

## ON THE STUDY OF THE MULTICULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION FACTORS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EURASIA

*This article analyzes some social, historical and ethno-cultural factors that influenced the spread of religion in the South-Eastern Siberia region, also frontier territories, especially among the Turkic population. The author examines how religion was introduced to the area through the Silk Road, shifts in social powers, population migrations, and the cultural and religious receptivity of Muslim peoples. Furthermore, the article highlights how the ethnic composition of South-Eastern Siberia and the spiritual worldview of its population created favorable conditions for the adoption of Islam. The role of Islam is explored not only as a religious system but also as a civilizational phenomenon that shaped social, legal, and cultural institutions. Employing historical-comparative, geopolitical, and content analysis methods, this study for the first time provides a comprehensive comparative overview of Islamization in this region within the framework of social, public, and ethnocultural influences. The article also thoroughly examines the social and cultural impacts of neighboring states, as well as the historical and political events during the Arab and Mongol invasions. Particular attention is given to the interconnections of religions along the Silk Road, described with scholarly rigor. This research constitutes an important source for readers interested in the religious history of South-Eastern Siberia. By addressing the Islamization in the context of the interplay between social and ethno-cultural factors, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the religious history in this region.*

**Keywords:** *Eurasia, South-Eastern Siberia, religion, culture, Russia, Kazakhs, China, Uyghurs, Silk Road*

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### Introduction

South-Eastern Siberia is a historical and geographical region, with an ethnically diverse population primarily engaged in cattle breeding, agriculture, and traditional crafts (*Simay-ijiang et al.* 2019: 262).

This confessional diversity makes it possible to understand not only the cultural and religious combination of Islam between ethnic communities in South-Eastern Siberia, but also the historical and civilizational dynamics of the region. This region stands out as a space that has witnessed the spread and interaction of various religious traditions throughout history (*Baitenova, Duissenbayeva* 2012: 163). As a result of its geopolitical location and strategic importance along the Silk Road (*Hasanov* 2025: 59–60), this region has become a crossroads

of various civilizations. As a result of historical evolution, the religious landscape here has become multi-layered. The history of the development of religions here can be divided into four stages, the first one being the predominance of local religious beliefs and shamanic traditions (up to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC). In this era, religious practice was based on the cult of ancestors. The second stage (4<sup>th</sup> century BC — 9<sup>th</sup> century CE) was marked by the dominance of Buddhism, while Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Daoism, and Nestorian Christianity co-existed alongside it. This religious pluralism persisted in the region for nearly a millennium (*Lenz-Raymann* 2014: 120–121). The third stage (9<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries) witnessed the spread of Islam. In the southern part, Islam gradually replaced Buddhism, while in the northern areas Buddhist traditions maintained their influence. Over time, Islam gained strength, diminishing the impact of other religions such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Nestorian Christianity. The fourth stage (16<sup>th</sup> century — present) saw Islam established as the principal faith of the region. During the period of the Eastern Chagatai Khanate, Islam was consolidated politically and socially, and the majority of ethnic communities embraced the religion. Nevertheless, Buddhism and Daoism persisted among Chinese communities, while in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Oirat Mongols' adoption of Tibetan Buddhism reinvigorated religious diversity in the north. Later, Catholicism and Orthodoxy were also introduced, though they never achieved broad influence (*Van Wie* 2008: 16–17).

