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Airlangga University, Indonesia

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Nazgul Kudaibergenova  
✉ nazgul.zhanysovna@gmail.com  
Zeinabil Aidarbekov  
✉ zeinabil@mail.ru  
Asset Kuranbek  
✉ akuranbek@gmail.com  
Raimbek Zeinullin  
✉ zeynullyn.raymbek@gmail.com

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# Understanding Nauryz among Kazakhs and Nogais: the cyclical concept of time and cultural renaissance

Raimbek Zeinullin<sup>1\*</sup>, Nazgul Kudaibergenova<sup>1\*</sup>,  
Zeinabil Aidarbekov<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Asset Kuranbek<sup>1\*</sup> and Tursun Gabitov<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan,

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science, Samarkand State University named after Sharof Rashidov, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

This study investigates the Nauryz holiday in Kazakh and Nogai cultures, focusing on its cyclical conception of time and social-symbolic significance. Traditionally, Nauryz marks the transition from the old year to the new, restoring harmony in nature and society. Drawing on structural anthropology (C. Lévi-Strauss), functional anthropology (B. Malinowski), ritual theory (V. Turner), semiotics (Y. Lotman), and the invention of tradition (E. Hobsbawm), the research analyzes the holiday's mythological origins, symbolic structures based on binary oppositions (dark–light, winter–summer, stagnation–renewal), and its role in social integration. Despite restrictions during the Soviet era, Nauryz was preserved in collective memory and experienced a revival by the late 20th century. In contemporary urban settings, it functions as a key element of national identity formation, while also undergoing commercialization and adaptation to new sociocultural contexts. The study highlights how Nauryz mediates temporal, social, and ritual dimensions, connecting historical traditions with modern practices, and illustrates the resilience and reinterpretation of cultural knowledge. Comparative analysis of Kazakh and Nogai practices provides insights into the broader role of cultural festivals in maintaining community cohesion, negotiating historical transformations, and fostering social integration, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between tradition and contemporary cultural environments.

## KEYWORDS

Nauryz, cyclical time, Kazakh culture, Nogai culture, ritual, symbolism, invention of tradition, social integration

## Introduction

Nauryz signifies not only the day and night equinox but also clearly reflects the concept of cyclical time in the worldview of nomadic and semi-nomadic societies. In Kazakh and Nogai cultural and philosophical system Nauryz symbolizes the renewal of the world, the restoration of harmony between nature and humanity, and is accepted as an important temporal milestone indicating the end of the annual cycle and the beginning of a new phase (Konuratbaev, 1987). Research results demonstrate that the cyclical nature of time exists in the mythological systems, calendrical traditions, and economic life of Turkic peoples (Auezov, 1947). In this regard, the Nauryz holiday is viewed not only as an agrarian or natural phenomenon but also as a manifestation of the spiritual renewal of society. The ritual activities and symbolic meanings of this holiday in Kazakh and Nogai culture define the repetitive nature of time and are closely

linked to ancient Turkic traditions (Suleymenov, 2002). Research in anthropology and global cultural studies (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Eliade, 1987) particularly emphasizes the recurrence of time sacred and profane levels in traditional societies. Moreover, Nauryz plays an important role as a factor that strengthens Kazakh and Nogai historical and cultural commonality. The image of this holiday is reflected in their oral literature, folklore, calendrical traditions, and customs (Isaev, 1998). This research aims to deeply analyze Nauryz in Kazakh and Nogai cultures, its connection with the concept of cyclical time, and the idea of renewal. Additionally, its historical development path, renaissance after the Soviet period, and changes in the context of urbanization will also be examined in detail.

The main research objective is a comprehensive analysis of Nauryz significance in Kazakh and Nogai cultures from anthropological, ethnographic, cultural and historical perspectives. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set:

- To provide a comparative analysis of Nauryz ritual structure in Kazakh and Nogai societies;
- To determine the connection of the holiday with cyclical time concept;
- To describe the role of Nauryz as a tool for social integration.
- To research the renaissance and historical transformation of the holiday after the Soviet era.

In this regard, the ideas of scholars such as F. Boas, C. Lévi-Strauss, V. Turner, Y. Lotman, and E. Hobsbawm are considered in the context of Nauryz to be a cultural event. This analytical approach allows for a deeper understanding the holiday far from its traditional context and within the current socio-cultural system.

## The research methodology

The research work is aimed at a comprehensive analysis of the ritual, social, and temporal significance of Nauryz in Kazakh and Nogai cultural space. To achieve this goal, qualitative research methods, anthropological and semiotic approaches were used.

