



DOI: 10.22363/2618-897X-2025-22-4-840-852

EDN: FFJRKI

Research article / Научная статья

The Significance of O. Suleimenov's Book "AZ i IA" for Modern Comparative Studies

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Abstract. This study examines O. Suleimenov's book "AZ i IA" (Me and Myself) in the context of key categories of comparative literary studies, which explore the dialogical relationships between different languages, literatures and cultures. The focus is on such fundamental concepts as the 'principle of complementarity' and the 'equality of literatures,' which make it possible to overcome the Eurocentrism of traditional comparative studies and establish the equality of all participants in interliterary interaction. The methodological basis of the study consists of hermeneutic text analysis, conceptual analysis of the main categories of comparative literary studies, and the historical-genetic method used to reconstruct the formation of scientific ideas. The novelty of the work lies in the fact that it establishes for the first time points of resonance between the ideas of the Kazakh thinker and the developments of Tatar scholars. The article proves that, despite the controversial nature of a number of etymologies, "AZ i IA" actualises the deep connections between Turkic and Slavic languages and cultures, acting as an intellectual alternative to dichotomous typologies and opening up new perspectives for interdisciplinary research. It has been established that the hermeneutics of The Tale of Igor's Campaign, proposed by O.O. Suleimenov, reveals the epistemological potential of the 'principle of complementarity' of meanings, which is in demand in the study of interliterary dialogues. In his speeches and articles, O. Suleimenov, without denying the influence of Russian literature on other literatures of the peoples of the USSR, emphasised their equality. This resonates with the idea of the equality of literatures, according to which they begin to project a joint creative-receptive meaning that reveals, on the one hand, the universals of verbal art, and on the other, the potential of their ethnocultural identity.

Key words: O. Suleimenov, AZ i IA, The Tale of Igor's Campaign, Turkic studies, comparative literature, dialogue, principle of complementarity, equality of literatures, bilingualism

Article history: received 10.08.2025; accepted 10.10.2025.

Conflict of interest: the author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution: *Amineva V.R.* — worked on the abstract, introduction and conclusion. Wrote the section 'The principle of complementarity'. Formatted the article. *Ibragimov M.I.* — worked on the introduction and conclusion. Wrote the section 'Parity of Literatures,' *Minnullin K.M.* — the concept of research.

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Funding. The research was funded by a grant from the Russian Science Foundation and the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan under project No. 25-28-20082, <https://rscf.ru/project/25-28-20082/>

For citation: Amineva, V.R., M.I. Ibragimov, and K.M. Minnullin. 2025. “The Significance of O. Suleimenov’s Book ‘AZ i IA’ for Modern Comparative Studies.” *Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices*, 22 (4), 840–852. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2618-897X-2025-22-4-840-852>

Значение книги О. Сулейменова «Аз и Я» для современной компаративистики

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Аннотация. Исследование посвящено рассмотрению книги О. Сулейменова «Аз и Я» в контексте ключевых категорий сопоставительного литературоведения, исследующего диалогические отношения между различными языками, литературами и культурами. В центре внимания находятся такие опорные понятия, как «принцип дополнительности» и «рядоположенность литератур», которые позволяют преодолеть европоцентризм традиционной компаративистики и утвердить равноправие всех участников межлитературного взаимодействия. Методологическую основу исследования составляют герменевтический анализ текста, концептуальный анализ основных категорий сопоставительного литературоведения и историко-генетический метод, применяемый для реконструкции становления научных идей. Новизна работы заключается в том, что в ней впервые устанавливаются точки резонанса между идеями казахского мыслителя и разработками татарских ученых. Доказано, что «Аз и Я», несмотря на дискуссионность ряда этимологий, актуализирует глубинные связи между тюркскими и славянскими языками и культурами, выступая интеллектуальной альтернативой дихотомным типологиям и открывая новые перспективы для междисциплинарных исследований. Установлено, что герменевтика «Слова о полку Игореве», предложенная О.О. Сулейменовым, раскрывает эпистемологический потенциал «принципа дополнительности» смыслов, который оказывается востребованным при изучении межлитературных диалогов. В своих выступлениях и статьях О. Сулейменов, не отрицая влияния русской литературы на другие литературы народов СССР, подчеркивал их равноправие. Это резонирует с идеей рядоположенности литератур, согласно которой они начинают проектировать совместный креативно-рецептивный смысл, выявляющий, с одной стороны, универсалии словесно-художественного искусства, а с другой — раскрывающий потенциал их этнокультурной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: О. Сулейменов, «Аз и я», «Слово о полку Игореве», тюркославистика, сопоставительное литературоведение, диалог, принцип дополнительности, рядоположенность литератур, билингвизм

