

## Contours of Attitude of Adolescents towards Religion and Religious Identification in Kazakhstan

Kabidenova ZD<sup>1\*</sup>, Rysbekova SS<sup>1</sup>, Rysbekova GE<sup>2</sup> and Duisenbayeva A<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan

<sup>2</sup>Department of Kazakhstan History and Social Sciences and Humanities, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Eurasian Technological University, Kazakhstan

\*Corresponding author: Kabidenova ZD, Student, Department of religious and cultural studies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71al-Farabi Avenue, Almaty, Kazakhstan. Tel: +7 (727)377-35-00; E-mail: 780611kabidenova@mail.ru

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### Abstract

The article discusses the analysis of research of attitude of adolescents towards religion and religious identification in light of the need to support socio-cultural space in the country and in light of the questions on the global situation relating to the Central Asian region. Such aspects as attitude towards religion and its role in the society, religious tolerance, interest in any specific religions, knowledge about religious organizations and the significance of citizenship are investigated. Respectively, according to the purpose of the article, the authors raise a question if the problem of formation and strengthening religious identity as a cultural code in the younger generation has a solid foundation. The research results show that religiosity is superficial, with tolerant and neutral-indifferent attitude towards people with distinct religious way of life. This attitude of the younger generation towards religion can lead to poor religious awareness. The civic aspect of identity in adolescents is more pronounced than the religious and ethnic ones. Therefore, they are subordinate to the civic identity, which let us understand the importance of socio-humanitarian education in the development of common values.

socio-humanitarian sector in education, in particular, the fields of religion and culture is significant as interest in the Central Asian region by the leading countries of the world matters much. And the issues of interaction in the sphere of education, religion and state construct specific social identity of a person. The purpose of this article is to cover the issue of attitude of adolescents towards religion in light of the need to support socio-cultural space in the country and in light of the questions on the global situation relating to the Central Asian region. Respectively, according to the purpose of the article, the authors raise a question if the problem of formation and strengthening religious identity as a cultural code in the younger generation has a solid foundation.

### Introduction to an overview of Kazakhstan in the modern scientific discourse: religion and state

In this article it is important to consider an overview of Kazakhstan in the modern scientific discourse in regard to the interaction between religion and state, which has political tools of religious identity formation. Accordingly, an overview of the religious situation in Kazakhstan from the point of view of foreign research is given.

Most researchers, who published their works in the journals of Western Europe, Canada and the United States, believe that the relationship between the state and religion is ambivalent in character. In particular, M. Omelicheva notes that the political life of Kazakhstan shows definitely alarming tendency toward securitization of Islam, which in the discursive process creates new understanding of some forms of Islam as existential threats to the state, community and people [1]. In this respect it should be noted that the efforts of the state are aimed to preserve "traditional" Islam, which is understood as Islam containing a tolerant and peaceful basis.

The dichotomy between "traditional" and "nontraditional" religion causes an ambiguous attitude on the part of Western studies. Lecturer of Eurasian studies of the Centre for Russian and East European studies at the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom) G. Yemelianova notes that the Government of Kazakhstan and the Muftiate mimic their Russian and Uzbek

**Keywords:** Religion; Kazakhstan; Religious identification; Education; Socio-cultural space

## Introduction

### Introduction to the problem

The socio-cultural space of any state or region is an important factor in its spiritual and cultural image and identity. The mechanisms of image perception of "the others" and self-images create a field of intercultural communication, which is formed in the information space. In today's multicultural society it has become difficult to maintain national identity of socio-cultural space. To date, the importance of supporting the

colleagues in the legitimation of the dichotomy between “traditional” (i.e. “home-grown”, apolitical Islam) and “non-traditional” (foreign and radical Islam) [2]. In respect of “mimic” or imitation of neighbouring countries it should be noted that after 1991 the doors opened to missionary work, which has been grounded in the spiritual vacuum. An open access to the information space brought to the population different versions of Islam, Christianity and Eastern occult teachings. As a result, the dichotomy between traditional and nontraditional religion emerged. The leadership of post-Soviet countries took carefully decisions in the religion sphere, as there were a number of objective reasons for it. The first reason was the Soviet atheistic past, where religion was superseded and veiled in the cultural sphere. The second one, as consequence of the first reason, was the mentality and the prevailing ideological stereotypes of the Soviet period of the population. Accordingly, at the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century the population was not ready to “be tested by freedom” in search of new spiritual religious values against the background of socio-economic crisis.

