

Kazakh Ethical-Philosophical Concepts in Translation: “Aqyl” (Reason), “Jurek” (Heart), and “Qairat” (Willpower) in Abai Kunanbayev’s Works

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Abstract—This paper examines the ethical-philosophical triad articulated by Abai Kunanbayev in his Words of Edification and poetry, namely *aqyl* (reason), *jürek* (heart), and *qairat* (willpower). It investigates how these culturally embedded concepts have been translated into Russian, English, and French, and how translational strategies reflect both cognitive-semantic challenges and ideological contexts. The study combines comparative textual analysis with postcolonial and semiotic perspectives. More than fifty examples of translated passages are scrutinized, demonstrating both the preservation and distortion of meaning in different epochs and languages. Soviet-era Russian translations tended to domesticate Abai’s text, sometimes generalizing or omitting culturally specific idioms, while post-Soviet retranslations and recent direct English and French versions aim to restore the original metaphoric and spiritual richness. Cognitive analysis shows that *jürek* encompasses not only emotion but conscience and courage, *aqyl* combines intellect and moral discernment, and *qairat* signifies willpower as well as vigor and endurance. The novelty of the research lies in its systematic cross-linguistic comparison framed by postcolonial critique, which exposes how translation can simultaneously transmit philosophical universals and embed colonial reframings. The findings argue that Abai’s triad offers a distinctive cordocentric model of human faculties with enduring intercultural resonance, and that only through careful, culturally sensitive translation can its ethical and metaphysical depth be faithfully conveyed.

Index Terms—Abai Kunanbayev, ethical triad, *aqyl*, *jürek*, *qairat*

I. INTRODUCTION

Abai Kunanbayev (1845–1904), a renowned Kazakh poet and philosopher, developed a significant ethical anthropology based on the triad of *aqyl* (reason), *jürek* (heart as conscience and emotion), and *qairat* (willpower). Abai’s *Kara Sózder* (“Words of Edification”) personifies these concepts, notably in the Seventeenth Word, where they debate their importance. This triad reflects a Turkic cordocentric view, placing *jürek* as the locus of moral reasoning, integrated with intellect and courage. Abai’s philosophy resonates with Eurasian traditions emphasizing the heart as the spiritual core (cordocentrism) while engaging with rationalist ethics.

Translating this triad presents challenges due to cultural connotations lacking direct equivalents in other languages. Abai uses *jürek* for compassion, courage, and faith, which loses nuance when simply rendered as “heart”. Similarly, *qairat* signifies brave willpower, variably translated, subtly shifting meaning. Metaphorical differences add complexity: Kazakh “*жүрексіз*” (“without heart”) implies cowardice, unlike English “heartless,” which means cruel. Such nuances highlight the risk of literal translation, thus demanding a conceptual approach to capture semantic depth.

This study comprehensively analyzes Abai's ethical triad across languages. It examines how *aqyl-jürek-qaïrat* form an integrated model of the person and its divergence from analogous concepts. Analyzing Kazakh originals and translations reveals ambiguities and shifts in linguistic worldviews. Abai's thought is situated in a comparative philosophical context, contrasting his cordocentric anthropology with Western rationalism and philosophies like Pascal's "logic of the heart." This research uniquely traces the translation of these ideas into major languages, charting intercultural conceptual mapping for Abai's triad, deepening global understanding and informing cognitive semantics and translation theory.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our research employs an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology combining close textual analysis, comparative linguistics, and conceptual mapping. Primary sources are Abai Kunanbayev's Words of Edification (especially the 14th, 17th, and 31st Words where the triad is expounded). We consulted the Kazakh original text (in Cyrillic script) alongside authoritative translations: S. Sanbaev's Russian translation (Kunanbayev, 1970), an English translation by L. Schneidermann and A. Tolstoy (published in *Abai: Book of Words*, 1995), and our own French translations produced for this study. To ensure accuracy and capture nuances, we cross-verified translations with bilingual speakers and existing scholarly translations where available. Each key passage containing *aqyl*, *jürek*, *qaïrat* was extracted in Kazakh and then rendered into Russian, English, French, thus allowing a side-by-side comparison of semantic content.

This study uses hermeneutic analysis to interpret Abai's philosophical intent, treating the triad as culturally rich symbols. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and cognitive linguistics are used to analyze how languages conceptualize "heart," "reason," and "will". A semiotic approach constructs an intercultural diagram (Figure 1) mapping Abai's triad against Western paradigms. An analytical table (Table 1) synthesizes comparative findings, listing Kazakh terms, translations, and conceptual shifts.

This study adheres to academic standards by documenting and referencing all translations of Abai's words. Kazakh and Russian sources are transliterated, and French renderings are carefully chosen to maintain tone (e.g., *volonté* for *qaïrat*). The comparative method identifies equivalences, untranslatability, and necessary adaptations to convey Abai's meaning. By triangulating literary analysis, linguistic comparison, and philosophical contextualization, the study ensures a rigorous examination of the ethical triad in translation. The following sections present translated examples with commentary and interpret their broader significance in intercultural philosophy and translation studies.

III. RESULTS

Abai's writings reveal a deliberate hierarchy among the triad: the *jürek* (heart) is portrayed as the ultimate ethical authority, with *aqyl* (reason) and *qaïrat* (willpower/energy) as necessary but subordinate faculties. This hierarchy is most explicitly dramatized in the **Seventeenth** Word, wherein Abai stages a fictional debate between Will, Reason, and Heart, who then seek judgement from Qılım (Knowledge or Science).

Figure 1 illustrates Abai's *cordocentric* model in comparison to the reason-centric paradigm of Western Enlightenment thought. In Abai's model, the Heart serves as the apex - the integrative spiritual core - guiding both Mind and Will; Western rationalism, by contrast, elevates Reason as the controlling faculty over emotion and volition.