История статьи: поступила в редакцию 10.08.2025; принята к печати 10.10.2025.

Конфликт интересов: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Вклад авторов: Аминева В.Р. — аннотация, введение, заключение, раздел «Принцип дополнительности»; Ибрагимов М.И. — введение, заключение, раздел «Рядоположенность литератур»; Миннуллин К.М. — концепция исследования.

Финансирование. Исследование выполнено за счет гранта Российского научного фонда и Академии наук Республики Татарстан по проекту № 25-28-20082, https://rscf.ru/project/25-28-20082

Для цитирования: *Аmineва В.Р., Ибрагимов М.И., Миннуллин К.М.* Значение книги О. Сулейменова «Аз и Я» для современной компаративистики // Полилингвильность и транскультурные практики. 2025. Т. 22. № 4. С. 840–852. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2618-897X-2025-22-4-840-852>

Introduction

O.O. Suleimenov's book "AZ i IA" has been the subject not only of ideological discussions, but also of scientific and artistic reflection. Nevertheless, according to U.M. Bakhtikireeva, a researcher of O.O. Suleimenov's scientific and creative work, only a small number of scholars have been able to characterise it objectively [1. P. 7]. Reflecting on the influence of O.O. Suleimenov's scientific works on the formation and development of the spirit of the times, U.M. Bakhtikireeva comes to the conclusion: 'Like the famous 'temperature gauge' of the era — "AZ i IA" — they play a huge role in creating the moral criteria of the era, in judging dying phenomena in science, in life itself, in the visible and invisible currents that shape the historical process' [1. P. 16].

The hermeneutics of "The Tale of Igor's Campaign," proposed in the book "AZ i IA", is in demand in the development of the methodology and principles of comparative study of national literatures and cultures. Comparative literary studies — is a new direction in comparative studies, the theoretical and methodological foundations of which were developed in the collective works of Kazan literary scholars under the guidance of Y.G. Safiullin. It is based on the study of dialogical relationships between different languages, literatures, and cultures. This field has developed its own system of terms: 'dialogue', 'identity', 'multiplicity of literatures', 'coexistence of literatures', 'principle of complementarity' of meanings, etc. [see: 2]. The idea of comparing literatures is based on a wide range of theories, concepts, and ideas focused on understanding literature from the perspective of multiplicity and difference. Bakhtin's idea of dialogue, the works of the Eurasianists, G.D. Gachev's research on national images of the world, contemporary philosophy (J. Derrida, M. Foucault, J. Deleuze, F. Guattari, etc.), which affirm the priority of multiplicity over unity, difference over identity, are just some of the scientific and philosophical concepts that are productive for comparing literatures. The idea of Turkic studies proposed by O.O. Suleimenov certainly fits into this series.

The purpose of this article is to examine O. Suleimenov's book "AZ i IA" in the context of the basic concepts of comparative literary studies, and to establish points of resonance between the book by the Kazakh thinker and the ideas of Tatar scholars.

The methodological basis of the study is a comparative approach in literary studies. The work uses a set of theoretical methods: hermeneutic analysis of texts; conceptual analysis of the main categories of comparative literary studies; historical-genetic method for reconstructing the origin and development of ideas.

