

GENDER PECULIARITIES IN KAZAKH AND GEORGIAN DANCES: REFLECTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract. The concepts of dance, cultural code, and national identity play a significant role in the fields of Art History, Cultural Studies, and Anthropology. Gender codes in choreographic solutions, that is, the personification of men as courage and women as tenderness, are among the features reflected in the dance traditions of many peoples. This article considers dance as an artistic and communicative tool that reflects the culture of a particular community, serving as a carrier of cultural codes. The study focuses on a comparative analysis of the national dances of the Kazakh and Georgian peoples. *The aim* of the research is to identify gender characteristics in the national dance traditions of the Kazakh and Georgian peoples and to examine their role in preserving national identity through dance. The chronological scope of the study encompasses dances from the past five years. To achieve the research objectives, particular attention was given to the works of professional choreographers in the field of national dance. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the national and gender-specific movement vocabularies characteristic of male and female performances in the dances of both nations was conducted. *The methodological* framework of the research combines qualitative and comparative approaches, including the author's experience and observations gained during an academic internship in Georgia. Primary data were supplemented by a review of scholarly literature in Cultural Studies and Anthropology, providing a multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon. *The results* reveal both similarities and distinctive features in gender representation, showing that Kazakh male dances often emphasize expansive, powerful movements symbolizing freedom and heroism, whereas Georgian male dances focus on sharp, precise footwork and upright posture reflecting discipline and bravery. Female dances in both traditions convey grace and modesty, yet differ in tempo, spatial use, and arm movements. These findings confirm that gendered choreographic codes are an integral part of cultural heritage, functioning as symbolic tools for transmitting national values. The study contributes to the broader discourse on how intangible cultural heritage, particularly dance, serves as a living repository of identity in the context of globalization.

Keywords: Kazakh, Georgian, dance art, national identity, gender identity, choreography, cultural heritage, ethnocultural studies.

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Introduction

In recent years, scholarly research in the fields of choreography, cultural studies, and anthropology has increasingly approached dance as a form of intangible cultural heritage, recognizing it as a visual language that reflects the values and national identity of an ethnic community. Dance is understood not merely as an art of movement, but also as a collection of cultural codes and symbols. One of the key dimensions in this regard is gender representation: the male figure is typically portrayed as heroic, determined, and resilient, while the female figure embodies delicacy, grace, and refinement. These gendered features occupy a distinct place as a subject of theoretical interest within the broader discourse of identity formation (Lovell 79).

Gender codes are closely linked to historical, social, and aesthetic norms. In both Kazakh and Georgian national dances, these features are clearly manifested: male dancers are characterized by bold, decisive, and expansive movements, while female dancers are distinguished by modesty, elegance, and soft plasticity. Such gender archetypes are transmitted from generation to generation through dance, becoming a mechanism for preserving national consciousness and identity.

Approaches to conceptualizing national identity are shaped by a range of factors, including the weakening of state mechanisms and the growing role of language and culture. Official historiography, national symbols, religion, contemporary culture, mass media, and architecture collectively form the ethno-national trajectory of state-building. Within this framework, the roles of the Kazakh language and bilingualism are becoming increasingly prominent (Rakhimbekova et al. 111). In this context, national dances occupy a particularly significant place. Dance is an essential component of culture (Liu 153) and may serve as a form of cultural capital marked by ethnic dimensions (Urquía 385).

In contemporary Kazakh national dance, certain choreographers' performances increasingly depict female roles that go beyond the traditional delicate image, presenting bolder and more active characters. For instance, performances such as «Zhashtar Bi» and «Zhauhar» are noted for incorporating female movements that harmonize with some of the bold gestures typically associated with male dancers.

Similar tendencies are observed in Georgian national dance as well. According to some studies, prominent Georgian choreographers have been reinterpreting

traditional gender roles in their recent works. For example, in performances by the «Sukhishvili» ensemble, lyrical qualities are emerging in male roles, while female roles display more assertive characteristics.

The relevance of this study lies in elucidating the role of traditional dance art in preserving national identity through gendered markers. Although Kazakh and Georgian dance arts have been examined in separate ethnographic and art studies, comparative research that connects their gender structures with national identity remains practically unexplored.

