

Arrival and Consolidation of Islam in Central Asia: An Examination of Western Scholarship

Kasymbekova Marzhan¹, Zhengjis Zhomart², Oshan Zhanymkhan³, Zhumadiil Arman⁴,
& Sauyrzhan Eldos⁵

¹Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

^{2,3,4,5}Institute of History and Ethnology named after Shoqan Ualikhanov, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Email: zhengjis.zhomart@bk.ru

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Abstract

Central Asia exists at the junction of the East and the West, in the center of the most active part of the Great Silk Road. Its geopolitical location is thus an important factor, and it is in this territory that the ideological foundations of many world religions have been laid. At the end, Islam has taken deep roots there. Islam, which came to the region in the 8th century, have gone through two periods: the period of expansion (VII-XVIII centuries) and the period of consolidation (XVIII-XXI centuries).

This paper analyzes the discourse of Islam in modern domestic and foreign (1991-2021) literature, using interdisciplinary methods. In the study, western research are analyzed on the issue of the arrival and establishment of Islam in Central Asia.

This information contributes to the lessons of historiography, as well as the history and Islamic studies. They will be useful in further study of the traditional worldviews, history and ethnography of the Kazakhs.

Keywords: Islamic history, Central Asia, Western researchers, Traditional worldview, Historiography

Introduction

It is important to study the historical path of Islam in the territory of Central Asia, from its emergence in the early Middle Ages, its spread under different political systems, its rise and relaxation and finally its consolidation. Searching for answers to the questions of what role Islam has played in the history of the people of this region, what is its place in modern times, and what is its perspective are important issues that historians need to study. Therefore, the history of the emergence and spread of Islam in the territory of Central Asia is one of the urgent issues that need to be studied not only for Russia, but also for all the post-Soviet Central Asian states.

Important geopolitical changes and globalization processes taking place in the modern world in recent decades encourage a new approach to the role of Islam. Moreover, today, Islam is becoming an important factor in world politics. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the so-called "Islamic revival" has contributed to the politicization of Islam and the Islamization of politics in Muslim countries. One of the main reasons for this phenomenon is that Islam, as a whole religious system, is a comprehensive regulator of all the spheres of the life of a Muslim. This is influenced by historically formed ideas about the inseparability of religion and politics in Islam, spirituality and secularism, Islam and the life of Muslims in general.

The paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon by exploring the geopolitical dynamics and globalization processes influencing the role of Islam. Its aim is to shed light on the political implications of the "Islamic revival," highlighting the intricate interplay between religion and politics in the Muslim world. Its objective is to contribute to the broader discourse on the evolving nature of Islam in the contemporary political landscape.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article draws on the critical examination of pre-revolutionary history in Kazakhstan within the context of modern non-Marxist historiography. To achieve a nuanced understanding, it is imperative to explore the ideological-theoretical and epistemological foundations that underpin research on key historical issues. This framework involves a critical analysis of the contributions of the Western authors to the history of Islam in Central Asia, emphasizing the contemporary relevance of their work.

Ideological-Theoretical Sources

Unraveling the ideological underpinnings of research is crucial for understanding the perspectives that shape historical narratives. This framework explores how non-Marxist ideologies influence the interpretation of pre-revolutionary history in Kazakhstan, shedding light on the diverse theoretical approaches employed by the scholars.

Epistemological Sources

Examining the epistemological sources helps to understand the methods, assumptions, and paradigms that guide historical research. The article delves into the epistemological foundations of non-Marxist historiography, exploring how scholars construct knowledge about pre-revolutionary Kazakhstan and its implications for contemporary understanding.

Conceptual Framework

The article will articulate and evaluate the most important concepts within modern non-Marxist historiography. Concepts such as cultural syncretism, religious hybridity, and identity formation are explored, emphasizing their role in shaping interpretations of pre-revolutionary history in Kazakhstan.