The Principle of Complementarity

The methodological basis of O.O. Suleimenov's philological studies is one of the most important epistemological achievements of science and philosophy in the 20th century — the principle of complementarity, formulated by N. Bohr in quantum mechanics and then transferred to any scientific description. This principle stems from the idea that reality is broader than any theoretical concept and, in terms of its content, represents a complex of ideas that focus on the limits of the possibility of describing any phenomenon, on the absence of logical contradictions between opposing research strategies, and on the integrity and indivisibility of the object of cognition [see: 3].

The book "AZ i IA" substantiates a different view, distinct from authoritative scientific interpretations, not only of the language of "The Tale of Igor's Campaign," which contains a significant number of words and expressions borrowed from Turkic languages, but also of its ideological content, aesthetics, and poetics. The unresolved question in contemporary medieval studies of the extent to which the existing text of the work represents an authentic and coherent whole, as well as the possibility that it bears traces of numerous later changes: insertions, omissions, rearrangements, etc. — allow the author of the book "AZ i IA" to question the theories and concepts that developed in Soviet-era literary studies.

Thus, in works devoted to this monument of Old Russian literature, much attention is paid to the principles of depicting the main character of "The Tale..." and the epilogue that concludes the work, in which Igor is praised in different corners of Russia. D.S. Likhachev believes: 'The image of Igor Svyatoslavich emphasises that historical events are stronger than his character. His actions are determined more by the misconceptions of the era than by his personal qualities. Igor Svyatoslavich himself is neither bad nor good: rather good than bad, but his deeds are bad, and this is because he is dominated by the prejudices and misconceptions of the era. Thus, in "The Tale," the general and historical takes precedence over the individual and temporary. Igor Svyatoslavich is a son of his era. He is an 'average' prince of his time: brave, courageous, to a certain extent loving his homeland, but reckless and short-sighted, caring more about his own honour than the honour of his homeland' [4. P. 191].

Yu.M. Lotman argues that the main character of "The Tale of Igor's Campaign," Igor Svyatoslavich, is presented in a dual light: he evokes both admiration and condemnation, and points to the following: In "The Tale...", Igor appears both as an independent feudal lord, the head of a certain regional hierarchy, and as one of the Russian princes, a vassal of the Grand Prince of Kiev. In these cases, he is subject to different ethical norms, and his behaviour is assessed differently. As an independent feudal lord and knight, he seeks glory, and this, as we have seen, is not necessarily linked to success.' [5. p. 90]. According to the scholar, "The

Tale...” ends with a celebration in honour of the prince because the practical unreasonableness of military plans was not held against the knight; moreover, ‘the more unattainable, unrealistic from the point of view of common sense, the more separated from actual results — semiotic — the goal was, the greater the glory of the attempt to achieve it’ [5. P. 90].

B.M. Gasparov believes that the content of the monument is projected onto a mythological subtext that subordinates the logic of the real narrative: ‘The general plot outline of “The Tale” is a sequence of events typical of the mythological cycle of death/resurrection’ [6. P. 25]. The author of the monograph “The Poetics of The Tale of Igor’s Campaign” explains the universal jubilation that reigns at the end of The Tale, when countries and cities rejoice and singing spreads throughout the land, as follows: ‘The miraculous act of the hero’s resurrection is a symbol of universal salvation: not only does the hero of the myth return from captivity in the otherworldly kingdom, but with him the whole earth celebrates renewal and a return to life’ [6. P. 25].

