



## **“Tengrism as a Lived Religion in Kazakhstan and its Role in National Identity Building”**

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### **Author**

**Abigail Scripka**

Glasgow ID: 2486636

Tartu ID: 21101996

KIMEP ID: 20210777

### **Supervisors**

**Nygmets Ibadildin**  
KIMEP University

**Catherine Gibson**  
University of Tartu

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## Abstract

Tengrism has slowly been experiencing a revival in Turkic countries across the world, most notably in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. This thesis seeks to explore the connection between Tengrism in Kazakhstan, national identity, and the theory of lived religion in order to better understand the relationship between this ancient religion and the people. This thesis relies on theoretical and historical frameworks along with an online survey, which was disseminated amongst 18-30 year olds living in Almaty. It consists of multiple choice, scaled, and short response questions. These responses have been coded in order to understand how this data supports, or denies, the framing of lived religion in Kazakhstan and whether or not Tengrism has a role in Kazakh national identity. It additionally explores the themes of promotion of the religion by both the media and potentially the government. The thesis is broken into seven chapters (Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion).

This work is an exploratory study looking to fill the gap in research surrounding the study of Tengrism in both Kazakhstan but also as a cultural phenomenon rather than the traditional research. Through my survey, this research has found the deep-rooted role of Tengrism within Kazakh culture and in the role of identity amongst young Kazakhstanis, additionally has looked at the intersection of Islamic and Tengri traditions and their roles in Kazakhstani national identity.

## Author's Declaration

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources, and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank my amazing friends Emily Coco, Marika Olijar, and Alex Warburton. Emily helped me produce code in R for data analysis. Marika also helped with R coding and was instrumental in providing guidance on the topic of survey writing and methodology for my thesis. Alex helped me navigate the world of Kazakh language references and helped translate the myriad of alphabets and decode traditions. On top of all of this help, they were amazing emotional support through this process. Additionally, thank you to Marika Olijar and Junda Li's survey design and question wording assistance, stemming from their own forthcoming study on LGBTQ+ Attitudes Among Young Online Users in Central Asia.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dear friend who did not make it to Almaty with me, Oliwia Szalas. You are missed dearly and I still think of you often; it's hard to imagine how much better this all would've been with you here. Мен сені сағындым және сені жақсы көремін.

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## Notes on the Text

### Translations/Transliterations

All Kazakh translations have been done by Arailym Seiitkhanova, research assistant, while Kazakh proof-reading and all Russian translations are my own. All Russian transliterations follow the Library of Congress system. Kazakh transliterations are based on the alphabet approved by the Library of Congress. The Latinisation of Kazakh has undergone five alphabet changes, and a new one is still being developed, so I have chosen this one based on personal preferences.

### Place Names

The scope of this thesis will only discuss the territory of modern Kazakhstan. The city of focus, Almaty, underwent a name change in 1921 in the Soviet Union to Alma-Ata, meaning “Father of Apples” but was changed back to Almaty in 1993 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The name will change to reflect the time periods discussed.

### *Natsional’nost’* and *Narodnost’*

*Natsional’nost’*<sup>1</sup> quite literally translates to mean “nationality” as the word would suggest in the original Russian. This term comes from the Soviet Union, and specifically referred to an idea best understood as “ethnicity” in English. *Narodnost’*,<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, is understood to mean the idea of belonging to a nation, i.e. citizenship.

### Kazakh vs Kazakhstani

Similar to the complexity of the terms *russkii*<sup>3</sup> and *rossiiskii*,<sup>4</sup> *ruskii* referring to people whose ethnicity is Russian and *rossiskii* referring to people of any ethnicity who hold citizenship of the Russian Federation. The same differentiation can be seen between Kazakh and Kazakhstani; Kazakh referring to someone whose ethnicity is Kazakh, while Kazakhstani refers to people of any ethnicity who hold citizenship of Kazakhstan.

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<sup>1</sup> Национальность

<sup>2</sup> Народность

<sup>3</sup> Русский

<sup>4</sup> Российский



## Chapter 1: Introduction

In modern Kazakhstan, the state and society are seeking new ways to define and understand their identity. For some young people, this has involved turning back to Kazakh as their primary language, and for other young people, this has involved returning to the religious practices of Tengrism. This thesis explores the connection between lived religion and national identity through the case study of Tengrism in Kazakhstan. It aims to better understand how the revitalisation of religion interplays with the formation of national identity, and how Kazakhs relate their own culture and identity to Tengrism. Due to gaps in both English and Russian-language literature surrounding Tengrism in Kazakhstan, the goal of this thesis is also to better understand how young people aged 18-30 in Almaty relate their identity or the identity of being Kazakh with Tengri or Tengri practices.

Tengrism is an ancient religion with many scholarly and historical interpretations, there is no specific origins of Tengrism and through the course of history, some traditions have been lost along with historical narratives. Despite this, it is believed to have been spread by Turkic people across Eurasia and is focused around a single sky god, Tengri or *Tänri* (also found written in multiple other forms).<sup>5</sup> Tengrism comes from nomadic religious traditions that focus on a balance between nature and people in order to maintain harmony with the Earth. The primary focus is worshipping Tengri in order to maintain this balance. This thesis seeks to understand the relationship between Tengrism and the young adults of Kazakhstan, specifically in Almaty, and how it shapes national identity and tradition, if it does at all. This movement is part of a larger neo-pagan revival movement that is being seen across the former Soviet space (i.e. the Baltics and Russia) where people, in wake of their independence, are seeking to redefine themselves and embrace, or re-embrace, their culture and identity from before the Soviet Union. This thesis seeks to answer the question, “what is the role of Tengrism as a lived religion in national identity building amongst young people in Almaty,

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<sup>5</sup> Marlene Laruelle, “Religious Revival, Nationalism and the ‘Invention of Tradition’: Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (2007): 204.

Kazakhstan?” and to further look into how Tengrism is used to define traditions in Kazakh culture.

The term *Tänri* has also been used in ancient Islamic texts, but has been translated into other languages, like Kazakh, to mean “Allah”;<sup>6</sup> this is also the case for the term *Kuday*<sup>7</sup> which is the Kazakh word for “God.” The words *Tengir* and *Kuday* are used interchangeably within both Kazakh language and society. A great example of this can be seen in this headline from sputnik.kz on President Tokayev’s talks with the President of Iran in July, 2022: “*Neighbourhood Fee - The Right of Tengir*”: *Tokayev Held Talks with the President of Iran*.<sup>8</sup> Given the context of this article, it can be understood that *Tengir* means “God” but this also displays the interchangeability of these words in Kazakh.

The origins of Tengrism are highly disputed, but the first mentions of it are seen around the 2nd-1st centuries BCE, when the “Creator” or Tengri, is said to have originated.<sup>9</sup> However, authors like Abaev argue that Tengrism did not become the principal religion of the ruling class of the steppe until the 6th century, and remained the ruling religion until the 9th century.<sup>10</sup> At this point in history, Islam arrived to the region through missionaries, and soon became the dominant religion throughout Central Asia.

The structure of Tengrism follows most of the common beliefs of world religions – the overworld being a representation of heavenly spirits, Earth being for the people, and the underworld being a dark underbelly of the universe, full of demons and unknowns. The traditions in Tengrism are designed to maintain balance between the three realms and to maintain harmony between nature, man, and the over- and underworlds. Many Tengri practices have been lost to time; scholars believe that what is understood to be Tengri practices in the modern context are not actually Tengrism but co-opted Islamic

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<sup>6</sup> Marlene Laruelle, “ *Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia*. UCL Press (2021): 97.

<sup>7</sup> құдай

<sup>8</sup> Sputnik. ““Ko’rs’i aqysy – ta’n’ir haqysy”: Toqayev I’ran prezi’dentimen kelisso’z ju’rgizdi.” Sputnik Қазақстан, June 19, 2022. <https://sputnik.kz/20220619/toqayev-iran-kelissoz-25629003.html>.

<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is the narrative found in an exhibition at the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan about religions on the territory of Kazakhstan. This exhibition did not have citations. Visited by the author on March 30th, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> N Abaev. “Tengrianstvo As National And State And National Religion Of The Turko-Mongolian People Of Internal Asia.” (2011): 4.

practices.<sup>11</sup> The practices that have survived through to the modern age are associated most strongly with wedding or funeral traditions. In Kazakhstan, some traditions have syncretism with Muslim practices, but many are described as simply “Kazakh traditions”, representing that Tengrism has been lost as a distinct part of Kazakh identity and has been absorbed into the idea of “Kazakhness.” The myths and traditions of Kazakhs are viewed as inherently Tengri myths by Kazakhstanis and are understood as traditions that have been adapted and changed over time. At their root, they remain steeped in their cultural history stemming from when Kazakhs were Tengri and nomadic.<sup>12</sup>

Religion has often found itself at the centre of discourse surrounding national identity. For centuries, religion has helped define which people belong to a state but also operated as a means of sharing common interests and beliefs. Kazakhstan is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, hosting approximately 160 different ethnicities, and just as it is multi-ethnic, Kazakhstan is also multi-religious. According to a 2015 OSCE study, freedom of faith is getting progressively more constricted in Kazakhstan.<sup>13</sup> With the rise of Islamic extremism throughout the region, Kazakhstan seeks to prevent radicalisation among its own people by regulating Islam, something that is also seen in Uzbekistan<sup>14</sup> and Tajikistan.<sup>15</sup> Islam has a precarious position within Kazakhstan, the government is officially secular so there is no state promotion of religion, but in the case of Islam it is in order to prevent radicalisation. In the midst of these concerns, there is Tengrism. Tengrism finds itself as an important part of the contemporary national identity of Kazakhstan, especially in light of modern research and literature written by Kazakh scholars. It has become more strongly associated with the basis of cultural heritage in Kazakhstan, rather than being conceptualised as merely a religion. Islam continues to hold an important role within Kazakhstan, given that it is

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<sup>11</sup> Marlene Laruelle, “ *Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia*. UCL Press (2021): 97.

<sup>12</sup> I B Minuarvo. “On How Tengrism Affected the Ethnic Identity and Culture of Turkic-Mongolian People.” <https://e-history.kz/en/news/show/7720/>.

<sup>13</sup> Sergey Marinin. “State Regulation of Religion in KazaKhStan: Reconsideration of Approaches.” (April 2015): 4.

<sup>14</sup> Office of International Religious Freedom. “Uzbekistan 2021 International Religious Freedom Report,” June 2, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/uzbekistan/>.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Lemon. “Transforming Tajikistan: How the Rahmon Regime Turned Religion into a Site of Struggle.” OpenDemocracy, September 4, 2018. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/transforming-tajikistan-islam/>.

the majority religion and in turn the rest of the world views Kazakhstan as a Muslim country. These outside observations do not take into account the historical and cultural influences of religion within Kazakhstan which inherently intertwines the relationship between being Kazakh and being Tengri but can also include the role of Islam in that relationship.

Narratives surrounding Tengrism in Kazakhstan have recently become more and more popular, not only in terms of online publications and books, but also through state museum narratives surrounding the history of Kazakhstan. While visiting the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan on March 30th, 2022, my guide took me to a portion of the building titled “Religions on the Territory of Kazakhstan.” Listed under “Zoroastrian religions” was the sub-section “Tengrism,” where the exhibit outlined the historical existence of Tengrism in Kazakhstan. It cites Tengrism as being one of the, if not *the*, first religions on the territory of modern Kazakhstan, establishing a long historical narrative of the religion’s presence in Kazakhstan. It also states that Tengrism is a historic belief of the Ancient Turks and discusses the name and historical context of Tengri in all ethnic Turkic minority groups that exist across Central Asia, Siberia, and Russia.

Tengrism today has maintained popularity in Mongolia and in parts of southern Russia through similar revival movements, as Tengrism is said to have existed in this region before the local people converted to Islam, Buddhism, or other religions.<sup>16</sup> The unifying factors surrounding Tengrism for Kazakhs have largely become commercialised since the collapse of the Soviet Union, with events like “Tengri Fest,” a festival that displays all Tengri cultures and shares their own kinds of worship, becoming largely popular throughout the Turkic world. Despite what appears to be a widespread appreciation of Tengrism, the revitalization of Tengrism as a religion in Kazakhstan is often viewed as a small intellectual movement amongst urban elites.<sup>17</sup> The Tengri revival movement we are seeing is occurring in republics and countries that were

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<sup>16</sup> Marlene Laruelle. “Religious Revival, Nationalism and the ‘Invention of Tradition’: Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan.” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (June 2007): 204.

<sup>17</sup> Marlene Laruelle. *Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia*. UCL Press, (2021): 97.

converted to Islam and continue to have a largely Muslim population and because of this, Tengrism is often positioned in opposition to Islam. Whether intentionally or not, the existence of one puts the other in competition for influence.

Many countries that were once a part of the Soviet Union now focus on the promotion of local languages and cultures and resisting Russian as a lingua franca, promoting both nation-building and national identity. This is seen in the context of Russian being removed as a state language in Georgia,<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> Ukraine (Article 10),<sup>20</sup> Lithuania,<sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> Latvia,<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> and Estonia.<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> The government of Kazakhstan, while working towards promoting its own culture, maintains a close relationship with the Russian Federation, and retaining Russian as a state language can be understood as one such effort to keep the country in Russia's good graces. The relationship between identity and Tengrism for the people of Kazakhstan, however, is very different from the relationship between identity and language. The revival of Tengrism plays upon the idea of shared traditions and culture, whereas language is essential for communication as an aspect of identity. Language focuses on a means of communication that is unique for people of Kazakhstan; the use of the Kazakh language holds an important role in the practice of Tengrism as well, as practices and traditions all have Kazakh names. The Kazakh language functions as a broader unifier for people in Kazakhstan and is not related to identity in the same way that Tengrism is. People of all ethnicities speak Kazakh, but Tengrism is viewed as the religion of Kazakhs.

Indeed, the best example of the revival of Tengrism can be seen in Kyrgyzstan, where the far-right party, Mekenchil, has aligned itself with Tengrism as a means for

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<sup>18</sup> Russian was removed as a second language in 2010 and was replaced with English.

<sup>19</sup> Sutherland, JJ. "Georgia To Change Official Language To English." Accessed July 20, 2022.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2010/09/27/130156334/georgia-to-change-official-language-to-english>.

<sup>20</sup> Oficijne internet-predstavništvo Prezidenta Ukraïni. "Konstituciâ Ukraïni - Rozdil I." Accessed August 14, 2022. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/constitution/konstituciya-ukrayini-rozdil-i>.

<sup>21</sup> Lithuanian became an official state language during the Soviet Union on January 25, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Ina Druviete. "Linguistic Human Rights in the Baltic States" 1997, no. 127 (January 1, 1997): 167.

<sup>23</sup> Latvian became an official state language during the Soviet Union on May 5, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Ina Druviete. "Linguistic Human Rights in the Baltic States" 1997, no. 127 (January 1, 1997): 167.

<sup>25</sup> Estonian Language Act of 1995. Rannut, Mart, *Language Policy in Estonia 2004* but in the Soviet Union Estonian became the official language on January 18, 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Ina Druviete. "Linguistic Human Rights in the Baltic States" 1997, no. 127 (January 1, 1997): 166.

promoting “ethnic purity” within the country. Tengrism has become highly politicised in Kyrgyzstan, which draws more political attention and attention from scholars to Tengrism there rather than in Kazakhstan. Scholarship on Tengrism holds a political interest through the lens of state-building in Kyrgyzstan which directly contrasts this thesis which is focused on the cultural study of Tengrism in Kazakhstan. Tengrism is not only prevalent in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, additionally, in the early 2000s, Tengrism began institutionalising in Russia through the development of the “Tengir-Ordo Association for the Preservation of the National Heritage (*Fond sokhraneniia natsional'nogo naslediia Tengir Ordo*).”<sup>27</sup>

In the wider context of the former Soviet space, Kazakhstan is not the only country experiencing a revival in what we would call “neo-pagan” movements. Similar movements are being seen throughout the Baltics<sup>28 29 30</sup> and Russia,<sup>31</sup> making Kazakhstan an important and interesting case study in this wider context as these examples are focused on European pagan traditions which, while also focused on nature in many instances, contrasts greatly to the Turko-Mongolic and nomadic traditions that are seen in Tengrism. This thesis seeks to explain the importance of Tengrism in Kazakhstan and its reciprocal relationship with Kazakh national identity. In this chapter, I will discuss the historical context of Tengrism. This thesis will then further examine the role of Tengrism in culture, tradition, and national identity in Kazakhstan, seeking to understand the relationship between them, if there is one. Tengrism alone has been understudied in English-language scholarship, with most of the literature coming from Marlene Laruelle, who focuses almost entirely on Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent, on Tatarstan. Her work also predominantly focuses on Tengrism as a

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<sup>27</sup> Ina Druviete. “Linguistic Human Rights in the Baltic States” 1997, no. 127 (January 1, 1997): 166.

<sup>28</sup> In Estonia this movement is called *Maausk*. Jenni Rinne *Searching for Authentic Living through Native Faith: The Maausk Movement in Estonia*. Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations 122. Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> In Latvia this movement is called *Dievturi*. Mats Lindquist “Giving Voice to the Nation : The Folkloristic Movement and the Restoration of Latvian Identity,” (2003): 187.

<sup>30</sup> In Lithuania this movement is called *Romuva*. Michael Strmiska “Eastern Religions in Eastern Europe: Three Cases from Lithuania.” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 44, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 52.

<sup>31</sup> Victor A. Shnirelman “Perun, Svarog and Others: Russian Neo-Paganism in Search of Itself.” *Cambridge Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (1999): 21.

political phenomena or an aspect of right-wing parties in Kyrgyzstan rather than the cultural relationship of Tengrism with the people.

Additionally, Kazakhstan lends itself to being an interesting case study given its multiethnic background. Ethnic Kazakhs are the ethnic majority now in the country, but this was not always the case. With all of this in mind, this thesis aims to answer three questions: How are 18-30 year olds in Kazakhstan, specifically Almaty, engaging with Tengrism as part of their identity and how can this be understood through the theoretical framework of lived religion? Is Tengrism being used in national identity building in Kazakhstan by the government and state media? How does the resurgence of Tengrism help explain traditions in Kazakh culture?

