

Embodied Identity in Kazakh Male Dances: Movements and Anthropological Meanings

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the features of contemporary Kazakh male dance through an embodied and choreological analysis of three authorial works: Zholbarys Zhürek, Asan & Üsen, and Tas Tülek. Drawing on somatic and anthropological approaches, it explores how movement encodes culturally situated masculinities, post-nomadic identity, and intergenerational memory. The analysis integrates fieldwork, visual documentation, and theoretical frameworks from gender studies, phenomenology, and dance ethnography. Methodologically, the study combines movement analysis with choreographic reconstruction and embodied inquiry to reveal how Kazakh male bodies negotiate tradition and innovation on stage. Findings suggest that these dances – while grounded in ethnic motifs and social roles – mobilize a plural, reflexive masculinity that challenges binary gender models and affirms dance as a legitimate medium of male expression and cultural continuity.

Keywords: Kazakh male dance, Authorial choreography, Embodied movement, Cultural masculinity, Dance anthropology, Somatic practice.

INTRODUCTION

As a symbolic and aesthetic expression of knowledge and culture, dance is one of humanity's oldest and most universal means of non-verbal communication. For the Kazakh people, male dance is not merely a form of art, but a manifestation of national identity, historical memory, and the continuity of generations conveyed through bodily expression. Kazakh male dances articulate heroism, courage, masculine character, and social values through movement. However, scientific investigation of this genre—particularly from somatic, anthropological, and choreographic perspectives—remains insufficient. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of its cultural significance.

The distinctiveness of Kazakh male dance lies in its symbolic gestures, corporeal expressiveness, and incorporation of military, domestic, and epic elements. It is not merely a sequence of movements, but an embodied

representation of worldview and ethnographic identity. For instance, gestures such as mounting a horse, wielding a weapon, or offering a traditional greeting serve as cultural codes embedded within the choreography. In this regard, Kazakh male dance significantly differs from Slavic, Caucasian, or Western European male dance traditions, where the focus often lies on aesthetic plasticity or athletic display. In contrast, Kazakh dance conveys mythological, martial, and social narratives through its movement vocabulary.

This article analyzes three original male dance works – Zholbarys Zhurek, Asan & Usen, and Tas Tulek created by the author through a synthesis of practice and theory. These choreographies are examined as instances of embodied knowledge production. Guided by the somatic principle of “knowing through the body,” the article explores not only the technical execution of movement but its cognitive and cultural dimensions. The research aims to position Kazakh male dance within international somatic and choreographic discourse.

The focus and methodology of this article align with the conceptual scope of the *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* (JDSP), which emphasizes the exploration of knowledge produced through the body, movement, and embodied experience. By analyzing Kazakh male dance as a medium for transmitting national and gendered meanings through the body, this study offers a contribution that is both culturally specific and globally relevant within the somatic field.

REVIEW LITERATURE

Kazakh male dance, rooted in Islamic values, nomadic heritage, and warrior-spiritual traditions, stands out as a unique phenomenon within the global landscape of dance studies. Its movement vocabulary is not only aesthetic but also serves as a medium for conveying national identity, historical memory, and culturally embedded notions of gender roles. This aligns with current global scholarly discourse on gender theory and masculinity studies, which examine how bodily practices reflect and reproduce social structures.

Ramsay Burt (1995) investigates the cultural and social codes embedded in male dance forms, emphasizing how masculinity is constructed and expressed through performance. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999) presents movement as a fundamental form of embodied knowledge, while Susan Leigh Foster (2011) explores choreography as a cultural practice laden with ideological content. These scholars offer theoretical frameworks that are highly relevant for analyzing Kazakh male dance, especially in terms of its symbolic, cognitive, and cultural layers.

In the Kazakh context, early researchers such as Zhienskulova (1955) highlighted the importance of folklore and ethnic expression in traditional choreography. However, there remains a significant gap in analyzing Kazakh dance from a somatic or interpretive anthropological perspective. This research aims to fill that void by applying interdisciplinary methodologies.

It is important to note that studies specifically focused on male dance in Kazakhstan remain scarce. Most existing research predominantly addresses folk-stage dance and pedagogical approaches to choreography. Among these, the textbook *Theory and Methods of Teaching Kazakh Dance* (Izim & Kulbekova, 2015) is notable for its focus on pedagogical strategies related to Kazakh dance. Additionally, the work of Orazkyzy Salima (2017), *Fundamentals of Kazakh Dance Art*, provides valuable insights into the development and characteristics of Kazakh dance, offering a general overview of choreographic art. On an institutional level, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan developed the Kazakh Dance: Choreography Training Program to formalize instruction in this field. Furthermore, the collective monograph *Dance Culture of the Turkic Peoples* (Saitova, 2021) contains research aimed at preserving the national dance heritage and offers terminology relevant to male dance genres. Collectively, these works provide foundational knowledge on the history, development, and teaching methodologies related to men's dance in Kazakhstan.

