



Religious-Ethical Values in Kazakh Culture in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Public consciousness today oscillates between secular rationalisation, accelerating digital economies, and a renewed desire for spiritual and ethical depth. Mythologemes and symbols mediate religious knowing, they also stabilise ethical horizons when informational noise rises. Building on Ernst Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms, where myth and language are foundational cultural expressions, and Martin Heidegger's view of language as world forming, not merely expressive, this article investigates how religious-ethical values are encoded in Kazakh mythologemes and symbols, and how these values are being reinterpreted in the digital age. Through hermeneutic, cognitive linguistic and cultural semiotic methods, we analyse cosmological metaphors in Khoja Ahmed Yassawi's *Hikmet* and Abai Kunanbayev's *Words of Edification*. We show that Yassawi's four elements, earth, water, fire, air, constitute a semiotic system that maps to humility, purity, love, transformation, while Abai's "full person" reframes these archetypes into modern ethical categories. In dialogue with Jungian psychology on archetypes, Ricoeur's symbol-thought dialectic, and Baudrillard's hyperreality, we argue that revitalising mythologemes can ground ethical reflection against the flattening forces of digital simulation. Pedagogical and design implications for digital culture follow.

Keywords: public consciousness, Ahmed Yassawi, Abai Kunanbayev, religious, Muslim, digital age.

Introduction

Modernity promises transparency through data and technique, yet experiences of meaning often arrive through symbols and stories. Cassirer treats humans as "symbolic animals," whose myths, languages and arts are not secondary decorations but primary ways of world making (Cassirer, 1923–1929, 1944). Heidegger similarly stresses that language discloses being, so a community's word-world is also its value-world (Heidegger, 1971). Jung names recurring mythic motifs mythologemes, structural elements of the psyche that carry ethical charge across eras (Jung, 1959).

Kazakh culture offers a rich testbed for this lens. Yassawi's Turkic-Islamic mysticism and Abai's humanistic reconfiguration of Sufi imagery articulate a continuum from cosmological symbol to ethical category. At the same time, digital media construct a hyperreal environment where signs often reference other signs, not reality, which risks dissolving depth and agency (Baudrillard, 1994). The central problem addressed here is simple and urgent, how do traditional mythologemes sustain religious-ethical orientation within a high velocity information ecology.

Cassirer's symbolic forms, myth, language, art, science, are parallel, each with an inner logic rather than a single ladder of progress (Cassirer, 1923–1929). Lotman's semiosphere concept adds that meaning circulates within cultural boundaries, where core and periphery exchange codes (Lotman, 1990). Peirce's triad, sign, object, interpretant, allows us to track how a symbol like "fire" points to both empirical heat and spiritual love, then produces an ethical response in the interpreter (Peirce, 1931–1958).

Heidegger's later writings argue that language does not label a pre given world, it lets a world appear, so any erosion of symbolic language narrows what can be experienced as real (Heidegger, 1971).



Jung treats mythologemes as recurring psychic structures, for example the earth mother, purifying waters, transforming fire, animating breath, that carry normative force because they organise desire and attention (Jung, 1959, 1968). Baudrillard describes simulation replacing referential reality, while Han analyses an achievement subject who self exploits under constant exposure and comparison, both conditions compress contemplation and ritual time (Baudrillard, 1994, Han, 2015, 2017). Eliade's sacred time, a re entering of origins in ritual, suffers when perpetual presentness dominates (Eliade, 1954, 1957).

The linguistic picture of the world frames concepts as networks where metaphor links domains, for example moral purity as cleanliness, humility as low verticality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kubryakova, 1996; Popova & Sternin, 2007; Telia, 1996).