Thus, although Islam became the dominant religious system in the region from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, the region's religious history has consistently been characterized by its multi-confessional structure. The article examines the stages of the spread of Islam in the South-Eastern Siberian region, as well as its geopolitical and ethno-cultural influences. Islam is the youngest among the world's religions. Whereas Buddhism and Christianity emerged during the era of slavery and adapted to medieval conditions, Islam appeared and developed as a genuine historical and cultural phenomenon of the medieval period. While Buddhism and Christianity evolved within specific religious and cultural frameworks, Islam distinguished itself by selectively integrating significant elements from various religious and cultural traditions. This synthesis shaped the comprehensive scientific system, legal foundations, cultural practices, and social patterns of Islamic civilization. Such processes paved the way for scientific renewal, civilizational advancement, and the establishment of a new system of values within Islamic culture. During the Abbasid Caliphate (9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries), the so-called “Eastern Cultural Renaissance” defined a new global historical dimension of Islamic civilization (*Barthold* 1993: 68). This period stimulated not only religious practices but also the development of Sharia law, architecture, literature, Arabic script, and calligraphy. At the same time, contributions to philosophy, medicine, and the natural sciences reinforced the universal character of Islamic civilization.

Thus, while preserving its distinctive religious and historical features, Islamic civilization assimilated the cultural achievements of previous societies and, by shaping universal human values, exerted a long-term influence on global civilization. This study aims to systematically analyze the particular features of Islam's establishment in South-Eastern Siberia and to demonstrate its significance in the region's religious and cultural evolution.

### **Research Methods and Sources**

In order to identify the geopolitical and ethno-cultural factors that contributed to the spread of Islam in the South-Eastern Siberian region, several scientific methods were used. 1 — Through the historical-comparative method, the influence of political events and his-

torical changes in the region on the development of Islam was determined. 2 — the spread of Islam through the method of geopolitical analysis was considered not only in terms of religious, but also in terms of international relations and spatial factors. 3 — formed the basis for a systematic review of academic papers, monographs, and articles through the method of content analysis. Also, official census materials, scientific research, and data from international organizations were used to study the current ethno-demographic situation. In the course of the study, the requirements of academic ethics were observed, and content analysis, thematic coding, statistical, and comparative methods were used in the processing of qualitative and quantitative data. The use of such methods made it possible to comprehensively explain the process of Islamization in South-Eastern Siberia, its historical foundations, modern features, and challenges.

The spread of Islam into the South-Eastern Siberian region of Asia began during the period of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750). According to historical sources, the introduction of Islam into Central Asia and the South-Eastern Siberian region dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Records indicate that the first Arab missionaries arrived around the year 670 (*Gafurov* 1972: 216). By the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic missionary activity in the region had become noticeably more active (*Manzhibayev* 2009: 105). Some accounts suggest that the earliest attempts by the Arabs to disseminate Islam among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia took place during the reign of Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (724–743). The introduction of Islam into Central Asia took place during the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750). A specific starting point of this process is often associated with the military campaign of the Arab commander Qutayba ibn Muslim in 714. It was during this period that Turkic tribes first encountered Islam under conditions of military confrontation. Historian B. Gafurov notes concerning this event: “Qutayba was not interested in the commercial significance of this center but in its strategic role: by seizing Isfijab, he hoped to cut off the main routes used by the Turkic armies to support their allies in Central Asia” (*Gafurov* 1972: 216). This evidence indicates that the Arab military campaigns of that period were not aimed at the complete conquest of the Turkic peoples but rather at securing their own territories against external threats. According to historical sources, Islam began to penetrate Central Asia and South-Eastern Siberia around the 670s through the activities of Arab missionaries. By the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, the intensification of Islamic proselytization became evident (*Lenz-Raymann* 2014: 119–125).

The Battle of Talas in 751, fought between the Arab forces under Ziyad ibn Salih and the Chinese troops led by General Gao Xianzhi, marked a decisive turning point in the consolidation of Islam in Xinjiang and Central Asia. As a result of this conflict, the Chinese army suffered a complete defeat, and the regions of Zhetysu and South-Eastern Siberia were freed from Chinese influence. The Battle of Talas created historical preconditions for the wider spread of Islam and Islamic civilization across Central Asia. Although the region’s location along the Silk Road facilitated the penetration of diverse religions and cultures, Islam spread peacefully among the local populations, gradually strengthening its socio-cultural influence (*Chyngoguang* 1998: 92). In 935, Satuk Bughra Khan, the ruler of the Karakhanid state, became one of the first Turkic sovereigns to embrace Islam and actively promoted it at the state level. As a result, the cities of Kashgar and Atush in the South-Eastern Siberia emerged as important centers of Islamic culture. In 960, Islam was officially declared the state religion of the Karakhanid dynasty. The Arab historian Ibn al-Athir describes this period, stating: “In the year 349 of the Hijra (960 CE), 200,000 households of a certain Turkic people accepted Islam” (*Hansen* 2013: 275–277).