The aim of this research is to identify how national identity is expressed through gender codes in Kazakh and Georgian dances. The object of the study consists of contemporary choreographic works performed within the last five years. This research is intended to strengthen intercultural connections and demonstrate the potential for preserving national heritage through dance.

Methods of research

This study employed interdisciplinary methods integrating cultural anthropology, art studies, and gender research. The primary method was comparative analysis, which allowed for identifying similarities and differences in gender representation within Kazakh and Georgian dance arts. The content of national dances was recognized as a means of expressing national identity. Through content analysis, elements such as traditional national costumes, musical accompaniment, stage performance components, and movement structures of the Kazakh and Georgian peoples were examined. Interpretative analysis revealed the significance of plastic and artistic symbols associated with male and female roles.

Participant observation (naturalistic observation) was also utilized. In this regard, the author's internship in Tbilisi in May 2025, during which they observed

rehearsals of local dance ensembles and conducted interviews with Georgian choreographers, served as a foundation for selecting the topic of this article. These empirical materials provided a deeper understanding of the research process.

Attention was given to the works of domestic and international scholars studying gender characteristics in dance and issues of national identity. The research is based on Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics (Lotman 704), Judith Butler's concept of «gender as performance» (Butler), and Benedict Anderson's theories on national identity (Anderson 160).

Discussion

Efforts to revive and preserve national identity have become a matter of concern for many post-communist countries, including Kazakhstan (Kulsarieva et al. 76). Globalization is viewed as a stage in the evolution of the capitalist world system, characterized by geographical, class, and gender-specific features (Moghadam 695). In the context of globalization, Kazakhstan is undergoing key stages in the formation of a unified identity aimed at ensuring national cohesion and stability (Balapanova & Asyltaeva 72). In fact, national culture functions as a counterforce to globalization (Chamba Nana 24). The formation and maintenance of a sense of national identity is vital for all societies (McAllister 157). Establishing a new spatial ideology — by revitalizing identifiers such as steppe memory, national cultural codes, and sacred sites — opens new prospects for the future of the nation (Musatayeva & Yermagambetova 6498).

Certain aspects of culture can be considered as a significant foundation of Kazakhstan's development model (Dairabayeva et al. 115). Traditions are elements of social and cultural heritage that are passed down from generation to generation and preserved over a long period within a particular social group or community (Stud.kz).

Modern information and communication technologies — especially the Internet — play a significant role in contemporary Kazakhstani society, profoundly influencing the national identity of its citizens (Toktarov & Altaev 3).

Studies assessing performance have shown that boys generally demonstrate lower academic competence compared to girls, but tend to outperform them in mathematics-related subjects. Such gender differences in competence may be relatively minor (Kessels et al. 220). No significant differences were found between men and women in terms of overall identity indicators (Lewis 159). However, variations in identity measures—such as ethnic centrality, private regard, and public regard—revealed inconsistencies associated with gender and religious upbringing (Rahal et al. 544). For instance, certain elements traditionally associated with Kazakh female dances are now also incorporated into male dances. These transformations in dance elements offer insights into the integration of gender identities within the framework of national dance (Ma et al. 51).

Culture is a semiotic space — a system of signs — where dance, costume, and bodily movement all function as signs bearing cultural meaning (Lotman 704). Both Kazakh national dances and Georgian national art possess their own distinctive characteristics. In Georgian dance traditions (e.g., Kartuli, Khorumi), male roles are portrayed through heroism, upright posture, discipline, and vigor, whereas female roles are expressed through calmness, modesty, and delicate movements.

A similar binary structure is preserved in Kazakh dance: male dances (such as Erler Bii or Batyr) are marked by expansive gestures, energetic movements, and expressions of strength; while female dances (Kyzdar Bii, K ktem) emphasize gracefulness and tenderness.

Thus, it becomes evident that historically established gender archetypes in both Kazakh and Georgian national dances have retained their relevance in the present day. Male representations continue to embody bravery, resilience, and determination, while female representations reflect gentleness, politeness, and subtlety. These enduring models serve as artistic reflections of national identity.

