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G.A. Atembayeva

*Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University
Almaty, Kazakhstan*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4376-5022>

email: g.atembaeva@gmail.com

D.A. Sabirova

*Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University
Almaty, Kazakhstan*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6001-5314>

email: dinasabirova_84.kz@mail.ru

IMAGOLOGICAL IMAGES OF KAZAKHSTAN IN FOREIGN LITERATURE

Abstract. This article examines the representation of Kazakhstan in literary texts created outside its national borders. The research explores the theoretical differentiation between the concepts of the “Kazakh” and “Kazakhstani” texts, applying an imagological approach to analyze cultural identity and narrative positioning. The study focuses on two groups of authors: emigrant writers born in Kazakhstan and foreign writers who depict Kazakhstan from an external perspective. Through a comparative analysis of selected works, the article identifies key imagological markers, including spatial metaphors, cultural codes, and national stereotypes. Special attention is paid to the poetics of the “Kazakhstani text” as a sociocultural and artistic phenomenon. The methodology combines literary analysis, imagological theory, and statistical review of academic databases. The imagological approach to the study of the Kazakh text has significant analytical value, as it allows us to identify the complex interaction of internal national narratives with external images of Kazakhstan in the global literary context. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of Kazakhstan's literary image in global discourse. The article defines the Kazakh text as a tool for representing cultural identity in foreign literature.

Keywords: Kazakhstani text, imagology, cultural codes, literary representation, national identity, translingual authors, cultural memory

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Introduction

The distinction between the Kazakh and Kazakhstani texts is crucial for imagological analysis of Kazakhstan's literary representations. These terms reflect different layers of cultural identity and shape methodological approaches in global literary studies. The Kazakh text refers to works written in Kazakh by ethnic Kazakhs, rooted in ethnolinguistic identity and cultural heritage. It originates in oral traditions of the VI–VIII centuries and includes key works like “The Book of Words” by Abai. According to Britannica (2025), Kazakh literature consists of oral and written texts by ethnic Kazakhs. Its defining features are traditional imagery, cultural metaphors, and Kazakh linguistic forms.

Kazakhstani text includes works in Kazakh, Russian, English, and other languages. It stems from a hybrid identity shaped by post-Soviet nation-building and global literary integration. As D. Kudaibergen (2023) notes, “Kazakhstani” reflects not only ethnic but also civic and cultural identity. This expands analysis beyond Kazakh literary tradition to a broader sociocultural phenomenon.

The terms differ in literary imagology. Kazakh text is rooted in ethnolinguistic frameworks, as in Abai's works with traditional symbolism. Kazakhstani text reflects Kazakhstan's evolving image in émigré and foreign authors like Christopher Robbins. The Contemporary Kazakh Literature anthology (2019) emphasizes Kazakhstani text by featuring multilingual authors in a global context. It thus embraces ethnic, linguistic, and geopolitical diversity. Imagological analysis of Kazakhstani text offers deeper insight into the interplay between national narratives and global representations of Kazakhstan.

Cultural adaptation is key to ensuring translation adequacy. Without considering the source and target cultures' realities and mentality, conveying the true meaning, especially of idioms, realia, and culturally marked vocabulary, is impossible.

Analysis of specific examples shows how theory is applied in practice, highlighting the need for an individual approach and professional translator training. This study aims to examine Kazakhstan's representation in literary texts created abroad through an imagological lens and to define the theoretical and methodological basis of the “Kazakhstani text” as a form of cultural and literary identity.

Material and methods

Modern research in the field of linguistics and translation requires an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account not only linguistic but also cultural, historical, and cognitive aspects. This makes an in-depth analysis of translation as a special type of interlanguage communication relevant.

This study applies an imagological approach to analyze Kazakhstan's representation in literary texts created abroad, combining comparative analysis, structural literary studies, and statistical evaluation of academic discourse. It examines two text groups: works by Kazakh emigrant writers and portrayals of Kazakhstan by foreign authors.

Selection is based on relevance to the Kazakhstani text as a sociocultural and artistic concept. The first group includes authors born in Kazakhstan who explore themes

of displacement, cultural memory, and hybrid identity. The second group features foreign authors offering external views of Kazakhstan, such as Apples are from Kazakhstan by Christopher Robbins (2007), The Hungry Steppe by Sarah Cameron (2018), and Travellers in the Great Steppe by Nick Fielding (2020). These texts shape Kazakhstan's global literary image, either reinforcing or challenging stereotypes.

