



ACTA HISTRIAE
23, 2015, 2



ISSN 1318-0185

UDK/UDC 94(05)

Letnik 23, leto 2015, številka 2

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Translations:**

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**Lektorji/Supervisione/
Language Editor:**

Petra Berlot (angl., it., slo)

**Stavek/Composizione/
Typesetting:**

Grafis trade d.o.o.

**Izdajatelj/Editore/
Published by:**

Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko / Società storica del Litorale®

Sedež/Sede/Address:

Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko, SI-6000
Koper-Capodistria, Kreljeva 3 / Via Krelj 3,
tel.: +386 5 6273-296; fax: +386 5 6273-296;
e-mail: actahistriae@gmail.com; www.zdjp.si

Tisk/Stampa/Print:

Grafis trade d.o.o.

Naklada/Tiratura/Copies:

300 izvodov/copie/copies

**Finančna podpora/
Supporto finanziario/
Financially supported by:**

Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije / Slovenian Research Agency

**Slika na naslovnici/
Foto di copertina/
Picture on the cover:**

Detajl reliefa po Maurits Cornelis Escher (Haag, Nizozemska) / Dettaglio del rilievo dedicato a Maurits Cornelis Escher (Aja, Olanda) / A detail of the relief after Maurits Cornelis Escher (The Hague, Netherlands) (Public domain: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Denhaag_relief_houtrustweg2.jpg)

Redakcija te številke je bila zaključena 2. junija 2015.

Revija Acta Histriae je vključena v naslednje podatkovne baze / Gli articoli pubblicati in questa rivista sono inclusi nei seguenti indici di citazione / Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in: Thomson Reuters: Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Social Scisearch, Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Journal Citation Reports / Social Sciences Edition (USA); IBZ, Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur (GER); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) (UK); Referativnyi Zhurnal Viniti (RUS); European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH); Elsevier B. V.: SCOPUS (NL)

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NATIONAL TRADITIONS OF THE 21ST CENTURY:
PROBLEMS WITH THE PRESERVATION AND TRANSLATION
OF KAZAKH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper raises questions about the place of Kazakh traditional music, in today's society. In particular, it focuses on the oral-professional art "en-kui-zhyr" (song, instrumental and epic tradition). This art reflects one of the highest achievements of Kazakh culture with thousands of examples demonstrating the nation's spiritual heritage. The authors reveal the vitality of Kazakh musical traditions, which developed the culture of Central Asian nomadic civilization. Therefore, despite economic and social disasters at the beginning of the 20th century, these traditions, which have centuries-old history evolution, are alive and in-demand today.

Key words: National traditions, nomadic culture, Kazakh music, folklore, polyphony of cultures, globalization, ethnomusicology

TRADIZIONI NAZIONALI DEL XXI SECOLO: PROBLEMI CON LA
CONSERVAZIONE E TRADUZIONE DELLA MUSICA TRADIZIONALE
KAZAKA

SINTESI

Il contributo solleva la questione della posizione della musica tradizionale kazaka nella società attuale. In particolare, s'incentra sull'arte orale professionale, en-kui-zhyr

(*canzone strumentale di tradizione epica*). *Questa forma d'arte rappresenta uno dei culmini della cultura kazaka, con migliaia di esempi che formano il patrimonio spirituale della nazione. Gli autori comprovano la vitalità della tradizione musicale kazaka, nata nella cultura di una civilizzazione nomade dell'Asia centrale. Infatti, nonostante i disastri economici e sociali che segnarono l'inizio del Novecento, queste tradizioni con storia secolare sono a giorno d'oggi ancora vive e richieste.*

Parole chiave: tradizioni nazionali, cultura nomade, musica kazaka, folclore, polifonia di culture, globalizzazione, etnomusicologia

In the system of traditional culture of nomadic peoples, the leading medium was taken by spatial and temporary types of the art, in particular, poetry and music. Over the centuries, this development led to the creation and flourishing of original classical traditions across a range of Turkic cultures. In Kazakh, this song (*en*), instrumental (*kui*) and epic (*zhyr*) traditions, differ in regional styles of signing and instrumental artistic performance. The sources of this legacy trace their roots back to the ancient Turkic epoch, common for central Asian nations. In Kazakh culture, during the period of the Middle Ages, the original national traditions were formed, which have a certain integrity system, original language and display in different genres of folklore and verbal professional art. It is necessary to say that several thousand samples of musical and musical-poetic creativity, including a work by the author, brilliantly represent the development of the nomadic culture (Omarova, 2002) which was actively functioning in Kazakhstan at the beginning of the previous century.

