

# Abai's Philosophy and Literature in the Context of World Philosophical Thought

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## Abstract

*The article is devoted to the philosophical and literary aspects of the work of Abai Kunanbayev, one of the greatest thinkers and poets of Kazakhstan, in the context of the world philosophical tradition. The work examines how Abai's ideas relate to the teachings of leading philosophers of the East and West, such as Confucius, Socrates, Leo Tolstoy and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Particular attention is paid to the philosophical categories presented in Abai's works, such as reason, conscience, faith, knowledge, man, labor and society, and their interrelations. The methodological basis of the study is hermeneutic, comparative and historical-philosophical analyses. The study revealed that Abai's philosophy is a synthesis of national traditions and universal humanistic values, and is also relevant in modern society. The work emphasizes the importance of Abai's philosophy as an important element of world thought and the cultural identity of Kazakhstan.*

## Introduction

The personality of Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904) - an outstanding Kazakh poet, educator, philosopher and thinker, occupies a special place in the cultural and spiritual life of Kazakhstan. His works are distinguished by a synthesis of philosophical knowledge, poetic expression and moral and ethical guidelines. Abai sought to unite national culture with the achievements of world civilization, seeking ways of harmony between the Eastern worldview and Western rationalism. The purpose of this article is to consider the philosophical and artistic aspects of Abai's work in the context of the world philosophical tradition, to identify conceptual similarities and differences with Western and Eastern philosophy, and to determine his place in the canon of world thought.

## Research Methods

The methodological basis of this article is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines philosophical, literary, cultural and comparative historical analysis.

The hermeneutic method used in interpreting Abai's texts - his "Words of Edification", poems, as well as letters and statements. The analysis is carried out taking into account the cultural and historical context.

The comparative method, by which Abai's philosophical ideas are compared with the concepts of representatives of world thought: Confucius, Aristotle, Rousseau, Tolstoy, Pascal, etc.

Historical and philosophical analysis - the sources and development of philosophical thought close to Abai are considered, including Sufism, Islamic theology, Eastern ethics, as well as the ideas of the Enlightenment.

## Discussion

The sources of the study are both Abai's primary texts (in the original and in translations), and the works of domestic and foreign researchers, including Ch. Valikhanov, M. Auezov, M. Zhumabaev, as well as modern philosophers engaged in a comparative analysis of Eastern and Western thought.

One of the central themes of Abai's philosophy is the search for the meaning of life, understanding the role of man in the world. He focuses on the internal, spiritual development of the individual, on self-

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improvement. Abai calls for work, knowledge, rationality, emphasizing the importance of education and personal responsibility of each person. In his works, we find reflections on how a person should strive for moral and intellectual maturity, as well as on the importance of realizing one's mission in life. Abai also actively develops ideas about morality and ethical guidelines. He criticizes immorality, selfishness, laziness and base impulses of people, condemning social vices. His works, such as "Words of Edification" ("Qara sozder"), contain deep reflections on human nature, virtues and vices. He calls on his contemporaries to strive for virtue, the development of inner peace, and in this context condemns cruelty and ignorance.

Abai was one of the first thinkers who realized the importance of combining traditional values with new, more progressive ideas. He criticized the stagnation in the life of Kazakh society, pointing out the backwardness in education, the lack of desire for modernization. At the same time, Abai did not reject his culture and traditions, but, on the contrary, called for renewal with respect for the heritage. Thus, he becomes one of the brightest representatives of the philosophical search for a compromise between the Eastern tradition and Western civilization. Abai's philosophy contains a unique interweaving of local traditions and universal values, which allows us to place his thinking on a par with outstanding thinkers of the East and West. Comparison with them helps to better understand the scope of his ideas. Abai created poetry that was not simply an expression of popular feelings or aesthetic images, but was filled with deep reflections on life, society and man. His poems sound philosophical pathos, the desire to convey to the reader the most important questions of human existence. In this sense, Abai is a kind of "philosophical poet" whose works enriched Kazakh literature with new ideas and forms. His poetry touches on such important topics as good and evil, morality, knowledge of truth, freedom of choice and human suffering. Like Confucius, Abai believed that virtue and education are the basis of social order. However, in contrast to the Confucian emphasis on ritual, Abai emphasizes individual moral effort - "demand an account from your soul." Both thinkers attach primary importance to morality and the internal education of man.