To assess academic engagement with the “Kazakhstani text”, the study applies quantitative analysis of scholarly trends in major academic databases. Data were collected from eLibrary, Lens.org, and CyberLeninka using keywords such as “Kazakhstani text,” “Almaty text,” and “image of Kazakhstan”. The findings highlight the uneven attention paid to Kazakh literary identity and its cultural representation in global academic discourse.

The methodological framework includes a literature review, textual analysis, imagological comparison, and statistical interpretation. The texts are examined in terms of narrative structure, cultural codes, and markers of national identity. Comparative analysis reveals differences in self-representation and external perception. The results contribute to the theoretical refinement of the Kazakhstani text as an imagological category and underscore the impact of geographical displacement on literary identity.

Results and discussion

To evaluate the academic discourse surrounding the Kazakhstani text, a comparative statistical analysis was conducted using three major academic databases: eLibrary, Lens.org, and CyberLeninka. The search focused on three key terms: “Kazakhstani text”, “Almaty text”, and “Image of Kazakhstan”, with searches performed in both Russian and English across fields related to cultural studies, linguistics, and literary studies (table 1).

Table 1. Number of Publications on “Kazakhstani Text” and Related Terms in Academic Database

Database	Search Term	Russian	English
eLibrary	Kazakhstani Text	4	115
	Almaty Text	15	1
	Image of Kazakhstan	15	5
Lens.org	Kazakhstani Text	0	14
	Almaty Text	0	1
	Image of Kazakhstan	0	155
CyberLeninka	Kazakhstani Text	9	0
	Almaty Text	1	1
	Image of Kazakhstan	3	30

The frequency of publications mentioning Kazakhstani text remains low, particularly in Russian-language sources.

- eLibrary: 4 works in Russian, 115 in English
- Lens.org: 14 works (English only)
- CyberLeninka: 9 works in Russian, 0 in English

These results indicate that while the term has gained some recognition in international research, it remains underdeveloped in Russian-language literary studies.

The analysis was extended to include related concepts such as “Almaty text” and “Image of Kazakhstan”. It provided a comparative perspective on how different aspects of Kazakhstani cultural and literary identity are represented in academic discourse.

– Almaty text:

1. eLibrary: 15 works in Russian, 1 in English

2. Lens.org: 1 work (English)

3. CyberLeninka: 1 work in Russian, 1 in English

4. Observation: The Almaty text is a localized concept with minimal global recognition

– Image of Kazakhstan:

1. eLibrary: 15 works in Russian, 5 in English

2. Lens.org: 155 works (English)

3. CyberLeninka: 3 works in Russian, 30 in English

The following observations can be made. The “Kazakhstani text” concept is underrepresented, especially in Russian-language academic discourse. The “Image of Kazakhstan” dominates research in English, particularly on Lens.org (155 publications). The “Almaty text” has very limited scholarly engagement internationally. Most discussions of Kazakhstani identity focus on its geopolitical and cultural aspects rather than its literary representation due to the number (155 publications) of works with the keyword “Image of Kazakhstan” in Lens.org.

The small number of publications (4 in Russian, 14 in English) indicates that the Kazakhstani text remains an underdeveloped academic concept. In contrast, the “Image of Kazakhstan” is well represented in global academia, suggesting a focus on Kazakhstan as a cultural and geopolitical, rather than literary, construct. This supports D. Kudaibergen's (2023) observation that Kazakhstani identity is often viewed through sociopolitical rather than literary lenses. English-language research prioritizes identity, history, and post-Soviet change, while Russian sources emphasize local literary discourse but lack integration into global imagological contexts (Khamraev, 2024).

This disparity highlights the need for a clear theoretical framework for the Kazakhstani text in imagology. Its interdisciplinary nature, linking literature, culture, and linguistics, requires more integrated research in both Russian and English scholarship. While works like the Cambridge University Press Anthology (2019) support the concept by including multilingual authors, the term remains unclear in academic discourse. Statistical data show limited scholarly focus and a dominance of geopolitical over literary analysis. The following review examines current debates on the Kazakhstani text and its imagological role.