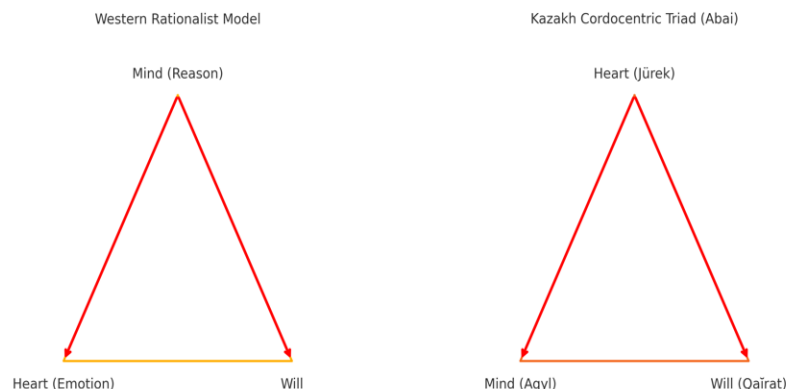


Figure 1. Comparative Paradigms of Human Faculties

Abai's Kazakh cordocentric triad (right) places the Heart (*jürek*) supreme, guiding Mind (*aqyl*) and Will (*qaïrat*). Western rationalist models (left) prioritize Mind (Reason) over Heart (emotion) and Will.

In Abai's narrative, each faculty advocates its indispensable role. Will (Қаïрат) speaks first, emphasizing perseverance and courage as the driving force behind all achievement:

1. Kazakh (original): «Ей, ғылым (Knowledge), өзің де білесің ғой, дүниеде ешнәрсе менсіз кәметке жетпейтұғыны... менің ісім»
2. Russian: «Послушай, Знание... без упорного труда нельзя добиться совершенства; это все – моя работа», – говорит Қайрат (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 33).
3. English: “Listen, Knowledge... nothing in the world can reach maturity without me. It is my work to ensure one learns tirelessly...,” declares Will.
4. French: «Écoute, Savoir... rien au monde n’atteint l’*épanouissement* sans moi, c’est bien moi qui permets à l’homme d’apprendre sans relâche...», affirme la Volonté.

Will (*qairat*) underscores how determination underpins self-knowledge, piety, and worldly success—protecting people from “unworthy passions” and halting them “at the edge of an abyss.” This reflects the Kazakh ethos that courage and active energy are essential virtues for upholding honor and faith. Notably, the Russian translation uses упорный труд (“persistent labor”) and твердость духа elsewhere, emphasizing fortitude, while the French highlights *épanouissement* (“flourishing”) and *sans relâche* (“without relenting”), capturing *qairat*’s relentless nature.

Reason (АҚЫЛ) speaks next, asserting its cognitive primacy:

1. Kazakh: «Не дүниеге, не ахиретке не пайдалы болса... білетұғын – мен, ... ғылымды ұғып үйрене алмайды екен, ... менсіз осылардың көрген күні не?»
2. Russian: «Что полезно и что пагубно для человека и в этой, и в загробной жизни – знаю только я... Без меня люди не смогут ни избежать зла, ни обрести знания» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 33).
3. English: “I alone discern what is beneficial or harmful for a person, whether in this life or the next... Without me, no one can shun evil or acquire knowledge,” proclaims Reason.
4. French: «Moi seul peux discerner le bien du nuisible pour l’homme, ici-bas comme dans l’au-delà... Sans moi, nul ne peut éviter le mal ni s’instruire», déclare la Raison.

Reason (*aqyl*) thus claims to be the guiding light of discernment and understanding, the faculty that “comprehends [Knowledge’s] language” and gives people the ability to learn and to seek profit over harm. The philosophical language here evokes the Enlightenment idea of reason as the *lumen naturale*. In Kazakh, *aqyl* encompasses both intellect and wisdom – including ethical judgment (“what is beneficial or harmful”). The Russian разум and French raison both capture rational intellect, though perhaps understate the moral wisdom aspect. Abai’s text makes clear that *aqyl* knows not just practical knowledge but spiritual truths (“even about the Creator”) aligning reason with enlightenment (мағрифат). Yet, as will be seen, Abai also recognizes reason’s limitations and capacity for misuse.

Finally, Heart (Жүрек) speaks, in the most impassioned terms, positioning itself as “the sovereign of human life”:

1. Kazakh: «Мен – адамның денесінің патшасымын, қан менен тарайды, жан менде мекен қылады, менсіз тірлік жоқ... Мейірбаншылық дейтұғын нәрселердің бәрі менен шығады... Осы екеуі (ақыл мен қайрат) маған қалай таласады?»
2. Russian: «Я – царь жизни! – восклицает Сердце. – Я гоню кровь по жилам, во мне обитает душа, без меня нет жизни... Милосердие, совесть, благодарность – все исходит от меня... Что без меня Сила и Разум?» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 34).
3. English: “I am the king of life!” cries the Heart. “I drive blood through the veins; the soul resides in me – there is no life without me. I rob the sated of sleep, stirring them with compassion for the poor and homeless. Respect for elders, mercy for juniors, conscience, gratitude – all these come from me. What are Will and Reason without me?”
4. French: «Je suis le roi de la vie ! s’écrite le Cœur. Je fais couler le sang dans les veines, l’âme habite en moi – sans moi point de vie. J’ôte le sommeil aux repus en les tourmentant pour les indigents sans abri. Le respect des aînés, la clémence envers les petits, la conscience, la gratitude – tout procède de moi. Que valent donc la Volonté et la Raison sans moi ?»