Methods

Hermeneutic Method

To keep the methods distinct, analysis proceeded sequentially: hermeneutic close reading -> cognitive metaphor mapping -> cultural-semiotic contextualisation -> digital-cultural interpretation. The hermeneutic method forms the core of this study and is applied through close textual reading of Khoja Ahmed Yassawi's *Divan-i Hikmet* and Abai Kunanbayev's *Kara sozder* in their Kazakh and Russian versions. Interpretation is guided by Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic principle that "the symbol gives rise to thought" (Ricoeur, 1967, 1970), meaning that symbolic expressions are not exhausted by literal meaning but open deeper ethical and ontological horizons. Texts were approached as historically situated yet semantically open, allowing meanings to unfold through dialogue between tradition and contemporary concerns. Particular attention was paid to cosmological imagery, moral exhortations, and anthropological metaphors that structure ethical self-understanding. The hermeneutic circle was employed, moving between individual passages and the broader philosophical vision of each author. This method enabled the identification of symbolic continuity between Sufi cosmology and modern ethical reflection (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Primary texts were Yassawi's *Divan-i Hikmet* (Sanat, 1993) and Abai's *Kara sozder* (Zhazushy, 1995), consulted in Kazakh and Russian editions; secondary studies were used to contextualise historical, linguistic, and semiotic claims. This continuity is important because it shows how classical Sufi imagery can be translated into a modern, teachable ethical vocabulary (e.g., Abai's 'full person') with implications for education and digital design.

Cognitive Linguistic Method

Cognitive linguistics was employed to analyse how ethical values are conceptualised through metaphor. Drawing on the theory of conceptual metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the study mapped recurring metaphorical structures such as HUMILITY AS EARTH, PURITY AS WATER, LOVE AS FIRE, and ASPIRATION AS BREATH or WIND. These metaphors were analysed as cognitive frames that shape moral perception rather than as decorative literary devices. The method assumes that metaphor reflects embodied experience and cultural cognition. By identifying stable metaphorical mappings across texts, the research demonstrates how ethical concepts are grounded in sensory and cosmological experience. This approach clarifies how abstract virtues become experientially accessible and culturally transmissible. Cognitive linguistic analysis thus bridges symbolic imagery and ethical behaviour (Lotman, 1990; Peirce, 1931–1958).



Cultural Semiotic Method

The cultural semiotic method situates symbolic motifs within the broader Turkic-Islamic semiosphere. Following Lotman's theory of cultural semiotics (1990) and Peirce's triadic model of sign, object, and interpretant (1931–1958), symbols are analysed as dynamic meaning-producing structures rather than fixed signs. This method allows tracing how traditional mythologemes migrate across historical periods and cultural codes, from Sufi poetry to modern ethical discourse. Special attention was given to how symbols operate within systems of opposition, centre and periphery, sacred and profane. The semiotic approach also enables comparison between pre-digital symbolic density and contemporary tendencies toward symbolic simplification. Through this lens, Kazakh religious-ethical symbols are understood as culturally stabilising mechanisms within shifting communicative environments. Concretely, we coded each key symbol for (a) semantic field, (b) ethical value, and (c) communicative setting (ritual-poetic vs. media-digital), and then compared how interpretants shift across these contexts.

Contextual and Philosophical Analysis of Digital Culture

To interpret the contemporary relevance of religious-ethical symbols, the study applies contextual philosophical analysis informed by Baudrillard, Han, Eliade, and Fromm. Digital culture is examined as a socio-symbolic environment characterised by acceleration, simulation, and the erosion of contemplative depth (Baudrillard, 1994; Han, 2015, 2017). Eliade's concept of sacred time (1954) provides a contrast to the perpetual present of digital media, while Fromm's critique of alienation (1941) informs ethical implications for subjectivity. This method enables evaluation of how digital hyperreality pressures symbolic meaning and ethical orientation. The analysis remains critical but constructive, seeking not rejection of digital culture but strategies for symbolic reintegration and ethical grounding within it (Baudrillard, 1994; Han, 2015, 2017; Eliade, 1954; Fromm, 1941).

