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RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: RESEARCH BY DOMESTIC SCIENTISTS

The article provides an overview of research on religious identity conducted by the scholars from Kazakhstan. An analysis of various methodological approaches and the evolution of the study of religious identity in Kazakhstan was carried out. The findings were obtained through application of a qualitative analysis of 21 publications using the keyword “Religious identity” in two internationally recognized citation databases, i.e., “Scopus” and “Web of Science”. Through application of such research method, the authors attempted to answer the research questions relating to following issues; the aspects religious scholars from Kazakhstan pay attention to and scientific conclusions they reached when studying the problem of religious identity, the hierarchy of factors influencing the formation of religious identity, interaction of religious identity with other spheres of identity and forms of its manifestation. The analysis of publications allowed the authors to carry out some terminological differentiation and identify the main priority areas that would enable scholars from Kazakhstan to formulate future research tasks. Further, the article focuses specifically on the religious identity of women and provides the results of the analysis of educational, age, ethnic, and cultural factors forming and changing their religious identities. At the same time, the analysis of the selected publications made it possible to identify the gaps jeopardizing the advancement of the scholarship of religious identity in Kazakhstan.

Key words: religious identity, religious values, globalization, society, trust, view.

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Діни бірегейлік: отандық ғалымдар зерттеуі

Мақалада қазақстандық ғалымдардың діни бірегейлік бойынша жүргізілген зерттеулеріне шолу жасалады. Қазақстандағы діни бірегейлікті зерттеудің түрлі әдіснамалық тәсілдері мен эволюциясына талдау жасалды. Біз әлемдегі екі жетекші дәйексөз дерекқорлары болып табылатын «Scopus» және «Web of Science» базасынан «Religious identity» түйін сөзін қолдану арқылы табылған отандық зерттеушілердің 21 жарияланымын сапалы талдау негізінде ғылыми нәтиже алдық. Осы зерттеу әдісіне сүйене отырып, біз келесі сұрақтарға жауап беруге тырыстық: Қазақстандық дінтанушылар діни бірегейлік мәселесін зерттегенде қандай аспектілерге назар аударып, қандай ғылыми тұжырымдар жасайды? Діни бірегейліктің қалыптасуына әсер ететін факторлардың иерархиясы қандай? Отандық зерттеушілер діни бірегейліктің басқа бірегейлік салаларымен өзара әрекеттесуін қалай анықтайды, олардың тоғысуы қандай формаларда көрінеді? Жарияланымдарды талдау кейбір терминологиялық жіктеу жүргізуге және қазақстандық ғалымдарға келешекте зерттеу міндеттерін тұжырымдауға мүмкіндік беретін негізгі басым бағыттарды анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Мақалада әйелдердің діни бірегейлігі, олардың діни бірегейлігінің қалыптасуы мен өзгеруіндегі білім, жас, этникалық және мәдени факторларға талдау жасалды. Сонымен бірге, аталған жарияланымдарды талдау отандық ғылымның осы бағыттағы ғылыми артта қалуына әкелетін олқылықтарды анықтауға мүмкіндік берді.

Түйін сөздер: діни бірегейлік, діни құндылықтар, жаһандану, қоғам, сенім, көзқарас.

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Религиозная идентичность: исследования отечественных ученых

В статье осуществляется обзор исследований по религиозной идентичности, проведенных казахстанскими учеными. Осуществлен анализ различных методологических подходов и эволюции изучения религиозной идентичности в Казахстане. Научные результаты нами получены на основе качественного анализа 21 публикаций отечественных исследователей, найденных по ключевому слову «Religious identity» в двух ведущих базах цитирования в мире – «Scopus» и «Web of Science». На основе данного метода исследования мы сделали попытку ответить на следующие вопросы: На какие аспекты уделяют внимание и каким научным выводам пришли казахстанские ученые-религиоведы, изучая проблему религиозной идентичности? Какова иерархия факторов, влияющих на формирование религиозной идентичности? Как отечественные исследователи определяют взаимодействие религиозной идентичности с другими сферами идентичности, в каких формах проявляется их пересечение? Анализ публикаций позволил провести некоторую терминологическую дифференциацию, выявить основные приоритетные направления, которые позволили бы казахстанским ученым сформулировать исследовательские задачи на будущее. В фокусе статьи – религиозная идентичность женщин, анализ образовательных, возрастных, этнических и культурных факторов формирования и изменения их религиозных идентичностей. Вместе с тем, анализ данных публикаций дал возможность выявить пробелы, которые могли бы привести к научному отставанию отечественной науки в этом направлении.

Ключевые слова: религиозная идентичность, религиозные ценности, глобализация, общество, вера, взгляд.