Foreign historians have made a great contribution to the study of the history and culture of the people of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The specially compiled study of foreign historiography, its organizational foundations, database, research methodology is of great interest for both science and practice (Bekmakhanov, 1957). The struggle to establish scientific and objective ideas about the past and the present historical development of human society in the minds of people is now taking place in the context of the increasing progress of common human interests and values. The concept of a controversial, but at the same time unified, interdependent world, which is the result of new political thinking, helps to truly assess the world around us. They also help to look differently at the relationship and dialectical connection of the past and the present, the history of international relations, and the methods of ideological and scientific controversial issues.

Review of Literature

European authors have published their studies on the history of Central Asia, especially on the description of the religious situation in this region, based on the collected facts. One of them is the Swiss scientist Adam Metz, the author of the book "Muslim Renaissance" translated into 32 languages. For Barthold, Metz's book inspired independent research. Appreciating Metz's work, Barthold has shown how to use Metz's book in his own work. The meaning of his explanations depended on Barthold has also shown how to analyze the data collected by Metz and supplement them with sources that the scientist could not use for various reasons. Barthold has foreseen that Metz's work would stimulate new research on the issues raised in the scientist's work (Bertels, 1973).

In the first decades of the 19th and 20th centuries, ethnographic and historical works have created in the spirit of the evolutionist trend appeared. This has been especially noticeable in France from the last quarter of the 19th century. The historical, ethnographic and anthropological study of people has significantly increased. French scientists have studied the physiological characteristics of Kazakhs, their national character, language, religion, housing, racial characteristics and legends.

At the end of the last century, the German historian Kramer, who visited Turkestan with Auli-Ata, Shymkent, Yrgyz and Kazali, writes about the population and ethnic basis of these cities, and about the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. His attention has been drawn to the social organization of the Kazakh society, vassals, sultans, khans and other social categories (Bekmakhanov, 1957). Although he says that the Kazakhs are supporters of Sunni Islam, he writes that religious fanaticism is foreign to them, and the remnants of shamanism are preserved among them.

Islamic mysticism or Sufism, or Tasawwuf in its original form still attracts the attention of specialists interested in the spiritual development of Islam, as well as the educated reader. Among the scientists, the Swiss orientalist Fritz Meier, who made a huge contribution to the study of the Sufi worldview with his fundamental research, stand out (Meier, 2001).

Mayer wrote five monographs discussing the most important themes and figures of Sufism. In his dissertation "The Life of Sheikh Abu Ishaq Al-Kazaruni" Mayer shows his originality and high professionalism. The rendering of the Persian text from a philological point of view is skillfully done, and in his very well-structured and clear introduction, written in good German, the author touches on the socio-historical, especially intellectual and psychological aspects of the text. Another monograph by Mayer, published in 1989, was devoted to Baha'i Vlad, the father of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi. Based on the Persian diaries of Baha'i Ma'arif, many of which are presented in a masterful German translation, Mayer creates a portrait that in many ways reflects a special kind of mysticism. Mayer's last major work, "Zwei Abhandlungen über die Nakshbandiya" (Two Treatises on Nakshbandiya), was published in 1994 (Sufism, 2001).

German researcher, one of the world's leading specialists in Sufism, Anne-Marie Schimmel, in her book "The World of Islamic Mysticism" delves into the history of medieval Sufism, introduces the reader to the most famous Islamic mystics and currents in a deep and subtle way and sheds light on the key issues of Islamic mysticism, and the symbolism of Arabic and Persian poetry. Anke von Kugelgen, have stated that the Bukhara Khanate was inhabited by high-ranking judges (qadis), muftis, supervisors of markets and customs (mukhtasibs), mudarris (teachers of madrasahs, which were considered higher educational institutions in the Middle Ages) and others. Most of the positions were held by seids and lords, who left their education and affairs, including through inheritance (Kügelgen, 2001).

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up new opportunities for the study of Islamic history in Central Asia. One of the researchers of this period, the famous Western Islamic scholar and historian Devin De Weese, devoted his work to medieval Sufism and wrote the fundamental work "Studies on Sufism in Central Asia" (Nadirova), which helps to understand many modern phenomena.