As a concept, the Kazakhstani text has gained attention within literary and cultural studies, especially in imagology, which explores how literature constructs national and cultural identity. Within this framework, the Kazakhstani text reflects both internal views and external representations (Abisheva, et al., 2024a; Abisheva, et al., 2024b).

Imagology provides a framework for analyzing the “Kazakhstani text.” As G. Vlasova (2019) notes, cultural texts are shaped by national mentality, historical memory, and aesthetic codes. In Kazakh literature, this appears in motifs of the steppe, nomadism, and Eurasian identity. The Kazakhstani text thus forms at the intersection of local and global traditions, reflecting the historical interplay of Kazakh and Russian cultures. Recent studies show that literary images of Kazakhstan transcend borders, shaping global perceptions of Kazakh identity (Kulieva, 2019).

Kazakhstan's presence in global literature falls into two categories. The first includes bilingual and translingual authors, where identity is negotiated through language and cultural memory. Kulieva (2019) argues that translated Kazakh authors both adopt

and challenge dominant linguistic paradigms, positioning the Kazakhstani text as a space of cultural negotiation shaped by displacement, trauma, and belonging.

The second category comprises external representations rooted in historical, political, or colonial perspectives. I.I. Yatsenko & A.V. Yatsenko (2023) examine how post-Soviet Russian-language texts from Kazakhstan maintain cultural borderlands, balancing Soviet legacy and emerging Kazakh identity. Other researchers highlight the influence of transcultural dynamics and national myth-making (Abisheva, 2024b), especially in historical fiction and contemporary works portraying Kazakhstan as a space of transformation and geopolitical relevance.

The notion of *cultural border* occupies a central place in these discussions. I.I. Yatsenko & A.V. Yatsenko (2023) highlight the resilience of localized Kazakh texts that encode cultural patterns both aligned with and divergent from Soviet and post-Soviet literary norms. This aligns with broader trends in imagology, where the binary opposition of *self* and *other* plays a crucial role in shaping cultural representations (Tabakova, 2014). Likewise, the spatial and temporal organization of Kazakh texts' illustrates how authors structure national identity through geographic metaphors, historical narratives, and mythopoetic imagery.

Contemporary studies of the “Kazakhstani text” use interdisciplinary methods: semiotics, intercultural hermeneutics, and historical-functional analysis (Khamraev, 2024). Its poetics draw on Eurasian traditions, blending myth, history, and culture, as seen in works by Bakhyt Kairbekov and Vladimir Gundarev. Z.K. Temirgazina (2024) explores the “Almaty” text in the poetry of the Kazakh Russian-language poet Bakhytzhn Kanapyanov as a semiotic phenomenon of a transcultural nature.

Despite growing interest, comprehensive imagological studies remain scarce. A clear framework is still needed to analyze the Kazakhstani text in global literature (Abisheva, 2024a).

As a literary construct, the Kazakhstani text reflects cultural memory, translingual identity, and national representation. Imagology helps trace how Kazakhstan's image is constructed and reshaped through both self-perception and external views.

As it was mentioned earlier, the Kazakhstani text can be categorized into two groups based on authorship and narrative construction. The first group of authors:

- V. Kiktenko, born in Kazakhstan and later moved to Russia, reflects a deep emotional bond with his homeland in his autobiographical prose. In Kogorta, Kazakhstan is portrayed through personal memory and cultural belonging. Almaty becomes not just a place but an emotional and cultural landscape shaped by childhood and post-Soviet changes. The image of Kazakhstan emerges through nostalgic descriptions of nature, urban life, and cultural markers, filtered through the lens of memory. The following examples illustrate his vision within the Kazakhstani text:

- **Nature of Almaty:** “*The blooming apricot trees in springtime Alma-Ata... I have never seen such wonder anywhere else in the world.*” (Kiktenko, 2014);

- **Urban topography and transformation:** “*Alma-Ata is a huge multi-storey metropolis, almost entirely built in European style. But in my childhood, it was still mostly low-rise and Asian.*” (Kiktenko, 2014);

- **Cultural diversity and everyday life:** “*Our neighborhood, especially the bazaar, was full of bright robes. Uzbeks usually sold sweets, Kazakhs sold meat, smoked products, and dairy like kurt, kumys, and shubat.*” (Kiktenko, 2014);

- **Nostalgia for the lost Alma-Ata:** “*That girl is gone, the apricots have faded, the willows too... youth is gone. The great city of Alma-Ata is gone with its gardens, mountains, and incredible people.*” (Kiktenko, 2014).

