

UDC 316.42

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КАЗАКСТАНДЫН КОНТЕКСТИНДЕГИ УЛУТТУК ИДЕНТТҮҮЛҮКТҮ  
ЖАНА КООМДУК КАБЫЛДООНУ ТАЛДОО**А.А. Бакытжанова<sup>1</sup>, Г.Т. Алимбекова<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан<sup>2</sup> Центр изучения общественного мнения, Алматы, Казахстанe-mail: [ainurb1997@gmail.com](mailto:ainurb1997@gmail.com) , [g.alimbekova@gmail.com](mailto:g.alimbekova@gmail.com)**ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ МИФЫ И ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ СТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ  
АЗИИ: АНАЛИЗ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ И ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЕ ВОСПРИЯТИЕ В  
КОНТЕКСТЕ КАЗАХСТАНА**А.А. Bakytzhanova<sup>1</sup>  , G.T. Alimbekova<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan<sup>2</sup> Public Opinion Research Center, Almaty, Kazakhstane-mail: [ainurb1997@gmail.com](mailto:ainurb1997@gmail.com) , [g.alimbekova@gmail.com](mailto:g.alimbekova@gmail.com)**HISTORICAL MYTHS AND STATE-BUILDING IN CENTRAL ASIA: ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL  
IDENTITY AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN THE CONTEXT OF KAZAKHSTAN**

**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the role of historical myths in the processes of state-building and formation of national identity in Central Asia with an emphasis on Kazakhstan. Historical myths, as shown by examples from world history, act as an important tool for legitimizing statehood, strengthening collective memory and consolidating society. In the context of the post-Soviet space, where the borders of the republics were created artificially, and ethnocultural diversity was significant, the need to rethink the historical heritage became a key challenge for the newly independent states. In Kazakhstan, one small part of the national identity is built on the basis of myths about the Kazakh Khanate, the Great Steppe and the fight against external threats, including the Dzungar wars and the colonial policy of the Russian Empire. These narratives contribute not only to the elevation of the Kazakh cultural heritage, but also to the positioning of the country as a strategic center in Eurasia. A comparative analysis shows the difference in approaches in other countries of the region: from the Uzbek emphasis on the figure of Amir Temir to the Turkmen cult of personality. Unlike its neighbors, Kazakhstan demonstrates a more inclusive model that takes into account the multi-ethnic composition of the population.

The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach with a sociological focus, including a literature review, content analysis, and sociological concepts. The findings confirm the importance of historical myths as a tool for the formation of identity and political legitimation. The Kazakhstan model shows that an integrative approach that combines historical heritage with modern challenges contributes to social stability and interethnic harmony.

The limitations of the study are related to the use of secondary data and the need for a more in-depth study of public perceptions of national narratives. The results emphasize the importance of a critical approach to historical myths and their role in the consolidation of a multi-ethnic society.

**Key words:** historical myths; national identity; state building; Central Asia; collective memory; interethnic harmony.

**Аннотация.** Макала Казакстанга басым жасоо менен Борбордук Азиядагы мамлекеттик курулуш жана улуттук иденттүүлүктүн калыптануу процесстериндеги тарыхый мифтердин ролуна арналган. Тарыхый мифтер бүткүл дүйнөлүк тарыхтын мисалдарынан көрүнүп тургандай, мамлекеттүүлүктү мыйзамдаштыруунун, жамааттык эстутумду чыңдоонун жана коомду консолидациялоонун маанилүү куралы болуп саналат. Республикалардын чек аралары жасалма жол менен түзүлгөн жана этномаданий көп түрдүүлүк олуттуу болгон постсоветтик мейкиндикте тарыхый мурастарды кайра карап чыгуу зарылчылыгы эгемендикке жетишкен мамлекеттер үчүн негизги чакырык болуп калды.

Казакстанда улуттук иденттүүлүктүн кичинекей бир бөлүгү Казак хандыгы, Улуу Талаа жөнүндөгү мифтерге, сырткы коркунучтарга, анын ичинде жунгар согуштарына жана Россия империясынын колониялык саясатына каршы күрөштүн негизинде курулган. Бул баяндар казактын маданий мурасын гана эмес, өлкөнү Евразиядагы стратегиялык борбор катары көрсөтөт. Салыштырмалуу талдоо региондун башка өлкөлөрүндөгү мамиледеги айырмачылыктарды көрсөтөт: өзбектердин Амир Темирдин инсанына басым жасоосунан тарта түркмөндөрдүн инсанга сыйынуусуна чейин. Коңшуларынан айырмаланып, Казакстан калктын көп улуттуу курамын эске алган кыйла инклюзивдүү моделди көрсөтүп келет.