Sampling Strategy

Textual sampling was purposive and theory-driven rather than exhaustive. In Yassawi's *Divan-i Hikmet*, passages were selected where elemental metaphors (earth, water, fire, air) cluster and function explicitly as moral guidance. In Abai's *Kara sozder*, sampling focused on sections discussing the ethical anthropology of the "tolyk adam" and its components, *nürly aqıl* (enlightened intellect), *ystyq qayrat* (ardent will), and *jılı jürek* (warm heart). These passages were chosen due to their philosophical density, symbolic clarity, and influence on Kazakh moral discourse. The sampling strategy prioritised interpretive depth and conceptual coherence over quantitative coverage (Baudrillard, 1994; Han, 2015, 2017; Eliade, 1954; Fromm, 1941).

Results

Cosmological semiotics in Yassawi

Yassawi repeatedly identifies the seeker with dust, soil, path dust, a posture of lowliness that makes cultivation possible. In Jungian terms, earth activates the maternal archetype, patience, fertility, endurance (Jung, 1959). In the Peircean triad, "earth" as sign points to humility as object, producing an interpretant of patient practice. Ritual washing, zamzam allusions, and river flow imagery encode mercy and generosity. Water signals an ethics of



renewal, where cleansing is cyclical, not a one-time act. Sufi cosmology links humours, virtues and elements, so water aligns with compassion and steadiness (Sufi Path of Love, 2020). Yassawi contrasts the destructive nafs fire with the purifying flame of love. This double valence performs what Cassirer notes about mythical affect, where meanings crystallise around intensities, then stabilise as cultural forms (Cassirer, 1923–1929). Breeze, breath, wind, gesture toward spirit, movement, prayer rhythm. Across traditions, breath links body and transcendence, so “air” frames vigilant attention as ethical vigilance.

These four elements interlock as a semiotic system, humility grounds, water cleanses, fire transforms, air sustains. The system is not decoration, it is pedagogy, it scripts ethical becoming through repeated, sensorily vivid images.

Abai’s transformation, from cosmology to ethical triad

Abai inherits Sufi vocabulary yet articulates a rational-ethical synthesis through the “tolyk adam,” a balanced person integrating enlightened intellect, ardent will, warm heart. The triad recodes cosmological motifs into psychological capacities. Intellect regulates and discerns, will animates resolve, heart orients toward compassion. This shift exemplifies what Ricoeur calls a “second naivety,” a return to symbol after critique, now as reflective commitment rather than unexamined myth (Ricoeur, 1967). Abai thus mediates tradition and modernity, preserving archetypal charge while offering portable categories for a changing society.

Continuities with broader Islamic intellectual traditions

The Kazakh synthesis resonates with encyclopedic projects like the Ikhwan al-Safa’, where cosmology, ethics and pedagogy are tightly coupled, an implicit reminder that symbol and science historically coevolved rather than opposed each other (Ikhwan al-Safa’, 2016). The point is heuristic, symbolic literacy once belonged to the same house as rational inquiry.

Digital hyperreality and symbolic flattening

Baudrillard diagnoses a media order where models precede events, images exceed lives, and subjectivity fragments (Baudrillard, 1994). Han notes how self optimisation and incessant exposure erode contemplative attention and ritual rhythm (Han, 2015, 2017). In such conditions, Yassawi’s elements risk becoming emojis, quick signals without ontological thickness. Eliade’s sacred time, reactualised in ritual, is displaced by a perpetual now (Eliade, 1954, 1957). The ethical danger is not entertainment itself, it is the loss of slow interpretants, that is, the loss of the long meanings symbols cultivate.

