
KEY ASPECTS OF THE KAZAKH RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Zhibek Saparbekovna Syzdykova*

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Mohovaya street 11, Moscow, 103009, Russia

(Received 22 December 2016, revised 16 March 2017)

Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of some aspects of religiosity of modern Kazakhs, the issue of religious identity. The fundamental difference between the level of declared religiosity and the activity of religious life in practice has been revealed. It is emphasized that the formal recognition of the axiom of monotheism and preservation of polytheism in practice is the most important feature of the Kazakh folk Islam. Throughout the whole Kazakh history, a mixed type of beliefs, where the Islamic stipulations prevailed, was absolutely dominant among the Kazakhs. The Kazakh religious identity is a symbiosis of pre-Islamic and Islamic beliefs and atheistic traditions of Soviet times. Most Kazakh beliefs, ceremonials, customs and legal regulations were adapted to the canons of Islam without the forcible change of habitual concepts. It is noted that at present mostly patriarchal traditions of nomadic society, the deepest layers of traditional culture take place in the modern Kazakh society, especially among habitants of rural areas, who are less subject to the processes of urbanization. It is concluded that the process of active substitution of folk customs, oral traditions could eventually lead to the levelling of an individual, constriction of the spiritual horizons and opportunities for the ethnic and cultural progress in general. The role of religious identity, an important factor for the sustainable and harmonious development of any traditional society, including the modern society, has been actualized.

Keywords: traditional values, Sufism, shamanism, ethnicity, society

1. Introduction

“In the globalized world there is a need for spiritual modernization, the development of a new system of values for the understanding and development of a dialogue between different cultures in order to achieve a civilization synthesis while maintaining the cultural pluralism”. [1]

This problem is especially urgent for the communities of citizens of those countries which were recently a single country – the Soviet Union. However, under new conditions, as before, cultural forms of life activities suggest that a person should belong both to a socio-cultural group and a religious community. [2]

*E-mail: saps2017@mail.ru

The process of religious identification of a modern person is closely linked to the cultural identity, so that the religion retains the ability to influence the formation of value orientations of the citizens. Therefore, the study of the phenomenon of religious identity also makes it possible to determine the potential of religions in the reproduction and preservation of value systems. The process of religious identification occurs at an unconscious level in the assimilation of habitual social practices and behaviour patterns associated with the religious affiliation, and implies a conscious self-determination.

Mchedlov, a well-known Russian researcher of religiosity, paid considerable attention to the issue of religious identity [3]. According to Durkheim, the ideology has the ability to bring people into the community. He thinks that people could have remained quite divided unless the religion had united them into the community [4].

The Islamization of the territory of Kazakhstan began in the 9th-10th centuries and continues to the present time. The Kazakhstan scientist Sultangalieva said: "Islam was not a form of social organization for the Kazakhs. It was one of the elements of collective identification, including generic assignment and ethnicity. At the same time, the attempts of a certain part of the Kazakh society to absolutize the role of Islam in the Kazakh history and culture are not so much historically conditioned, as a natural reflection of the current stage of mythologizing of history in order to build and strengthen the nation-state." [5]

Religious identity is part of a common system of identity, but its content and place in the system of other identities should be determined. The concept of religious identity is interpreted rather widely by different authors. A variety of approaches and lack of a common theoretical model of the phenomenon of religious identity, which is structured in a detailed way, cause the complexity of consideration of this issue. *However, there are several basic meanings constituting the concept under consideration.*

Religious identity is the awareness of one's own religious affiliation. There occur differences related to the need for determining the reasons for self-identity due to the fact that the process of religious identity takes place both consciously and unconsciously. The identity as a construct is a result of a conscious act of choice.

The initial process of religious self-identification takes place at the level of assimilation of family traditions, customs, behaviour patterns, rules, values, and this occurs in the course of 'being in the environment', 'participational' observation during religious festivals, ceremonies, rituals associated with the most important facts of family and social life, which have received religious consecration in the tradition. In most cases, these are events associated with the life cycle, which have acquired a sacred status in all religious cultures: birth, marriage, death of relatives, meals, some forms of work consecration, life activities, etc. 'Being in the environment' also implies the assimilation of religious beliefs, norms and principles in the educational, training procedures and manipulations.

It is obvious there cannot be an absolute solidity in the religious identity. The identification factors can be as follows: different ideas, norms, characteristics, the influence of credibility of different mentors, teachers, and preference in the choice of a moral and spiritual ideal.