The backbone of traditional culture, which have centuries of history cannot disappear overnight, even if the state and social system, household-economic system, ideology and spiritual-cultural orientation of the society have changed. The environment of the present functions of Kazakh traditional music at the beginning of 20th century slowly disappeared with the nomadic way of life. There was a disintegration of ethnic social structure and basic grounds of culture. However, as with any other high art form, music is not connected only with the environment in which it was created. It is part of the mentality, outlook, ethnic and artistic culture of a people that can be preserved and developed. People search, or try to understand, not only their current cultural national identity, but also the spiritual basis of their culture. Generally, European classics are based on this law. Music that can be traced back to the epoch of Western-European Renaissance is focused on the timeless artistic content. The traditional music of *tengrism super ethnos* (Mukhambetova, 2002a) possesses the same cultural and spiritual potential. It reaches out beyond the limits of the nomadic routine and the nomadic time period, from the original nomadic Turkic and Mongolian peoples of the Central Asia.

In the traditional music research of Central Asian peoples, the authors apply widely known methods of modern ethnomusicology (Nettl, 1983; Chekanowska-Kuklinska, 1990; Jordania, 2006, Mukhambetova, 2002b *et. al.*). The present article is aimed at a designation

of the most important tendencies of the socio-cultural process that effects on the change of functional Kazakh traditional music in 20th and 21st centuries. Analysis of modern realities in the culture of Kazakhstan has not only theoretical, but also practical value, in connection with the topic of problems dealing with the preservation and development of national musical traditions. The following tasks are detailed in the article: a) exposure of the phenomenon of eastern musical cultures vitality, specifically Kazakh, as a system, which have a civilized bases, b) detection of the consequences of “westernization” in Kazakh music, in the 20th century, and globalization during the 21st century, c) determination of the most important steps in the way of preservation and translation of the Kazakh traditional music.

Today, we state that in spite of its complex position in the system of modern culture, Kazakh traditional music is vivid and in high demand. To the masses, traditional music functions¹ namely as art, but also as folklore, which as it is known to have applied value. The actual ethnic cultural context that generated it, such as ceremonial-ritual functions, has died out. In order to understand the phenomenon of the national musical tradition’s vitality as a cultural system,² in the eastern people, it is necessary to remember the civilized basis of the cultures, including nomadic ones (Masanov, 1995).

Three epochs, usually separated in the history and culture of the Central-Asian nomad way of life of nomads as: the ancient times including the Sakes, Massagetae, Huns, Wusuns, the average “classical”, Turkic and Turkic-Mongolian tribes of 6th–14th century and the “late”, Kazakh khanate of 15th–18th century, represent a single spiral of nomad civilization with a specified history of “turns”. These “turns” are interdependent and interrelated historical structure. This is specified by scientists as: 1) genetic Sako-Hun period, 2) functional Turkic period and 3) transformed properly Kazakh period (Orazbaeva, 2005).

Altaiy Orazbaeva considers the period of early nomads to be the phase of conceptualization of nomad civilization and its culture. Here the formation of the nomad way of life and archaic layer of the culture was born. During the phase of objectification, the Turkic period began with the formation of ethnic identity, spiritual archetypes, language, ideology and statehood (Orazbaeva, 2005). In the phase of socialization, or the Kazakh period, the improvement of all the subsystems of nomadic civilization and execution of the whole historical mission took place; this laid the foundation for the demonstration of the “programme” of natural and human society evolution (Orazbaeva, 2005, 172). Thus, in this phase, traditional Kazakh society was the bearer of “traditions, style, code, programme and mentality” of nomadic civilization. It should be considered that this phase is some sub-civilization, where peculiarities can be detected on the level of socio-cultural organization (Orazbaeva, 2005, 222).