The key motif in Abai's literature is enlightenment. He advocates the development of science, the advancement of rationality and education, considering them the basis of human progress. Abai's poems often contain ideas about the importance of knowledge and education, the value of wisdom as the basis for the development of the individual and society. This is especially evident in his reflections on religion, morality and social justice, where he expresses his own critical attitude towards the old order, considering them an obstacle to the development of society. Abai, like Socrates, preferred internal dialogue and self-knowledge to external knowledge. His famous "Word about Homo sapiens" echoes the idea of Socrates' self-knowledge. He, like Socrates, saw the meaning of philosophy in educating the soul.

The intellectual connections between Abai and Tolstoy have a solid foundation: both reflect on morality, the meaning of life, and the purpose of man. They rejected the formal ritual approach to religion and sought God through moral behavior and inner improvement. It is interesting that Abai read Tolstoy, and Tolstoy was interested in the East and could have been indirectly familiar with Kazakh humanism.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserted the natural virtue of man, corrupted by civilization. Abai, in turn, believed in the power of upbringing and self-education. He did not idealize the natural state, but believed that knowledge and faith are the path to purification. This shows the similarity with Rousseau in the belief in the spiritual potential of the individual.

Blaise Pascal spoke of a "thinking reed" - a person small in comparison with nature, but great in reason. Abai has similar images: a person is a creature destined for knowledge, but weak without God and moral support.

Thus, Abai's philosophy enters into a dialogue with various philosophical systems without losing its national soil. This is the uniqueness of his worldview.

## Main part

The name of Abai Kunanbayev occupies a special, truly sacred place in the history and culture of Kazakhstan. He is not just a poet, philosopher and educator of the 19th century, but also a cultural code, a

collective image of Kazakh spirituality, national identity and intellect. His work and legacy still form the basis of Kazakhstan's humanitarian knowledge, serve as a spiritual guide for the people and symbolize the desire for education, morality and harmony between tradition and progress.

Abai is considered the founder of Kazakh written literature of the new era. Before him, Kazakh literature was mainly transmitted orally - through akyns, zhyrau, improvisers. Abai managed to give Kazakh poetry a new, intellectual and philosophical vector, combining traditional forms with high examples of world literature. He not only wrote poetry, but also systematized the language, improved its style, thereby preparing the ground for the formation of the literary Kazakh language. His work became the basis for the development of critical thinking and new literary genres in Kazakhstan.

Before Abai, a poet in traditional culture was perceived more as a singer, a reciter, an exponent of national aspirations and epic memory. Abai expanded the scope of this image. He acted as an independent thinker, an intellectual, a social critic. He rethought the purpose of a poet, making him the voice of conscience and reason, and not just a keeper of oral traditions. His poems are not only a glorification of nature, love and homeland, but also deep reflections on the meaning of life, truth, good and evil, and the future of the people. In this sense, Abai was a prophet of his time, who called on Kazakhs to self-development and spiritual purification.

Abai's educational mission is of great importance for Kazakh culture. In the conditions of colonial pressure and stagnation of tribal consciousness, he made a powerful call for education, morality, work and knowledge. He wrote: "Science is the only way to happiness", calling the people to abandon fruitless inter-clan conflicts and nomadic way of thinking, focusing their efforts on the development of intelligence and culture. His ideas are still relevant today and formed the basis for the modernization of public consciousness in modern Kazakhstan.

Abai played a unique role in introducing Kazakhs to world culture. He translated and adapted the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Goethe, Byron, Krylov and other classics into Kazakh, thereby opening the way for national culture to world literature. His translations are not just technically accurate, but also have a deep understanding and interpretation of someone else's thought in the context of Kazakh spirituality. These translations have become an example of artistic bilingualism and have proven that the Kazakh language is capable of conveying the subtle philosophical and aesthetic ideas of great authors.