This account demonstrates the wide dissemination of Islam across Zhetysu and the Far

East during the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The spread and development of Islam in South-Eastern Siberia was significantly influenced by Central Asia. Although a portion of the Islamic literature available in the region consisted of works by Arab scholars, the majority were authored by intellectuals originating from Central Asia. Medieval Eastern culture provided an impetus for the advancement of Muslim science and civilization, shaping the formation of religious thought in the South-Eastern Siberian region. For instance, the Qur’anic exegesis al-Kashshaf by the Khwarezmian scholar Abu al-Qasim al-Zamakhshari (1075–1144), al-Tafseer al-Kabeer by al-Fakhr al-Razi (1149–1209), as well as the hadith compilations of Imam al-Bukhari were widely studied among the peoples of South-Eastern Siberia and came to be regarded as foundational religious texts. These works not only facilitated the consolidation of the Islamic worldview but also contributed to the flourishing of local scholarly and cultural traditions (*Chyngoguang* 1998: 92).

Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the South-Eastern Siberian region experienced the domination of the Khitan and later the Mongol powers. The political entities that emerged during this period generally followed policies of religious inclusiveness, which allowed Islam to coexist with Buddhism and other traditions. After the Mongol conquests, large parts of this region together with Transoxiana were incorporated into the Chagatai Khanate. Within the cultural framework of this state, the Chagatai literary language took shape (*Lenz-Raymann* 2014: 121–122). This language was raised to a higher level through the works of poets such as Alisher Navoi and spread as a folk language. The literary and religious heritage written in the Chagatai language includes such works as Ibn Ali’s “Kipchak book”, “Nakhzh Al-Faradis”, “Yusuf and Zuleikha”, and Saif Sarai’s “Gulistan-i Ibn Turk”. In addition, the works of such Central Asian scientists as Muhammad Haidar Dulati and Shah Mahmud Zhoras were translated into Chagatai and widely distributed among the local population. This cultural and linguistic process continued during the Manchu rule of the Qing Kingdom (*Manzhibayev* 2009: 105).

During this period, the Sufi branch of Islam, which had a profound influence on the spread and consolidation of Islam in Central Asia and the Kazakh steppes, began to gain ground. Sufism, which emerged in the 8<sup>th</sup> century within the framework of Islamic civilization, was based on Islamic ethics and spiritual-ascetic practices. Its primary aim was the cultivation of the human soul, the restraint of the nafs (carnal desires), and the attainment of closeness to God. The term sufi is often linked either to the Arabic word suf (“wool”), symbolizing the coarse woolen garments worn by early ascetics, or to the Greek word sophia (“wisdom”), highlighting its intellectual and spiritual dimensions (*Cetinkaya, Billings* 2023: 1069–1070).

Tasawwuf encompasses the belief system, spiritual practices, and ethical norms of the Sufis. Its main principles include abstaining from worldly pleasures, purifying the self, striving for spiritual perfection, and approaching God through sincere love and ma’rifa (gnosis). The Sufi tradition did not confine itself to the external rituals of Islam but emphasized the cultivation of the inner self. For this reason, it played a distinctive role in the history of the spread of Islam, particularly among the Turkic peoples. The Sufis paid special attention to spirituality and the purity of souls in the name of love for Allah. In Islamic Civilization, Sufism has the main goal of overcoming human lust, striving for spiritual perfection. In Central Asia, Sufi tariqats were formed between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and had a deep influence on the religious and spiritual life of the region. Among them, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, the founder of the Yasawi Tariqat, took a special place in the spread

of Islam among the Turkic peoples. This tariqa was distinguished by its interpretation of Islam as a spiritual teaching close to folk culture or a worldview. Through the Yasawi tradition, Islam became deeply rooted in the customs, literature, and social relations of the Turkic community, laying the foundation for the development of subsequent Sufi schools (*Baitenova, Duissenbayeva* 2012: 163).