Research Methods

The methodological basis of the article is the generally accepted scientific positions of studying historical processes and real events through historicism and objectivism. The representativeness and reliability of the research results ensured by using such methods as systematic.

Literature Survey

Conduct an extensive literature survey to identify existing gaps and contributions in the field of Central Asian studies, especially focusing on traditional Kazakh society. This will help establish the context and relevance of the research.

Historical Analysis

Employ historical analysis to examine primary and secondary sources related to traditional Kazakh society. This method will provide a foundation for understanding the historical processes and events under investigation.

Comparative Analysis

Utilize comparative analysis to juxtapose the approaches and methodologies used in domestic and Western historiography. Compare the perspectives, methodologies, and findings of foreign scholars with those of domestic historians to identify areas for improvement and development.

Systematic Approach

Embrace a systematic approach to ensure the representativeness and reliability of research results. Systematic methods involve organizing data, sources, and information in a structured manner, facilitating comprehensive analysis and interpretation.

Documentary Analysis

Analyze historical documents, archives, and manuscripts to extract valuable insights into the formation and development of traditional Kazakh society. This method will contribute to the objectivity and depth of the research.

Cross-disciplinary Approach

Adopt a cross-disciplinary approach by incorporating insights from social and humanitarian sciences. This approach will enrich the research by considering diverse perspectives and methodologies.

International Comparative Study

Extend the comparative analysis internationally by studying the experiences and methodologies employed in leading foreign countries. This will contribute to the global context of the research and offer insights for improvement in domestic historiography.

Critical Evaluation

Engage in critical evaluation of the methodologies used in both domestic and Western historiography. Identify strengths and weaknesses in existing approaches and propose modifications or innovations to enhance the quality of research in traditional Kazakh society. By employing these research methods, the study aims to contribute to the further development of domestic historiography and the improvement of research methods related to traditional Kazakh society in the broader context of Central Asian studies.

A significant amount of historical, philosophical and political research is devoted to the study of Islam in Central Asia. First of all, it is necessary to mention the general theoretical, historical and philosophical works devoted to the problems of the emergence and spread of Islam in the Central Asian region.

Findings

Among the literature on this issue, there are various sources that contain a lot of information about the socio-economic, political life, culture, population and territory of Kazakhstan

When considering the works of European authors about spiritual processes in the countries of Central Asia, there are reasons why we start with medieval works. Most importantly, both medieval authors and modern European researchers have the same goal, which is missionary and political-economic policy towards the peoples of Central Asia.

The emergence of Genghis Khan's empire was the event that shocked the whole world and left a deep mark on the fate of people as a great impetus for the development of geographical

and ethnographic ideas about individual countries of the East in Western Europe. The conquests of the Mongols.

«had such a strong impact on the minds of their contemporaries that in the 20s and 30s of the XIII century, the Mongol invasion was spoken of as the greatest misfortune of that time in all the countries of Central Asia, North Africa and Europe»

Bekmakhanov, 1957:51

According to Mikaelyan (1952), from the second half of the 13th century, before the Mongol invasion of the Western European states, during the last echoes of the Crusades, when rumors about the Mongol campaigns and their Christianity spread, Pope Innocent IV, Louis IX and other Christian world figures sent several embassies to Tatar commanders and Great Khans. The goal of the embassies have been there to find out whether the Tatars are a threat to the West, and whether it is possible to spread Christianity among them and use them against the Sultan of Egypt. However, the embassies of Plano Carpini in 1245, Andrey to Kuyik Khan in 1249, Ascelina to Batu Khan in 1247, Rubruk to Monke Khan in 1253-1255 did not have the expected results (Mikaelyan, 1952).