Mchedlov considered basic religious values as basic values in the overall structure of personal identity. As traditional constants in the hierarchy of identities, they are passed on from generation to generation and, therefore, they are long-term and widespread [6].

The scientist has built his own structural identity model: “In the identity system, situational (social, political, international) identities differ both from the primordial (gender, race) and traditional, long-term (ethnic, religious) identities not only by their duration, but also by the mechanism of formation. In the first case, conscious, rational factors prevail, in the second case – natural factors (innate – gender, race), in the third – the power of historical inertia plays a significant role.” [7]

Religious identity is a form of collective and individual identity, based on the awareness of our confession and forming the ideas about ourselves and about the world by means of religious dogmas. According to Krylov it implies “recording of the identity of a subject in terms of gaining one's own existential experience by means of religion in the subjective awareness of a person of his\her belonging to a particular religious community” [8].

Religious identity consists of all kinds of views shared to one extent or another by members of a certain religion. “Religious identity is a category of religious consciousness consisting of the awareness of adherence to the ideas and values called religious in this culture, as well as the awareness of belonging to a particular form of religion and religious group”. [9]

Thus, it can be stated that the concept of religious identity includes both common religious self-determination of a person and a certain form of confessional identity. Religious identity is a way of the awareness of one's own spiritual orientation in its correlation with the other form of spirituality.

2. Methods

The methodological basis of the research is interdisciplinary in nature. A principle of historicism has been used. This principle is based on the awareness of the constant correlation between the past, present and future, it requires the identification and analysis of the most complete set of facts needed to solve a particular historical problem in its particular historical determination and development. A systematic approach to the study of references reflecting the ambiguity of various aspects of the history of the spread of Islam in Kazakhstan has been applied. The method of analysis of the dialectical relationship of interethnic and interfaith relations has also been used.

The following methods have also been used in the study: traditional philosophical and religious interpretations of religion and the approaches to the analysis and interpretation of the role of religion in society, which are of high

priority in modern national and foreign religion studies, the research concepts of modern religiosity and religious identity. The method developed within the structural functionalism, which is characterized by its social realism and understanding of society as a system tending towards equilibrium [4, 10-14] is one of the basic methods used in this study. The theory of secularization is the next research paradigm that defines a number of conclusions of this work. The statements of representatives of the classical period [10-13, 15, 16] and theoretical developments of supporters of the concept of contra-secularization [17-19] and neo-secularization [20, 21] have also been used. The theories of the rational choice of religion are also an important methodological basis for the study of religiosity.

The specifics of the study area requires the use of research procedures taken from different sciences and branches of knowledge, the formation of the multi-paradigmatic approach, which allows to take into account not only the results of the Philosophy of religion, but also Sociology, Psychology, etc.

The generalized results of the most important empirical studies of various aspects of religiosity in Kazakhstan conducted by research centres and certain groups of scientists and experts have also been used in the analysis of types of religious identity of the Kazakh. Preference was given to those that applied an integrated approach to the study of religion, taking into account various existing methods.

The works of Kazakhstan scientists, including the works of Shaykemelev - 'Kazakh Identity' [28], Kadyrzhanov - 'National Identity of Kazakhstan and Ethnic-Cultural Symbolism', Orymbekov – 'Spiritual Foundations of the Kazakh Consolidation', Sarsenbayev 'Ethnicity and Values', Shakhanova - 'The World of Traditional Kazakh Culture (Ethnographic Essays)', etc., were of particular importance for this research. These works contained recommendations for conducting research of religiosity and awareness of the results obtained.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The return of religion

In the late 1980s and since early 1990s, social and political conditions have fundamentally changed. There was a new era of religious freedom, the market of religious ideas and the formation of a new state. The growth of religiosity in society, as a consequence of the post-Soviet 'religious revival', or rather the Islamic one, was expected. According to 2009 census, in Kazakhstan there were 72% of officially registered Muslims. It turns out that most Kazakhs consider themselves Muslims. But, in this case, this is about the ethnic Muslims (i.e. if you were born Kazakh, Uighur, Tatar, Uzbek, then you are Muslim). These data do not indicate the degree of religiosity. Considering oneself Muslim (or Orthodox) by birth does not always imply the adherence to the dogmas and faith ceremonies. If we take a look at the dynamics of religiosity during 20 post-Soviet years, it appears that the share of Muslims, who attend the mosque on a

more or less regular basis, has slightly increased – from 14.8% to 17.4%. The share of Kazakhs, who consider themselves religious, but do not observe religious precepts, is about 43%. Only 5.4% of the Kazakhs in difficult situations seek advice from the scriptures and clergymen. Most of them rely on themselves (37.1%), law (22.9%), social conventions (19.6%) and family advice (13.5%) [22].