### Anthropological method

- Structural analysis: The symbolic content of Nauryz rituals is studied through K. Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology.
- Functional analysis: The role of the holiday in social integration is considered on base of B. Malinovsky's functional perspective.
- Ritual analysis: The role of Nauryz in transitional periods and social transformation is clarified through V. Turner's ritual theory.

### Ethnographic and comparative method

- A comparative analysis of Nauryz tradition historical and cultural features set in Kazakh and Nogai cultures.
- Describing the evolution of the holiday through the study of archival materials and historical data.

### Semiotic method

- Determining the Nauryz structure as a cultural event through Y. Lotman's semiotic analysis method;
- Unveiling the meaning of holiday rituals and symbols characteristic (for example, Nauryz Kozhe, fire purification ceremony, the cult of nature) based on R. Barth's symbolic interpretation.

### Historical-genealogical method

- Researching the connection between the holiday and ancient Turkic traditions.
- Narrating the Nauryz historical formation process through the analysis of medieval sources and writings.

### Social-cultural analysis

- Considering holiday transformation in contemporary society within the framework of E. Hobsbawm's "The invention of tradition" concept;
- Contextual analysis of Nauryz features set in rural and urban spaces.

The comprehensive application of these methodological tools ensures the scientific validity and depth of research results interpretation. Through these approaches, the significance of the Nauryz holiday in Kazakh and Nogai culture and its historical-cultural transformation can be comprehensively revealed.

The study seeks to elucidate the cultural-philosophical and socio-anthropological nature of the Nauryz festival by employing a complex of interrelated theoretical frameworks. In this context, structural and functional anthropology, ritual theory, semiotic analysis, and the concept of the "invention of tradition" are examined in theoretical complementarity.

The principles of structural anthropology (C. Lévi-Strauss) enable an interpretation of Nauryz as a system of deep mythological and symbolic structures. According to this framework, cultural rituals and festivals are organized around binary oppositions (e.g., winter–summer, death–life, darkness–light, old–new), which reflect the dialectic between order and chaos in the world. Nauryz embodies this dualistic model as a ritualized mechanism for restoring balance between humans and nature.

From the perspective of functional anthropology (B. Malinowski, A. Radcliffe-Brown), Nauryz functions as a social institution that strengthens communal unity, renews collective memory, and ensures the continuity of cultural values. The festival symbolically reinforces social ties and contributes to the stability of the social structure.

Within ritual theory (V. Turner), Nauryz may be seen as a classic example of a liminal phase. In Turner's interpretation, ritual transitions temporarily suspend established hierarchies, generating a condition of *communitas* characterized by equality and renewal. This framework clarifies Nauryz's meaning as a threshold between the end of the old year and the beginning of the new—an intermediary moment of transformation and regeneration.

A semiotic approach (Y. Lotman, R. Barthes) allows for the exploration of Nauryz as a system of cultural signs and codes. The festival reproduces collective meanings and cultural memory through

an integrated ensemble of semiotic elements – rituals, clothing, food, fire, water, colors, and spatial arrangements. From a semiotic standpoint, Nauryz operates as a “text” that encodes and communicates complex layers of symbolic meaning within the cultural space.

Finally, E. Hobsbawm’s concept of the “invention of tradition” provides a lens for understanding the recontextualization of Nauryz within the post-Soviet and urban milieu. After a period of suppression during the Soviet era, the festival’s revival signifies the reconstruction of national identity, collective memory, and cultural heritage. This process re-codes traditional elements within new ideological and symbolic frameworks, illustrating the adaptive continuity of cultural practices.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives complement one another, allowing Nauryz to be interpreted not merely as an ethnographic or folkloric phenomenon but as a complex cultural system that integrates time, space, memory, and social cohesion. This multidimensional methodological approach reinforces the interdisciplinary nature of the study and facilitates a comparative-cultural understanding of both the traditional and contemporary semantic dimensions of the festival (Tables 1, 2).

## Nauryz is an ethnocultural time measure

The research found that there are common worldview, ritual, and symbolic structures in the Nauryz celebration by the Kazakh and Nogai peoples. This holiday reflects seasonal changes, as well as serves as a phenomenon that defines time cyclical nature, strengthens social integration, and acts as a part of cultural memory.

Nauryz connection with cyclical time concept. Time perception by the Kazakh and Nogai peoples has a cyclical nature, which is reflected in their economic systems, mythological worldview, and

TABLE 1 Roles and functions of community members in Nauryz celebrations.