The first embassy was sent by Pope Innocent IV in 1245, led by the Italian Plano Carpini. Carpini left Lyon and came to the Palace. About his visit to Karakoram, Plano Carpini wrote:

«After that we entered the land of the poor. We entered the land of the Kanlyaris into the country of the Bisermins. There is one big river in this region, the name of which is unknown to us (Syr Darya). Then we went to Karakytai (along the Emil River), where the Tatars built only one city called Omyl (Chuguchak)»

Puteshestia, 1993:23

During these trips, travelers describe the places they have visited and provide information about the religion and traditions of the local people. For example, Plano Carpini, an Italian traveler of the 13th century, says about the God religion of the ancestors of modern Kazakhs, "they (Mongols) believe in one god... But they do not praise and pray to their god" (Puteshestia, 1993).

In turn, the Mongols sent several embassies to various European countries. Abaqa Ilkhan alone sent three embassies to Western Europe: in 1265, 1274 and 1276. Ilkhan's activity in the diplomatic sphere was to a certain extent due to the fact that his mother Dokuz-khatun and one of his wives, Maria, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, were Christians. However, the Western travelers who were in the court of the Mongols, in the palace of the Ilkhans, their Turkic wives: the wife of Hulagu Khan, Dokuz Khatun, the wife of Abaka. Horda drew attention to the important role of khatun.

Moreover, in the 12th-14th centuries in China, Iran, Central Asia and Europe, representatives of the Turkic tribes have been recruited by the Mongols to rule in the countries that were part of the empire of Genghis Khan and his successors. All this was contrary to the political goals of the kings of Western Europe, who wanted to defeat the Turks with the help of the Mongols. Thus, news of the Mongols and the countries and peoples they enslaved had reached the British Isles.

Medieval Western European scholars have been able to provide information about Central Asian states and their people. The English philosopher and naturalist Roger Bacon has given a historical and geographical description of Asia in his works (Bekmakhanov, 1957). He believes that there are two obstacles on the way to the truth: worship of power, and harmful customs of the past.

Therefore, cognitive research should be based on real experience in researching unknown regions and populations. Bekmakhanov (1957) has used the notes of many travelers who has visited distant Asian countries at different times. It is also known that he has used the works of al-Farabi. All this has allowed him to create a large encyclopedia, which has expanded the knowledge of medieval people. It has contained some information. He talks about the Tatars

and Karakhitas, and gives a detailed account of the peoples and places of Central Asia (Bekmakhanov, 1957).

In the Middle Ages, the colonies of the trading republics of Genoa and Venice on the Black Sea coast have been of great importance in spreading knowledge about Asian countries and people in Western Europe. After being driven out of the Black Sea trade by their rival Genoa, the Venetians have turned their attention to other areas. This is the reason for the journey of Nicollo, Maffeo and Marco Polo to Asia in the second half of the 13th century, which has started a new chapter in the acquaintance of Europeans with many eastern peoples.

Marco Polo has spent 17 years in the service of Khan Kublai of the Yuan Mongolian ruling dynasty in China. During this period, he has visited many countries and provinces and mastered the Tatar, Arabic, Persian, and Uyghur languages. He has used this unique opportunity to collect various information that later became the basis for Marco Polo's book. Despite the many facts in the field of economy and trade, Marco Polo has not had only utilitarian goals.

For Marco Polo, the countries and places he had seen have been a wonderful display of the abundance of forms of animal and plant life and the amazing diversity of human races and tribes. This is evidenced by his descriptions of Samarkand, Turkestan cities, and the kingdom (Marco Polo, 1956). The book contains references to the rule of the Mongols in Central Asia, the Kipchaks, and the struggle between Berke and Alau Batyr. Based on the data of Polo and his predecessors, the outline and geographical nomenclature of Central Asia has begun to take shape in a completely new (Bekmakhanova, 1986).

González de Clavijo in his "Travel Diary" describes in detail the biography of Lame Iron, his relationship with Tokhtamys and Edige. Later, Shiltberger has added new information about Temir's son Abu Bakr, Khan Shadibek, Jalal-ad-Din, feudal disputes and palace revolutions, other events in the Golden Horde, and the possessions of Joshi and Sheibani. In the travel book, he is also interested in ethnographic information about the inhabitants of the Bavarian Kazakh steppe and their occupations. The process of accumulation of geographical and historical-ethnographic knowledge about Central Asia and Kazakhstan has been later connected with the era of great geographical discoveries and the colonial expansion of European states (Khil'da, 1994).