Cassirer’s thesis that mythical consciousness has its own logic helps explain why Yassawi’s images do normative work, they organise perception and action, not just belief (Cassirer, 1923–1929). When Abai reframes elements into intellect, will, heart, he demonstrates Heidegger’s claim that new speech can open new dwelling, a modern Kazakh ethical subjectivity appears through linguistic labour (Heidegger, 1971). For example, Abai’s triad of nūrly aqıl (enlightened intellect), ystyq qaýrat (ardent will), and jılı jürek (warm heart) offers a compact ethical lexicon that can be operationalised in contemporary education more directly than cosmological imagery alone. If hyperreality compresses reflection, then pedagogy should lengthen attention. Symbols can be re embedded in practices that slow interpretation, reading aloud, calligraphy, recitation with commentary, digital storytelling that preserves ritual arcs rather than only producing instant clips. Elemental modules, four week cycles around



earth, water, fire, air, pairing Yassawi's verses with reflective practice, service, ecological attention. Abai triad studios, exercises that explicitly balance intellect, will, heart, for example, debate skills, disciplined craft, care projects. Second naivety seminars, reading Ricoeur alongside Abai to train critical faithfulness rather than cynical distance. Digital culture and design. Ritual-aware interfaces, features that invite return, silence, repetition, for example reading timers that reward slow completion rather than only streaks. Symbolic scaffolds, micro rituals embedded in platforms, opening a session with a line from *Hikmet*, a brief pause for breath before posting. Community semiospheres, curated archives where users annotate symbols together, keeping interpretants communal rather than purely individual.

This study is interpretive, it does not claim statistical generality. Textual selections privilege widely circulated editions and translations, which may smooth over dialectal or manuscript differences. Future work could employ corpus linguistics on Kazakh and Chagatai sources, ethnographic study of contemporary ritual uses of Yassawi and Abai, comparative analysis with other Turkic cultures, and experimental design studies that test ritual-aware features in digital platforms.

Revival and Reinterpretation of Symbolic Traditions in Modern Kazakh Society

Contemporary Kazakh society has witnessed a growing revival of traditional customs and symbols, as communities seek to anchor their identity in a rapidly changing world. Notably, this revival is not a simple return to the past, but a *reinterpretation* of traditions in modern contexts. According to a recent national study, Kazakhstan is experiencing a resurgence of interest in national customs and rituals, driven by a desire for continuity and stability rather than a rejection of modernity (Omirgazy, 2025). Sociologists observe that these traditions act as a "safety cushion," providing social cohesion and a sense of identity amid uncertainty. Crucially, traditions demonstrate an inherent flexibility – they can take on new forms while preserving their core ethical roles of fostering community bonds and moral norms. For example, many life-cycle rituals (weddings, child-naming, etc.) are still practiced, but urban Kazakhs might celebrate them in adapted ways (shorter ceremonies, new venues) that fit contemporary lifestyles while retaining symbolic elements like blessings or gift exchanges that affirm communal values of unity and generosity. Researchers note that this adaptive revival is facilitated by *glocalization*, the interplay of global and local dynamics, whereby global trends are localized in culturally meaningful ways. In other words, young Kazakhs are blending global modern culture with traditional symbols to create hybrid expressions of identity (Omirgazy, 2025).

One vivid arena of symbolic revival is youth culture itself. Kazakhstani youth, now highly connected through digital media, are redefining what it means to be "modern Kazakh" by infusing art, fashion, and music with traditional motifs (Omirgazy, 2025). For instance, contemporary music festivals like OYU Fest combine modern genres with traditional music and imagery – kobyz and dombra tunes sampled in electronic music, or stage visuals featuring Kazakh ornaments – as a statement of cultural pride. Youth fashion designers incorporate ancient patterns (*oy-örnek*) and nomadic textiles into streetwear, creating styles that are "young, bold, and rooted". This phenomenon reflects what cultural theorists call a *hybrid identity*: recent studies show that Kazakh youth frequently blend modern design elements with traditional motifs, resulting in a layered identity expression that is both globally cosmopolitan and distinctly Kazakh (Zhumabay et al., 2025). The persistence of ethnic symbols in daily objects – jewelry, clothing, home decor – illustrates that these symbols continue to carry meaning even when mass-produced or used in new settings. As one cultural