These examples show a multilayered representation of Kazakhstan. V.V. Kiktenko reconstructs space through memory, blending personal experience with cultural codes. His prose contributes to the formation of the Kazakhstani text as a space of emotional geography, urban identity, and collective imagination.

– A. Schmidt belongs to the first group of authors discussed in this study. He was born in the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan and emigrated to Germany, where he continues his literary activity. His poetry is deeply rooted in childhood memory, rural space, and cultural imagery associated with Kazakhstan. Through recollection, sensory detail, and symbolic contrast, he reconstructs a poetic homeland. Kazakhstan appears not only as geography but as emotional and mythological space;

- In his poem “The Return” (‘Vozvrashchenie’), the speaker revisits the village of his childhood. The imagery is layered with nostalgia, memory, and cultural codes: *“Here it smells of tar, hemp, golden pine resin, and freshly baked bread.”* (Schmidt, 2025);

- The motif of returning home repeats throughout his works, positioning Kazakhstan as a fixed point of emotional orientation: *“We are returning home. The feather grass rolls in a gray wave onto our house. Time roars at the walls, trying to erase the past.”* (Schmidt, 2025);

- In the poem “The Field” (‘Pole’), nature is portrayed in minimalist but powerful terms. The image of the steppe carries emotional and cultural resonance: *“The field crackled, electrified by grasshoppers. The power lines of feather grass turned my heart.”* (Schmidt, 2025);

- In “Fields of Wormwood” (‘Polynnye polya’), the steppe is again central, this time framed as a space of return and emotional healing: *“Where will I find the lights of my native village, the wormwood fields?”* (Schmidt, 2025);

- His poems often engage with themes of memory, identity, and displacement. In “The River of My Childhood” (‘Rechka moego detstva’), Kazakhstan is a lost space of innocence and belonging: *“I remember you. I remember your smell, your taste, the goosebumps of happiness. But I will never find you. The riverbed is dry. Pebbles. Heraclitus was right.”* (Schmidt, 2025);

- Even in more abstract poems, Kazakhstan appears through sensory and symbolic language. In “The Taste of Time” (‘Vkus vremeni’), the poet returns to a childhood memory of eating from an anthill: *“The taste of time – the taste of sorrow.”* (Schmidt, 2025).

These examples show that A. Schmidt’s poetry contributes to the *Kazakhstani text* by constructing a lyrical space of memory, landscape, and cultural return. His use of rural imagery, natural elements, and intimate language transforms Kazakhstan into a literary homeland. The emotional geography he evokes – through smells, sounds, textures, and metaphors – situates his work within imagological research. His verses preserve a vision of Kazakhstan as both real and remembered, physical and symbolic, lost and reclaimed.

The second group of authors, whose texts often present Kazakhstan as a post-Soviet transformation space or a geopolitical construct, are foreign authors with their literary representations of Kazakhstan. They are the following:

– C. Robbins’ “Apples are from Kazakhstan” (2007) presents Kazakhstan as a little-known post-Soviet state undergoing political and economic transformation. From an outsider’s view, the narrative blends themes of modernization, exoticism, and Soviet legacy, shaping global perceptions of Kazakhstan. Robbins explores national identity through vivid experiences: joining eagle-hunting nomads, meeting a musician dubbed the “Kazakh John Lennon,” and sampling boiled sheep’s head, highlighting cultural

traditions. He also addresses Kazakhstan's complex history – Soviet labor camps, nuclear testing, and population diversity due to deportations – contributing to the Kazakhstani text within global literary and journalistic discourse.

– S. Cameron's "The Hungry Steppe" (2018) uses narrative history to shape Western views of Kazakhstan's past. She highlights key cultural codes, starting with pastoral nomadism – central to Kazakh identity before Soviet policies forced sedentarization and disrupted traditional life. Cameron also emphasizes Kazakh resilience during the famine. Through oral histories and memoirs, she reveals stories of survival and adaptation, portraying a society that endured immense hardship while preserving its cultural spirit.