Introduction

Religious identity is a complex, multifaceted concept and category that requires in-depth study by scholars from various fields. Religious identity includes the ways in which individuals and communities understand, experience, and express their religious beliefs and attitudes. The study of religious identity is important for understanding social phenomena such as political behavior and participation, intergroup relations, cultural integration, and individual psychological well-being, etc.

Research into religious identity in Kazakhstan has changed significantly over the past few decades. Studies conducted recently reveal shifting public attitudes toward religion, a rise in religious variety, and improvements in theoretical and methodological approaches. The growth in the number of publications in foreign peer-reviewed journals is also encouraging. These studies often use qualitative methods, such as ethnographic research and in-depth interviews, to capture the lived experiences of individuals and groups who strictly practice religion (Smith, 2003).

In recent years, there have been significant changes in interdisciplinary approaches to research. Researchers increasingly recognize the links between religious identity and other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, and socioeco-

nom status (Peek, 2005). These changes led to the adoption of mixed methods, in which research combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of religious identity (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014).

Determining the function of religious institutions in the establishment and maintenance of religious identity is one of the most significant areas of the current research. Institutions such as mosques, churches, and synagogues are considered important places for the transmission of religious values and practices. These institutions provide social support networks that strengthen religious identity in the face of external pressures and secularizing trends (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). Research shows that active participation in work of religious institutions enhances a sense of belonging, which is an important component of religious identity (Wuthnow, 2007).

Another important area of research is the impact of globalization and migration on religious identity. The rapid movement of people across borders has led to increased religious pluralism and the emergence of hybrid religious identities. In studying how migrants negotiate their religious identities in new cultural contexts, researchers have encountered issues such as discrimination and the need to reconcile different belief systems (Levitt, 2009). People

construct their religious identity based on both their present surroundings and their ancestry (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). This approach points to the adaptive and fluid nature of religious identity.

Psychological approaches to religious identity have contributed to this field by examining the influence of religious beliefs and practices on mental health and coping mechanisms. Research shows that a strong religious identity can provide a sense of purpose and stability during times of adversity (Koenig, 2012). However, there is also evidence that threatening and fundamentalist religious identity may have negative psychological consequences, such as increased anxiety and decreased openness to new practices (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009).

The intersection of religious identity with political and ethnic identity has become an important area of research revealing deep connections between belief systems, political attitudes, and group affiliations. Political scientists have studied the influence of religious identity on political attitudes and behavior noting that religious beliefs determine political preferences and affiliations. In particular, citizens with a potential religious identity are likely to support policies that are consistent with their moral and ethical values (Layman, 2001). This connection is evident in societies where religion and politics are closely intertwined and lead to the formation of religious-political blocs that have significant influence on politics (Wilcox & Robinson, 2011).

Ethnic identity further complicates the relations. Due to the fact that religion and ethnicity are frequently entwined, complex identity structures that spur social and political development are created. In many contexts, religious and ethnic identities reinforce each other, and religious practices provide or counteract ethnic markers (Smith, 2013). Such intersections can lead to both cooperation and conflict. Ultimately, a common religious-ethnic identity can unite communities against external threats but can also increase tensions in relations with other groups (Juergensmeyer, 1993).

Despite the progress made, there remain significant gaps and challenges in the scholarship of religious identity. We believe that more case studies to understand how religious identity develops and changes over time are required. Furthermore, findings may be more generalizable and reflect the range of religious beliefs in the society if a study sample includes more varieties of religious traditions and underrepresented groups (Ammerman, 2013).

Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives

The article's *goal* is to provide a thorough overview of the studies on religious identity that have been done in Kazakhstan and to present the findings and theoretical underpinnings that have influenced the field.

To achieve the goal, the following objectives have been assigned:

to demonstrate the evolution of the scholarship of religious identity, its growth and modifications;

to ascertain the effects of how religious identity interacts with other facets of identity such as gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity;

to reveal the influence of religious identity on mental health and to identify the links between religious, political, and ethnic identity;

to highlight the most relevant findings of recent research and to make suggestion about future directions to deepen our understanding of religious identity.

By achieving these objectives, the article aims to contribute to the academic discourse on religious identity and provide a foundation for future research. Therefore, we are to find the answers to the following *research questions*:

1. What aspects do Kazakhstani religious scholars pay attention to, and what conclusions have they reached when studying the problem of religious identity?

2. What is the hierarchy of factors influencing the formation of religious identity?

3. How do researchers in Kazakhstan define the interaction of religious identity with other spheres of identity, and in what forms does their intersection manifest itself?

