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## RELIGIOUS INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION FUNCTIONS: THE EXAMPLE OF KAZAKHSTANI STUDIES

The article delves into the examination of the integration and disintegration functions of religion within Kazakh society. Authors endeavor to address this issue by drawing upon the research conducted by domestic scholars. To delineate the role of the evolution of Tengrianism and Islam in Kazakhstan's history and the formation of the religious worldview of the Kazakh people, the perspectives of 19th-century and contemporary scholars are scrutinized. Employing comparative historical and structural-functional methods, the study unveils the potential impact of these religions on the socio-spiritual development of society. The article poses inquiries regarding the conflicting perceptions of traditional Islam's authority, precipitated by the actions of contemporary politicized radical Islamic factions, the proliferation of Islamophobia, and the low levels of education and religious literacy within society. Additionally, emphasis is placed on the activities of Neotengrians seeking to alter the tenets of Tengrism and the missionary endeavors of neo-Protestant religious associations. Throughout the investigation, the authors assert that the activities of religions in Kazakhstan have contributed to an elevation in the religiosity of the populace, prompting shifts in the ethno-confessional landscape, and fostering trends in the dissemination of Islamophobias and Islamic radical ideologies. To safeguard religious stability and spiritual cohesion within the nation, the State is urged to incorporate education about religion into secondary schools, specialized, and higher educational institutions, alongside the development of scientific frameworks aimed at reconciling the tensions between traditionalism and innovation within society.

**Key words:** religion, Kazakh society, religious integration, disintegration, Tengrianism, Islam, tradition.

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### Діннің интеграциялық және дезинтеграциялық функциялары: қазақстандық зерттеулер мысалында

Мақалада қазақстандық қоғамдағы діннің интеграциялық және дезинтеграциялық функциялары талданады. Авторлар бұл мәселені отандық ғалымдардың зерттеулеріне сүйене отырып ашуға тырысады. Қазақстан тарихындағы тәңіршілдік пен исламның эволюциясының қазақ халқының діни дүниетанымының қалыптасуындағы орынын анықтау мақсатында XIX ғасырдағы ағартушылардан бастап, қазіргі кезеңдегі ғалымдардың көзқарастары сарапталады. Зерттеуде салыстырмалы тарихилық және құрылымдық-функционалдық әдіс арқылы аталған діндердің қоғамның әлеуметтік-рухани дамуына әсер ету әлеуеті анықталады. Мақалада қазіргі саясиленген радикалды исламдық бағыттардың әрекеттерінің салдарынан дәстүрлі исламның беделіне қатысты қайшылықты көзқарастардың болуы туралы, елдегі исламофобияның өсуі, қоғамдағы білім мен діни сауаттылықтың төмен деңгейі туралы мәселе көтеріледі. Сондай-ақ, қоғамда қазақтардың ежелгі сенімі тәңіршілдікті ғылыми таныммен сабақтастырып оның мазмұнын өзгертуге тырысқан топтардың және неопротестанттық діни бірлестіктердің миссионерлік қызметтерінің белсенділік танытуы атап көрсетіледі. Зерттеу барысында авторлар Қазақстандағы діндердің қызметтерінің нәтижесінде халықтың діндарлық деңгейі өсіп, этноконфессионалды құрылымы өзгеруде және исламофибиялық, исламдық радикалды идеологиялардың таралу үрдістері бар деген қорытындыға келеді. Еліміздегі діни тұрақтылық пен рухани бірлікті сақтау үшін мемлекет дін туралы білімді орта мектепте, арнаулы және жоғарғы оқу орындарында беруді іске асыруы керек және де қоғамдағы дәстүршілдік пен

жаңашылдық арасындағы қайшылықтарды шешудің жолдарын беретін ғылыми концепциялар жасақтау ұсынылады.