The Mongol invasion temporarily impeded the spread of Islam in South-Eastern Siberia and Central Asia. As a result of the conquests, numerous cities were destroyed, centers of science and culture were plundered, mosques and madrasas were demolished, and trade relations along the Silk Road suffered significant disruption. However, over time, a process of revival began in the region. The Mongol rulers and the tribes under their control gradually embraced Islam and adopted the Turkic language. This development strengthened religious and cultural integration in the area and paved the way for the revitalization and wider dissemination of Islam across the nomadic steppe. Consequently, Islam became firmly embedded in the spiritual life of local ethnic groups and influenced various social strata of the population. In general, the Mongol rulers did not exert religious pressure on the Muslim community but instead pursued a policy of tolerance. This created a favorable environment for the gradual strengthening of Islam in the region. The adoption of Islam by the rulers of the Golden Horde further enhanced the religion's authority in both state and public life. Berke Khan (1255–1266) is regarded as one of the first Mongol rulers to embrace Islam. Medieval sources emphasize the significant role of the Sufi milieu in Bukhara in his conversion. For instance, Siraj al-Din al-Juzjani reports that Berke Khan accepted Islam at the hands of Sayf al-Din Bakhrazi, while 14<sup>th</sup>-century Arab historians Ibn Khaldun and al-Ayni note that he converted under Shams al-Din al-Bakhrazi, a disciple of Nazhm ad-Din Kubra. In a later period, Ozbeg Khan (1312–1342) elevated Islam to the status of the state religion. Contemporary accounts state that during his reign, more than ten mosques operated in the capital of the Golden Horde, and the khan himself was known to perform the five daily prayers without fail. As a result, Islam became the primary factor of political and cultural integration among diverse tribes, serving as a unifying force across the steppe (*Tizengauzen* 1941: 369).

Some medieval sources indicate that Berke Khan embraced Islam even before ascending to power. For example, the Arab geographer and scholar al-'Umari records that Berke's conversion to Islam took place around 1251, on his return from the kurultai at which Möngke was proclaimed Great Khan. Likewise, the Franciscan monk William of Rubruck, who visited the Golden Horde in 1253, notes in his memoirs: "Berke regards himself as a Muslim and does not permit the eating of pork in his court." (*de Rubrouck* 1997: 117–118).

These accounts demonstrate not only Berke's genuine inclination toward Islam but also the immediate influence of his faith on his personal customs and household practices.

The consolidation of Islam among the nomadic population gradually acquired a systematic character. In this process, religious preachers arriving from Central Asia, the Volga region, and other parts of the Muslim world played a pivotal role, with the Sufi tradition followers constituting the majority. The influence of the Naqshbandiyya and Yasawiyya orders extended equally to both the ruling elite and the common people. The khans maintained close relations with Sufi shaykhs, often drawing upon their religious authority to reinforce their own political legitimacy. At the same time, Sufi teachings resonated with the traditional worldview of the nomadic communities, thereby facilitating the deeper entrenchment of Islam in the steppe environment (*Abylov* 2019: 81–82).

