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## THE LANGUAGE OF GREETING GESTURES IN TRADITIONAL KAZAKH CULTURE THROUGH THE LENS OF CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

This study is based on the premise that the language of traditional gestures possesses a distinct specificity – both as an attribute of its semiosphere and as a bodily modality of “constituted behavior”, that is, a socially embedded program of corporeality. In this case, the focus is on traditional Kazakh society and its worldview. The research aims to examine the language of traditional Kazakh greeting gestures through the framework of visual anthropology. Gestures, as a form of embodied communication, are analyzed as a particular bodily modality within the holistic and contemplative worldview of a nomadic society. Engaging with traditional cultural practices – specifically, descriptions of Kazakh greeting gestures – does not preclude drawing on “indigenous knowledge”, which, within the Kazakh epistemological tradition, is referred to as “steppe knowledge”. Traditional gestures carry axiological significance, rooted in sacral-ity and linked to ritual practices as well as conceptions of the unified cosmos and the human body. The semiotic structure of greeting gestures is anchored in the sacred (magical) meanings ascribed to elements of the human body, understood as an emanation of the nomadic cosmos. The gendered dimension of traditional Kazakh greeting gestures functions as a regulatory code, structuring the system of social interaction. A key finding of this study, within the perspective of visual anthropology, is the recognition that analyzing gesture as a sign must also account for an equally fundamental, structural component of gesture language – corporeality as a mode of embodied cognition and image-based thought. The conclusions drawn from this research highlight the broader potential for studying gesture language as an object of cultural anthropology, semiotics, and communication studies, particularly within cross-cultural research on the sociology of the body.

**Key words:** traditional greeting gestures, gesture semiotics, visual anthropology, nomadic society, corporeality.

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### Қазіргі көрнекі антропология тұрғысынан дәстүрлі қазақ мәдениетіндегі сәлемдесу тілі

Мақаланың зерттеу гипотезасы дәстүрлі ым-ишара тілі өзінің семиосферасының атрибуты ретінде де, «құрылған мінез-құлық» денесінің режимі ретінде де, яғни белгілі бір қоғамның тәндік бағдарламалары ретінде өзіндік ерекшелігі, біздің жағдайда – дәстүрлі қазақ қоғамы және оның дүниетанымы бар екенін түсінуге негізделген. Зерттеу қазақтың дәстүрлі сәлемдесу тілін көрнекі антропология контекстінде зерттеуге бағытталған. Қимылдар дене тілі ретінде әрекет етеді және көшпелі қоғам әлемінің біртұтас ойлау бейнесі аспектісі дененің белгілі бір модусы ретінде қарастырылады. Дәстүрлі мәдени әдет-ғұрыптарға жүгіну – қазақтың дәстүрлі ым-ишарасын сипаттау – қазақ гносеологиясында аталатын «жергілікті таным», яғни «дала танымына» жүгінуді жоққа шығармайды. Дәстүрлі ым-ишара басқа нәрселермен қатар біртұтас ғарыш кеңістігі мен адам денесі туралы салт жоралар мен идеялар туралы қасиетті табиғатпен байланысты аксиологиялық мәнге ие. Сәлемдесу семиозы көшпелілер ғарышының эманациясы ретіндегі адам денесінің элементтерінің қасиетті (сиқырлы) мағынасына тіреледі. Қазақтың дәстүрлі сәлемдесу ым-ишарасы тілінің гендерлік статусы әлеуметтік қатынас жүйесін ұйымдастыратын код қызметін атқарады. Қазақтың дәстүрлі сәлемдесу қимылының тілін көрнекі антропология

зерттеудің нәтижесін қимыл таңбасы ретіндегі конфигурациясын ғана емес, сонымен қатар оның жүйе құраушы элементі – тәндік қасиетін «дене ойлауы», ой-бейне ретінде қарастыру қажеттігі туралы қорытындыны да қарастырған жөн. Зерттеудің қорытындылары мен ережелері қимыл тілін мәдени антропологияның, семиотиканың, коммуникация зерттеулерінің объектісі ретінде, мәдениетаралық зерттеулерде дене социологиясы теориясы аспектісінде зерттеу перспективасын ашады.