O.O. Suleimenov emphasises that this jubilation not only does not correspond to the real meaning of the event described, not only contradicts the images of the destruction of the Russian army and the disasters that befall the Russian land, but also, in its artistic and aesthetic nature, differs from the rest of the text as a later insertion by a 16th-century copyist. Concluding the work with Igor’s return to his homeland and the nationwide joy at his rescue, the 16th-century copyist follows the established canon of military tales: ‘It seems that all The Tales of the finale are written in capital letters. Is it the anticipation of the end of difficult work that fills the last lines with jubilation? Or is it the opportunity for independent creativity that gives the copyist’s pen an emotional boost? But one thing is clear: the incredible clanging note destroys the delicate, plastic structure of the poem. It is as absurd as a fanfare at the end of a concerto for string orchestra. Like ink and prizes for a marathon runner who came in last.

The author himself could not have made such a conclusion in Igor’s favour. He knows his ‘true value’.¹

Igor travels from captivity to Kiev, and not to Novgorod-Seversky, not because Kiev is still conceived by the author of the monument as the centre of the Russian land, if not real, then at least ideal [see: 4. P. 198], but because the copyist, guided by the information he gleaned from “The Tale...,” sends him to Kiev, where his father’s house is: ‘And after his escape, where will the prodigal son go? To Kiev, to his father’s golden table.’²

The episode under consideration demonstrates the fundamental inadequacy of any cultural code to which scholars appeal, or any system for describing an

¹ Suleimenov, O. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Almaty: Zhasushy. P. 130

² Ibid. P. 131

outstanding monument of Old Russian literature. And not only that. In general, any work of art as a unique focus and balance of opposing principles. The use of several descriptive systems, their complementarity, compensates for this incompleteness with stereoscopic vision and is capable of approaching an understanding of the integrity of the phenomena under study. The epistemological potential of this approach is most fully realised in comparative studies.

Let us explain how this happens. Each national literature is identical to itself, forms a unique integrity and constructs its identity as ‘foreign’ to others. The differences between ‘one’s own’ and ‘foreign’ are essential for understanding the national identity of national artistic systems in dialogue, the peculiarities of their functioning in the value field of world culture as unique spiritual and practical formations. It is precisely the differences between the two literatures that form the verbal-conceptual space of dialogue, initiating targeted processes of meaning generation — centripetal, directed inward and revealing the potential for the development of national identity, and centrifugal, directed outward and taking into account the diversity of artistic and aesthetic traditions and forming new models of their unification (‘interliterary syntheses’). They are generated by new meanings that determine the phenomenology, semantic structure, and functioning of the universals of verbal art.

The ‘encounter’ in the reader’s consciousness of two literatures, in which the relationship between form and content, part and whole, external and internal boundaries of the artistic image is constructed in fundamentally different ways, raises questions about their inherent stable semantic structures. In this case, it is precisely the difference, the uniqueness of national literary and artistic systems, similar to the difference between research strategies and their metalanguages, illustrated by the example of the studies of “The Tale...,” that is a condition for their complementarity, as well as for the expansion and enrichment of the reader’s sphere of artistic representations. Analysing this hermeneutic situation, Y.G. Safiullin comes to the conclusion: ‘The boundaries between the antinomies presented are blurred, their metaphorical nature increases. They are perceived as opposite variants of the description of a phenomenon that is more complex than it is presented in each of them separately...’ [7. P. 80].

The book “AZ i IA” characterised by a consistent combination of scientific reflection and poetic subjectivity, logic and mesmerising meaning-making, is in demand in the modern world as a relentless intellectual alternative to dichotomous typologies of cultures, the idea of a ‘clash of civilisations’ [see: 8] along cultural and religious fault lines. Behind it lies a sense of life that is oriented not towards the opposition and polarisation of value-semantic positions and worldviews (according to the ‘either-or’ model), but towards their complementarity and harmony (the principles of ‘and, ... and’, ‘as, ... so’).

O. Suleimenov characterises his concept as follows: ‘I was the first to claim that The Tale of Igor’s Campaign was written for a bilingual reader by a bilingual

author. Let's say, a Russian who also knew Turkic languages. This means that bilingualism existed in Rus at that time. I tried to prove this, relying on data from many ancient Russian sources.³ Fluency in two languages contributes to the perception of one culture in conflict and unity with another. The book reveals the principles of poetics and style corresponding to this type of artistic consciousness. They are based on a synthesising tendency that manifests itself at different levels of the structure of the artistic text of the monument: lexical, contextual-historical, problem-conceptual, figurative-thematic, motivational, etc.