Information about the spread of Islam in the region of South-Eastern Siberia is extensively presented in the works of numerous medieval Muslim scholars. In particular, valuable data can be found in al-Idrisi's *Nuzhat al-Mushtakh fi ikhtirakh al-afakh*, Zakariyya ibn Kazwini's (1203–1283) *Asar al-Bilad ua Akhbar al-Ibad*, Qudama ibn Zhafar's (d. 948) *Kitab al-Kharazh ua Sanat al-Kitaba*, Ibn Hurdadbeh's *Kitab al-Masalik ual-Mamalik*, al-Maqdisi's (947–1000) *Ahsanut Taqasim fi Marifat al-aqalim*, and al-Bakri's (11<sup>th</sup> century) *al-Masalik ua-l-Mamalik*. In addition, works such as Safi al-Din Orun Qoylaqidi's *Nasabnama*, Ibn al-Asir's *al-Kamil fit Tarikh*, Kashifi's *Rashahat*, Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayat al-A'yan*, Khazini's *Zhauahir al-Abrar min Amuaj al-Bihar*, Jami's *Nafahat al-Uns*, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur's *Baburnama*, Muhammad Haydar Dughlat's *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, and Utemish Hajji's *Chingiznama* also serve as valuable sources for studying the history of Islamization in the region. In the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the widespread dissemination of Islam in the region was strongly influenced by the close economic, cultural, and spiritual ties between the local Muslim populations and the Tatar Muslims of Central Asia and the Volga region. During this period, scholars and preachers from major Islamic centers such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Khiva, and Turkestan arrived in the region, promoting Islamic teachings and consolidating religious-spiritual traditions. As a result of the integration of the Muslim community in the Far East with Islamic civilization, the religious and cultural development of the region reached new heights. The first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a difficult period for the people of this region. The local population had to fight for its independence against invaders from all sides, because the Ural Kalmyks, dzungars, Bashkir detachments, and troops of the Central Asian khanates marched on the territory of South-Eastern Siberia. As indicated in historical sources, due to the constant pressure of an external enemy, some residents of the region began to forcibly migrate to the inner regions of Central Asia. Such resettlement, in turn, strengthened ties with neighboring Muslim states and peoples professing Islam, creating conditions for increased cultural and spiritual integration. As a result, Islam became more firmly established in East Turkestan society, which contributed to the strengthening of the Muslim tradition (*Baitenova, Duissenbayeva* 2012: 163; *Lenz-Raymann* 2014: 121–122).

## Results

Islam became widely established in South-Eastern Siberia and exerted a profound influence on the ethno-cultural life of the local populations. Islamic values and worldview principles deeply permeated the region's culture and customs, becoming an integral part of both the spiritual and social life of its inhabitants. This influence was evident in language and writing traditions, dance and musical arts, architectural styles, and even in the development of astronomical calendar systems. Moreover, Islam significantly impacted everyday life and worldview, introducing notable changes in culinary practices, clothing styles, and other aspects of material culture (*Israeli* 2012: 253–259).

After embracing Islam, the people of this region began to integrate religious values into the core of their customs, traditions, and beliefs. The foundation of these cultural and spiritual values primarily drew from the verses of the Qur'an, while a significant portion was grounded in the Hadiths and Sunnah, regarded as the secondary sources of Islamic guidance. Customs and traditions constitute a social phenomenon that develops over centuries in accordance with the religious beliefs, daily life, and unique structural characteristics of a nation or community. They represent accumulated life experiences and encompass patterns of behav-

ior established within society, including accepted norms and social practices that informally regulate daily life and distinguish cultural groups from one another. For a nation, customs and traditions serve as principles of living and societal order, shaping consciousness, educational orientation, and systems of practical and spiritual activity. Members of the community are expected to observe these norms, and those who fail to do so are held accountable within the accepted social framework. Historically, in Kazakh society, customs and traditions functioned as such regulatory mechanisms. Examples include celebrations, Nowruz porridge (Nauryz kozhe), marriage ceremonies, guest hospitality, ritual scattering of food (shashu), and communal feasts such as erulik ata (*Abylov* 2019: 79–84; *Israeli* 2012: 261–267).