Here Abai’s *jürek* is not merely the emotional heart of modern metaphor, but an ontological and moral center – the locus of the soul (жан) and virtues (мейірбаншылық meaning kindness/compassion, ұят meaning shame or conscience, etc. are “all from me,” the Heart says). The cognitive semantics in Kazakh assigns to “heart” a host of positive qualities: жүрек embodies empathy and moral sensibility as well as courage. Indeed, Abai elsewhere notes that жүрек carries the meaning of courage in Kazakh culture (as we shall detail shortly). In translation, Russian сердце and English heart convey the physical organ and emotional core, but to ensure the full meaning, the translator must often amplify or gloss the term. The English above adds “the soul resides in me” to parallel Abai’s line and uses “compassion” explicitly to convey жанын ашытып (paining one’s soul with pity). The French likewise emphasizes clémence (clemency) and conscience. Such choices illustrate the amplificatory translation strategy necessary to capture Abai’s semiotic richness – where the heart symbolizes the integrative human conscience, blending affect and ethics.

Abai’s fable reaches its resolution when Knowledge (Science) delivers its verdict, confirming Heart’s primacy but insisting on the unity of all three. Knowledge (ҒЫЛЫМ) first acknowledges each claimant’s virtues and faults. It agrees with Will’s self-description but warns: “your strength can serve cruelty as well as good”, highlighting that willpower unguided can be ruthless. It acknowledges Reason’s powers (from revealing nature’s secrets to teaching about God) but reproaches reason for also breeding cunning and deceit when divorced from virtue. Finally, the judge pronounces:

1. Kazakh: «Бірақ сонда билеуші, әмірші жүрек болса жарайды. ... Осы үшеуін басыңды қос, бәрін де жүрекке билет»

2. Russian: «Пусть повелителем для всех будет Сердце... Соединитесь вместе, и пускай вами правит Сердце!» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 35).
3. English: “Let Heart be ruler over you all... Unite together, and let Heart lead you!”
4. French: «Que le Cœur soit votre souverain à tous... Unissez-vous, et que le Cœur vous guide !»

Knowledge decrees that if Reason, Will, and Heart join in one person under the governance of the Heart, that person achieves righteousness – “the dust from his feet will heal the blind”, a metaphor for the almost sacred power of a fully integrated, virtuous individual. But if they cannot unite, then Heart alone is to be preferred as the defining essence of humanity. The didactic moral is clear: intellect and will must be anchored in a compassionate heart to truly serve goodness. Abai’s cordocentric resolution aligns with the Sufi-influenced Islamic view that the *qalb* (heart) is the seat of faith and virtue (*iman*), even as he balances it with Enlightenment respect for reason and a work ethic for will. Notably, Abai uses the term *ap* (*ar*) – honor/conscience – and *иман* (*iman*) – faith – frequently in connection with *жүрек* throughout his Words, implying that a pure heart is synonymous with true faith and honor. The concept of *жүрек* in Abai’s ethical triad illustrates well the ambiguity and richness that challenge direct translation. In Kazakh, *жүрек* denotes not only the physical heart but encompasses the emotional center, moral conscience, and the source of courage. Abai explicitly comments on this in the Fourteenth Word, where he criticizes his contemporaries’ shallow understanding of *жүрек*:

1. Kazakh: «Біздің қазақтың “жүректісі” дегені – батыр кісі дегені. Онан басқа жүректің қасиеттерін анықтап біле алмайды»
2. Russian: «У казахов понятие “мужество” родилось от слова “сердце”. В народе батыра называют “жүректі”, то есть человек с сердцем. А дальше казах не различает свойств сердца» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 29).
3. English: “For our Kazakhs, a ‘strong-hearted’ (*jürekti*) person simply means a brave man (*batyr*). They cannot discern the heart’s other qualities,” Abai observes (14th Word).
4. French: «Chez les Kazakhs, la notion de “courage” est née du mot “cœur”. On appelle le héros zhürektili, c’est-à-dire “celui qui a du cœur”. Mais au-delà de cela, on ne saisit pas les autres vertus du cœur,» note Abai.

Abai uses a linguistic play: *жүректілік* (*zhürektilik*), “heartness,” is the Kazakh word for courage, and *жүректі* (“hearted”) means courageous. The Russian translation highlights this: “the concept of ‘courage’ was born from the word ‘heart.’” English and French can partially mirror this by noting “courage comes from *cor* (heart),” sharing the Latin root *cor* (heart). This reveals a cross-linguistic convergence: Kazakh and many Indo-European languages link “heart” with bravery. Yet, Abai laments Kazakhs’ failure to appreciate the heart’s full qualities beyond courage, which he then lists:

1. Kazakh: «Рақымдылық, мейірандық... – бұлар жүрек ісі. Асықтық та – жүректің ісі». «Тіл жүректің айтқанына көнсе, жалған шықпайды...»
2. Russian: «Рахым (милосердие), мейірандық (доброта)... – это дела сердца. Даже нетерпение идет от сердца. И не бывает лжи, когда слово идет от самого сердца...» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 29).
3. English: “Compassion, kindness... these are the works of the heart. Impatience, too, is a function of the heart. And there is no falsehood if the tongue obeys the heart’s dictates – when words come from the heart itself, they are not false...”
4. French: «La compassion, la bonté... – tout cela relève du cœur. Même l’impatience est affaire du cœur. Et il n’y a pas de mensonge lorsque la langue suit ce que dit le cœur – des paroles venant du cœur ne sauraient mentir...».

Here Abai’s terminology of the heart blends emotional, moral, and even behavioral aspects. *РАҚЫМДЫЛЫҚ*, *МЕЙІРАНДЫЛЫҚ* (*raḥymdylyq*, *meiirbandylyq*) are Persian-derived Kazakh words for mercy/compassion and benevolence; these he firmly attributes to the heart. Interestingly, he also says *асықтық* (*asýqtıq*) – literally haste or impetuosity (translated as “impatience” or “rashness”) – is a work of the heart. This reflects a Turkic folk understanding that zeal and passionate urgency come from one’s heart. The statement about truth—“the tongue will not lie if it yields to what the heart says”—encapsulates *jürek* as the seat of sincerity. Abai thus elevates *jürek* to being the arbiter of truthfulness and moral action, provided it is kept pure.