Participants	Roles and Functions
Youth	Receiving blessings from elders, providing assistance, initiating virtuous deeds in the new year
Elderly people	Giving a blessing, sharing life experience, continuing tradition
Women	Setting the table, preparing Nauryz Kozhe, leading festive ceremonies
Community leaders	Strengthening public consensus, organizing festive events
All community members	Participation in common rituals, revitalizing social connections

TABLE 2 Symbolic elements and their meanings in Nauryz traditions.

Symbolic element	Meaning
Nauryz Kozhe	Abundance, unity, and diversity
Purifying fire	Goodbye to the old year, welcoming the new year with a pure heart
The Equinox	Natural and social harmony
Blessing	Generational continuity, spiritual renewal
Blue wolf symbol	Guardian spirit, renewal and resurrection

calendar traditions. Nauryz acts as a key indicator of this cyclical time concept, as it simultaneously reflects nature revival and social renewal.

Time cyclical nature and its mythological basis. Cyclical time concept holds significant importance in many traditional cultures. Eliade (1954) emphasizes that time repetitive nature is of primary significance in its sacred structure. In Kazakh and Nogai mythology time is viewed not as a straight line, but as a recurring circle. Several key aspects shall be considered to explain this concept:

- The day and night equinox is the natural striving for time balance. It is to be manifested in day and night equalization during Nauryz.
- Death and rebirth – the life of nature and humans is the subject to cyclical processes in many myths. Nauryz signifies not only the end of winter and the spring arrival but also the end of the old year and the beginning of the new one.
- Natural and cosmological harmony –Nauryz celebration is considered to be a ritual for maintaining and renewing cosmic order Eliade (1954).

In this study, the concept of cyclical time is examined through the theoretical framework of Mircea Eliade’s notion of sacred time and N. E. Masanov’s analysis of seasonal rhythms in nomadic societies. Cyclical time refers to a repetitive temporal structure rooted in natural seasonal changes, economic cycles, and annually recurring ritual practices. In Kazakh and Nogai cultures, this temporal model manifests through distinct phases such as spring renewal, summer flourishing, autumnal accumulation, and winter stagnation, thereby functioning as a key mechanism in organizing collective memory and maintaining ritual continuity. Thus, cyclical time is conceptualized as a fundamental category that shapes the worldview and cultural code of the nomadic civilization (Masanov, 1995).

Mythologically, Nauryz plays the role of time “resetting.” Holiday rituals (lighting fires, sprinkling water, cleaning the land) symbolize the cosmos to have been made anew from the global chaos. According to Eliade, in traditional societies, festive rituals are aimed at renewing time at a sacred level and reshaping it from the original chaos (Eliade, 1987).

Binary oppositions and their cultural interpretation. Based on Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) structuralism method, it can be observed that binary oppositions are clearly manifested in Nauryz ritual structure. Lévi-Strauss describes the mythological structure of cultures through binary oppositions, and Nauryz can be considered an example of this theory.

- Winter - Summer: the contrast of cold and warmth, stagnation and renewal. The end of winter is compared with singing the old era out.
- Darkness - Light: The balance of day and night is understood as the victory of light over darkness.
- Death - Life: spring arrival becomes a symbol of nature’s revival and renewal.
- The old year - The new year: Nauryz symbolizes the cyclical time repetition, marking the boundary between the past and the future.

Nauryz rituals are aimed at neutralizing these oppositions and restoring global balance. As Levi-Strauss (1966) noted, myths and

rituals serve as a tool for reconciling contradictions in society. In this regard, Nauryz is viewed as a seasonal holiday as well as a cultural-symbolic structure. So, Nauryz cyclical time concept accepted by the Kazakhs and the Nogais is closely related to their mythological traditions and economic systems. This holiday reflects cyclical time nature, serves to renew society cultural memory and to strengthen social integration.

Nauryz ritual, calendar, and social significance. During the research, it was found out that there are common worldview, ritual, and symbolic structures in the acceptance of Nauryz by the Kazakh and Nogai peoples. This holiday serves as a phenomenon that reflects seasonal changes, defines the cyclical time nature, strengthens social integration, and acts as a part of cultural memory.

### Ritual structure and binary oppositions

The main Nauryz rituals form a symbolic structure of time and space in society. As [Levi-Strauss \(1966\)](#) noted, mythological and ritual systems are organized through binary oppositions. Based on this theory, the following binary structures can be observed in the Nauryz holiday:

- Purification ritual – to get rid of the difficulties and evils of the old year;
- Preparing Nauryz Kozhe – to demonstrate abundance and unity by combining various dishes;
- Public holiday rituals – restoring social balance.

In Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology, rituals are considered to be one of the chaos organizing mechanisms ([Levi-Strauss, 1966](#)). From this perspective, Nauryz ritual structures are closely related to nature and to social relations in society.

