

Folk Motifs in Poetic Language of Ilyas Zhansugurov and Their Interpretation in Modern Times

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Abstract—This paper examines the significance of folk motifs in Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry and analyzes their interpretations within contemporary literary and cultural contexts. To achieve these objectives, the study employs stylistic analysis, contextual analysis, an intertextual approach, and comparative analytical methods. The findings reveal that Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry is rich in folk motifs, and the poet focuses on describing the steppe, nomadic lifestyle, and the customs of the Kazakh people, showcasing the values of wisdom, courage, and honor, and glorifying Kazakh traditions and the indigenous lifestyle. It was found that Ilyas Zhansugurov contributed to the personification of the *dombra*, the development of epic storytelling, the use of folklore-based symbolism, and the incorporation of proverbs and sayings within the poetic texts. The research demonstrated that Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry inspired modern Kazakh poets, leading to the incorporation of folk motifs into their works. Besides, four key motifs in Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry were outlined. They included the *dombra* (identity, history, and the voice of the nation), the steppe (freedom, endurance, and the nomadic way of life), the horse (betrayal, loss, and political oppression), and the *kuishi* (bridge between generations). Additionally, it was revealed that several stylistic devices were employed in Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry. They included the following: metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, personification, repetition, rhetorical question, contrast, irony, and allusion. The findings offer valuable implications for contemporary literary studies.

Index Terms—symbols, national identity, nomadic lifestyle, steppe, oral storytelling

I. INTRODUCTION

Folk motifs in poetry typically function as vehicles for preserving cultural heritage and shaping national identity (Pise, 2023). These themes often emerge as direct reflections of oral traditions and mythological narratives, maintaining a close connection with the rhythmic structures of folk songs and epic storytelling (Sahoo & Rath, 2023; Zhamgyrchieva et al., 2020). Poets often use folklore to emphasize collective memory, moral values, and the beauty of nature, reinforcing a sense of cultural continuity (Gülüm, 2023). In modernist poetry, folk motives are often reinterpreted, fragmented, or reimagined to reflect the complexities of modern existence (E Hosne Ara, 2022). While modernist poets continue to incorporate elements of folklore, they often employ folk symbols to explore existential themes, political struggles, or psychological depth (Sahoo & Rath, 2023).

During the Soviet era, poets frequently incorporated folk motifs to convey ideas that were prohibited by state censorship. Folklore, rich in deeply embedded symbols, served as a medium through which political dissent, national consciousness, and social critique could be subtly expressed within ostensibly apolitical narratives (Almas et al., 2025). Brown (2024) focused on the ideological control and the repression of the Kazakh language under the Soviet Union. The scholar emphasized that it had a significant and long-lasting impact on modern-day Kazakhstan, introducing a complex and nuanced discourse on Kazakh national identity, language policy, and the interpretation of hidden symbols in literature. To overcome political dissent, Soviet-era authors often drew on traditional legends and epic heroes as indirect

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commentaries on oppression, cultural loss, and resistance. These narratives enabled writers to address sensitive themes without overly challenging the authorities (van der Heide, 2023). Folk tales and oral traditions became powerful communicative tools, allowing authors to convey resonant messages to their audiences while avoiding confrontation with Soviet authorities. This use of folk motives became an instrument of poetic freedom, enabling writers to preserve historical memory and critique Soviet policies under the guise of celebrating folklore and tradition (Jacquesson, 2022).

Kazakh poets, particularly Ilyas Zhansugurov, employed various symbols and legends to convey national identity, historical memory, and a spiritual connection across generations. The *dombra* is considered a powerful symbol, often used in Kazakh poetry. For example, in his poem, *Dombra*, Zhansugurov praises the *dombra* as the bearer of the soul of the people, its history, and its feelings. He wrote:

*Play your kui, dombra, play.
Spread a wonderful melody,
Babble like mountain streams,
Sing joy into your heart.
So that all the fog in the mountains disappears,
So that all the clouds come down from the sky,
So that everyone listens to you,
Loving your melody.*

These lines illustrate the intrinsic unity between music and nature, wherein the melody of the *dombra* appears to intertwine with the winds of the steppe. The instrument assumes a symbolic voice of the Kazakh land itself, reflecting its vastness, beauty, and freedom.

Kazakh folk culture is incredibly rich, originating in the nomadic traditions that have shaped the identity, worldview, and artistic expressions of the Kazakh people for centuries (Kuzembayeva, 2024). This cultural wealth is reflected in epic poetry, oral storytelling, proverbs, and traditional music, all of which capture the spirit of the steppe, the deep connection to nature, and the values of hospitality, bravery, and freedom (Abduov et al., 2020). These nomadic themes have inspired many writers and poets, describing vast landscapes, horses, yurts, and spatial mobility (Tokşılıkova & Abdul Rakhmanuly, 2023). The nomadic lifestyle, often associated with people's survival, is a metaphor that represents the resilience, freedom, and brevity of the Kazakh population (Shoinzhanova et al., 2024). Ilyas Zhansugurov made significant contributions to Kazakh poetic culture and significantly influenced the development of Kazakh oral folk art (Aitbaeva & Tarakov, 2023). Under the impact of Kazakh epos, he incorporated folk motifs, national traits, and values into his works. Importantly, Zhansugurov's poetry preserved the traditional Kazakh verse and extended its artistic potential through expressive language and symbolism. Additionally, his works were influenced by the socio-political context of that time and Soviet censorship. The experience of life on the steppe and as a nomad enabled Zhansugurov to describe the social and cultural identity of the Kazakhs and adapt folk traditions to new literary forms (Zhansugurov, 1984). Several literary critics have agreed that Ilyas Zhansugurov contributed to the collective memory by articulating folk literature (Mamayev et al., 2021). They emphasized that the poet possessed a unique ability to present oral folk art to a modern audience, thereby facilitating the further development of Kazakh literature. It is important to note that several contemporary Kazakh poets adapt folk motifs in their works, but they draw on them through 21st-century realities. For example, *dombra*, steppe, and *aul*, which Ilyas Zhansugurov described as symbols of culture and ideological resistance, are currently depicted through the influence of technology, globalization, and multiculturalism (Boman & Mussakhanova, 2024). Additionally, poetry is a powerful medium for conveying Kazakh history, the national challenges, joys, and sorrows of a typically Kazakh in modern society (Omarova et al., 2020).