**Түйін сөздер:** дәстүрлі сәлемдесу ым-ишарасы, қимыл семиотикасы, визуалды антропология, көшпелі қоғам, дүниелік.

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### **Язык жестов приветствия традиционной казахской культуры в фокусе современной визуальной антропологии**

Исследовательская гипотеза статьи строится на понимании того, что язык традиционных жестов имеет свою специфику и как атрибут ее семиосферы, и как модус тела «конституированного поведения», т.е. программы телесности данного социума. В нашем случае – традиционного казахского общества и его картины мира. Исследование следует цели рассмотреть язык казахских традиционных жестов приветствия в ключе визуальной антропологии. Жесты выступают как язык тела и рассматриваются как определенный модус тела в аспекте целостно-созерцательной картины мира кочевого общества. Обращенность к традиционным культурным практикам – описаниям традиционных жестов казахов – не исключает апеллирования к так называемому, «индигенному знанию», что в казахской эпистемологии названо «степным знанием». Традиционные жесты наделены аксиологической значимостью, связанной с природой сакрального, восходящего к ритуалу и представлениям о пространстве единого космоса и человеческого тела в том числе. Семиозис жеста приветствия покоится на сакральном (магическом) значении элементов человеческого тела как эманация кочевого космоса. Гендерно выраженный статус языка традиционных жестов приветствия казахов выступает как код, упорядочивающий систему социальной коммуникации. Результатом исследования языка традиционных казахских жестов приветствия в аспекте визуальной антропологии следует считать также вывод о необходимости рассматривать не только конфигурацию жеста как знака, но и не менее важный системообразующий элемент языка жеста – телесность как «мышление тела»,мыслеобраз. Выводы и положения исследования открывают перспективу изучения языка жестов как объекта культурной антропологии, семиотики, коммуникативистики, в кросс-культурных исследованиях в аспекте теории социологии тела.

**Ключевые слова:** традиционные жесты приветствия, семиотика жеста, визуальная антропология, кочевое общество, телесность.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary cultural anthropology has increasingly emphasized the study of gesture as a fundamental form of nonverbal communication. Since the time of Charles Darwin, gestures have drawn the interest of anthropologists both as aspects of human corporeality and as elements of the nonverbal language of culture, forming the foundation of the discipline known as kinesics. Modern scholarly discourse, structured around a linguistic paradigm for understanding human and cultural phenomena, has placed a strong focus on the communicative function of gestures. Additionally, contemporary

anthropological studies, drawing on the evolutionary theory of language, seek to explore whether nonverbal forms of communication preceded spoken language and how they manifest across different cultures. Cross-cultural research on nonverbal communication, such as Body Language Difference in Meaning in Cross-cultural Communication, highlights the significance of these inquiries (Dandan and Jun, 2023:35).

At the same time, as Sotaro (2009:145) observe, while speech and gesture constitute tightly interconnected systems, gesture remains an understudied phenomenon compared to spoken language. The multimodal nature of human communication

underscores the need for a deeper understanding of cultural variations in gestures, as well as differences in linguistic structure and cognitive processing.

### **Relevance of the topic of articles, goals and objectives**

This study examines gesture as an element of the visual culture of the Kazakh people, with its distinctive ethno-specific features, within the ontological framework of its traditional nomadic socio-cultural system. This perspective aligns with gesture theory within cultural anthropology.

In traditional Kazakh society, gestures function as components of a socio-cultural language system. As is well established, both in traditional and modern cultures, gestures serve a variety of conventionalized functions, including greetings, farewells, negation, pointing, summoning, and taboos, among others. Importantly, as traditional gestures undergo semantic shifts or loss of meaning, they persist in contemporary social practices as behavioral stereotypes within the framework of ethno-cultural identity. Moreover, the inherited meanings of gestures, originating from traditional practices, continue to function as carriers of nonverbal social communication codes, serving as a distinct instrument for structuring social relations.

Visual anthropology is expanding its methodological scope by broadening the range of objects under study, leveraging its epistemological potential, particularly its core anthropological focus. When considering gestures as nonverbal semiotic signs, it is essential to recognize that they convey a specific kind of “corporeal information”. As T. E. Tsvetus-Salkhova (2010:13) asserts in her distinction between the concepts of “body” and “corporeality” in cultural studies, corporeality represents the enactment of a specific cultural and semiotic schema (concept), ultimately constituting a bodily modality.

In this study, traditional Kazakh gestures are analyzed as both a research object and a subject of visual anthropological inquiry. They are examined as elements of nonverbal communication, rich in symbolic meaning, as well as a socio-cultural phenomenon – bodily “actions/signs” with their own distinct semantics.