Scientific research methodology

In this article, we analyzed the content of the research on religious identity made in Kazakhstan in terms of their conceptualizations, features, and similarities. We focused on the articles indexed in two leading global citation databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), using the keyword "Religious identity". We accessed the "Article title, Abstract, Keywords" service in the Scopus database and the "Topic" service in the WoS database. Consequently, 5 170 materials from the Scopus database and 2 686 materials from the

WoS database were located. Among the materials found, we selected studies by researchers from Kazakhstan. Table 1 illustrates the selection of 30 materials from the Scopus database and 10 materials from the WoS database. This approach allows for a systematic analysis of articles reflecting the current state scholarship of religious identity in Kazakhstan. It is noteworthy that the further analysis did not pay include 11 articles published in journals that are no longer indexed in the Scopus database. Furthermore, the analysis was performed on 21 materials since 8 materials were concurrently indexed in two of the top citation databases.

Table 1 – Number of Scopus and Web of Science databased publications by scholars from Kazakhstan; keyword “Religious identity”

2004	1	2020	8 (3)
2016	1 (1)	2021	4
2017	3	2022	2 (2)
2018	3	2023	2
2019	5 (4)	2024	1

The data were collected by the authors using the Scopus and Web of Science databases; the WoS data are displayed in brackets (information as of April 1, 2024).

According to the Scopus database, most of the materials listed in Table 1 are in the “closed access” format; only 8 materials are in open access. Most of the materials are articles and one is a book chapter. Researchers from 29 institutions in Kazakhstan are shown the data; of these, the following institutions have more than two publications: Al-Farabi Kazakh

National University – 16; Gumilyov Eurasian National University – 4; Nazarbayev University – 4; Toraighyrov University – 4; Institute of Philosophy, Political Sciences and Religious Studies – 3; Karaganda University of Kazpotrebooyuz – 3; National Academy of Science – 2; Karaganda Buketov University – 2; Zhansugurov Zhetysu University – 2. There have been publications of two collaborative studies with contributors from the Russian Federation, two with those from the UK, and one in collaboration with an author from Canada. The following journals have published more than two articles: “European Journal of Science and Theology” – 6; “Central Asia and The Caucasus” (due to the suspension of indexing in 2021, these materials were not analyzed) – 4; “Social Identities” – 2; “Religiovedenie” – 2.

As for the materials in the WoS database, there are 8 journal articles, one book chapter, and one conference proceeding. Only two of these publications are open access. The WoS Index is divided into several categories: Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) – 7; Book Citation Index – Social Sciences & Humanities (BKCI-SSH) – 1; Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH) – 1; Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) – 1. Researchers from eleven institutions of Kazakhstan are represented in the WoS database; among them five are from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and four from Gumilyov Eurasian National University. One publication was in collaboration with a Russian author. Four papers that appeared in the “European Journal of Science and Theology” contain more than two studies.

Following the sampling, we analyzed the main themes to classify the publication thematically (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Thematic Classification and Characteristics

Section	Main issues covered
main findings from the analysis of religious identity	institutionalization of religious identity pluralization of Islam new identity issues religious values in the modern world promoting identity through various works
analysis of the origins and features of religious identity in Kazakhstan	global-local interaction of religious identity foundations for an inclusive religious identity and peculiarities in the history of Kazakhstan arising problems religious identity in a multicultural and multiethnic society religiosity of urban residents and traditional attitude towards Islam factors and preferences in religious identity of student youth
issues concerning women	religious identification of modern Kazakhstan women women in religion initiative and a view from Kazakhstan gender and faith, gender symbolism

Before discussing the results of the qualitative analysis, the following limitations revealed in the systematic literature review shall be mentioned.

1. Focus on the publications in Scopus and Web of Science databases; thus, the study is limited to the research findings published by scholars from Kazakhstan indexed in two leading citation databases. The publications in the journals no longer indexed in the Scopus database were not included. The rationale for the selection is given above.

2. Language and accessibility: most of the analyzed materials were published in English. We analyzed 3 articles published in Russian. In addition to open access studies, the results of several closed access studies were considered.

3. Complexity of religious identity research: religious identity is a complex concept closely related to other social identities such as cultural, national, linguistic, affiliation, and class. Recognizing these connections, we would like to clarify that the main analytical category in the study is religious identity. This approach will not thoroughly examine other types of identity that might provide a full understanding of contemporary social forces.

4. Data limitation: the article is based on the previously published research findings and secondary data sources because of theoretical character of the analysis of religious identity research. This analysis did not involve primary data collection, i.e., questionnaires, in-depth interviews, or field investigations.