The research aims to analyze Ilyas Zhansugurov's role in the development of Kazakh literature, examine the influence of folk motifs in his poetic works, and explore the interpretations of these motifs in contemporary literary and cultural contexts.

The study focused on answering the following *research questions*:

- (1) How do folk motifs in Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry reflect Kazakh national identity and cultural heritage during the early Soviet period?
- (2) What aspects of Kazakh poetic traditions are influenced by Ilyas Zhansugurov's folk motifs?
- (3) In what ways are Zhansugurov's folk motifs interpreted in modern times, particularly in relation to contemporary socio-political issues?
- (4) What stylistic instruments does Ilyas Zhansugurov use in his poetry?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since incorporating folk motifs into written literary forms is an extensive scientific problem, some poetic works are devoted to symbolism and imagery (Sahoo & Rath, 2023). According to Khayrilloeyvna (2024), these elements carry deep cultural meanings that enrich poetic expression. Asaqli and Masalha (2020) investigated specific rhythmic and structural patterns in traditional folk poems, including repetition, parallelism, and musicality. In Kazakh literature, motifs related to nomadic heritage and heroic epics serve as a means of cultural continuity (Kuzembayeva, 2024). Research findings suggest that folk motifs frequently draw on mythological and legendary archetypes, including spirits and supernatural beings (Zhamgyrchieva et al., 2020). At the same time, folk traditions influence the language of literary

works, contributing unique expressions, proverbs, and metaphors derived from oral storytelling (Rakymzhan et al., 2022). Zakirova et al. (2023) argue that folk motifs address universally resonant themes, including love, the pursuit of a better future, interpersonal relationships, and humanity's bond with nature.

History is a key topic that focuses on societal transformations and the formation of national identity (Matayeva et al., 2025). Özkan (2020) supported this idea, indicating that incorporating myths and folk tales paints a peculiar picture of Kazakh character and mentality. Many writers incorporate folk motifs, traditional storytelling techniques, and epic narratives to connect the past with contemporary literature, thereby ensuring cultural continuity (Almas et al., 2025). Some findings outlined the literature as a carrier of national identity (Sadvokassova et al., 2024). For example, Chaika et al. (2024) stated that literature contributes to preserving national languages, particularly in societies where linguistic assimilation has threatened the native tongue. Besides, some sources investigated the role of myth and heroic figures in national consciousness (Bekzhanova & Durrani, 2025). Moreover, it established the importance of postcolonial and post-Soviet identity reconstruction (Kossyn, 2024). Literature often engages in the re-examination of national identity since it questions past narratives, reclaims indigenous cultural elements, and redefines the nation's place in the global context (Adedeji, 2024).

The analysis of scientific literature has shown that oral tradition has long been a foundational element of written literature, shaping storytelling, thematic depth, and cultural expression, and positively affecting social responsibility and ethics (Nikolenko et al., 2024). Before the widespread development of written texts, societies preserved their histories, beliefs, and moral values through oral storytelling, epic poetry, and folklore (Zakirova et al., 2023). These oral traditions influenced later written literature by providing a rich reservoir of narratives, archetypes, and poetic forms (Toktanova et al., 2021). Many literary works use oral storytelling, which enhances the readability of texts and strengthens their connection to cultural memory and common values (Zehadi, 2024).

In the case of Kazakh literature, oral tradition is deeply connected with its written forms, particularly due to the nation's historical reliance on oral storytelling (Bekzhanova & Durrani, 2025; Kuzembayeva, 2024). Kazakh literature has its roots in the epic poetry of *zhynrau* (bardic poets), who recited heroic tales and lyrical narratives that conveyed historical events, moral values, and philosophical reflections (Egamkulova, 2024). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, when it was possible to document oral epics, many representatives of Kazakh literature, including Ilyas Zhansugurov, started to integrate folk tales and other traditional patterns into modern texts (Matayeva et al., 2025). Recent findings demonstrate that Soviet-era Kazakh writers extensively incorporated folk elements into their literary works, as they sought to preserve national heritage and resist ideological constraints (Nurgali et al., 2021).