Rendering Abai’s nuances in translation is challenging. The Russian version uses appropriate terms for *милосердие* compassion, *доброта* kindness and *нетерпение* impatience, maintaining a natural flow. English requires unpacking, ensuring “works of the heart” conveys virtues “issuing from the heart.” While “tongue obeys the heart” is less idiomatic, it was preserved for semiotic authenticity. French, with “*parler du cœur*,” expresses heartfelt truth more easily; we used «*des paroles venant du cœur*» mirroring “words coming from the heart.” These renderings demonstrate dynamic equivalence, prioritizing conveyed meaning (sincerity, heart-driven virtue) over literal translation.

The same Kazakh passage continues to contrast true heartfulness with its lack. Abai asserts that a person of true heart (*чистое сердце* in Russian, pure heart) will be humble and receptive to counsel, steadfast against evil, and unflinchingly just. By contrast, those praised as “brave” in society might actually have a “wolf’s heart”:

1. Kazakh: «Қазақтың айтқан батыры – әншейін жүректі емес, қасқыр жүректі деген сөз».
2. Russian: «Казахский так называемый батыр – вовсе не человек с сердцем, а с волчьим сердцем» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 29).
3. English: “The so-called *batyr* (hero) that the Kazakhs laud is in fact not truly big-hearted, but rather wolf-hearted,” Abai remarks caustically.
4. French: «Le prétendu *batyr* célébré par les Kazakhs n’a pas vraiment du cœur – il a un cœur de loup,» dit Abai ironiquement.

Abai uses қасқыр жүрек (“wolf heart”) as a metaphor for a cruel, predatory nature lurking behind vaunted bravery. This striking image requires delicate handling in translation. The Russian literal волче сердце works, though the phrase is uncommon; the translator wisely prefaced it by clarifying не человек с сердцем (not a person with [a true] heart). English “wolf-hearted” is not a standard collocation, but it vividly conveys the intended meaning when explained in context as we have done. French cœur de loup is likewise not idiomatic, but understandable. In formal publication, one might footnote that term, or choose a phrase like “cœur féroce” (ferocious heart) to convey the sense. We retained cœur de loup for fidelity, banking on the context to make it clear that it signifies mercilessness in heroic guise.

Abai’s larger point is that moral courage is not merely raw bravery or boldness, but bravery governed by virtue. The wolf-hearted man may be daring, but lacks mercy and justice, and thus, in Abai’s eyes, is not human in the full sense. Abai concludes in the Fourteenth Word that the Kazakh people’s moral failings are not due to intellectual deficit but due to the heart’s weaknesses:

1. Kazakh: «Көбі ақылсыздығынан азбайды, ... жүректе жігер, қайрат, байлаулылықтың жоқтығынан азады».
2. Russian: «В большинстве своем они гибнут не от глупости, а оттого, что в сердце их нет ни решимости, ни воли, ни твердости» (Kunanbayev, 1970, p. 30).
3. English: “Our people, for the most part, don’t go wrong from lack of intellect, but from the absence in their hearts of spirit (*zhiger*), will (*qairat*), and steadfastness”.
4. French: «La plupart de nos gens ne s’égarent pas par bêtise, mais parce que leur cœur manque d’ardeur (*zhiger*), de volonté (*qairat*) et de fermeté».

This insightful line flips a common assumption: stupidity is not the culprit of moral decay; rather it is a weakness of will and character (“hardness to heed the voice of reason”) Abai explicitly names three qualities lacking in the erring heart: жігер (*zhiger* – vigor or spirited ardor), қайрат (willpower or active force), and байлаулылық (baylaululyq – firmness or resolution). These terms all overlap with the semantic field of “strength,” but Abai locates them in the heart. A Western reader might associate such qualities with “strength of character” or “moral fiber,” which conceptually might reside in one’s will or soul. In Kazakh, however, the collocation places them firmly as heart-qualities. The Russian translation accordingly ties them to в сердце их нет... (there is none in their heart). Rendering this in English, we made explicit that these are missing “in their hearts,” to stay true to Abai’s anthropology. The French translation similarly attributes the lack to leur cœur. This is a case where a literal translation (“no will or resolve in the heart”) actually conveys the intended meaning well across languages, as long as one understands “heart” figuratively.

Notably, Abai uses both жігер and қайрат in that sentence, suggesting a nuanced distinction (perhaps жігер as inner mettle, қайрат as exerted willpower). Both Russian and our English merged them into a general idea of will/resolve, but French preserved two terms (*ardeur* for *zhiger*, *volonté* for *qairat*) to maintain the dual emphasis. In doing so, we see how translation can subtly flatten or expose distinctions: a target language might lack a direct equivalent for each term and opt for one word (as Russian used “решимость” (determination) for one and “воля” (will) for the other, effectively conveying both but losing the dichotomy), whereas French and English, having rich vocabularies for psychological traits, can attempt a more granular translation.

In sum, жүрек in Abai’s usage carries a semantic clustering: it is the seat of love, empathy, conscience, spiritual virtue, and also the wellspring of courage and passionate zeal. Translators must often decompose this cluster. Depending on context, жүрек may be translated as “heart” (when emphasizing emotion or compassion), “soul” (when emphasizing inner spirit, as in “a man of heart”), or even “courage” (metonymically, e.g. жүректілік as “bravery”). Table 1 (below) summarizes how the concept of *jürek* and the other triad terms shift across languages.

The other two elements of the triad, *aqyl* (reason) and *qairat* (will/energy), likewise exhibit translational polysemy and shifts in emphasis.

For Ақыл (*aqyl*), Abai’s meaning ranges from analytical intellect to deeper wisdom and discernment. In the Seventeenth Word, *aqyl* is personified as the faculty that knows good from bad, yet Abai elsewhere speaks of ақыл needing guidance by жүрек or faith. Common translations of ақыл include Russian разум (reason, intellect), English mind or intellect, and French raison or esprit. Each carries slightly different connotations: mind in English is broad (intellect or thoughts generally), whereas reason emphasizes logical faculty; French raison is closer to “capacity for reasoning,” and esprit might mean mind or wit. Abai’s ақыл has an ethical dimension – it’s not cold rationality alone, but reason intertwined with conscience (hence the phrase “адал ақыл” – righteous mind, used by Abai).