Results and discussion

Main Findings of Religious Identity Scholarship

D. Beben's research in a published collection of papers provides insight into the process of identity of a group of mountain communities with a vibrant culture, language, and complex political history. The chapters in the book develop concepts of affiliation and critically analyze how globalizing and transregional dynamics affect scattered communities' integration, engagement, and activity. Various arguments have been presented in the work regarding the process of identity and identification. In turn, D. Beben (2019, 123-142) focuses on the process of institutionalization of religious identity, the movement of traditions, and the role of history in the introduction of religious understanding. In our opinion, this process includes several key components: firstly, over time, religious customs are disseminated, modified, and maintained. This process includes the transmission of traditions

from generation to generation, their adaptation to new positions, and the ways in which they enter everyday life. The movement of traditions tends to be dynamic and reacts to historical and cultural changes. Secondly, history plays a crucial role in introducing and strengthening religious concepts. Historical events, memories, and personalities contribute to the development and interpretation of religious beliefs. It involves religious communities remembering and reinterpreting their past to shape their present identities and practices. Thirdly, the process of institutionalizing religious identity shapes the formalization of religious practices, doctrines, and organizational structures. At this point, we believe that religious movements transform from informal gatherings and practices to more structured and officially recognized institutions. Establishment of religious bodies, codification of doctrines, and renewal of religious texts and rituals will be the main activities of this process. Thus, we can say that religious identity is formed through the interaction of tradition, historical perspective, and institutional structures.

The article by M. Dunne, N. Durrani, K. Fincham, and B. Crossouard (2020) challenges the stereotypical homogeneity of Islam often prevalent in global discourses. The authors show different ways in which young people construct their religious identity. The analysis is based on the notion that local, national, and global discourses are important for assigning subjects and constructing their identities. These ongoing processes foster pluralism and diversity within specific historical contexts. The authors point at such values as universal peace and harmony characteristic for the global Muslim ummah being a common point in young people's understanding of Islam. The interweaving of debates about religion with debates about nationality leads to the study of various socio-historical consequences for the youth of post-colonial countries. Therefore, we believe that local and national issues create the religious identity of young people within the historical and political positions of each nation.

A.Zh. Idrissov's (2021) study examines how religion plays a part in a new identity. According to the independent researcher, religion is an alternative to secular nationalism and is reviving a new religious identity as a reaction to the crisis in the secular form of nation-building. The author of the study views religious identity as an inflexible framework created by certain actors through a variety of techniques. Analyzing the role of religion in the formation of a new identity, the author draws the following conclusions: 1) religion acts as a legitimating factor

in new religious communities, providing a sacred justification for power; 2) religion acts as a hostile dominant identity that is a factor in protecting individual identity in the wave of globalization; 3) the religious community acts as a separate “imaginary” structure that dissolves linguistic and ethnic boundaries on a global scale and is considered a divisive factor in local conflicts. These findings highlight the dual role of religion in shaping identity: religion unites and legitimizes communities or, alternatively, it causes disagreements and conflicts in the local situation. Thus, the influence of religion on identity is multifaceted; it serves as both a source of solidarity and an object of conflict.

The most fundamental component of a religion is its foundation of ideals, which connect the followers’ experiences with their belief in the Creator. A religious worldview is formed by religious practice and self-awareness which together generate religious values. Religious values are dynamic because, in contrast to dogmas, they evolve. Processes of religious identity development and raising secularization are linked to religious values (Kosichenko et al., 2022). The authors claim that these characteristics foster relationships with liberal and secular beliefs. Despite the conceptual framework based on human acts and worldviews, secular and religious values do not correlate even though they both share a moral space. Despite having their roots in religious principles, liberal values eventually clash with religious principles. The liberal values that dominate the modern world push religious values out of public life and discourses. Secularization is probably one of the most significant features of our time. The authors contend that because religion is linked to the ontological immutability, history persuasively demonstrates that religion is a reality of societal and individual life. Therefore, freedom and creativity increase the relevance of religious values as a form of human spirituality. The authors argue that, despite the important role of religious values in individual spiritual life, they are less in demand in the modern world focusing on other value based on the ideas and practices of misunderstood pluralism. Therefore, we can say that religious values play a decisive role in the formation of religious identity and preservation of spiritual life. Religious identity interacts with secular and liberal values contributing to secularization and tolerance due to the spiritual nature of humanity. The challenge is to reconcile these values in a modern context that prioritizes materialistic and pluralistic ideals.

Among the findings in the analysis of religious

identity, it is said that the self-awareness of a multifaceted person is an actual problem. The article by A.R. Gaynutdinova, A.F. Galimullina, F.G. Galimullin, and A.K. Kairzhanov (2019) analyzes the work of the Tatar poet, writer, and philosopher R.R. Bukharaev (1951–2012), who lived in England for more than 20 years and wrote in Russian. The authors showed how Bukharaev demonstrated the ability to organically perceive the ideas of the universal artistic culture, literature, and worldview from the ancient times to the present day as well as adopting to the new cultural situation while preserving his national and religious identity. The authors conclude that Bukharaev’s novel “Letter to Another Room”, published in 2011, offers a perception of England through the perspective of an Other. The poet rejects the one-sided notion of the “gentleman” as the sole bearer of the English literary and cultural tradition, introducing himself as an Other to the English tradition. The image of England in the novel is ambiguous: on the one hand, the writer has found a real House with a wonderful garden, a place for recreation and creativity; on the other hand, the author does not seek to glorify English society. He strives for maximum objectivity in the artistic representation of England in his novel. The peculiarity of the novel is the combination of the Russian and English realities in the text, the comparison of the everyday life of the English with the memories of the Russian life. Based on these findings, we draw the conclusion that famous people may both affect readers’ identities and creatively express their religious identity.