This thesis will be broken into seven different chapters: Introduction, Framing the Research Subject: Religion and National Identity in Kazakhstan, Theoretical Foundations, Methodology, Results, Discussion, and Conclusions. The second chapter, "Framing the Research Subject: Religion and National Identity in Kazakhstan" functions as a literature review. This chapter will cover the history of Kazakhstan, the role of religion in the country, Tengrism, and the concept of "Kazakhness." The third chapter, based on my understanding of the history and people of Kazakhstan, will focus on three main theories: lived religion, national identity, and tradition. Lived religion is a growing theory in religious studies that posits that religion is a part of culture, tradition, and identity rather than just a spiritual practice. National identity has been widely studied; my approach will instead specifically focus on religion as a part of national identity in a secular state, allowing me to deconstruct the relationship between religion and national identity with lived religion. Additionally tradition, religion, and identity are all socially constructed ideas, the use of this theoretical framework allows for these ideas to engage with each other. The fourth chapter is the methodology chapter, in which I will explain my question formation, research methods, and how I chose participants for my study based on the information I collected in the first three chapters. The fifth and sixth chapters will focus on the results of my study. The results section will focus on the quantitative aspects of my results (i.e. number of respondents, quantitative trends, etc.) and the discussion chapter will examine these trends more closely through short answer

questions and will look at how the responses interplay with my theoretical foundations. Finally, chapter seven will reflect on the work done for this thesis, what could have been done better, and what directions this work could take in the future, along with reflections on recent developments in the field of Central Asian studies given the war in Ukraine. This chapter will look particularly at how Russian imperialism has continued to affect our field of study and how, in our approaches as foreign scholars of Central Asia, we can work to separate ourselves from these Russian imperialist ideas and uplift voices from the region. This thesis is focused on an independent and modern Kazakhstan and while it is important to use the Soviet Union to help establish historical context, in the analysis and understanding of the survey and research, I aim to focus on Kazakhstan outside of the context of the Soviet Union and the country's relationship with the modern Russian Federation. This thesis will give a cohesive understanding of the cultural role of Tengrism in Kazakhstan and how it is utilised through lived religion for national identity building and the invention of "tradition."



## Chapter 2: Framing the Research Subject: Religion and National Identity in Kazakhstan

This literature review seeks to contribute important historical, cultural, and theoretical understanding to the role of Tengrism in modern Kazakhstan. There are many layers to be understood before one can analyse the identity and religion of the country, so I have provided a lengthy literature review to best outline these ideas. Understanding Kazakhstan as a modern and independent nation is my first priority. The idea of the Kazakhstani nation has been described in many ways, some applauding the ethnic diversity of the country, which hosts people of over 160 different ethnicities, but also creating difficulty for the government to construct a national identity without excluding different ethnicities while focusing on Kazakh identity. Through major events since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the national identity of Kazakhstan has been able to be manipulated by the government to better assert their own goals of a cohesive nation. Kazakhstan now seeks to embrace its historical roots from before the Soviet Union, which includes religion and Tengrism to a considerable extent.

This thesis seeks to further understand the role of Tengrism in the national identity of Kazakhstan by framing it through three questions. How are 18-30 year olds in Kazakhstan, specifically Almaty, engaging with Tengrism as part of their identity and how can this be understood through the theoretical framework of lived religion? Is Tengrism being used in national identity building in Kazakhstan by the government and state media? Finally, how does the resurgence of Tengrism help explain traditions in Kazakh culture? These questions have been formulated through the literature and seek answers through a survey. Each of these questions can be approached from different perspectives and the survey questions formulated give respondents the opportunity to give answers from these different perspectives. With these questions in mind, I hope to contextualise my research in the scope of Central Asia and the former Soviet Union.

## 2.1 Identity and Religion in Kazakhstan

The people of Kazakhstan were historically nomadic. Under the rule of the Russian empire from approximately 1731 until 1917 and self-rule as an autonomous republic of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic between 1917 and 1932, Kazakhs continued to practise their nomadic traditions and their own religions. Despite attempts at the Russification of Central Asia during the period of the Russian Empire, involving the forced use of the Russian language and removal of unique cultural features, the people of Central Asia were “allowed” to maintain nomadic traditions given their physical distance from Moscow.<sup>32</sup>

However, after the formation of the Soviet Union, Central Asian peoples were subjected to restrictions on religious and nomadic practices. The suppression of all religions and religious practices in Soviet territory formed the basis of a multiethnic atheist state. Atheism was essential to the goals of the Soviet authorities for ideological unity amongst the people of the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> Smolkin outlines that the Bolsheviks had to decide between “ideological purity or effective governance, cultural revolution or social stability,”<sup>34</sup> meaning that the presence of religion would further complicate these decisions. Religion would be abolished across the region, but the influence of atheism would spread beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and would become ingrained in the ideology of Communism.<sup>35</sup>

The second major change to the way of life for Kazakhs and Kyrgyz under the Soviet Union was the end of their nomadic lives, forcing them into sedentarisation. This forced transition to a sedentary lifestyle allowed Soviet authorities to have direct control over the people of Central Asia by fostering the establishment of regional and local governments and organisations. The importance of the sedentism of the nomads can be understood through the historical context of religious practices in nomadism in comparison to sedentary lifestyles. Nomadic people tend to adhere to religions that

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<sup>32</sup> Alun Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin* (2020): 137.

<sup>33</sup> Victoria Smolkin, *Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (2019): 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

focus on the Earth and nature, whereas sedentary communities tend to practice religions that are more focused on community and the self, such as Islam.

Islam was introduced by Muslim missionaries to the region before sedentarisation and as Kazakhs became sedentary they began to shift their religious practices to Islam and incorporated Islamic traditions and beliefs into their personal practices. Focusing on Tengrism in order to maintain balance with nature, while still important, was no longer the sole focus of religious beliefs as sedentary society brings different struggles. Given that Islam was introduced while Kazakhs were still nomadic, it greatly affected the way that Islam was practiced. Islam in Central Asia, takes a different form than is practiced on the Arabian peninsula and other parts of the world; Edward Said discusses at length how Islam was constantly shaping and changing as it moved across the world.<sup>36</sup> This approach to understanding Islam in Central Asia is important as aspects of Tengrism may have incorporated into Islam when it was introduced to Kazakhstan, resulting in a more relaxed form of the religion than what is seen in other Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia.

In the late Stalinist period, the Soviet government relaxed/reversed its policy of state atheism, instead emphasizing a state-sanctioned version of Islam to its Central Asian republics. While many Central Asians, Kazakhs among them, were practicing Muslims prior to Soviet control, the state preference for Islam did not allow for practice of other Central Asian religions, which had been similarly repressed during the period of state atheism. Stalin created organisations to control the spread of Islam and to co-opt the religion, such as the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) and Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM).<sup>37</sup> Many scholars argue that Stalin may have institutionalized Islam in Central Asia to establish better relationships between the Soviet Union and the increasingly powerful and wealthy Middle East through strong religious ties.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said "Islam Through Western Eyes," January 2, 1998.  
<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/islam-through-western-eyes/>.

<sup>37</sup> Eren Tasar. *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991*. (2017): 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 8.

In the Soviet Union (1936-1991), we can see the people's growing discontent with Kazakhstan's position in the Soviet Union. The 1986 uprising in Alma-Ata, known now as *Jeltoqsan* (Kazakh for "December"), is remembered by some Kazakhstanis as a rejection of Russian imperialism and Soviet colonialism and governance. Though this discontent had always existed, it only grew stronger with time and came to a head during these events. There were additional uprisings throughout the Soviet era by Kazakhstanis, but the memory of this specific event is still fresh to this day and marked a turning point in Kazakhstan in terms of popular support for independence from the Soviet Union.

### **2.1.1 Road to Independence and Onwards**

Kazakhstan's road to independence has been long and complex. After living under the rule of the Russian Empire, power shifted hands and suddenly Kazakhs were living under Soviet Rule. The gradual Russification of Central Asia during the period of the Russian Empire was only implemented in full force during the Soviet Era.<sup>39</sup> This Russification, in terms of religion, can be seen in the historic city centre of Almaty, now known as the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen. The development of Almaty during the Russian Empire loosely followed the Kremlin model seen in Russia, specifically the building of a Russian Orthodox Church in the city centre, now known as Zenkov Cathedral in 1907. Through the establishment of a religious building in the centre of the city, Orthodox Christianity was being asserted as a religion of the Russian Empire and permanently established its importance.

Then, the Soviet Union moved in for influence. First, the Soviet government ordered the dissolution of all religion in the territories of the Soviet Union in order to form an atheist state.<sup>40</sup> Second, the Soviet government sedentarised nomadic groups in Central Asia, forever changing the way of life for Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. The presence of religion would further complicate these decisions. Religion was abolished across the

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<sup>39</sup> Ulrich Hofmeister. "Civilization and Russification in Tsarist Central Asia, 1860–1917." *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 419

<sup>40</sup> Victoria Smolkin. *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*, (2019): 22.

region, but the influence of Atheism would spread beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and would become ingrained in the ideology of Communism.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of the sedentarisation of the nomads can be understood through the historical context of religious practices and nomadic versus sedentary lifestyles. Sedentarisation allows for the establishment of bureaucracies and allowed the Soviets to impose direct control over the people of Central Asia, which could not have been done without sedentarisation. Nomadic groups lost their autonomy through sedentarisation and the structure of their political society would forever change. In the 1930s, Kazakhstan was subjected to a famine by Stalin's government that killed so many ethnic Kazakhs that they became a minority within Kazakhstan. With these deaths came huge losses to Kazakh culture, and Kazakhs believe that these deaths also brought the demise of many Tengri traditions as their practitioners were killed by the famine. .

The sedentarisation of Central Asian nomads facilitated the instigation of many Soviet policies in order to keep track of populations more effectively. Sedentarising Kazakhstan began with the visits of the "Red Caravan" around the Steppe visiting nomadic groups. The Red Caravan was a group sent by the Soviet government in Moscow whose role was to observe nomadic groups and report back to the Kremlin on society, development, and culture within these groups. The Red Caravan "acted as an inspecting, instructing and galvanising arm of the regional Communist Party executive."<sup>42</sup> These teams presented the Kremlin with reportat that painted an image of "shortage, destitution and need"<sup>43</sup> to further outline the importance of the sedentarisation of Kazakhs, implying that sedentarisation would actually lead to a "drastic improvement"<sup>44</sup> of quality of life for the Kazakh nomads, which in turn would give the Soviet government the opportunity to establish their power in the region. Further, the Red Caravan saw the potential for crop-growing on the steppe and needed a way to remove the nomads from these lands. Ultimately, the Soviet government's

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<sup>41</sup> Victoria Smolkin. *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*, (2019): 22.

<sup>42</sup> Alun Thomas. *Nomads and Soviet Rule*. Bloomsbury Publishing, (2019): 135

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 136.

understanding of Central Asia only came from the orientalist library of the Russian Empire, which was not an accurate depiction of Central Asians, especially their more rural communities, and enacted sedentarisation according to its biases. Their lack of knowledge was not their issue; it was the knowledge that they had and the way they chose to interpret the lives and practices of the nomadic people of Central Asia.

In the late Stalin period, religion was re-instituted in the Soviet Union, but the focus of these efforts in Central Asia would not be on the multiple religions that had been practiced before state atheism, but on Islam alone. Stalin's religious organisations would become known as the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) and Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM).<sup>45</sup> No one has been able to discern with certainty Stalin's reason for this reintroduction of religion into the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup> While there are many theories, two largely dominate. The first posited that institutionalizing Islam in Central Asia would allow for the Soviet Union to establish a better relationship with the increasingly powerful and wealthy Middle East<sup>47</sup>, allowing the Soviet Union to procure more investors through a strong religious relationship. The second one proposed that the move was a reaction to the Second World War, as there were rising fears that a secular society could lead to fascism and that reinstating religion would allow the people of the Soviet Union to integrate it as part of their Soviet identity in a controlled way to prevent this.<sup>48</sup> This period was short-lived. Khrushchev came into power in 1953 and reintroduced religious suppression in the Soviet Union.<sup>49</sup>

Returning to the notable event that would help lead to this separation from the Soviet Union, *Jeltoqsan Korterlisi*<sup>50</sup> the 1986 uprising in Almaty. This uprising was sparked by Gorbachev's dismissal of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, Dinmukhammed Kunaev. Kunaev was an ethnic Kazakh and viewed as a national hero amongst Kazakhs, but he was replaced by Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic

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<sup>45</sup> Eren Tasar. *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991*. (2017): 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Robert G Wesson. "The Soviet Interest in the Middle East." *Current History* 59, no. 350 (1970): 214.

<sup>48</sup> Eren Tasar. *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991*. (2017): 12.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Желтоқсан көтерілісі; December uprising

Russian (or Chuvash) from the Russian SFSR. The protests lasted a total of four days and what initially began as student protests would turn into thousands of people marching on Brezhnev Square (now Republic Square), the Soviet government would send OMON forces and the situation would escalate into a violent conflict resulting in thousands of casualties and with over two hundred people dead. Each year this event is remembered in Kazakhstan as a reminder of the atrocities committed by the Soviet Union. Jeltoqsan serves as an example of the rise of nationalism in Kazakhstan; a key part of the transformation into an independent Kazakhstan that rejects its Soviet past.

The very recent events of *Qandy Qantar*<sup>51</sup> in 2022 have led to a new wave in the understanding of the modern state of Kazakhstan by both Kazakhs, Kazakhstanis, and scholars of Central Asia. The current president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, has responded to the protests, mass violence, and torture of citizens by removing most of the old regime of Kazakhstan which had been in power since the Soviet period and was kept in power by former president Nursultan Nazerbayev. This act has made him wildly popular in Kazakhstan as it marks a major step in the removal of Russian and Soviet influence in the government of Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan, young people are enthusiastic about reclaiming their identity and language, and women can be seen wearing traditional Kazakh jewellery and headpieces and donning tattoos in ancient Turkic runic writing. The image of modern Kazakhstan has changed greatly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, being championed by the youth of the country, but their religious beliefs are also changing alongside their image. The government of Independent Kazakhstan has long been viewed by both the people and scholars as a secular country and the government does not oppress the religious beliefs of the people of Kazakhstan. With the relationship between the state and religion in mind, Tengrism is often viewed by Kazakhs as the original religion of the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and any nomadic peoples in the region, extending as far as Mongolia. While it is not a religion exclusive to Kazakhstan, the revival of the religion has taken on interesting forms in Kazakhstan, specifically in regards to the aesthetic importance of Tengrism amongst the youth; for example, many

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<sup>51</sup> Қанды Қаңтар; Bloody January

people have tattoos of the petroglyphs of Tengri himself, on their bodies. These aesthetic choices show some kind of devotion to Tengrism but can be perceived as a devotion to the representation of Kazakhstan rather than religious devotion, showing an aesthetic tie between Tengrism and Kazakhstani identity.

## 2.2 “Kazakhness”

The idea of Tengrism as a form of “Kazakhness” will be another major theme throughout this thesis. It is important to outline the idea of “Kazakhness” in order to better understand how Tengrism interplays with this idea. Kazakhstan faced a unique problem after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as they were the only former Soviet republic where the “titular nationality” was considered an ethnic minority alongside Russians (with ethnic Kazakhs making up 6,534,616 people in 1989 and ethnic Russians making up 6,227,549 people).<sup>52</sup> To redress this, the state worked to promote the idea of “Kazakhness” and focused its effort towards bringing the titular nationality to the forefront. These efforts are reflected in the promotion of the culture of the Kazakhs which is also demonstrated in promoting the Kazakh language. The distinction between Kazakh and Kazakhstani arose as a response to these efforts, which is briefly discussed in the Notes section. This differentiation is relevant because of the relationship between Kazakhs and the State, being that Kazakhstani belongs to the ideas of the government and citizenship, whereas Kazakh belongs to the ideas of ethnicity and *natsional’nost’*.

### 2.2.1 The Government and “Kazakhness”

In his 1999 book *In the Current of History*<sup>53</sup>, Kazakhstan’s first president and “Elbasy”<sup>54</sup> Nursultan Nazarbayev devotes an entire chapter to the topic of national identity, along with chapters regarding “Cultural Perspective”, the Kazakh steppe, and

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<sup>52</sup> Laruelle, Marlene. “The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness and Transnationalism.” *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia. Dimensions, Dynamics and Directions*, (2014): 1.

<sup>53</sup> В Потоке Истории

<sup>54</sup> Елбасы, Kazakh for “leader of the nation”



further important cultural points for Kazakhs. This book was written in 1999, after Nazerbayev's third presidential victory. Within the chapter "About National Identity"<sup>55</sup> he begins by talking about the role of Islam in Kazakhstan, stating that "The role of Islam for Kazakhs is significant and is becoming an important feature of our national consciousness, especially after years of distortion of the role and meaning of this great and humanistic religion."<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup> He goes on to discuss how Orthodoxy was imposed onto the Kazakhs under the Russian Empire and then atheism likewise under the Soviet Union. He makes claims to Islam being the religion that can help the people of Kazakhstan find their identity, but in the same breath stating that religion should not be all there is to Kazakh culture. It is important to note that the government of Kazakhstan is officially secular; Nazarbayev even mentions within this book that Islam has become highly fragmented and contentious across the world and to align the government with Islam could be dangerous.<sup>58</sup> He recognises the importance of a religion in the formation of a *narod*<sup>59</sup> but does not want the modern Kazakh state to be focused on religion.<sup>60</sup> Nazarbayev notes the difficulties of this task given the multiethnic nature of the country and the huge variety of religions within the country.