The educational and social significance of customs is considerable, as they constitute the primary mechanism for transmitting historical, social, cultural, professional, and spiritual values from one generation to the next. Kazakh customary practices include respect for parents and elders, participation in collective rituals such as bayghazy, korimdik, suinshi giving, kade requests, greetings, attributing lineage, and peer humor. Additionally, habitual practices, gestures, superstitions, prohibitions, and learned behaviors all reflect the embodiment of customs. In this way, customary values are regarded as a vital component of a people’s cultural and spiritual heritage (*Adilbayev* 2018: 14). The influence of Islam on the peoples of this region, including the Kazakhs as part of the region’s demographic composition, can be categorized as follows:

The ethical and Sharia-based foundations of Islam merged with the traditional beliefs of the Kazakhs, fostering a worldview rooted in devotion to God and a human-centered moral framework. Among the Kazakhs, numerous religious figures emerged at various levels, including qadis, spiritual leaders, imams, Islamic scholars, and medrese instructors, who made significant contributions to the religious and cultural development of the community. As Islam became widely disseminated among the Kazakhs, Arab literature and culture gradually permeated their society. Kazakh bards composed unique works based on various Qur’anic narratives. For example, in 1899, Zhusipbek Khoja Shaykhislamuly (1857–1937) published *Qissa-i Hazret Zhusip (Joseph) and Zuleikha in Kazan*. Similarly, Akyt Khaji Ulimzhuuly authored works such as the didactic poem *Akhyrzaman Kui* and the poem *Shughaip*, which depicted Qur’anic events, including apocalyptic scenes and the story of Prophet Shuhaip. In all of these works, the poets glorified Allah and offered blessings upon the Prophet. During the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the spread of Islam in the region gradually displaced the previously used Old Turkic (Orkhon) and Old Uyghur scripts, establishing Arabic script as the dominant writing system. The majority of Uyghur and Kazakh written heritage has been preserved through the Arabic alphabet. Notable works include *Gulistan bi-t-Turki* (Saif Sarai), *Diuni Lugat at-Turk* (Mahmud al-Kashgari), *Kutadgu Bilig* (Yusuf Balasaguni), and *Hibat al-Haqa’iq* (Ahmad Yugnaki), among others. However, the use of Arabic script presented certain challenges. In 1912, A. Baitursynov introduced the first reforms to adapt the Arabic script to the Kazakh language, identifying phonemes unique to Kazakh that were absent in other Turkic languages and creating new characters to represent them. This orthography, called the “New Orthography” or *Töte jazu* (“direct writing”), marked a significant advancement in literacy. Beginning in 1913, it was adopted in madrasahs and, until 1929, in Soviet schools. Baitursynov’s modified Arabic script, *Töte jazu*, became the native writing system for over 1.5 million ethnic Kazakhs in China, playing a crucial role in their social, cultural, and educational development (*Cetinkaya, Billings* 2023: 1072–1079; *Manzhibayev* 2009: 105).

Following the spread of Islam, the peoples of South-Eastern Siberia, East Turkestan regarded the preservation of their national identity, culture, language, and religion — and the transmission of these to future generations — as inseparable from the eradication of illiteracy and the establishment of a national educational system. Consequently, a religious education system adapted to both sedentary and nomadic lifestyles developed. Among nomadic communities, during the winter months, children from a single village or clan would gather, and a mullah would be invited from outside to provide religious instruction. This process became the foundational form of education at that time (*Sanik* 2011: 67–70).

Over time, interest in religious education increased, and the number of children acquiring it grew. This created the need to consolidate educational institutions in one place for systematic teaching. During this period, affluent individuals and community leaders from major regions of South-Eastern Siberia pooled their resources to establish small madrasahs dedicated to providing religious education (*Makhmet et al.* 2021: 523–525). Through its diverse functions, Islam introduced new concepts into human consciousness. It called for the cultivation of high moral virtues grounded in faith. These virtues emphasized principles such as truth, justice, equality, freedom, and peace.