The objective of this research is to analyze, through the lens of visual anthropology, the lan-

guage of traditional Kazakh gestures as a cultural code of socio-cultural identity within the semiosphere of the holistic and contemplative worldview of the nomadic tradition.

### **Methods and methodology**

A comprehensive perspective on the subject of inquiry – the language of traditional Kazakh greeting gestures as a sociocultural phenomenon is grounded in contemporary theoretical frameworks, primarily within the field of visual anthropology. As a subdiscipline of cultural anthropology, visual anthropology possesses a complex epistemological structure that informs the study of gestures. This paradigm underscores the active engagement of modern scholarship in exploring the genesis, sociocultural conditioning, and broader implications of this phenomenon. The present study draws upon a review of key hypotheses and contemporary theories of gesture, while the methodological framework is shaped by an analysis of existing approaches to studying this subject and their subsequent interpretation.

Contemporary research places significant emphasis on gesture’s role in the evolution of human communication, particularly within the broader discourse on language genesis. Arbib’s hypothesis (2005:108) posits that the brain’s ability to control bodily movements underlies the development of sign language, which, in turn, influenced the emergence of spoken language. This theory has been further elaborated in subsequent studies. Notably, Goldin-Meadow’s work, *Learning through gesture* (2011:599), attributes a pivotal role to sign language in the evolution of human intelligence and communicative systems. A more recent publication, *Gesture is an intrinsic part of modern-day human communication and may always have been so* (Goldin-Meadow, 2024:759), explores the origins of gestures and their connection to linguistic development. Drawing upon research in psycholinguistics and neurobiology, the author advances a theory supporting the claims of both Arbib and Goldin-Meadow – namely, that gestures play a fundamental role in the emergence of intelligence and speech by carrying information and facilitating social communication. The study underscores the significance of examining gesture-speech interplay across diverse social and cultural contexts, as this

line of inquiry holds promise for identifying new theoretical and empirical challenges.

### Literature review

In recent years, scholarly works have increasingly examined the variation of gestures across cultures, their relationship to cultural practices, and their role in social communication as markers of identity and cultural codes. For instance, “Gesture and Speech in Interaction” investigates how gestures, in combination with speech, generate new meanings within different cultural contexts (Wagner et al., 2014:213).

The study of traditional Kazakh gestures has been approached from various interdisciplinary perspectives, with particular attention given to scientific ethnography. In this regard, the research of Sh. Zh. Tokhtabaeva (2017a; 2017b) is particularly noteworthy. Tokhtabaeva’s work analyzes the semantics of diverse traditional kinesic expressions, in which gestures function as key elements of folk etiquette alongside other expressive means. Central to her argument is the symbolic nature of both verbal constructs and visual materials, their semiotic properties necessitating an understanding of etiquette as a “semiotic object”. Given that gestures inherently possess sign-like attributes, they may function autonomously as semiotic entities, textual constructs, and communicative utterances.

Similarly, S. S. Tatubaev (1979:109) developed a methodological framework for actor training, focusing on key visual expressive techniques. Tatubaev examined gestures within the pragmatic and syntagmatic dimensions of the Kazakh socio-cultural communication system. His meticulous descriptions of specific gestures, capturing their dynamics and nuances, allow for their visual reconstruction and elucidate their semantic-symbolic significance. The practical relevance of this research lies in the fact that traditional gestures are gradually losing their original meaning and are disappearing from social and interpersonal communication. More often than not, traditional gestures and their symbolic content undergo transformation, with verbal language becoming the dominant mode of expression over time. Consequently, in contemporary performance arts, there is a growing need to reinterpret and reconstruct these gestures in their traditional visual significance.

In the article “Features of the Nonverbal Communication Model of the Kazakh People” (Berdaliyeva, 2021:44), the author argues that there is no “international” sign language; nonverbal language is always national, just like spoken language. This idea is supported by the description of “nonverbal components that, first, are inherent only to the Kazakh language” and, second, have meaning only within this culture, making them nationally significant. Undoubtedly, each culture and its languages are directly linked to the process of ethnogenesis.