**Түйін сөздер:** дін, қазақ қоғамы, діни интеграция, дезинтеграция, тәңіршілдік, ислам, дәстүр.

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### **Интеграционные и дезинтеграционные функции религии: на примере казахстанских исследований**

В статье анализируются интеграционные и дезинтеграционные функции религии в казахском обществе. Авторы пытаются раскрыть эту проблему, опираясь на исследования отечественных ученых. С целью определения роли эволюции тенгрианства и ислама в истории Казахстана и в формировании мировоззрения казахского народа анализируются взгляды ученых XIX века и современного периода. В исследовании с помощью сравнительно-исторического и структурно-функционального методов выявляется потенциал влияния указанных религий на социально-духовное развитие общества. В статье поднимается вопрос о наличии противоречивых взглядов на авторитет традиционного ислама вследствие действий современных политизированных радикальных исламских направлений, о росте исламофобии в стране, о низком уровне образования и религиозной грамотности в обществе. Вместе с тем, подчеркивается активность неотенгрианцев в обществе пытающихся изменить содержание древней веры казахов тенгрианства и миссионерской деятельности неопротестантских религиозных объединений. В ходе исследования авторы приходят к выводу, что в результате деятельности религий в Казахстане повысился уровень религиозности населения, меняется этноконфессиональная структура и существуют тенденции распространения исламофобий и исламской радикальной идеологии. Для сохранения религиозной стабильности и духовного единства в стране государству необходимо осуществлять передачу знаний о религии в средней школе, специальных и высших учебных заведениях, а также разрабатывать научные концепции, позволяющие разрешить противоречия между традиционализмом и инновациями в обществе..

**Ключевые слова:** религия, казахское общество, религиозная интеграция, дезинтеграция, тенгрианство, ислам, традиция.

#### **Introduction**

Religion and its societal impacts serve as the subject of study for scholars across various disciplines. Textbooks in religious studies introduce theories and concepts explaining the social functions of religion, as proposed by representatives of diverse philosophical and sociological schools. A comprehensive analysis of these interpretations and theories regarding the social functions of religion, put forth by different researchers in various historical epochs, proves highly beneficial for illustrating the influence of religion on specific societies and individuals. Simultaneously, it enables the illumination of previously unexplored facets of religion's functioning in society. Within the realm of scholarly inquiry, numerous functions of religion are contemplated, including its role in shaping worldviews, providing compensation, facilitating communication, regulation, integration, and disintegration, as well as nurturing cultural practices. In this discourse, we particularly focus on the integrative and disintegrative functions of religion in society, drawing conclusions

predominantly through an analysis of the works of Kazakhstani scholars.

#### **Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives**

A significant amount of literature is now dedicated to the subject of religion. Despite its complexity, the issue of religion has garnered interest from the general public, including believers and religious scholars. Religion serves as a vital spiritual source that shapes social identity, corrects behavior, and enhances human responsibility. In the context of modern social relations, where diverse ideas and worldviews are presented, individuals are tasked with determining their own paths. Disagreements regarding the role of religion in society, particularly the role of Islam, and the absence of a unified stance between the people and the state concerning the activities of non-traditional religious movements highlight the existence of numerous unresolved issues. While Kazakhstan has developed a normative and legal framework for the operation of religious

associations to some extent, the status of religion, its true role in societal life, and its impact on the socio-political and spiritual spheres remain subjects of ongoing debate, characterized by conflicting perspectives (Borbassova, 2010: 49). Our objective is to analyze the uncertainty surrounding the role of religion in Kazakhstan, particularly the negative consequences associated with religion and the scientific conclusions related to emerging trends in the current religious landscape of our country.

To comprehend the root causes and repercussions of these issues, it is imperative to ascertain the position of religion in the lives of Kazakhstan's people as a whole, focusing on the positive or negative influence of religious worldviews on societal development. Additionally, the task involves evaluating the status of traditional religion alongside new religious trends and tendencies in modern religious consciousness, drawing insights from the works of domestic scholars.

### Research methodology

The article employs a comparative historical method to analyze the integration and disintegration functions of religion within Kazakh society. This method enables the examination of the varying levels of influence exerted by religions prevalent in Kazakhstan at different periods on the Kazakh society. Consequently, an evaluation is provided regarding the distinctive features of the religious worldview of the Kazakh people, as well as the types of religious practices and missionary endeavors.

Furthermore, the structural and functional method allows for the consideration of religious phenomena and processes within society as an interconnected system, thereby illuminating the specific functional purposes of each element of religion. This entails an analysis of the influence of norms and values propagated through religious ideology on individuals, including the extent to which religion fosters social cohesion or engenders deviant behavior.

### Main part

The encyclopedic Dictionary of religious studies defines the "Integrative-disintegrative function of religion" as the ability of religion to unite individuals, groups, and institutions while also distinguishing them from one another. Integration facilitates stability and cohesion at both the individual and societal levels, whereas disintegration undermines

these aspects, leading to weakening. The integrative function operates in contexts where a shared religious faith is recognized, promoting unity. Conversely, religion serves a disintegrative function when conflicting tendencies exist within religious consciousness and behavior, or when diverse and conflicting denominations emerge within social groups and society.