The tradition of leaders writing the history of their country is notable across Central Asia, from the current President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, writing his 2001 book *The Tajiks in the Mirror of History: From the Aryans to the Samanids*, to former President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow's several books ranging in topics from the horses of Turkmenistan to writing the history of the Silk Road. While Nazerbayev's book can be understood to be written in the context of Nazarbayev's private opinions, he was the president of Kazakhstan at the time it was written. This book does not seem to present the official opinions of the government but

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<sup>55</sup> О Национальной Идентичности

<sup>56</sup> "Роль ислама для казахов значима и приманите этого становится важной характеристикой нашего национального сознания, особенно после долгих лет искажения роли и смысла этой великой и гуманистической религии. В то же время необходимо ясно видеть, что религия не является сегодня доминирующим способом национальной идентификации. Причин тому много, в том числе и исторических."

<sup>57</sup>Nursultan Nazarbaev. *V Potoke Istorii*. (1999): 182.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>59</sup> See Notes on the Text

<sup>60</sup>Nursultan Nazarbaev. *V Potoke Istorii*. (1999): 187.

as it was written by the president, it would have a great impact on the people from the perspective of their leader.

Nazarbayev's nephew Kairat Satybaldy used his position and wealth in the government to promote Islam, specifically Salafi Islam. This is reflected in his joint funding, with Aslbek Musin, of a group of radical islamists who attacked police in Aktobe in 2011.<sup>61</sup> Then there is the case of Tazabek (Mukhamedzhan Tazabek), a Youtuber coined a "Kazakh Islamic Celebrity" by The Diplomat.<sup>62</sup> As of October 2020, he was running a talk show called "Talim<sup>63</sup> Trend" on state sponsored television where he expounds upon the beliefs of Islam and comes from a group called *Aity*s which practices oral poetry sung with dombra music and was long funded by the Nur Otan party, the party of the first president Nursultan Nazerbayev, which was renamed Amanat after the January protests. Tazabek also has a series of Youtube videos that expound upon the "Kazakh way" and reinforce both conservative Islam and dissuading viewers from speaking out or acting against the government.<sup>64</sup>

These cases demonstrate that while the government of Kazakhstan is officially secular, it allows its members to directly fund Islamic groups and allows for preaching Islamic beliefs on state-sponsored television. In the instance of Tazabek, his channel expresses the idea that being Muslim can be conflated with being Kazakh, and the funding of Islamic groups by government officials can be understood as confirming this stance. This state-related sponsorship of Islam exists in opposition to the idea that the government of Kazakhstan runs a secular state and opens the doors for its ability to promote Tengrism. Given this state-related sponsorship, it makes it harder to find evidence of the government supporting Tengrism as it would exist in opposition to their related support of Islam. The next section will examine existing narratives.

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<sup>61</sup> Open Dialog Foundation. "The Kazakhstan Insider: Understanding Social and Political Risks of Kazakhstan," (May 2012): 4.

<sup>62</sup> Issatay Minaurov, "Understanding Tazabek, a Kazakh Islamic Celebrity," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 27, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/understanding-tazabek-a-kazakh-islamic-celebrity/>.

<sup>63</sup> Kazakh word for "education" or "upbringing"

<sup>64</sup> Issatay Minaurov, "Understanding Tazabek, a Kazakh Islamic Celebrity," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 27, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/understanding-tazabek-a-kazakh-islamic-celebrity/>.

## 2.3 Narratives of Tengrism in Kazakhstan

In Zira Nauryzbayeva's seminal book *The Eternal Sky of the Kazakhs*<sup>65</sup> she discusses the history of Kazakh traditions. There has been a growing trend in Kazakhstan towards the publication of books on the topic of the history of Kazakhstan, focusing on cultural traditions, myths, and religion. The book is aimed at the general population, putting it in direct contrast with academic works on the topic of Tengrism, and as it was published in Russian it gave me insight into information that is available to people in Kazakhstan. With the audience in mind, Nauryzbayeva believes that Tengrism is the traditional and historical religion of Kazakhs. Throughout the book, Nauryzbayeva goes into great detail extracting the references to Tengrism that exist in Kazakh national identity and Kazakh traditions. She begins with a critique of how Kazakh traditions and spirituality have been commodified by pop culture, seemingly existing only for tourism, saying "Traditional spirituality today is an object of speculation for the "fathers of the nation"<sup>66</sup>, it is an "exoticism for sale to foreign tourists, it is a field of experiments for pops and vanguardists, a commonplace object of scornful criticism for journalists boasting of their national nihilism."<sup>67</sup> <sup>68</sup> She further asserts that the national emblem of Kazakhstan represents themes of Kazakh culture that can be derived from Tengri traditions and goes on to discuss the fact that those who designed the emblem were not aware that they were imbuing this imagery with Tengri mythos and ideology. I believe, however, that despite their integration of these things being unconscious, in fact, the use of these symbols represents how rooted Tengrism is in the history and identity of Kazakhstan. Nauryzbayeva asserts that this state building is conscious, but as will be discussed in the preliminary findings section of this paper, this does not seem to be the

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<sup>65</sup> "Вечное Небо Казахов"

<sup>66</sup> This statement could be understood as a reference to the first president, Nursultan Nazerbayev.

<sup>67</sup> "Традиционная духовность сегодня —это предмет спекуляции для "отцов нации", это выставленный на продажу иностранным туристам экзотикум, это поле экспериментов для попсы и авангардистов, это дежурный объект для насмешливой критики журналистов, бахвалящихся своим национальным нигилизмом."

<sup>68</sup> Zira Naurzbaeva. *Večnoe nebo kazahov*, (2013): 143.

case, as many respondents feel that the state does not have anything to do with the contemporary Tengri identity.

Naurzbaeva asserts in her book that she does not believe Tengrism to be a pagan religion, but its own branch of Islam and that Muslims and Christians alike recognise Tengrism - impressing upon its relevance in Kazakh culture.<sup>69</sup> In turn, she claims that Tengrism is an essential part of Kazakh culture which surpasses the role of religion in a society, and argues that calling Tengrism a religion would be a disservice. Naurzbaeva states that when speaking to Christians, Kazakhs would say the phrase “*Shanyrakka kara!*”<sup>70</sup> which means “look at the *shanyrak!*” (the *shanyrak* is the design seen at the top of a Yurt, traditional in Kazakh and Kyrgyz culture), alluding to the idea that the same *shanyrak*, and in turn its history and its relationship with the family, which is passed down generation to generation must be observed.<sup>71</sup> To demonstrate how Tengrism exists beyond the scope of religion, Naurzbaeva asserts that Christians understand this phrase to mean “Be aware of where you are, respect and observe the customs of this land,”<sup>72</sup> suggesting that the beliefs of the *narod*<sup>73</sup> will always trump the religious beliefs of a people. This supports the idea that Tengrism is more than a religion to Kazakhstan, but a part of their identity in the terms of grassroots nation building.

Further, looking at the relationship between Islam and Tengrism, Naurzbaeva notes the tension between the two groups - “a part of ethno-cultural elite is trying to oppose Islam with Tengrism as the primordial religion of Kazakhs.”<sup>74</sup> Yet while there may be conflict between religious groups out of a sense of wanting influence, that does not necessarily mean the two faiths are actually in conflict. Though Islam is a newer religion in Kazakhstan, many view Islam and Tengrism as separate but intertwined in their cultural practices in weddings, funerals, and other traditions. Both Muslim and Tengri traditions and holidays co-exist, but while Muslim holidays and traditions are often

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<sup>69</sup> Zira Naurzbaeva. *Večnoe nebo kazahov*, (2013): 144.

<sup>70</sup> “Шаңыраққа қара!”

<sup>71</sup> Zira Naurzbaeva. *Večnoe nebo kazahov*, (2013): 144.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>73</sup> Народ

<sup>74</sup> Zira Naurzbaeva. *Večnoe nebo kazahov*, (2013): 146.

labelled as religious, Tengri traditions and holidays are often explained as being “Kazakh traditions.”

What Naurzbaeva does not take into consideration is that the beliefs of Tengris exist in opposition to the politics of Kazakhstan. Despite every day believers of Islam, Christianity, and Tengrism existing in harmony, like with any religious group there are outspoken believers of Tengrism who are seen as politically opposite to Muslims due to their more “radical” beliefs as a progressive environmental movement. Tengris believe that the Tree of Life<sup>75</sup> is the source of all life on Earth, so it is therefore their moral duty to protect both the Earth and the environment, and this is shown in their political beliefs as outspoken environmentalists, often seen advocating for climate action within the country. While I have found the work of Naurzbaeva to be enlightening as an understanding of Tengrism by a Kazakh author and insight into important Kazakh cultural aspects, her work limits a more critical approach to identity. The work is historical, which allows the reader to understand ancient cultural traditions in Kazakhstan, but fails to acknowledge that these symbols and beliefs shaped Tengrism and not necessarily vice versa. The study of religion as a part of culture becomes particularly difficult as often it is a matter of determining whether the egg or the chicken came first. It is difficult to determine if cultural beliefs in Kazakhstan have exclusively stemmed from Tengrism or if Tengrism developed the way it did through nomadic beliefs across Central Asia, but this book asserts the former.

The works of Marlene Laruelle offer important insight into the modern study of Tengrism and its relationship in Kyrgyzstan, but does not investigate relationships people have towards Tengrism other than Kyrgyz nationalist movements.<sup>76</sup> Laruelle examines Tengrism from the perspective of an “identity revival” in Kyrgyzstan and how that affects the political relationship between Tengrism and the people.<sup>77</sup> Her work yields insight into this political relationship in Kyrgyzstan but yields little information in regards to the cultural or religious relationship of Tengrism and people in Kyrgyzstan. The

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<sup>75</sup> Zira Naurzbaeva. *Večnoe nebo kazahov*, (2013): 147.

<sup>76</sup> Aurélie Biard & Marlene Laruelle. ‘Tengrism’ in Kyrgyzstan: In Search of New Religious and Political Legitimacy. (2010): 56.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 56.

additional obstacle involved is that there are very few works written on Tengrism that focus on the culture and practices and almost none that focus on the cultural role of Tengrism in society. Seeking to redress this balance, my research via online questionnaire seeks to fill these gaps in literature that exist in understanding the broader role of Tengrism in society.

This literature review has raised several concerns towards understanding Tengrism as an aspect of identity in Kazakhstan. There is a strong clash between local scholars and Western scholars in understanding the importance of Tengrism and the role that it plays in people's religious beliefs in the region, exemplified by the cultural focus of local scholars versus the political focus of Western scholars. Local authors like Nauryzbayeva assert that Tengrism is inherently a part of Kazakh identity, that its symbols and beliefs are ingrained in the state and politics and people. This idea can be further understood through Foucault's interpretive theory where he states that things can only become "real" when they have found their place in language and culture and develop a wider meaning.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, understanding traditions and cultural practices in Kazakhstan will also bring light to the role of Tengrism in national identity in Kazakhstan. The role of tradition in Kazakh culture is understood through Foucault's interpretivist theory as it is up to the respondents to interpret the role of Tengrism in their culture and society.

Unlike Central Asian scholars, Western scholars like Laruelle assert that Tengrism is a political tool for people in the region, though her work focuses on Kyrgyzstan and not Kazakhstan. The works of Marlene Laruelle on Tengrism in Kyrgyzstan offer a baseline understanding of the religion and focus more on its role within identity revival through Tengrism rather than on the aspects of Tengrism which can be applied to identity. Focusing on the political aspects of Tengrism takes away from the very real connections that people have with the religion and how they can relate it to their own beliefs and identity. This study seeks to address the gaps in the cultural study of Tengrism in Central Asia, particularly, Kazakhstan. It is important to also

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<sup>78</sup>Mark Bevir and R A W Rhodes. "Interpretive Theory," (2000): 9.

address that understanding Tengrism in the context of Kazakhstan does not seek to understand culture in Kazakhstan as a whole as it is more nuanced.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Foundations

My theoretical framework is based around the ideas of lived religion, national identity, and the idea of tradition. This thesis intends on bringing new perspectives to the study of lived religion when interplaying with national identity and Tengrism in Kazakhstan. These ideas will shape each other both through the eyes of outsiders, but also in the eyes of the state, Kazakhs, Kazakhstanis, and Tengris. The cultural heritage of Kazakhstan is intertwined with Tengrism, and the question of whether people are aware of the deep relationship between the two allows for the perfect environment to study lived religion as it presses upon the importance of studying lived religion in order to understand a society but also to further understand the role of traditions in this relationship.

### 3.1 Lived Religion

Lived Religion is a theoretical framework within religious studies that looks beyond the scope of religion, practices, and scripture. This theory was developed in the last 50 years with rising global secularism to better analyse the lasting cultural effects of religion on populations. My focus on lived religion will come preliminarily from Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari's "Theorizing Lived Religion: Introduction."<sup>79</sup> Drawing from this work, I intend to bring a new approach to the study of lived religion, which is highly focused on lived religion in the United States. By using this approach, I will be looking at how Tengrism features in the everyday lives of Kazakhstanis beyond those who are spiritual and pious. Lived religion looks specifically into the everyday practices of religion and the role that religion can hold in a society. Tengrism is often integrated into society as being a part of being culturally Kazakh and part of the cultural practices of being Kazakh. Understanding this allows us to come to the conclusion that culturally, Tengrism holds a large role in modern Kazakhstan, therefore making lived religion as a part of my theoretical framework is particularly relevant. Lived religion also allows for the

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<sup>79</sup> Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari, "Theorizing Lived Religion: Introduction," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35, no. 2 (March 2020): 159.



exploration of the intersection of religious creativity and culture, which allows for a deeper and more well-rounded understanding of the interaction between religion and everyday life.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, lived religion is not just focused on the idea of religion existing in life, but additionally how religion can engage every part of life, not just institutions and religion drawing in people.<sup>81</sup> The theory does not come without its own limitations and weaknesses, however. A large critique of lived religion is that it predominantly focuses on places where people are deemed “wounded or broken, amid disruptions in relationships, because it is in these broken places religious media become most exigent”<sup>82</sup> which signals why the study of lived religion is focused heavily on the United States. The United States is frequently highlighted for having religious disruption of the state and a strong relationship between religion and policy-making but is also a religiously divided country. Focusing on Kazakhstan will go against the grain of this critique as religion is not intertwined with the government in Kazakhstan, a secular state and there are not large religious rifts supported by media within the country. Additionally, lived religion is “intersubjective”<sup>83</sup> meaning that when working with participants who may be more religious, they may present a form of reality that is heavily biased towards their own beliefs. But this also represents the opposite, where subjects who are not religious, or even anti-religion, will show extreme bias.

Given that Tengrism is largely incorporated into the idea of being Kazakh, whether directly or indirectly, Tengrism is inherently a player in the formation of the Kazakh and Kazakhstani national identities. Most scholarship on the interplay between religion and national identity building in Kazakhstan looks to Islam, while my research will be a part of a new and growing field of analyzing Tengrism and its effect on national identity in Kazakhstan. Focusing solely on Islam underplays the relevance that Tengrism has had *on* Islam in Kazakhstan, especially since many people within the country believe that the Islam that they practice is highly influenced by their cultural heritage and

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<sup>80</sup>Orsi, Robert A. “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2003): 172.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 173.

Tengrism, as will be seen in the results section of this thesis. This, again, alludes to Edward Said's work discussing how Islam changed as it moved, and will be discussed later in chapter 6.<sup>84</sup>

With all of this in mind, applying lived religion to Kazakhstan will help provide a new analysis of Tengrism's interconnectivity with society, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs. Its application also contributes a novel approach to the study of Tengrism and its role in Kazakh culture and traditions while taking into account the extent that respondents identify with Tengrism.

### **3.2 National Identity**

Discussions and ideas of national identity have recently become more complex, beyond the existing complexity of having borders drawn by colonial powers and having ethnic minorities face disenfranchisement. This section seeks to understand national identity in religion, looking beyond borders and ethnicities and how national identity can interplay with religion. As scholars we are asked to engage with national identity through different narratives. This thesis is focused on Tengrism and choosing to understand Tengrism in the context of a religious revival. Understanding national identity through religion is not a new theory, but the discussion of a religion being a central part of a country's titular ethnicity's culture and identity is an approach we have not seen before in Central Asia. As this thesis is not focusing on a state religion, as there is none in Kazakhstan, or Islam, which is the majority religion in Kazakhstan, Tengrism allows us to analyse the idea of national identity from a different religious perspective.

I will be looking initially at Brubaker's "Religion and nationalism: four approaches<sup>85</sup>" in order to dissect the differences between nationalism and religion but to also understand the interplay between the two further. Brubaker identifies four different approaches in his work, the first discussing religion and nationalism as analogous ideas,

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<sup>84</sup> Edward W. Said. "Islam Through Western Eyes," January 2, 1998.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/islam-through-western-eyes/>.

<sup>85</sup> Rogers Brubaker. "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches": Religion and Nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (January 2012): 2.

stating that some may conflate the idea of nationalism to almost be a kind of religion.<sup>86</sup> He goes further to state that nationalism, in many ways, is the religion of the people.<sup>87</sup> Tengrism is often not conflated with being a religion that is actively practised because the beliefs, traditions, and customs of Tengrism are inherently intertwined with the idea of being Kazakh and part of the national identity of Kazakhstan, making it to be its own kind of religion through the lens of nationalism. The second approach looks at religion as a “cause of explanation for nationalism.”<sup>88</sup> The third approach is religion as “imbricated or intertwined” with nationalism.<sup>89</sup> This approach looks at how religion and nationalism explain each other, that they have never existed without the other and organically formed together.<sup>90</sup> This asserts the idea that nationalism and religion formed together for similar purposes and will help explain the myths of Kazakhstan that are believed to be rooted in Tengrism. The fourth approach is religious nationalism as a distinctive kind of nationalism.<sup>91</sup> This approach distinguishes between state-sponsored nationalism and nationalism deriving from religion. This approach can be seen as useful in understanding the role of Tengrism in everyday society.