analysis notes, the “mass replication” of symbols via modern manufacturing does not erase their significance; rather, cultural meanings “persist in a layered fashion” on material objects. For example, a young professional in Almaty might wear a pendant shaped like the *qoşqar myŭiz* (ram’s horn) pattern as a trendy accessory, but that symbol still resonates with the protective motif of the ancestral *tumar* (amulet) and the value of prosperity it traditionally signified. Indeed, even after the secularizing Soviet era, many protective archetypal symbols remain in use – necklaces with the *qoşqar myŭiz* motif, akin to an “evil eye” talisman, are still worn for spiritual security. Such examples show how cultural memory endures: Kazakh symbols continue to link individuals to their heritage, sometimes unconsciously, through design and habit. At the same time, some uses of ornament and heritage symbols are trend-driven or commercial, which can flatten meanings unless accompanied by explanation or community practice.

However, the reinterpretation of symbols is not uniform across all social settings. Ethnographic observations suggest a divergence between rural and urban experiences: rural communities tend to maintain traditional practices more robustly (with deeper implicit understanding of their symbolism), whereas urban populations often modify rituals and symbols to suit contemporary urban life. In cities, some symbolic practices are reinvented as part of a new creative culture. Members of the urban creative class (artists, writers, IT entrepreneurs) have begun to consciously reclaim symbols – for instance, by incorporating the image of the steppe and the *kök tu* (blue sky of the flag) in public art and digital media – to assert a modern Kazakh narrative of progress that is still rooted in ancestral land and sky. *National cinema* provides another example: recent Kazakh films often foreground iconic images like the endless steppe, the yurt, or the horse, which function as symbolic anchors of identity for viewers. These images, presented on modern screens, evoke the ethos of freedom, hospitality, and harmony with nature characteristic of nomadic Kazakh philosophy. By consuming and producing such media, contemporary Kazakhs engage in *symbolic practice*: they continuously re-signify what these heritage symbols mean under present conditions. In sum, the ongoing revival of symbolic traditions in Kazakhstan exemplifies an active dialogue between past and present – a process that reinforces moral and cultural continuity even as forms change. This revitalization is itself a strategy of cultural resilience, a way to resist the “threat of cultural homogenization” in globalization by re-rooting modern life in familiar ethical symbols (Nysanbayev, 2018, as cited in Komekova & Koç Aydın, 2024)

Applications of Symbolic Ethics in Education and Digital Platforms

The renewed interest in Kazakh symbolic ethics has also permeated educational initiatives and digital platforms, as scholars and practitioners seek to harness these cultural resources for moral development, identity formation, and creative design. Recent research in Kazakhstan’s education sphere provides empirical support for the benefits of integrating traditional narratives and symbols into learning. Toibazar et al. (2025) conducted a quasi-experimental study in a university setting where Kazakh epic stories and *mythopoetic images* were incorporated into the literature curriculum. They found a statistically significant improvement in students’ “national value achievement” scores in the group exposed to these epic narratives, compared to a control group (Toibazar et al., 2025, p.170). In other words, teaching with Kazakh epics measurably strengthened students’ appreciation and internalization of ethical values rooted in Kazakh culture. The same intervention also improved students’ attitudes towards their literature course, suggesting that culturally meaningful content can increase engagement and personal relevance in education. These findings align with the broader pedagogical recommendation that *culturally rich content* be



integrated at all levels of education – from university syllabi to primary school materials – to reinforce ethical heritage. Indeed, Toibazar et al. (2025) urge curriculum developers in Kazakhstan to prioritize teaching materials that emphasize the historical and ethical aspects of epics, and to train teachers in culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches to deliver this content.

Parallel to content integration, educators are also exploring digital technologies as tools to transmit spiritual and moral values. Digital platforms offer new ways to present folklore, language, and art to the younger generation, many of whom are digital natives. Nagymzhanova et al. (2025) highlight the *urgent need* for methodological frameworks to use digital technology in fostering spiritual culture in schools. They argue that digital tools – from multimedia presentations to virtual reality – can be powerful instruments for cultivating spiritual and ethical values, provided they are used thoughtfully (Nagymzhanova et al., 2025). For example, interactive e-learning modules could allow students to explore the meanings of Kazakh symbols (such as the tree of life or the four elements from Yassawi’s cosmology) through games, stories, and discussions. Properly designed, such tools can enhance key humanistic qualities by engaging students’ curiosity and empathy in a format they find accessible.