### Nauryz calendar significance and time symbolism

Nauryz holiday is one of the main time milestones for nomads. In the traditional calendar of the Kazakh and Nogai peoples, Nauryz is accepted as the beginning of the year, and all economic and social cycles are measured by this day ([Konuratbaev, 1994](#)). Turkic peoples have a tradition to measure time in a twelve-year cycle, each cycle to be supposed as the beginning of a new era. Nauryz temporal structure is not limited to natural cycles. This holiday also influences time structuring on social and symbolic levels. It is a sign of spring and spiritual renewal, social and cultural phenomenon that represents changes in society.

### The role of Nauryz in social integration

Nauryz holiday is one of the important mechanisms that strengthens social ties and ensures the unity of society in Kazakh and Nogai communities. The rituals carried out during this holiday reinforce relationships among people, restore social balance, and strengthen collective identity.

Nauryz in terms of functionalism, strengthening social cohesion. According to [Malinowski \(1975\)](#) functionalism theory, any cultural phenomenon is aimed at ensuring the stability and harmony in society. Within this theory, we shall examine several key functions to manifest Nauryz social significance.

### Public agreement and cooperation

Preparing and distributing Nauryz Kozhe is a symbolic act that represents the unity of community members. Creating a communal

table is an important ritual that strengthens family and community bonds. Public games and festive events are experiences to contribute to social integration.

### The temporary linearization of social hierarchy

Equality principle is maintained among people during the holiday: the rich and the poor, the young and the old participate on equal terms. Young people receive blessings from the elders, which strengthens intergenerational continuity. The idea of 'New Year' allows for forgetting old social conflicts and establishing new relationships.

### Mutual aid and charity

The tradition of providing assistance to orphans, widows, and socially vulnerable groups is preserved during the Nauryz holiday. The "Charity Table" is laid out, and food is distributed to people in low social conditions. These traditions ensure social harmony in society.

Emile [Durkheim \(1912\)](#) emphasizes the role of collective rituals in shaping moral order in society in his works. In this regard, Nauryz is one of the important social mechanisms that ensure the stability in society. In conclusion, it has been established that Nauryz is a holiday that shapes a special time concept in Kazakh and Nogai understanding, symbolizing cyclical renewal. Through this holiday, people achieve harmony with nature, with their society and spiritual world. Additionally, all rituals and traditions during Nauryz are closely related to the sacred time cycle, which highlights its significant role in traditional culture. From this perspective, studying Nauryz allows for an understanding of time structure by human mind, its cultural symbolism, and its social function.

In recent years, both Kazakhstani and international scholarship has witnessed the emergence of new paradigms for interpreting the cultural and philosophical nature of Nauryz. Increasingly, researchers approach Nauryz not merely as a spring festival or an ethnographic custom but as a civilizational phenomenon that embodies the cyclical structure of time, spiritual renewal, and the preservation of cultural memory.

In this regard, [Amirova \(2018\)](#) study "The Spring Holiday Nauryz-Meiramy in the Kazakh Tradition" provides a comprehensive analysis of the ritual and aesthetic dimensions of Nauryz within the Kazakh cultural system. Amirova conceptualizes the festival as a calendar-ceremonial complex of high social and spiritual significance, identifying three interrelated components—ritual, competitive, and recreational—that together illustrate the integrative nature of its social and artistic functions. Moreover, she reconstructs the existence of a now-vanished genre of "Nauryz songs" in Kazakh folklore, arguing that this musical tradition once played a central role in shaping the festival's performative culture. Amirova's findings thus illuminate the syncretism of ritual and music in Kazakh cultural heritage and expand the understanding of Nauryz as a symbolic system of collective renewal and harmony ([Amirova, 2018](#)).

[Sadikova \(2013\)](#), in her article "Nauryz Holiday and Kazakh National Tradition – the Basis of Young People Education", emphasizes the festival's educational and moral-ethical potential. She interprets Nauryz as a cultural code expressing harmony between nature and humanity, renewal of life, and the ecological and moral balance central to the Kazakh worldview. According to Sadikova, the symbolic content of Nauryz reflects ideals of unity, peace, compassion, and benevolence, making it a powerful instrument for moral education and social cohesion in modern society. Her research reinforces the understanding

of Nauryz as a socio-pedagogical phenomenon that sustains the continuity and stability of national culture (Sadikova, 2013).