Senior researcher of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, program “Silk Road” S. Peyrouse notes that the Independent “new” Central Asian governments faced many problems as they had to cope with such elements as religion, which the Soviet regime tried in vain to keep in the background. Every government made every effort to promote an idea of profound changes in these fields and the movement of religious “renewal” and the idea of “revival” of national traditions were chosen. However, under the influence of the Soviet regime, from which they emerged, the political authorities perceived religion quickly, in particular Islam, as a potential rival to ideology [3].

Political scientist E. Karagiannis also notes relating to ambivalent policy in the sphere of religion that such transnational Islamic movement as Hizb ut-Tahrir poses a particularly difficult problem for the government of Kazakhstan because it has radical views but stands for only peaceful change. This suggests that ideology of the group can be understood as a powerful and integrative basis for collective actions [4].

Introduction to an overview of Kazakhstan: the impact of socio-economic parameters

We can speak not only about the religious situation, but also about the socio-economic aspect of this issue which has direct relationship with any of the socio-cultural transformations in the society. Central Asia is considered one of the pivotal regions of the world. It is located in the core of the Eurasian continent and is an important link among several rapidly developing economies, such as China, European Union, India, Japan and Russia [5]. According to G. Xuetang, Central Asia is a region where the effects of geopolitics and competition among the great powers are the most active compared to any other part of the world, where the ethnic and religious conflicts, the energy competition, the strategic positioning of various subjects and political disturbances in the region are a recurring feature in the regional context [6].

Thus, this overview has nature of exploring the issue by some active researchers both from Kazakhstan and the Central Asian region. The problem of the processes of religious identification of the population of Kazakhstan in the polyethnic and polyconfessional society is of great importance for the development, strengthening stability, peace and harmony. The issue of the socio-economic aspect is one of the important reasons for the active research of our country and the Central Asian region in the socio-cultural context. Accordingly, the importance of strengthening and supporting education of the younger generation in the socio-humanitarian sector has a real reason to support social stability and to prevent religious terrorism.

## Methods

### Measurement parameters of religious identification

The need for sociological studies of religious identification in the Republic carries the constant monitoring of the situation in the younger generation, taking into account that the population of the country is heterogeneous in ethno-confessional aspects due to its historical peculiarities. Accordingly, it is necessary to pay attention to these issues in all parts of the Republic. We also conducted a survey of the North-Eastern part of the Republic (September, 2015). The research was concentrated in Pavlodar, where three secondary schools with Russian language of instruction were selected to analyze ethno-confessional measurement of identity, and 334 respondents aged 15-18 were surveyed.

To date the research of attitude of adolescents towards religion and religious identification has heightened interest and relevance in light of national security threats by extremist organizations and destructive movements, in the world in general and in the country. The similar studies are conducted in different regions of the Republic, in the cities of Petropavlovsk, Karaganda, Almaty, Astana, etc.

### Comparative parameters of religious identification

S.A. Bilialov, following the results of the comparative analysis of three surveys, conducted in Kazakhstan in 2003, 2007 and 2009, revealed such highlights as growth dynamics of religious identification in the younger generation; most young people are adherents of Islam and Orthodoxy, religiosity of youth is diffuse and superficial, which is characterized by the inner orientation of faith without need to perform and to know religious rites and by the relatively low level of participation in religious life. Young people are positive about the role of religion in the society and mark the need to strengthen its impact. Also it is noted that when affiliating themselves with a religion, the respondents relied on the national-cultural tradition (Kazakh - means Muslim, Russian - means Orthodox Christian) [7].