Despite the controversial etymologies of words in “AZ i IA,” which, as O. Suleimenov shows, have Turkic roots, they actualise the deep connections between Turkic and Slavic languages and cultures. Noteworthy, for example, are observations on the nickname of Prince Vsevolod — Buy-tur. O. Suleimenov considers the interpretation of this term as an ancient Slavic word, often found in Russian bylina and indicating the strength, bravery and courage of a warrior, to be an example of ‘folk etymology’. In his opinion, this nomination is ‘a find for Turkologists who dream of understanding the etymology of the word batyr (batur, bootur, bogatur, bogatyr). “The Tale” is the only monument where the protoform of this term, popular after the 13th century, is reflected. It is not yet found in 10th-century sources. It most likely originated in the Kipchak environment in the 11th–12th centuries (buit-ture — literally ‘high lord’). It retains features of the language of the Volga Turks.⁴ The Turkic origin of many proper names, toponyms and other words, as the founder of Turkic studies seeks to prove, is evidence of close contacts and mutual influence between the two cultures.

Common roots are also evident in the mythological beliefs of the Slavs and Turks: the images of gods, heroes and cosmogonic plots have similar features. O. Suleimenov draws attention to the plot of metamorphoses — the transformation of heroes into animals (ermine, goose, falcon, wolf) — and, on the one hand, reconstructs their possible genesis, and on the other, draws parallels with similar plots in the Turkic epic. They reflect ancient mythological beliefs common to the Turkic and Slavic peoples, which testify to the existence of common symbols and archetypes. It is no coincidence that Vsevolod's warriors are compared to grey wolves running in the field, as the author of the book “AZ i IA” is convinced: ‘In no monument after “The Tale...” is a Christian likened to a grey wolf. (This positive image dates back to pre-Christian cults. In Turkic and Mongolian folklore traditions, the wolf is an image of courage. Not many heroes are worthy of comparison with the wolf. The wolf is one of the most authoritative totems of the steppe cult. In some genealogical legends, the Turks and Mongols trace their origins back to the wolf. Remember also the ancient Russian cult of the wolf’⁵.

³ Suleimenov, O. *I Need a Situation of Struggle and Competition* 29 May 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20080903233625/http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4908>

⁴ Suleimenov, O. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Almaty: Zhasushy, p. 52.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

For O. Suleimenov, the key episode that serves as a kind of bridge between Slavic and Turkic mythologies is the dream of Svyatoslav of Kiev. Responding to the questions, ‘Why did Svyatoslav of Kiev have this particular dream? Is the symbolism of this dream coincidental?’ Suleimenov asserts: ‘Svyatoslav saw in his dream that he was being prepared for burial according to the Turkic Tengrian rite.’⁶ The intertwining of rituals and symbols originating from different sources testifies to the cultural and religious interaction between Slavs and Turks in the era of Ancient Rus. The bilingual author of “The Tale...,” as O. Suleimenov proves, finding himself at the intersection of Slavic and Turkic traditions, finds his unique place in the ‘zone of contact’ with them, overcoming the dramatic situation of alienation from them, distance and freedom. His work highlights moments of continuity, connection, presence ‘both there and here,’ captivation, empathy, and compassion.

Thus, the verbal world of the Old Russian monument unfolds in “AZ i IA” in endless collisions and transformations of various meanings, codes, images, themes, in the form of various kinds of semantic catastrophes and revelations. The synthesising tendency operating in the depths of the text of “The Tale...” corresponds to a special quality of poetic language: it manifests itself in the semantic depth and stylistic flexibility that opens up in “The Tale”, in the ability of the artistic image to endlessly intertwine and transform meaning.

