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### **Kazakh culture and Literature in the American Higher Education Curriculum**

**Abstract.** I am an American educator and researcher working in the Department of Russian and Slavic Studies at the University of Arizona, a large public university in the Southwestern region of the United States. As a longtime student of the Kazakh language and literature, as well as a researcher of the cross-cultural links between Kazakhstan and its neighbor countries, I often encounter a surprised reaction by both Kazakhstanis and my fellow Americans when I describe my topic of research. Both Americans and Kazakhstanis have asked me: Why would an American study Kazakhstan? What use is the Kazakh language to an American? What can American students hope to learn from Kazakhstan? The ultimate purpose of this article is to provide some answers to these questions. I have found the study of Kazakhstan to be enriching in many ways, both for myself and for the students I work with at the University of Arizona. In this article, I will provide an overview of the contemporary status of Kazakhstan as a subject of study in American institutions of higher education, and I will also share some of my personal experiences as both a student and a teacher. I will discuss not only specialized courses on the Kazakh language and culture, but also courses in the humanities and social sciences that incorporate Kazakhstan into broader interdisciplinary topics, such as global studies. Finally I will discuss international connections between American and Kazakhstani institutions of higher education.

**Keywords:** Kazakh literature, Kazakh language, anthology, poetry, prose, interdisciplinary research, art

**Introduction.** Enrollments in Kazakh language courses at American institutions of higher education have remained modest but steady since the mid 1990's. According to language enrollment data gathered by the Modern Language Association, five American institutions have offered Kazakh language courses in this timeframe: the University of Wisconsin, the University of Washington, the University of Illinois, Indiana University, Columbia University, and Stanford University. Summer language programs, particularly those hosted by the School of Global and International Studies, Indiana University and the Center for Russian, East Europe, and Central Asia, University of Wisconsin, are a popular venue for the study of less-commonly-taught languages, including other Central Asian languages such as Uzbek, Uyghur, Tajik, and Mongolian. Other institutions created online collections with teaching materials on Kazakh and

other languages. I will give you 2 examples: University of California Language Teaching Materials Project and the Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region at Indiana University. American students also take advantage of government-sponsored programs such as the American Councils Eurasian Regional Languages Program in order to study the language while living in Kazakhstan.

**Methods.** The research methods are objective-analytical and comparative method of analysis in the context of contact and typological interrelations, analysis of diverse reception processes, new literary translations and new anthologies of Kazakh literature.

**Results.** The publication of new anthologies about Kazakh literature such as “The Stories of the Great Steppe. The Anthology of Modern Kazakh Literature” (ed. by Dr. Rafis Abazov. Translated by Sergey Levchin and Ilya Bernshtein [1] and «Summer Evening, Prairie Night, Land of Golden Wheat. The Outside World in Kazakh Literature. First Edition» (Ed. by Dr. Rafis Abasov and translated by Sergey Levchin) [2] in the United States and has enabled American students to study Kazakh literature and culture in English language.

**Discussion.** I received my Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures in 2013 from the Department of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles. Following my graduation, I taught general education courses for two years in the same department, before transferring to the Department of Russian & Slavic Studies at the University of Arizona. At both of these institutions, I successfully incorporated topics on Kazakhstan into my courses on Global Studies, Russian literature, Eurasian area studies, and the history of Soviet and post-Soviet film. In each case, I was able to tailor Kazakhstan-specific content to fit in line with the goals and standards of the course, while also piquing student interest in Central Asia. For example, one course provided an overview of Eurasian history and cultural life from the time of the Mongol Empire up to the contemporary era. In addition to reading Russian historical documents and classic works of Russian literature, students read poetry by Olzhas Suleimenov, Jambul Jabaev, Bakhytzhhan Kendzheev, and Chingiz Aitmatov in English translation. They also viewed the 2006 documentary film *Koryo Saram: the Unreliable People*, produced co-directed by Y. David Chung and Matt Dibble which follows the journey of Kazakhstan’s Korean diaspora population from the time of their deportation from the Russian Far East under Stalin to their contemporary life as part of Kazakhstan’s multicultural “melting pot.”