Folk motifs continue to evolve in modern literature. Their primary role is to reflect contemporary realities through the use of language devices. Modern poetic texts transmit myths and legends but, at the same time, figuratively explain burning issues such as identity crises, globalization impact, multiculturalism, environmental concerns, social justice (Boman & Mussakhanova, 2024), the use of artificial intelligence and virtual reality which can contribute to the creative processes (Sobolenko et al., 2024). One example is the manifestation of the image of *Korkyt Ata*, a legendary 9th-century Turkic songwriter (Zakirova et al., 2023). Another example refers to nomadism in modern literature. Usually, it is portrayed as a counteraction to modern urbanization (Özkan, 2020). It is important to mention the literary transformations of ancient archetypes in contemporary narratives. For example, the *batyr* (warrior) was historically depicted as a defender of the people. Still, in modern works, this image represents the struggle against ideological oppression and the necessity to be confident and determined (Zharylgapov & Takirov, 2023).

According to Özkan (2020), Ilyas Zhansugurov remains one of the most eminent Kazakh poets, widely recognized for his vivid portrayals of nomadic life. It was emphasized that Zhansugurov is skilled in conveying the values of freedom, resilience, and the spirituality of the Kazakh people (Mamayev et al., 2021). Aitbaeva (2022) noted that Zhansugurov developed a distinctive poetic language by incorporating various customs, myths, and proverbs into his works. At the same time, Zhansugurov's literary style is characterized by rich and expressive poetic language (Aitbaeva & Tarakov, 2023). He often employs parallelism, repetition, and alliteration (Mukhtarova et al., 2024). The scholars refer to these techniques as a mirror of the structure of Kazakh oral poetry. Additionally, the use of metaphors and personification adds emotional depth to his verses. Zhansugurov demonstrates a strong narrative style, particularly in his long poems, where he weaves historical and contemporary themes (Bulanov & Kyiakmetova, 2024). Thematic analyses of his poetry (Aitbaeva, 2022; Özkan, 2020) highlight recurring concerns with national identity, social justice, and the transformation of Kazakh society under the dual pressures of modernization and political change. Other scholars underscore his emphasis on cultural preservation, resistance to oppression, and the dignity of labor, portraying the working class (Syzydykova et al., 2023). It was also noted that Zhansugurov drew inspiration from ancient times, capturing the nostalgia of traditional Kazakh customs and heroic historical episodes (Kungurova et al., 2021).

Therefore, this scholarly investigation is vital for understanding the profound connection between oral folk traditions and the written literary heritage of Kazakhstan. Analyzing folk motifs in Zhansugurov's poetry may reveal the new meanings of traditional symbols, myths, and values in Kazakh society. Interpreting these motifs may also outline their evolution in today's literary discourse.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The research emphasized the role of literature in shaping cultural identity with a particular focus on the broader context of Kazakh oral and written heritage. By examining Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry, it was found that integrating traditional imagery, symbols, and themes enriches a poetic line and conveys the cultural background of the Kazakh language through literature. The research model implied a hermeneutic approach, defining a folk motif as a constantly evolving cultural element with significant historical, social, and philosophical meanings (Fluck, 2019). This methodology enabled an exploration of Zhansugurov's contribution to the synthesis of folklore and modern literary expression, allowing the researchers to trace the historical transformations and evolving practices of Kazakh ritual culture as reflected in modern poetic texts.

Furthermore, the research model is grounded in literary theory, with a focus on the interrelationships between narrative texts and their contexts (Ibrahim et al., 2024). The theory was employed to describe the functions of folk motifs through intertextual references, thereby forming a positive national identity, promoting patriotism, and evoking collective memories related to the native country. Additionally, the research elucidated the peculiarities of Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetic language by comparing it to similar cultural narratives in other literary traditions. This theory encouraged us to conduct the aesthetic and structural analysis of Zhansugurov's folk motifs and to reveal their meaning in different historical contexts, illuminating the interplay between culture and history.

B. Data Collection

This research aimed to analyze the influence of folk motifs in Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry and to interpret these elements within contemporary literary contexts. The primary data consisted of original poetic texts that featured folk motifs. The study systematically examined Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetic works, prioritizing those that incorporated elements of oral folklore and traditional symbols. These texts included poems *Dombra* (1924), *Kui* (1929), *The Steppe* (1930s), *Kuishi* (1934), and *Kulager* (1936). The selection criteria were based on the following parameters: (1) poems should reflect Kazakh oral heritage; (2) poems should be widely recognized and demonstrate the author's literary style; (3) poems should be written at various times (between 1924 and 1936) representing the change of author's emotional state and external circumstances. Literary critiques and historical documents were used to provide a comprehensive understanding of Zhansugurov's contribution to the development of Kazakh national literature. The researchers utilized both the Web of Science and Scopus databases for literary journals. Also, they added all journals that met several requirements: (1) journals with a specific focus on literary theory; (2) journals published by Kazakh educational institutions and research organizations; (3) journals published during the recent five years; (4) journals with a high impact factor. Furthermore, 133 articles were selected, ensuring a comprehensive overview of the research problems. Thematically, they can be divided into five groups: (1) articles on general literary studies – 18; (2) articles revealing the connection between the development of Kazakh literary and socio-political events at a certain period – 23; (3) articles studying the folklore in poetry – 34; (4) articles examining the works of certain Kazakh poets – 41; and (5) articles specifically addressing the literary contributions of Ilyas Zhansugurov – 17.