There is a gradual increase in the traditional religiosity, when the inherent worth of Islam, its ideas and practices are important for faithful Muslim Kazakhs. They attend courses on Islam, Arabic language, buy brochures on how to perform the prayer (namaz), keep the fast (sawm); hence the interest in different interpretations of Islam, finding ways to gain a religious experience. The religion more often becomes an individual choice, a search for personal salvation. Thus, in recent years there is an expansion of the spectrum of religious movements among the Kazakhs – from Puritan ‘Jamaats’, Salafis to the city Sufi clubs, not to mention the Islamic forums and blogs on the Internet. It is necessary to go through this difficult time when previous reference points are lost, while new life-purpose ones are formed, the foundation for future ideology is updated. A reviving interest of working people in Islam is an attempt to fill the spiritual vacuum, which formed after the collapse of the former atheist ideology, and this is a quite logical return to the spiritual and moral basics and the spiritual tradition.

3.2. Tengrianism and shamanism

Studying the Kazakh religious identity, the absence of deep roots of the Islamic religion in the popular mind should be noted. This is caused by the nomadic lifestyle, which did not contribute to the consolidation of religious dogmas in the spiritual realm. Another reason lies in the relatively short history of Islam in Kazakhstan. In addition, in Soviet times the atheism dominated. The spiritual consciousness of the Kazakhs is a syncretic type, where various elements of pre-Islamic, pagan beliefs and dogmas of the Islamic period are mixed.

“The analysis of ancient beliefs in Kazakhstan, – noted Orynbekov, – opened their continuity nature. Starting with tengrianism and shamanism, through the cult of Mithras to Zoroastrianism, they appear as a manifestation of a single entity – the religious ideology of nomadic society, which still exists in many forms”. [23]

The *ancestor worship* takes a special place in the beliefs of the Kazakhs. This cult is based on beliefs that the souls of the dead exist not only in our minds, but they also affect the predetermination of people's destinies from the heavens. At the mental level, the spirits of ancestors (Aruahs) are endowed with a sensible sacred power and considered immortal. In difficult moments of life, the Kazakhs often address the spirits of ancestors with requests for protection, luck, well-being and salvation of the soul. The Kazakhs in their prayers address both the Allah and the spirits of dead ancestors, great warriors and khans revered

on par with the saints. An oath made in the name of Aruahs has an enormous power among the Kazakhs. All the spiritual realm of the Kazakhs is full of pre-Islamic rites and ancient idolatry ceremonies inherited from previous generations of nomads Desht-i-Kipchak [24].

Thus, the pagan foundation of religious beliefs is so powerful that none of the world's religions could completely subjugate the soul of a nomad.

“But the influence of nature on a person in this life, especially on a baby, is too profound, too active, and a person has to create rules to be followed in relationship with mysterious nature, what to do and what not to do. That is the origin of those customs and rituals, – considers Valikhanov, – which at those times were the true faith, surely living faith”. [25]

The origins of the Kazakh beliefs are rooted in the long history of Tengri worship. This monotheistic faith has developed over the centuries in the vast Eurasian steppes, becoming a specific steppe product.

3.3. The purpose of the Kazakh religious identity is the maximum fusion with nature

Nomads, mentally and aloud, by means of rituals and sacrifice, begged the Great Heaven's blessing and protection. “In fact, tengrianism was a monolatry, where there is one supreme god, while the others are engaged in the provision of services for him – wrote Orynbekov – meaning Tengri and female deities Jer-Su and Umai. On this basis, totemic, shamanic and tengristic levels of religion were distinguished; a transition from totemic beliefs to shamanism is observed in tengrianism”. [23, p. 14]

In the traditional culture of the modern Kazakhs, which is partly preserved in the villages, we can still hear the echoes of pagan worship of Tengri, fire, water, earth, and livestock. “Tengrianism helps to understand a problem of ethnicism of Turks, which historically appeared due to the land division into ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ and later grew into the problem of specificity and identity of the Kazakh people”. [26]

Valikhanov in his work ‘Traces of Shamanism among the Kirghiz’ made an attempt to find the origins of Kazakh beliefs, which affected the mentality of his compatriots so deeply. He came to the conclusion that Islam did not have a serious impact on people's beliefs, which actually remained pagan and “shamanism was a basis of this mixed faith” [25, p. 49].

