

# A BOOK REVIEW ON ABAY KUNANBAYEV’S “BOOK OF WORDS”

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## INTRODUCTION

With Mongolians’ help, the Russian made Kazakh Khans lose their power, and accordingly, at the beginning of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kazakhstan became dependent on the Soviet Regime. Kazakhs were exposed to starvation and their population dramatically dropped, which also caused them to mislaid their faith and many values. In such a desperate situation, society needed a guide showing the right path with advice to save them from this depression. Abay Kunanbayev’s *Book of Words* embodied the required morals that they actually needed to keep their essence. I aim to introduce this great writer and poet’s literary masterpiece to the literary world with my inferences.

## REVIEW

Having been translated as *Book of Words*, *Qara Sözder*, takes charge of guiding light for a nation in order to catch up the science and help them advance both educationally and morally. It contains several philosophical thoughts, advice, and anecdotes. The author of the book, Abay Kunanbayev, who lived between 1845-1904 in Kazakhstan, was a writer, philosopher, composer, and poet.

When Abay Kunanbayev was born in 1845, Kazakhstan experienced one of the most turbulent events of its history. The society was under the rule of incompetent Khans who quarrelled with each other, which caused the country to be divided into parts, and they came to the point of losing their independence (Kafkasyalı, 2012, p. 169). A few years later after Kunanbayev’s birth, I. Nicholas - the emperor of Russia - announced that Kazakhstan went under Russian control in 1854, which brought about Kazakhstan to be controlled by the Soviet

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Makale Gönderim Tarihi/ Received: 08.03.2021.

Makale Kabul Tarihi/ Accepted: 30.05.2021

(İnceleme/ Review)

Bu makaleyi şu şekilde kaynak gösterebilirsiniz /To cite this article (APA):

Kayaalti, Aysun (2021). “A Book Review On Abay Kunanbayev’s “Book Of Words””. *World Language Studies (WLS)*, 1 (1): 73-76

Regime (Kafkasyalı). Many values covering religious, social, political, and cultural that Kazakh society held so far changed at a swift pace. Accordingly, Kunanbayev maintained a pessimistic view in guiding Kazakh people: I have no hope that they will mend their ways or that I may bring them to reason or reform them (Word 9). Nevertheless, Kunanbayev did not give up conveying science's significance, and he tried to teach morality and advised to be virtuous. He did not know that Kazakh people took his words into their heart, that even after his death, his tenets gave them a power of endurance during the unnatural starvation years between 1932-1933 (Kara, 2013, p. 436).

During the regime, Kazakh people had to learn Russian, and the new generation was even more exposed to this new language. However, to keep a nation's traditions and values alive, they must keep their language. Otherwise, they will be assimilated and lose all the ethics, beliefs, and rituals left from their ancestors. Besides having known many languages, Kunanbayev wrote the *Book of Words* in his mother language, Kazakh. It is noteworthy to say that along with his work, he made a considerable contribution to the Kazakh language with a rich range of words he employed in his book, and consequently, many national authors have affirmed that the Kazakh literature cannot be delivered without adding his doctrines. Awezov, another famous Kazakh writer, states that Abay's greatness lies upon that he has expanded the narrow frame of traditional poetry, and he did not only criticize the deficit he saw but also showed the way out (Zeyneş and Çınar 1995, 374).

The book consists of forty-five essay collections which he calls "Words" for each. He criticizes and complains about are mostly related to laziness, boastfulness, ignorance, and wastefulness of his people. According to him, there are three things making humankind miserable. The first of them is tactlessness, which causes ignorance and philistinism. The second is laziness, which he sees as the enemy of all talents, leading to poorness, effortlessness, and reluctance. The last one is cruelty, which is the enemy of humanity.

In defiance of his critics, throughout his book, Kunanbayev gives recommendations on how to change this ongoing lack of education and the unfavourable aspects of Kazakhs. Basically, he recommends that parents should send their children to school, regardless of their gender. Remarkably, education and learning science are essential facts for him. Moreover, he provides Islamic values in order to reach a high degree of good morality. For a more profound understanding of his philosophy and the evidence of God, he restates some anecdotes from Socrates and Aristotle (Word 27). For national advancement, Kunanbayev also defends the idea that the development of a country is in the hand of its people, and principally, the development

of the people is in each individual's hand. Consequently, everyone should be hardworking and do their best as much as they can. Another suggestion in the book is that people ought to be respectful and friendly to all other nations and remove the clichés that Kazakhs had to benefit from the positive aspects of the foreigners (Kara, 2013, p. 343). As an excellent example of his suggestion, he is known to read and translated Russian works of reputed authors from Lermantov to Pushkin into the Kazakh language (Öztürk & Sembi, 2017, p. 43).

To sum up, Kunanbayev was a great innovator as he succeeded in an exemplary job to spread the science and literal improvements of the west in Kazakhstan. He conveyed the importance of qualifications, such as work, humanity, skill, science, education, and friendship, which are needed by all segments of people, and advised to take experienced people as an example (Öztürk & Sembi, 2017, p. 44). To decrease or eliminate poverty, enslavement and corruption, he advices to be educated in the sense of literacy and morality. His influence on Kazakh people and other nations cannot be underestimated. His statue all over Kazakhstan and a mascot of his in Moscow are real indicators of his fame. I think today's people still have much to get from his tenets to construct their futures.

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