Meanwhile, Gundogdu (2024) recent work “The Holiday of Navruz (Nauryz) among Turkic Peoples and in Turkey” approaches Nauryz as a mythological and cosmological phenomenon within the broader Turkic civilizational space. Gündoğdu interprets the festival as the beginning of sacred time, symbolizing the re-creation of the world and the restoration of natural and spiritual equilibrium. This perspective underscores the cosmogonic essence of Nauryz and its position within the shared cultural memory of Turkic peoples. The author further highlights typological parallels among related spring festivals – Yengi Kün, Hıdrellez, and Sabantuy – demonstrating that each expresses the archetypal idea of renewal and abundance. Through this comparative approach, Gündoğdu expands the civilizational significance of Nauryz and frames it as a unifying cultural code within the Turkic world (Gundogdu, 2024).

Taking into account the findings of these studies, the present research examines the phenomenon of Nauryz within the Kazakh and Nogai cultural systems in relation to the concepts of cyclical temporality, social integration, and spiritual renewal. The works of Amirova, Sadikova, and Gündoğdu provide a solid theoretical foundation for understanding Nauryz from ritualistic, educational, and cosmological perspectives. Building on these frameworks, the current study argues that the Nauryz tradition functions today as a vital mechanism of cultural renaissance and a marker of national identity in the contemporary sociocultural landscape.

### Nauryz: ritual anthropology, “communitas” and folkloric-symbolic meaning

#### Victor Turner and Nauryz “communitas” phenomenon

Turner (1969) concept of “communitas” in ritual anthropology describes it being the temporary linearization of social structure and people unification as community equal members. If we consider the Nauryz holiday within this theoretical framework, we shall demonstrate three key aspects to show its features.

#### Transitional period and renewal

Nauryz is a time marker that coincides with the end of the old year and the beginning of the new one. According to Turner’s “liminality” concept, this time represents a moment when the social structure is temporarily dissolved and new relationships are formed (Turner, 1969). During the Nauryz celebration, past disagreements are to be forgiven, and the idea of renewal and harmony comes to the forefront.

Temporary equality and unity (“anti-structure”). During Nauryz, the social hierarchy in society weakens. As Turner (1969) noted, during festive rituals, people act equally regardless of their official status. In Kazakh and Nogai traditions, during the Nauryz holiday, rituals such as distributing food to the less fortunate and paying special attention to children and the elderly take place. This is a manifestation of the “anti-structure” as a sign of the ritual transitional period.

Collective cooperation (communitas). Nauryz is a holiday that reinforces collective unity. During this celebration, all social groups representatives gather at a communal table and participate in festive events together. According to Turner (1969) concept, “communitas” participants feel like equal community members, that strengthens social ties.

### Nauryz—time cyclical description

The role of Nauryz in modern society: In the context of contemporary urbanization, while the role of Nauryz in social integration has been preserved, its content is undergoing changes. In a traditional rural environment, the holiday is celebrated through collective rituals, whereas in urban settings, it is celebrated individually. Nevertheless, Nauryz remains an important factor in preserving ethnic identity and promoting national values.

Folkloric and symbolic meaning: Nauryz holiday is a symbolic system that reflects the mythological worldview of the people alongside natural phenomena. In turkic people folklore, we often encounter the ritual and mythological plots of this holiday (Eliade, 1987). And the folkloric plots associated with Nauryz are based on the ideas of nature renewal, spring arrival and the struggle between light and darkness.

Characters that overcome the winter and bring the spring. In Kazakh fairy tales, there are images that chase away winter and call for spring. For example, in ‘Er Tostik’ fairy tale, the main character descends underground and rises again, depicting the eternal life renewal in accordance with cyclical time concept (Konuratbaev, 1994). In Nogai legends, there is an image of a hero who brings the spring.

In analyzing the cultural relics of the Nogai people, this study considers not only their deep historical and structural affinities with Kazakh culture, but also the ritual-symbolic practices that have persisted in the post-nomadic context. Spring festivals such as Tulkobas and Kurash embody ideals of communal solidarity, physical strength, and the cyclical renewal of nature. Through equestrian competitions, traditional wrestling, folk dance, and musical performance, these celebrations demonstrate the enduring vitality of nomadic heritage in living cultural forms. Such ethnographic evidence highlights the typological continuity of cultural memory mechanisms shared by the Nogai and Kazakh peoples.

The struggle between day and night. The day and night equinox of Nauryz can be viewed mythologically as a struggle between light and darkness. This motif is widespread in world mythology: for example, it is similar to the eternal struggle between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu in ancient Persian culture (Boyce, 1982).

The Blue Wolf and Turkic Renewal Concept. In Turkic peoples ancient mythology, the image of the blue wolf has a special meaning. It is considered as a new year protector and a sign of renewal (Golden, 1992). This Nauryz motif aligns with the ideas of starting new life, overcoming difficulties, and hoping for the future. Symbolics and their semiotic meanings: The ritual elements used during the Nauryz holiday reflect people’s worldview as part of a certain cultural-symbolic system (Levi-Strauss, 1983).