The religious education system, which originated in the Chagatai language, began to spread widely across the South-Eastern Siberian region. In areas and villages settled by Muslims, private madrasahs or those attached to mosques were established. Consequently, many affluent families began sending their children not only within East Turkestan but also to Central Asia and even Arab countries to pursue religious education. According to Volume 1 of the History of the Kazakh SSR: “In the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, literacy was primarily characteristic of representatives of the feudal elite — khans, sultans, mullahs, and qazis. Children from wealthy families traveled to cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand to study the Arabic language and Sharia. They studied works written by medieval Muslim authors in Arabic, Persian, and Chagatai languages” (*Adilbayev* 2018: 14–19; *Manzhibayev* 2009: 80–85).

The establishment of the religious education system and the teaching of Arabic, Persian, and Chagatai languages in madrasahs began to introduce new vocabulary into the lexicon of the Muslim populations in the region. In addition to religious terms such as Allah, fard (duty), iman (faith), namaz (prayer), imam, shari‘ah, jannah (paradise), and jahannam (hell), numerous other words entered every day and intellectual use, including terms related to culture, literature, truth, happiness, the world, nature, science, and books (*Myngzhanuly* 1990: 41).

The local authorities governing the region invited religious scholars from Central Asia, established mosques and madrasahs in their villages, and began educating children (*Myngzhanuly* 1987: 57).

Islam encouraged attention to the signs of God’s power in the universe and urged believers to establish a personal connection with Allah. Nomadic Muslim Kazakhs fulfilled this connection through acts of worship and by performing their duties faithfully. Islam also promoted compassion, love, mutual assistance, and profound respect for parents, while encouraging the pursuit of knowledge. Scholars who mastered Islamic teachings earned exceptional prestige and respect within the community (*Bihai* 2005: 58–59).

Islam shaped the customs and legal traditions of Kazakhs in the region. The principles of Islamic Sharia served as the foundation for social order, which was further regulated through Abak Kerei’s “Law of the Four Biys and Tore.” As a result, private property among Kazakhs in China was strictly protected, and the principles of individual ownership were reinforced. Crimes, including homicide, were punished in accordance with Sharia

rulings. Penalties for offenders varied according to the nature of the crime and included public beating, stoning, humiliation, fines, or being thrown to the ground.

The “Law of the Four Biys and Tore” represented a continuation of earlier steppe legal traditions, such as Qasym Khan’s Qasqa Zholy, Yesim Khan’s Eski Zholy, and Tauke Khan’s Zheti Zhargy. However, following the administrative control of Altai city near Beijing by the officials known as Wan and Gun, it became the first codified customary-legal system established in the region. Unlike ancient steppe laws, this legal framework was notable for ensuring that all citizens were equally accountable before the law within the scope of Sharia. Distinctive features are observed in proper names, particularly the prevalence of names associated with religious concepts under the influence of Islam. These include the names of prophets mentioned in the Qur’an, such as Musa (Musa), Yunus (Yunus), Dawud (Dawud), Ishaq (Ishaq), and Suleiman (Suleiman); names related to the esteemed Prophet Muhammad; and names conveying the meaning “servant of God,” such as Abdullaha (Servant of the One), Abdul Baki (Eternal Servant), Abdurrahman (Servant of the Most Merciful), Habibullah, and Izzatullah (God’s Beloved or Honored). Names honoring Caliph Ali, such as Karimali, Asadullah, Haidar, and Zulfiqar, were also commonly used. Female names also frequently exhibit religious anthroponyms. Anthroponymy (from Greek anthropos “human” and onoma “name”) refers to the collection of personal names within a particular language or region. Examples include Aklima (wisdom, intellect, insight), Adiya (honor, respect), Nurinisa (light of God), and Sharipa (kind, noble, sacred, powerful), among others. The influence of Islamic culture was strongly evident in music and dance. The Chinese historian and musicologist Zhou Jingbao, in his work *Music Culture along the Silk Road*, notes: “The late 16<sup>th</sup> century marked the Islamization of Xinjiang music. Persian and Turkic musical traditions gradually merged, forming Islamic-Turkic music. This Islamic-Turkic music became the core of the ancient Silk Road musical heritage and aligned with the traditions of the Silk Road urban music” (*Adilbayev* 2018: 14–19; *Manzhibayev* 2009: 80–85).