On foundations and Features of Religious Identity in Kazakhstan

L. Yerekesheva (2004) examines religious identity in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and analyzes the impact of globalization and modernization thereon. According to the author, within international relations theories and sociology of religion, such an identity in Central Asia cannot be considered only as a local product. Influences on religious identity are two-dimensional: local and external. This duality reflects the influence of global religious movements, political ideologies, and transnational connections although local historical, cultural, and social contexts deeply influence religious practices and beliefs. According to the article, local growth and modernization must be enhanced even though external factors are important. Differences in local development and modernization in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods arise from a fundamental difference between the nomadic and sedentary

Kazakh and Uzbek societies which vary considerably in terms of degrees of religiosity beliefs which is stronger among the Uzbeks than the Kazakhs. As a result, it is important to recognize how globalization reinforces local religious identities and disseminates religious concepts online. Since the Internet and digital media allow people to access and engage with a wide variety of religious content from around the globe, they pose a challenge to this process.

There are some oversimplified and clichéd perspectives on Islamic doctrine and theory. Firstly, Kazakh identity and religious views align with the core tenets of Islamic Sunni doctrine defined by depoliticization, xenophilia, and spirituality. Secondly, there might be connections between Kazakh Muslim openness and the historical and cultural foundations of Kazakhism. Like all ethnic groups emerging from this part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhs are predominantly Muslim, yet the Soviet regime was unable to totally alter or eradicate their historically-rooted, civilized Islamic legacy. Research has shown that Kazakhstan's post-independence official policies facilitate the development of a pluralistic national and religious identity and encourage the adoption of fundamental liberal values in the domains of culture and education (Zhussipbek et al., 2017; Zhapekova et al., 2018). The analysis of these subjects is based on the principles of the inclusive religious identity of the Kazakhs and the features of religious identity construction throughout Kazakhstan's history. We believe that the religious identity of the Kazakh people is syncretic, combining various religious traditions and practices. From a historical perspective, Sufism—a mystical branch of Islam—Tengrism, the teachings of the indigenous Turkic people, and traditional Islamic practices are all included into Kazakh spirituality. A flexible and wide-ranging religious identity that can incorporate a variety of influences is made possible by this inclusivity. Furthermore, we think that national and ethnic identity in Kazakhstan is influenced by religion. Even though many Kazakhs do not follow rigid religious guidelines, being a Muslim is an essential component of their ethnic history. Such a view of religion contributes to the preservation of the sense of unity and national identity. Following the nation's independence in 1991, religious traditions and identity saw a resurgence. To bring society together and combat extremist tendencies, the government prioritized a moderate interpretation of Islam.

Traditional material culture as an “ethnic marker” as well as public articulation of ethnic,

tribal, and religious identity contribute to preservation and representation of the Mongolian Kazakhs (Baigabatova et al., 2018). This perspective can be linked to a more extensive discourse on the establishment of religious identity in Kazakhstan focusing on the mutual influence of material culture and religious identity in fortifying and advancing the community's cultural and spiritual legacy. In any community, traditional material culture serves as an “ethnic marker” that reinforces collective identity. These “markers” include traditional clothing, tools, architectural styles, and artifacts associated with daily life and spiritual practice. The preservation of traditional material culture and its role as an “ethnic markers” ensures the preservation of the Kazakh identity both in Kazakhstan and among the Kazakh diaspora. Preserving one's identity is essential in the face of globalization and modernization which may destroy traditional practices and beliefs. Religious values and material culture, while preserving the main traditions, can inspire religious identity capable of adding new elements. Therefore, we believe that the integration of religious identity with “ethnic markers” may contribute to maintenance of cultural continuity.