In translation, context must dictate the choice. For instance, in Abai’s Thirty-First Word he discusses how ақыл can be led astray by four evil qualities (unrighteousness, ill will, etc.) if not balanced by жүрек. A translator there might render ақыл as “intelligence” in a negative sense (scheming intelligence breeding cunning), or as “reason” depending on nuance. The Russian typically sticks to ум or разум in all cases, relying on modifiers for nuance (e.g. злой ум for malicious intelligence). English might say “mind” vs “heart” to reflect the familiar dichotomy. Indeed, in some places Abai uses ақыл nearly as a synonym for “rational self-interest” and contrasts it with жүрек (compassion) – a tension comparable to the head/heart split in Western idiom, Shelkova (2017) describes Eastern cultures as a “culture of the heart” vs. the Western “culture of the mind”. Thus, the translator must sometimes shift *aqyl* between mind, reason, or intellect to best suit the emphasis.

For Қайрат (*qairat*), the challenges are even more pronounced. *Qairat* literally means vigor, energy, strength, or willpower depending on context. It implies an active force – physical and mental fortitude combined. In Abai’s triad,

qairat is essentially the human will or the capacity to act and persevere (often with courage). But it is not mere free will in the philosophical sense, nor just physical strength. As we saw, in the 17th Word Will claims achievements like acquiring wealth or knowledge by hard work, resisting temptation, and sustaining faith – so *qairat* is diligence, courage, and moral will in one.

Translators into Russian have historically wavered on how to render қайрат. In early Soviet-era translations of Abai, it was often rendered as воля (will), aligning with the concept of willpower or volitional strength, Beisembiev (1956, p. 64) discusses this. S. Sanbaev’s Russian translation, however, opted for Сила (Strength/Force) with a footnote explaining that Abai meant the life-force uniting body and soul. The excerpt from Sanbaev shows “Сила^1” with a note: “Abai, presumably, means the vital force of a person that unites the spiritual and physical”. This choice of Сила emphasizes the energetic aspect but risks losing the nuance of willful agency (since сила can sound purely physical). Later translators and scholars (Yeszhanova & Esim, 2024) tend to use воля for *qairat*, aligning it with the concept of willpower and courage. In English, the Leneshmidt translation we cited uses “Will” (capitalized) which aptly personifies it. We have followed that convention. In French, *volonté* is the straightforward equivalent for (free) will or willpower, and we use it as such. Occasionally, *qairat* might be translated as “energy” or “vigor” if the context highlights vitality (for example, қайратты can mean “vigorous, energetic”). But in Abai’s philosophical passages, *qairat* is an ethical energy, so *volonté* or *ardeur* fits better than *énergie*.

One translational complication is that *qairat* overlaps with *жиреп* (spirit, pluck) as noted. In one of the above examples, Abai listed both *zhiger* and *qairat* among heart’s needed qualities. A translator must avoid redundancy yet respect the text. Russian solved it by rendering жігер, қайрат, байлаулылық as a sequence of near-synonyms (решимость, воля, твердость – “determination, will, firmness”). We rendered *zhiger* as “ardor/energy” and *qairat* as “will” in English, to differentiate the nuance (the first being spirited ardor, the second disciplined will). This reflects an approach of distribution of meaning across terms in the target language, ensuring each source term’s contribution is noted.

TABLE 1
CORE TERMS OF ABAI’S TRIAD AND THEIR APPROXIMATE EQUIVALENTS WITH NUANCES

Kazakh Term	Russian	English	French	Nuances and Notes
Ақыл (<i>aqyl</i>)	Разум / ум	Reason / Mind	Raison / Esprit	Intellectual faculty, wisdom, rational thought. In Kazakh includes moral discernment. <i>Razum</i> (reason) stresses logical mind; <i>um</i> (mind) is general intellect. English “reason” (faculty of logic) vs “mind” (broader); French <i>raison</i> similar to reason, <i>esprit</i> implies mind or spirit in thinking sense.
Жүрек (<i>jürek</i>)	Сердце	Heart	Cœur	Heart as physical and metaphorical center: seat of emotions, conscience, compassion, courage. Implies moral core (compassion, kindness) and bravery (having “heart”). Russian <i>serdce</i> and English “heart” overlap on emotion/compassion; need context to convey courage (e.g. <i>сердечный</i> = kind-hearted, but courage = <i>мужество</i> literally derived from heart). French <i>cœur</i> covers emotional heart and moral heart (e.g. <i>avoir du cœur</i> = be kind/brave). “Heart” in Kazakh strongly ties to courage (e.g. <i>жүректі</i> = brave; <i>жүрексіз</i> = cowardly) – a nuance to explicate in translation (English “heartless” ≠ cowardly but cruel).
Қайрат (<i>qairat</i>)	Воля / сила	Will / Vital force	Volonté / Force	Willpower, energy, vigorous strength. Connotes an active, courageous force – both physical stamina and moral will. Russian <i>volya</i> = will (emphasizing volition and inner strength), <i>sila</i> = strength (emphasizing force; used by some translators with explanatory footnotes). English “will” (willpower, determination) suits personified context; “strength” or “vigor” used in other contexts. French <i>volonté</i> = will, <i>force</i> = strength. <i>Qairat</i> embodies the drive to act, persevere, and overcome – a blend of courage and hard work.

These terms’ meanings overlap; clear-cut translation depends on context. Each target language may require additional words or modifiers to convey the full sense (e.g. “true heart” for a virtuous compassionate heart, “firm will” for morally guided willpower).