– N. Fielding in "Travellers in the Great Steppe" explores historical and contemporary travel narratives across Central Asia and highlights several cultural codes intrinsic to Kazakh society. Fielding discusses the pastoral nomadism practiced by the steppe peoples, a lifestyle centered around herding and seasonal migrations. The book explores the encounters between Kazakh nomads and various travelers, shedding light on the exchange of knowledge, goods, and cultural practices. Fielding addresses the strategic importance of the Great Steppe, examining how its vastness influenced political decisions and territorial disputes. The narrative delves into how Kazakh nomads adapted to the steppe's challenging environment, developing unique survival strategies and social structures (Fielding, 2020).

Table 2 highlights key differences in Kazakhstan's representation by Groups 1 and 2. Authors in Group 1, born in Kazakhstan, depict it through personal memories, nostalgia, and internal cultural markers, portraying it as emotionally close, spatially familiar, and deeply personal. In contrast, Group 2 authors approach Kazakhstan from geopolitical and historical angles, focusing on exoticism, national trauma, and strategic relevance, more distant and impersonal aspects. Together, these perspectives enrich the concept of the Kazakhstani text, presenting it as both an internally lived and externally imagined experience.

Table 2. The Image of Kazakhstan in Works by the first and the second Groups of Authors

Author	Group	Image of Kazakhstan	Cultural Codes
Alexander Schmidt	Group 1 (Kazakh emigrant)	Emotional landscape, village nostalgia, lyrical time	Fields, rivers, bread, poplar trees, feather grass
V. V. Kiktenko	Group 1 (Kazakh emigrant)	Urban childhood, cultural polyphony, loss and memory	Bazaar, city transformation, apricot bloom, neighborhood life
Christopher Robbins	Group 2 (Foreign)	Exotic transformation, modern nationhood, Soviet legacy	Hunting with eagles, hospitality, apples, national leader
Sarah Cameron	Group 2 (Foreign)	National trauma, famine, broken nomadism, collective memory	Collectivization, hunger, nomads, loss, sedentarization
Nick Fielding	Group 2 (Foreign)	Endless steppe, Eastern exoticism, historical frontier	Yurts, camels, geography, travel, empire encounter

Conclusion

The study of the Kazakhstani text as an imagological category reveals its complexity as both a literary and cultural phenomenon. It shows how Kazakhstan is represented in literature written outside the country, combining the self-image of Kazakh emigrant writers and external portrayals by foreign authors. The Kazakhstani text emerges at the intersection of national identity, displacement, and global literary discourse. It is a dynamic space where literature reflects on identity, belonging, and historical memory.

Despite growing interest, statistical analysis confirms the Kazakhstani text remains underrepresented in academic research, especially in Russian-language sources. This highlights the need for further theoretical and methodological development.

Kazakh emigrant writers depict Kazakhstan through nostalgia, cultural memory, hybrid identity, and emotional attachment. Their works reinterpret Kazakhstan as both a distant homeland and a symbolic construct, blending Soviet, post-Soviet, and Kazakh codes. These texts reflect experiences of displacement, language adaptation, and preserving cultural ties – demonstrating how distance reshapes national identity in literature.

In contrast, foreign authors like C. Robbins, S. Cameron, and N. Fielding portray Kazakhstan through themes of historical trauma, geopolitical shifts, exoticism, and cultural mystery, often challenging stereotypes and contributing to Kazakhstan's image in world literature.

Future research should further develop the imagological framework, including comparative studies with other post-Soviet literatures and the role of translation in globalizing Kazakh literature. The Kazakhstani text remains fluid, evolving alongside Kazakhstan's national identity. It bridges national and transnational literary traditions, reflecting the interplay of historical memory, linguistic adaptation, and cultural hybridity. Imagology thus offers valuable tools for understanding Kazakhstan's literary representations and identity construction in global discourse.