However, in contemporary performances, this contrast has become less rigid: elements of assertiveness are increasingly observed in some female roles, while lyrical expressions appear in male parts. This shift can be attributed to globalization and the evolving language of stage aesthetics. For example, lyrical expressions and emotional moments are often observed in male roles, especially in dances themed around love. In some contemporary performances of traditional dances such as «Kazagym» and «Altybakan», the typically bold and swift movements characteristic of male dancers are complemented by lyrical elements, reflecting a transformation of gender codes. A similar tendency is observed in Georgian dances as well, although the forms and degrees of its manifestation vary. Thus, the transformation of gender codes is identified as a significant phenomenon within the contexts of both cultures.

Nevertheless, the traditional gender structure remains relevant and firmly preserved (Hamidullina 19). Previous studies have clearly demonstrated how cultural archetypes are transmitted to younger generations through dance (Kvekveskiri 12).

The present study contributes to this scholarly discourse by examining gender codes in Kazakh and Georgian dances through an intercultural comparative lens. Its novelty lies in the use of both theoretical foundations and empirical data collected by the author during a research internship in Tbilisi in 2025.

Results

The dance art of each nation serves as a carrier of that ethnic group’s cultural codes. Kazakh and Georgian dances are recognized as artistic means for preserving and revitalizing national identity. Gender representations in dance reflect the worldview, social structure, and aesthetic values of the nation.

For instance, the wide arm movements and playful shoulder gestures in Kazakh dance symbolize the nomadic lifestyle and a sense of freedom, while the upright posture and sharp movements in Georgian dance express a warrior spirit and historical discipline. The soft and circular motions of the hands and feet in female parts emphasize the unique role of women in society.

By considering core gender characteristics (Bonanno et al. 6498), it becomes possible to identify both the similarities and differences in the dance traditions of these two nations. In this regard, the empirical data collected during the author’s internship in Tbilisi, Georgia, in May 2025 significantly enhanced the quality of the research.

Participation in rehearsals, interviews with choreographers, and direct observation of theatrical performances provided deeper insight into the nature of gender codes in

Georgian dance and allowed for meaningful comparisons with national characteristics in Kazakh choreography. A comparative overview of gender codes in Kazakh and Georgian dances is presented in the table below (Table 1).

The internship was conducted at the Faculty of Choreography of the Shota Rustaveli State University of Theatre and Cinema. Within the framework of the internship, the author is carrying out a research project titled «Trends in the Development of National Male Dance in the Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context of Kazakhstan». By comparing the choreographic education systems of the two countries, the author aims to strengthen academic and cultural ties.

The academic supervisor of the internship is Dr. Lasha Chkhartishvili – Doctor of Art Studies, theatre scholar, and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Art Studies, Media, and Management of the Shota Rustaveli State University of Theatre and Cinema (balletacademy.edu.kz).

During the internship, clear similarities and differences between Kazakh and Georgian dances were identified (see Figure 1). For the purpose of experience exchange, on April 16, 2025, Almat Sherdaruly conducted a master class for first-year students, presenting the distinctive features of Kazakh dance. This

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of Gender Codes in Kazakh and Georgian Dance

Element	Kazakh dance	Georgian dance
Male image	Wide swings, shoulder engagement, and strength	Upright posture, sharp movements, discipline
Female image	Softness, gracefulness, and circular movements	Composure, smoothness, silence
Direction of movement	Horizontal orientation (ground-connected)	Vertical orientation (connected to the sky)
Costume elements	Nomadic style: shapan (robe), kamzol (vest)	Long dress, headwear (chokha)
Musical rhythm	Rhythmic, accompanied by the dombra	Fast tempo, drum/chorus accompaniment
Gender relations	Clearly differentiated	Strict boundaries maintained
Note: the table was compiled by the author		

event served not only as a new experience for the students but also as a vivid example of cultural exchange (balletacademy.edu.kz).