Abai is not only a poet, but also an original philosopher who reflected on the essence of man, morality, religion and the meaning of life. His famous work "Words of Edification" (or "Kara sozder") is an outstanding example of national philosophical thought. In it, he addresses the reader as a compatriot, interlocutor, student, instructing him to live according to conscience, develop the mind, cherish honor and not succumb to base instincts. Abai thinks in categories akin to Socrates, Confucius, Leo Tolstoy, but his ideas are rooted in the realities of the Kazakh steppe, in the fate of his people. Abai became a symbol of national revival. In difficult periods of history, including the Soviet period, when Kazakh identity was being eroded, the image of Abai retained legitimacy and authority. His name became synonymous with genuine Kazakh culture, free from ideological and ethnic prejudices. During the years of Kazakhstan's independence, the cult of Abai received a new lease of life - his works are included in school and university curricula, his image is immortalized in monuments, films, music, and his philosophy is actively used in public and political discussions. Today, Abai remains a source of inspiration for poets, musicians, artists, and filmmakers. His texts are reinterpreted in a modern way, sound in rock compositions, theater productions, scientific conferences, and even in the digital space. The state program "Abai Alemi" stimulates the rethinking of his legacy in the context of globalization. He has become a kind of cultural bridge between generations, between tradition and innovation, between Kazakh culture and the world.

In his program essay "Abai and Kazakhstan in the 21st Century", the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized that the ideas of the great poet are the philosophical basis for the modernization of the nation. Abai acts as a universal symbol of sustainable development, spiritual renewal, and education. His moral guidelines - honesty, work, education, justice - formed the basis of the concept

of the "Listening State", where the dialogue between the government and the people is based on wisdom and mutual respect. Thus, Abai is not just a cultural heritage, but a key element of the national strategy.

The importance of Abai Kunanbayev for the culture of Kazakhstan is difficult to overestimate. He is not just a poet of the 19th century, but a universal figure living outside of time. His ideas about morality, education, work and love for the homeland continue to shape the spiritual image of the nation. It combines the traditions of the East and the achievements of the West, the national and the universal, the past and the future. Abai is a mirror into which Kazakhstan looks to see its face - intelligent, deep, spiritual.

Abai gives reason an exceptional role. In the 38th Word, he emphasizes: "The main wealth is reason." He does not think of reason as pure rationality, but as a spiritual force capable of reflection, of distinguishing between good and evil, to moral choice. Reason in Abai's philosophy is a tool for comprehending the truth, leading to God.

The category of conscience occupies a central place in Abai's ethics. He appeals to the reader with a call for honesty, responsibility, and self-control. For him, conscience is the voice of God in man, an internal moral judge. Without it, according to Abai, man loses his human form.

Abai is not just religious, he seeks personal, deep faith based on reason and conscience. He criticizes formal religiosity, hypocrisy, and ignorance. God for Abai is the source of justice, love, and light. Through knowledge of God, man finds the meaning of existence.

In poetry and prose, Abai repeatedly emphasizes the value of labor and education. He saw labor as the path to the spiritual and material well-being of the people. Knowledge is a means of combating ignorance. His idea: "Only through labor and study - to freedom."

Abai exalts the personality of a person, calling for self-development, spiritual purity, and goodness. His humanism is manifested in respect for everyone, regardless of origin, and in faith in the ability of everyone to become better. He writes: "Man is born for good."

Abai speaks out against social injustice, corruption, and indifference. He calls for social solidarity, mutual assistance, and education in the spirit of justice. He is confident that without a moral foundation, it is impossible to build a decent society.

Thus, Abai's philosophy is a coherent system of views permeated with faith in reason, morality, labor, and spiritual improvement of the individual. His ideas are relevant today, as they touch upon the eternal problems of human existence.