The term author's dance in this article refers to choreographic works that emerge from the creator's personal artistic vision and experiential knowledge. Rather than merely reproducing tradition, these dances reinterpret and recontextualize cultural elements, contributing to contemporary artistic discourse. The concept of national art is understood as a symbolic system through which an ethnic group expresses its worldview, values, and historical consciousness. In this sense, Kazakh male dances function as a form of embodied patriotism—manifesting emotional and physical devotion to cultural heritage through movement. The study of male dances involves not only choreographic analysis but also encompasses cultural, gendered, and somatic dimensions. This research aims to integrate Kazakh male dance into the broader international scholarly discourse.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comprehensive multi-method approach, incorporating the following distinct methods:

1) **Theoretical analysis** – based on key theories from cultural studies and dance scholarship aimed at examining the role of dance in constructing and expressing national and gender identities. This includes the application of frameworks for analyzing cultural symbols and practices.

2) **Anthropological method** – a methodological approach that considers culture as a system of symbols and enables an in-depth analysis of national and social cultural codes through dance movements. Within this framework, we analyzed the movements and postures in Kazakh men's dance by situating them within national and cultural contexts. Furthermore, we explored the synthesis of traditional and contemporary elements, examining how they are manifested through choreography. In doing so, we provided a comprehensive interpretation of how national consciousness, as well as spiritual and cultural values, are embodied and expressed through dance.

3) **Artistic analysis** – involving a detailed examination of choreographic decisions, stylistic elements, and movement structures, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the dance compositions.

4) **Practice-based research** – centered on the author's direct involvement in the creation and performance of three original male dances ("Zholbarys Zhurek," "Asan & Usen," "Tas Tulek"). This method integrates theoretical insights with practical experience to provide an in-depth understanding of the processes of meaning-making and transmission through movement.

The term "scientific" in this context refers to a systematic and substantiated approach that combines theoretical, anthropological, artistic, and practical dimensions of research, aimed at generating new professional knowledge and methodological tools.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Global Perspectives on Men's Dance

Over the past four decades, scholar-practitioners have increasingly approached dance not merely as an aesthetic or social artifact but as a phenomenological event located in the moving, sensing body (Sirotkina, 2019). Building on Merleau-Ponty's claim that movement is humanity's primordial mode of experience (Bianco, 2011), Sheets-Johnstone (2013) reminds us that to move is to feel oneself alive. Men's dances throughout the world crystallise this insight by foregrounding heroic resolve, virtuosity, and the communal cohesion of martial display. From the Ukrainian Hopak and Armenian Kochari to Brazil's Capoeira and the Māori Haka, choreographies of defiance and solidarity continue to function as living archives of cultural memory. The Georgian dance tradition also includes male-specific choreographic forms that embody cultural ideals of strength and resilience. One prominent example is Kazbeguri, a dance performed exclusively by men, which showcases the physical endurance, fortitude, and indomitable spirit of the highland communities. Recognized for its vigorous dynamics and expressive movement vocabulary, Kazbeguri is considered one of the most visually compelling and energetically demanding dances within Georgian national choreography (The Golden Fleece, 2018). Reflecting on such characteristics, Shara Zhienkulova wrote in her work *Kazakh Biys*: "With the growth of the general culture of the population, the aesthetics of dance is also enriched. The positions of dance movement evolve. The art of choreography at different times is inextricably linked with the place, time of events, and the character traits of peoples" (Zhienkulova, 1955). In other words, each nation possesses a distinctive behavioral code that is reflected in the plasticity and expressive qualities of its traditional dances.

In addition to the discussed regional traditions, a broader look at men's dance globally reveals the variety of forms, functions, and social meanings it embodies in contemporary culture. In addition to martial and ritual dances, there exist numerous choreographic forms of a domestic or recreational nature. Many of these male dance traditions are accessible through digital platforms, where instructional videos and performance examples are widely available. Within Russian traditional culture, alongside solo dances, paired forms such as various versions of the kadril (quadrille) are also prominent. These dances are notable for their intricate footwork and refined movement vocabulary, demonstrating a significant and dynamic role for male performers.

The primary objective of stage dance is often to produce an aesthetically engaging experience for the audience. In this context, classical male dance plays a formative role in developing the performer's self-confidence, leadership qualities, and refined physical comportment. The assumption that men who engage in classical dance become overly feminized misrepresents the discipline; on the contrary, classical male dance emphasizes ethical poise, aesthetic refinement, and physical elegance.