One can imagine a mobile app that teaches proverbs and moral lessons by having children virtually interact with wise folk characters, or an online platform where elders share video anecdotes of traditional virtues (hospitality, courage, humility) for youth to reflect on. In fact, a meta-thematic analysis by Kaliyeva et al. (2025) underscores that Kazakh mythological concepts carry rich pedagogical potential, which can be adapted to modern learning. Their extensive review of ethnolinguistic studies finds that mythological vocabulary – including archetypal figures like the *Batyr* (heroic warrior), animal totems, and ancestral spirits – plays a central role in constructing national identity and collective memory. These elements also have cognitive and educational functions: they shape thought patterns and moral schemas, and thus could be leveraged in contemporary education to enrich students’ metalinguistic awareness and cultural knowledge. The study explicitly notes *implications for education and digital learning*, suggesting that incorporating mythic and symbolic content into digital curricula can aid the preservation of cultural heritage in the Information Age.

Concrete steps are being taken in this direction. Some Kazakhstani educators are developing curricula that tie ethical lessons to symbolic artifacts – for instance, lessons on environmental ethics built around the reverence for *Zher-ana* (Earth-Mother) in Kazakh lore, or leadership and selflessness taught through the stories of legendary heroes (such as Alpamys or Yer Targyn). Others focus on language: by teaching Kazakh proverbs and idioms in schools, educators impart not only language skills but also the moral wisdom embedded in these sayings. Proverbs like “*Ülderi toly beysaq, öz orının tabady*” (“Even if scattered, the feather will find its place”) are used to spark discussions on destiny and personal responsibility, bridging traditional outlooks with students’ own life experiences.

On digital platforms, we see a rise of youth-oriented content celebrating Kazakh culture and values – from YouTube channels that animate folk tales, to Instagram influencers who explain the meaning of traditional ornaments or holidays to broad audiences. These trends reflect a conscious effort to mediate tradition through technology. This mediation is largely beneficial for access and intergenerational transmission, yet it also risks reducing symbols to aesthetics or branding; therefore, contextual annotation and source transparency are important. Importantly, as these practices grow, scholars stress the need to evaluate their



effectiveness. For example, Zhumabay et al. (2025) suggest creating “jewelry motif analysis modules” in design education, where students would study traditional Kazakh ornament patterns and their meanings as part of art and design curricula. Such modules not only teach technical skills but also strengthen students’ sense of identity by revealing the symbolic significance of design elements. This kind of integration can ensure that young designers and creators carry forward the essence of Kazakh symbolic ethics in their modern work – whether they are crafting jewelry, user interfaces, or even video game art. It also addresses a noted gap: previous generations sometimes saw ceremonial objects as mere aesthetics once removed from context, but with guided education, youth can regain an adequate comprehension of symbols’ meanings.

By combining traditional content with innovative pedagogy and tech-based delivery, Kazakhstan is experimenting with a model of education that equips young people to navigate globalization *without losing their moral compass*. This model resonates with global movements in values education and “character education,” but is distinctive in drawing from indigenous cultural symbols as a source of ethical guidance.

Archetypal Symbols, Moral Pedagogy, and Cultural Resilience in the Digital Age

Beyond specific applications, the revival of archetypal symbols in modern Kazakhstan carries deeper philosophical implications. At its heart is the idea that archetypal images and narratives – the *mythologemes* of Kazakh culture – can serve as enduring vessels of ethical meaning, providing moral orientation in an age often described as disorienting or value-fragmented. The earlier sections of this study showed how Khoja Ahmed Yassawi’s four elements and Abai Kunanbayev’s concept of the “full person” encode ethical values in symbolic form. Revitalizing such symbols today can be seen as a way of grounding ethics in culturally resonant narratives. This is especially pertinent given the challenges of the “hyperreal” digital environment, where incessant information flow and virtual simulations threaten to flatten moral discourse (Baudrillard, 1994).