The lack of rigidly structured and centralized secular power made it impossible to teach children Islam in madrassas, while imams and mullahs, among which there were virtually no ethnic Kazakhs, could not follow a nomadic flock over the vast steppes and deserts. “The less number of clergymen there are among the Kyrgyz, the more various wizards there are among them”. [27]

As a young ethnic group, the Kazakhs lacked a fundamental dominant of consciousness in the form of a religious idea consolidating the society. In our opinion, this feature of the tribal consciousness explains a lot even today. First

and foremost, it explains the fact that an alien ideology and religion do not find an active external opposition, but, on the other hand, they do not have a noticeable effect on deep layers of the national consciousness. In olden times, Islam did not find the spiritual opposition and did not have a noticeable effect on the nomadic population, which actually did not follow its basic precepts. “Faithful Muslims are so rare in this nation that Islamism could have faded away if not maintained by the clergymen who often came from Bukhara, Khiva, and Turkestan and by mullahs sent by the Russian government to the khans and tribal chiefs for working as clerks”. [27, p. 314]

The tsarist government actively tried to promote the Islamization of the Kazakh population – in order to have a spiritual influence on the nomads through spiritual mediators (interpreters, imams, mualims, etc.), bringing all sorts of beliefs to a common denominator. It must be admitted that the Russian tsarist regime was flexible enough in the religious sphere, gradually conducting the cultural expansion: they opened madrassas, Russian-Kazakh trade schools, and teacher courses.

The adherence of the Kazakhs to Sunni, Hanafi Islam made local customs legal in all the specific cases that were not prescribed by the Koran. Perhaps, this was the most tolerant school of all legal schools of Islam. This flexibility explains the fact that the majority of non-Arab Muslims are followers of this Shariah Islam school. The division of Islam into two streams – Shia and Sunni, and even the essence of the difference between Sharia schools (schools of thought), is hardly recognized at the level of mass consciousness.

Islam in its original form (the latter-day proselytes, including in Kazakhstan, are calling to go back to its origins) grew out of the Arab culture and is an organic form of spiritual and religious identity, firstly, for the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. Arabs and other sedentary peoples always could convert their children to Islam through religious institutions.

Since the Kazakh religious institutions have a strong pagan heritage, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, did not have the opportunity to ingrain in the popular consciousness due to the lack of time and the imposition of a new spiritual wave of the adapted form of Islam, they came under unprecedented pressure of the communist atheism of the Soviet period.

3.4. Main pillars of Islam

Let us try to make a comparative analysis of the basic precepts of Islam, identify their similarities and differences with the previously existing and remained beliefs of the Kazakhs. As is known, Islam is based on five fundamental pillars-stipulations: 1) *shahada* – the testimony of faith in Allah, 2) *namaz* – a prayer read five times a day, 3) *zakat* – a religious tax, 4) *ura* – religious fasting, 5) *Hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The first principle of monotheism in Islam is *shahada*, which in Arabic means ‘the testimony’. This creed declares strict monotheism (*tawhid*), belief in the oneness of Allah. *Shahada* means that the God is the Eternal One. As the

testimony of faith it presents the first stipulation: ‘There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet’. To become Muslim, a person should proclaim these words in the presence of two witnesses. Perhaps, this democracy includes one of the secrets of its appeal. Allah is both the beginning and the creator of the whole universe, he is only one by definition and a Muslim must believe in this commandment with all his mind and heart.

The second pillar of Islam is a prayer. Firstly, a five-time namaz – abdest accompanied by prayers to Allah. Let us return to the background. “The Kyrgyz people do not keep fasting and perform the abdest, which are rather reasonable Mohammed’s stipulations. It is also difficult for them to pray five times a day, there are no mosques and no mullahs found among the Kyrgyz.” [27, p. 314]

Before gaining independence, a few people in Kazakhstan prayed five times a day performing the abdest, they were mostly old men. Today, an interest in the Friday prayer and visiting the mosque on Fridays is growing and it is considered a duty of each Muslim man.