As Bekmahanova (1986) points out, in the middle of the 15th century, the historical situation in Europe has changed significantly (Bekmakhanova, 1986). The beginning of the emergence of the elements of the capitalist structure, the creation of large "nation" states, the sea voyages and campaigns of the Portuguese and Spanish, the Dutch, the French and the English has led to the conquest of territories inhabited by peoples of different races, languages and cultures across the seas. The enormous flow of information about these people led to a dramatic expansion of the ethnographic horizon. The science of cartography has developed rapidly.

In 1552, Kazan, and in 1556, with the accession of the Astrakhan khanate to Russia, the road to Western Siberia and the Kazakh steppe was opened, and the south-eastern road to the Zhayik River and the Caspian Sea was opened. England also decided to take advantage of the favorable geographical location of these routes and created a special "Society of Merchants in Search of Unknown Countries, Lands, Islands, States, and even Places Unvisited by Sea."

English artist John Kestle, who participated in the Orinbor expedition, published materials about Russian history in his "Diary". The description of this work in English consists of three parts, the Horde of Khan Abilkhair, all the fauna and flora of the territory of Kishi Yuz, and all the various wealth of minerals are introduced. Kestle was a witness at the Court of Judges in the Palace. One Kazakh, who kidnapped 40 mares, was punished mercilessly and ordered to return the stolen cattle (Castle, 1998). The diary describes Kazakh yurts, military weapons, food (kumyz, sheep, agargan, etc.), women's and men's clothes, Kazakh women's products: earrings, rings, mirrors, combs and others. He also writes about the size of cattle, the meeting of future spouses, betrothal, funeral ceremonies, and national musical instruments.

Speaking about the religion of the Kazakhs, the author reports that there is a small number of mullahs among them, that Islam is mixed with shamanism (Castle, 1998).

As one of the generalized works of the members of the historical and ethnographic expeditions about the Kazakhs, Pallas's work entitled "Travel to various provinces of the Russian Empire in 1768-1784" can be mentioned (Pallas, 1786).



Fig. 1: Tomb (Temir [Iron] Tower)
Source: Pallas, 1786

Near the settlement of Varna in the Chelyabinsk region of the neighboring Russian Federation, there is a complex of roof-shaped tombs called "Kesene Mazar" or "Temir Tower" (Fig. 1). Located 230 km from the city of Kostanay, this complex consists of a 17-meter-high tower, several mounds belonging to the Early Iron and Bronze Ages, and 150 mounds belonging to the later Middle Ages.

After conquering Kazan and Siberia, the Russian state strictly forbade the construction of architectural monuments, minarets, stone mosques and mausoleums accumulated over thousands of years in the conquered regions for 200 years. In 1770, the traveler Pyotr Simon Pallas came to the Orynbor region, took a picture of the mausoleum on paper and left information about the complex for the first time (Pallas, 1786).

In the mentioned work of Pallas, he describes the religious concepts of the Kazakhs and writes that they come to spend the night in this mausoleum.

In the first half of the 19th century, England's military and political goals in the Asian continent, especially in Central Asia adjacent to India, were determined by the struggle for raw materials and influence. Official visits of the "West India" Company and British diplomats to Bukhara, Khiva and Kokan with intelligence duties were an integral part of this policy.

Discussion

Nadirova's monograph represents a significant contribution to our understanding of the religious dynamics in Central Asia. By delving into previously unexplored data sources, the author brings forth fresh perspectives on the social history of main Sufi groups, unraveling the intricate interplay between the conversion to Islam and indigenous religious values. This exploration becomes a pivotal element in shaping the ethnic identity discourse in Central Asia, emphasizing the complex nature of religious influences (Nadirova, 2019:4).