C. Instruments and Procedures

A combination of methodological approaches was employed to achieve the research objectives. First, historical analysis was used to examine Ilyas Zhansugurov's literary texts under the impact of the early twentieth century's social, cultural, and political circumstances (cultural suppression, land seizures, economic displacement, industrialization, and urbanization). Second, stylistic analysis served as a main instrument to identify the integration of folk elements in Zhansugurov's poetic expression. This analysis involved a detailed examination of the linguistic instruments in his works, such as metaphors, symbolism, repetition, and rhythmic structures, and their subsequent categorization. Third, contextual analysis established the connection between folk motifs and their background. During the research, Zhansugurov's poetry was studied as an example of a reflection of folk motifs in collective memory. Fourth, the intertextual approach was applied to enhance the study. It examined the interaction of Zhansugurov's folk motifs with other literary and folkloric texts. Fifth, a comparative analysis was used to compare Ilyas Zhansugurov's texts with works of other Kazakh poets who depict folklore patterns. Table 1 represents the overview of instruments and procedures used during the research.

TABLE 1
OVERVIEW OF INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES

Method	Purpose	Units for analysis
Historical analysis	To understand the impact of specific periods and events on the literary themes in Zhansugurov's poetry	Historical sources, literary critiques, and ethnographic studies
Stylistic analysis	To explain the uniqueness of Zhansugurov's style	Linguistic and structural levels of poems
Contextual analysis	To understand the impact of external factors on the themes used in the poetic texts of Zhansugurov	Author's biography, reception context
Intertextual analysis	To examine the relationships between Zhansugurov's poetry and folklore texts	Fairy tales, songs, and legends
Comparative analysis	To explore the relationships between Zhansugurov's poetry and other literary works	Poetry of classical and modern authors

D. Data Analysis

The data analysis combined statistical and descriptive methods to study the peculiarities of folk motifs in Ilyas Zhansugurov’s poetry and interpret them in light of modern times (Figure 1).

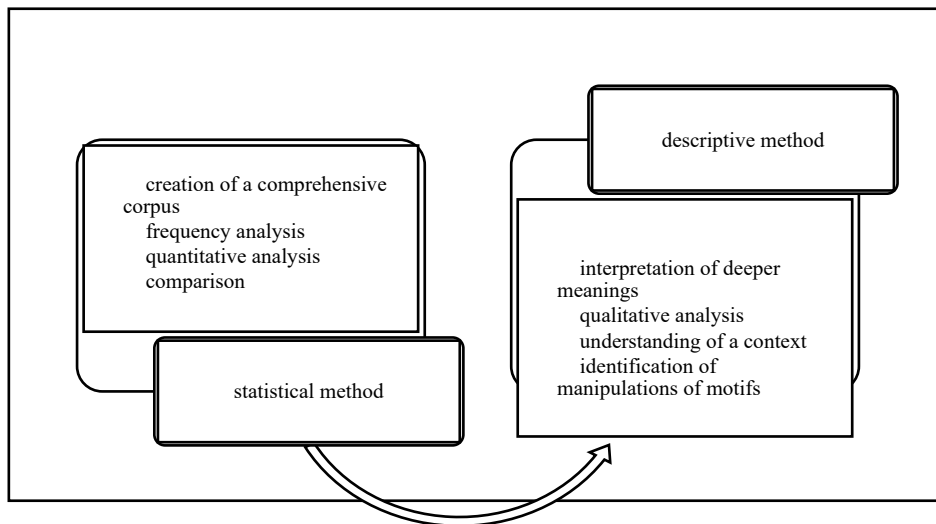


Figure 1. Data Analysis Framework

The first step was to apply the statistical method. It involved the creation of a comprehensive corpus of Zhansugurov’s works, selecting poems where folklore patterns were used extensively. Then, a frequency analysis was conducted. It helped identify the use of specific motifs in the text. Additionally, the data were analyzed quantitatively to measure the frequency of each pattern and identify the use of various motifs. The statistical analysis also included comparative techniques. The motifs in Zhansugurov’s poetry were compared with Kazakh folklore texts of different genres (epic poems, traditional songs, proverbs and sayings, folk tales, legends, ritual chants, folklore performances with music, and oral poetry). A descriptive method was used to supplement this. It interpreted the meanings of motifs selected during the statistical analysis. It included qualitative analysis to reveal symbols and hidden connotations in Ilyas Zhansugurov’s poetry. Other techniques focus on understanding the chosen texts and identifying the manipulations of folk motifs.

IV. RESULTS

A. The Depiction of Kazakh National Identity and Cultural Heritage During the Early Soviet Period

The Soviet period profoundly transformed Kazakhstan’s political, social, and cultural landscape (Cameron, 2020). The Bolshevik government implemented aggressive policies of Sovietization, which aimed to negatively affect traditional Kazakh structures. Soviet authorities also sought to suppress the Kazakh language, customs, and religious practices. Then, Zhansugurov faced significant oppression due to his unflinching commitment to Kazakh national identity and cultural heritage (Nakispekova, 2024). His work, rooted in Kazakh traditions, was often seen as politically unaligned with the Soviet project. Besides, his open criticism of Soviet policies, such as forced collectivization, led to his persecution.

Studying Ilyas Zhansugurov’s poetry (Zhansugurov & Seifullin, 1973), it was found that the steppe and the nomadic lifestyle are central themes. In *The Steppe*, he reflects on the land’s spiritual significance and its role in shaping Kazakh identity. He portrays the steppe as a symbol of the Kazakh people’s deep connection to their heritage. In *Dombra*, Zhansugurov emphasizes the role of the dombra, a traditional string instrument, as a symbol of the Kazakh spirit and identity. In *Kui*, the poet elevates the role of conventional music, expressing the soul of the Kazakh people, who lived in harmony with nature and respected their traditions. These works reflect Zhansugurov’s efforts to immortalize the Kazakh way of life in the face of rapid political and social change during the Soviet era. In *Kulager*, Zhansugurov draws on the heroism of the nomads, showcasing the courage of a people who, despite political upheaval, remain rooted in their ancestral traditions. Table 2 presents an analytical overview of how Kazakh national identity and cultural heritage are depicted in Zhansugurov’s poetry.