## Result

The study revealed a number of significant results that reveal Abai's philosophy as a unique phenomenon in dialogue with world intellectual traditions. Abai's work demonstrates a holistic worldview, where philosophical categories - reason, conscience, faith, knowledge, labor, man and society - are interconnected and form a spiritual matrix aimed at self-improvement of the individual and harmonization of society.

Abai builds his philosophy based on the Kazakh cultural tradition, but at the same time includes universal ideas common to Eastern and Western thought. This makes his works not only a national treasure, but also a contribution to world philosophy.

A comparative analysis has revealed significant parallels between Abai and Confucius, Socrates, Pascal, Rousseau, and Tolstoy. These consonances are manifested in ethical rationalism, the desire for inner enlightenment, recognition of self-education and moral autonomy of the individual. At the same time, Abai does not mechanically borrow ideas, but processes them in the context of Kazakh existence and Islamic spirituality. The central element of Abai's worldview is the idea of the moral development of the individual

through work, faith and reason. He rejects both empty rituals and abstract religiosity, offering a path of active spiritual life, where God is an internal guide, conscience and justice.

A distinctive feature of Abai's philosophy is its expression through artistic form: poetry, aphorisms, parables. This brings him closer to the tradition of Eastern philosophy (in particular, Sufi) and emphasizes the intuitive-contemplative aspect of his thinking.

His ideas remain relevant in the context of a global identity crisis, moral disorientation and loss of meaning. Abai offers a humanistic path in which a person realizes his responsibility to himself, society and God. His call for spiritual self-improvement and social justice is relevant in the context of modern Kazakhstan and all of humanity.

The study confirmed the thesis that Abai is not only a poet and thinker, but also the founder of Kazakh philosophy as a system based on the synthesis of traditional wisdom and modern thought. His works serve as a basis for the further development of philosophy in Kazakhstan and beyond.

Abai was one of the first to formulate the principles of Kazakh identity, based not on ethnic isolation, but on openness to the world, the desire for knowledge and moral purity. His idea of a “full-blooded person” (“tolyk adam”) is a concept of a person of the future, uniting tradition and modernity.

Thus, Abai's philosophy can be considered as a full-fledged system, possessing both local roots and universal resonance. Its study enriches not only Kazakh but also world humanitarian thought, allowing us to rethink fundamental questions of existence, morality and human destiny.

## Conclusion

The philosophy and literature of Abai Kunanbayev occupy a central place not only in Kazakh but also in world cultural traditions. His views and ideas, reflected in his poems, "Words of Edification" and other works, have a unique ability to combine Eastern wisdom and Western rationalistic concepts. Abai was a man of his time, but his thoughts go beyond the limitations of the era and cultural differences.

During the study, it was established that Abai's philosophy is a synthesis of moral and spiritual values inherent in both the Eastern tradition and Western philosophy. His ideas on rationality, morality, conscience and work echo the teachings of such great thinkers as Confucius, Socrates, Leo Tolstoy and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which confirms the universality of his philosophy. At the same time, Abai remains true to his national identity, relying on the values close to the Kazakh people.

One of the most important aspects of Abai's philosophy is his affirmation of the importance of personal responsibility and self-awareness. He saw man, first of all, as a spiritual personality, capable of self-development and the search for the meaning of life through reason and faith. This teaching is relevant in our time, when issues of morality, education and spirituality remain no less important.

Thus, the work of Abai, regardless of time and space, continues to be a source of inspiration for those who seek answers to eternal questions about good and evil, the meaning of life and the purpose of man. His philosophy not only overcame geographical and temporal barriers, but also became an important element of the world cultural and philosophical tradition. Abai's inclusion in the dialogue with world philosophers emphasizes his significance as a thinker whose ideas remain relevant and important for all cultures and peoples. The philosophy of Abai Kunanbayev is not only a key part of the Kazakh spiritual heritage, but also an important contribution to the development of world philosophical thought.

## Acknowledgment

The article is published within the framework of the International Scientific Project "Abai 180: Digital Renaissance" with the participation of Abai KazNPU and the University of Turin by order No. 05-04/250 dated 03.04.2025.

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