De Wies' meticulous translation and analysis of historical sources spanning the 13th to the 17th century showcase not only deep professional and philological skills but also exemplify original conceptual thinking. The focus on Sufi traditions, groups, and individuals sheds light on their vital role in the historical development of Islam in the region. Researchers of national history and religion will undoubtedly find this study to be an invaluable resource (Nadirova, 2019).

In parallel, the work of Prof. F. Starr and co-authors at the Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus provides a detailed examination of the religious landscape in Kazakhstan. The historical analysis, encompassing Islamization, Russian colonization, and the emergence of Kazakh nationalism, contextualizes the intricate relationship between religion and statehood. The authors' exploration of the Kazakhstani model of secularism, influenced by French and Turkish experiences, adds a layer of complexity, revealing a unique approach to categorizing

religions into traditional and non-traditional, with a preference for the former. The conflict between Hanafi Islam and "popular Islam" influenced by Sufism presents a significant challenge for authorities, highlighting the nuanced religious landscape in Kazakhstan. This discussion offers a rich foundation for further exploration into the dynamics of religion and statehood in the region (Svante, 2018).

The general line of research is established by the first part of the book, which is retrospective in nature. At the same time, the authors conclude that the religious life of the Kazakhs (and other people) in its Islamic history experienced severe pressure first from the Russian authorities, and then from the Soviet authorities. As can be seen from the book, the main issue in this matter is: when and how deeply did the Islamic religion take root in the Kazakh society? In this matter, the authors argue that since the time of Shokan Valikhanov (which was arbitrarily supported by Soviet historiography), the Kazakhs (not the elite, but the mass of the people) were never true Muslims, but were essentially pagans (cult holy places, pre-Islamic holidays, shamanism, etc.). approved the thesis. It cannot be called Islamic when it concerns only the elite. This is especially true of the Haji (pilgrim) lineage, which traces back to the founders and first caliphs of Islam. In general, the authors recognize Kazakh Islam as very unique and a kind of synthesis with theism and Sufism (Svante, 2018).

Regarding the Russian-imperial period of the history of Kazakhstan, the authors adhere to Alcott's concept. According to him, it is based on the idea that Islam was purposefully introduced in the Kazakh steppe by Catherine the Second (the forces of the Tatar clergy against radical Central Asian Islam) as a certain civilizing force. As a result, in the middle of the 19th century, Kazakhs became the object of double Islamization from the north and the south. Researchers consider the establishment of Kazakh nationalism to be the main event of the tsarist era.

They say that among the Kazakh elite, a group of secular intellectuals (Ualikhanov, Altynsarin, Kunanbayev) appeared who turned their backs on the Russian authorities. The second wave shows that even in the 20th century, future alashordans appeared: Bokeikhanov, Baitursynov, Tynyshbaev, Dulatov, Shokaev and others. In the period before the First World War, intellectuals such as Karataev, Seydalin and Lapin entered the political and spiritual life of the region. According to the authors, during the difficult years of the revolution and the civil war, the secular view of the future of the Kazakh society won as an ideological direction. The authors emphasize that this is not the result of forced Bolshevization (Svante, 2018). Analyzing the Soviet period in the history of Kazakhstan and the entire region, the authors recall all known obstacles of the former Soviet system. Summarizing this era, they resort to academic trickery, drawing common conclusions about Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republics, despite their strange and sometimes contrasting cultural, historical, and socio-political context. According to them, the conflict of the next post-Soviet period will be based on religious, ideological and political competition between traditional Hanafi Islam and Salafism.

According to the research results of the mentioned authors, Islamic and Muslim currents and teachings are fighting in the territory of modern Kazakhstan. The republic has also become a field for the expansion of various directions of Christianity. In such a situation, the Orthodox Church becomes an ally rather than a rival of official Islam and its patron state. Here, the authors note the phenomenon of "Christian revival" in Soviet Kazakhstan. Back in 1989, the number of Protestant and non-traditional organizations registered within the framework of only 46 Muslim associations reached 671. In this situation, the Sunni Hanafi direction of official Islam and Orthodoxy are becoming true allies of each other and the state.