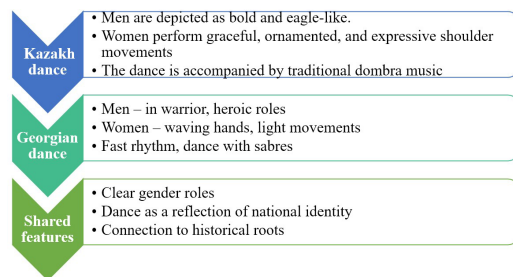


Figure 1. Similarities and Differences between Kazakh and Georgian Dance

Georgian dance serves as an artistic expression of the nation's centuries-old theatrical culture, vividly reflecting its historical, spiritual, and aesthetic identity. At its core lie ancient customs and military-heroic motifs, as well as a poetic portrayal of harmony with nature and the human condition. Dance is not merely physical movement but a cultural narrative (Assmann 410) – a mode of self-representation for the people.

A distinctive structural feature of Georgian dance is its clear gender differentiation. Male roles predominantly feature dynamic, swift, and sometimes acrobatic movements, symbolizing heroism, bravery, and historical discipline. Conversely, female roles are characterized by soft, silent, introspective, and graceful plasticity (Butler). Although men and women interact on stage, a physical distance is maintained, reflecting social restrictions and traditional etiquette inherent in Georgian culture.

Most Georgian dances are stage reconstructions. Notably, Kartuli is a couple's dance symbolizing love and tenderness, while Khorumi embodies warrior spirit and heroic motifs. These dances synthesize national costume, music, and movement into a cohesive aesthetic structure. The musical accompaniment employs rare instruments

such as the doli, panduri, and zurna, and the harmony between music and movement deepens the content conveyed through the language of dance. Furthermore, Georgian dance plays a significant role in expressing national identity. According to Anderson's theory of «imagined communities» (160), dance functions as a tool for reproducing national unity. In this regard, the stage performances of the Sukhishvili National Ballet introduce dance art in a contemporary format while enabling the preservation and revitalization of traditional gender roles and national codes (Figure 2).

Georgian dance music is often characterized by pronounced, rapid, and complex rhythms. These rhythms reveal the heroic character of each dance: for example, male dances embody courage and freedom, whereas female dances convey softness and sincerity. Music and dance develop synchronously, providing the audience with a powerful aesthetic experience (sukhishvili.net).



Figure 2. Stage image of men and women in Georgian dance

Source: Official website of the Sukhishvili National Ballet (<https://sukhishvili.net>)

Kazakh dance is a unique art form rooted in musical improvisation that expresses the national spirit and character. Through its rich language of movement, it conveys cultural codes such as openness, modesty, and gentleness, while the portrayals of men and women reflect contrasting qualities of courage and delicacy. Kazakh dance functions not only as an aesthetic act but also as a vital means of preserving national memory and traditions, transmitting

them from generation to generation. The harmony of traditional costumes and musical instruments like the *dombra* and *sybyzgy* enhances the dance's artistic beauty and reinforces its social and spiritual significance

Renowned choreographer Shara Zhienkulova describes the symbolic meaning of Kazakh dance as follows: the dances embody freedom and expansiveness, signifying closeness to nature, while their movements reveal the inner source of the people. Gender representations in Kazakh dance are distinctly differentiated. Male dances feature rapid, clear movements, wide arm swings, playful shoulder gestures, and upright postures that symbolize heroism, bravery, and the free spirit of the nomads. These characteristics are particularly evident in male performances of *Erler Bii*, *Kamazhay*, and *Jorga* dances. Conversely, female dances express delicacy, softness of movement, circular hand motions, bending turns, modesty, and introspection, reflecting the upbringing and cultural role of Kazakh women.

Structurally, Kazakh dance has developed syncretically alongside other art forms related to national identity and traditional worldview. As a manifestation of the people's artistic imagination, dance has formed a system of movements that aesthetically expresses the general worldview and aspirations of the Kazakh people (Izim 132).

The female image in Kazakh dance reflects both delicacy and spiritual elevation, closely aligning with national aesthetic values. In this context, dance is perceived not merely as a sequence of plastic movements, but as a cultural expression embodying the worldview and temperament of the nation. Furthermore, the structural and rhythmic characteristics of Kazakh dance are intimately connected with metaphors rooted in the national consciousness — such as the vast steppe,

the flowing gait of a horse (*zhorga*), and the dynamic force of the wind — thereby shaping a unique cultural and spatial narrative.