Although Kazakhstan is a multicultural and multiethnic nation with a majority sharing similar values, there are differences in opinion on “sensitive” topics such as consciousness and conduct, beliefs and objectives, and persistent binary viewpoints. Some authors claim that this bears the possibility of societal collapse. The ability to explain the socio-cultural perspective of Kazakh life was made possible by the emergence and consolidation of national sociology (Nysanbayev, Burova, & Sailaubekkyzy, 2019). This study explains the dynamics of civic, linguistic, and religious identity patterns that emerged at various points during the nation's independent existence. The authors claim that the state's practice and policy of influencing identity formation under conditions of sovereignty are highly complex requiring careful consideration of numerous variables to prevent social risks. Identification of the patterns and peculiarities in the contemporary mindset of socially varied Kazakh society shall enable to build successful technologies of social and political control. The authors conclude that there is some loss of traditional identity that has traditionally been ingrained in Kazakhstani culture is inevitable as a result of globalization which poses serious challenges for the preservation of traditional identities, but also offers opportunities for renewal of religious identity. The balance between taking advantage of global opportunities and preserving

religious identity is difficult. By recognizing the dual influence of local and global forces, each country manage these changes in a way that respects and preserves its rich cultural and religious traditions. Such an approach ensures that each country maintains its religious unity and heritage through its participation in global affairs.

The purpose of the article by G. Shamshudinova, M. Altybassarova, G. Seifullina, A. Turlybekova, and G. Dyussebekova (2019) is to consider ways of peaceful coexistence and constructive dialogue of representatives of different ethnicities within multiethnic Kazakhstan. The primary goal, according to the authors, is to examine state-confessional relationship models and develop suggestions for enhancing the state model of inter-confessional tolerance in a contemporary polyethnic society. When introducing the notion of freedom of conscience and religion, the authors acknowledge the necessity to protect national, cultural, ethnic, and religious identity. This is how community's collective identity and important components of its legacy are protected and the benefits of religious freedom are not jeopardized. Religious identity has the property of providing a set of common values and ethical principles that contribute to social unity. These shared ideals support social harmony, mutual respect, and understanding in a community that appreciates diversity. Religious identity is an integral part of cultural heritage, social cohesion, individual and collective identity, and resistance to cultural homogeneity. Maintaining these elements promotes national stability and unity as well as the spiritual and cultural well-being of individuals and communities. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the importance of religious identity while promoting religious freedoms.

Religious values are the most significant part of a person's worldview and are likely to have an impact on daily activities as well as political views. The analysis of the changes in religious attitudes shows that in the post-Soviet space there is a clear tendency to move from atheistic attitudes to religious revivalism. In modern Kazakhstan society, a complex model of religious identity is being formed combining the ideals and principles of religious consciousness with the ideas of spirituality and national revival. However, these values can often be of an external, declarative nature (Alimbekova, Shabdenova, & Lifanova, 2020). According to the authors, the share of religious believers in Kazakhstan is increasing. The researcher was aimed at showing whether or not the respondents observe religious rituals and traditions or follow religious precepts.

The authors state that a sizable majority self-identify as religious, but this does not necessarily mean the rise in the number of those who actively adhere to all religious laws and customs. Furthermore, the study demonstrate that the underdevelopment of religious consciousness and inadequate religious education can coexist with the spirit of religious revival in the youth which may lead to propagation of erroneous religious beliefs including extremist ones. Finding solutions to potential problems and comprehending the state of religion today depend heavily on the data presented in the article. The fact that a sizable portion of the respondents has a religious stance demonstrates the link between religious beliefs and culture and ethnicity. This finding may suggest that religious identity is more related to cultural and ethnic identity than indicate deep religious beliefs. We think that the manifest religious revival among younger people is a reflection of their renewed interest in identifying their spirituality and religious identity. We also need to consider the ramifications of inadequately elucidating religious teachings to the youth which stems from a deficiency in comprehensive religious education. A well-thought-out strategy may help to maintain religious identity while preventing the emergence of the threats posed by ignorance and fanaticism.

The religious societal climate during Kazakhstan's independence era, disputes motivated by religion, and the rise and spread of extreme religious viewpoints are covered in the paper by A. Zakhay, K. Tyshkhan, and S. Shamakhay (2024). The study uses a conventional methodology centered on the issue of religious identity to examine Islam and traditional faiths in Kazakhstan. The article is based on the historical theory of relativity, methods of generalization, content analysis, and classification. The study led to the formulation of the characteristics of the Kazakh model in the interaction between the state and religion as well as links between religious beliefs and secular viewpoints. We believe that religious identity is frequently entwined with national and cultural identity. Instead of being limited to the spiritual commitments of religion, this junction enables religious practices to coexist within a secular framework that is considered as part of the cultural legacy. Kazakhstan has a unique model of balancing religious expressions with secular principles. This model ensures freedom of belief and combines cultural and religious identity within the framework of secularism. Key features include promoting moderate Islam, promoting interfaith harmony, regulating the activities of religious organizations, preserving national identity, and

balancing secularism and religious in harmony. This approach helps maintain social stability and helps countering extremism.