Zakat (spiritual self-perfecting) is the third pillar of Islam. It is a compulsory religious tax, requiring rich and wealthy Muslims to provide material assistance to poor compatriots. Zakat is different from charity, which is donated in mercy to the poor, disabled, frail elderly people, and from voluntary contributions – sadaqah, by its regularity and anonymity. The payment of the religious tax contributes to the spiritual self-perfecting of not only a person, who pays this tax, but also of a person, who receives this donation. Zakat is a non-state tax, the payment of which is controlled neither by state authorities nor by religious institutions. It is quite obvious that zakat is a test for a person, checking his/her civil conscience and honour. Currently, a Mullah is often invited to conduct a rite of circumcision (*sundetke otyrgyzu*) and provide a funeral service (*zhanaza*). Nowadays, a ‘voluntary’ religious tax among the Kazakhs is in the form of donations, cattle offerings, all sorts of charity, which is called sadaqah [28]. Thus, in addition to a single, universal concept of a religious tax zakat, Sadaqah, in the Kazakh and all Muslim outlook vary considerably in its Quranic understanding.

The fourth pillar of Islam is the observance of fast (uraza) in the month of Ramadan sacred for all Muslims. During this month, the Prophet Muhammad received the Quranic revelations for the first time. “The post requires a Muslim to consciously bring his mind into a state of prayer and rest. In the daylight hours of the month a devout Muslim exposes himself to physical limitations and refuses to eat, drink, smoke and have sexual relations.” [29]

Among ordinary nomads, the fast was observed practically nowhere, except for the devout old men, kazhy (Haji) – faithful Muslims, who visited Mecca, a number of whom were very few in earlier times, clergymen – ishans and mullahs, as well as the descendants of Arabian missionaries – kozha.

The fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca, visiting the Prophet Muhammad’s homeland during the holy month of Ramadan. Historically, Hajjs were rare among the Kazakhs, as only a few people could afford such a long journey that required a great deal of money. The Kazakhs also

worshipped their own saints. Hodja Ahmet Yassavi, who is buried in Turkestan, is the most revered saint among the Turkish-speaking peoples. ‘Umrah’ is performed to Turkestan. There are discussions about the legality of these actions.

3.5. *Adat and Sharia Law*

The entire nomadic system of ethical and moral stances and prohibitions-taboos, violation of which causes the punishment by the fate, providence, was based on the life experience of many generations. The Kazakhs always had a set of unwritten rules, summarizing the experience of many generations of nomads and regulating the social life – *adat*.

The devout Muslims have a set of rules – Sharia Law, which regulates the behaviour in all spheres of public and private life. Sharia rules are so closely linked with the rules of customary law, in this case the Law of the Steppe – *adat*, that sometimes it is simply impossible to identify the origin of a certain legal rule.

Adat has almost always successfully adapted to changing external circumstances. “In fact, *adat* rules and procedures were elastic legal instruments, but they proceeded from the direct correlation between maintaining the cultural integrity and the welfare of the nomadic economy. That is why the success of *adat* in practice was largely dependent on the value system of members of the nomadic community, which legitimized the power of *adat*. That is why *adat* was so universal, as it was required due to the changing common demands and needs of the nomads”. [30] Sharia laws did not find opposition among the nomads due to their proximity to the Laws of the Steppe, but they did not leave any deep traces in the minds of the Kazakhs. It is a fundamental mistake to think that the Sharia Law regulated all life situations. It is noteworthy that the attempts of Christianization (baptism) of the Kazakhs were not successful in the nomadic society, in contrast to the small-numbered northern peoples.

As a rule, those Kazakhs, who have been baptized, managed to settle down in border towns. They held positions of clerks, interpreters, the church and colonial administration often took part in their lives. Most of them were orphans and homeless baygushis (‘neither house nor home’), who had nobody to take care of them. The apostasy was severely punished. Valikhanov wrote: “The Kyrgyz see in every action of the Russian authorities only evil, encroachment on their freedom and privileges” [25, p. 85]. During the reign of Catherine II, the Russian colonial administration undertook vigorous efforts to introduce the religion in the Kazakh steppe, but these actions were virtually unsuccessful. This is due to the fact that the abstract sermons, excerpts from the Quran in a strange language, which had little in common with their daily lives, did not speak to them.