TABLE 2
THE DEPICTION OF KAZAKH NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH ZHANSUGUROV’S POETRY

Category	Depicted elements
Traditional culture	Description of the steppe, nomadic lifestyle, and the customs of Kazakh people
Ancestral wisdom	Showing the values of wisdom, courage, and honor
Resistance to Sovietization	Glorification of Kazakh traditions and the indigenous lifestyle
Heroism and national pride	Mentioning of Kazakh historical figures

Zhansugurov's portrayal of Kazakh national identity not only captured the essence of the steppe, nomadic lifestyle, and ancestral values but also played a significant role in revitalizing his people's literary heritage.

B. The Influence of Zhansugurov's Folk Motifs on Kazakh National Poetic Traditions

The analysis of Zhansugurov's (1958, 1973, 1984) poetry revealed that he skillfully adapted traditional Kazakh folk motifs into his written poetry, preserving and revitalizing the nation's cultural heritage. In the epic poem, *Kulager*, he employs rhythmic, musical language and vivid imagery to narrate the tragic fate of a legendary racehorse, a symbol of freedom and national pride in Kazakh folklore. In *Dombra*, he personifies the traditional Kazakh musical instrument, weaving it into the fabric of oral traditions, much like *zhyrau* did through song and verse. *Kui* and *Kuishi* further illustrate this connection by transforming musical compositions and their historical narratives into poetic form.

During the research, it was found that Zhansugurov's use of folk motifs contributed to the strengthening of Kazakh national identity and cultural pride, particularly during the early Soviet period, when policies of collectivization and Russification threatened indigenous traditions (Bulanov & Kyiakhmetova, 2024). Zhansugurov's poetry served as both a celebration of cultural identity and a reflection on the beauty and the pain of the past; the author also declared the acts of resistance against Soviet efforts to strengthen a national identity through aesthetic elements and structures in poems (Aitbaeva & Tarakov, 2023). At the same time, incorporating folk songs and legends ensured that Kazakh heritage remained a living force rather than a relic of the past (Zakirova et al., 2023).

Based on literary sources (Zhansugurov, 1984) and recent scholarly research (Aitbaeva, 2022; Tokşılıkova & Abdul Rakhmanuly, 2023), this study highlights the significant contribution of Zhansugurov's folk motifs to the development of Kazakh poetic traditions and the preservation of oral folk art (Figure 2).