Our research hypothesis is based on the understanding that the language of traditional gestures, as an element of ethnic culture, has its own specificity both as an attribute of its semiosphere and as a mode of “constituted bodily behavior,” meaning a socially constructed program of physical expression. In our case, this pertains to traditional Kazakh society and its worldview. The focus on traditional cultural practices – namely, descriptions of traditional Kazakh gestures – does not exclude references to so-called “indigenous knowledge,” which in Kazakh epistemology is termed “steppe knowledge.” This concept is explored in works such as A. Kodar’s “Steppe Knowledge: Essays on Cultural Studies” (2002:208) and S. M. Altybayeva’s “Steppe Knowledge as a Historical-Cultural and Aesthetic Phenomenon” (2023:411). The author of this article believes that the foundation of this knowledge lies in tradition – an ongoing, uninterrupted process of inheritance and transmission of meaningful, philosophical, historical-cultural, and other types of information essential for understanding the national worldview, the distinctive syncretic perception of reality, and the worldview of the nomads of the Great Steppe.

### Results and discussion

Today, the definition of gesture is no longer limited to the concept of “body language”. Instead, it is associated with the culturally significant concept of “embodiment”, which serves as a projection of a people’s worldview. This refinement opens new perspectives for studying gestures as structural elements of an entire cultural system. If a gesture is viewed solely as a form of human body language, its study is confined to the actions of a physical, biological entity. However,



when examined through the lens of embodiment, a different subject emerges – the language of the historical human. As T.E. Tsvetus-Salkhova rightly notes in “Distinction Of the Concepts of ‘Body’ and “Corporeality” in Culturological Research” (2010:13), embodiment is meant to express the cultural, individual-psychological, and semantic dimensions of human existence.

Thus, embodiment as a sociocultural concept determines the direction of our study of gestures in relation to our hypothesis that traditional gestures function as a visual language within the semiosphere of Kazakh ethnic culture, fulfilling specific sociocultural roles. Gestures, as signs of visual order, are expressed through bodily movements, yet their symbolic semantics are directly shaped by the worldview in which they gain meaning as a socio-cultural concept of embodiment.

The worldview of traditional (primarily pre-Islamic) Kazakh society was built upon its nomadic way of life, while its transcendental model was embodied in the Tengrian tripartite symbolic vertical, known as the “Upper–Middle–Lower” worlds. This model of traditional society, with its worldview based on the principle of the interrelation between parts and the whole, where a part possesses the properties of the whole, is projected and transmitted through both visual and verbal signs, shaping different forms of cultural language. This process can be seen as the formation of a semiosphere, representing a natural practice of semiosis within the human “lifeworld”.

Our analysis focuses on gestures within traditional culture, with special attention given to greeting gestures, which are part of “ritualized” ceremonial, canonical, and cultic forms. In this context, the study of gesture language raises questions about the genesis of linguistic and speech systems, as well as the system of stable visual symbols. Stability, in this sense, refers to the authentic cultural-historical semantics of a gesture, which retains the long-term configuration of its form – its bodily signs. This quality is inherent in gestures of ritual origin. They form an archetypal foundation within the overall structure of gesture language, traditional etiquette, and even everyday behavior in a given ethnic community.

In traditional societies, including Kazakh culture during the early stages of its active cultural development, ritual and everyday gestures were

not rigidly separated. According to F.N. Petrov (2006:192), in traditional beliefs, “the sacred and the profane were not strictly differentiated”, and “the world was perceived as both living and sacred, where the small and the great reflected and embodied one another”.

However, an absolute claim about the indistinguishability of everyday and ritual gestures in traditional society would be unproductive in a diachronic perspective. As a unique cultural entity, a traditional society has its own historical-typological characteristics and socio-cultural dynamics. In this process, transformations and shifts in the semantics of sign systems are natural, often leading to the loss of their magical significance and their functional transition into the system of etiquette. Numerous examples of such transformations exist, primarily driven by changes in social structures, shifts in worldview and cultural values – processes collectively referred to as desanctification.

Viewed synchronically, the traditional Kazakh society represents a construct of inherited stable attributes from the nomadic traditions of Eurasia. Traditional gestures carry a degree of axiological significance tied to the concept of the sacred. This notion is grounded in the idea of a unified cosmic space and its projection onto the surrounding world, human beings, and their bodies. As a result, specific parts of the human body acquire sacred properties by analogy with the original cosmic model. In the broader framework of the symbolic language of gesture, they function as meaning-forming structures. The semiotics of gesture is rooted in the sacred (magical) significance of bodily elements as an emanation of the nomadic cosmos.

Following Y. Lotman’s idea (2000:704) that “the semiotic world is amorphous, in which core structures are immersed”, we can assert that the formation of gesture as a semiotic subsystem within the ritual system is primarily shaped by the symbolically encoded structure of the human body. The language of the body, as a system of symbols, functions similarly to proto-writing, serving as the primordial matrix of visual signs within the socio-cultural system. Gesture, as kinetic speech, employs the symbolic language of the body, whose units are bodily signs that are inherently figurative.