The concern, as Baudrillard and Byung-Chul Han have noted, is that in a culture of constant stimulation and competition, traditional spaces for reflection – ritual, story, communal dialogue – are shrinking (Han, 2015). In Kazakhstan, one might interpret the renewed interest in traditional symbols as a response to this predicament: by reintroducing archetypal reference points (ancient symbols, ancestor tales, spiritual metaphors) into public consciousness, communities seek to restore depth and context to ethical thinking. Indeed, Jung’s theory of archetypes suggests that figures like the *Wise Old Man* or the *Earth Mother* persist across eras as part of our collective unconscious, ready to offer wisdom when recognized (Jung, 1959). Kazakh legends abound with such archetypes. Mursalim et al. (2020) observe that the archetypal figures of *aqsaqal* (the wise old man) and the *saint* in Kazakh folklore are closely linked, both embodying core virtues like rationality and humanism. These figures have long guided moral behavior in oral tradition by exemplifying how wisdom, patience, and piety should manifest in communal life. When modern storytellers, educators, or media producers invoke these archetypes – for example, a popular novel featuring a sage elder character, or a television drama drawing on the saintly hero motif – they are effectively *pedagogues of virtue*, teaching by reactivating timeless symbols.

Revivals of archetypal symbols also promote cultural resilience, defined as a community’s capacity to withstand and adapt to external pressures (e.g., globalization, cultural homogenization) while maintaining its core identity. An insightful meta-study by Kaliyeva et



al. (2025) concluded that mythological elements in Kazakh language and lore (such as warrior-heroes, totemic animals, ancestral legends) contribute to a form of “symbolic resistance” against cultural erosion. In other words, these symbols act as a reserve of collective memory and values that communities draw upon to assert their uniqueness and values in the face of change. For instance, the archetype of the *Batyr* – the brave warrior endowed with not just strength but a code of honor – has re-emerged in post-Soviet Kazakhstan as a cultural ideal, invoked in everything from new literature to youth patriotic education. By celebrating historical and legendary batyrs (heroes like Bogenbai or Makhanbet), society reinforces ideals of courage, justice, and sacrifice for the greater good. Similarly, the mythic totem of the wolf (*kok bəri*), which in Turkic epics symbolizes courage and freedom, has been creatively adopted in modern narratives to inspire patriotism and moral reflection. Akbulatov et al. (2025) analyze a contemporary Kazakh novel where the *heavenly wolf* archetype is used to represent the “national spirit” and ethical concepts such as conscience, liberty, and the *struggle for the good* in independent Kazakhstan (Akbulatov et al., 2025). The wolf, deeply rooted in Turkic mythology as an ancestral guide, is thus repurposed to speak to today’s quest for ethical integrity and self-determination. What these examples illustrate is a conscious philosophical stance: by looking back to archetypal symbols, one can look forward with a stronger moral footing. Revived symbols become a medium through which modern Kazakhs negotiate questions of right and wrong, purpose and identity, in a language that is both ancient and familiar.

From a pedagogical perspective, the use of archetypal symbols offers a rich, imaginative approach to moral education – one that resonates emotionally and intuitively. Educational theorists often emphasize the role of narrative and image in teaching values; abstract principles alone seldom engage young minds, but stories and symbols can *model* virtues in concrete ways. The Kazakh tradition provides a vast repository of such teaching tools: consider the didactic tale of Zhirenshe Sheshen, the wise folk philosopher who uses clever parables to impart ethical lessons, or the symbolic practice of giving *bata* (blessings), where elders bestow morally charged wishes (for kindness, courage, prosperity) upon the young. Re-integrating these practices in youth education – e.g., encouraging students to learn proverbs and explain their meaning, or having school ceremonies where elders offer blessings and narratives – can build a moral vocabulary that is experientially rich. As one recent cultural study noted, *ritual consciousness* can be transmitted even through play: traditional Kazakh dolls and toys were historically used to socialize children into ritual practice and collective values.