The national stage images of men and women in Kazakh dance (Figure 3) are largely based on musical improvisation. This improvisation reflects the performer's inner freedom and spiritual inspiration, transforming into an open form of national expression. This very freedom affirms the performative nature of Kazakh dance, making it not merely an aesthetic act but also a part of the national memory. Kazakh dance cannot be confused with the dance of any other nation. At its core, our national dance embodies qualities akin to the Kazakh character itself — openness, modesty, and gentleness — which have been nurtured since the nomadic lifestyle and continue to accurately portray contemporary life through the language of movement (*Akhanbaikyzy*).



Figure 3. National Stage Images of Men and Women in Kazakh Dance

Source: Official website of Egemen Kazakhstan newspaper (<https://egemen.kz>)

Basic Provisions

1. Gender codes in Kazakh and Georgian dances represent archetypes inherent to their national cultures and are transmitted from generation to generation through dance.

2. The male and female dance roles embody historically established role

models, becoming expressions of national identity.

3. Although contemporary choreographic works show trends of changing gender characteristics, traditional structures remain preserved.

4. Choreography serves as an important representative tool of a nation's cultural code and historical memory.

5. Through the study of dance art, one can understand the spiritual world and cultural genetics of a people, which in turn strengthens intercultural dialogue.

6. The data obtained during the author's internship in Tbilisi enriched the empirical basis of the study and provided a concrete foundation for comparative analysis.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively highlights the significant role of gender codes in Kazakh and Georgian dances in expressing national identity, revealing the resilience of traditional choreographic structures alongside contemporary trends. The findings not only identify the similarities and differences between Kazakh and

Georgian dances but also demonstrate the symbolic importance of dance as a means of transmitting cultural codes across generations. The empirical data collected during the author's internship in Tbilisi enriched the theoretical foundation of the research and enhanced the reliability of the comparative analysis.

This scientific article contributes to strengthening cultural ties between Kazakhstan and Georgia and shows the possibility of preserving national identity through dance. The conclusions drawn open broad opportunities for further research in dance studies. Firstly, future analyses of gender semiotics in stage dynamics and costume design may reveal new dimensions of national identity. Secondly, to clarify the social recognition of dance symbols and traditions, it is necessary to conduct surveys and focus groups involving dance instructors and performers to study the cultural perceptions of audiences. Thus, this study deepens the understanding of Kazakh and Georgian traditional choreography and contributes to strengthening intercultural dialogue and preserving national heritage.

Authors' contributions:

A. Shamshiev – as lead author: working with sources and interpreting the collected data; analyzing and systematizing the material; organizing the practical component of the research; scientific editing of the manuscript.

L. Chkhartishvili – as foreign consultant: verifying and validating empirical data on Georgian dances; ensuring the analysis of cultural context and gender codes; evaluating the quality of the methodology and discussion sections.

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ГЕНДЕРНЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ В КАЗАХСКОМ И ГРУЗИНСКОМ ТАНЦАХ: ОТРАЖЕНИЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

Аннотация. Понятия танца, культурного кода и национальной идентичности играют значительную роль в областях истории искусства, культурологии и антропологии. Гендерные коды в хореографических решениях, то есть олицетворение мужчин как смелости и женщин как нежности, являются одними из особенностей, отражённых в танцевальных традициях многих народов. В данной статье рассматривается танец как художественный и коммуникативный инструмент, отражающий культуру конкретного сообщества и выполняющий функцию носителя культурного кода. Исследование сосредоточено на сравнительном анализе национальных танцев казахского и грузинского народов.