Изилдөө адабияттарды карап чыгуу, мазмунду талдоо жана социологиялык концепцияларды камтыган социологиялык багыт менен дисциплиналар аралык мамилеге негизделген. Изилдөөлөр тарыхый мифтердин инсандыкты жана саясий легитимдүүлүктү калыптандыруунун куралы катары маанилүүлүгүн тастыктайт. Казакстан модели тарыхый мурастарды заманбап чакырыктар менен айкалыштырган интеграциялык мамиле коомдук туруктуулукту жана этностор аралык ынтымакты бекемдөөгө өбөлгө түзөрүн көрсөтөт.

Изилдөөнүн чектөөлөрү экинчи даражадагы маалыматтарды колдонууга жана улуттук аңгемелерди коомчулуктун кабыл алуусун тереңирээк изилдөөнүн зарылдыгына байланыштуу. Жыйынтыктар тарыхый мифтерге сын көз караш менен мамиле кылуунун маанилүүлүгүн жана алардын көп улуттуу коомду консолидациялоодогу ролун көрсөтөт.

**Негизги сөздөр:** тарыхый мифтер; улуттук өзгөчөлүк; мамлекеттик курулуш; Борбордук Азия; жамааттык эс тутум; улуттар аралык ынтымак.

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена роли исторических мифов в процессах государственного строительства и формирования национальной идентичности в Центральной Азии с акцентом на Казахстан. Исторические мифы, как показано на примерах из мировой истории, выступают важным инструментом легитимизации государственности, укрепления коллективной памяти и консолидации общества. В условиях постсоветского пространства, где границы республик создавались искусственно, а этнокультурное разнообразие было значительным, необходимость переосмысления исторического наследия стала ключевым вызовом для новых независимых государств.

В Казахстане одна маленькая часть национальной идентичности строится на основе мифов о Казахском ханстве, Великой степи и борьбе с внешними угрозами, включая джунгарские войны и колониальную политику Российской империи. Эти нарративы способствуют не только возвышению казахского культурного наследия, но и позиционированию страны как стратегического центра в Евразии. Сравнительный анализ показывает различие подходов в других странах региона: от узбекского акцента на фигуре Амира Темира до туркменского культурного персонажа. В отличие от соседей, Казахстан демонстрирует более инклюзивную модель, учитывающую многонациональный состав населения.

Исследование основано на междисциплинарном подходе с социологическим акцентом, включающем литературный обзор, контент-анализ и социологические концепции. Выводы подтверждают значимость исторических мифов как инструмента формирования идентичности и политической легитимации. Казахская модель показывает, что интегративный подход, объединяющий историческое наследие с современными вызовами, способствует социальной стабильности и межэтническому согласию.

Ограничения исследования связаны с использованием вторичных данных и необходимостью более глубокого изучения общественного восприятия национальных нарративов. Ре-



зультаты подчеркивают важность критического подхода к историческим мифам и их роли в консолидации многонационального общества.

**Ключевые слова:** исторические мифы; национальная идентичность; государственное строительство; Центральная Азия; коллективная память; межэтническое согласие.

### Introduction

The process of state-building is traditionally accompanied by the formation of historical myths, which play a key role in the creation of a collective identity. These myths help to unite nations around common values, giving meaning to their existence through a symbolic understanding of the past. For example, myths about the "golden age" of Athens and the exploits of Pericles helped the ancient Greeks strengthen their sense of unity and cultural superiority, while the image of Rome as an "eternal city" and the myth of the city's foundation by the brothers Romulus and Remus formed the basis of Roman imperial ideology. In the Middle Ages, European states actively used historical narratives to assert their legitimacy. French kings, for example, relied on legends about the divine origins of their dynasties, such as the myth of Clovis and the holy anointing, symbolizing divine election. In Sweden, the myth of the Vikings as ancient ancestors with unrivaled valor and aspiration for freedom was popular. These historical images, often supplemented by artistic interpretations, created powerful symbols on which national identity was built.