The nomads together with the northern Aboriginal-pagans were members of national minorities: “Siberian nomads and wandering trappers of Turkic and Mongol tribes, practicing their shamanism – a priestly faith, have more uniqueness in their temper, life and language more than the Turks-Ottomans and

Kazan Tatars do. The Mohammed's religion destroys every spark of uniqueness in them, any nationality... The Kazan, Ottomans, Crimeans are so deep in the Quran and Islam, that they do not have any folk tale and have not preserved an ancient song". [25, vol. 1, p. 298]

According to Valikhanov, the forced Islamization threatened precisely these qualities, which give hope for development. "God knows, whether a new religion will be better for future welfare in the steppe. Wouldn't it be more sensible to leave them with their previous tolerance? The Kyrgyz, as befits the sons of the steppes, taking a lively interest in the new religion, were head over heels in Islam and do not tolerate anything that is not in accordance with the Quran. Songs, ancient poems, wrestling, freedom of women and their participation in public amusements – everything is passing out of existence." [25, vol. 1, p. 303].

The loss of identity can lead to a loss of language and uniqueness of each ethnic group, what lead to the loss of nationality.

Kunanbayev wrote: "Having studied the language and culture of other peoples, a person becomes equal among them, he/she does not humiliate him/herself with any useless requests. Education is useful for religion too." [31]

Religious tolerance of the Kazakhs is based on the syncretic consciousness, its eclecticism, when the steppe inhabitants, learning about new beliefs, tested them on their practical suitability. Everything that did not suit was rejected, something that made a deep impression, gradually settled in the collective consciousness in the form of layers of new beliefs and rituals which, gradually crystallizing, transformed the ancient customs and traditions. Shamanism, Tengriism and Islam coexisted peacefully in the syncretic consciousness of the Kazakh nomadic culture. There is no doubt that a significant impact of Mongolian beliefs and a Mongolian component can be traced in the ethno-genesis of the Kazakhs.

3.6. Sufi traditions

Although a mixed type of beliefs with many Islamic stipulations appeared to be popular among the Kazakhs, according to Levshin: "However, a Mohammedan confession dominates over all other parts of this mixture of various confessions. Although, it does not cause fanaticism among the Cossack hordes, which the other Muslims have..." [27, p. 314]

In the broad cultural context, the most famous Kazakh writer Abay also inherited Sufi traditions and the adoration of God. This is especially evident in his 'Thirty-Eighth Essay', where the adoration of Allah and love of truth merge into one activity-cognitive commitment [31, p. 157].

The new religion attracted the newly-converted Kazakhs with its modest rituals, which do not require stationary temples, the opportunity to communicate with God without intermediaries, as well as a certain similarity of the traditional tenets of Islam, which were also based on religious postulates of the nomadic culture of the Arab Bedouins. "A Sufi element of freedom for permission of any

method likely to help a devotee to be closer to Him became a license for the Central Asian nomads, which allowed them to hide their old religious practices in the name of Islam”. [32]

This wholeness was based on the considerable similarity of life and customs of nomadic Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula and steppe nomads united by a tribal division, common economic set-up, a constant need to survive in harsh climatic conditions..., etc. Sufism and Sufi associations (fraternities) appeared in those Muslim countries, where some people wanted to develop mystical movements in Islam, which were not contrary to its nature, but adapted to local conditions [33].

4. Conclusions

Based on the foregoing, we can draw some conclusions concerning the features of the Kazakh religious identity.

Thus, during the years of the political and socio-economic reform in Kazakhstan, a religion, previously considered marginal, turned out to be a structurally significant cultural and spiritual phenomenon.

This is not about reducing the number of adherents of various religions and cultic doctrines, rather on the contrary. Meanwhile, in the process of revival of the religion in Kazakhstan there is one remarkable feature: despite a significant increase in the number of religious devotees and a new status of the mosque and church in the life of society, the religion has not turned out to be an actual imperative regulating both public and interpersonal human relations.

However, graduates of Arab and other madrasas and non-resident teachers greatly contribute to the penetration and export of the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism into the spiritual field of the Kazakhstan society.