The evolution of philosophical and sociological thought has further elucidated the concept of the integration-disintegration function of religion by exploring religion's impact on society. This development has allowed for an examination of the factors contributing to either the stabilization or disintegration of society (Baitenova, Sakbaeva, 2017: 7).

The social perspective on religion has played a significant role in shaping the field of Religious Science, particularly among Soviet-era domestic researchers. Scholars of the XIX century, such as Sh. Ualikhanov, made substantial contributions to the advancement of Religious Science by studying religion and its various components.

Sh. Ualikhanov's research sheds light on Tengrism as an ancient belief system among the Kazakh people, which held a significant place in the worldview and customs of the ancient Turks. He observed that the Kazakhs worshipped both Allah and Tengri equally, even before they were acquainted with the teachings of Muhammad. They practiced rituals such as sacrificing to Muslim saints and honoring Khojas, while also venerating fire and calling upon both Muslim angels and shamanistic spirits. Ualikhanov viewed this syncretism positively, seeing it as a harmonious blending of religious traditions within Kazakh society (Ualikhanov, 1985: 48).

This perspective on religious syncretism in Kazakh society finds resonance with the views of Academician A. Nysanbayev.

The traditional Turkic worldview is characterized by syncretism, encompassing various forms of folk thought that transcend religious or philosophical categories. This syncretism represents an initial compromise between diverse worldviews, embodying rationality and folk wisdom within people's minds. During the era of Al-Farabi, the traditional worldview of Turks epitomized this syncretic fusion, blending Islam with ancient rituals and cults, a phenomenon known as "Double faith." Ritual complexes deeply ingrained in daily life fostered the interaction of diverse perspectives, fostering constant spiritual revitalization. Al-Farabi's works serve as evidence of this cultural synthesis (Nysanbayev, 2016: 64).

Academician Garifolla Yessim argues that Islam and Tengrianism lack qualitative opposition in terms of worldview. He suggests that the simultaneous worship of Allah and Tengri by the Kazakh people reflects a synthesis of Islamic and Tengrian worldviews in their minds (Garifolla, 2006: 9). This notion resonates with the thoughts of Shokan, who contends that countries embracing Islam and Muslim culture uphold Quranic values in public life, legal systems, and international relations.

Shokan emphasizes Islam's pervasive influence across political, social, and economic spheres, including its role in shaping spiritual life within society. In analyzing the religious landscape of East Turkestan, Beisenov observes a unique phenomenon: despite the presence of Islam, its influence, advantages, and prestige in this region pale in comparison to other Muslim countries. This assessment sheds light on the religious dynamics and societal implications in East Turkestan during that period (Beisenov, 2011: 86).

Shokan Ualikhanov's perspectives on Islam evoke varied interpretations among contemporary scholars. P. Suleimenov's work, "Muslims in the Steppe," articulates concerns about the social, cultural, and spiritual evolution of Kazakh society under Islamic influence. He notes a perceived lack of deep penetration of Islam into the Kazakh psyche, warning of potential societal divisions. Suleimenov underscores the persistence of traditional Shamanic practices alongside Islamic rituals, drawing parallels to Russia's historical period of dual religion. He emphasizes the increasing assimilation of Kazakh identity into a broader Muslim framework, a trend that resonates with contemporary Kazakhstan (Suleimenov, 2015: 88). Suleimenov also suggests that Russia viewed the strengthening of Islam in Kazakhstan as disadvantageous, aligning with Shokan Ualikhanov's opposition to the spread of Islam in the Kazakh steppes, which he believed served Russia's colonial interests by hindering Kazakh-Russian unity (Sairanuly, 2023).

Islam gained traction among the Kazakh population towards the late 18th century, a period notably marked by the reign of Catherine II. Historical documents indicate state funding for mosque construction and school openings during this time, as highlighted by Kenzhaliyev and Dauletova. Shokan Ualikhanov offers contrasting views on Islam's societal role during this era. He acknowledges state support for Islamic education in 1822, which included the establishment of schools and madrasas. However, he also warns of the potential negative consequences of

Islam's influence, attributing them to the actions of illiterate mullahs and the corrupt policies of Tsarist authorities, which he predicts could lead to societal disintegration in the future (Borbassova, 2023: 50).