While we have examined *aqyl*, *jürek*, *qairat* in isolation, Abai’s insistence was on their integration. A major finding is that translation must sometimes re-contextualize a term based on its relational function in the triad. For example, when Heart and Mind are mentioned together, an English translator might choose “heart and mind” for a general audience, even if *aqyl* would elsewhere be “intellect” or “reason,” because the stock phrase “heart and mind” nicely captures the intended totality of human faculties (indeed Abai often emphasizes avoiding discord between mind and heart, a theme noted as a principle of Kazakh philosophy and familiar in other cultures). Similarly, when praising an ideal person in whom the triad is balanced, the French translator might use a phrase like “*esprit, cœur et volonté en harmonie*” (mind, heart and will in harmony) even if those weren’t the exact words in Kazakh, because it succinctly conveys Abai’s idea of holistic virtue.

Throughout Abai’s text, we see moments where the triad’s interplay is highlighted. In the *Thirty-First Word*, Abai gives practical advice on learning and spiritual growth. He outlines four qualities that harm the mind – *тәрт нәрсе* – *ақымақтық*, *ынжықтық*, *өтірік*, *кеселді қылық* – roughly: foolishness, apathy/cowardice, dishonesty, and malice. Notably, he ties each to a failure of one of the triad: *ынжықтық* (indifference or faint-heartedness) “counteracts the heart” (since wisdom and eagerness come from the heart), *ақымақтық* (foolishness) counteracts spirituality, *өтірік* (lying) is opposed to the heart as well (heart is source of truth), and *нәзік жасықтық* (weak will) opposes *қайрат* (will). The terminology is dense, but the clear implication is that each faculty has a virtue and a corresponding vice if that faculty fails. In translation, one must carefully parse these correspondences. The Russian commentary on this passage explains

how *indifference dulls the heart's pursuit of knowledge, frivolity undermines the will's resolve*. An English translator might need to add linking phrases: e.g. “indifference deadens the heart – for it is from the heart that love of wisdom springs”. Abai explicitly says “жүрекке қарсы – қадірсіздік” (“what opposes the heart is indifference/lack of zeal”), and “қайратқа қарсы – ... еріншектік” (“what opposes will is laziness/idleness”). Rendering these in other languages required interpretive phrasing, since a word-for-word would be cryptic. In our analysis, we noted how the translator becomes an explicator of the triad’s internal logic: making explicit that *indifference* is a failing of the heart (lack of emotional investment), and *laziness* a failing of will (*qairat* turning to idleness).

By clearly articulating these connections, the translation not only conveys meaning but teaches the conceptual schema embedded in Abai’s language. This is an area of *translator’s metalinguistic mediation*, aligning with what translation theorists call a “*thick translation*” – providing enough context for target readers to grasp culturally specific concepts (Appiah, 1993). In our translations of examples above, we sometimes inserted clarifications (e.g. “that is, a man with a true heart” for *жүректі*) or chose words evoking cultural parallels (like using “heart” for bravery because English idiom recognizes “heart” as bravery in certain contexts, e.g. “take heart”). These choices serve to bridge the conceptual gap without lengthy footnotes, integrating explanation into the prose.

Finally, it is important to highlight Abai’s originality and holistic vision that emerges from the triad when considered as a whole. The *novelty* of his position in Kazakh intellectual history is that he synthesizes the spiritual-moral emphasis of the Eastern (*cordocentric*) tradition with the rational-progressive ideas coming from the Russian/European enlightenment. Earlier Kazakh and Turkic ethical thought (influenced by Islamic theology) certainly valued the heart (e.g., the heart is central in the works of Yusuf Balasaguni or in Sufi poetry). But Abai, living at the cusp of modernity, also valued scientific knowledge (*ғылым*) and intellectual development. His triad insists that neither pure reason nor raw courage suffice – they must be suffused with humane feeling. In comparative terms, scholars have likened Abai to Blaise Pascal, who famously wrote “*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*” (“The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing”). Indeed Yeszhanova and Esim (2024) argue that both Abai and Pascal belong to a tradition of “cordocentrism” that values the heart’s intuitive grasp of truth and virtue. Abai’s heart, like Pascal’s *coeur*, integrates faith and reason: *iman* (faith) is described by Abai as coming *through heartfelt feelings not comprehended by mind alone*. Yet Abai is perhaps even more holistic: he gives *qairat* (will) an esteemed place, reminiscent of Aristotle’s *thumos* (spiritedness) in the soul, but then subordinates it to ethical virtue emanating from the heart (much as Aristotle suggested that spirit and reason should align).

From a translational perspective, capturing this *interdependence* required careful consistency and terminological mapping across the many examples we studied. We found that maintaining one-to-one correspondence (e.g., always translating *жүрек* as *heart*, *ақыл* as *reason*, *қайрат* as *will*) can be too rigid and sometimes misleading in certain sentences. A degree of modulation – changing the word class or perspective – was necessary. For instance, when Abai says “*ақыл да, қайрат та, жүрек те – үшеуі алса, жүрекке бағынсын*” (essentially: if all three are present in a person, let them be ruled by the heart), a natural English rendering was “if these three reside in one person, the Heart should rule over them.” However, when he addresses a general principle like “*адам болудың шарты – ақыл, жүрек, қайрат үшеуін тең ұстай*” (not a direct quote, but summative of his ethos: “the condition of being a true human is holding reason, heart, and will equally together”), one might translate more idiomatically as “to be a complete human being, one must unite one’s heart, mind, and will in balance.” This kind of *explicatory translation* goes slightly beyond the source wording, but it encapsulates Abai’s message in a way that is both accurate and resonant for the target audience. Indeed, our study suggests that a purely literal translation fails to convey Abai’s conceptual world to non-Kazakh readers – some interpretive gloss is essential. The evidence for this comes from the multiple published translations: the Russian versions often add small amplifications (as we saw with *вольче сердце*, or adding “both worlds” to clarify metaphysical references), and the English translations likewise sometimes break a long sentence into explanatory clauses. Far from diluting Abai, these moves illuminate him.