I also find that it is useful to employ Brubaker’s approach from “Ethnicity without Groups” but also the classic work of Anderson’s “Imagined Communities” in further understanding groupism and how groups can form within the context of national identity. Brubaker impresses upon the issues grouping by themes like race and ethnicity, and that he wants to break these understandings of “ethnic conflict” and other types of groupism.<sup>92</sup> This approach is helpful in understanding how “religious conflict” may not have anything to do with religion, this helps us when looking at the relationship between Tengrism and Islam. In the case of Anderson, his chapter “Official Nationalism and Imperialism” can help us understand two sides to the Kazakh identity, one side looking

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>87</sup> Rogers Brubaker. “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches\*: Religion and Nationalism.” *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (January 2012): 3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Rogers Brubaker. “Ethnicity without Groups.” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 43, no. 2 (2002): 166.

at imperialism from Russia but also from the influence of the Arab invasion bringing Islam to the region.<sup>93</sup> He discusses at length how imperialism affects nationalism and how it creates groups within a nation, while nationalism aims to unite these groups.<sup>94</sup> This serves as a great example given the multi-ethnic background of Kazakhstan and the history of imperialism in the country.

Additionally, I will be looking at Heather Rae's "State Identities and the Homogenisation of Peoples" to focus on her theory of "pathological homogenisation" in state formation.<sup>95</sup> This refers to the state defining a homogenous identity for the people of the state. Rae challenges the assertion that the elites of a nation have the ability to form the national identity of the state and claims that since the end of World War II and the war in Yugoslavia it is dangerous for the state to try and control the identity of the people.<sup>96</sup> These events highlight that when the state is able to control identity, it allows for the state to wage wars within their own borders and abroad in order to assert homogeneity of the state.<sup>97</sup> With this in mind, Rae then discusses this approach in international relations and how in modern renditions of understanding the state, theorists and scholars have begun to realise that the state is composed through social, political, and cultural practices, and that these practices are not defined by the state as these practices predate the state.<sup>98</sup> It is important to note that this argument cannot wholly apply to this research as there is little evidence as to the state defining the importance of Tengrism as it is predominantly a grassroots movement.

Andreas Wimmer's work "Why Nationalism Works and Why it Isn't Going Anywhere" focuses on breaking down the sentiment of French president Macron that nationalism is the death of patriotism.<sup>99</sup> Patriotism is inherently structured through the idea of nationalism, without one the other cannot exist.<sup>100</sup> The role of nationalism is a

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<sup>93</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (1983): 83

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>95</sup> Heather Rae, *State Identities and the Homogenisation of Peoples* (2002): 14.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>99</sup> Andreas Wimmer. "Why Nationalism Works," (June 27, 2022): 24.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2019-02-12/why-nationalism-works>.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

large force in understanding national identity, as the idea is formed through nationalism. If national identity is measured through tradition and patriotism then the state inherently perpetrates nationalism through holidays and other traditions.<sup>101</sup> Mylonas' work "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know" discusses how "national attachments emerge and transform in places where a state did not systematically pursue nation building."<sup>102</sup> In the case of Kazakhstan, given the multi-ethnic nature of the country, it is hard to develop national identity and nationalism without excluding groups but still these attachments and relationships with culture and Tengrism have emerged over time in the national identity and understanding, whether it be through imagery or myths surrounding the nation.

In terms of examining the results of my questionnaire, this theory could be applied if the results show an overwhelming support of Tengrism but believe that the state does not support it in the way they would like, or that the state even downplays Tengrism in its narratives. It will also take into consideration the forming of groups and nations from a bottom-up perspective if respondents feel the government of Kazakhstan does not promote Tengrism as a part of Kazakh identity.

### 3.3 "Tradition"

Another important aspect to national identity and religion is the idea of "tradition" which will be discussed at great length in the discussion section of this thesis. In terms of understanding what is tradition and what isn't, I will be looking at Eric Hobsbawm to understand the idea of "invented tradition."<sup>103</sup> He presents the idea that traditions are "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period- a matter of a few years perhaps- and establishing themselves with great rapidity."<sup>104</sup> For Kazakhs, tradition is extremely important to both their culture and society, especially when looking at smaller

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<sup>101</sup> Andreas Wimmer. "Why Nationalism Works," (June 27, 2022): 30.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2019-02-12/why-nationalism-works>.

<sup>102</sup> Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor, "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know," *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (November 2021): 118.

<sup>103</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and T. O Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*, (2012): 1.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 1.

communities that are homogenous. Within the context of this research, the ideas of traditions and practices are presented to participants in order to understand if practices from Tengrism affect life and culture in Kazakhstan.

The ability to define a tradition as ancient belongs to both the people and the government. Whether or not these traditions are actually ancient, however, is disputable. Many holidays and traditions, such as *Nauruz*, which is known as “Persian New Year” stem from Zoroastrian traditions but were not allowed to be practised during the Soviet Union, this could be understood as a tradition interrupted by Soviet rule, but also may be presented in independent Kazakhstan as a means of national identity building. Taking into account the idea of tradition and the role that Tengrism has in the understanding of tradition in Kazakhstan is not to be ignored. Many Kazakhs associate different traditions with Islam, Tengrism, the Soviet Union, and to their nomadic roots, depending on where they are from, their backgrounds, and their education this can change how they perceive these different traditions and whether or not they tie these traditions to their religion and identity will also be important to understand.

Additionally, Kazakhstan finds itself situated in a place of fear, something that is discussed in “Modernity of Tradition” by Rudolph Lloyd Irving is a “fear of cowardice.”<sup>105</sup> This book discusses the case of India under British rule but can also be applied to independent Kazakhstan as global fears towards radical Islam grow. Understanding the construction of tradition in Tengrism in Kazakhstan can also be understood and practices being ascribed to Tengrism out of fear, there is discrepancy as to where some traditions may come from, many are also seen in Islam, but this could be a result of fear of the idea of radicalisation.<sup>106</sup> This alone could also explain the role of tradition in Kazakhstan.

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<sup>105</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. (1984): 160

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 161.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

While there is much more to be said on all of the topics covered in this literature, it is important to narrow the focus of this research. With my literature in mind, I will further apply these ideas to dissecting the responses of my survey and looking for similar language surrounding identity. I will discuss the specific survey questions I have used in section 3.2.1 but from this literature I have established four overall themes to formulate questions. The first theme being focused on Tengrism as an aspect of identity, as to both how people perceive themselves but also to what degree they believe Tengrism is an aspect of Kazakh identity and national identity. The second theme is to understand Tengrism in a more traditional sense, through traditions and prayer and what roles that plays in personal beliefs and identity, but it is important to also take personal piety into consideration when examining this. The third theme looks at Tengrism as an influence on Kazakh identity instead of focusing on it being an inherent part of it. The fourth and final theme seeks to discover if there is, in the opinions of my participants, promotion of Tengrism by the government, seeking to see if there is an active promotion.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

This thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative data and methods through an online survey about Tengrism as a lived religion in Kazakhstan. Through this survey participants were invited to express their personal opinions and ideas about the national identity of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan and how that identity relates to Tengrism, allowing participants to express their feelings about people who identify as Tengri. With a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions, participants could adopt a range of participation: from answering multiple choice questions to expanding on their answers in the short answer question.

As discussed above in the review of literature, most studies of Tengrism do not take into account the overall focus on Tengrism and do not take into consideration the personal beliefs of people, as it mostly focuses on the impact that Tengrism has on politics and narratives surrounding national identity. Drawing on theoretical work on lived religion, I seek to incorporate this perspective by focusing on the personal beliefs and practices of individuals. This will be the first public opinion study in urban Kazakhstan, specifically in Almaty, which asks about Tengrism and identity. The goal of this research is to treat Tengrism as the central topic of identity in Kazakhstan, to understand the goals and beliefs of Kazakhstanis, but to also engage with young people's views on identity in Kazakhstan.

### **4.1 Methods**

The principal method used in this thesis is an online survey, which contained both multiple choice questions and a short answer section. Some multiple choice questions had a corresponding short answer question, in which respondents could elaborate on their multiple choice answer. While my initial goal was to conduct in-person interviews, the January 2022 protests and violence, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic made in-person interviewing ethically precarious. I decided to make the switch to a survey for a few reasons. The first reason being that this focus on Tengrism as a part of identity is the first of this kind of work and using a survey allows for it to be both



exploratory and descriptive work. The second reason is the fact that I lived through the January protests in Kazakhstan and had to be evacuated to the United Kingdom with no immediate housing prospects. Survey methods also have several advantages. One of the biggest advantages of surveying is that it allows me to collect data from a larger number of respondents and generates data that I can consult well into the future. It is impossible to talk to every single person in Almaty between the ages of 18 and 30, but through a survey, I am able to gather a better idea as to what the attitude of this age group is towards Tengrism. Though I make no concrete claims toward representativeness, I claim that interviews may have been more biased given that the sample size would have inherently been smaller with less geographical spread. Surveys are also only a snapshot of a community, in this case, Almaty, so the opinions of 85 respondents cannot be indicative of a city of 1.77 million people.

This study recognises the limitations, which will be discussed in 3.4, of the use of surveying in the context of this research. Given the restrictions due to COVID-19 and unrest in January here in Kazakhstan, these methods and methodology suit the aims, scale and restriction of this project, while also bringing the benefit of a larger sample size which is important for this exploratory study. Through interviewing I would not have been able to reach this scale of respondents. By reaching more people, I have been able to gather responses that will inform future research.

## **4.2 Participants and Field Work**

The target population of my survey was Kazakhstanis between the ages of 18-30 living in Almaty, including the city and surrounding region. The 18-30 demographic in Kazakhstan is famously dubbed the “Nazerbayev Generation” given that they grew up under the rule of the *Elbasi*.<sup>107</sup> In their 2020 study, Barbara Junisbai and Azamat Junisbai find that this demographic of Kazakhstanis differ greatly from the generations before them.<sup>108</sup> Specifically, they found that this demographic is less likely to be

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<sup>107</sup> Barbara Junisbai and Azamat Junisbai. “Are Youth Different?: The Nazarbayev Generation and Public Opinion in Kazakhstan.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 3 (May 3, 2020): 253.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 254.

concerned about issues like welfare, nepotism, and inequality.<sup>109</sup> By focusing on the Nazarbayev generation, the study captures the influence of a political leader.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, using a closed age group allowed me to focus on participants who are constructing their own identity in the context of Kazakhstan not being in the Soviet Union. However, using this population has a limitation: this study cannot compare the generations that came before and after of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Junisbai and Junisbai reference that childhood is extremely important for development of attitudes, whether it be personal or political, and that this age group allows us to capture a snapshot of the effects of Nazarbayev's rule but also a snapshot of a generation that grew up in an independent Kazakhstan which is seeking its own power and identity.<sup>111</sup> With all of this in mind, the 18-30 age group makes for an interesting case study for understanding Tengrism in Kazakhstan, from both social and cultural standpoints. Young Kazakhstanis of this age group will give us their prior and posterior attitudes towards Tengrism, in their childhood and adulthood respectively.

Additionally, it is important to note the socio-political environment of Almaty in the context of this survey. As people living in Almaty were surveyed, it raises the issue that Almaty is not representative of Kazakhstan, given the concentration of wealth and political power (this can be seen in the number of Oligarchs as well) in the city. The average monthly salary in Kazakhstan is 174,000 KZT<sup>112</sup> <sup>113</sup> whereas the average monthly salary in Almaty is 440,000 KZT<sup>114</sup> <sup>115</sup> alone showing the huge gap between average Kazakhstan-wide society and Almaty society. Zira Nauryzbayeva discusses the idea that Tengrism is brushed off as a religion for the educated elites of Kazakhstan. It is

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<sup>109</sup> Barbara Junisbai and Azamat Junisbai. "Are Youth Different?: The Nazarbayev Generation and Public Opinion in Kazakhstan." *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 3 (May 3, 2020): 256.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

<sup>112</sup> Approximately 365 USD

<sup>113</sup> Agency of Statistic of the Republic of Kazakhstan. "Kazakhstan Average Monthly Wages - July 2022 Data - 2000-2021 Historical." Accessed August 15, 2022.

<https://tradingeconomics.com/kazakhstan/wages>.

<sup>114</sup> Approximately 924 USD

<sup>115</sup> Salaryexplorer. "Average Salary in Almaty 2022 - The Complete Guide." Accessed August 13, 2022. <http://www.salaryexplorer.com/salary-survey.php?loc=1244&loctype=3>.

hard to discern if there is an elite bias, so respondents were asked to give their opinion on this matter.<sup>116</sup> While this is important, many of the respondents are also not from Almaty originally, which further blurs the lines between elites and non-elites.

#### 4.2.1 Survey Design and Questions

The survey consisted of 26 questions, 21 of which were multiple choice or scaled and 5 of which were short answers. According to the requirements by the University of Glasgow ethics committee, the survey was hosted on Microsoft Forms. The survey was circulated via social media and email listservs i.e. via tweets, instagram posts and stories, facebook posts, and email listservs. The survey was circulated by me, friends, and colleagues from throughout the Almaty region. Additionally, the survey was bilingual, with both Kazakh and Russian language options. The survey was published in a single format with Kazakh written first and Russian second. My choice in doing this is reflective of the official language policy of Kazakhstan but also of showing respect as a foreign researcher: many researchers conduct their research in only Russian.

Please see Appendix 1 for the survey questionnaire, but I will elaborate on questionnaire design here. The first 7 questions focus on demographic data about my participants. The first two questions serve as exclusion criteria, first asking whether or not the participant lives in Almaty, answering “No” or “prefer not to answer” will automatically end the survey. The next question asked for participants’ age: those younger than 18 and older than 30 were taken to the survey end page. From here on the entire survey was completely optional to fill out without the survey ending for them. The next 5 questions were designed to explore the demographic image of my respondents asking for gender, *natsional’nost’*, region, their level of education, and their religion(s).

The next fourteen questions focused on collecting data about attitudes towards Tengrism and religion. The first three questions pertain to the respondents’ knowledge of Tengrism and the respondent’s beliefs. They are designed to gauge how religious respondents are, their familiarity with Tengrism and also allows for the self-identification

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<sup>116</sup> Zira Naurzbaeva. *Večnoe nebo kazahov*, (2013): 126.

of my respondents as being Tengri. These are to determine an image of how religion, or Tengrism, fits into the life of the respondent.

The next five questions pertain to perceptions of the role of Tengrism in Kazakhstan. The questions are designed to discern if there is a rift between Tengrism as a part of greater Kazakh identity or if it is believed that movements surrounding Tengrism are actually just youth movements. Specifically the question, “To what extent do you agree that Tengrism is only for the “urban elite”?” this question directly stems from literature that has implied that the revival of Tengrism is understood as a topic for the “urban elite” and that outside of these urban spaces, people do not ascribe to Tengrism as a movement or religious ideology.<sup>117</sup> Though these questions may introduce bias through social desirability bias.<sup>118</sup> The questions also work to understand if respondents believe that Tengrism has a larger role in the country and identity, overall.

The next four questions focus on the practices and traditions of Tengrism in the scope of people’s lives and how those traditions and practices are used. This section gives participants the opportunity to share their practices and beliefs. The final questions are designed to engage with each other so that while someone may believe that Tengrism does influence Kazakh identity, it allows the same respondent to state that they believe it might only have a little influence, scaling the results of the survey to harness more variation.

Next is the short answer section of the survey where five questions are asked. These questions are looking for explanations as to why people would believe that Tengrism has a strong influence or otherwise on Kazakh identity and to see what people do know about Tengrism, what they think they know, and maybe even share where they know these things from. There has been great contention in the literature over whether or not national symbols and traditions in Kazakhstan come from Tengrism, prompting me to ask “Briefly explain what aspects of Tengrism are or are not important to Kazakh identity?” This question hones in on how Tengrism has been incorporated into everyday

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<sup>117</sup> Marlene Laruelle. “Religious Revival, Nationalism and the ‘Invention of Tradition’: Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan.” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (June 2007): 206.

<sup>118</sup> Kwiksurveys. “Response Bias: Types and Prevention Methods.” *KwikSurveys* (blog), October 8, 2018. <https://kwiksurveys.com/blog/survey-design/response-bias>

culture but even into symbology by the state. Meanwhile “Do you think your government promotes Tengrism? Briefly explain why or why not?” seeks to understand if people believe that the government does promote Tengrism as a part of culture and identity.

Many survey questions in regards to religion have been adjusted from the works of Steven Brooke in his paper *Sectarianism and Social Conformity: Evidence from Egypt* as his work also focuses on religious climates.<sup>119</sup> His questions also focus on allowing respondents to give ranged responses towards different statements made about their religious beliefs. I found this approach particularly useful as a survey with only short answer questions would be too long to complete and might not touch on all of the topics of interest within the survey. Additionally, I used Olijar and Li 2022’s working paper on their survey on LGBTQ+ attitudes among young online users in Central Asia in order to help develop my questions in regards to demographics.

#### **4.2.2 Participants**

In total there were 85 respondents to my survey, including those who were excluded after the first and second questions, while this is a good number for an independently circulated survey, it is hard to say that this number is valid or representative of Almaty. According to the law of large numbers<sup>120</sup>, if this survey was performed a large number of times, or in the case of a survey, filled out a large number of times, then it is more representative of a population. Because of the number of respondents I cannot make generalised claims, but it still adds to regional knowledge about both Kazakhstan and Tengrism. Represented in three tables below are the demographic data for my 85 respondents, all information will only be presented either as a whole or in groups for sake of anonymity. Below is a table of the demographic data of my respondents (Table 1), to note there are 9 respondents who were over the age of 30, the survey would end for them immediately in this instance but is taken into consideration into the total count of respondents. There does not appear to be any

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<sup>119</sup> Steven Brooke “Sectarianism and Social Conformity: Evidence from Egypt.” *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2017): 851.

<sup>120</sup> Geoffrey Grimmett, and David Stirzaker. *Probability and Random Processes*. 2nd ed. (1992): 6.

major trends in the age of respondents, there seems to be overall a decent spread of ages, but also noting that there are no respondents at the age of 30.