Ualikhanov further delineates the origins of Islam in Siberia, where Tatars from Kazan and Central Asian pilgrims played pivotal roles. He critiques the influx of Tatar seminarians for propagating what he perceives as dogmatic beliefs and steering Kazakhs towards religious devotion.

It's worth noting the dual nature of the concept of "Brought by the Tatars." One perspective highlights the positive impact of Islam, such as the promotion of literacy among Kazakhs through Arabic and the proliferation of books printed in Arabic script. Shokan Ualikhanov recognized the progressive influence of the Arabic alphabet on literacy and knowledge-seeking among Kazakhs. He emphasized its broader cultural significance beyond the Quran, including its connection to ancient Greek culture and Arabic literature. Ualikhanov noted that access to Tatar literature allowed Kazakh youth to engage with various literary works in the Chagatai dialect of Turkish (Gabdullin, 1988: 25).

Conversely, Ualikhanov criticized certain Tatar mullahs for their regressive interpretation of Islam and their imposition of fanaticism on the Kazakh people. He condemned their narrow-minded approach and their focus solely on economic gain. Ualikhanov warned of the dangers posed by the spread of Tatar Islam in Kazakhstan, likening it to the Byzantine era's influence on Russian civilization. He advocated for the establishment of Russian schools to counteract the influence of Tatar schools and mullahs, suggesting that the Kazakh people needed to move beyond the limitations imposed by Tatar religious ideas to achieve progress and enlightenment (Gabdullin, 1988: 31).

In the article "A Muslim in the Steppe," Shokan Ualikhanov also criticizes the arbitrary spread of Christianity in Kazakhstan through missionaries and priests. He describes how the local population feared Orthodox believers to the extent that they abandoned areas abundant in resources, such as the banks of the Ob River, due to the oppressive behavior of Christian missionaries and priests. Kazakhs even complained to Prince Shcherbatov about the robberies and corrupt practices of these missionaries and priests. (Gabdullin, 1988: 49).

Furthermore, Shokan highlights the blind devotion of some Kazakhs to their rulers, believing them to possess sacred qualities regardless of their sinful actions. This blind allegiance was akin to the vene-

ration of the pope by Catholics (Ualikhanov, 1980: 170).

Shokan's critique of religious leaders who distorted the essence of Islam earned him the title of an anticlerical warrior, as described by O.A. Segizbayev, who saw him as an open fighter against such corruption within the clergy (Segizbayev, 1996: 201).

Despite the challenges posed by external religious influences, Islam remained deeply ingrained in Kazakh customs, traditions, and way of thinking. M.S. Orynbekov emphasizes that Islam has been an integral part of Kazakh life for over thirteen centuries, shaping their culture, worldview, and philosophy (Orynbekov, 2005: 17).

Indeed, the religious system of the Kazakhs cannot be viewed as interchangeable types, as they have evolved through syncretism and interaction with each other over specific historical periods. Professor T. Gabitov provides compelling examples to support this notion. He suggests that Tengrianism and the veneration of ghouls incorporated Muslim content and formed a comprehensive and complex cultural phenomenon. This perspective aligns with the views expressed by Shokan, as mentioned earlier (Gabitov, 2013: 115).

## Results and discussion

Scientists also hold differing assessments of Islam and Tengrism in the contemporary era. Z. Nauryzbayeva highlights that "at the spiritual level, the National idea for Muslims signifies that our secular state is committed to the principle of monotheism. Essentially, it calls for a great Jihad—a holy war against the internal forces of darkness. Simultaneously, the National idea mandates that Muslims exhibit boundless respect for the history and culture of our ancestors, acknowledging that the spiritual tradition of the steppe—Tengrism—is not pagan but a branch of the divine tradition" (Nauryzbayeva, 2010), underscoring the role of Tengrism in the modern Kazakh worldview. On the other hand, I. Mukan and E. Mukatai argue that "after the adoption of Islam, the significance of Tengri faith for the Turks is merely historical. In other words, the indigenous faith of our ancestors held importance only in the pre-Islamic era, and its significance was diminished after the adoption of Islam" (Mukan, Mukatai, 2023: 156). They also cite researchers such as D. Kydyrali, E. Ongarov, D. Kenzhetai, and A. Abilgazy who subscribe to this viewpoint.