As an example, let us consider traditional Kazakh greeting gestures. Their structural analysis reveals the symbolic language of the body and

bodily signs whose origins trace back to archetypal bodily language. S. Tatubaev (1979:109), in his description of greeting gestures in traditional Kazakh society, highlighted their gender distinctions. The greeting gesture performed by young women when addressing elders involved a slight bow of the head and placing the palm of the right hand on the solar plexus area, while the left hand remained passive – either lowered or slightly drawn back. Notably, this gesture emphasizes a bodily sign – the solar plexus area. In Eastern cultures, this region is regarded as sacred, often associated with the element of fire and the sun (chakras). In traditional Kazakh culture, this part of a young woman's body was adorned with jewelry, while her clothing was frequently decorated with solar motifs, reinforcing the sacred significance of this bodily region.

Meanwhile, the question of whether this bodily gesture is truly authentic to the ritual traditions of the nomadic Kazakh people remains open. It is worth noting that in the Kazakh language, the concept of the “solar plexus” exists only as an anatomical term, without a sacred connotation. Instead, the word “qursaq” is used, referring to the abdomen, which includes the solar plexus region. Depending on context, “qursaq” can signify the “peritoneum” or “the place of the child”. However, another Kazakh term, “kok qap” (literally “blue sack”), symbolically represents the center of life energy, the core of spiritual and physical harmony. This symbolism is tied to the word “kok”, which traces back to the sacred Kök Tengri (Blue Sky God). In Kazakh, the affectionate address “koke” conveys a sense of reverence toward someone perceived as possessing special spiritual and life-giving qualities.

From this perspective, the gesture of a young woman placing her hand over her solar plexus can be interpreted as an invocation of life energy from Tengri, which, in turn, acquires the later connotation of respect and deference. Yet, this gesture also carries a significant symbolic nuance. Anatomically, the solar plexus lies at the boundary between the chest and the abdomen. By covering this area with her hand – while maintaining the fundamental symbolic meaning of the gesture – a woman simultaneously conceals from view the sacralized, tabooed aspects of her body. The female breast holds sacred significance due to its maternal function,

but it is also considered an intimate area, subject to cultural taboos against exposure or overt gestural emphasis. In contrast, young men, when greeting elders, would place their hands over their chests. Here, the distinction in bodily symbolism between genders is particularly pronounced.

S. Tatubaev (1979:109) describes the gesture of “salem etu” – the bow performed by a bride when greeting her husband's relatives; where the first “salem etu” (or “salem salu”) occurs during the betashar ritual, the unveiling of the bride's face. As each relative of the groom is introduced by name and status, the bride responds with a silent bow, acknowledging their presence. In the context of betashar, a ritual still practiced in contemporary wedding ceremonies, the bride's bow signifies her acceptance of her new role within the groom's family. Positioned at the threshold between symbolic “death” in her natal family and her “rebirth” into a new household, the bride uses this gesture to signal her readiness to enter the metaphysical realm of her new life and status.

The greeting of a woman to her husband's elder relatives follows a different gestural structure. As described by Tatubaev, the woman kneels on her left knee while placing her hands, palms facing inward, atop one another on her right knee (1979:68). The act of kneeling carries a universal significance – expressing respect, humility, and deference across various cultures. In the gesture of a Kazakh woman's greeting, kneeling serves as a sign of reverence. The practice of lowering oneself onto the left knee holds particular etiquette-based importance: the left knee symbolizes feminine energy, and its bending before senior members of the husband's family represents a demonstration of submission and respect.

The gesture of placing one palm over the other and resting them on the right knee carries pragmatic and symbolically encoded meaning. The act of kneeling creates a temporary instability of the body, and balance can be maintained by using the hands as support on the right knee. The visual symbolism of hands folded on the right knee represents closure, containment, and protection of a young woman's reproductive area. This gesture of greeting by a daughter-in-law toward her husband's senior relatives likely originates from the traditional custom of bridal avoidance, a transformation of archaic incest taboos.

Thus, it can be argued that the phenomenon of female corporeality in traditional Kazakh culture was shaped by the pragmatics of a gendered social status and influenced the specificity of gestural language as a structured communication system. The concept of “female corporeality” is conceptualized from the anthropological perspective of the female body as a whole, where the “requirement of chastity is one of its aspects” (Chesnov, 2007). Viewing a woman’s body as a mediator between culture and nature, Chesnov highlights that the essence of the visual concept of the body lies in its image, meaning corporeality is a dynamic mental construct whose symbolism changes depending on its spatial and temporal context. This dynamism of corporeality is likely linked to changes in gesture culture and, consequently, the traditional sacrality of the female body.