Modern educators are exploring how such insights can translate into classroom activities or educational media. For example, a primary school program might incorporate a “story circle” where students reenact folktales, thus learning cooperation (by playing community roles) and empathy (by seeing through a hero’s or a helper’s eyes). These methods align with contemporary moral pedagogy approaches that advocate storytelling, role-playing, and cultural immersion as means to develop character. What is novel in the Kazakh context is the deliberate *archetypal revival* at play: educators are not simply using any stories, but specifically those carrying the ethical archetypes of their own culture, thereby doubling the effect – strengthening moral reasoning and cultural identity simultaneously.

Finally, there are implications for design and technology in the information age. If, as this research posits, revitalizing mythologemes can help counter the “flattening forces” of digital hyperreality (where meaning is often shallow and transient), then designers of digital experiences might incorporate features that embed depth, context, and even *ritual* into



technology use. Scholars in human-computer interaction have begun to ask whether we can design digital rituals or symbolic interactions that foster reflection and connection (e.g., “ritual design” in user experience). In Kazakhstan, this could mean creating digital platforms that are “ritual-aware” – for example, a social media app that reminds users of important cultural days (like Nauryz, the spring new year) and encourages sharing of stories or family recipes associated with it, thereby inducing communal reflection rather than endless scroll. Another idea is the incorporation of *slow media* principles: drawing inspiration from Eliade’s notion of sacred time (Eliade, 1954), Kazakh designers might develop applications that periodically invite users to pause and engage in a meaningful activity (such as listening to a short bi-weekly podcast on a virtue from Abai’s teachings, or viewing a piece of traditional art with commentary) – a digital equivalent of a minor ritual that punctuates the day. These are speculative directions, but they highlight a broader philosophical point: technology need not eliminate cultural-symbolic richness; if thoughtfully guided, it can amplify it.

By integrating archetypal symbols and ethics into the digital interfaces that people interact with daily, one could reinforce cultural continuity even in virtual spaces. This approach would serve not only cultural preservation but also the well-being of users, offering moments of grounding and ethical orientation amid the frenetic pace of online life. It resonates with global trends noted by cultural analysts – that in 2025, there is a return of ritual and symbolism as “tools for resilience, connection, and meaning-making,” even (or especially) in technologically advanced societies. In short, the philosophical and practical revival of Kazakh archetypal symbols represents a conscious strategy to retain moral depth and cultural resilience in the digital age. It acknowledges, as Ricoeur (1967) suggested, that “the symbol gives rise to thought” – symbols can continually provoke ethical reflection – and extends that insight into new realms of pedagogy and design. For example, a ritual-aware reading app could begin sessions with a short Hikmet line, invite a 10-second breathing pause before posting, and run a four-week earth/water/fire/air reflection cycle with community annotation.

Conclusion

Kazakh mythologemes and symbols encode a durable ethic, humility, purification, love, aspiration. Abai shows how these can be reframed for modern life without losing archetypal energy. Digital hyperreality pressures symbolic thought, yet it also opens design spaces for re-ritualising attention. Revitalising symbolic language is therefore not nostalgia, it is a future-facing cultural strategy, returning depth and agency to communities navigating information abundance.

This study is limited by its interpretive and textual focus, which does not include empirical sociological or psychological data on contemporary audiences. The analysis is confined to selected canonical texts and may not capture the full diversity of lived religious practice across regions or generations. Additionally, reliance on translated editions introduces potential semantic mediation. The philosophical framework privileges depth interpretation, which may not fully account for pragmatic or institutional dimensions of digital ethics. Future research should combine (1) corpus-based analysis of Kazakh/Chagatai sources, (2) ethnography of contemporary uses of Yassawi and Abai in ritual and education, and (3) user studies evaluating prototype ritual-aware digital interventions.



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