Ballroom dance genres, such as the waltz, cha-cha-cha, rumba, foxtrot, and tango, also cultivate a sense of rhythm and an appreciation for beauty and romantic expression. Although these forms are less commonly practiced among contemporary men, they continue to offer valuable opportunities for expressive embodiment.

In Turkey, male belly dance may appear unconventional from an external perspective. However, this dance tradition is rooted in national identity and serves as a rigorous physical practice focused on muscular control and expressive movement, rather than imitation of female forms.

Modern male dance styles have expanded further to include hip-hop, breakdance, dubstep, and other contemporary genres, each reflecting evolving cultural narratives and kinetic vocabularies.

Anthropological Dimensions of Kazakh Men's Dance

Within the nomadic lifeworlds of the Great Steppe, dance evolved from shamanic rite to social entertainment, absorbing influences from geography, subsistence, and inter-ethnic exchange. Kazakh repertoires include martial (Sadak bi), hunting-imitative (Burkut - Koyan), zoomorphic (Orteke), and therapeutic (Baksy) forms, each embodied differently in the Karaganda, Jetysu, and Western stylistic schools (Asemkulov, 2012).

The art of dance is imbued with symbolic meaning that reflects the cultural heritage and spiritual values of a given society. It serves not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a means of transmitting national traditions and customs, distinguishing one culture from another. Movement, the essence of dance, is often equated with life itself. The Kazakh people, known for their ability to convey narratives and emotions through physical movement, developed a rich dance tradition many centuries ago. As noted in *Kazakh Art* (2022), "Dance is an art form that creates an artistic image through bodily movements synchronized with music or rhythm. It is one of the oldest components of Kazakh folk culture and, alongside poetry and kui (instrumental music), has been practiced since ancient times." Evidence of this can be found in rock carvings, historical accounts, and ethnographic records documented by Russian travelers, historians, and researchers on the territory of present-day Kazakhstan. Dance also serves as a critical medium for rethinking traditional epistemologies and exploring the speculative dimensions of human communication (Acorn, 2023).

In his article "Our Kazakh, Who Danced and Played the Kui," Berdibek Kabay addresses the ongoing debate surrounding Kazakh men's dances. He notes that recent discussions have polarized into two camps: one argues that "Kazakh men did not dance," while the other maintains that "Kazakh men danced, and this tradition has persisted for many centuries." The question of whether Kazakh men danced at all remains contested. However, according to Kabay, a definitive answer can be found by examining the image (Figure 1) preserved in the secret collection of the renowned Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. This image clearly depicts men among the Kazakh people engaging in dance in ancient times. In addition to the image preserved in the Hermitage, rock engravings, travellers' diaries, and Barbich's 1792 watercolour titled *Kazakh Dance* further corroborate the antiquity of paired male choreography among the Kazakh people (Kabay^a, 2021). The painting was created by the French artist Barbich, who served in the Russian military during 1792–1793. During his visit to the Kazakh Horde, Barbich presented a collection titled *Kazakhs, Rites to Empress Catherine II*. The collection comprises 15 works, among which is the watercolor titled *Kazakh Dance*. This artwork depicts an authentic example of a paired male dance. Observing the movements of the figures portrayed, it is evident that they are engaged in a "paired dance," which today is commonly referred to as Kara Zhorga. This historical evidence further supports the longstanding tradition of male partnered dances within Kazakh culture.



Figure 1. "*Kazakh Dance*", watercolor by Barbish (1792–1793), held in the restricted collection of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Based on historical evidence, it can be concluded that traditional male-only dances have existed among the Kazakh people since ancient times. These choreographic forms emerged within a distinct cultural, historical, and philosophical milieu (Huo, 2023). Among the notable examples of such male dances are *Kara Zhorga*, *Orteke*, *Tepenkök*, *Burkut-koyan*, *Sadak bi*, *Kusbegi*, *Koyan bi*, *Aiy bi*, *Nasybayshi*, *Asau at*, *Bura bi*, and *Burkit bi* (Kabay^b, 2021). These dances are often characterized by strong, expressive movements that reflect masculine values and traditional Kazakh lifeways.

In addition to these, the *Baksy* dance holds a unique position within the repertoire of male dances. Although traditionally performed by men, the *Baksy* dance served a different function—its purpose was primarily ritualistic and therapeutic. As discussed in the article “Dance Movements of Baksy as a Paradigm of Development of the Kazakh Dance Art,” the primary goal of the *Baksy* (shaman) was to heal illness and to communicate with spirits of the upper and lower worlds, acting as an intermediary between the material and spiritual realms (Moldakhmetova et al., 2023).