### Demographic Data

Age	Gender	Oblast'	Education	Religion
18	3 Female	29 Abai	1 Middle school or below	2 Islam 23
19	3 Male	23 Akmola	6 High school (vocational)	1 Orthodox Christianity 2
20	9 Other Gender Identity, Not Listed Here	2 Aktobe	2 High school (general)	7 Tengrism 3
21	3	Almaty	28 Technical Post-Secondary Education E. College (less than 4 years)	2 Atheism/ Agnosticism 25
22	1	Western Kazakhstan	1 Bachelor's Degree	23 Other 1
23	5	Zhambyl	2 Specialist's Diploma	2 Prefer not to answer 4
24	7	Zhetysu	1 Graduate School (Master's or Doctoral)	17
25	8	Karagandy	3	
26	5	Kostanay	1	
27	1	Pavlodar	1	
28	2	Turkistan	5	
29	3	Ulitau	1	
		Eastern Kazakhstan	1	

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

Next is gender, I gave the option for participants to refer to themselves Male, Female, or as an unlisted gender, which interestingly constituted 3.7% of responses (see Table 1). Having this option, and having respondents choosing it, speaks to the nature of Almaty being “cosmopolitan” and the comfort in choosing that response as this survey has been run by an independent American researcher. This aside, a majority of respondents are women. I attribute this majority female response to the fact that a

majority of people who follow me on social media are women, and that when others would share my survey, it may have been shared by other women.

The last point of demographic data to be discussed is what *oblast'*<sup>121</sup> or region the participants are from. All respondents who have filled out this section currently live in Almaty but in terms of the number of respondents, of the 85 respondents, 28 of them noted that they do not live in Almaty, ending the survey for them and 2 indicated not wanting to say, which also ended the survey for them (see Table 1). A majority of respondents were from the Almaty region, with significantly less people responding from other regions. There are 17 regions in Kazakhstan and there are only responses from 13 regions. Notably there is only one response from the Western Kazakhstan region but none from the Mangystau and Atyrau regions. Additionally, the second highest number of responses came from the Akmola region which hosts the capital city, Nur-Sultan.

Within the demographic data it can be seen that the respondents are likely exposed to diverse and “cosmopolitan” ideals as they live in the largest city in Kazakhstan and are exposed to tourists and foreigners

#### **4.3 Data Analysis**

The expected time to complete the survey was expected to be approximately 13.5 minutes while the average time it took to complete in practice was calculated by Microsoft Forms (4 minutes and 44 seconds). This is likely because only approximately 30 respondents per question engaged to some extent with the short answer section, though if a respondent filled out the short answer sections they were more likely to respond to all of the questions. The quantitative data in this thesis was analysed using R by running a regression on different indicators so that I may extrapolate data in different ways.

In terms of the short answers section of the survey, I translated from Russian into English while Arailym Seiitkhanova translated Kazakh responses into English. All data has been analysed after being translated, though I referenced the original language of

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<sup>121</sup> Област'

the short answers to insure that the specific language being used was taken into consideration (i.e. referring to specific practices that only have Kazakh names).

#### **4.4 Limitations**

Firstly, this study only focuses on Almaty city and region, which on average has a higher percentage of people who are educated, exposed to foreigners as it is a hub for expats and foreign students in the region, and are more likely to have been educated abroad or have spent time abroad. This alone makes the study of Almaty not representative to all of Kazakhstan as both Almaty and Nur-Sultan are more representative of “elites.” Additionally, by focusing on an urban community, it prevents me from engaging with pastoral and rural communities which may have a higher likelihood of practising Tengrism or having explicit traditions related to Tengrism. Rural communities would offer more substantial understanding of Tengrism and its traditions given that it is focused on the relationship between man and the Earth, but these communities are less likely to have access to laptops or smartphones that would allow them to participate in this survey as well.

Given that the sharing of my survey was done via social media, it can be assumed that a portion of respondents are people who may know me personally. While my survey was then shared by them and by other people on twitter who are unrelated to me, my research, and my master’s programme, it still allows for bias and can skew the results. But as my survey was often shared under “viral tweets” it allowed me to reach a wider audience.

Using the format of a survey allows me to collect data from a wider pool of participants, but as an exploratory study, it gives me a framework and raises further questions to focus on in later work. The use of a survey has allowed me to form a preliminary understanding of the impact of Tengrism in Kazakhstan which can be applied to future work.



Conference feedback<sup>122</sup> has expressed the concern about the reliability of the data as participants may only be referring to things as being Tengri in my survey because I have given them the word Tengrism. This has raised concern that people are trying to “explain away” their identity to something that they find more suitable than Islam. This is the concern that participants may have been primed by the overall topic of the survey being about Tengrism, already centering their focus on Tengrism, whereas if asked questions in a different format (i.e. “What religion do you think that many Kazakh traditions come from?”) may have yielded results not relating traditions and beliefs to Tengrism but potentially somewhere else. Additionally, degrees of syncretic practices involving Islam and Tengrism may also be points of contention, but no literature has teased out contention within Tengri communities.

I translated all survey questions and responses. The Kazakh survey questions were translated into Kazakh by Arailym Seitkhanova, who read both the original English and Russian to assist in her translation. I did my best to translate the survey responses that were in Kazakh myself first (given my level of B1), but Arailym always checked my translations to ensure consistency and accuracy of translations. Another language consideration, as discussed in the introduction chapter, is the use of the word “*Tengir*” in Kazakh is typically interchangeably used to mean “God” and not just “Tengri.” I believe that this misunderstanding was mitigated through the use of Kazakh and Russian, as the words “God” and “Tengri” are not interchangeable in Russian, reducing the possibility of misunderstanding but also does not account for if any of the respondents do not speak Russian. Based on the responses, I believe that the separation between “God” and “Tengri” was made clear.

This study is preliminary in its form, as the field of Tengrism is highly understudied and this work is aiming to fill a gap in research on the topic. This study enables future research endeavours that could include rural areas in Kazakhstan and could additionally look at the comparative case of Kyrgyzstan or Mongolia.

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<sup>122</sup> Note: Preliminary results of this dissertation were shared on June 23rd, 2022 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan at the Central Eurasian Studies Society’s annual regional conference as part of a religion in Eurasia panel. Preliminary results were given in the form of a presentation, no paper was published. The feedback referenced here was given at this panel.

## **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

This research was authorised by the Ethics Committee in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow. All data from the survey was anonymised and held on an encrypted hard drive. This data will be held for 10 years as per University of Glasgow's Code of Good Practice and Research on this encrypted hard drive. Data will be destroyed on June 16, 2032.

Data was anonymised, if discussing the specific responses of a participant, no demographic data was used and they were assigned a letter to represent them. All demographic data was presented in the form of percentages and only in relation to the same data set, making it impossible to differentiate what demographic data could be paired to identify someone.

Data was anonymised through generalisation and merging data. For example, instead of each value standing on its own, all data was grouped (i.e. 29 respondents identified as female) to prevent respondents from being able to be identified through responses. Short answer responses were considered individually and not factored in other data (i.e. gender, where respondent is from, etc.). The wording of questions, given the nature of discussing religion, personal beliefs, and identity being very personal, was determined by examining past surveys focused on the theme of religious identity similar to the approaches of Steven Brooke as discussed earlier.

## Chapter 5: Results

From June 16th, 2022 until July 16th, 2022 my survey was live for responses; in this time I received a total of 85 responses. Approximately 30% of written responses were completed in Kazakh, but some responses in Russian also included Kazakh terminology or phrases. This chapter will give an overview of results, look at trends seen in responses, and present empirical data from the short response section. The discussion chapter (Chapter 6) will be discussing these responses using the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3.

### 5.1 Multiple Choice Responses

All multiple choice questions allowed for respondents to skip any questions and included the option to select “prefer to not respond.” It is important to note that not all respondents responded to every single question; some short answer questions would be left empty.

#### 5.1.1 Demographic Trends

As discussed in section 3.2.2 “Participants”, I have been fortunate that my respondents have been overall relatively diverse in terms of age within the age group. By focusing on 18-30 year olds I am ostensibly focusing on the young adults of Almaty. These are people with access to the internet, higher education, foreigners (whether it be tourists, classmates, or friends) and are living in one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Central Asia. Their personal beliefs and perceptions of their country are going to be entirely different from the beliefs of someone from a village, but many young people do feel they are in touch with both themselves and their culture.

#### 5.1.2 Religious Trends

When asking respondents what their religion was, this question specifically allowed for the selection of more than one religion. This was allowed given the nature of people’s relationships with religion and the goal was to permit people to identify with

more than one religion. There was only one response for “other” and that was indicated as being Protestantism so the “other” section is omitted in this graph.

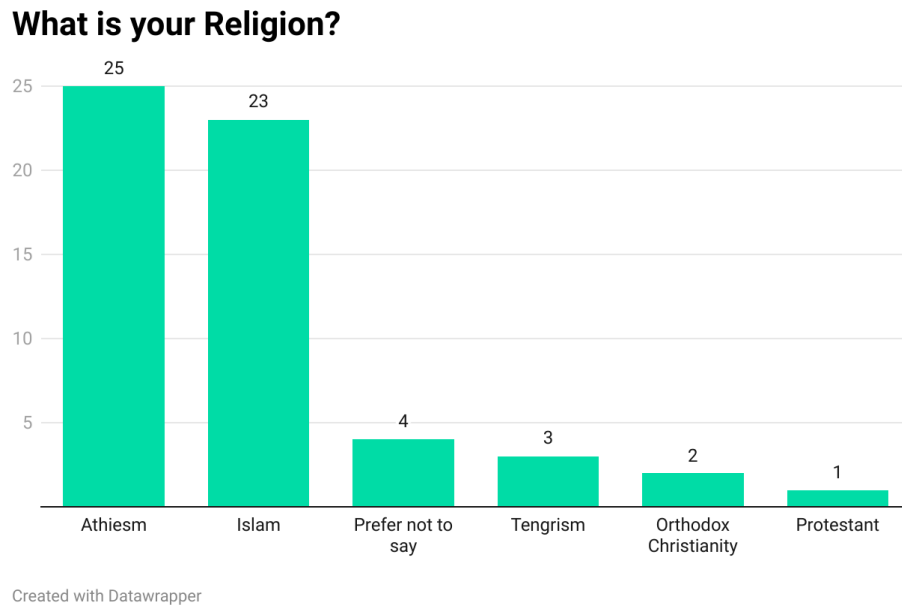


Chart 2

(Bar graph showing the self-identified religious beliefs of respondents)

The note relating that respondents were able to respond to more than one religion yielded a few interesting results which add to the elements of Tengrism being an aspect of lived religion. It was found that commonly respondents would pair Atheism with another religion, typically Islam and Tengrism. It is hard to discern what this means for a respondent without asking them, but what this may be alluding to is an idea that while the respondent is atheist, they do culturally believe in a religion and/or its associated practices (i.e. Islam or Tengrism).

### 5.1.3 Tengrism as Identity

Using R and with the assistance of Emily Coco, below I have created three charts which I believe strongly identify trends in the responses to my survey to help better understand the correlation of Tengrism with identity through response trends. All three charts engage with the question “Do you identify as Tengri?” as a means to directly see how Tengris, non-Tengris, and maybe-Tengris engage with these different

ideas of identity and the role of Tengrism in them. In this first graph the results of “How proud are you to be Kazakh?” Pride in being Kazakh has been coded with Very proud = 5, Somewhat proud = 4, Neutral = 3, and Not very proud = 2. There were no responses stating that they were not proud and this dataset excludes those who are not Kazakh for sake of simplicity. The overall trend we see is that the majority of responses for identifying as Tengri have indicated being the group most proud to be Kazakh, whereas the only place we see responses of people stating they are not proud to be Kazakh are within the group that does not identify as Tengri. Additionally, the group not sure if they are Tengri is the group most neutral towards being Kazakh. This chart conflates that pride towards being Kazakh is not one hundred percent, but strongly correlated to being Tengri, or at least strongly relates to the idea of being Tengri.

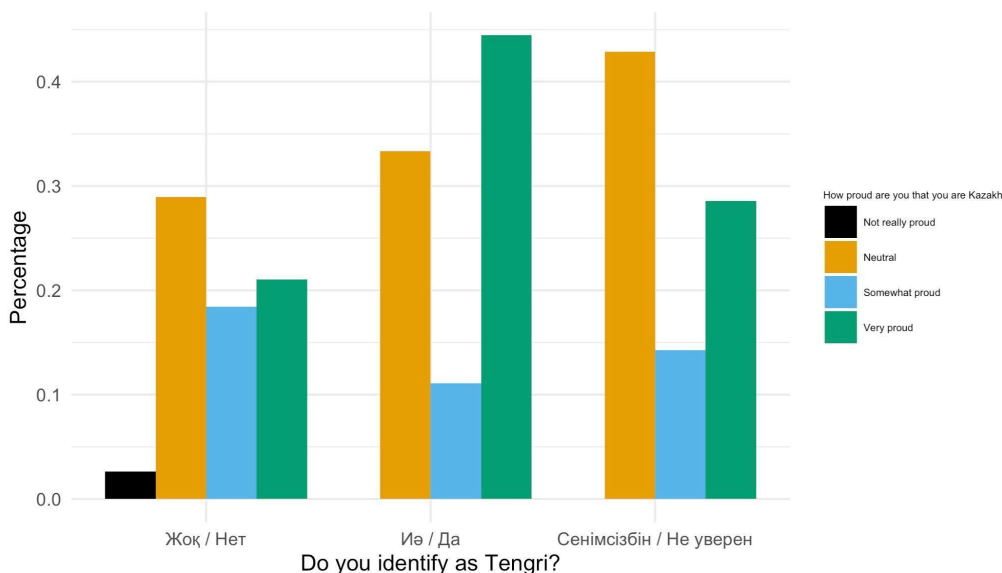


Chart 3

(Clustered bar graph showing whether or not respondents identify as Tengri contrasted with how proud respondents are to be Kazakh)<sup>123</sup>

The next chart focuses on whether respondents feel that Tengrism has a role in Kazakh identity regardless of age. We see very similar trends as the last chart, noting

<sup>123</sup> Жоқ / Нет: No

Иә / Да: Yes

Сенімсізбін / Не уверен: Not Sure

that those who feel that Tengrism is important to Kazakh identity, either very or just important, identify as Tengri. Those who feel the role of Tengrism as a part of Kazakh identity is somewhat important are also uncertain as to whether or not they are Tengri and those who do not identify as Tengri feel the most negatively towards Tengrism as a part of Kazakh identity. This chart features similar coding with Very Important = 5, Important = 4, Somewhat Important = 3, Not very Important = 2, Not Important = 1, Prefer not to answer = 0.

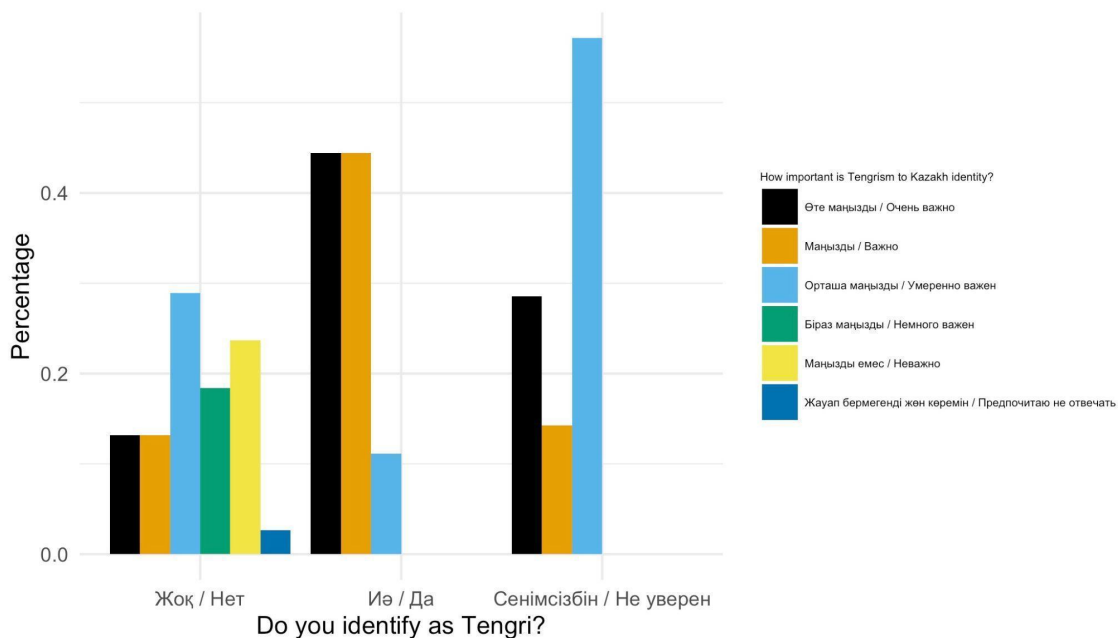


Chart 4

(Clustered bar graph showing whether or not respondents identify as Tengri contrasted with how important they feel Tengrism is to Kazakh identity)<sup>124</sup>

The final chart looks specifically at youth identity. Regardless of the personal beliefs of the respondent in terms of whether they are Tengri or not, overwhelmingly

<sup>124</sup> Жоқ / Нет: No

Иә / Да: Yes

Сенімсізбін / Не уверен: Not Sure

Өте маңызды / Очень важно: Very Important

Маңызды / Важно: Important

Орташа маңызды / Умеренно важен: Somewhat Important

Біраз маңызды / Немного важен: Not Very Important

Маңызды емес / Не важно: Not Important

Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін / Предпочитаю не отвечать: Prefer to Not Respond

respondents believe that being Tengri is important for Kazakh youth identity. The most enthusiastic responses being from those who identify as Tengri, of course, but what is most interesting to consider in these responses is that this survey was distributed to the youth of Almaty, 18-30 year olds. This question was asking respondents to reflect on the beliefs of both themselves and their peers and it still resulted in very enthusiastic responses as to Tengrism being a part of Kazakh youth identity. Given youth trends towards the aesthetic appeal of Kazakh traditional wear and adopting Kazakh symbology (i.e. tattoos of petroglyphs depicting Tengri, traditional jewellery and clothing developing huge popularity) it is not surprising that young people in Kazakhstan, especially Almaty, would feel that Tengrism is playing a larger role in Kazakh youth identity. There appears to be a strong desire towards reclaiming culture by young people in Almaty and that can be seen in this popular trend towards Tengrism.