"In their recent book 'Tengrianism in the Religious Knowledge of the Kazakh People,' K. Zatov, A. Ryskiewa, and T. Abylov examine the perspectives of Kazakh scholars on Tengrianism and the roles of Tengrianism and Islam in contemporary Kazakh society" (Zatov, Ryskaliyeva, Abylov, 2023: 164). Without delving into all the analyses provided, we chose to focus on the authors' conclusions. It is undeniable that divine faith and archaic culture hold significant positions in the mythological worldview of the Kazakh people. However, valid questions arise regarding the appropriateness of reviving ancient layers of national consciousness and making them the nucleus of the National Bregei, and whether this process can facilitate the socio-cultural, political, and economic modernization of contemporary Kazakhstan. Conversely, such extensive theological discussions undoubtedly contribute to the development of Kazakh society, intertwining its consciousness and mental capacities in perpetual contradictions" (Zatov, Ryskaliyeva, Abylov, 2023: 169).

The authors present objective critical observations regarding the contemporary Divine reconstruction in their study. "It is worth noting that initially, Tengri groups placed significant emphasis on traditional Kazakh values and customs. However, Tengri's pronouncements are rife with hateful and notably anti-Islamic sentiments" (Zatov, Ryskaliyeva, Abylov, 2023: 170). Utilizing social networks, Tengri propagates its own ideologies through the International Research Foundation in Russian, disseminating scientific and academic information about Tengri. Furthermore, the authors expose various methods by which groups operating through the Kazakh Internet pollute the consciousness of the population. Toktar conducts a scholarly evaluation of Beisenbinov's book "The Sacred Kazakh system Akikat" and delivers lectures on both the Youtube channel and Arman Nurmukhanbetov's channel "Areke Neonomad".

Regarding the issue of religious literacy in modern society, in the latter half of the 19th century, the problem of literacy resurfaced in the Kazakh steppe. While schools assisted in teaching reading and letter recognition, religion tainted the pure consciousness of the people, and missionary activities were conducted through schools as part of the colonial policy of the Tsarist authorities. The education provided in these schools was rooted in "fiction and scholasticism," devoid of truth, as noted by the educator.

In his critique of religious fanaticism in Kazakh society, Ybyrai Altynsarin's views closely align with those of Shokan. Ybyrai also highlights the futile attempts of shamans in his time to perform feats like flying, healing illnesses by knocking on the chest, or providing protection through amulets. He remarks:

“For headaches, shamans,  
Will you bring it,  
Killing an innocent animal,  
So that the demon will flee  
Obtain the amulet.  
In ignorance of the matter,  
Without understanding.”

Under the guise of Islam, religious leaders who consider themselves educated – mullahs, engage in disputes with the Masters. Ibrai launches an open attack on them, boldly asserting to their faces that they are slaves of the kulyn, malicious, and evil:

“Mullah from a degenerate land,  
You're a big one.  
Don't pretend to be too important,  
You're not the true God.  
Without seeing someone firsthand,  
You must testify.”

“Mullahs not only exhibit unique human “qualities” but also violate the natural Kazakh language,” emphasizes the spiritual wealth of the people. They are perpetrators of language violation. Meanwhile, Moldovans remark that Kazakhs are encountering increasing difficulty in dealing with such individuals. This is because they are deeply troubled by the encouragement they receive from dominant figures, and by the swift punishment meted out by the “honor of the mold” to “infidels” as soon as Kazakhs or fellow countrymen.

Abai's critique extends beyond religion, the clergy, and religious educational institutions. He recognized that the primary focus of educational efforts should be to liberate people's consciousness from darkness and the influence of religion. “The most crucial aspect of this,” says Ibrai, “is to prevent the imposition of Tatar fanaticism (Islam) on the Kazakhs.” According to the educator, the primary means of emancipating people's consciousness from the influence of religion is education. This is why Abai placed greater emphasis on the establishment of schools than other reformers (Gabdullin, 1988: 104). The teachings of Khoja Ahmed

Yasawi, adeptly blending Islamic principles with traditional Turkic beliefs, gave rise to the doctrine of “Khal,” which enables individuals to maintain their spiritual unity and existence in the “alimsak” even in this world, despite linguistic and religious differences (Nurmuratov, Diyarbek, 2015: 123). The dissemination of Yasawi's Islamic worldview in Kazakhstan has made a significant contribution to the society's spiritual development. Through the celebration of love for God, Yasawi's teachings have instilled in people a profound love for the world and for one another. It is natural, therefore, that thinkers such as Abai and Shakarim, who subscribe to this viewpoint, are dissatisfied with the manifestation of Islam in Kazakhstan.