Цель исследования заключается в выявлении гендерных особенностей в национальных танцевальных традициях казахского и грузинского народов и изучении их роли в сохранении национальной идентичности через танец. Хронологический охват исследования включает танцы последних пяти лет. Для достижения целей исследования особое внимание уделялось работам профессиональных хореографов в области национального танца. Кроме того, проведён сравнительный анализ национальных и гендерно-специфических движений, характерных для мужских и женских выступлений у обоих народов. Методологическая основа исследования сочетает качественные и сравнительные подходы, включая опыт автора и наблюдения, полученные в ходе академической стажировки в Грузии. Первичные данные были дополнены обзором научной литературы по культурологии и антропологии, что позволило получить многомерное понимание явления. Результаты выявили как сходства, так и отличительные особенности в гендерном представлении: казахские мужские танцы часто подчеркивают широкие, мощные движения, символизирующие свободу и героизм, тогда как грузинские мужские танцы сосредоточены на точных, четких движениях ног и прямой осанке, отражающей дисциплину и мужество. Женские танцы в обеих традициях передают грацию и скромность, но различаются по темпу, использованию пространства и движениям рук. Эти результаты подтверждают, что гендерные хореографические коды являются неотъемлемой частью культурного наследия и функционируют как символические средства передачи национальных ценностей. Исследование вносит вклад в более широкий дискурс о том, как нематериальное культурное наследие, в частности танец, служит живым хранилищем идентичности в условиях глобализации.

Ключевые слова: казахский народный танец, грузинский народный танец, танцевальное искусство, национальная идентичность, гендерная идентичность, хореография, культурное наследие, этнокультурные исследования.

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ҚАЗАҚ ЖӘНЕ ГРУЗИН БИЛЕРІНДЕГІ ГЕНДЕРЛІК ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕР: ҰЛТТЫҚ БІРЕГЕЙЛІКТІҢ КӨРІНІСІ

Аңдатпа. Би, мәдени код және ұлттық бірегейлік ұғымдары өнер тарихы, мәдениеттану және антропология салаларында маңызды рөл атқарады. Хореографиялық шешімдердегі гендерлік кодтар, яғни ерлер бейнесі – батырлық, әйелдер бейнесі – нәзіктік, көптеген халықтардың би дәстүрінде көрініс тапқан ерекшеліктердің бірі болып табылады. Мақалада би өнері белгілі бір қауымдастық мәдениетін бейнелейтін, мәдени кодты тасымалдаушы ретінде әрекет ететін көркемдік және коммуникативтік құрал ретінде қарастырылады. Зерттеу қазақ және грузин халықтарының ұлттық билерінің салыстырмалы талдауына бағытталған.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – қазақ және грузин халықтарының ұлттық би дәстүріндегі гендерлік ерекшеліктерді анықтап, би арқылы ұлттық бірегейлікті сақтаудағы рөлін зерттеу. Зерттеудің хронологиялық ауқымы соңғы бес жылдағы билерді қамтиды. Зерттеу мақсаттарына жету үшін ұлттық би өнері саласындағы кәсіби хореографтардың еңбектеріне ерекше назар аударылды. Сонымен қатар, екі халықтың билерінде ерлер мен әйелдерге тән ұлттық және гендерлік қозғалыс тілінің салыстырмалы талдауы жүргізілді. Зерттеудің әдістемелік негізін сапалық және салыстырмалы тәсілдер құрайды, оған автордың Грузия елінде тағылымдамадан өту барысында алған тәжірибесі кіреді. Бастапқы деректер мәдениеттану мен антропология саласындағы ғылыми әдебиеттерге шолу арқылы толықтырылып, құбылысты көпқырлы түсінуге мүмкіндік берді. Зерттеу нәтижелері гендерлік бейнелеудегі ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылықтарды көрсетті: қазақ ерлер билері көбіне кең, күшті қимылдар арқылы еркіндік пен ерлікті бейнелесе, грузин ерлер билері дәл, нақты аяқ қимылдары мен тік дене ұстау арқылы тәртіп пен батылдығы көрсетеді. Екі халықтың әйелдер билері нәзіктік пен сыпайылықты жеткізеді, бірақ қарқын, кеңістік қолдану және қол қимылдары жағынан ерекшеленеді. Бұл нәтижелер гендерлік хореографиялық кодтардың мәдени мұраның ажырамас бөлігі екенін және ұлттық құндылықтарды жеткізетін символдық құрал екенін растайды. Зерттеу жаһандану жағдайында би сияқты материалдық емес мәдени мұра ұлттық бірегейліктің тірі қазынасы ретіндегі рөлін талқылауға үлес қосады.

Түйін сөздер: қазақ ұлттық биі, грузин ұлттық биі, би өнері, ұлттық бірегейлік, гендерлік бірегейлік, хореография, мәдени мұра, этномәдени зерттеулер.

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