Relatedly, in another one of my courses, *Eurasia in Five Meals*, students studied the unique history and cultural significance of beloved Central Asian dishes such as pilaf, *nan*, bishbarmak, samsa, tea, horse sausage, and—of course—Korean carrot salad. They had the opportunity to taste these dishes during the final class session of the semester, which many students described as the highlight of their time in the department. Thus, studying Kazakhstan not only opened students’ eyes to the diversity of the post-Soviet world, but they also learned to appreciate the diversity within Kazakhstan itself, and in turn to look more deeply at the diversity underpinning their own culture and conditioning their experiences. In this way, studying Kazakhstan—and Central Asia in general—proved to be an excellent way for students to develop the skills that are of paramount importance in the American higher education system: intercultural competence, critical thinking, and humanistic values.

While still a graduate student at UCLA, I was a founding member of the Workshop on Central Asia, a weekly research seminar that “locates” Central Asia at the crossroads of several different modes of scholarly inquiry, bringing together students and faculty from history, geography, anthropology, political science, and literary studies. The workshop was part of a

wider initiative in Los Angeles called the Central Asia Program, which promotes research and curriculum development on Central Asia topics. Weekly meetings and presentations of invited scholars included such diverse topics as the medieval history of Central Asia, methods of restoring Islamic architecture, modern art and musical creativity of Kazakhstan, as well as the role of Kazakhstan in regional economic associations. Also within the framework of the seminar two international conferences were held, at which the language problems of Central Asia, literature, culture, history and the modern period were discussed.

At the University of Arizona, in addition to my work in the Department of Russian & Slavic Studies, I have become an instructor in the interdisciplinary Global Studies program. In my course "Dimensions of Globalization: States, Societies, and Institutions," I used examples from Kazakhstani popular music – the Soviet-era musical ensemble Dos Mukasan and the hip-hop group Black Cost – to illustrate the complex dynamics of appropriation and authenticity inherent in the transplantation of cultural art forms across our increasingly connected world. Interest in Kazakhstan on our university campus is also enhanced by a colloquium for first-year students, "Kazakhstan: The Heart of Eurasia", which is held by the Russian Language and Slavic Studies department.

A significant event was the publication of the poetic collection of the young poetess from Kazakhstan Aigerim Tazhi in English language in the USA [3]. As a manuscript, Aigerim Tazhi's book, "Bumazhnaya kozha/Paper-Thin Skin", was a finalist in the Annual Chapbook-in-Translation contest ("Goodmorning Menagerie"). At the end of last year, her translator James Kates received the literary award - Käpylä Translation Prize (UCONN). Kates is a famous poet and translator in the United States, the former president of the US Literary Translators Association. Previously he translated the books of M. Aizenberg, M. Eremin and G. Sapgir.

The poems of A. Tazhi were translated into English, French, Polish, Armenian, Uzbek, and Kazakh languages. Seven years ago, Kates made the first translation of a poem by a Kazakhstani poetess for the American magazine "Words Without Borders." Three years ago, the US National Endowment for the Arts allocated a special double grant to translate a future book, highlighting the manuscript on the list of winners.

In the book of A. Tazhi "Bumazhnaya Kozha / Paper-Thin Skin" there are poems in Russian language and their translations into English language. Many translations included in the new book by A. Tazhi have been published before in American and European magazines: "Stand", "Kenyon Review", "Prairie Schooner", "Chtenia/Readings", "Words without borders", "Colorado Review", "Salamander", "St. Petersburg Review", "Two Lines", "Massachusetts Review", "Atlanta Review", "Cyphers" and others.

The book is already available on many of the world's online sites (Amazon and others). On April 27, the book readings will be held in New Hampshire (USA), and her first presentation will be held in Boston on May 1.

Students of the University of Arizona have an opportunity to learn about Kazakhstan by studying abroad thanks to the initiative developed by Liudmila Klimanova in partnership with the Summer School of Russian Language and Eurasian Studies at Nazarbayev University. This project, which continues to this day, was the result of a partnership initiated in 2011 by Nazarbayev University and the University of Wisconsin.

Institute of Literature and Art named after M.O. Auezov published a collection of scientific articles on the works of Olzhas Suleimenov, which includes my article (Caffe N. "Identity and hybridity in O. Suleimenov's poem "Zemlya, poklonis cheloveku!") [4].

In "Afterword. The Expanding Horizons of Kazakh Literature and Culture" I consider the recognition of Kazakh culture abroad as "the result of the geographical and virtual dissemination of Kazakh art" [5, p.142].

I hope that such initiatives are just the beginning of institutional ties between our two countries.