Zhukova E.V. conducted the study of religious attitudes and values of high-school children of Petropavlovsk. On the results of the study it was established that the vast majority of schoolchildren take interest in the supernatural and mystical phenomena, but don't have enough knowledge to see fundamental differences between the creeds of traditional religions and various occult practices or outright quackery. She noted that religiosity is a permanent feature of the vast majority of young people today, where even those who call themselves atheists believe in supernatural phenomena and agree with some religious dogmas [8]. Religion, as a socio-cultural institution, is in the process of growth in the context of religious identification of adolescents; their religiosity is superficial, with tolerant and neutral-indifferent attitude towards people with distinct religious way of life. But it is important that this superficiality towards religion of the younger generation can lead to poor religious awareness, and subsequently there may be a change of religious identification in the direction of the beliefs of new religious and destructive movements.

## Religious Identity

Speaking about religious identification, it is necessary to identify contemporary studies of identity. Religious identity can be defined as individually-subjective self-identification in the context of religion [9]; religious identity is an answer to the question: "Who am I (as a religious person)?" Religious identity emerges in socio-historical context and shows that its

development is a changeable phenomenon but not a static one. For example, the events of September 11, 2001 demonstrate how crisis may lead to an event [10]. The process of religious identity formation is due to the influence of a number of external factors and social determinants, among which are education, mass media and family [11]. Each of these social institutions one way or another performs a function of religious socialization and formation of an individual's identity. An important factor is the balance between religiosity and tolerance, especially in the polyconfessional society. The problems of religious identity formation are examined in the content of educational programmes at secondary schools [12,13]. The scientific research is focused on the process of religious education, and the possible consequences on the society are examined. Along with other public institutions school is an important institution for the formation and strengthening students' worldviews.

## Results

This research was concentrated in Pavlodar, where three secondary schools with Russian language of instruction were selected to analyze ethno-confessional measurement of identity, and 334 respondents aged 15-18 were surveyed. The ethno-confessional cross-section showed that the majority of respondents identified themselves on the basis of the national-cultural tradition (Table 1).

**Table 1:** "Ethno-confessional parameters".

Confession	Ethnicity																Total
	The Russians	The Kazakhs	The Ukrainians	The Germans	The Tatars	The Belarussians	The Chechens	The Ingushs	The Azerbaijanis	The Moldovans	The Uzbeks	The Armenians	The Bashkirs	The Turks	The Kirghiz	Not specified ethnicity "human being"	
Total number of the respondents	176	77	13	9	9	4	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	32	334
Islam	-	63	-	-	-	-	1	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	6	75
Orthodoxy	121	1	5	1	2	3	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	11	149
Catholicism	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Protestantism	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Atheism	29	9	5	3	4	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	60
Difficult to answer	16	2	3	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	6	34
Others	8	2	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	13

Thus, 9.6% (32) of the respondents did not indicate ethnicity, but indicated confession and their attitude towards religion. Moreover, 59% (19) of them in the column "ethnicity" wrote "human being". The importance of civil identification

was marked only by 17 respondents, 6 found it difficult to answer, as others marked ethnic and religious identification.

In the matter of sources of information about religion, the respondents referred to such responses in the following order

of the total number of the respondents: 46.7% - TV; 40% - Internet; 36.2% - parents; 25.1% - school (teacher, lessons of religious studies, homeroom); 13.8% - friends; 12.6% - close relatives; 4.8% - books; 1.2% - Church, mosque; 0.6% - Bible, Koran. We can see that the important sources of information are the media, parents and schools. Today television and the Internet represent a large amount of information about the events relevant to religion which affected the opinions of young people. However, a secondary role was assigned to parents and schools. Interest in any particular religion of the respondents in most cases came down to knowing the religion with which they affiliated themselves, only 17% of the respondents indicated that they were interested in all religions in the comparative study.