Abai understands that the role of religion in society is to unify all of humanity. He values a person's attitude towards their surroundings, judging it based on their capacity for love and justice:

“Love gave birth to mankind  
So love God, sweeter than life itself.  
This is the essence of religion, and upon careful consideration, one can anticipate  
Two worlds; this is the assurance of truth – Haq.  
However, three factors disrupt this harmony:  
Greed, arrogance, and love for falsehood”  
(Nurmuratov, Diyarbek, 2015: 124)

According to Abai, since faith forms the foundation of religion, he placed particular emphasis on the faith of individuals. He recognized that the future of Kazakh society hinges greatly on public religious consciousness. With a profound understanding of Islamic teachings, Abai delineates Muslim faith into two categories. “Yakini Iman” denotes true, genuine faith, which emerges from reasoning, evidence, and knowledge. In contrast, “Taklidi Iman” represents faith based on imitation, devoid of rationality or evidence, but rather reliant on blind adherence to what the clergy dictate..

After examining two forms of faith, Abai asserts that true faith is synonymous with knowledge. Furthermore, he suggests that faith, when combined with ethical and moral principles, embodies conscience and shame. Abai states, “He who has shame—there is faith; he who has no shame, he has no faith.” Additionally, Abay engages in debates with Muslim scholars, aiming to demonstrate their lack of true understanding of faith. According to Abai, the faith of the clergy is characterized by deceit and dishonesty. He criticizes them for swearing false oaths and manipulating truth, declaring, “White is

black, or black is white, lies are true.” Abai expresses resentment towards mullahs, portraying them as two-faced merchants of their religion who seek to maintain the populace in ignorance.

Abai criticizes the tradition of pilgrimages during his era. He suggests that the main goal of pilgrims in his time was to present themselves as superhuman, “a person on the path of peace, rather than a person on the path of God.” Furthermore, upon their return, working people should be referred to not by their former title “bayeken,” but by the title “Aulie kazheken.” The issues Abai addressed a century ago are recurring in Kazakh society today. Mass pilgrimages by individuals who do not fully uphold their religious duties, coupled with the actions of groups exploiting these religious journeys for profit, have led to mistrust and suspicion towards Islam among the population.

In Shakarim’s perspective, the lines “religion is one brother to man” and “those who break it and create hostile weapons are not adherents of religion” continue to hold their significance. Specifically, Shakarim Kudaiberdiuly expressed these sentiments in the collection “Imanym”:

«All religions at that time were bad,  
None of them are straight  
The Origins of World Religions  
In three things hugging  
God is there, conscience is true, Judgment Day is true»

The root cause of the wars during that period is traced and correctly identified in conflicts masked by religion. Indeed, the country and its lands have been stained with blood and massacres due to tumultuous religious tensions. Achieving peace among representatives of different religions within one country remains an elusive dream for humanity (Nurmuratov, Diyarbek, 2015: 123). It is evident that the activities of extremist religious movements emerging in Kazakhstan in recent years serve as a prime example of this ongoing issue.

These movements advocated for absolute submission to Islam and urged adherence to the lifestyle and beliefs of the early Muslim community. They encouraged Kazakh people to abandon or disregard values that aligned with their national identity, asserting that the “local” Islam passed down from generation to generation had undergone significant alterations. Similar to practices in Arab countries, these movements insisted on adherence to Sharia law, which contradicted local customs. Consequently, they promoted a foreign way of life and culture that

was alien to the Kazakh people. The consequences of such misguided religious ideology among some young individuals are evident in the recent events in Aktobe and Almaty. A series of terrorist attacks occurred in 2011-2012, followed by further incidents in 2016 in Almaty and Aktobe, resulting in loss of life and injuries to many individuals.

In modern Kazakh society, the perception of Islam is highly contentious and politicized, serving as a focal point in the ideological struggle for power. The limited theoretical understanding of Islam has contributed to a negative portrayal of the religion, often associated with aggression and animosity. Bakhytzhan Satershinov noted the increasing prevalence of Islamophobia in his writings (Satershinov, 2014: 89). Islamic scholar Askar Sabdin and political scientist Rasul Zhumaly also observe the widespread presence of Islamophobia in Kazakhstan. They argue against linking terrorist attacks in the country with traditional Islam, emphasizing the need to differentiate between legitimate religious practices and criminal activities masquerading as religious acts. The growth of Islamophobia, they assert, can be attributed to the inadequate state of education and religious literacy in the nation (Kosenov, 2011).