Authorial Case Studies: Zholbarys Zhürek, Asan & Üsen, Tas Tülek

The dances embody a reflective process of reinterpreting and synthesizing traditional Kazakh movement aesthetics. *Zholbarys Zhürek* (Tiger Heart, 2023). Conceived as a kinetic metaphor for resilience, the dance juxtaposes prowling, low-centre weight shifts with sudden, claw-like accents. Anthropologically, the tiger—though not native to the steppe—echoes Turkic totemic lore of the predator-warrior. National imagery surfaces in the shapan-style over-garment stitched with stylised tiger stripes and in the dombra-inspired rhythmic ostinato. Choreographically, the work integrates inverted shoulder isolations and deep lunges drawn from folk *kara zhorga* while deploying barrel turns derived from contemporary ballet technique.

Asan & Üsen (2024). Framed as a dialogic duet between two legendary trickster-brothers, the piece dramatizes nomadic notions of brotherhood (*agalyk–inishtik*) by alternating competitive virtuosic jumps with moments of cooperative balancing. Anthropological markers include lasso-miming gestures, throat-singing samples from East Kazakhstan, and a spatial pathway evoking yurt circularity. The duet’s masculine coding lies less in brute force than in the ethics of mutual support, aligning with relational models of inclusive masculinities (Connell, 1995).

Tas Tülek (Stone Fledgling, 2024). Inspired by oral epics describing mythic birds that petrify during harsh winters, this solo transforms the dancer’s torso from rigid “stone” to soaring avian motifs. National symbolism appears in the felt *tymaq* cap and the use of asymmetrical 5/8 walking patterns common to Jetysu dances. From a choreological view, the work fuses floorwork indebted to breakdance with the heel stamping (*teppekök*) vocabulary of Kazakh shepherd rituals, illustrating post-nomadic hybridity.

Embodiment, Training, and Masculine Expression: Responding to the Classical-Ballet Critique through Gender Theory

Critical observations regarding the balletic carriage of the dancers' spines and port de bras are valid and acknowledged. Drawing on biomechanical principles, Ward (2020) identifies four fundamental aspects of classical ballet technique—alignment, placement, turnout, and extension—and highlights how deviations from these principles can inform improvements in dancer training and pedagogy. Traditional ballet emphasizes strict verticality, turned-out feet, and fluid arm movements, elements which are deeply codified within Western classical dance. However, the present Kazakh choreographies strategically deploy ballet training not as an aesthetic template but as a functional conditioning matrix tailored to the cultural and biomechanical needs of the dance form. For example, foot placement remains predominantly parallel rather than turned out, jumps are executed with a forward-tilted pelvis reminiscent of the steppe riding posture, and deliberate torso isolations disrupt the verticality associated with the Vaganova line (Ward, 2020). This nuanced adaptation reveals a conscious hybridization, where classical ballet technique underpins physical strength and articulation but the resultant kinesthetic identity asserts a distinctively Kazakh embodiment.

Beyond the technical aspects, these choreographies also encode complex masculine expressions. The dances manifest traditionally masculine traits such as explosive power, spatial assertion, and falconry-inspired wrist flicks. Yet, drawing on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, masculinity here is understood not as an inherent natural essence but as a socially constructed and performed script. In this context, Kazakh choreographic masculinity actively negotiates between Connell's (1995) hegemonic ideal of the stoic, solitary warrior and more plural, relational masculinities, as exemplified by the cooperative lifts and interactions between dancers such as Asan & Üsen. This duality challenges monolithic conceptions of masculinity and presents male dance as a dynamic site of sociality, collaboration, and emotional expression.

Furthermore, by foregrounding agility, musicality, and narrative play within the choreography, these works resist the long-standing stereotype of feminisation attached to male stage dance. Instead, they affirm dance as a legitimate and vital space for male identity construction, emotional articulation, and cultural continuity. This engagement with embodied masculinity through dance contributes not only to the preservation and innovation of Kazakh dance traditions but also to broader conversations about gender, performance, and cultural identity in post-Soviet Central Asia.

RESULTS

The Integration of Tradition and Bodily Movement in Kazakh Men's Dance

The anthropology of any nation is inextricably linked to its culture and history. The anthropology of Kazakh men's dance has developed in accordance with the unique characteristics of the Kazakh people. Drawing upon the works of scholars studying Kazakh art, including national dance, it can be firmly established that Kazakh dance possesses deep historical roots. According to art researcher Serali Mukhamedsadykov, the art of dance emerged very early in the history of Kazakhstan. He notes that during times of combat, Kazakh batyrs expressed joy and victory to their communities through dance movements. He stated: "I was even surprised that the heroes of the Kazakh people were closely connected to dance. They defeated their enemies and returned home victorious, and ordinary villagers recognized them by their dance. Typically, after victory, the batyrs would dismount their horses and perform the 'Burkit' (Eagle) dance in the village to convey the good news. This tradition is uniquely characteristic of the Kazakh people, specifically Kazakh men" (Kabayev, 2021). Hence, if Kazakh batyrs are regarded as representatives of Kazakh men, it is reasonable to conclude that men's dance was well-developed during those periods.