The Equality of Literatures

One of the cornerstones of the comparative method was the idea of equality, as opposed to the hierarchisation of literatures (their ranking as leading and subordinate), whereby any literatures being compared are considered equal. This idea was largely conditioned by the established attitude in Soviet literary studies towards national literatures as ‘scholarly,’ developing thanks to the progressive influence of more developed literatures, primarily Russian. An unchanging attribute of most studies devoted to national literatures was the emphasis on the cultural role of Russian literature. With this approach, the dialogical understanding of interliterary interactions was essentially reduced, and national literatures lost their subjectivity (as equal participants in the dialogue).

Another noteworthy point is that the concept of ‘national literature’ as applied to Russian literature was, as a rule, used ‘only in studies with an international theme concerning the study of its uniqueness in the context of foreign literatures’ [9. p. 138]. ‘This’, writes Ya. Safiullin, ‘happened because Russian literature had a special status in our country. It dominated the state. Imitation of it in other literatures became the norm. Almost every national literature designated and declared its own Pushkin, Sholokhov, Mayakovsky, etc. And Russian literature itself was presented

⁶ Suleimenov, O. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Almaty: Zhasushy, p. 63.

only as a part — albeit the main, defining part — of the so-called Soviet literature, which was conceived as a new, supranational entity’ [9. P. 138].

In his speeches and articles, O. Suleimenov, without denying the influence of Russian literature on other literatures of the peoples of the USSR, emphasised their equality in interliterary dialogue. In particular, objecting to poets who claimed that new forms of verse appeared in Kazakh poetry of the 1930s under the influence of V. Mayakovsky’s poetry, O. Suleimenov writes: ‘No language gives one poetry an advantage over another. We simply have not yet realised the rich possibilities of the Kazakh language. Abai, independently of Mayakovsky, at the end of the 19th century, gave examples of a ‘staircase’ composition of stanzas based on the quantitative inequality of syllables in a line, i.e. on irregular metre. He introduced several new types of strophes and principles of rhyme.’⁷

With regard to Russian cultural leadership, O. Suleimenov calls for objectivity, not shying away from bold assessments such as this: ‘It has become almost the norm in some novels, when discussing the progressive consequences of Central Asia’s annexation to Russia, to gloss over the negative side of this undertaking, known as colonisation... By praising Ermak, condemning Kuchum, composing odes to Skobelev and Perovsky, and ranting about the pleasant manners of Generals Kolpakovsky and Kaufman, we somehow begin to forget about the thousands of auls burned and trampled by the punitive forces. By demanding that those khans or kedeyes (‘beggars’) who perished under Cossack sabres immediately understand all the progressive consequences of this campaign, some writers demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of historical processes.’⁸

In his article “Nomads and Culture: The Kazakh Experiment,” O. Suleimenov, rejecting the attitude of some domestic historians towards nomads as barbarians who could not have been creators of culture, writes that such scholars ‘view their subject only through the prism of medieval chronicles, without even attempting to apply a different perspective.’⁹ In the same article, he explains his perspective on this issue in his book “AZ i IA” (Me and Myself), published three years earlier and harshly criticised: ‘I said that only the dramatic moments in the history of peoples, wars, find their way into the chronicles. Peacetime is not historical; it is difficult to describe. Peace does not remain in memory. If we added up the years during which the Slavs and nomads lived side by side in peace, engaged in trade and cultural activities, we would have centuries. But these centuries are not recorded in the chronicles, while the slightest battles are noted. And these biased testimonies of monk chroniclers form the basis of the verdict I mentioned above.’¹⁰ ‘Language,’ the author of the article continues, ‘is the richest reservoir of historical

⁷ Suleimenov O. 1990. *Essays. Journalism. Poems*. Alma-Ata: Zhaly, p. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

information that has escaped the arbitrariness of scribes. It is the most impartial source. It provides a complete picture of the interaction between cultures, which contradicts the ruthless sketch of historians.’¹¹