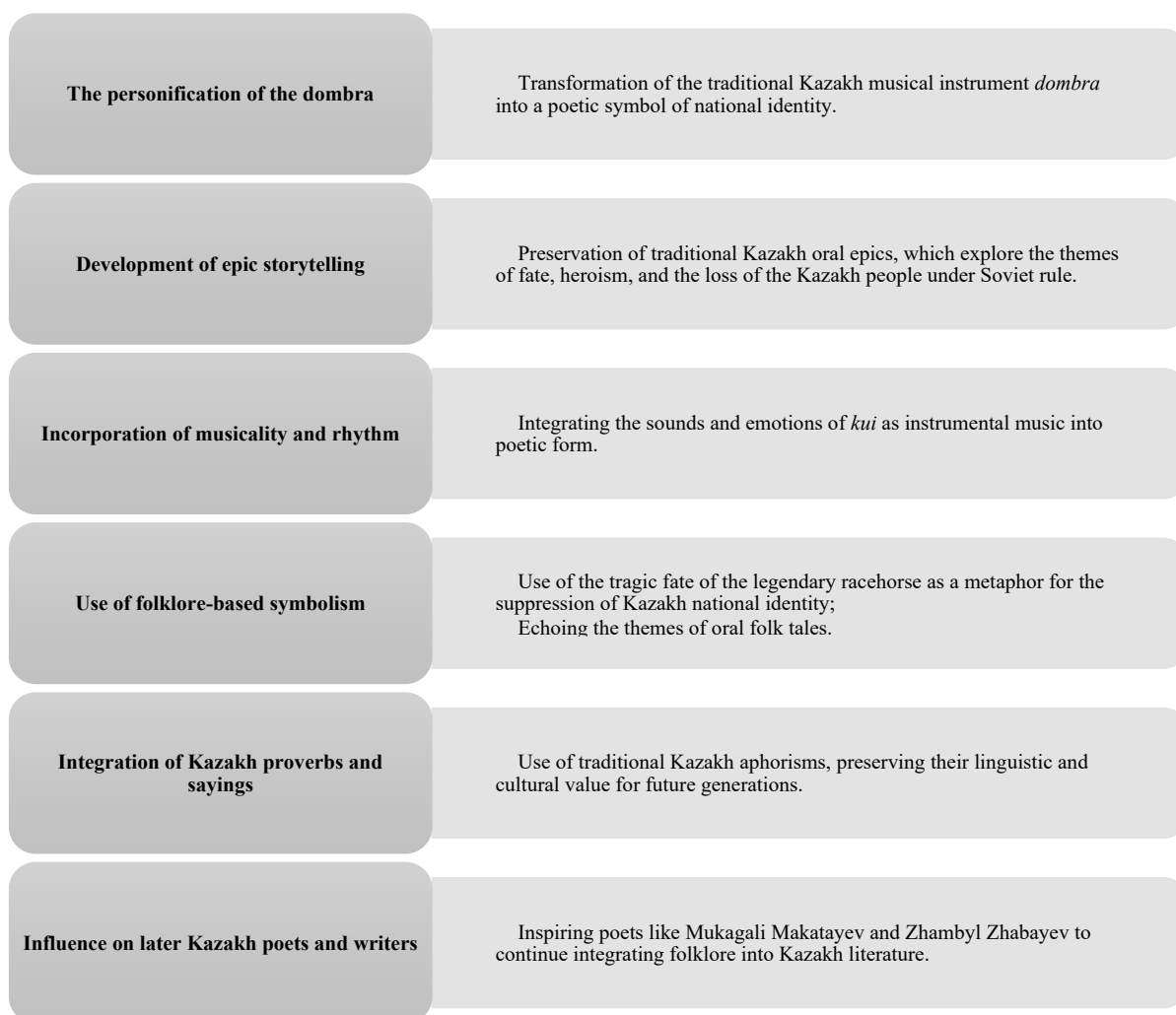


Figure 2. Zhansugurov's Contribution to the Development of Kazakh National Poetic Traditions

In this context, it is important to compare Ilyas Zhansugurov's use of folk motifs with that of other prominent Kazakh poets. Thus, Zhansugurov's use of folk motifs stands out among Kazakh poets due to his ability to blend oral tradition with literary expression, creating a rich, rhythmic, and deeply symbolic poetic style. Unlike Saken Seifullin, who focused on revolutionary themes and the modernization of Kazakh society, Zhansugurov remained deeply rooted in traditional Kazakh folklore, myths, and legends (Omarov, 2021). Zhansugurov's epic poem, *Kulager*, is a vivid example of utilizing

the oral storytelling tradition in written form. Hence, Zhambyl Zhabayev, a qayyn or Kazakh traditional folksinger, incorporated several folklore variations into his poems, making them accessible to most people (Tebegeenov & Kozhashev, 2019). A comparative analysis of the poetry of Mukhtar Auezov, Olzhas Suleimenov, and Ilyas Zhansugurov was conducted. For example, Auezov introduced a native form of poetic folklore as a lyric-epic story with a dramatic plotline (Nurgali et al., 2021). Suleimenov used folklore to synthesize Soviet anticolonial themes (Caffee, 2020). To compare, Zhansugurov explored various topics and incorporated folk symbols to illustrate the aesthetic richness and mythic depth of Kazakh culture (Aitbaeva & Tarakov, 2023).

C. Interpretation of Zhansugurov's Folk Motifs in Modern Times

Ilyas Zhansugurov's use of folk motifs remains highly relevant in modern times. According to scholars (Matayeva et al., 2025; Özkan, 2020), they continue to shape Kazakh national identity and literary traditions. Through his symbolism, oral storytelling, and folk legends, he reconnects contemporary readers with their cultural heritage (Kungurova et al., 2021; Zhansugurov, 1973). For example, the traditional Kazakh musical instrument featured in *Dombra* serves as a potent metaphor for national spirit, resilience, and historical continuity. And today, the dombra remains a powerful symbol of Kazakh identity (Rancier, 2024). His poem, *Kulager*, goes beyond a simple folk tale to symbolize the loss of innocence, betrayal, and the harsh realities of life. This theme remains relevant today as Kazakhstan navigates its post-Soviet identity and grapples with historical memory (Boman & Mussakhanova, 2024). *Kui* illustrates historical narratives with the use of traditional melodies, which is a widely used technique among modern poets. Thus, Sabit Mukanov, in his poem *Song about an Orphan*, explains the bitter emotions of an orphan, describing *domra* and *kui* (Bahargul, 2023).

A detailed analysis of Zhansugurov's (1973, 1984) poetry identified four key motifs: the dombra, the steppe, the horse, and the *kuishi*, each serving as a powerful symbol of Kazakh cultural traditions (Figure 3).