Although historically it is considered that men's dance developed relatively late within Kazakh culture, recent years have witnessed significant progress and emerging trends in its development. This indicates an increasing interest in dance among young Kazakh men. Traditional male dances include "Nasybayshi," "Zhigit Bii," "Maskarampaz Kara Zhorga," "Burkutshi," "Baksy," "Asau At," "Bura Bii," "Sadak Bii," and others (Shamshiev & Jumasseitova, 2023). Based on these data, analysis of the movements and postures in Kazakh male dances, considering the content and nature of each dance, allows classification into four distinct groups (see Figure 2).

Thus, Kazakh men's dance represents a living embodiment of the nation's cultural anthropology, synthesizing traditional symbols and motifs with contemporary choreographic techniques and authorial innovation.

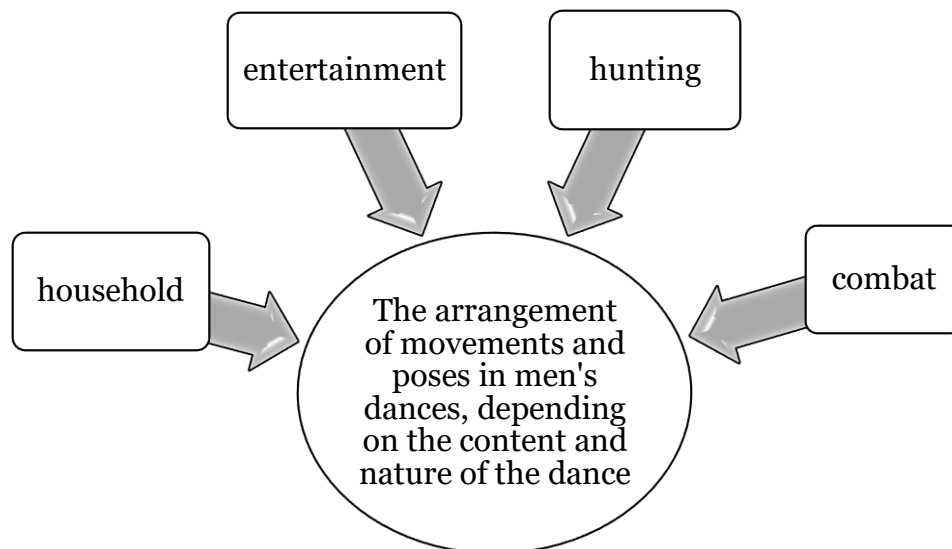


Figure 2. Classification of movements and postures in men's dances according to the content and character of the dance.

Describing the postures and movements in Kazakh men's dances according to the aforementioned categories allows for a more detailed classification, which reveals their distinctive characteristics (see Table 1).

Table 1. Detailed characteristics of postures and movements in Kazakh men's dances.

Nº	The content of the dance	Description	Dance cuts and postures	
1	Household dance	Everyday dance movements symbolize the everyday life of men. He shows Labor, economy, harmony with nature	Demonstration of labor actions	Wood chopping: making jerky movements with the arms up Herding and driving to the field: polite bent postures and beckoning movements with a wave of the hand Sowing: bending over the ground and showing sowing movements Moments of rest: crossing your arms over your chest, swinging lightly, sitting with your head bent, stroking your mustache and much more
2	Entertainment dance	This dance symbolizes the festive mood of men, freedom and competition with each other	Crossing and escaping	Fast and rhythmic kicks with the feet Jumping and spinning on one leg
			Funny movements	Swing the shoulders, raise the arms up and make free movements Jump high and take steps back and forth
3	Hunting dance	Gestures that symbolize the hunting tradition of men. In this group, communication with nature and ways of hunting are reflected	Control of predatory animals	movements to flex the body and stay awake
			Run and jump	fast movements and agile rotations for hunting
			The use of weapons	figurative gestures such as pulling a bow, throwing a spear
			Demonstration of animal behavior	flapping wings like a bird, depicting the jumping of an animal
4	Battle Dance	This dance demonstrates the heroism, fighting spirit and military skills of men	Hostilities	Swing a sword, hold a shield To bypass the opponent and attack
			Resistance movements	Fast movements, jumping, bending Focused attitude and body hardening at one point
			Demonstration of victory and heroic gestures	hands up and symbolizing victory
			Army formation	standing up straight, stepping, disciplined movements