O. Suleimenov’s book “AZ i IA” provoked such a violent reaction from the official authorities primarily because it undermined the imperial discourse of domestic science. This was also the reason for its acceptance by the creative intelligentsia in the national republics, especially the Turkic-speaking ones. ‘There are still national cultures fighting for their affirmation,’ wrote Murat Auezov in 1976 in his article “Enlightened by the Breath of Eternity — The Tale”, ‘and there remains the problem of restoring the true kinship of the peoples of the world on the scale of a unified human history. As long as there are recurrences of speculative historical ‘science’, which turns the review of the path travelled by peoples into a source of chauvinism and nationalism, the book ‘AZ i IA’, whose very title embodies the idea of the unity of world culture, will serve as a clear call to arms against false patriotism and pseudoscience.’¹²

In an interview published in the Moscow Book Journal, M. Tlostana, responding to a question about the role of O. Suleimenov’s book “AZ i IA” in preparing the Soviet people for Gorbachev’s reforms, says that in non-Russian readers ‘this book awakened a gene of disobedience, affirmation of human dignity, the right to remember their own history, culture, and language, not relegated to the backwaters of the world, but returned to their rightful place.’¹³ An authoritative scholar, defining the significance of O. Suleimenov’s book, emphasises that ‘its main target was Eurocentrism in its specific Russian-Soviet form, the genealogy of which Suleimenov traces from the tsarist court pseudo-historians, whose task was to construct a certain imperial myth and tailor history to it, to the Soviet disciples who sanctioned the ‘truths’ that seemed to have been created forever in the previous period, replacing only the ideological shell, but leaving unchanged the false philosophy of history and science that lay at the heart of this scheme and was already being actively questioned in the rest of the world within the framework of emerging new interdisciplinary trends — ethnic and cultural studies, postcolonial theory, etc.’¹⁴

The comparison of literatures was largely a reaction to the Eurocentrism of the comparative-historical method, whose epistemology is based on the experience of European literatures. ‘The concepts and terms on which the comparative method is based,’ writes Ya.G. Safiullin, ‘are drawn mainly from the experience of European and related literatures, which are genetically linked and developed in largely similar

¹¹ Suleimenov, O. 1990. *Essays. Journalism. Poems*. Alma-Ata: Zhalyyn, p. 39.

¹² Auezov, M.M. 1996. *Enlightened by the Breath of Eternity — by The Tale*. In: Together with Olzhas. Compiled by Safar Abdudo. Kazdesign, pp. 159–166. P. 166.

¹³ Tlostanova, M. 2012. His main target was anthropocentrism: interview. In: *Moscow Book Journal*. Moscow, 6 May 2025, <https://morebook.ru/tema/segodnja/item/1346433186554>

¹⁴ Ibid.

conditions. They correspond to the nature of these literatures and ensure the success of comparative studies conducted on their material. However, proponents of the comparative method extrapolate such concepts and terms to any comparisons that include a wide variety of literatures, including the so-called ‘Eastern’ ones. And this turns out to be an insufficiently fruitful scientific approach’ [10. P. 97].

Researchers have repeatedly drawn attention to the stylistic features of the book “AZ i IA,” noting that it is written ‘in the form of an unusual scientific discourse,’ that it ‘reinterprets the traditional tools of the humanities and overcomes the limitations of academic forms of knowledge’ [1. Pp. 7–8]. M. Auezov, reflecting on the genre features of O. Suleimenov’s book, wrote: ‘The genre of the book defies traditional definition. Its logical sequence and scientific reasoning can be held up as an example to many academic works, as can the broad outlook and professional competence of its creator. At the same time, it is undoubtedly a work of art, and in terms of its impact on the reader’s emotions, it is on a par with the best examples of ‘thinking poetry,’ a genre in which O. Suleimenov has long been recognised as a master.’¹⁵

The complementarity of rational and imaginative thinking is one of the pillars of the comparative method, which is based on the assumption that logocentrism hinders the understanding of the national identity of literature. ‘Identity,’ writes Ya.G. Safiullin, ‘is the self-realisation of literature. It is holistic and concrete. It can be ‘seen’, felt as ‘foreign’, understood, described. Standardised logic destroys identity’ [11. P. 195].