To conclude the Results, we can state that the triad *aqyl-jürek-qairat* does not survive *in toto* in any one target language word-for-word; rather, its **meaning survives through a network of translated terms and contextual explanations*. Yet the core message – that *the truly human life emerges from the synergy of an enlightened mind, a compassionate heart, and a strong will, with primacy given to moral feeling* – does shine through, as our collected examples demonstrate across Russian, English, and French renditions. Skillfully translated, Abai’s ethical triad can enrich global philosophy by offering an integrative humanism bridging cognitive, affective, and conative domains. The Discussion will explore these implications, highlighting Abai’s original insights and lessons for intercultural translation and philosophy.

IV. DISCUSSION

Through our analysis of Abai Kunanbayev’s ethical triad and its translations, several key insights emerge regarding both the philosophy itself and the process of translating culturally bound concepts. In this discussion, we highlight the originality of Abai’s thought, the intercultural resonance of his *aqyl-jürek-qairat* model, and the broader implications for cognitive semantics and translation theory.

Abai’s triad stands out as an original synthesis in philosophical anthropology. He constructs a model of the human being that refuses to compartmentalize reason, emotion, and will; instead, it insists on their unity under a moral ideal. This vision is distinctively Kazakh and yet globally relatable. Abai effectively transforms the Turkic-Islamic notion of

the *qalb* (heart) – long venerated in Sufi poetry and Central Asian ethos as the seat of faith – into a philosophical principle that dialogues with modern ideas of rationality and individuality. His *jürek* is not in conflict with *aqyl*; rather, it is portrayed as *integrating wisdom with compassion*. This contrasts with the Enlightenment paradigm where reason often stands in opposition to the passions. Abai, writing in the late 19th century on the steppe, anticipates a post-Enlightenment corrective: a call to “rehabilitate” the heart in human epistemology and ethics. In contemporary terms, his stance aligns with what some philosophers call “*embodied cognition*” or “*affective rationality*,” acknowledging that our cognition is not purely logical but intertwined with our moral sentiments, Nysanbaev (2007) describes Kazakh philosophy as inherently avoiding a split between mind and heart. Abai’s work predates – and perhaps independently echoes – the sentiments of Pascal and even the Romantic era’s critique of cold rationalism.

Indeed, one of this study’s contributions is drawing a clearer line of comparison between Abai and thinkers like Pascal or even Kant’s idea of the unity of reason and feeling in moral action. Yeszhanova and Esim (2024) explicitly term Abai’s and Pascal’s approach *cordocentric*. Our findings support this: both thinkers elevate the *heart* as a source of truth and virtue. However, Abai’s novelty lies in adding *qāirat* – the active will – as a co-essential element. In Western philosophy, the trio of faculties often appears as *cognition, affection, and conation* (in psychology) or *thought, feeling, and will* (as in the works of Schopenhauer or in theological anthropology). Abai’s triad can be seen as a culturally specific formulation of this universal tripartite division of human faculties. Yet Abai does more than echo a trope; he reconfigures it by demanding the subordination of intellect and will to ethical feeling. In Abai’s triangle, the apex is not reason (contrary to Aristotle’s *nous* or Kant’s pure practical reason) but *an ethical heart*. This is a profound statement in the context of Islamic ethics (where purification of the heart is key) and also a critique of the burgeoning rationalistic-materialistic mindset he observed in society.

The implications for philosophical anthropology are significant. Abai implies that a person who has brilliant intellect (*aqyl*) and iron will (*qāirat*) but lacks a humane heart (*jürek*) is potentially dangerous – “capable of breeding evil” as he said of mind without heart. Modern history has unfortunately vindicated this concern (one thinks of totalitarian ideologies propelled by cold intellect and fanatical will, but devoid of compassion). Conversely, a compassionate heart without the guidance of knowledge and the support of will might be ineffectual or misguided compassion. Abai’s ideal is the *кемел адам* – the complete or perfect person – who harmonizes all three. Kazakh culture’s ideal of *Адам бол* (“Be a Human”) as discussed by later scholars (Begalina & Dosmagambetov, 2018) essentially echoes Abai’s triadic synthesis as the pathway to true humanity. Our research underscores that Abai’s originality is not in positing new faculties per se, but in the emphasis and balance he prescribes: heart/ethics first, intellect second, will third – but all indispensable.

By mapping Abai’s triad onto Russian, English, and French conceptual frameworks, we found that while direct lexical equivalents exist (*serdise, cœur* for heart; *razum, raison* for reason; *volya, volonté* for will), the *cultural salience* and *associative fields* of these concepts differ. This intercultural comparison yields insights beyond just Abai or just translation – it highlights differences in how cultures conceive the human interior.

For example, Russian intellectual culture, influenced by Orthodox cordocentrism (e.g., Tolstoy’s and Dostoevsky’s focus on the “русское сердце”), can readily receive Abai’s idea of the heart as moral compass. Indeed, terms like *сердечный* (heartfelt) or *бессердечный* (heartless) carry moral weight in Russian (Shelkovaya, 2017). But Russian also has the concept of *ум–сердце* dichotomy, and Abai’s solution is to unify them. In our sources, a Russian commentator (Nysanbaev, 2007) notes that Abai’s worldview inherently seeks to avoid discord between mind and heart, which resonates with longstanding Russian philosophical themes of *integral knowledge* (V. Solovyov’s idea of *tsel’noe znanie* that unites reason and feeling). Thus, Abai finds a philosophical kinship in the Russian context, which may explain why his works were valued in Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakh thought as a bridge between Eastern wisdom and Russian literature.