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- 1 The place of traditional music in the modern culture of Kazakhstan is determined by functioning in the concert practice of professional genres (*en, kui, zhyr*) and their involvement (as the bearers of tradition) in the triad of statehood of the education system in school-college-higher educational establishment.
 - 2 Today we understand that this is not only cultural, but ecocultural systems: “... the world aspires to listen to the authentic music in authentic performance of authentic musicians. The originality, but no eclectics, corresponds to the time, when the ecology of culture became seemingly important notion, as well as the ecology of nature” (Mukhambetova, 2002b, 455).

It is supposed that Kazakh traditional musical culture is one of small number of system integrities, which preserved the socio-cultural experience of the Kazakh society and carried it through the ages, as archetypes and codes of nomadic culture (Omarova, 2012).

Therefore, it seems to be normal that if the applied genres of musical folklore do not function naturally today, the professional Kazakh music as a national tradition didn't lose its meaning and continues to hold some cultural-historical and spiritual substance for Kazakh people. Generally, due to total syncretism of public areas and institutes in the system of nomadic civilization, including economy, policy, science, religion, art and etc., cultural legacy of the civilization, represented mainly by traditional art was preserved.

However, in order to understand what happened with Kazakh music during the last centuries, you only need to look at culture in traditional and modern societies. First, there were *zhynrau* syncretised according to their public functions. In music and poetry these are creators of epos and subjects of individual-author's epic creativity. *Akyn'y*, *sal'y* and *seri* are improvising poets, authors of the poetic and musical text of songs and simultaneously composers. In modern life, there are only *zhyrshy*, composers or songwriters, and *enshi*, singers. Traditionally, there were *kuishi*, combined singer-songwriters and now basically, *domyrashi*, *kobazshy*, *sybyzgyshy*, artists who are independent from the composing aspect. That is to say if in traditional society there were creators, and now we only have performers, who *reproductive* previously created works³. Thus, absence of the traditional first person composition creativity, as a result of absence of the conditions for this creativity, stopped the natural course of the development of Kazakh music. Clearly, it first of all, the regular result of the nation entering into industrial, or the soviet epoch, and post-industrial, current, time frame, with forced-acceleration culture intensified "development of the differential functions."⁴

Peculiarities of Kazakh traditional music's existence on the background of socialism until the obtainment of state sovereignty by the republic were excellently elucidated in the scientific-analytical article "Urban branch of the traditional instrumental music of Kazakh people (up to 1975)", written by Kazakh music expert and cultural studies scholar, doctor Mukhambetova. As shown in scientific works, on the material of Kazakh musical culture, the theoretical conceptions of the famous ethnic musicians of the last century is tied to the destinies of traditional music in the 20th century. Thus, in Kazakhstan already in 1930s the urban branch of traditional culture was actively formed, and its development within the next decades "followed according to the logical scenario that can be considered classical, as in it there are the same processes, which jointly acted in the urbanized eastern cultures in XX century, shown themselves", Mukhambetova writes (Amanov & Mukhambetova, 2002).

3 Speaking strictly, in the system of modern culture, there is nothing in it – the present reproduction of the traditional legacy: music and poetry, music and word in the nomadic society were, first of all, a means of communication and means of the high spiritual communication of people. In the modern culture the genres of traditional music function as the European opuses (in the conditions of concrete form of execution) and are represented only for listening to the musical-aesthetic perception.

4 The term by V. Cabo "Evolution of the culture, at all conditionality of this notion, similarly to the evolution in the nature in some extent is reduced to differentiation and division of the integrated forms and the development of the differentiated functions" (Cabo, 1972, 275).



Singer, called akyn. <http://eurasia.travel/kazakhstan/culture/music/>

Modernization and “westernization”, termed by Bruno Nettle, of Kazakh music in the system of socialistic culture is expressed, mainly, in the transition into written language by the noting of the samples, their numerous processing and transposition, teaching of the traditional musicians by notes, European or concert forms of performance, and orchestral-assembly artistic performance. With the aim of execution of *kuis*, and also the use European works in the Kazakh orchestras with the original musical instruments (*dombra*, *kobyz*). Their traditional musical system became unified; the forms and constructive building of the instruments changed and naturally led to levelling not only of the natural sound ideal, but also concord and rhythmic structure of the music. Transformed traditional musical samples, in the instrumental and vocal arrangements in popular and symphonic orchestras, piano accompaniment, on the opera scene, etc. All this should in-

spire the thought about the folklore essence of traditional music⁵, which could “acquire” professional status according to the laws of European written-musical culture.