The transition period witnessed deep and radical transformations across all sectors of society, including the spiritual realm and religious consciousness. The collapse of the Soviet totalitarian system and atheistic ideology triggered profound shifts in societal values. Ideological uncertainty and social upheaval during this period fostered feelings of fear and confusion among the populace. Additionally, religious illiteracy, gaps in the law regarding religious faith and associations established in 1992, shortage of religious experts and qualified theologians, and the vigorous missionary activities of religious movements collectively contributed to a negative impact on the religious landscape of the country and the formation of religious consciousness.

Since the 1990s, the Russian Orthodox Church and neoprotestant religious associations have actively pursued missionary “evangelization” efforts in Kazakhstan. This phenomenon has been the subject of special scientific research projects, resulting in publications led by scholars such as N.Zh. Baitenova, K.M. Borbassova, and A. D. Kurmanaliyeva (Baitenova, 2009: 45). These works not only analyze the teachings and religious practices of new religious movements in Kazakhstan but also document the presence of proselytism in their missionary activities.

Through the examination of diverse catalysts and motivations prompting the establishment of religious movements during that era, as well as their capacity to draw followers (including instances of departure due to deception), it was demonstrated that the underlying reasons for this phenomenon were shaped by socio-political, economic, and psychological factors.

The majority of members in new religious movements comprise isolated elderly individuals and young people seeking companionship and community. Younger members often express interest in opportunities such as learning a foreign language at no cost, experiencing modern music during worship, traveling to countries like Korea or the United States sponsored by the organization, and obtaining exemptions from military service obligations (Kurmanaliyeva, Utebaeva, Askenuly, 2018: 104).

Kazakhstan is assuming a new, often politically charged status. Within the expert community, there exist mutually exclusive perspectives regarding its role and functions as a social institution, the legalization of religious organizations, and consequently, the formulation of State-confessional policies.

Religion in contemporary Kazakhstan serves as a significant factor in socialization, fostering both the resurgence of traditional ethno-confessional identities and the broadening of avenues for transitioning to different religious denominations. This duality underscores its prominent role as one of the evident directions in religiosity (Borbassova, 2009: 103).

Despite the demonstrated stability of these trends and the rise in new religious organization neophytes (GDO), experts tend to avoid discussing the scale of these processes. Issues pertaining to the criteria for classifying GDO as religious entities, within the expansive interpretation of international law norms, and the utilization of Political Technologies as a potent tool, remain largely unaddressed (Burova, 2014: 85). Leaders of these new movements and religious organizations swiftly capitalize on fluctuations in public sentiment, promptly critiquing the perceived vices of the “sinful” world, while positioning themselves as advocates of monotheistic saviors and purveyors of profound wisdom and morality.

Religion in contemporary Kazakhstan serves as a significant factor in socialization, facilitating both the revitalization of traditional ethno-confessional identities and the broadening of avenues for adopting religious affiliations. This dual role underscores its importance as one of the most prominent facets of religiosity in the country.

Despite the demonstrated stability of prevailing trends and the increasing number of new religious organization adherents, experts refrain from quantifying the scale of these processes. Issues surrounding the criteria for categorizing these organizations as religions, within the broader interpretation of international law norms, and the utilization of Political Technologies as effective tools remain largely unexplored (Burova, 2014: 178). Leaders of these new movements and religious organizations swiftly capitalize on fluctuations in public sentiment, critiquing the perceived vices of the “sinful” world while positioning themselves as advocates of monotheistic saviors, purveyors of profound wisdom, and morality.

### Conclusion

Through historical and comparative analysis of the works of Kazakhstani researchers, we have reached several conclusions regarding the integration and disintegration functions of religions prevalent in Kazakh society. These conclusions shed light on the roles these religions play in shaping social cohesion and fragmentation.

They delve deeply into various aspects of Tengrianism, including its philosophy, history, and shamanistic practices. Notable scholars in this field include S. Akatai, N. Ayupov, A. Kodar, M. Orynbekov, Z. Nauryzbayeva, tracing back to the works of Sh. Ualikhanov. These researchers posit that Tengri faith underwent syncretism with the advent of Islam, resulting in a reinterpretation and evolution of its beliefs and practices.