From the Author's Repertoire of Men's Dances

Author's Dance «Zholbarys Zhurek»

The development of men's dances, along with the scientific articulation of their history and evolving trends, remains one of the most urgent challenges in contemporary dance art. The dance *Zholbarys Zhurek*, created by the author of this article, incorporates various elements characteristic of traditional Kazakh men's dance. Artistic works function as a shared medium for creating and reinforcing social bonds (Gingrich et al., 2024). It is for this reason that the author, collaborating with a colleague, choreographed this dance and presented it to audiences. The project aims to explore new, effective, and accessible methods of uniting performers (Sermon et al., 2021), as well as to integrate diverse approaches to male dance within a collective framework (Natalie et al., 2022).

Dance is a spatiotemporal art form—a continuous sequence of actions unfolding in space and time (Saitova et al., 2023). The choreography of *Zholbarys Zhurek* was developed at the Kazakh National Academy of

Choreography, an international educational, scientific, and creative center that unites the classical and national heritage of Kazakh choreographic art with the artistic diversity of cultures both near and far (balletacademy.edu.kz, 2024).

The dance *Zholbarys Zhüreke* was choreographed to the music of the ethno-folklore ensemble *Hassak*, which contributed to its popularization by integrating elements of early genres of traditional Kazakh music, particularly through the composition *Turan Zholy*. This melody provides ample opportunity for varied movements within the dance, reflecting contemporary trends and modern sonic elements. For example, the melody incorporates sounds reminiscent of a tiger's growl, blending traditional and modern auditory motifs. Due to the incorporation of diverse and transformed sounds across time, this dance transcends classification as a purely folk dance and is better understood as a stylized interpretation, with noticeable tempo accelerations.

The dance *Zholbarys Zhüreke* expresses feelings of vigor and energy traditionally associated with masculinity (see Figure 3). Within dance, the mind reveals itself in multiple dimensions—rational, volitional, and emotional. In the philosophical ontology of the mind, as conceptualized in Platonic thought, the soul is divided into three components: reason, will, and feeling (Osintseva, 2006). Choreographic motifs derived from participant movements (Bayliss et al., 2005) play a crucial role in the genre's development (Kloetzel, 2014). The title of the dance itself evokes the resilience inherent in men. The heart of the tiger symbolizes courage and bravery. The word heart in the dance's name is purposeful, as “the heart reveals the true essence of a person; there is no false or artificial image of the heart” (The Heaton File, 2020).



Figure 3. Scene from the dance «Zholbarys zhurek». Choreography by A. Shamshiev. Photo from the website of the Kazakh National Academy of choreography (<https://balletacademy.edu.kz/en>)

Another notable feature of the dance is the continuous alternation of poses, which simultaneously presents multiple positions. For instance, while the dancers form a circle on one side of the stage, they create a diagonal formation on the opposite side, with a distinct scene unfolding in the foreground. This spatial arrangement allows for greater freedom of the choreographer's imagination and creativity.

The dance is performed by a group of sixteen dancers. The number of performers is fundamentally important in creative choreography, as it directly influences the audience's perception, the clarity of the dance's thematic direction, and the overall conveyance of its mood. This factor impacts both the theoretical frameworks and practical execution of the dance. For example, teaching choreography to a smaller group is generally easier, while increasing the number of participants complicates both the structure and the learning process. Furthermore, the responsibility for the successful staging of the performance increases proportionally.

Regarding the overall thematic expression, the tiger—a serious and predatory animal that calmly surveys its environment—symbolizes qualities also inherent in Kazakh men. This symbolism reflects the character of Kazakh men, who are courageous, patient, and, when provoked, attack their adversaries with the ferocity of a tiger. The author's intention was to embody this national identity in the choreography. Throughout the dance, the performers depict various postures representing the life and behavior of a tiger group. Accompanying these movements is a powerful sound resembling a tiger's roar, which evokes a visceral response in the audience.

Each dancer demonstrates individual skill, and the choreographer employs a non-verbal communication method to convey meaning. This creative approach fosters flexibility and expressiveness as unifying elements.

Specifically, the non-verbal method encompasses gestures, postures, facial expressions, and pantomime (Shevchenko & Petuhova, 2020). Through this dance, the author aims to promote unity and cooperation among Kazakh men and to instill a sense of patriotism via artistic expression.

Author's Dance «Asan & Usen»

The author's dance «Asan & Usen» is based on folk music and was inspired by humorous interactions and jokes among peers. This dance aims to promote respectful and fraternal relations between peers through the medium of movement. Since the choreography is grounded in national musical traditions, particular attention is given to the dancers' attire, who perform in traditional costumes. The duet men's dance is characterized by lively music and an active rhythm (Figure 4).