The modern era and the rise of nationalism in the 19th century made historical myths a key tool in the politics of nation-states. The German idea of the "sacred empire" and the sacred significance of the unification of the German lands through the figure of Otto the Great contributed to the consolidation of Germany. In Italy, the concept of "Risorgimento" (rebirth) inspired the population to unite, emphasizing the connection of the modern nation with the legacy of the Roman Empire.

These examples show that national myths not only interpret the past, but also create the basis for political and cultural unity. Their creation involves the adaptation of real historical events in order to emphasize heroism, the struggle for freedom, or the special destiny of the nation. Such myths continue to be a powerful means of shaping collective consciousness, being woven into official narratives, the educational system, and cultural traditions.

In Central Asia, by contrast, the process of state-building and national identity formation began suddenly, largely as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The region's republics, artificially created as part of Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s and 1930s, had to rethink their pasts in order to create new narratives that legitimized their existence as independent states. However, the region's specific conditions, including its historical mosaicism and multilayered cultural influences, complicated this process.

The borders of the modern Central Asian republics were drawn by the Bolsheviks along ethnolinguistic lines, a novelty for a region where identity was traditionally defined through family, tribe, or place of origin. This led to significant complications: for example, Turkic-speaking, Persianized communities or Persian-speaking, Turkified groups, confusing identification of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, and intermingling between Uzbeks and Turkmens. The creation of new political-territorial units caused not only conflicts and divisions, but also the need to find a new meaning for existence.

After gaining independence in 1991, the states of Central Asia began to rapidly construct national myths to justify their statehood. These myths became an important tool for strengthening national consciousness and legitimizing power. In Kazakhstan, for example, much attention was paid to exalting the historical heritage of the Great Steppe, the role of the Kazakh Khanate as the basis of state tradition, and the fight against external threats, including the Dzungar Wars and the colonial policy of the Russian Empire. Such narratives not only emphasized the uniqueness of Kazakh identity, but were also used to position the country as an important center of the Eurasian region.

In 1991, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan faced the challenge of creating sovereign states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each republic was forced not only to build a new political and economic system, but also to formulate a national narrative that could unite its multi-ethnic popu-

lation and strengthen its collective identity. This process was not only complex, but also highly heterogeneous: historical, cultural and demographic differences in the countries of the region determined unique approaches to the creation of national mythologies. However, the formation of these myths was far from a straightforward process. The post-colonial legacy, the influence of Soviet ideology and the need to strike a balance between multiculturalism and national dominance gave rise to numerous contradictions. On the one hand, Kazakhstan sought to reflect its historical heritage and the identity of the Kazakhs as the titular nation. On the other hand, the complex ethnic structure of society required that the interests of other ethnic groups be taken into account in order to avoid social conflicts.

In many cases, rather than relying on objective historical legacies, Central Asian leaders have resorted to interpretations of the past that emphasize national heroes and greatness. For example, in Kazakhstan, the legends of the creation of the Kazakh Khanate, the struggle against the Dzungars, and the cultural traditions of the nomadic people have taken center stage. In Uzbekistan, the emphasis has been on the legacy of Tamerlane as a symbol of power and national unity. Tajikistan has turned to its Persian past, emphasizing the continuity from the Sassanid era. Turkmenistan has emphasized the greatness of ancient civilizations such as Parthia and turned the personality cult of the leader into part of the national narrative. Kyrgyzstan, in turn, has elevated the Epic of Manas as a key symbol of national identity.

Importantly, the creation of these narratives has often been accompanied by ignoring or changing historical facts. The colonial era, the Soviet legacy, and interethnic conflicts have been either simplified or distorted to suit political objectives. This allowed the elites to legitimize their power and form the image of a "national state" reflecting the interests of the titular nation, sometimes at the expense of the multinational population. As we will see, approaches to the formation of historical myths varied from country to country. These differences were due to unique historical and demographic features, as well as current political needs. However, everywhere these myths became an instrument of state policy and part of the ideological system supporting national unity.

This article examines key aspects of the formation of historical myths in the context of state-building in Central Asia, with a special emphasis on Kazakhstan. The study aims to identify the mechanisms of myth construction, their influence on the processes of national identification and political legitimation, and to analyze the public perception of these narratives.