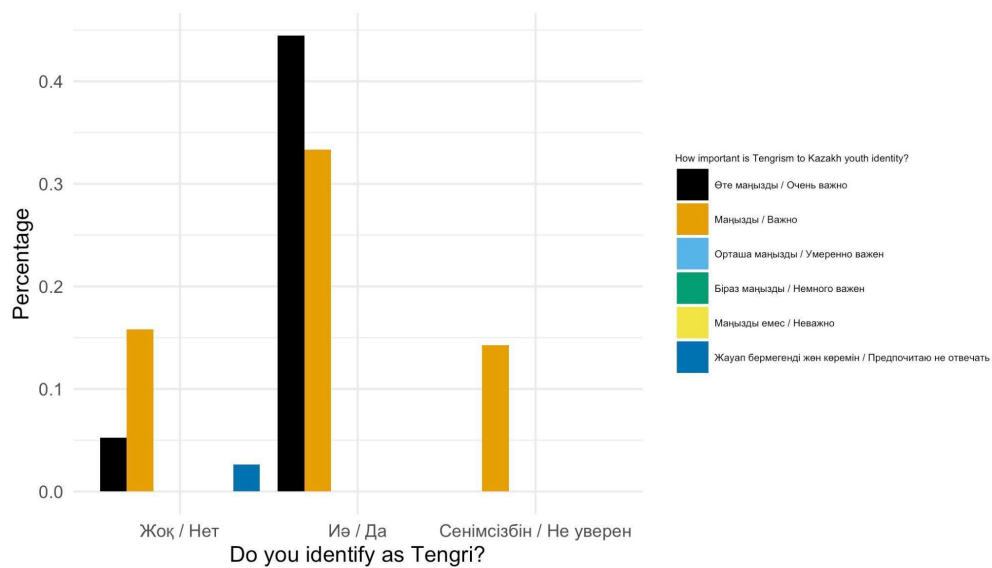


Chart 5

(Clustered bar graph showing whether or not respondents identify as Tengri contrasted with how important they believe Tengrism is to Kazakh youth identity)<sup>125</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Жоқ / Нет: No

Иә / Да: Yes

Сенімсізбін / Не уверен: Not Sure

Өте маңызды / Очень важно: Very Important

Маңызды / Важно: Important

Орташа маңызды / Умеренно важно: Somewhat Important

Біраз маңызды / Немного важно: Not Very Important

## 5.2 Short Answer Responses

Of the short answers received, 66% responses were in Russian, 30% were in Kazakh, and 4% were in English.<sup>126</sup> In this section, I present short answer section trends focusing on key words and ideas.

### 5.2.1 Tengri Traditions

The origin or importance of these traditions will be covered in the Discussion chapter. The purpose of this section is to outline and elucidate the different traditions that were indicated in the survey as being related to Tengrism. It is notable that the origins of many of these traditions are debated .

Almost all respondents referenced *Alastau*<sup>127</sup> which is a practice of fire worship that is used to cleanse the home and body from evil spirits through smudging ashes from wild rue and also hanging wild rue, if *Alastau* is not directly mentioned, there is fire and oil worship mentioned which goes hand in hand. The next most frequent response was *baksilik*<sup>128</sup> which can be understood as “shamanism” which is a very broad term but is the terminology being used by respondents, there is no discernable difference between the English understanding of shamanism and the Kazakh understanding of *baksilik*. Then there is a variety of responses, referencing *Nauruz* which is considered a Zoroastrian practice and is also called “Persian New Year” and is a holiday that practises fire worship. *Tusaukeser*<sup>129</sup> is the practice of fetter cutting where when a child begins to take their first steps, their feet are tied with a string the colour of which symbolises different meanings, but the string is then cut in order to symbolise an easy path for the child. There is also the tradition of bathing a child at 40 days old in a font filled with silver coins and rings called *kyrkynan shigary*.<sup>130</sup> Additionally there is the

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Маңызды емес / Не важно: Not Important

Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін / Предпочитаю не отвечать: Prefer to Not Respond

<sup>126</sup> Note: Some responses were written in a combination of Russian and Kazakh, if the response was written mostly in Russian (more than 50% by word count) the response was assigned to having been written in Russian.

<sup>127</sup> Аластау

<sup>128</sup> Бақсылық

<sup>129</sup> Тұсаукесер

<sup>130</sup> Қырқынан шығару



worship of “Mother Umay” who is the goddess of fertility in Turkic mythology, continuing the focus on children and childbirth in these traditions. In terms of food traditions there is *Zhuma shelpek* or *Zheti shelpek*<sup>131</sup> which literally translates to “friday flatbreads” and “seven flatbreads” but is a fried dough which is eaten on fridays for ancestor worship, which is also referenced as *Aruach*<sup>132</sup>. Another practice referenced is *Adyraspan*<sup>133</sup> or sometimes referred to as “*harmala*” which is the practice of drying stored herbs. Some responses even state that if there is a tradition in Kazakh culture that is not from Islam, then it is from Tengrism.

Overall the responses to this question also allude to the practices of shamanism<sup>134</sup>, fortune tellers<sup>135</sup>, and other “mystical” practices have been explained as Tengrism in these responses. These “mystical” practices being *Alastau*<sup>136</sup>, *Tusaukeser*<sup>137</sup>, either *zheti* or *zhuma shelpek*<sup>138</sup>, and *Adyraspan*.<sup>139</sup> In the context of the responses to this short answer question, respondents represent a shared and equal understanding of what traditions belong to Tengrism as each tradition is mentioned more than once and often several times, showing a collective understanding of these traditions.

### 5.2.2 Influence of Tengrism Explained

This question yielded 31 responses in total. Throughout the short answer responses highlighting what they know about Tengrism the common theme seen throughout is referencing Tengrism as the ancient religion of the Kazakhs, that before Islam there was Tengrism. Others impress upon the importance of the role of nature when understanding Tengrism, that there is a harmony between nature and humans that is focused on in Tengrism. The third group of responses focuses on the “ancient

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<sup>131</sup> Жұма шелпек

<sup>132</sup> Аруах

<sup>133</sup> Адыраспан

<sup>134</sup> Mentioned 5 times

<sup>135</sup> Mentioned 4 times

<sup>136</sup> Mentioned 5 times

<sup>137</sup> Mentioned 2 times

<sup>138</sup> Mentioned 4 times

<sup>139</sup> Mentioned 2 times

Turks” who brought Tengrism to Kazakhstan or the Mongols bringing it, focusing on the idea that, much like Islam, Tengrism was brought to Kazakhstan. One response notes that they feel that Tengrism is more of a “magical” belief rather than being an ancient belief, this can be understood as that shamans are the main religious figures in Tengrism and some people even associate fortune tellers with Tengrism, so this could be the magic that the respondent is referring to.

### **5.2.3 Important Aspects of Tengrism**

This question showed the most uncertainty for my respondents, which yielded 28 responses in total. Many stated that they simply did not know any aspects of Tengrism so they did not feel that they could comment on what aspects could affect Kazakh culture. Some went as far as to say that Tengrism doesn’t really have any important aspects, as it is a religion without any structure, or aspects that could be notable to culture or tradition in Kazakhstan. Some stated that the relationship with nature was important enough for Kazakhs in terms of harmony with nature which they felt was adopted from Tengrism. Others stated that the sheer existence of Tengrism is important to Kazakh culture as it gives Kazakhs a traditional religion to focus on and reference in history, but did not elaborate on any key aspects or features of the religion.

### **5.2.4 The Government**

This question yielded 30 responses in total. All respondents stated, in one way or another, that the government does not, in any way, promote Tengrism. They also stated that the government is officially secular therefore does not promote any religion, and promoting Tengrism would inherently go against this. These responses could be understood through the theory of preference falsification, as described by Timur Kuran, it is a specific kind of lying designed out of self preservation.<sup>140</sup> The preference falsification, in the case of this question, would be in relation to protecting the secular identity of Kazakhstan. Additionally, asking any questions in regards to an autocratic

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<sup>140</sup> Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (1997): 5.

government may have respondents expressing more favorable opinions towards the government due to fear of being repressed. This is expressed in one response stating “... we are afraid to talk about religion openly.” Thus, making preference falsification a preferable way to respond to a question looking to find if the government of Kazakhstan would promote a religion, even if it is the “ethnic religion” of Kazakhs. Other responses include that they do not understand or do not follow what the government does so they feel they cannot give an accurate response.

### 5.2.5 Additional Comments

There were 15 additional comments left in total. In terms of extra comments, many respondents indicated that they wished to know more about Tengrism, “in simple/plain terms.” This represents a desire to learn more about the religion and potentially how this relates to their own identity and culture. One respondent likened Tengrism to Shintoism in Japan which I personally found quite enlightening. People in Japan consider Shintoism to be their ethnic religion and relate to it in a more spiritual sense, the practices and traditions of Shintoism are ingrained into Japanese culture in a way that is understood through the lens of lived religion. Shintoism, like Tengrism, celebrates the relationship between people and nature, but where they differ is that Shintoism was a state religion in Japan, but faces the issue of being manipulated for political reasons.<sup>141</sup> This manipulation is used by the government in order to assert a national identity.<sup>142</sup> The relationship between Shintoism and the Japanese can be likened to the relationship between Tengrism and Kazakhs given that both religions are nature-focused but also because neither are religions that have strict rules of practice and that the practices are in the context of cultural traditions and practices rather than explicitly being understood as a religion. Additionally, they are both seen as the source of modern traditions in their own cultures.<sup>143</sup> It is a religion of the people but the people

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<sup>141</sup> Young-Sook Lee, Seiichi Sakuno, Nina Prebensen & Kazuhiko Kimura “Tracing Shintoism in Japanese Nature-Based Domestic Tourism Experiences.” Edited by Pier Luigi Sacco. *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 5.

do not actively practise it themselves. Additionally, respondents are concerned about the “radicalisation” of Tengrism, worrying that they will see Tengrism go down a similar path to Islam in terms of radicalising people into extremists.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

In the Discussion chapter (Chapter 6) I will go more in depth as to how the data collected engages with my literature and theories but this conclusion will take a moment to reflect on the quantitative results of the survey. The number of responses (85) afforded me many options in terms of quantitative analysis. Drawbacks to the survey include the lack of engagement with certain questions and data loss: despite the high number of respondents, not all took the time to give short answer responses or would omit responses to some multiple choice questions. The number of responses is quite high for an independently distributed survey, though making generalisations about Almaty with 85 responses would not be appropriate. Whether or not I could make generalisations through this survey would be best determined through a Chi<sup>2</sup> test but that is not a capability I have at this moment.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

Using critical discourse analysis and adhering to my theoretical framework, I will be looking at the results of my survey through a critical lens but also pairing my understanding of the responses through pop media and literature to better understand why respondents would have these beliefs or respond in these fashions. The sections have been broken down into lived religion, national identity, and “traditions” to better understand how survey responses can be paired with these bigger ideas and additional literature will also be provided here to help decipher how these responses pair with larger trends.

### 6.1 Lived Religion

Respondents engaging with the idea of lived religion appeared several times in the survey. The first being that when given the opportunity, some respondents chose to indicate their religion as Atheism alongside either Islam or Tengrism. Now, it is hard to determine whether or not this means that their relationship to Atheism is one that denounces religion and that their relationship to Islam or Tengrism is a form of cultural heritage, but the indication of both pairs strongly with the argument that religion can be a source of culture, identity, without being something actively practiced. These trends can further be seen in the short answers section when looking at how respondents talk about Kazakh cultural traditions that they explain as being from Tengrism .

Lived religion asserts the idea that religion can seamlessly be intertwined into everyday life. Kazakhs are people of great tradition and these traditions have always been ascribed to nomadic traditions from the pre-Soviet era. With the revival of Tengrism into the cultural identity of Kazakhstan, many of these traditions are still understood as being from nomadism, but more closely related to the religion of nomads, Tengrism. Though, what role does this play in the modern Kazakh identity? “I think Tengrism has played a role in shaping our thinking and worldview, but in today's world there are only residual elements” says one respondent, an idea echoed by other respondents when asked for an explanation for to what extent does Tengrism influence

Kazakh identity. Though it may be believed that there are only residual elements in Kazakh identity, that still acknowledges the presence of them. Another respondent states "...Tengrism is a religion of the ancient nomads of Eurasia. People lived by believing in Tengri, and had rituals, and now they mix Islamic religion with various rites from Tengrism. So I think there is a connection," acknowledging the importance of not viewing Tengrism and Islam as two completely different things that are unrelated.

But when confronted with the possibility of a religion being a part of a culture, many respondents pushed back, and given the status of Kazakhstan being a secular state, this can be easily understood. "No religion pre-determines your *natsional'nost'*. They are completely different things" says one respondent, and others go as far to say that there are no elements of Tengrism in Kazakh culture, and even, simply "Tengrism is cringe, it is bullshit" which alludes to a deeper resentment towards people who practise Tengrism or those who are part of the wider revival of the religion. This respondent does not elaborate further on the subject of Tengrism or why they feel this way, there are many ways to understand why someone would be so vehemently opposed to Tengrism, they may believe that Tengrism is an exoticisation of the population or they are from a community where they have met more believers of Tengrism but we are only able to speculate. Unfortunately, no respondents go into great detail to discuss why they feel negatively towards Tengrism but one respondent indicates "it has a kind of destabilising effect because of the actions of supporters who want to present it as a religion." This indicates an aspect of lived religion that some may not even view Tengrism as a religion, rather it is a cultural point for many. I am not certain that Tengrism has the kind of power to destabilise the country of Kazakhstan from its religious beliefs, it does not have the same power or influence that Islam has in terms of outside funding and governmental support from other countries.

One respondent brought up the case of Shintoism in Japan, stating "The Japanese have Shintoism as their major religion and consider it part of the Japanese culture, they go to temples a lot, but they don't really see it as a religion. It would have been cool if they hadn't imposed Islam on us at some point, and we would have kept traditional Tengrism. Mother nature, worship of the sky, respect for the ancestors, their

own temples. Wouldn't that be cool?" Shintoism is another great example of lived religion as some would describe the beliefs of Shintoism to be "superstitious" in terms of maintaining traditions for harmony with nature and good luck, this is something that could be easily seen as a means of practising Tengrism in Kazakhstan.

All in all, the responses to the survey have expressed a deep connection between Tengrism and Kazakh traditions and culture, making the case that Tengrism, while maybe in its early stages, can be interpreted as a lived religion. It may now be in a stage of revival, and many people have expressed uncertainty as to what constitutes the religion, what the beliefs are, etc. but the religion clearly holds an important cultural meaning to Kazakhs in reference to both history and culture. Lived religion does not mean that the religion has to be actively practised, but the recognition of it as a part of life, culture, and tradition alone reaffirms the importance of religion, and in this case, Tengrism in the lives and minds of people.

## **6.2 Religion and National Identity**

Looking at Brubaker's approaches will be my primary method of examining the intersection of religion and national identity. In this subsection I will be using each of his approaches to look at survey responses to help uncover other trends.

### **6.2.1 Analogous Phenomena**

Within this approach, the ideas of religion and nationalism become the same through the understanding that nationalism has its own gods and mythology. The story of the nation demonstrates the idea of a myth and the original leaders, the great leaders, and the "saviours" of the country, are all gods to a nation. When reflecting on one's own country, it is hard to see how these two ideas, religion and nationalism, can be seen as completely different when they share so many of the same features. Nationalism, much like ethnicity, creates a social order and a sense of identification, which can also be seen in the case of religion.<sup>144</sup> With all of this in mind, when looking at

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<sup>144</sup> Rogers Brubaker. "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches\*": Religion and Nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (January 2012): 4.

responses from my survey in terms of whether or not Tengrism is important to Kazakh identity, I am looking for identifiers of myths in Kazakh culture that can be tied to national identity or culture.

When asking respondents if there are any aspects of Tengrism that are important to Kazakh culture, what was found is while many said they were unsure, there were also many responses that specifically cited legends and traditions being important. “I think legends and some traditions are important, but worship and shamanism are not important” for the case of understanding national identity through Tengrism, worship is not important in the understanding of its role. Lived religion explains that the actual practice of worship is not important for understanding its role in national identity, as many people believe that religion is part of their identity without being believers themselves.

Several respondents, across questions, reference the idea of Tengrism either being the ancient religion of Kazakhs, the ethnic religion of Kazakhs, or as an inherent part of their identity. While the government may not be pushing this narrative specifically, it is still something believed by young people. Some respondents even referenced that they had learned about Tengrism in school as part of their national heritage and culture. When asked about Tengri traditions that respondents knew of, many respondents identified holidays that are national holidays in Kazakhstan, like *Nauruz*, in doing this they have intrinsically related their understanding of their identity, with the idea of their holidays and culture coming from aspects of Tengrism. In this sense, religion and nationalism are becoming analogous in the minds of young Kazakhs, even if this is not the case with the presentation from the government.

Nationalism creates a cult surrounding itself, where the nation and identity of said nation is identified through traditions, beliefs, and cultures. Many respondents have indicated that while Tengrism is not said by government officials, many people, including president Tokaev use the terms “*Kudaı*” and “*Tenir*” which both mean “God” or “Allah” but is also understood by Kazakhs and Kazakh speakers to mean “Tengri” so while the intent of the speaker to refer to a god or Allah, the use of the name *Tenir* further instills the presence of Tengrism in the country.