«Asan & Usen» is a national dance reflecting the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan through folk music. Research indicates that cultural dances fulfill numerous functions, including traditional ritual practices, celebrations, wellness, spirituality, cultural transmission, and social bonding (Jain & Brown, 2001). This improvisational dance serves as a form of self-expression (Shay, 1998), designed to evoke a positive emotional response in the audience. Historically, improvisation in dance has been considered a fundamental element of national entertainment. In Eastern cultures, dance improvisation has been preserved not only in folk games but also in professional artistic expressions (Kazakh culture, 2005).

The choreography showcases a range of playful movements, including wide swings of the Kulash, high jumps, walking patterns, and expressive use of facial gestures. These elements were carefully selected to deepen the communication of the dance's narrative. Moreover, the dancers wear traditional hats, short embroidered vests, flexible trousers, and «masi» (national shoes) adorned with subtle Kazakh ornamentation on the legs. Such attire, alongside the symbolic props, enhances the thematic content of the performance. The essence of this dance embodies the concept of life as an art form (Ruyter, 2009).



Figure 4. Scene from the dance Asan & Usen. Choreography by A. Shamshiev. Photo courtesy of the Kazakh National Academy of Choreography (<https://balletacademy.edu.kz/en>).

This dance is characterized by its lightness, cheerfulness, playfulness, and strong national identity. The movements are dynamic and emotionally expressive, reflecting the vibrant spirit of the choreography. The dance incorporates a variety of leg, hand, body, group, and additional elements, which together create a rich and engaging performance.

Leg movements frequently employed include running in a circle; plié jumps such as splits and jerks; swinging on both legs; sideways walking with jerky alternating steps between the right and left; and plié turns.

Hand movements consist of circular motions, raising the arms upward, clapping palms, swinging the arms back and forth, gentle shoulder swings, among others.

Body dynamics involve subtle waist rotations that add plasticity to the dance, forward leans, plié movements, shoulder plays, and more.

Group elements include counter-steps and cross-steps, which are harmonious movements typical of partner dances, as well as rapid movements and synchronized jumps.

Additional playful elements comprise dancing on tiptoe, emphasizing national style through movements of the headdress, and other distinctive features. The rhythmic coordination of these movements with the music allowed the dance to be presented to the audience in a vivid and memorable manner.

Author's Dance «Tas Tulek»

In the dance Tas Tulek, the author portrays two eagles soaring in the sky, symbolizing vigilance and watchfulness. The eagle holds a special place in Kazakh culture, revered as a sacred bird. Historically, the way of

life of the Kazakh people has been closely connected to the eagle (Ualieva, 2023). The eagle was considered highly significant; early Kazakhs regarded not only horses but also birds as sacred beings, often burying them alongside humans. Archaeological findings from the Kazakh steppes reveal that in the Middle Ages, eagles were interred with human remains (Hinayat & Isabekov, 2007).

The choreography is set to music performed by the folklore and ethnographic ensemble TURAN, which enhances the expressiveness and vividness of the dance. The scenography, lighting, and costumes were carefully selected to align with the thematic content of the piece. Notably, the author paid meticulous attention to the dancers' attire, employing a modern approach to amplify the innovative and imaginative qualities of the performance (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Scene from the dance Tas Tulek. Choreography by A. Shamshiev. Photo courtesy of the Kazakh National Academy of Choreography (<https://balletacademy.edu.kz/en>).

During the performance, the rapid movements and intense emotions of two young eagles are vividly conveyed, embodying strength and vitality (Figure 6). The dance expresses a passionate spirit and a yearning for freedom. The author's innovative principles (Johnson & Oliver, 2017) contribute significantly to the creative originality of the choreography.

This piece represents a distinct form of men's dance, illustrating the movements of an eagle. It symbolically demonstrates freedom, power, and agility. The fundamental movements employed include:

Arm and body movements: waving the arms like wings; raising the arms upward and then slowly lowering them to mimic the eagle soaring; imitating the eagle's flight by slightly bending the arms and rotating them in circular motions, among other gestures.

Leg movements: depicting the eagle stalking its prey by quickly sitting down and rising; demonstrating attacks through bounding jumps; and expressing the eagle's agility through dynamic leg movements resembling a slingshot.

Head and eye movements: conveying the eagle's vigilant observation of its surroundings by rapid head turns; maintaining a sharp, focused gaze to reflect the eagle's alertness.

Body dynamics: illustrating the eagle's sudden stooping by bending the waist and leaning forward; swaying or climbing by arching the back; depicting the eagle's swift pursuit of prey through sudden forward bends followed by rising and arm movements.