The state system of education was focused on popular-orchestral musicians with the corresponding learning programme. In this programme, the actual combination of the instrumentalists of “traditional Kazakh and European repertoire forms eclectic consciousness, unable to interpret deeply both European and Kazakh works” (Amanov & Mukhambetova, 2002). In the complex of musical-theoretical disciplines, the Europeans have always been the priority until now, with solfeggio, harmony, history of the world music, reading of the score, etc. Similar to the transition from the written methods of study, away from the system of “*ustaz-shekirt*” – “teacher-pupil,” and concert forms of artistic performance changed the whole musical thinking of Kazakh musicians. As a result, for example, the multi-variant instrumental *kuis* improvisation, according to its nature is schematized, and solo musicians in the city environment lose their ability to the “rural” composer’s creativity.

The village (aul) environment had produced many traditional singers and musicians up until the 1960s. However, the village branch of traditional music in the last quarter of 20th century becomes extinct because of the absence of musical resources and moral support. “The popular musicians in auls, proclaimed as non-professionals, lost the ability to make a living from their own art. Since that time and until now they all are forced to work by other specialties, like shepherders (shepherds), book-keepers, mechanization experts, teachers, etc. in order to earn a living. In the nomenclature of the specialties and positions specified by the state, there is no column “popular professional...” (Amanov & Mukhambetova, 2002, 14). Thus, the analysis of Kazakh music’s modern state shows that “traditional professionalism was equalled to folklore, and its bearers – to non-professional amateurs” (Amanov & Mukhambetova, 2002, 544).

Thus, in the 20th century, the perspective of the development of national musical traditions, at best, was represented as a transformation. Traditions must be set in the system of the new “more advanced culture” and “born again”. The composition schools of many eastern countries followed this form, having offered authentic samples of the national opera, symphony, poems, etc. in some hybrid forms, which in each culture found their niche. However, time showed that the way of “indifferent mixing” or “re-melting” of genres and forms can happen. Equal dialogue is possible, or in musical language, - polyphony; polyphonic sounding of the musical cultures, in which all valuables must be kept as the part of general spiritual culture of humankind. Namely, this view on the process of modern functioning of ethnic music was formed during the 1960s, when together with opening and recognition by the world community of eastern cultures, their recognition became inherently valued and self-sufficient. Kazakh musical knowledge in the USSR also actively developed in this direction and formed the theoretical position about oral professionalism of musical cultures of Eastern people (Mukhambetova, 1972).

5 The great power of this reprimand and inertia of thinking demonstrate the used terms “folklore” until now (in relation to the professional genre *en, kui, zhyr*), “folk music”, “folk instruments”, “folk executor” and accordingly – the departments and faculties of the folk instruments and popular singing in the educational establishments (Omarova, 2009).

In the ethnic musicological school of Kazakhstan, formed during the 1970s and 80s, great attention was paid not only to the historical-theoretical, but also to the practical issues of traditional music. Thus, the Alma-Ata conservatory existed during these years. “It was when ethnic solfeggio for dombrists was created, based on national musical material and musician-improviser modelling of traditional activity...”⁶ (Matsievskiy, 1998, 183–196). The results of practical and theoretical developments on the issues of ethnic solfeggio in Kazakhstan were demonstrated during Republican seminars and All-Union conferences. The experience of teachers’ work was generalized in academic programmes (Utegalieva, 2005) and the dissertation of studies of young specialists (Alpeisova, 2003). Generally, the courses of ethnic solfeggio, based on the structural-theoretical studies of Kazakh music, were created with the aim of renaissance of traditional norms of musical thinking and authentic creative forms of artistic performance.

However, in spite of the success of musicological science in Kazakhstan and the fruitful practice of progressively thinking musicians and pedagogues in mass knowledge, as well as in socio-political and state educational system, the inertia of forming false representations about relative value of the traditional music was not overcome. Then at the turn of 20th century at the epoch of political independence for the Republic, the previous system of cultural-valuable coordinates, has actually been reproduced (Bujbek, 2009). The difference is only in the scales. The processes of excommunication from ethnic and national musical traditions are passed on now within the frameworks of world globalization. How did it happen?