The purpose of this study is to comprehensively analyze three interrelated areas reflecting key aspects of the formation of national identity and state-building in Central Asia. First, the article examines the role of historical myths as one of the main instruments shaping national identity, paying special attention to their political and social significance. Second, the process of state-building in the countries of Central Asia is analyzed with an emphasis on the use of historical heritage and narratives of the past to strengthen power and collective identity. Thirdly, the features of Kazakhstani identity are studied, including specific features of the national narrative and the perception of this process by society in the context of a multinational state. The synthesis of these areas allows us to identify how historical myths and national narratives are integrated into political and social structures, becoming an important element in the formation of identity and consolidation of society.

#### **Literature review**

The formation of national identity and state building in Central Asia is a complex process in which historical myths play a key role. To analyze these processes, it is important to turn to theoretical concepts developed within the framework of the study of historical memory and collective identity.

#### **The role of historical memory in the formation of national identity**

Historical memory plays a central role in strengthening collective consciousness and creating a national narrative. The French sociologist M. Halbwachs views memory as a socially conditioned phenomenon, emphasizing that individual memories do not exist in isolation, but are formed within social groups (Halbwachs, 1992) [1]. His concept of collective memory identifies "social frameworks" that structure memories and determine the ways in which they are interpreted. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of Central Asia, where state elites have actively used collective narratives to shape national identity.



J. Assmann introduces the concept of cultural memory, emphasizing that it goes beyond personal memories and becomes a mechanism for transmitting values and traditions that form the basis of national identity (Assmann, 2011) [2]. In the context of Central Asia, cultural memory serves as a tool through which the uniqueness of the nation is emphasized, for example, in Kazakhstan through narratives about the Kazakh Khanate and the Great Steppe.

P. Nora's concept of places of memory emphasizes the role of symbolic spaces such as monuments, museums, and national holidays in maintaining collective memory (Nora, 1996) [3]. These spaces in Central Asian countries are often used to legitimize power. For example, the Independence Monument in Almaty symbolizes national unity and the struggle for sovereignty.

#### **Falsification of History and Its Impact on Public Consciousness**

Falsification of historical memory poses a significant challenge to identity formation processes, especially in multinational societies such as Kazakhstan. According to Halbwachs, social groups can consciously reinterpret the past in their own interests, which leads to a distortion of historical facts (Halbwachs, 1992) [1]. This is confirmed by the politics of post-Soviet countries, where historical narratives were often reworked to strengthen the legitimacy of new regimes.

An example is the history textbooks of Kazakhstan, which demonstrate ambivalence in assessing the Soviet legacy. As Kasymbayev and his colleagues note [4], the narratives in the textbooks emphasize both the forced nature of Kazakhstan's annexation to the Russian Empire and certain positive aspects of the colonial period (Kasymbayev, 2012) [4]. This reflects not only the complexity of postcolonial reinterpretations, but also the political need to balance nationalism and international relations. Soviet Legacy and Post-Soviet State-Building

The policy of "indigenization" in the Soviet Union contributed to the formation of national elites, but at the same time laid the foundation for systematic Russification, which had a long-term impact on national consciousness. The modern Kazakh state continues to balance between ethnically oriented and civic identities. The doctrine of national unity initiated by Nazarbayev is aimed at strengthening intereth-

nic harmony, which has become an important factor in political stability (Kesici, 2008) [5].

A special place in the national narrative of Kazakhstan is occupied by the rethinking of the Kazakh Khanate as a symbol of historical statehood. The celebration of its 550th anniversary in 2015 was strategically aimed at strengthening the identity of the titular nation, which emphasizes the importance of historical myths in state-building (Isaacs, 2015) [6].

#### **National Identity through Education Systems**

School textbooks play a key role in constructing national identity, especially in the context of postcolonial transformation. Research shows that textbooks in Kazakhstan attempt to balance ethnic and civic narratives while retaining elements of Soviet rhetoric (Kozybayev et al., 2013) [7]. However, their content is often criticized for the lack of an analytical approach and being overloaded with facts.

Literary analysis demonstrates that the formation of national identity in Central Asia is based on the concepts of collective and cultural memory, as well as the use of historical myths. In Kazakhstan, this process is complicated by the legacy of Soviet policy and the multinational structure of society. Further strengthening of national identity requires a deeper decolonization of narratives, the development of critical thinking, and the creation of more balanced educational materials.

#### **Methodology**

*The purpose and objectives of the study.* The purpose of this article is to study the role of historical myths in the process of state-building and the formation of national identity in Central Asia with an emphasis on Kazakhstan. The study aims to identify the mechanisms of constructing historical narratives, their influence on public perception and political legitimation. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are solved:

- Conducting a literature review of key concepts of historical and collective memory related to national identity.
- Analyzing secondary data, including statistics, results of sociological research and scientific publications, to identify dominant narratives.
- Conducting a content analysis of books, educational materials, official documents and other sources to study the ways of integrating myths into national strategies.