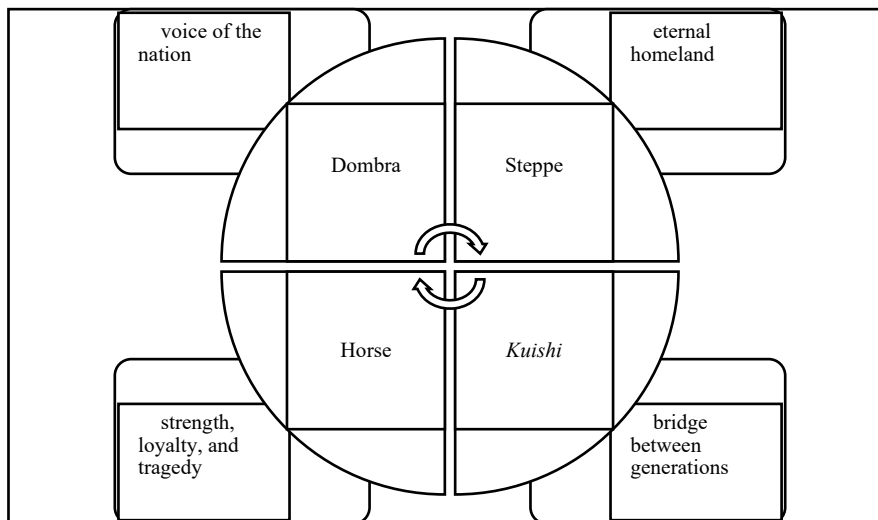


Figure 3. Key Motifs in Zhansugurov's Poetry

The dombra is portrayed as a symbol of Kazakh identity, history, and cultural expression. A cultural phenomenon of the great steppe is another motif, particularly in *The Steppe*, where Zhansugurov describes the nomadic spirit in the mysterious land. Figuratively, the steppe represents freedom, independence, courage, and endurance. Today, the concept of the "Great Steppe" is utilized as an ideological management tool, representing Kazakhstan's positioning in the Eurasian geopolitical arena (Ismakova et al., 2019). Horses are often described as symbols of cultural identity and resistance, as well as carriers of historical myths and cultural artifacts (Tokshylykova et al., 2024). Regarding Zhansugurov's poetry, *Kulager's* story describes a horse as a metaphor for betrayal, loss, and political oppression. The *kuishi* appears in *Kuishi* and *Kui*, where it is depicted as a bridge between generations. Music is considered a keeper of Kazakh oral traditions, using melodies to tell stories of love, war, and heroism. Zhansugurov's *kuishi* stresses the importance of cultural continuity, reminding us about folk traditions.

It is important to reveal the adaptation of Ilyas Zhansugurov's traditional ideas and motifs in the works of modern Kazakh poets. For example, the steppe, celebrated as the idealized space, symbolizes freedom in Zhansugurov's poems. Still, it is viewed as a nostalgic image, highlighting the contrast between traditional nomadic life and contemporary city life. For example, Ilyas Zhansugurov wrote in his poem *The Steppe Today*:

*The spring sun rays shine,
And you reflect them in the sky again,
Spacious steppe, endless land.*
Olzhas Suleimenov describes the steppe in *Argamak*:
*You are famous for your herds,
There roam the black horses.*

*In showers of dry grass.
Give me a young horse,
The veins play inside,
I will gallop to the edge,
The city and the steppe
Tilting.*

In *Kulager*, Zhansugurov showed the loss of freedom and the traditional nomadic life through the image of the horse. Importantly, the horse was compared to a suppressed nation. He wrote:

*My incomparable Kulager, help me live,
How you would now gallop ahead of the baigi!
Here in the fatal ravine, in the gloomy place
I mixed your blood and my tears.*

Galym Zhailybai, in his poem *From Altai to Tanirtau*, wrote the following line:

*Let the bird Tanirtau flash for me
With its blue fiery wing.
Let the horse that was under the Hun's saddle
neigh at the ancient kurgan.*

Here, the horse is depicted as a symbol of military glory, evoking Kazakhstan's rich military heritage. The poet also speaks about independence, speed, and the greatness of nature.

Thus, contemporary Kazakh poets could reinterpret Zhansugurov's folk motifs, adapting them to new realities. At the same time, folk motifs in poetry require careful expression through distinct literary techniques and instruments.

D. Use of Stylistic Instruments in Zhansugurov's Poetry

Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry introduces numerous stylistic instruments (Rakymzhan et al., 2022; Zhansugurov, 1984). Through the use of symbolism, Zhansugurov elevates the themes of nomadism. His metaphors are often rooted in the natural world, where elements like the steppe, the dombra, and the wind serve as literal images and symbols of the Kazakh spirit. These stylistic tools help Zhansugurov convey a connection to his cultural roots. Also, he skillfully utilizes rhythmic patterns and repetition to reflect the oral traditions of Kazakh poetry. Notably, the recurrent emphasis on motifs such as the dombra and the steppe underscores their significance as emblems of Kazakh identity. Other stylistic instruments include hyperbole, contrast, imagery, allusion, irony, and rhetorical questions. Table 3 provides a detailed analysis of the stylistic instruments employed throughout Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetic oeuvre.

TABLE 3
STYLISTIC INSTRUMENTS USED IN ILYAS ZHANSUGUROV'S POETRY

Poem	Instrument	Explanation
<i>Dombra</i>	Metaphor	The dombra symbolizes the spirit and soul of the Kazakh people.
	Hyperbole	The poet describes the music of the dombra as "reaching the heavens," emphasizing its cultural significance.
<i>Kui</i>	Symbolism	The steppe is used as a symbol of freedom and heritage.
	Imagery	Zhansugurov describes the steppe's colors and sounds to create a vivid picture of the natural world.
	Personification	The wind is personified as a messenger carrying the dombra's tune.
<i>Kulager</i>	Repetition	The phrase "Kulager, my dear Kulager" creates an emotional connection to the horse.
	Rhetorical Question	The poet asks, "What is freedom?" referring to deeper meanings of life.
<i>The Steppe</i>	Contrast	Zhansugurov contrasts the harsh realities of life with the beauty of the Kazakh landscape.
	Irony	The poet reflects ironically on the "progress" that means cultural loss.
<i>Kuishi</i>	Allusion	Zhansugurov references Kazakh myths and historical figures in his poems.

Various stylistic techniques add richness and depth to a poem. These techniques allow the poet to engage the reader's senses and emotions, creating a deeper connection with the poetic text.