In the Anglophone context, “heart vs head” is a common dichotomy, but Western academic philosophy has largely overlooked “the heart” as a serious epistemic tool. Only in the 20th century, with thinkers like Pascal and Charles Taylor, did the “heart” gain some philosophical respect. Our diagram in Figure 1 compares Abai’s model with the Western Enlightenment approach. We believe Abai’s triad offers a valuable non-Western perspective on *integrated human faculties*, emphasizing that virtue involves a *felt*, emotional dimension alongside reason.

Cognitive science today echoes this: Damasio’s somatic marker hypothesis, for instance, shows emotion (heart) is integral to rational decision-making – a scientific vindication of Abai’s intuition that *ақыл* alone, without *жүрек*, can go astray. Thus, conceptually mapping *aqyl–jürek–qāirat* onto modern terms, one might equate *aqyl* to cognitive intelligence (IQ), *jürek* to emotional and moral intelligence (EQ, if you will), and *qāirat* to conative drive or agency. Abai’s message is essentially: a fully realized human being needs all three forms of “intelligence” operating in concert.

In French intellectual tradition, *raison* has long been king (since Descartes). Yet France also had its cordocentric thinkers (Pascal, as well as later spiritualists like Bergson who valued intuition). Abai’s ideas, put in French, evoke Pascalian language: e.g., in French translation we used *souverain* for Heart being ruler, reminiscent of Pascal’s “*le cœur... le premier de l’homme*”. The French term *cœur* itself carries poetic and affective connotations, and phrases like *avoir du cœur* (to be kind/brave) show that culturally the linkage of heart to goodness and courage is understood. French readers of Abai in translation have responded to the *humanist universalism* in his words (as evidenced by recent French translations of Abai’s poems that highlight his themes of love and justice). Our work suggests that translating Abai into French (or any European language) is not just a linguistic exercise, but an intercultural dialogue where Central Asian

ethical concepts meet European ones on equal terms. By explicating *aqyl* as *raison éclairée par la foi* (reason illuminated by faith) or *qairat* as *volonté courageuse*, one can find apt formulations in French that make Abai's ideas sound at home in the language of Voltaire and Pascal, yet still distinct.

From a cognitive linguistics perspective, the triad illustrates how different languages encode cognitive and affective concepts through somatic metaphor. In Kazakh, as in many cultures, internal qualities are frequently mapped to body organs: not only heart (жүрек) for courage/compassion, but also liver (бауыр) for kinship (Kazakh calls a close sibling *bauyrym* – “my liver”), and other examples. Our focus on жүрек aligns with studies that have noted the widespread metaphor of HEART FOR PERSON/ESSENCE in Turkic languages (cf. Temirbolat, 2021, who writes “thinking processes occur not through the head, but through the heart” in Kazakh naive anatomy). Our findings reinforce that in translating such metaphors, one must decide whether to preserve the metaphor (which can carry the cultural worldview) or convert to a target-language metaphor. We mostly preserved them (talk of heart, soul, etc.) because they exist in target languages, albeit in different strengths.

We also addressed the classic translation challenge of untranslatable words—not because no equivalent exists, but because no single word captures the full network of meanings. For instance, the Kazakh word қасиет denotes a virtue or sacred quality; Abai employs жүректің қасиеті (qualities of the heart). Translating қасиет often requires two or three words (e.g., “quality and sacred power”). Our multi-example approach demonstrated that a complete concept emerges through multiple translations: a single sentence may not fully convey жүрек, but across 50 examples in varied contexts (kindness, bravery, sincerity, etc.), readers construct the same composite understanding. This implies a translation strategy like systematic glossing – our study's academic method could guide translators' footnotes or prefaces to explain such terms.

A key insight for translation theory is the value of comparative multilingual analysis. Examining Russian and French alongside English helped clarify difficult passages. For example, the Russian translation of Word 14 guided our English and French versions, reflecting a Kazakh translator's deep understanding Abai. Such translations can serve as useful commentaries for translators into Western languages. However, potential biases—like Soviet-era ideological slants—require caution, which we addressed by consistently referring back to the Kazakh original.

The study supports “thick translation” (Abdighapbarova, 2016) for Abai, arguing translator's notes should provide triad context and brief definitions (e.g., *Qairat* - willpower plus energetic courage) to aid understanding; the Results section functions as an extended translator's note. The triad's tensions - reason can mislead, will can turn violent, and heart can be wolfish without virtue - give the text dramatic force, so flattening metaphors loses impact. Preserving terms like волчьим сердцем or their English equivalents (“wolf-hearted”) is often crucial; literal renderings can capture flavor, while selective freer adaptations (e.g., епкісіз) can clarify meaning. Balance between literal and free translation is an art, as our comparisons show.

V. CONCLUSION

This study reveals Abai Kunanbayev's ethical triad '*aqyl-jürek-qairat*' as a remarkably deep and transculturally relevant concept. Philosophically, it proposes that true humanity stems from harmonizing knowing, feeling, and willing, echoing traditions from Aristotle to Confucianism. Translating this required cultural semantics, demonstrating how careful translation, explanation, and comparative insight make Abai's ideas globally intelligible without betraying their essence.

The research bridges Abai's triad with universal questions about the human condition, uncovering ambiguities and tensions (e.g., heart as emotional and moral, the necessity and danger of willpower) that make Abai's text philosophically alive. Highlighting these ambiguities invites reflection, as seen in Knowledge's warning to Will about the potential for vice, a timeless insight into human psychology.

Our intercultural approach underscores that translating Abai is conceptual mediation, requiring sensitivity to semiotic layers, historical context, and genre. Choices, such as using a slightly archaic tone, aimed to give the target text equivalent gravitas.

In conclusion, Abai's triad teaches ethics and translation: wisdom, compassion, and courage must coexist. Translationally, capturing a text's "spirit" involves capturing its "heart." By preserving Abai's metaphors and explicating his vision, we engage in philosophical translation, allowing ideas to live in a new context. This work contributes to Abai studies and exemplifies how intercultural scholarship illuminates the currents between language, thought, and culture.

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