting performer and audience are substantiated;
– the preservation of the traditional code and the renewal of its stage representation in Kazakh neo-choreography are conceptualised through metamodern oscillation.

Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Study

The theoretical significance of the study lies in substantiating a triadic model and a metachoreographic method for examining national identity through dance. These approaches broaden the scope for integrated analysis of the national code, cultural memory, ethnosymbolic content, and artistic transformation of dance movements at the intersection of art history, cultural studies, philosophy, and choreology. The proposed methodological framework may also be applied in comparative studies of the traditional dance heritage of other peoples.

The practical significance lies in the applicability of the six-element scheme to the systematic classification of traditional dances and in the potential use of the research findings in choreography programmes, the course "Theory and Methodology of Teaching Kazakh Dance," the development of new stage productions, and projects aimed at preserving national heritage. The findings provide choreographers and directors with guidance for reinterpreting traditional movement vocabulary while retaining its original cultural meaning.

Main Propositions Submitted for Defence

1. Metachoreography is a comprehensive method grounded in the descriptive, analytical, normative, and reflexive functions of metalanguage, enabling traditional dance to be studied as an integrated semantic, semiotic, and cultural structure.
2. The triadic model for studying national identity in Kazakh dance is based on the interrelation of primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism and reveals the enduring ethnocultural core of identity, its historical and cultural formation, and its contemporary social and artistic function.
3. "Aigolek" and "Balbyrauyn" are characterised as cultural-plastic texts inseparable from their musical and social contexts, whereas "Kara Zhorga" and "Buyn Bi" are defined as national movement patterns associated with the nomadic way of life, the rhythm of the kui, and historical cultural contacts.
4. The ontological analysis of "Kamazhai" establishes its status as cultural heritage, while the six-element scheme comprising style, symbolism, music, attributes, poses, and ritual is proposed as an analytical tool for studying other traditional dances.
5. Rhythmic vocal exclamations in Kazakh dance function as an artistic and communicative device that complements the emotional-expressive layer of movement, conveys national distinctiveness, and establishes a connection between performer and audience.

6. Kazakh neo-choreography preserves the traditional national code, while the modes of its artistic representation change under the influence of contemporary stage and digital technologies; this process reflects a metamodern oscillation between past and present.

Research Validation and Publications

The main findings were discussed in scholarly publications, international research conferences, round-table discussions, and other academic events. The articles “Художественные аспекты метамодерна в современной казахской хореографии” (2024) and “Онтолого-ориентированный подход к традиционному танцу: на примере казахского танца” (2025) were published in the Central Asian Journal of Art Studies. In addition, the article “Dance, ontology, and national identity in the metamodern cultural paradigm” by B. Kuketov, A. Shankibayeva, A. Kussanova, and M. Assanova was published in Cogent Arts & Humanities (2026, Vol. 13, Issue 1, Article 2722608; DOI: 10.1080/23311983.2026.2722608). Between 2023 and 2025, research papers and conference materials were presented on traditional Kazakh dance, rhythmic vocal exclamations, and the ontological approach.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of 220 references, and appendices. The total length of the dissertation is 133 pages.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that national identity in Kazakh choreography is not a set of immutable external features, but a dynamic system in which historical memory, cultural meaning, and contemporary artistic practice are interconnected. Although the traditional kinetic code is transformed in contemporary stage forms, its semantic core remains connected to the national worldview, social experience, and cultural memory. The metachoreographic method and triadic model make it possible to describe, analyse, and evaluate this continuity. The findings support an understanding of Kazakh dance not only as a repository of national cultural heritage, but also as a living cultural system that is continually renewed and enriched with new meanings in contemporary artistic and digital environments.