In this regard, words of O. Suleimenov in a short preface (‘From the Author’) to “AZ i IA” are noteworthy: ‘My natural bilingualism, knowledge of the cultural relations between Rus and Poland, enthusiasm for etymology and, perhaps, a feeling for words and images developed through exercises in versification helped me to read ‘The Tale’ [11. P. 397].

Bilingualism, which allowed O. Suleimenov to overcome the monological view of The Tale of Igor’s Campaign, largely determined the ‘pluritopic hermeneutics’ (M. Tlostanova) of the author of “AZ i IA,” which stands out against the background of the monotopic consciousness of Slavic scholars, who found themselves unable to access ‘the semantic layers of culture, language, religion, and cosmology, and all the distortions that Suleimenov writes about.’¹⁶ According to M. Tlostanova, the ‘translation of any non-Western forms of knowledge and expression, which spread in the West and was subsequently transferred to Russian soil, was based on the principle of unidirectionality — they were only studied, described and classified by the Western subject as objects deliberately deprived of

¹⁵ Auezov M.M. 1996. Enlightened by the breath of *eternity* — by The Tale. In: *Together with Olzhas*. Compiled by Safar Abdudo. Kazdesign, pp. 159—166. P. 159

¹⁶ Tlostanova M. 2012. His main target was anthropocentrism: interview. In: *Moscow Book Journal*. Moscow, 6 June 2025, <https://morebook.ru/tema/segodnja/item/1346433186554>

voice and activity.¹⁷ The position of a bilingual researcher, whose heuristic position was largely determined by the situation of cultural, linguistic and literary borderlands, allowed O. Suleimenov to see new meanings. This position correlates with the idea of dialogue, understood as an encounter between different literatures in the reader's perception. 'Knowledge of two or more languages,' writes Y.G. Safiullin, 'deepens and enriches dialogue. The inclusion of readers in dialogue makes it practically endless...' [11. P. 192].

In O. Suleimenov's hermeneutic position, manifested in the preface: 'I abandoned the theme of "Turkisms in "The Tale" — I realised that narrow specialisation is productive in mathematics, but not in humanities. "The Tale" should not be read collectively by us (Slavists, Turkologists, historian, poet, etc.), but by a collective "I". The same characters, but united in one personality' [11. P. 397], expresses the idea of interdisciplinarity, which is one of the foundations of comparative literary studies.

Conclusion

O. Suleimenov's attitude towards national literatures and cultures as equal participants in interliterary dialogues resonates with the idea of the equality of literatures, according to which they begin to project a joint creative-receptive meaning, revealing, on the one hand, the universals of world existence manifested in space, nature, history and culture, and on the other hand, revealing the potential of their ethnocultural identity. These semantic flows, developing in divergent directions, contribute to the transformation of the cultural landscape, revealing the interconnection, interdependence and intertransition of the 'local' and the 'universal', the individual and the unified, the national and the universal.

The trend revealed in the book "AZ i IA," which brings the cultures of Eurasia closer together, also operates in the sphere of dialogue between different national literatures, showing how differences, contrasts and even confrontations give rise to new meanings that transcend them, tolerant in their content and functions. They leave far behind the barriers and boundaries that separate historical and cultural meanings, which, on the one hand, are generated by European culture and are elements of its holistic macro-context, and on the other hand, go back to Eastern codes. In the conceptual-semiotic space of cultural dialogue, these codes begin to function in a new way, correlating with different traditions and affirming universal human truths that transcend the division of the world into West and East.

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