**Conclusions.** In this article I have outlined some of the ways in which the country of Kazakhstan, along with the Kazakh language and culture, is being incorporated into American higher education curricula. Although student interest in Eurasia has diminished overall in the decades since the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the study of the Kazakh language continues to be limited to a few universities throughout the country, an increasing number of interdisciplinary courses are introducing students to topics in Kazakhstan's history, culture, and significance on the global stage. Ultimately I see this as a positive development. My overall observation is that Kazakhstan—much like the United States, in fact—is a large and diverse country with a rich history that everyone can learn from. My experiences teaching students about Kazakhstan, as well as my observations of my peers in American institutes of higher education, indicate that there is a wealth of potential for mutual understanding and collaboration between students and researchers from our two countries.

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## **АҚШ УНИВЕРСИТЕТТЕРІНІҢ ОҚУ БАҒДАРЛАМАСЫНДАҒЫ ҚАЗАҚ ӘДЕБИЕТІ МЕН МӘДЕНИЕТІ**

**Аңдатпа.** Мен Америка Құрама Штаттарының Оңтүстік-Батыс аймағындағы Аризона университетінің орыс тілі және славистика кафедрасында жұмыс істейтін американдық педагог әрі зерттеушімін. Мен қазақ тілі мен әдебиетін және де Қазақстанның көрші елдермен мәдениетаралық байланысын зерттеймін, мен өз зерттеу тақырыбымды сипаттап айта бастағанда қазақстандықтардың тарапынан, сондай-ақ, американдық әріптестерімнің тарапынан таңқалуларға жиі кездесіп жатамын. Американдықтардың да, қазақстандықтардың да менен үнемі сұрайтын сұрақтары: Неліктен американдықтар Қазақстанды зерттеп жүр? Американдықтарға қазақ тілі не үшін керек? Американдық студенттер Қазақстан туралы не білгісі келеді? Бұл мақаланың мақсаты осы сұрақтарға американдық педагогтың көзқарасын көрсету болып табылады. Қазақстанды зерттеу менің білімімді және Аризона университетінде дәріс беріп жүрген студенттерімнің білімін көптеген бағыттарда кеңейтетінін байқадым. Бұл мақалада американың жоғары оқу орындарында зерттеу пәні ретінде жүретін Қазақстанның қазіргі заманғы жай-күйіне қысқаша шолу жасаймын, сондай-ақ, студент және оқытушы позициясынан өз жеке тәжірибеммен бөлісемін. Мен қазақ тілі мен мәдениеті бойынша арнайы курстар туралы ғана емес, сондай-ақ, кеңейтілген пәнаралық зерттеу және жаһандық зерттеулер сияқты Қазақстанды зерттеуді қамтитын бағдарламаларды талқылайтын боламын. Сонымен қатар, американдық және қазақстандық жоғары оқу орындары арасындағы халықаралық байланысқа тоқталамын.

**Кілт сөздер:** қазақ әдебиеті, қазақ тілі, антология, поэзия, проза, пәнаралық зерттеулер, өнер

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## **КАЗАХСКАЯ КУЛЬТУРА И ЛИТЕРАТУРА В УЧЕБНОЙ ПРОГРАММЕ УНИВЕРСИТЕТОВ США**

**Аннотация.** Я – американский педагог и исследователь, работающий на кафедре русского языка и славистики в Университете Аризоны, крупного государственного университета в Юго-Западном регионе Соединенных Штатов. Я изучаю казахский язык и литературу, исследую межкультурные связи между Казахстаном и соседними странами и часто сталкиваюсь с удивлением со стороны как казахстанцев, так и моих коллег американцев, когда я начинаю описывать свою тему исследования. Как американцы, так и казахстанцы спрашивали меня: «Почему американцы изучают Казахстан? Зачем нужен казахский язык американцу? Что американские студенты хотят узнать о Казахстане?». Цель данной статьи состоит в том, чтобы показать взгляд американского педагога на эти вопросы. Я обнаружила, что исследование Казахстана расширяет мои знания во многих направлениях и знания студентов, с которыми я работаю в Университете Аризоны. В этой статье я приведу краткий обзор современного состояния Казахстана как предмета исследования в американских высших учебных заведениях, поделюсь своим личным опытом с позиции студента и преподавателя. Я буду обсуждать не только специализированные курсы по казахскому языку и культуре, но и программы, которые включают изучение Казахстана в более широком междисциплинарном плане как глобальные исследования. Я планирую обсудить международные связи между американскими и казахстанскими высшими учебными заведениями.

**Ключевые слова:** казахская литература, казахский язык, антология, поэзия, проза, междисциплинарные исследования, искусство

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