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## Socially-Psychological Research of Religious Orientations and Preferences in Modern Kazakhstan

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### Abstract

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This article presents the results of the socio-psychological research of religious orientations and preferences of students in Kazakhstan, one of the major states of Central Asia. Kazakhstan, where more 130 ethnic groups live all together, states religious tolerance and acceptance as one of the main internal policies. However, due to the rise of religious extremism and terrorism around the world there is a danger that religious tensions can also affect Kazakhstan. The purpose of this socio-psychological research is to study religious orientation and preference of students in a multicultural and multi-religious society. Research methods include M.Kuhn's (1954) twenty statements test and Bogdanov's (2002) questionnaire of religious orientations. Intensity of religious identity is evident among 15% of representatives of Kazakh ethnic and among 5% of representatives of Russian ethnic group. In terms of ethnic identity, it is evident among 40% of ethnic Kazakhs and only among 5% of Russians. 90% of students and 75% of Kazakh-Russian students consider themselves as believers. Thus, our socio-psychological research has shown that religious identity does not take an important place in the self-categorization of the personality of students of both national groups - Kazakh and Russian. In these circumstances, students apart from the religious factor, focus on themselves, define and update their interests in personal, professional, ethnic problems.

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**Keywords:** Religious identity; religious orientation; students

### 1. Introduction

The Republic of Kazakhstan gained its independence as the result of collapse of the USSR in 1991. Having the specific geopolitical placement in the heart of Central Asia, Kazakhstan accumulates the



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diversity of cultures, religious and ethnicities. Despite the fact that population of country is predominantly Muslims, the Constitution states that Kazakhstan is secular country. In this sense, Proclaimed policy let Kazakhstan to remain the island of peace and harmony, where people of different ethnical and cultural backgrounds can live in the atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance.

Nowadays, there are more than 130 ethnic groups, which live in Kazakhstan and share not only territory but also some cultural and religious peculiarities. The majority of population of Kazakhstan are Kazakhs and Russian, whose traditional religions - Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity. Also, there is a plethora of different religions: Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, ancient and modern polytheistic cults and many other religious and spiritual groups. At present, the country has more than 2,500 religious associations representing some 50 denominations and religious movements.

Despite this religious diversity, Islam is the most common religion among the main part of the Kazakhs, Turks, Chechens, Tatars, Uzbeks and some of the Russian population.

Speaking as an integrating cultural force, Islam promotes the formation of a certain worldview, organically merged with ethnic and religious and ethnic peculiarities of Kazakhstan.

At the same time, Islam in Kazakhstan has several features that allow you to talk about the so-called Kazakh version of Islam.

Chokan Valikhanov (1985) was a first Kazakh scholar, who has studied the ethnogenesis of the people, came to the conclusion that his ethnic history cannot be studied in isolation from religion and beliefs. In this regard, he paid great attention to the study of shamanism, which is considered a kind of primitive religion inherent Kazakhs.

In «Traces of shamanism in Kirghiz» Valikhanov (1985) wrote that despite the fact that Islam has long been accepted by Kazakhs, however, traces of shamanism remain and closely intertwined with the life and customs of the Kazakhs.

Valikhanov (1985) considers Tengriism as an alternative to Islam among the Kazakhs. Religion of Kazakhs is different, on the one hand - this is the worship of the spirits of their ancestors, and on the other - the belief in Allah. To characterize these features of the religion of Kazakhs Valikhanov (1985) coined the term «dualism», which describes the dualistic attitude to religion among Kazakhs.

Thus, the rooting of Islam in Kazakhstan took place in close connection with the pre-Islamic beliefs and Zoroastrianism, Tengrianism. As a consequence, the Kazakh Islam characterized by tolerance for dissent, recognition of freedom in religion, lack of rigor in compliance with fanatical ritual and legal norms of Sharia.

There is a prejudice that Islam is practiced only by Kazakhs or other representatives of the Turkish people, and Christianity by Russian and Slavic people, however, nowadays people in Kazakhstan tend to choose certain religion based not only on historical background but mostly on personal preferences. In its historical development of Kazakhstan has never been closed, cut off from the world of the island, on the contrary, its vast variety of mixed beliefs and traditions. The population of Kazakhstan celebrates both Muslim and Christian holidays (Qurban Eid and Christmas), as well as many other cultural and religious celebrations.

such places and 20% of them rarely visited places of religious worship, whereas 15% of students do not visit such places at all.

The most common reasons for students praying to God are these particular situations (answers are given on occurrence frequency):

- difficult life situation, health or work problems,
- difficult situation with no hope for any solution,
- cases of life-threatening risk,
- joyful events with gratitude of God,
- spiritual search.

According to the majority of young people, «a religious person» is a person who has God in his heart and believes in higher power.

The analysis of students' religious orientations provided an opportunity to understand the motives that appeal to students of in their choice of religion and to examine their relationship to the requirements of the cult in the system.

## 7. Conclusion

The conducted social and psychological research shows that religion does not take an important place in a self-categorization of the identity of the Kazakhstan students (Kazakhs and Russians). At the same time research shows that religion is more actual for Kazakh students rather than for their Russian counterparts. It might be due to the historic situation of Kazakh ethnic group, which developed a synthesis of Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions, as well as the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of the population of Kazakhstan.

In this context, people of Kazakhstan could be described as religious tolerant. Consequently, religious identity is predominantly determined by the age characteristics of the students. Young people tend to organize their life based on professional and personal orientations. The socio-psychological study of religious attitudes and preferences in modern Kazakhstan of students has great relevance in the modern reality of the existence of the multicultural and multi-religious state.

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