V. DISCUSSION

The comprehensive literature review revealed that folk motifs are extensively employed in both classical and modern Kazakh poetry (Shoinzhanova et al., 2024). These motifs, rooted in folklore and oral literature, challenge mainstream ideas of Kazakh identity, the nomadic lifestyle, and the connection between humans and their surrounding nature (Kungurova et al., 2021). Recent findings (Bekzhanova & Durrani, 2025; Mamayev et al., 2021) demonstrate that Kazakh poetry has evolved into a tool for both personal and national reflection, with the incorporation of folk motifs facilitating the ongoing redefinition of identity. At the same time, the research outcomes revealed that Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry incorporates several folk motifs, including the steppe, nomadic lifestyle, and Kazakh customs, which are representative of traditional Kazakh culture. Additionally, the poet emphasizes the manifestation of wisdom, courage, and honor in his poems. Some works relate to resistance to Soviet rule by glorifying Kazakh traditions.

According to several scientific sources, traditional culture has been known to shape modern Kazakh literature, as it establishes values and themes, and employs specific storytelling techniques and genres (Özkan, 2020). It was found that incorporating folklore elements into modern Kazakh literature helps keep it dynamic, socially conscious, and globally aware (Boman & Mussakhanova, 2024). The use of folk motifs makes Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry a unique and symbolic phenomenon within Kazakh literature. Studying the role of Ilyas Zhansugurov revealed several objective transformations that remain relevant today. Thus, the analysis of Zhansugurov's poetic texts demonstrated that his contribution encompasses the personification of the *dombra*, the refinement of epic poetry form, and the utilization of folklore-based symbolism. Also, the researchers outlined that Ilyas Zhansugurov could integrate several proverbs and sayings effectively into poetry. This technique enhanced the characters described, making them appear wise, experienced, or culturally rooted. More importantly, the research revealed that Zhansugurov's poetry inspired later Kazakh poets, who were able to explore national identity and historical memory in their works.

In modern Kazakh literature, folk motifs are frequently reinterpreted in light of the evolving socio-political landscape (Kungurova et al., 2021; Zakirova et al., 2023). Writers typically introduce traditional themes that portray the nomadic life or a hero's destiny, often alongside burning issues such as the struggles of post-Soviet society, globalization, and digitalization (Boman & Mussakhanova, 2024). According to Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry, four main motifs were differentiated – the *dombra*, the steppe, the horse, and the *kuishi*. The findings emphasized that these motifs serve as powerful symbols of the Kazakhs. For example, the *dombra* is closely tied to the voice of the nation, and the steppe represents the freedom and courage of the nomad. The horse depicted betrayal, loss, or even Stalin-era repression. The *kuishi* appeared as a tool to foster dialogue between different generations.

Considering the recent findings, stylistic devices enhance the text's expressiveness and contribute to the author's unique style (Bataeva & Zhaksylykova, 2024). Currently, Kazakh poetry is facing new trends, particularly the use of various stylistic devices aimed at enhancing a text's aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual impact. Some of them refer to metaphor (Rakymzhan et al., 2022), parallelism (Khaybullina et al., 2022), comparison, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony (Tortkulbaeva, 2023). Some authors (Aubakir et al., 2019) note that Kazakh poets often employ culturally specific poetisms to name realities or individual notions. The stylistic instruments in Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry included metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, personification, repetition, rhetorical question, contrast, irony, and allusion. The findings demonstrated that incorporating various stylistic elements into his poetry imbues the works with profound meaning, vivid complexity, and deep emotional impact.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study outlined the richness of Ilyas Zhansugurov's poetry in folk motifs and their impact on the reader's emotions and thoughts. It was found that the poet focused on describing the steppe, the nomadic lifestyle, and the customs of the Kazakh people, showcasing the values of wisdom, courage, and honor, and glorifying Kazakh traditions and the indigenous lifestyle. The use of folk motifs makes Zhansugurov's poetry unique in Kazakh national literature. The findings showed that Ilyas Zhansugurov contributed to the personification of the *dombra*, the development of epic storytelling, the use of folklore-based symbolism, and the incorporation of proverbs and sayings within the poetic texts. The research proved that Zhansugurov's writings inspired later Kazakh poets and encouraged them to integrate folk motifs. Besides, four key motifs were differentiated in Zhansugurov's poetry. They included the *dombra*, the steppe, the horse, and the *kuishi*. At the same time, it was revealed that several stylistic devices were employed by Zhansugurov, including metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, personification, repetition, rhetorical questions, contrast, irony, and allusion.

This research demonstrates the deep connection between oral traditions and written literary forms. This understanding reinforces the role of folklore as a foundation for national poetry. Moreover, it highlights the significance of cultural heritage in shaping national identity and consciousness. Beyond literary analysis, the study has implications for Kazakhstan's broader socio-cultural and historical context. The examination of Zhansugurov's poetry reveals the national identity of the early Soviet period and explores the intricate relationship between cultural preservation and political influence. The findings suggest that folk motifs were not just poetic devices but also subtle forms of resistance and self-assertion in the face of Soviet efforts to reshape Kazakh traditions. This perspective enriches discussions on cultural resilience, illustrating the role of literature in negotiating identity and historical memory during ideological transformation. Additionally, interpreting Ilyas Zhansugurov's folk motifs in modern times opens new gaps for contemporary literary studies. The insights gained from this research can be applied to a comparative analysis of modern Kazakh poets and writers, facilitating a deeper understanding of the traditional folk elements they incorporate into their works.

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