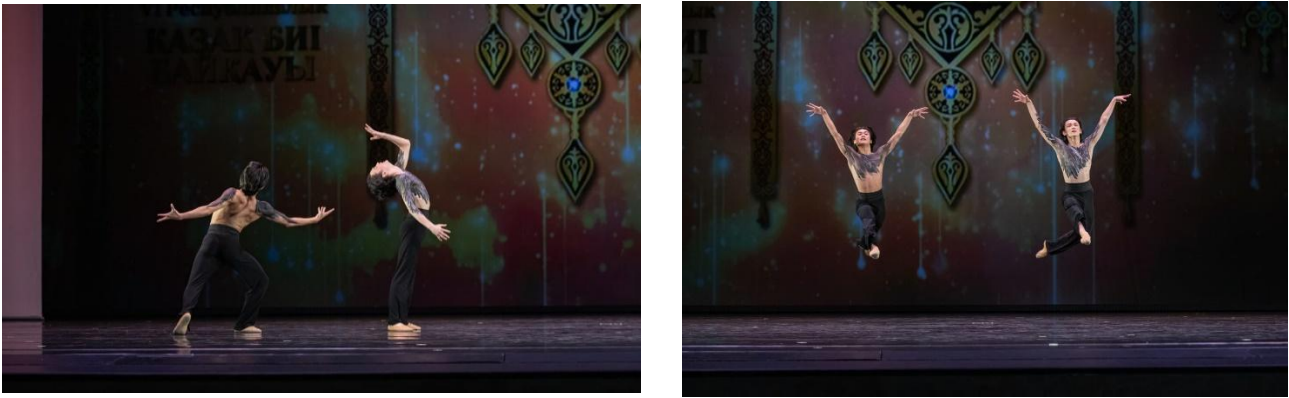


Figure 6. Scene from the dance «Tas tulek». Choreography by A. Shamshiev. Photograph courtesy of the Kazakh National Academy of Choreography (<https://balletacademy.edu.kz/en>).

This dance is perceived as a distinctive performance that embodies not only national traditions but also the harmony of nature, freedom, and courage. The author's intention is to inspire modern Kazakh youth to embody the vigilance and bravery of the eagle, as demonstrated through the portrayal of young eagles in the dance.

All three choreographic works — *Zholbarys Zhürek*, *Asan & Üsen*, and *Tas Tülek* — were publicly performed and received positive feedback from a range of audiences, including professional artists, students, and the general public. Although no formal audience surveys were conducted, responses to the performances were documented through video recordings, informal interviews, and online commentary. These responses indicate a strong emotional engagement with the thematic content, especially regarding national symbols, male expressivity, and the physical articulation of movement.

Visual documentation, including photographs and video footage of the performances, served as both analytical material and evidence of audience engagement. In some cases, viewers expressed admiration for the choreographic structure and physical discipline of the dancers, while others noted how the performances evoked a sense of cultural continuity and historical memory. Collectively, this material supports the view that contemporary Kazakh male dance not only preserves cultural heritage but also stimulates critical reflection on masculinity, identity, and embodiment.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the characteristics of male dance movements and their anthropological nature are shaped and developed according to the national features of each country. In Kazakh men's dance, the national identity is distinctly manifested, with its spiritual and cultural codes preserved and transmitted through bodily movements. These dance movements serve as a vital tool for fostering patriotism, as traditional dances portray values such as heroism, bravery, and courage inherent to the Kazakh people. Moreover, the use of symbols and metaphors in dance works contributes to the formation of national consciousness and intercultural cultural identity.

A clear synthesis of tradition and modernity is observed in contemporary male dance. This fusion is realized through authorial dances that integrate classical national motifs with innovative choreographic techniques, as well as contemporary musical and scenographic elements. Consequently, a dialog between the national heritage and contemporary demands emerges within dance art, enhancing both the artistic value and cultural significance of the performances. This trend should be regarded as an important step in the transformation of dance from traditional to modern forms.

Within the framework of the somatic and embodied practice approaches featured in the JDSP journal, this article examines the significance of Kazakh men's dance in body culture and how it conveys national and cultural meanings through movement. The authorial dances actively employ somatic experience, embodying spiritual and cultural values of the nation through the body, which aligns with embodied practice theories emphasizing the integration of the body within cultural contexts. From this perspective, the article contributes to a deeper scientific understanding of Kazakh men's dance as a form of somatic practice representing national identity and cultural traditions.

In conclusion, the current development of Kazakh men's dance reflects the harmonious fusion of tradition and modernity while playing a crucial role in promoting patriotism and national identity. This study scientifically reveals the anthropological and cultural values of Kazakh dance art and demonstrates its adaptation to

contemporary contexts. Such analysis provides a significant theoretical and practical foundation for further research and development in the field of dance.

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