Regarding the astronomical calendar, nearly all Muslim communities used the Hijri calendar. Religious holidays, particularly Eid festivals, became the most significant celebrations for all Muslims. Food practices, clothing, and burial rites were conducted in accordance with Islamic Sharia law. The architectural development of the predominantly Muslim population in East Turkestan was largely shaped during the Qing Dynasty. For example, the Khayitkar Mosque in Kashgar, inhabited by Uyghurs, was constructed during this period. However, due to differences in lifestyle among Islamic communities, Islamic architecture did not develop uniformly across all ethnic groups. For nomadic peoples such as the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, whose livelihoods were based on pastoralism, the history of architectural development emerged significantly later (*Bihai* 2005: 93–96).

## Conclusion

The study results indicate that the spread of Islam in South-Eastern Siberia was closely linked to several geopolitical and ethno-cultural factors. Geopolitical circumstances, the development of trade routes, and the influence of external states directly affected the dynamics of religious processes, while ethno-cultural factors — such as language, traditions, popular beliefs, and customs — facilitated the penetration of Islam into local communities. The spread of Islam transformed not only the religious sphere but also political and cultural life, leading to significant changes in the social structure of the region. Religious values

and institutions influenced everyday life, legal norms, and moral standards, while their cultural impact was reflected in literature, art, and traditional celebrations.

**Marriage Traditions:** The traditional marriage ceremonies of the peoples of South-Eastern Siberia closely align with Islamic matrimonial practices. For instance, the legitimacy of a marriage is confirmed through the mutual consent of both parties and the presence of witnesses.

**Benevolence and Charity:** In the traditions of the peoples, helping others and showing kindness are considered important. Similarly, in Islam, performing acts of charity is an obligation for Muslims. The parallels between these traditions and Islamic principles demonstrate the close integration of Islam into the region's culture. Former customs, such as offering blessings and honoring ancestors, were adapted to align with Islamic requirements (Abylov 2019: 79–80; Tabeikyna et al. 2021: 236–237).

**Recitation of the Qur'an:** One of the most important religious customs among the peoples of East Turkestan is the recitation of the Qur'an and its transmission from generation to generation. Among the peoples of South-Eastern Siberia, it is a religious right to read the Koran, present it to the public at meals and weddings.

**Traditional holidays and Islamic holidays.** Such holidays of the peoples of this region as Nauryz, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and the tradition of burying the deceased are combined with important Islamic holidays. This demonstrates that the customs and traditions of the peoples of East Turkestan and the Islamic religion are interconnected, based on mutual respect and harmony. These two systems complement each other, contributing significantly to the spiritual and cultural development of the Far East society (Manzhibayev 2009: 104–105).

Over time, Islam deeply penetrated the traditional culture of various Muslim ethnic groups in the region, becoming a fundamental component of their spiritual identity. However, the majority of these communities managed to preserve significant elements of their ancient cultural heritage. This phenomenon is particularly evident in national holidays, family and social customs, as well as in the continuation of longstanding beliefs and rituals. Nevertheless, as a result of Islam's widespread presence over the centuries, these traditions and beliefs harmonized with Islamic culture, forming an integrated religious and cultural system.

Furthermore, local populations integrated Islamic values with their traditional culture, creating a unique religious and cultural system. This process, taking into account regional characteristics and ethnic diversity, ensured the adaptive and sustainable acceptance of Islam.

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