All the aspects analyzed above demonstrate that Nauryz is a natural phenomenon and an important factor in uniting society. From a functionalist perspective, this holiday maintains social stability and strengthens social cohesion (Malinowski, 1975). According to ritual anthropology, Nauryz is viewed as a ritual in the model of ‘communitas’ aimed at strengthening transitional periods and social ties (Turner, 1969). In contemporary society, the holiday has transformed from its traditional rural version into a tool for preserving national identity.

Thus, Nauryz is not only time renewal concept but also an important cultural phenomenon that strengthens social ties.

## Nauryz renaissance and transformation after the Soviet era

Nauryz holiday has retained its historical roots and has gone through a revival despite the social and political changes in the 20th century (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

The prohibition of Nauryz during the Soviet era and its preservation in people's memory. The Soviet government viewed Nauryz as a feudal relic and officially ceased its celebration. However, it continued to be celebrated informally among the people (Sultanov, 2003). At the end of the 1980s Nauryz has revived and in 1988 began to be officially celebrated again in Kazakhstan. In 1991, after gaining independence, it was established as a national holiday.

In understanding the phenomenon of Nauryz within the cultural worldview of the Kazakh and Nogai peoples, it is impossible to overlook its deep archetypal connection to the Tengrist belief system. Tengriism, or the worship of the Eternal Sky, represents an ancient philosophical framework founded on the harmony between nature, the cosmos, and ancestral spirits. This worldview perceives time and space through a cyclical model, embedding the principles of birth, death, and renewal at the core of spiritual and social existence.

In recent decades, the revival of Tengriism has become a subject of increasing attention within Kazakhstan's spiritual and cultural discourse. As highlighted in the study "The Revival of Tengriism in Kazakhstan as an Ancient Belief System of the Kazakh People: Prospects and Challenges," this process has evolved into a crucial mechanism for national self-identification and cultural introspection. The authors link this resurgence to the broader post-independence movement of spiritual renewal, identifying several dimensions of the modern reinterpretation of Tengrist philosophy: philosophical (the idea of harmony between the human being and the universe), cultural-symbolic (reverence toward nature and space), and existential (the quest for personal spiritual balance).

This research demonstrates that the contemporary revival of Tengriism is not merely a religious phenomenon, but a manifestation of cultural re-coding and the restoration of historical memory. The core principles of Tengrist cosmology—equilibrium between nature and humanity, the cyclical nature of life, and the symbolism of purification and renewal—are also embedded within the ritual and semantic structure of Nauryz (Bulan et al., 2025).

Thus, examining the revitalization of Tengrist traditions alongside the reinterpretation of Nauryz reveals a profound civilizational continuity between ancient cosmological ideas and their modern cultural expressions. This process constitutes a key aspect of the post-Soviet cultural renaissance and affirms the reactivation of the Turkic spiritual code within contemporary society.

Modern Nauryz: transformation and new meanings: Adapted to urban culture (Mustafina, 1992). Acquired a commercial character: contributed to the growth of tourism and the festive industry. Political and national identity factor increased its role. Moreover Nauryz is not just a spring holiday, it is a complex symbolic system that reflects the Kazakh and Nogai people's worldview.

- From a folkloric perspective, this holiday is characterized by mythological figures that symbolize spring and renewal.
- From a semiotic perspective, it is a system of signs and rituals that demonstrates the harmony between nature and society.

- Historically, a cultural tradition that was revived after the Soviet era.
- In modern society, Nauryz has gained new meanings and has become an important element of national identity.

The findings of this study focus on analyzing the semantic, social, and ritual structures of the Nauryz festival within Kazakh and Nogai cultural systems. Based on the collected data and textual analysis, the results were organized into four key thematic blocks:

1. The symbolism of time and renewal;
2. Ritual and social integration;
3. Linguistic and mythological codes;
4. Contemporary transformations and national identity.

The temporal structure of Nauryz is grounded in a cyclical model of time, symbolizing the restoration of both natural and social equilibrium. In the Kazakh and Nogai worldview, time is not perceived as linear but as an eternal recurrence, reflecting the cosmic principle of rebirth from chaos – the renewal of the world. Nauryz thus coincides with the equinox, a sacred moment of balance between light and darkness, representing the restoration of harmony between humanity and the cosmos. The transition from the "old year" to the "new year" carries an ontological, rather than merely chronological, significance: it reaffirms the collective idea of purification, renewal, and regeneration of both community and individual life.