Considering the foundations and features of religious identity in Kazakhstan, the researchers attach great importance to the views of young students. For instance, research published in 2016 indicated that 15% of Kazakh ethnic group representatives and 5% of Russian ethnic group representatives exhibit a distinctly noticeable level of religiosity. In terms of ethnic identity, between 40% of ethnic Kazakhs and 5% of Russians identify as such. 75 percent of Kazakh-Russian students and 90 percent of students identify as religious (Aimaganbetova et al., 2016). According to data from another study, 90% of Kazakh students identify as Muslims and believe that they are Muslims by national identity—that is, by birth. Buddhism, Protestantism, and Tengriism are the three most popular “other” religions mentioned by 7% of Kazakh students. Three percent of the students who took part in the study identified as non-believers or atheists. As for students of Russian ethnicity, the study showed that 75% of them identify themselves as Orthodox by nationality. Orthodoxy is traditionally defined by the Russian community in Kazakhstan, including students as one of the fundamental tenets of Christianity at birth. In this case, Orthodoxy plays a significant role in ethnic identification within Almaty’s multiethnic and multireligious community. Therefore, among Russian youth, unlike Kazakhs, there are very few representatives of other Christian denominations, such as Protestantism, Catholicism, etc. (Aimaganbetova et al., 2020, 63-64). There is a hypothesis that permanent residence and initial socialization do not affect the formation of religious identity in Kazakhstan. A preliminary investigation was carried out to validate or refute this theory. According to the study, young people’s religious identification may be influenced by socioeconomic and cultural-historical regional characteristics (Dashkovskiy, Zhanbosinova, & Stolyarova, 2023). Therefore, we think the research indicates that religious identity is not a significant factor in the self-categorization of student youth’s personal identities. Under these conditions, students define their interests in personal, professional, and ethnic issues by focusing on their personal views apart from the religious factor. Therefore, the study of students’ religious preferences is relevant both from a theoretical point of view and within the framework of applied empirical research.

Women Issues and Scholarship of Religious Identity

The article by D.K. Kusbekov, A.A. Beissenova, B.I. Karipbaev, and D.K. Mamytkanov (2019) investigates how Kazakhstan women develop their religious identities. The authors assume that as the entire social structure changes, the major traditional institutions that guarantee the upbringing of the younger generation will play a smaller role, religiosity will rise in women’s lives, and religious laws and values will continue to be followed nationwide. The lack of attention given by academic circles to the issues surrounding women’s religiosity and socio-political engagement does not imply that these issues are unimportant. Taking this conclusion into account, the authors make their first attempts to study the social status of Kazakh women. Specifically, the influence of religion, religious precepts, holidays, and rituals on a woman’s family life, career choice, and way of life is examined. Among the survey participants, a neutral attitude towards those who outwardly demonstrate their religious affiliation prevails. It might be argued that most women and girls do not share negative attitude towards those who wear religious apparel as a means of expressing their religious identity. There are no representatives of other religions in women’s families. This division of opinions indirectly reflects the isolation and limitations in choosing another religion in the family. Although girls and women say they do not approve of their relatives changing their religion, many respondents say they do not criticize those who decide to change their faith believing that everyone has their right. The respondents indicate that women have an average awareness of state policies regarding religious freedom and rights. Most respondents believe that their religious beliefs do not influence their views on politics. Those who think there is such an influence consider it to be negligible. The researchers concluded that survey respondents did not have a clear understanding of the extent and quality of religion’s influence on politics.

Using the case of elderly women living in Kazakhstan, Z.D. Kabidenova, G.K. Zhapekova, D.S. Utebaeva, Z.A. Amirkulova, and D.R. Mussina (2020) explore the characteristics of the perception of religion and changes in religious consciousness. The study demonstrates a relationship between ethnicity and the rise in religiosity and religious affiliation (Muslims in the case of the Kazakhs, Orthodox Christians in the case of the Russians).

The participants showed intolerance toward religion. The results of this study show a close connection between religiosity and ethnic environment among women in Kazakhstan. This connection seems to be deeply rooted in the cultural and historical structure of the nation. Moreover, the desire to preserve cultural conservatism and ethnic identity appears to generate intolerance towards the acceptance of other religions. Combating this intolerance requires a multifaceted approach that promotes education, interfaith dialogue, community participation, and a tolerant and diverse society.