Simultaneously, there emerged groups within modern society attempting to redefine the concept of divinity by integrating it with scientific understanding. Consequently, “Tengrianism” evolved into a natural philosophical worldview. Contemporary Tengrianism endeavors to merge these natural philosophical concepts with Islamic rituals such as fasting, prayer, and funeral rites, thereby shaping a novel religious framework. Adherents to this movement often reject the positive influence of Islam on Kazakh spirituality, viewing it instead as a foreign religion imposed on Kazakh people to maintain subjugation (Zatov, Ryskaliyeva, Abylov, 2023: 183).

Some researchers acknowledge Tengrism’s historical significance in Kazakh culture but argue against its relevance in the contemporary Kazakh worldview. They propose a perspective suggesting that Kazakh people willingly embraced Islam upon



its introduction to the Kazakh steppes. Research in this area encompasses the broader scope of Islamic history, Islamic studies, Islam's impact on the Kazakh steppe, the perspectives of intellectuals on Islamic religion in Kazakh territory, the current state of Islam, and the necessity for its ongoing enhancement.

When analyzing the religious and psychological climate within the collective consciousness of the population, it's essential to consider the spectrum of religious beliefs. With over 70% of the country identifying as Muslims, distinct groups emerge:

1. Those who embrace fervent or fanatical interpretations of Islam.

2. Individuals who align with a more secularist interpretation of Islam, emphasizing a separation of religion from state affairs.

3. Those who identify as Muslim but do not strictly adhere to religious practices or teachings.

4. People who maintain a neutral stance towards Islam or outright reject its principles.

These diverse perspectives reflect the multifaceted nature of religious belief within the society, each contributing to the overall religious and psychological landscape of the nation..

Following the collapse of atheistic ideologies, Kazakhstan witnessed the emergence of various religious educational institutions, ranging from small boarding schools to universities. This development highlights the divergence between the educational system's approach to religion and the prevailing religious and psychological climate. The former, rooted in religious philosophy, focuses on disseminating Islamic teachings, preaching, and promoting religious ideals. In contrast, the latter, grounded in the philosophy of religion, rejects the propagation of secularism, fanaticism, and the exaggerated glorification of religious beliefs (Gabitov, 2013: 116).

Another significant concern revolves around the missionary endeavors of emerging religious groups. Presently, the missionary efforts of Protestant organizations represent a direct cultural and social influence stemming from Western civilization. This activity is reshaping the ethno-confessional landscape across various regions, prompting the formation of ethno-political stances that endorse states fostering the growth of non-traditional religious entities. Consequently, it becomes imperative to scrutinize

missionary activities within the broader framework of national security maintenance (Kurmanaliyeva, Utebaeva, 2015: 235).

Religious values deeply ingrained in individuals' minds shape their behavior. Consequently, by introducing pseudo-religious doctrines into the collective consciousness of citizens in independent nations, it becomes feasible to manipulate these countries in the future using the classic strategy of controlled conflict. Simultaneously, there's also the exertion of pressure through the dissemination of radical religious movements with historical roots. Terrorism rooted in religious ideologies serves as a distinct manifestation of certain effects stemming from geopolitical processes.

Islamic ideologies encompass a spectrum of political views, ranging from radicalism to positions and values that emphasize faith in Allah, obedience, moderation, compromise, loyalty to authorities, and tolerance. While radicals often co-opt and distort these ideologies, they can also serve as the foundation for countering extremism and terrorism. Drawing from the teachings of Imam Abu Hanifa, there's an opportunity to oppose radical Islamic ideology by promoting the principles of Sunnism within the Hanafi School of thought. This approach aims to reclaim and redirect Islamic ideologies towards peace, moderation, and cooperation, countering the extremist interpretations that threaten the stability and harmony within Muslim communities and beyond (Burova, 2013: 87).

In conclusion, the integration of religious literacy into mainstream education is essential. This involves equipping individuals with the knowledge to recognize and understand various world religions, both traditional and emerging, alongside the ability to discern pseudo-religions and extremist groups. By doing so, individuals can develop what has been termed 'information immunity' against radical ideologies (Baitenova, 2017: 5). Hence, the implementation of a 'Religious Studies' course becomes pertinent, serving as a primary tool for cultivating religious literacy among young people. However, it's imperative to extend religious education beyond schools to encompass specialized and higher educational institutions. This broader approach ensures that individuals continue to deepen their understanding of religion, fostering critical thinking and resilience against extremist ideas.

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