Traditionally, a man’s greeting was visually expressed in various ways: in some cases, through a nod that mimicked a bow, accompanied by placing the right hand on the chest over the heart; in others, it was supplemented with a verbal greeting. The form of greeting depended on social status and age. When greeting socially significant individuals, young men were required to dismount from their horses, kneel, place a hand on their chest, and bow their heads while awaiting a response.

The handshake, a widely practiced greeting gesture among many cultures, is believed to have originated from military etiquette but was not customary among nomads in pre-Islamic times. This is largely due to the functional symbolism of the male rider’s or warrior’s body. Additionally, the handshake was not a part of nomadic etiquette because of the implicit mechanisms of corporeality as a symbolic model of vital space. Tactile contact had a designated sphere of legitimacy, and a handshake was only used within a strictly ritualistic context as a sacred sign of unity and agreement.

This principle is reflected in the greeting gesture known as “tos kagystyru” – an embrace where two individuals touch chests. According to S.S. Tatubaev’s description, this gesture consists of an embrace with one arm over the other’s shoulder and the other arm around the waist. The second phase of the embrace mirrors the first (Tatubaev, 1979:78). Physical contact between men in this gesture is legitimized exclusively as a ritual element. In some cases, it signifies reconciliation

between conflicting parties or the expression of brotherly bonds; in others, it represents mutual recognition between the fathers of a bride and groom as matchmakers, acknowledging their newfound kinship (Aristov, 1897:393).

This form of kinship, known as “kudalyk”, is highly valued and respected in Kazakh traditional society, often expressed through the saying: “kudalyk – myn zhyldyk” (“matchmaking bonds last a thousand years” in Kazakh). The importance of such alliances lies in their pragmatic function, ensuring inter-clan distance in marriage by prohibiting unions within seven generations. Additionally, these marriages establish inter-clan, inter-tribal, and familial alliances that strengthen the positions of both families. Kinship alliances were equated with blood-related kin groups, “even though they included members of different clans, families, and even groups of outsiders”.

The verbal meaning of this greeting gesture points to a part of the body that serves as its symbolic core. From the perspective of Kazakh traditional semiotics of embodiment, a man’s chest symbolizes the harmony of physical and spiritual strength. The bodily topos in symbolic representation aligns with the worldview and demonstrates the conceptual and visual connections of traditional thinking. Thus, the chest embodies the anthropological structure of the ribcage as a protector of vital organs and as a center of spiritual and vital energy. The multitude of meanings attributed to this part of the body as a structural element of embodiment manifests in greeting gestures used in match-making rituals, reconciliation, and the “Körisu” ritual (to meet, to reunite in Kazakh), which marks the prosperous arrival of spring.

The examined material does not encompass all greeting gestures, focusing instead on the most common ones found in contemporary practice. Thus, the traditional Kazakh greeting gestures, as elements of ritual cultural practices, serve as their semantic core.

## Conclusion

The study of the Kazakh traditional gesture language as a cultural code of social identity within the semiotic sphere of the nomadic worldview aims to highlight the aesthetically integral nature of the contemplative understanding of the nomadic

cosmos. The analysis of traditional Kazakh greeting gestures from the perspective of visual anthropology has demonstrated, first, the effectiveness of the embodiment methodology in studying the semiotics of the body as a social and cultural phenomenon. Second, the analysis of greeting gestures as an element of ritual cultural practices has shown that the symbolic structure of the body is a meaning-forming component of the gesture. The ritual basis of the traditional Kazakh greeting gesture retains the sacred meaning of embodiment within its spatial cosmos – the visual topos of traditional thinking. The visual nature of the contemplative understanding of the surrounding space in Kazakh traditional knowledge has concentrated, recorded, and presented the worldview as a unified cosmos through the symbolic language of iconic signs. The language of gestures is one of the most important

ways of maintaining harmony within this cosmos.

The results and conclusions of this study hold the potential for further conceptual development through the methodology of visual studies, particularly visual anthropology. Given the semiotic essentialism of the Kazakh traditional cultural language, embedded in its nonverbal sphere, a comprehensive study of the spatial representation of the nomadic world in terms of embodiment is necessary.

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