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Г.А. Атембаева, Д.А. Сабирова

*Абай атындағы Қазақ ұлттық педагогикалық университеті
Алматы, Қазақстан*

ШЕТЕЛ ӘДЕБИЕТІНДЕГІ ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ИМАГОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ БЕЙНЕЛЕРІ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада Қазақстанның ұлттық шекарасынан тыс құрылған көркем мәтіндердегі өкілдігі қарастырылады. Зерттеуде «қазақ» және «қазақстандық» мәтіндер ұғымдарының теориялық саралануы қарастырылады, мәдени бірегейлікті талдау және баяндау позициялау үшін имагологиялық тәсіл қолданылады. Зерттеу авторлардың екі тобына бағытталған: Қазақстанда туылған эмигрант Жазушылар және Қазақстанды сыртқы көзқараспен бейнелейтін шетелдік

жазушылар. Таңдалған шығармаларды салыстырмалы талдау негізінде мақалада кеңістіктік метафораларды, мәдени кодтарды және Ұлттық стереотиптерді қоса алғанда, негізгі имагологиялық маркерлер анықталады. «Қазақстан мәтінінің» поэтикасына әлеуметтік-мәдени және көркемдік құбылыс ретінде ерекше көңіл бөлінеді. Әдістеме әдеби талдауды, имагология теориясын және академиялық мәліметтер базасына статистикалық шолуды біріктіреді. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық базасы ғылыми әдебиеттерді талдауды, мәтіндік талдауды, имагологиялық салыстыруды, сондай-ақ деректерді статистикалық өңдеуді қамтиды. Зерттелетін мәтіндер баяндау ұйымы, мәдени кодтар және ұлттық бірегейлікті көрсететін элементтер тұрғысынан талданады. Салыстырмалы тәсіл ішкі өзін-өзі таныстыру мен елдің сыртқы келбеті арасындағы алшақтықты анықтауға мүмкіндік береді. Қазақстандық мәтінді имагологиялық талдау үлкен аналитикалық әлеуетке ие, өйткені ол әлемдік әдеби дискурста Қазақстанның ішкі ұлттық баяндамалары мен сыртқы өкілдіктері арасындағы серпінді өзара іс-қимылды көрсетеді. Алынған нәтижелер Қазақстанның әдеби бейнесін әлемдік дискурста кеңінен түсінуге ықпал етеді. Мақала қазақстандық мәтінді шетел әдебиетіндегі мәдени бірегейлікті бейнелеу құралы ретінде айқындайды.

Түйінді сөздер: «қазақстандық мәтін», имагология, мәдени кодтар, әдеби репрезентация, ұлттық сәйкестік, транслингвалды авторлар, мәдени жады

Г.А. Атембаева, Д.А. Сабирова

*Казахский национальный педагогический университет имени Абая
Алматы, Казахстан*

ИМАГОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОБРАЗЫ КАЗАХСТАНА В ЗАРУБЕЖНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается репрезентация Казахстана в художественных текстах, созданных за пределами его национальных границ. В исследовании рассматривается теоретическая дифференциация понятий «казахский» и «казахстанский» тексты, применяется имагологический подход для анализа культурной идентичности и нарративного позиционирования. Исследование сосредоточено на двух группах авторов: писателях-эмигрантах, родившихся в Казахстане, и зарубежных писателях, которые изображают Казахстан с внешней точки зрения. На основе сравнительного анализа избранных произведений в статье выявляются ключевые имагологические маркеры, включая пространственные метафоры, культурные коды и национальные стереотипы. Особое внимание уделяется поэтике «казахстанского текста» как социокультурному и художественному феномену. Методология сочетает в себе литературный анализ, теорию имагологии и статистический обзор академических баз данных. Имагологический анализ казахстанского текста обладает большим аналитическим потенциалом, поскольку отражает динамичное взаимодействие между внутренними национальными нарративами и внешними репрезентациями Казахстана в мировом литературном дискурсе. Полученные результаты способствуют более широкому пониманию литературного образа Казахстана в мировом дискурсе. Статья определяет казахстанский текст как инструмент репрезентации культурной идентичности в зарубежной литературе.

Ключевые слова: «казахстанский текст», имагология, культурные коды, литературная репрезентация, национальная идентичность, транслингвальные авторы, культурная память.

Authors' contributions

Atembayeva G.A. – conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; methodology; roles/writing – original draft preparation and writing.

Sabirova D.A. – validation; formal analysis; writing – review and editing.