To the question "Who do you feel?" the answers were distributed as follows: 72.1% - the citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan; 10.5% - the representative of the confession; 10.2% - the representative of the ethnos; 7.2% found it difficult to answer. In this situation we can say that the civic aspect of identity of adolescents is more pronounced than the religious and ethnic ones. Therefore, they are subordinate to the civic identity.

As for the people, leading a religious way of life and wearing religious clothes, the responses indicated that most respondents were neutral to the way of life - 56%, and were indifferent to clothes - 33%. The democratic attitude towards this question was also observed, 25% of the respondents noted that any person has the right to choose religious dress, as well as 13% were positive about it and thought that the dress is for fixation of religious identity. But 21% of the respondents indicated that wearing religious clothing is external, not having any true religiosity. Only 5% were negative, due to the principle of secularism. To the question about the knowledge of banned religious organizations in the Republic the respondents in most cases noted that they had no any idea of them. But only 5% filled in this item. Those, who indicated their atheistic position, evaluated the influence of religion on the society positively, but were not interested in gaining knowledge about religion. They remember of God in difficult moments and visit the temples on significant events. The respondents are respectful of the believers leading a religious way of life and wearing religious clothes. Only isolated indifference was found, but it manifested in total lack of interest in religion as the person gains knowledge about religion only at school and believes that religion is absolutely unnecessary and its impact on the society is negative. In general, the attitude of the respondents towards religion is positive, and they evaluate its influence on the society positively - 89%, only 11% indicate a rather negative stance on this issue. This negative stance is most likely a consequence of vigorous activity of media sources in covering international issues in the field of interaction between religion and society.

## Discussions

### Education in socio-cultural context

The role and importance of education in different socio-historical conditions can be transformed depending on the value system assumed by human community. The idea of which laws form human development in the educational process defines the content, forms and methods of teaching and upbringing, pedagogical thinking, the position of teachers and students, the way of life in educational institutions. The goals and objectives of education are an element of values and norms of society's culture derived from the social ideas about the nature and possibilities of man. At the present stage education is the most urgent field among human activities. Education, especially higher, is considered as the main, leading factor of social and economic progress. The reason of such attention consists in understanding that the most important value and main capital of the modern society is a person capable of searching and mastering new knowledge and taking unconventional decisions. It should be noted that education is a key factor in the processes of creation, maintenance and development of particular socio-cultural space. And in this aspect the identity formation should be considered as a product of discursive practices which are associated with a power function and consider the subject as a product of power relations. The essence of discursive power, as production of subjectivity, is represented by the "disciplinary institutions" (school, army, prison, hospital, enterprise). The discourses of pedagogy, military science, criminology, medicine and political economy present the individual as a "learner" (and a teacher), "soldier", "criminal" etc. Dedicated by M. Foucault disciplinary discourses as "science", "technologies of the self" and "dividing practices" produce "docile bodies" which may be subordinated, used, transformed and improved. Education, training, standardization, normalization, rationalization, classification perform operations of disciplinary practices [14].

The very "socio-cultural" is understood as social space in which the social subject creates. The socio-cultural approach integrates three dimensions of human existence: man in his relation to society, the nature of culture and the type of sociality [15].

The socio-humanitarian directions in education are intended to perform the task of supporting space in the country. And today the most urgent problem of the younger generation and young people is the field of knowledge about religion and culture. The issues "Why do young people retreat into religion? What causes the growth of religiosity in Kazakhstan and how does religion affect the development of civil society?" have become relevant [16].

During the period of independence there has been transformation of religious consciousness, where religion becomes a factor of identity for youth. Today the choice of religion faith. Accordingly, to date the problem of religious knowledge of young people is important by young people is mediated by predictions of healers, mystical component and

most often adolescents are involved with fashion trends following certain.