Up until the beginning of the 21st century, the intensification of the globalization processes took place across the world and some universal vector of world economic development led to internationalization of cultures. Raising “the iron curtain” at the beginning of 1990s and further development of technical-information created the unprecedented obtrusion of values of mass culture through mass media. In post-soviet space, media-productions of western-musicals and pop-culture flourished. In this situation, it turned out that it became more problematic to preserve original spiritual traditions. In the 1970s and 80s, the right of eastern cultures’ own way of development is acknowledged, by overcoming of the European centrism. Then in 21st century, humankind turns out to be powerless against the strict laws of the socio-cultural environment created by them. In other words, the conditions of intensive development of the techno and material-economic sphere and the values of culture are either being pushed aside, or being materialized, and finally have become the object of sales and commodity relations, which steadily leads to commercialization.

Thus, today in art, the creation or creator cannot come out to their viewer or listener without producing or promoting, which in turn is impossible without considerable financial contributions. Therefore, the creation of the art is the same, and the rest of it requires advantageous presentation, advertisement, sales, promotion and constant financial sup-

6 Ethnic solfeggio – the course of solfeggio on the material of traditional music. In Kazakhstan its initial name is “Dombra solfeggio”, then “Complex course of solfeggio for the faculty of the folk instruments”. In 1990s, the ethnic solfeggio course for traditional singers was created.

port. Moreover, the advertisement, sales, and commercial activity in the area of culture and art dictate the directions, tastes and passions. The spiritual consumption, which is similar to the material, flourishing gorgeously today, requires the creator “not to fly” too high and to go down up to the level of mass culture. In this situation, spirituality essentially becomes elite, and the simple statistics show how many followers of musical classics and pop-music there are in the world.

Without going into a deep analysis of the socio-cultural processes in Kazakhstan, we can only say that the issues of the modern existence of Kazakh traditional music arose in the last decade. This is evidenced in scientific and publicist articles, conferences, seminars, round tables, etc. Summarizing these events and publications, we can make a conclusion about the next stage. One-time auctions and projects are not able to revive the lost values of culture. A special long-term state programme must be created to actually rehabilitate traditional music as national musical classics. Accordingly, the social status of musicians, which actually are the modern bearers of cultural and spiritual legacy of the nation, must be restored.

Nonetheless, a full-fledged traditional musical legacy preservation is connected not only with the cultural policy of the state, but with the search for the most optimal and adequate forms of its presentation adequate to the nature of the very music. This practical task, from which solving the future of the national musical classics depends, appeared long time ago and requires an urgent solution. In essence, overcoming the modern executive impresses in the area of musical art, must become the real continuation of the state programme “Cultural legacy” (2004–2011). As it is known within the framework of the realization of this programme the projects “1000 Kazakh kuis” (41 discs) and “1000 Kazakh songs” (50 discs) is very substantial for the Kazakh cultural community. Nevertheless, these audio records, which represent the Anthology of Kazakh instrumental and song tradition, must not only be historical-cultural “monuments” or museum exhibits: only live, can perform their true assignment in the culture (Omarova, 2013, 51–54).

The problem of Kazakh traditional musicians’ education – bearers of the song, instrumental and epic cultures – stands out. In the system of professional education of musicians today, the whole programme of education is missing ways and methods of traditional music translation, developed during the past years. Here are the following research and methodical tasks:

- develop means, methods of perception and understating of syncretism and unity of verbal, poetic and prosaic, and musical texts in the content of traditional culture;
- restore methods of upbringing of the musicians since early ages as the singers and instrumentalists together with the parallel development of methods and complex possession of vocal apparatus and instrument;
- study the peculiarities of traditional voice training with the aim of the traditional artistic performance methods and means;
- restore the methods of: a) processing the articulation in the traditional song and epic singing, b) restoration of concord-intonation and rhythmic system of the instrumental music, for which purposes it is necessary to study the stylistic peculiarities of the regional vocal and instrumental styles;

- develop the reproductive methods of the executive culture and artistic behaviour of traditional *enshi*/singers, *kuishi*/instrumentalists and *zhyrshy*/narrator in the modern study.