Over time, an alarming trend has emerged regarding religious extremism. The penetration and spread of Salafism in the region was the result of strong financial support from foundations and individuals of the Persian Gulf countries. In this context, the mentioned book has a separate section devoted to the growth of the Islamic terrorist threat since the beginning of 2010s. According to the authors, the "contribution" of Kazakh Islamists to ILIM jihadism is about 400 people. As a countermeasure against such trends, the Government, including at the legislative level, acted against non-traditional religions and boldly supported the "traditional" confessions by the state. This primarily means official Islam under the jurisdiction of the

KMDB and the OPS, as well as Judaism, Buddhism, and, to a lesser extent, Protestantism, along with Catholicism suspected of proselytizing.

The authors have a separate chapter to the system of support and protection of state secularism, which has constitutional foundations, many laws and official institutions: the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Muftiyat, the NSC, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, and educational institutions. Summarizing this chapter, the researchers come to the conclusion that the Kazakh model of secularism is not yet fully formed and is undergoing evolutionary development. This model is based on the principles of French republicanism and anticlericalism (as a Soviet legacy), including the model of the Turkish secular model. But the alarming events of the last decade showed that the authorities underestimated the extent of the terrorist threat and tried to give dynamism to the process of forming and strengthening the country's secular system.

Scientists have noted that the Kazakh model of secularism attracts the attention of the West due to the geopolitical importance of this republic for it. In conclusion, the authors compare Kazakhstan with a socio-cultural laboratory that tests the working model of the relationship between the state and religion. But, like influential external (primarily Western) forces, the leading segment of the Kazakh elite is interested in preserving the country's secularism. In this regard, the task of preserving the secularity of the legislation, judicial system and education system becomes a strategic goal.

As for the level of religiosity of Kazakhs and the people of Kazakhstan, it generally supports the liberal character of religion, interfaith peace and interfaith dialogue. We add on our behalf that this is the most precious legacy of the Soviet internationalist system, which our Western colleagues love to criticize (Svante, 2018).

Jeanne Fau de la Croix's book "Holy Lands in Central Asia: A Moral Geography of Pastures, Dams, and Sanctuaries" is devoted to the analysis of the special situation in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, and the three political and social models - socialist (hydroelectric system), neoliberal (free use of pastures) and examines the interweaving of the neo-Islamic (cult of saints - holy places) model. De la Croix's works are based on debates about Islamic values in modern Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries (Jeanne, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this review underscores two key aspects related to the study of the religious landscape in the Central Asian region: Arrival and Consolidation.

Arrival of Foreign Interest

The religious dynamics of Central Asia, spanning the beliefs and practices of its people, as well as the state of Islam, have consistently captured the attention of foreign researchers throughout history. From the Middle Ages to the contemporary era, this interest has been multifaceted, initially driven by the religious curiosity of Christian missionaries and later influenced by the economic motives of European merchants. Today, the sustained attention is attributed to the strategic significance of the region for Western countries. Furthermore, in the era of globalization, where borders and distances lose significance, the region becomes a focal point that brings societies and cultures into closer proximity, transforming even the minute aspects of life and the cultural heritage of ethnic groups into shared global goods.

Consolidation of Western Scholarly Contributions

Western scholars, across various disciplines such as history, anthropology, and religious studies, approach their research on Central Asia with meticulous care. Their contributions stand out not only because of the rigor of their methodologies but also due to their commitment to mastering the Kazakh language. Immersing themselves in the lives of the people, particularly the Kazakhs in rural areas, Western scholars bring a unique depth to their work. This consolidation of expertise contributes significantly to the nuanced understanding of the religious dynamics of the region.

In essence, the enduring interest and scholarly contributions from the Western perspective not only reflect the historical context of foreign involvement but also show the contemporary importance of Central Asia in a globalized world. The meticulous approach of Western scholars enhances the depth and authenticity of the research, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the religious landscape in the region.

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