From the perspective of functional anthropology, Nauryz serves as a mechanism for social reintegration. Ritual acts such as hosting guests, sharing Nauryz Kozhe (a ceremonial meal), forgiveness, and reconciliation restore social cohesion and reinforce communal solidarity. This process resonates with Victor Turner's concept of liminality, where Nauryz represents a phase of temporary social suspension – a moment when hierarchies dissolve, equality is symbolically enacted, and the mechanism of collective renewal is activated. These rituals function not merely as religious or domestic practices but as symbolic forms of social cohesion and moral balance.

From a semiotic perspective, Nauryz constitutes a complex system of cultural codes and signs. Binary oppositions such as light/darkness, winter/summer, old/new, life/death permeate every level of the festival – from linguistic expressions and ritual texts to symbolic actions. In both Kazakh and Nogai traditions, Nauryz songs, blessings, and well-wishes articulate the cyclical rhythm of life and the interdependence of nature and society. According to Yuri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere, Nauryz operates as a cultural nucleus of communication, integrating the people's memory, language, and symbolic systems into a coherent cultural whole.

In the post-Soviet period, Nauryz has undergone a process of reinterpretation within new social contexts. After decades of ideological suppression during the Soviet era, it has re-emerged as a symbol of national consciousness and cultural renaissance. In the contemporary urban environment, the festival – while retaining elements of its traditional structure – has acquired new meanings within media, commercial, and institutional spaces. This transformation can be understood through Eric Hobsbawm's concept of the "invention of tradition," wherein Nauryz functions as a symbolic tool for rearticulating historical continuity and strengthening cultural identity.

However, this same process has also introduced new challenges, such as the commercialization of the festival and the gradual detachment from its folkloric and ritual essence, reflecting the broader tension between tradition and modernity in post-Soviet cultural discourse. Nauryz thus stands as both a marker of cultural memory and a dynamic field of identity negotiation within the evolving landscape of Kazakh and Nogai societies.

## Conclusion

The research results indicate that Nauryz is a universal cultural phenomenon that reflects time cyclical nature and strengthens the spiritual and social structures in society. It signifies the beginning of the agrarian period in nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples worldview as well as the renewal of time and space, the regulation of social connections, and the continuous revival of cultural traditions (Bromley, 1973).

The connection of Nauryz with time cyclical concept reveals its role and significance in traditional society. According to Levi-Strauss (1966) structuralist approach, the holiday rituals serve as a mechanism that unites oppositions (winter—summer, darkness—light, stagnation – movement). In other words, Nauryz plays the role of a cultural mediator between natural rhythms and human experience. The meaning of this holiday makes it an important element of social regulation.

The role of Nauryz in social integration allows it to be viewed as a tool for strengthening social ties and stabilizing social structures. From the perspective of Malinowski (1975) functional anthropology, this holiday ensures mutual assistance among society members, recognition of common values, and the establishment of social equality, even if temporarily. Based on V. Turner's ritual anthropology, it has been established that Nauryz is directly related to "communitas" concept. The collective mind that this holiday strengthens accelerates social stability and harmony (Turner, 1969). From a folkloric and semiotic perspective, Nauryz is a multi-layered phenomenon that connects archaic mythological structures with contemporary cultural practices. Considering Nauryz as a cultural event through Yu. Lotman's semiotics allows for a deeper understanding of its symbolic role (Lotman, 2004). This holiday is not only related to domestic or natural cycles but is also intertwined with ideas of rebirth, renewal, and the establishment of eternal order in human culture. When examined through R. Barthes' mythological analysis method, Nauryz represents a cultural code that reflects the process of enriching tradition with new meanings in contemporary society (Barthes, 1972). Based on Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) "The invention of tradition" concept, Nauryz renaissance after the Soviet era explains its historical transformation. The official prohibition of its celebration during the Soviet period further strengthened its symbolic significance in the collective memory. As noted in Xan (2025) study, the celebration of Nauryz was excluded from public life for more than sixty years and was officially reinstated only in 1988. During this period, the festival's form and ideological content were restructured within the framework of Soviet cultural policy. Initially, it was conceptualized as a "cultural form of national character with socialist content."

Drawing upon archival documents and contemporary press materials, Khan demonstrates that the first revival of Nauryz was closely linked to Perestroika's ideological climate, emphasizing

socialist values such as labor achievements, "friendship of peoples," and environmental responsibility. Over time, however, local intellectuals and cultural figures began to reinterpret the festival, shifting its focus toward its national, historical, and spiritual significance.