This is a syncretism of rites and customs – Sun worship, fasting, lack of religious aggression – forced conversion to the faith and fanaticism, mental complementarity, which was mentioned in the works of Gumilyov. In this regard, Islam and the Orthodox branch of Christianity have always coexisted virtually without conflicts in the vast Eurasian space. Apparently, in order to search and find the ways to a fruitful dialogue of religions, the needs of the Kazakh ethnic group for its self-definition should be taken into account.

The freedom of conscience stimulated the emergence of various movements and forms of manifestation of religious beliefs. Manuel Castells noted: “The main denominations, practicing a kind of a secular form of religion, which is dependent on either the state or the market, largely lose their ability to dictate the actions to the parishioners in exchange for the salvation of their souls and the sale of heaven real estate” [34].

In the mass consciousness of modern citizens of Kazakhstan, the ethnicity and denomination are considered similar, almost identical phenomena. Such similarity is caused by numerous reasons and factors of historical and cultural nature, including the features of ethno-culture genesis of the Kazakhs and other ethnic groups making up the population of present-day Kazakhstan. A religion

typical for a certain ethnic group is an integral part of its national identity, the main carrier of the national traditions and values.

Thus, during the period of independence and modernization reforms in Kazakhstan, the religion, previously ignored by the state, has become an important cultural and spiritual phenomenon. Despite a sharp increase in the number of religious devotees and a new status of religion in the life of society, it has not turned out to be an actual structure-forming mechanism for the regulation of human relations.

The global trends can be found in the modern Kazakhstan ideology that recognizes the religion as a significant part of the socio-cultural identity, but rather as for rituals and certain opportunities for the dialogue of the dominant confessions and other confessions non-traditional for Kazakhstan.

The social and political changes at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries gave rise to the process, which can be called the revitalization of religion in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. The nature of this process is due to the previous period of Soviet history and inspired by the need for a ‘compensator’ of crisis situations in the sphere of civil and ethno-cultural identity of the Kazakhs.

Mass ‘religious revival’ in Kazakhstan in the 1990s, having occurred as the ‘authoritarian response’ to the crisis period of social and political transformations, forced the Kazakhs to refuse from the previous totalitarian ideology of the Soviet period and use the religion as the other integrated and universal system. The declared high religious identity of the Kazakhs finds no match in the performance of religious practices.

Religious institutions experienced true revival. This led to the processes of ‘de-privatization of religion’ in the post-Soviet society. However, changes in the Kazakhs’ attitude towards religion, in comparison with the Soviet period, occurred mainly through an increase in the formally declared religiosity and the recognition of religion as an important basis for the formation of a new civic identity.

Certainly, mass religious identity of the Kazakhstan citizens as the followers of traditional religions shows a desire to be implicated in the historical ethno-cultural heritage.

Religion becomes a means of the construction of a new type of civil identity. Citizens, devoting themselves to religion, often show their assignment to the culture of their nation, which is manifested in familiar behaviour and morality rules, in household customs, vision of family, social stereotypes. Therefore, priority is given to the socio-cultural and ideological status of religions.

Today it is obvious that it is necessary to improve the Kazakh instrumental model for testing hypotheses about the reasons and content of various processes taking place in the religious sphere, which could contribute to the definition of the role and place of religious beliefs in the hierarchy of identities.

The Kazakhs en masse considered the religious identity as an important element of their civil, ethnic and cultural identity. However, this process was not accompanied by similar radical changes in the sphere of personal religious identity, affecting the level of beliefs and religious practice.

New religions non-traditional for Kazakhstan, which were not based on a long-term tradition and its historical significance that would strengthen their social, ideological status, attracted followers being oriented to the people's religious needs. These religions offered people an active religious practice, including regular attendance of meetings, worship services, participation in the community life, religious education, upbringing, missionary work, social projects aimed at solving specific problems: aid to the poor, orphans, prisoners, etc. Services in such churches included an active religious practice, the formation of the religious worldview affecting the level of beliefs.

The following question should be answered in the future: 'How do social roles of a practicing believer meet the expectations of a present-day individual?'

An actual influence of religions on the modern Kazakhs is limited to the performance of the life cycle rituals, festivals and cultural traditions, as well as to the sphere of the ideological discourse about the national idea and civil consolidation, the assimilation of cultural and historical heritage.

To avoid mistakes made by the Western Europe countries, Kazakhstan should be open to dialogue and possibly legalize the role of Islam as a full-fledged political subject. They need to create a powerful state with a certain social ideology that could unite all social groups.

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