### Religious education in the comparative aspect

The European foreign studies on the problem of religious knowledge in education are presented in another aspect. Paul Vermeer in his study asked the questions "Why should religious education be part of the school curriculum in a liberal democratic state? Why is religious education still part of the school curriculum in a liberal democratic state, on which such fundamental socio-cultural processes of secularization as pluralism and individualization have influenced much?" Mainly, from the standpoint of the theory of socialization it is stated that religious education at schools has a unique contribution that carries a target of cultural and normative integration of students. It is that in Europe religious education involves Church one supporting the connection between schools and churches. The close connection between Church and school is used in many European countries to acquaint children and youth with the Church's life. Religious education in many countries has still pronounced confessional nature. P. Vermeer marked a direct link between religious education and socialization. Education is an essential mean for the "methodical socialization of the younger generation" [17].

The importance of religion in the public sphere is presented in the context of democratic citizenship and religious education in the Netherlands. Religion is more and more perceived as a source of power. Accordingly, this raises questions relating to religious education at school. It is necessary that both public schools and religious affiliated schools should take the impact of globalization processes, and it is required to seriously pay attention to the training of students to meet cultural and religious values of "the others". From a social and pedagogical point of view it is argued that all schools are required to contribute religious dimension to citizenship [18].

Thus, we can say that for European countries the problem of religious education is also urgent. In this case religious education at schools is an important mean of socialization of the younger generation, and also in relation to their cultural and normative integration. Cultural integration implies not only the transfer and assimilation of a culturally homogeneous set of values and norms, but also the transfer of a set of basic democratic values. The transfer of these basic values is necessary to ensure a minimum level of social cohesion and to preserve the values of European culture and identity.

### Conclusion

The problem of the processes of religious identification of the population of Kazakhstan in the polyethnic and polyconfessional society is of great importance for the development, strengthening stability, peace and harmony. Having considered the views of Western researchers we can note that their research can impact possible modeling of social processes in Central Asia. But for European countries the problem of religious education is also relevant. Religious

education at schools is an important means of socialization of the younger generation, and also in relation to their cultural and normative integration. The transfer of basic values is necessary to ensure a minimum level of social cohesion and to preserve the values of European culture and identity. The sociological studies in the Republic have marked the growing religiosity of youth, which is often superficial. It is important in this case that this superficiality towards religion of the younger generation can lead to poor religious awareness, and subsequently there may be a change of religious identification of youth in the direction of the beliefs of destructive movements. The growth of religiosity of youth has been caused by good religious awareness, and the most important sources of information are the media, parents and schools. Today television and the Internet represent a large amount of information about the events relevant to religion which affected the opinions of young people. However, a secondary role is assigned to parents and schools. As for the choice of social identification, it is noted that the civic aspect of identity in adolescents is more pronounced than the religious and ethnic ones. Therefore, they are subordinate to the civic identity. Religious tolerance of adolescents is expressed by neutral loyalty to the people leading a religious way of life and wearing religious clothes. The survey question about the knowledge of banned religious organizations in the Republic raises fears: only 5% of students answered, the respondents in most cases noted that they had no any idea of them. In general, the attitude of the respondents towards religion is positive, and they evaluate its influence on the society positively - 89%, only 11% indicate a rather negative stance on this issue. This negative stance is most likely a consequence of vigorous activity of media sources in covering international issues in the field of interaction between religion and society.

"Why is it so important to trace the attitude of the younger generation towards religion?" In our opinion, no nation is immune to what is happening in countries regarding the religious situation and its relationship with politics. Unfortunately, today religion and politics have changed their forms of cooperation, sometimes intertwining with each other. The religion is "good". And it is not necessarily true that yesterday's high school students, brought up in a secular state and education, will destroy cultural monuments of their history in favour of personal religious beliefs, thus blurring the history. Accordingly, the importance of strengthening and supporting education of the younger generation in the socio-humanitarian sector has a real reason to support social stability and to prevent religious terrorism.

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