According to Khan (2025), by the early 1990s, the semantic orientation of Nauryz underwent a profound transformation, evolving into a phenomenon with "national content and socialist form." This shift reflected the festival's liberation from its earlier ideological layers and its reemergence as a manifestation of cultural renaissance grounded in historical traditions and collective memory.

The scholar analyzes this process through the theoretical frameworks of Eric Hobsbawm's "invention of tradition" and Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," highlighting Nauryz's integrative and symbolic role in post-Soviet society. In this context, the festival serves not only as a celebration of spring and natural renewal, but also as a symbol of overcoming historical discontinuity, reaffirming cultural integrity and national identity in the contemporary era. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Nauryz became a symbol of national and cultural renaissance in the post-Soviet space. Today, this holiday proves, that it is not just a legacy of the past, but a dynamically developing cultural phenomenon, by means of:

- Re-adaptation in urban space (through modern cultural events, public celebrations);
- Commercial characteristics (the interlace of traditional elements with market culture);
- Increasing political and social significance (becoming a tool for strengthening national identity).

Nauryz holiday is a unique phenomenon that reflects time cyclical structure, regulates social connections, and revitalizes cultural traditions, deserving of study from the perspectives of cultural anthropology, semiotics, ritual theory, structural and functional analyses. This research allowed for a deeper understanding of Nauryz acceptance in Kazakh and Nogai cultures by examining it in a mythological, anthropological, and ethnographic context. Additionally, studying the holiday role and function in modern society opens up avenues for rethinking it in a new socio-cultural context. Understanding the cultural significance of Nauryz is not limited to the scope of ethnographic or historical studies. Rather, it allows to revalue the holiday meaning in context of time, society, and the individual relationship. Research in this direction paves the way for recognizing Nauryz from a new perspective within the context of contemporary culture.

The Nauryz festival represents a unique cultural phenomenon that embodies the cyclical structure of time, regulates social relations, and revitalizes traditional practices. From the perspectives of cultural anthropology, semiotics, ritual theory, and structural-functional analysis, it offers a rich field for scholarly inquiry. Examining Nauryz within mythological, anthropological, and ethnographic contexts enables a deeper understanding of its significance in Kazakh and Nogai cultures. Moreover, the study of its contemporary role opens pathways for reinterpreting Nauryz within the framework of modern socio-cultural dynamics.

Understanding the cultural meaning of Nauryz extends beyond the boundaries of ethnographic or historical research. It provides an opportunity to reassess the interrelations between time, society, and the

individual, revealing the festival's enduring relevance as a site of symbolic renewal. Such an approach allows Nauryz to be viewed not merely as a seasonal ritual but as a living cultural text that continuously negotiates between tradition and modernity.

As one of the oldest and most semantically profound phenomena in the historical and cultural memory of the Kazakh and Nogai peoples, Nauryz represents a worldview model grounded in the cyclical conception of time and space. Through its ritual structure, the festival enacts the ontological harmony between nature and humanity, the renewal of social relations, and the reaffirmation of communal unity.

The cultural-philosophical significance of this study lies in demonstrating that Nauryz is not merely an ethnographic or ceremonial event, but a complex social institution that preserves civilizational memory, symbolic continuity, and cultural codes. The non-linear perception of time expressed through Nauryz rituals attests to the Turkic worldview, which perceives the world as an interconnected and holistic system.

In this regard, Nauryz functions as a cultural artifact that shapes collective identity, consolidates cultural integrity, and symbolizes the mechanisms of social self-renewal. Its mythological and ritual structure embodies the return to sacred time – a symbolic passage from chaos to order, from stagnation to renewal.

The suppression of Nauryz during the Soviet era and its subsequent revival in the post-Soviet space underscore the resilience of cultural memory and the adaptive vitality of tradition. In today's urbanized and globalized cultural environment, Nauryz has acquired new meanings, serving as a key mechanism for strengthening national identity, ecological consciousness, and social integration.

Thus, the phenomenon of Nauryz should be understood not only within the cultural frameworks of the Kazakh and Nogai peoples but also as a universal model for examining the vitality of ritual and symbolism, the continuity of cultural memory, and the transformation of tradition in post-traditional societies.

This study interprets Nauryz as an archetypal expression of time and renewal within the Turkic cultural continuum, offering a new cultural-philosophical and semiotic understanding of its place in contemporary culture.

## Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because there are no restrictions, as the manuscript does not include any datasets. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to [zeynullyn.raymbek@gmail.com](mailto:zeynullyn.raymbek@gmail.com).

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## Author contributions

RZ: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization. NK: Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Writing – original draft. ZA: Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. AK: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. TG: Writing – review & editing.

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