### **6.2.2 Religion as a cause or explanation**

In many ways, nationalism can replace religion within a society and can function as a religion on its own, but nationalists are also able to use religion to appeal to the masses. It is hard to see how Tengrism could be used as a means to foster nationalism or identity, but some respondents have offered insight into how this could be an explanation. Radical Islam has been seen as a threat within Central Asia since independence, if the people of Central Asia were to radicalise and become extremists, it would prevent the region from being able to rise to influence and affluence on the global scale. Because of this some countries, like Tajikistan, have passed laws that are designed to prevent Islamic radicalism, going as far as to ban people from going on Hajj. Others, take the course of Kazakhstan and deem themselves as an officially secular state and continue to impress upon that in their speeches and rhetoric. Though Islam still has an important cultural role in Kazakhstan which is not impressed upon by the government.

One respondent noted how Tengrism could have a destabilising effect on this careful balance that Kazakhstan seeks to maintain amongst its communities and people. Many respondents referenced a concern for increased Islamisation in the country, "There is an active and massive Islamisation of the population. Even if it/the state presents itself as secular." This is not the first time where a country that represents itself as secular is not actually secular, but Islam is finding itself at the center of this, instead of Tengrism. Islam is slowly becoming a part of the national identity of Kazakhstan but many feel the lines between Islam and Tengrism are blurred, that what they practice as "Islam" is not actually Islam, but instead a reformation of Tengrism into the name Allah. Many view Tengrism as something that is growing in response to this Islamisation within Kazakhstan, that it is more radical and progressive than Islam so young people find that it is more relatable to themselves and their culture, but given the nature of the revival of the religion, they can shape it to suit themselves. And in turn, the pride of being Kazakh, the pride of the nation, is being explained by the youth through Tengrism and Tengri traditions, moving themselves further away from Islam.

### 6.2.3 Intertwined

This approach seeks to view religion as something that is not an explanation for nationalism, but is inherently a part of it. Within the context of history and modern politics, leaders, when asserting a national identity, often lean on religion as a unifier of the people. Again, Kazakhstan is a secular state so we don't see the framing of uniting people through the lens of religion but more so through the lens of retraditionalization. Though it is to be noted that retraditionalization often is religiously tinged given the importance of religion in societies. Through retraditionalization, Tengrism can be seen as a part of their identity that is brought on through this process. One respondent's answer to whether or not the government propagates Tengrism, states, "The reign officially supports the separation of religion and state. The government treats Tengrism not as a separate religion, but more as a cultural heritage of the Kazakhs." This statement exactly makes the point that Tengrism, as a religion, is imbricated into the identity of Kazakhs. In the context of Islam there are set rules and practices, many of which are dictated by the Quran, in the case of Tengrism there are historic practices but they rely on being passed down accurately. Though this to extrapolate what is specifically from Islam and Tengrism within the society of Kazakhstan is difficult as there are still arguments disputing what constitutes as a "religious practice" and what constitutes as a "cultural tradition" but these arguments outside the scope of this thesis. While people do practise Tengrism today, there is very little known to people in Almaty about those practices. It would be easy to identify someone as Muslim, but much harder for the average person to identify someone as Tengri based on their dress, traditions, or practices. Especially given that many respondents indicated that many Tengri traditions are simply Kazakh traditions as well.

Another respondent pushed against the idea of Tengrism being a part of identity "There are no certain important aspects, it is not religion that makes a Kazakh - Kazakh" but this statement could be argued against stating that Tengrism is not a separate religion from being Kazakh, that it is the ethnic religion of the Kazakhs, an argument

made by several respondents. Where religion ends and where national identity and nationalism begin is often unclear, especially in the case of Tengrism in Kazakhstan.

### 6.3 Invented Tradition in Tengrism

In Hobsbawm's work, he reflects on the tradition and importance of the British monarchy in the culture and eyes of the British people. How so much of this "tradition" exists for the sake of the public more than the appreciation of actual tradition.<sup>145</sup> The age of traditions matters far less than the actual symbolism of it, what does this tradition mean for the people it's designed for? How has it manifested itself? I specifically asked respondents as to what Tengri traditions they knew of to further understand what tradition means for Kazakh people, but to further understand how these ideas of tradition have been constructed. Another author's work I would like to take into consideration while discussing these traditions is Edward Said. In his article "Islam Through Western Eyes" he discusses how narrow the scope of understanding both Islam and religion are when viewed from the West, or even just from outside Islam itself.<sup>146</sup> Many traditions that my respondents have described as being Tengri traditions can also be understood as being Islamic traditions. With this in mind, how do Kazakhs define their own traditions?

Respondents indicated a strong relationship between Tengrism and fire, the tradition almost every response includes is *Alastau* which is fumigation with fire or practices involving burning oil. The tradition of fire is typically understood as a Zoroastrian tradition and this is also seen in the holiday of *Nauruz* which is sometimes called "Persian New Year" but is from the tradition of Zoroastrianism. It celebrates the coming of the New Year through many traditions but is heavily focused on fire. *Nauruz* is also a common response to Tengri traditions, given that in the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation Tengrism was referred to as a Zoroastrian religion, it can easily be understood how the relationship between Tengrism and Zoroastrian has formed when

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<sup>145</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and T. O Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*, (2012): 1.

<sup>146</sup> Edward W. Said. "Islam Through Western Eyes," January 2, 1998.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/islam-through-western-eyes/>.

both a government-run museum/meeting space is promoting that the traditions of these two religions are intertwined.

One respondent even noted traditions that they believed are not intertwined with Islam. Their bringing this up, though, indicates that there is a cultural awareness of Islam and Tengrism being intertwined in many ways through traditions: “I think all these remnants of shamanism like *adiraspan* (used in *alastau*), *tusau keser* and other traditions that are not inherently related to Islamic tradition.” *Tusau Keser* is a practice of tying a baby’s legs once they learn how to walk, the colour of the string indicates the kind of fortune that it will bring for the baby if they are able to walk. *Adiraspan* is the wild rue flower that grows in Kazakhstan, it is dried and then used to fumigate the home during *Alastau*. The importance of these traditions relates to the ideas of nomadism and the relationship between being Kazakh and being nomadic, but many traditions from nomads are viewed as Tengri traditions by Kazakhs.

Other traditions like Friday or seven flatbreads and Nauruz are also seen in Islam. Initially, it was hard to understand how these two were related to one another, some respondents explained that these traditions are related because people are confused, but what is easier to understand is that as Islam spread, it collected traditions from where it was spread. It is hard to say if certain traditions are Muslim or Tengri, but the two are so intertwined that how people interpret and understand these traditions is more important than what they are actually related to. Thus, making these traditions “invented” in the minds of Kazakhs.

## **6.4 Conclusions**

The responses to my survey have been enlightening to the understanding of the role of Tengrism in Kazakhstan. It is clear that the revival is still in its early stages and that many Kazakhs are still searching for meaning. In the response section where respondents could add whatever they wanted, many respondents indicated that they did not know a lot about Tengrism themselves but that they had a strong desire to learn more. One respondent specifically said that they wanted to learn more about Tengrism in “plain or simple” terms, which alludes to the idea that the discussions around

Tengrism in Kazakhstan are still quite abstract when discussed. It's hard to say where these conversations are happening, though, only one respondent indicated that they were taught about Tengrism while in school, but many respondents said that they did not know anyone personally who practised Tengrism personally or that they know of any traditions themselves.

With this in mind, it seems many respondents have found explanations for their cultural traditions and beliefs in Tengrism. The historical relationship of Tengrism and the nomadic Kazakhs allows for Tengrism to be a venue of explanation for modern traditions and these beliefs are expressed throughout the survey. The short answer section has been found as enlightening in using lived religion as a lens for understanding national identity and tradition in Kazakhstan and these responses show that this thesis, as an exploratory study, has the ability to be expanded upon further in future work.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

The responses from my survey have been eye-opening and, for a preliminary study, I feel that it has been extremely successful in reaching a large audience and has also garnered a lot of results. I am grateful to the engaged respondents who took the time to fill out most of the survey, many of whom also took the opportunity to write short answer responses to help me gain a better image of the role of Tengrism in the greater Kazakh identity.

This thesis sought to answer three main research questions in the greater context of understanding Tengrism's role in national identity and lived religion in Kazakhstan. It sought to fill gaps in literature that do not take into consideration the ever-growing importance of Tengrism in the Kazakh cultural identity along with understanding what aspects of Tengrism play important roles in traditions. Additionally, this thesis looks to see if the government plays any perceived role in the revival of Tengrism in Kazakh cultural identity.

The research questions are as follows: How do 18-30 year olds in Kazakhstan, specifically Almaty, engage with Tengrism as part of their identity and how can this be understood through the theoretical framework of lived religion? Is Tengrism being used in national identity building in Kazakhstan by the government and state media? Finally, how does the resurgence of Tengrism help explain traditions in Kazakh culture? This chapter will focus on addressing each of these questions individually.

### **7.1 Tengrism as a Lived Religion**

Looking at lived religion in Kazakhstan through the lens of the Nazarbayev Generation (or the 18-30 year olds) in Almaty allowed me to see how Tengrism has helped form Kazakh cultural identity. Based on the responses to my survey, Tengrism is a lived religion in the minds of youth in Almaty. This can be seen in their assigning cultural traditions and their own identity to the credit of Tengrism in the larger Kazakh cultural identity. Respondents frequently attributed traditions and holidays in Kazakhstan to the practices of Tengrism, describing them as explanations for their modern

traditions. While a majority of respondents did not identify themselves as practitioners of Tengrism or even Tengri, a majority of respondents identified important aspects of their cultural identity as being from Tengrism, or at the least, from nomadic times. Lived religion does not mean that someone must identify with a religion or religious movement, but that they can culturally engage with a religion or movement and assign it to their own beliefs, which many of the respondents did in regards to Tengrism. 18-30 year olds in Almaty, like many young people across the globe are seeking to define themselves and their identity. In the case of those in Almaty, they are engaging with Tengrism to help define their Kazakhness and in turn, are engaging with Tengrism as a lived religion.

## **7.2 Tengrism in the Government and State Media**

Overwhelmingly, respondents stated that the government is not working to promote Tengrism and that it is not evident in state media either. While the government of Kazakhstan states that it is secular, leaders within the government do support Islamic movements and Muslim celebrities and speakers are given platforms in state media, existing directly in contrast with the assertion that the government is secular. While this argument is beyond the scope of this thesis, secularism is hard to define given that the government does not promote any religion in its official law-making and statements, but leaders give money to religious groups and leaders, and religious leaders have platforms on state channels. Though with this in mind, some respondents stated while religion is not sponsored by the government, Tengrism is sponsored both directly and indirectly. Directly by stating its cultural importance for Kazakhs and indirectly as some leaders (not specified) have Tengri beliefs and incorporate their own beliefs into the ideology of the government.

## **7.3 Tengrism in Kazakh Traditions and Culture**

This has already been discussed extensively throughout chapter six, but the formation and understanding of traditions in Kazakhstan is highly contentious and is reflective of different understandings of culture and tradition. Society in Kazakhstan was

nomadic before sedentarisation by the Russian empire and Soviet Union and many traditions are derived from this period of nomadism. When asked what aspects of Tengrism are in Kazakh culture, respondents referenced many Kazakh traditions along with traditions that may be understood as Muslim traditions. While there is the concern that participants were primed to respond by stating that they believe that many Kazakh traditions were Tengri, they also referenced specific myths and traditions that they believe to be from Tengrism. The resurgence of Tengrism has given many young Kazakhstanis in Almaty the ability to understand and explain their traditions and culture outside the context of Islam in a religious environment that has been described as becoming increasingly Islamified. As many Kazakh traditions are steeped in history, it is easiest to believe and understand that these traditions come from a time when Tengrism was widely practised by nomadic Kazakhs and through this understanding and the revival of Tengrism in Kazakhstan, these traditions are explained and understood as being Tengri traditions and inherently central to Kazakh culture.

#### **7.4 Future Directions for the Field**

As elaborated on in the methods chapter of this thesis, I had a strong theoretical conviction to do interviews but ultimately decided that doing a survey was the best option for a preliminary study. If I were to do a survey again, I would use a survey company in order to achieve wider geographical spread, more responses, and more representativeness. Additionally, I would have invested more in R coding skills. I have learned some coding through the process of analysing my data, but with more data analysis skills, I could have relied less on others' expertise and delved more into exploring different modes of analysis.

In terms of future research, I still feel firmly that I would like to return to this subject and conduct interviews. At the PhD level, I would want to conduct focused interviews through focus groups with people across Kazakhstan, finding participants in every region and not just focusing on major cities, but I also realise this is highly ambitious. Other routes this could take is focusing on an urban-rural comparison or even looking to Kyrgyzstan which has a large revival of Tengrism, but this manifests



very differently as in Kyrgyzstan its viewed as a far-right wing movement compared to Tengrism as being viewed as a more progressive movement in Kazakhstan. Additionally, Mongolia is highly understudied in context with Central Asia, this research could offer an exciting opportunity to work with experts on Mongolia to further diversify the field and promote cross-regional studies. Tengrism continues to be popular in Mongolia and has a much more grounded relationship with the country and could serve as a great case study with Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan. This research has brought about important information and insights into the opinions of young adults in Almaty towards Tengrism and Kazakh identity and there are many different directions this could go in, of which these are just some.

### **7.5 The Russian Imperial Legacy in Central Asian Studies**

The study of Central Asia in both academia has always struggled with the imperial legacy of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Additionally, the understanding of Central Asia in journalism and media struggles with detaching the region from Russia. Modern scholars of Central Asia have begun to focus more so on the work of scholars from the region and less so on Russian and Soviet academics. This can be attributed to a long-standing change within the field but the demand to engage with these issues has been further sparked by the war in Ukraine started by Russia. Scholars are working towards a more rounded understanding of Ukraine outside of the context of Russia and the Soviet Union, and more slowly, the same changes are being applied to Central Asia.

I am proud to be a part of a new wave of scholars of Central Asia: my peers and I value not only Russian but also Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and other regional languages. The works of previous scholars find themselves in a complex position given they often do not conduct their research in local languages, relying heavily on Russian as their main language of research. Central Asian scholars like Erica Marat and Botakoz Kassymbekova, in wake of the war in Ukraine, have discussed at length Russia's lack of innocence in the development of Russia's neo-imperial power across both Ukraine and

Central Asia.<sup>147</sup> They speak at length about the issues surrounding studying both Ukraine and Central Asia in the scope of Russian studies, as for many's education, the study of Ukraine and Central Asia are conflated with Russia rather than focusing on each country and its history without the interference of Russia.

Russian studies, as well, have to be “unwoven”<sup>148</sup> as a majority of Russia's territory consists of people who are not ethnically Russian. The continued focus on Russia continues to keep the field of Central Asia from moving forward. Russia is, of course, a major geopolitical player but younger scholars and scholars from the region are now calling to further move away from Russia and the Russian language. In this thesis I hope to have impressed upon, in some way, the value of using local languages in research. Being able to conduct research partially in Kazakh has allowed me to further appreciate the nuance of language - many concepts that have been discussed throughout this thesis are specific words that only exist in Kazakh and if this research had only been conducted in Russian it would have lacked the insight provided by Kazakh. Additionally, while Russian continues to be a useful language, the only way to truly begin to understand Kazakhstan, its people and culture, is by being able to engage in Kazakh-language media.

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<sup>147</sup> Botakoz Kassymbekova, and Erica Marat. “Time to Question Russia's Imperial Innocence,” n.d., 5. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/time-to-question-russias-imperial-innocence/>

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

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## Declaration of Authorship (KIMEP)

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or a substantial proportion of material which have been submitted for the award of any other degree at KIMEP University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. This thesis is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated, and the views expressed here are my own.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. A. S.', written over a horizontal line.

Date: 22 August 2022

## Appendices

### **Appendix 1: Survey Questions English**

Consent Clause: By completing this questionnaire, I confirm that I consent to my answers being used for Abigail Scripka's dissertation and future research in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research, and that I give permission to Abigail Scripka to use the data that I have provided. No identifiable data will be collected. All data from this research will be saved in a secure location for up to 10 years.

This questionnaire should take approximately 15-20 minutes.

Appendix for Questionnaire

1. Do you live in Almaty?
  - i. Yes
  - ii. No
  - iii. Prefer not to answer
2. Age
  - a. What is your age? Please list [age]
3. Gender
  - a. What is your gender?
    - i. Man
    - ii. Woman
    - iii. Other gender identity not listed here
    - iv. Prefer not to answer
4. Ethnicity (Natsional'nost' or "nationality" in Post-Soviet Space)
  - a. How proud are you to be Kazakh?
    - i. Very proud
    - ii. Somewhat proud
    - iii. Neutral
    - iv. Not really proud
    - v. Not proud at all
    - vi. I am not Kazakh [please write your nationality]
    - vii. Prefer not to answer
5. Region
  - a. What oblast are you from?
    - i. Abai
    - ii. Akmola
    - iii. Aktobe
    - iv. Almaty
    - v. Zhetysu
    - vi. Atyrau
    - vii. East Kazakhstan
    - viii. Karagandy
    - ix. Kostanay
    - x. Kyzylorda
    - xi. Mangystau
    - xii. North Kazakhstan

- xiii. Pavlodar
  - xiv. Turkistan
  - xv. West Kazakhstan
  - xvi. Ulytau
  - xvii. Zhambyl
  - xviii. Prefer not to answer
6. Level of education
- a. What is your highest/current level of education?
    - i. Middle school or below
    - ii. High school (vocational)
    - iii. High school (general)
    - iv. Technical Post-Secondary Education E. College (less than 4 years)
    - v. Bachelor's Degree
    - vi. Specialist's Diploma
    - vii. Graduate School (Master's or Doctoral)
    - viii. Prefer not to answer
7. What is your religion?
- a. Islam
  - b. Orthodox Christianity
  - c. Tengrism
  - d. Atheism/ Agnosticism
  - e. Other [please specify]
  - f. Prefer not to answer
8. Do you believe in God?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
  - d. Prefer not to answer
9. Have you heard of Tengrism?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
  - d. Prefer not to answer
10. Do you identify as Tengri
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
  - d. Prefer not to answer
11. How important do you think Tengrism is to Kazakh identity?
- a. Very Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Slightly Important
  - e. Not Important
  - f. Prefer not to answer
12. How important do you think Tengrism is to Kazakh identity for young people?
- a. Very Important
  - b. Important

- c. Moderately Important
  - d. Slightly Important
  - e. Not Important
  - f. Prefer not to answer
13. To what extent do you agree that Tengrism is only for the “urban elite”?
- a. Completely Agree
  - b. Mostly Agree
  - c. Slightly Agree
  - d. Slightly Disagree
  - e. Mostly Disagree
  - f. Completely Disagree
  - g. Prefer not to answer
14. How important of a role do you think Tengrism has in Kazakhstan?
- a. Very Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Slightly Important
  - e. Not Important
  - f. Prefer not to answer
15. To what extent do you agree that Tengrism is the religion of Kazakhs?
- a. Completely Agree
  - b. Mostly Agree
  - c. Slightly Agree
  - d. Slightly Disagree
  - e. Mostly Disagree
  - f. Completely Disagree
  - g. Prefer not to answer
16. When you make major life decisions, how often do you rely on personal prayer and religious reflection in the Tengri religious tradition?
- a. Never
  - b. Almost Never
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  - f. Prefer not to answer
17. How much do you practice Tengri traditions?
- a. A Great Deal
  - b. Much
  - c. Somewhat
  - d. Little
  - e. Never
  - f. Prefer not to answer
18. Do you know people who practice Tengri traditions often?
- a. Yes
  - b. No Unsure
  - c. Prefer not to answer
19. [Branched Question]

- a. If yes, can you describe which Tengri traditions they practice (in a few sentences)?
  - i. \_\_\_\_\_.
- 20. Do you think Tengrism influences Kazakh identity?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
  - d. Prefer not to answer
- 21. To what extent do you think Tengrism influences Kazakh identity?
  - a. Extremely
  - b. Very
  - c. Moderately
  - d. Slightly
  - e. Not at all
  - f. Prefer not to answer

Short Answer Section [Note to respondents: This is not a timed survey, and please feel free to take breaks or to skip any of the following questions that you would prefer not to answer. Feel free to briefly answer the following questions.]