Therefore, addressing the most actual problems of preservation and translation of Kazakh musical culture on the modern stage, we get the idea that the traditional music must not only be preserved as the spiritual legacy, but can naturally exist and develop in any socio-cultural conditions. It is natural that if in the society the demand of people in their national and cultural-historical identity is alive, “tradition is not an obstacle, and the source of development, as it doesn’t go about the return to any archaic forms of the world perception, but only about the achievement and synthesis of the past and present one. Essentially, in the traditions of all spiritual-moral and cultural the human communities achievements, which constantly are in the process of reconsideration, reprocessing and adaptation to the modern conditions, are established in the traditions, and serve the means of further self-improvement to a human and society on the whole...” (Orazbaeva, 2005, 112).

As in today’s cultural-historical situation, the problem of preservation of the national traditions in Kazakhstan is extremely important, it is necessary for: a) creation of the complex of social-economic measures on the support of traditional musical culture, b) qualitative renovation of the system of state education of the traditional musicians. As we showed above, this conclusion is based on the following one:

1. In the nomadic culture of Kazakhs the mechanisms of functioning and translation of musical tradition were perfected during centuries. The discrete and natural development of the music was provided by the preservation of historical conditions of its existence.
2. In 20th century in connection with the changes of these conditions the structural basis of functioning of the traditional music and the system of musicians’ education were violated. Yet, in spite of the socio-cultural cataclysms in 20th century Kazakh music has survived, using its civilized resource and century inertia of self-development.
3. In 21st century the situation changed. The processes of the actual marginalization of the national culture and music intensified not only in the connection with Kazakhs’ urbanization, but also in connection with factors of global order and culture and mass media.

The issue about how traditional music of different nations can developed in modern conditions worries many figures in culture and musical art. As this music was created according to the laws of non-literate creativity, the vivid execution and the deepest contact with the listener, who with their attention and understanding of this music inspired and “moved” the process of creativity. This is important for existence of such classical genres of the eastern cultures as *raga*, *maqam* (*maqom*, *mugam*), *kui* (*kai*, *hai*), *zhyr* (*yur*, *iyur*) etc., where improvisation is a part of the music. Finding a way for further life of these musical traditions, as the most valuable spiritual achievement of humankind, should be one of the primary objectives of modern people.

NACIONALNA IZROČILA 21. STOLETJA: TEŽAVE PRI OHRANJANJU IN
PREVAJANJU TRADICIONALNE KAZAŠKE GLASBE

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POVZETEK

Prispevek skozi družbeni in kulturni proces spremlja trende, ki so vplivali na: a) strukturno zasnovo funkcij kazaške tradicionalne glasbe; b) tradicionalni sistem glasbenega izobraževanja v 20. stoletju. Avtorji v članku predlagajo rešitve, s katerimi bi v moderni kazahstanski kulturi reševali in razširjali tradicionalno kazaško glasbo.

V raziskavi o tradicionalni glasbi ljudstev Centralne Azije so avtorji uporabili splošno znane metode moderne etnomuzikologije. Namen pričujočega članka je določiti najpomembnejše trende v sociokulturnem procesu, ki vpliva na spreminjanje funkcionalne tradicionalne kazaške glasbe v 20. in 21. stoletju. Analiza sodobne stvarnosti v kazahstanski kulturi ima ne le teoretično, temveč tudi praktično vrednost, povezano s temo o težavah, ki zadevajo ohranjanje in razvijanje narodnih glasbenih tradicij. V članku so tako natančno predstavljene naslednje naloge: a) izpostavljanje vitalnosti vzhodnih glasbenih kultur, zlasti kazaške, kot sistema s civilizirano osnovo, b) odkrivanje posledic "pozahodnjačenja" v kazaški glasbi v 20. stoletju in posledic globalizacije v 21. stoletju, c) določanje najpomembnejših korakov na poti k ohranjanju in prevajanju tradicionalne kazaške glasbe.

Ključne besede: nacionalna izročila, nomadska kultura, kazaška glasba, folklor, polifonija kultur, globalizacija, etnomuzikologija

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