The affirmation of one's national and religious identity demonstrates the significance of gender symbolism. Masculinist and patriarchal images emerge within the framework of gender assumptions in the narrative of youth identity giving rise to their heteronormative hierarchy and gender polarity. Personal claims on Islam are made legitimate by the regulation and control of women. Within the crucial realm of national identity, gender continues to be a site of postcolonial resistance that upholds and perpetuates the disparities connected to heteronormative gender norms. Dunne et al. (2020) challenge the way that young people's national and religious beliefs, along with possible gender symbolism and the material realities that result from it, are undermining liberal conceptions of gender equality. Indeed, this symbolism reinforces certain gender roles and establishes social norms and values within the context of religious practice and belief. Clearly, gender symbolism is a powerful means of expressing religious identity and shaping roles, expectations, and norms in different religious traditions. Symbolism helps to identify the identity and belonging of citizens and communities even while it perpetuates traditional gender roles as demonstrated in the study mentioned above. As social values evolve in religious traditions, there is increasing dialogue about the role of gender symbols and the need for equality. The ongoing dialogue reveals the dynamic nature of religious identity and the complex interaction between tradition and modernity.

H. Thibault (2021) explores how political ethnography might be used to better understand religious dynamics in conservative religious communities. The author adopts a reflective stance, citing fieldwork undertaken in conservative Muslim communities in Tajikistan, and suggests that informants utilized their status as a not married foreigner to steer conversations around the scholar's conversion and the necessity of marriage. The author gives the following reasons for these thoughts:

first, being a woman allowed her to interview both men and women as female researchers are generally not considered a threat by either gender. Secondly, the author's non-Muslim status, but was strongly interested in Islam, reflected the interest in communication with the author with the aim of changing her way thinking. Third, as a foreigner, the author was subject to different gender norms, so men conversed openly with the author. Finally, male respondents were eager to contact having dating or marriage aspirations because the author was a single woman. For many strict believers, nationality, language, and cultural background were above faith (Thibault, 2021, 409-410). The availability of such data allowed the scholar to demonstrate the isolation and mistrust conservative Muslims experience from the rest of society as well as from the authorities. The author argues that political ethnography allows to create a full portrait of conservative Muslim communities which often appear to be isolated and hostile. In addition, political ethnography can be useful for studying issues such as religious identity and its complex relationships with power structures. We think that political ethnography can help to understand how religious identity is constructed under socio-political conditions. Moreover, political ethnography allows to understand how religious identity interacts with and resists political power. Thus, using political ethnography to study religious identity helps to develop a fresh perspective on the complex issues of religion and power in contemporary society.

The question of designating women to bestow religious ordination is increasingly important in light of continuous advocacy for gender equality in all areas of public life including religion. The ritual of sacred religious ordination differs in each religion and in Islam there is no such ceremony. The authors analyze issues related to women's spirituality and religious identity within the framework of world and national religions. Based on this analysis, by describing the ordination of women in world and national religions, including Christianity, the public opinion and organizational reality of this ceremony in Christian countries are shown. According to the authors, the ritual is connected to the theological tenets and cultural customs of the faith and represents one aspect of religious identity. Furthermore, it is determined that it reflects a general tendency of national and international faiths toward women within the context of gender parity in both society and religion (Abdimaulen et al., 2022). We understand that traditionally this practice reinforces certain

gender roles in religious communities. The trend towards equality in ordination practices highlights the need to challenge established gender norms. These modifications signify a shift within religious establishments acknowledging the significance and input of women, as well as the congruence of gender parity with contemporary principles. This change not only redefines religious identity and practice but also promotes a more equitable representation of faith in diverse cultural and religious settings.

Conclusion

The research on religious identity has demonstrated that people and communities in the globalized world have made great progress in determining the course of their religious affiliations and views. This article has provided a comprehensive review of the findings and theoretical foundations that have shaped this area of research identifying several key research themes and directions. The article covered the main problems of the analysis of religious identity, the foundations, and features of religious identity in Kazakhstan, as well as women's question within religious identity.

The evolution of scholarship of religious identity has moved from qualitative studies focusing on social cohesion within homogeneous communities to modern interdisciplinary approaches that examine the relationship between religious identity and ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. These changes have expanded our understanding of the formation, maintenance and change of religious identity. Religious institutions play an important role in spreading religious values, providing social support, and fostering a sense of belonging and community. In a similar vein, it has been discovered

that the effects of globalization highlight the flexible and transitional character of religious identity and help people integrate into new cultural contexts to create identities that are true to their history. Psychological aspects have provided insight into the impact of religious identity on mental health and have revealed both positive and negative outcomes. Moreover, research on political and ethnic issues has revealed deep links between religious beliefs, political attitudes, and group ties showing that religious identity shapes political attitudes and behavior.

Despite these achievements, it should be noted that there are significant gaps. It is stated that long-term research is needed to track formation and change of religious identity. Furthermore, greater inclusion of various religious traditions and underrepresented groups in study samples is important to ensure the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should continue to employ interdisciplinary methods from other disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. This may provide an understanding of religious identity and its implications for personal and social well-being. Exploring new methodological and theoretical innovations will be important in addressing the complexities of religious identity in a pluralistic and interconnected world.

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