- 22. According to your answer to the last question (“To what extent do you think Tengrism influences Kazakh identity?”), briefly explain why you chose either extremely, very, moderately, slightly, not at all.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_.
- 23. Briefly list what you know about Tengrism.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_.
- 24. Briefly explain what aspects of Tengrism are or are not important to Kazakh identity?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_.
- 25. Do you think your government promotes Tengrism? Briefly explain why or why not?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_.
- 26. Is there anything you would like to say or add about Tengrism and Kazakh identity? If so, please provide your commentary below.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Appendix 2: Survey Questions Russian**

Оговорка о согласии: Заполняя эту анкету, я подтверждаю, что даю согласие на использование моих ответов для диссертации Эбигейл Скрипки и будущих исследований в соответствии с Кодексом Надлежащей Практики в области исследований Университета, а также даю разрешение Эбигейл Скрипке на использование предоставленных мною данных. Никакие идентифицирующие данные не будут собираться. Все данные этого исследования будут храниться в безопасном месте до 10 лет.

Заполнение данной анкеты занимает 15-20 минут.

Приложение к анкете

1. Живете ли Вы в Алматы?
  - a. Да
  - b. Нет
  - c. Предпочитаете не отвечать
2. Возраст
  - a. Укажите, пожалуйста, Ваш возраст
3. Укажите, пожалуйста, Ваш пол
  - a. Мужчина
  - b. Женщина
  - c. Другая гендерная идентичность, не указанная здесь
  - d. Предпочитаю не отвечать
4. Национальность  
Насколько Вы гордитесь тем, что Вы казах/казашка?
  - a. Очень горжусь
  - b. В некоторой степени горжусь
  - c. Нейтрально
  - d. Не очень горжусь
  - e. Совсем не горжусь
  - f. Я не казах [пожалуйста, напишите свою национальность]
  - g. Предпочитаю не отвечать
5. Область
  - a. Из какой вы области?
    - i. Абай
    - ii. Акмолинская
    - iii. Актобе
    - iv. Алматы
    - v. Жетысу
    - vi. Атырау
    - vii. Восточный Казахстан
    - viii. Караганды
    - ix. Костанай
    - x. Кызылорда
    - xi. Мангыстау

- xii. Северный Казахстан
  - xiii. Павлодар
  - xiv. Туркестан
  - xv. Западный Казахстан
  - xvi. Улытау
  - xvii. Жамбыл
  - xviii. Предпочитают не отвечать
6. Уровень образования
- a. Укажите, пожалуйста, уровень Вашего образования.
    - i. Неполное среднее или ниже
    - ii. Среднее профессиональное
    - iii. Среднее общее
    - iv. Среднее техническое (до 4 лет)
    - v. Степень бакалавра
    - vi. Диплом специалиста
    - vii. Высшее образование (магистратура или докторантура)
    - viii. Предпочитаю не отвечать
7. Укажите, пожалуйста, Вашу религию.
- a. Тенгрианство
  - b. Атеизм/агностицизм
  - c. Другое [пожалуйста, укажите]
  - d. Предпочитаю не отвечать
8. Верите ли Вы в Бога?
- a. Да
  - b. Нет
  - c. Не уверен
  - d. Предпочитаю не отвечать
9. Слышали ли Вы о тенгрианстве?
- a. Да
  - b. Нет
  - c. Не уверен
  - d. Предпочитаю не отвечать
10. Считаете ли Вы себя тенгри?
- a. Нет
  - b. Не уверен
  - c. Предпочитаю не отвечать
11. Насколько, по Вашему мнению, тенгрианство важно для казахской идентичности?
- a. Очень важно
  - b. Важно
  - c. Умеренно важно
  - d. Немного важно
  - e. Неважно
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
12. Как Вы думаете, насколько важен тенгрианство для казахской идентичности молодежи?
- a. Очень важно
  - b. Важно
  - c. Умеренно важно

- d. Немного важно
  - e. Не важно
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
13. В какой степени Вы согласны с тем, что тенгрианство - это только для "городской элиты"?
- a. В основном согласен(на)
  - b. Слегка согласен(на)
  - c. Слегка не согласен(на)
  - d. В основном не согласен(на)
  - e. Полностью не согласен(на)
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
14. Насколько важную роль, по Вашему мнению, играет тенгрианство в Казахстане?
- a. Очень важная
  - b. Важная
  - c. Умеренно важная
  - d. Немного важная
  - e. Неважная
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
15. В какой степени Вы согласны с тем, что тенгрианство является религией казахов?
- a. В основном согласен(на)
  - b. Слегка согласен(на)
  - c. Слегка не согласен(на)
  - d. В основном не согласен(на)
  - e. Полностью не согласен(на)
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
16. Когда Вы принимаете важные жизненные решения, как часто Вы полагаетесь на личную молитву и религиозные размышления в религиозной традиции Тенгри?
- a. Никогда
  - b. Почти никогда
  - c. Иногда
  - d. Часто
  - e. Всегда
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
17. Как часто Вы практикуете традиции Тенгри?
- a. Всегда
  - b. Часто
  - c. Иногда
  - d. Почти никогда
  - e. Никогда
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать
18. Знаете ли Вы людей, которые часто практикуют традиции Тенгри?
- a. Да
  - b. Нет
  - c. Не уверен
  - d. Предпочитаю не отвечать

Если да, можете ли Вы описать, какие традиции Тенгри они практикуют (в нескольких предложениях)?

\_\_\_\_\_ · \_\_\_\_\_ · \_\_\_\_\_ ·



19. Как Вы думаете, влияет ли тенгрианство на казахскую идентичность?
- a. Да
  - b. Нет
  - c. Не уверен
  - d. Предпочитаю не отвечать
20. В какой степени, по Вашему мнению, тенгрианство влияет на казахскую идентичность?
- a. Очень сильно
  - b. Сильно
  - c. Умеренно
  - d. Немного
  - e. Нисколько
  - f. Предпочитаю не отвечать

Раздел коротких ответов [Примечание для респондентов: Этот опрос не ограничен по времени, поэтому вы можете сделать перерыв или пропустить вопросы, на которые не хотите отвечать. Пожалуйста, кратко ответьте на следующие вопросы.

21. В соответствии с Вашим ответом на последний вопрос ("В какой степени, по Вашему мнению, тенгрианство влияет на казахскую идентичность?"), кратко объясните, почему Вы выбрали очень сильно/сильно/умеренно/немного/нисколько/предпочитаю не отвечать
22. Кратко перечислите, что Вы знаете о тенгрианстве.
23. Кратко объясните, какие аспекты тенгрианства важны или не важны для казахской идентичности?
24. Считаете ли Вы, что Ваше правительство пропагандирует тенгрианство? Кратко объясните, почему да или почему нет?
25. Есть ли что-нибудь, что Вы хотели бы сказать или добавить о тенгрианстве и казахской идентичности? Если да, пожалуйста, дайте свой комментарий ниже.

### **Appendix 3: Survey Questions Kazakh**

Зерттеуге қатысу келісімі туралы ескерту: Осы сауалнаманы толтыра отырып, мен жауаптарымның Эбигейл Скрипканың диссертациясы мен болашақ жұмыстарында Университеттің Зерттеудің Адал Тәжірибе Кодексіне сәйкес қолданылуына және ұсынған деректерімді Эбигейл Скрипкаға пайдалануға рұқсат беретінімді растаймын. Ешқандай сәйкестендіруші деректер жиналмайды. Бұл зерттеудің негізінде жиналған барлық деректер 10 жылға дейін қауіпсіз жерде сақталады.

Бұл сауалнаманы толтыру шамамен 15-20 минутты алады.

Сауалнамаға қосымша

1. Сіз Алматыда тұрасыз ба?
  - i. Иә
  - ii. Жоқ
  - iii. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
2. Жас
  - a. Жасыңыз нешеде?
3. Жыныс
  - a. Сіздің жынысыңыз қандай?
    - i. Ер
    - ii. Әйел
    - iii. Мұнда көрсетілмеген басқа гендерлік сәйкестік
    - iv. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
4. Этникалық тиістілік
  - a. Сіз қазақ болғаныңызды қаншалықты мақтан тұтасыз?
    - i. Өте мақтан тұтамын
    - ii. Аздап мақтан тұтамын
    - iii. Бейтарап сезінемін
    - iv. Мақтан тұтпаймын
    - v. Мүлдем мақтан тұтпаймын
    - vi. Мен қазақ емеспін (ұлтыңызды жазуыңызды сұраймыз)
    - vii. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
5. Аймақ
  - a. Қай облыстан боласыз?
    - i. Абай
    - ii. Ақмола
    - iii. Ақтөбе
    - iv. Алматы
    - v. Жетісу
    - vi. Атырау
    - vii. Шығыс Қазақстан
    - viii. Қарағанды
    - ix. Қостанай
    - x. Қызылорда
    - xi. Маңғыстау
    - xii. Солтүстік Қазақстан

- xiii. Павлодар
  - xiv. Түркістан
  - xv. Батыс Қазақстан
  - xvi. Ұлытау
  - xvii. Жамбыл
  - xviii. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
6. Білім деңгейі
- a. Сіздің біліміңіздің ең жоғары/қазіргі деңгейі қандай?
    - i. Аяқталмаған орта білім немесе одан төмен
    - ii. Орта кәсіптік білім
    - iii. Жалпы орта білім
    - iv. Орта білімнен кейінгі техникалық білім (4 жылдан кем)
    - v. Бакалавр деңгейі
    - vi. Мамандық дипломы
    - vii. Жоғары білім (магистратура немесе докторантура)
    - viii. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
7. Сіздің дініңіз қандай?
- a. Ислам
  - b. Православиелік христиандық
  - c. Тәңіршілдік
  - d. Атеизм/агностицизм
  - e. Басқа дін [жазуыңызды сұраймыз]
  - f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
8. Сіз Құдайға сенесіз бе?
- a. Иә
  - b. Жоқ
  - c. Сенімсізбін
  - d. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
9. Тәңіршілдік туралы естідіңіз бе?
- a. Иә
  - b. Жоқ
  - c. Сенімсізбін
  - d. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
10. Сіз өзіңізді тәңіршілмін деп санайсыз ба?
- a. Иә
  - b. Жоқ
  - c. Сенімсізбін
  - d. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
11. Тәңіршілдік қазақ болмысы үшін қаншалықты маңызды деп ойлайсыз?
- a. Өте маңызды
  - b. Маңызды
  - c. Орташа маңызды
  - d. Біраз маңызды
  - e. Маңызды емес
  - f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
12. Тәңіршілдік жастардың қазақ болмысы үшін қаншалықты маңызды деп ойлайсыз?
- a. Өте маңызды
  - b. Маңызды

- c. Орташа маңызды
  - d. Біраз маңызды
  - e. Маңызды емес
  - f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
13. Тәңіршілдік тек «қалалық элитаға» арналған деген пікірмен қаншалықты келісесіз?
- a. Толығымен келісемін
  - b. Көбінесе келісемін
  - c. Біраз келісемін
  - d. Біраз келіспеймін
  - e. Көбінесе келіспеймін
  - f. Толығымен келіспеймін
  - g. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
14. Тәңіршілдіктің Қазақстандағы рөлі қаншалықты маңызды деп ойлайсыз?
- a. Өте маңызды
  - b. Маңызды
  - c. Орташа маңызды
  - d. Біраз маңызды
  - e. Маңызды емес
  - f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
15. Тәңіршілдік қазақтың діні дегенге қаншалықты келісесіз?
- a. Толығымен келісемін
  - b. Көбінесе келісемін
  - c. Біраз келісемін
  - d. Біраз келіспеймін
  - e. Көбінесе келіспеймін
  - f. Толығымен келіспеймін
  - g. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
16. Сіз өмірлік маңызды шешімдерді қабылдағанда, Тәңіршілдік діни дәстүріндегі жеке дұға мен діни ойға қаншалықты жиі сенесіз?
- a. Ешқашан
  - b. Шамамен ешқашан
  - c. Кейде
  - d. Жиі
  - e. Өте жиі
  - f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
17. Тәңіршілдік дәстүрлерін қаншалықты жиі қолданасыз?
- a. Әрқашан
  - b. Жиі
  - c. Кейде
  - d. Аз қолданамын
  - e. Мүлде қолданбаймын
  - f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
18. Тәңіршілдік дәстүрін жиі қолданатын адамдарды білесіз бе?
- a. Иә
  - b. Жоқ
  - c. Сенімсізбін
  - d. Жауап бермегенді жөн көр
19. [Тармақталған сұрақ]

- a. Егер иә болса, олардың қандай тәңіршілдік дәстүрлерін ұстанатынын сипаттай аласыз ба (бірнеше сөйлеммен)?  
i. \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .
20. Тәңіршілдік қазақ болмысына әсер етеді деп ойлайсыз ба?  
a. Иә  
b. Жоқ  
c. Сенімсізбін  
d. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін
21. Тәңіршілдік қазақ болмысына қаншалықты әсер етеді деп ойлайсыз?  
a. Қатты әсер етеді  
b. Әсер етеді  
c. Шамамен әсер етеді  
d. Біраз әсер етеді  
e. Мүлдем әсер етпейді  
f. Жауап бермегенді жөн көремін

Қысқа жауаптар бөлімі [Сұхбаткерлерге ескертпе: Бұл сауалнама уақытпен шектелмеген, сондықтан үзіліс жасауыңызға немесе жауап бергіңіз келмейтін сұрақтарды өткізіп жіберуіңізге болады. Төмендегі сұрақтарға қысқаша жауап беруіңізді сұраймыз.]

22. Соңғы сұраққа («Тәңіршілдік қазақ болмысына қаншалықты әсер етеді деп ойлайсыз?») берген жауабыңызға сәйкес, неліктен қатты әсер етеді/әсер етеді/шамамен әсер етеді/біраз әсер етеді/мүлдем әсер етпейді деп таңдағаныңызды қысқаша түсіндіріңіз.  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .
23. Тәңіршілдік туралы не білетініңізді қысқаша атап өтіңіз.  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .
24. Қазақ болмысы үшін Тәңіршілдіктің қандай аспектілері маңызды немесе маңызды емес екенін қысқаша түсіндіріңіз.  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .
25. Қазақстан Үкіметі тәңіршілдікті насихаттайды деп ойлайсыз ба? Не себепті олай санайсыз?  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .
26. Тәңіршілдік пен қазақ болмысы туралы айтарыңыз немесе қосқыңыз келетін нәрсе бар ма? Олай болса, төменде өз пікіріңізді қалдырыңыз.  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .

## Appendix 4: University of Glasgow Ethical Approval



University  
of Glasgow

Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

College of Social  
Sciences

Notification of Ethics Application Outcome – UG and PGT Student Applications

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### Application Details

Undergraduate Student Research Ethics Application  Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2022/182/CEERS

Applicant's Name: Abigail Frances Scripka

Project Title: Tengrism as a Lived Religion in Kazakhstan

**Application Status: Fully Approved**

Date of Review: 14/06/2022

Start Date of Approval 27/06/2022 End Date of Approval 01/12/2022

**NB: Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.**

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### Recommendations (where changes are required)

Where changes are required by reviewers all applicants must respond in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee and provide this as the Resubmission Document to explain the changes you have made to the application as well as amending the documents. **Changes to the application form or supporting documents should be highlighted either in block highlight or in red coloured text to assist the reviewers.**

All resubmitted application documents should then be provided.

**Approval Subject to Amendments** means that the applicant can proceed with data collection with effect from the date of approval, but amendments must be fulfilled.

**Amendments Subject to SEF** should be submitted to ethics administrator.

**If your application is rejected** a new application must be submitted to the ethics administrator. Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document provided as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.

REVIEWER MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS	APPLICANT RESPONSE

REVIEWER MINOR RECOMMENDATIONS	APPLICANT RESPONSE

ADDITIONAL REVIEWER COMMENTS	APPLICANT RESPONSE
<p>In the document 'Appendix for Questionnaire' you included the old consent statement. Please make sure that you include the revised one in the survey itself (so that respondents also consent to data being used in future research, not only this dissertation).</p>	