*Research hypothesis:* Historical myths constructed within the framework of state-building are not only a means of strengthening national identity, but also an important instrument of political legitimation, especially in the context of postcolonial and multinational societies of Central Asia.

*Research question:* How do historical myths influence the formation of national identity and public perception of state-building in Kazakhstan?

*Justification of the study:* This question is important for understanding how historical memory is used to construct national narratives and legitimize power. The relevance of the study is due to the need to study the transformations of historical myths in the post-Soviet space, where nation-building processes take place against the backdrop of a multilayered cultural and political heritage.

*Relevance of the study:* The relevance of the topic is due to the fact that in the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, state-building is accompanied by complex work with historical memory. The formation of national identity and the search for a balance between ethnic and civic aspects continue to be important challenges for political stability and social consolidation. In this context, the study of historical myths provides unique opportunities to analyze the mechanisms for creating unity in a multicultural environment.

*Research methods.* The study is based on a comprehensive approach, including:

1. Literature review: Analysis of theories of collective memory (M. Halbwachs), cultural memory (J. Assmann) and places of memory (P. Nora), as well as theoretical works on postcolonial heritage and state building.

2. Review analysis of secondary data: Statistical data, results of sociological research and official reports were used to identify trends in the formation of identity.

3. Content analysis: Study of textbooks, scientific publications, official documents and media sources to analyze the ways of representing historical myths.

This approach provides a deep understanding of the multi-level processes of formation of national narratives, allows to identify key contradictions and assess their impact on public consciousness and state policy.

## Results

### 1. Analysis of identity and identification processes: historical, sociological and cultural approaches

Identity and identification processes are complex and multilayered phenomena that play a key role in the formation of collective consciousness, national memory and social cohesion. When considering this topic from the perspective of historical and sociological science, we face a number of challenges related to the dynamics of change in society, the intersection of local, ethnic and civic identity, as well as the use of historical myths to create national identity.

#### 1.1. Historical approach: myths and their role in identity

Historical myths, as practice shows, often become a tool for constructing national identity. As Gulmira Ileuova notes, after gaining independence, a kind of “replacement therapy” took place in Kazakhstan, where the former “Soviet identity” was replaced by a new one, associated with the statehood of Kazakhstan [8]. National narratives built on a mythologized version of the past, such as the struggle of the Kazakhs against the Dzungars or the cultural heritage of the Great Steppe, have become an important element in strengthening the state ideology.

However, the mythologization of history has a dual nature. On the one hand, it allows society to unite around a common memory, to emphasize the uniqueness of culture and history. On the other hand, excessive mythologization based on the distortion of historical facts can lead to the division of society and the creation of false benchmarks. As Ileuova argues, “for some reason, the question “where are you from?” has become more important than “who are you?”, which indicates the growth of local identity, which can become a threat to the unity of civic identity [9].

#### 1.2. Sociological view: multi-layered identity

Sociological research in Kazakhstan demonstrates that the identity of the population is multi-layered. Survey data conducted by the PF “TSSPI “Strategy”” [8] show that the most common forms of identity are local (resident of a city or village) and civic (citizen of Kazakhstan). It is noteworthy that with age, the share of local identity grows, reaching 59% among older age groups, while among young people, local identity is at the average level.



An interesting phenomenon is the age group of 35-44 years, which demonstrates the lowest identification rates in all categories. This “lost generation”, formed in the era of social and economic changes, is characterized by the absence of clear identification links. This fact indicates the need for deeper work with identification processes in this age group in order to overcome internal gaps and increase the level of civic consolidation.

### **1.3. The dangers of mythologizing history**

Mythologization can serve as both a creative and destructive tool. The use of historical myths to shape national memory requires caution, as excessive emphasis on the heroic past can lead to distortion of facts and the development of conflict narratives. For example, the glorification of certain ethnic groups or historical events can increase tensions in multinational societies such as Kazakhstan.

Historian Pierre Nora in his concept of “places of memory” notes [3] that memory becomes an instrument of power when it is used to manipulate collective consciousness. This emphasizes the need for a critical approach to interpreting the past. Instead of building national identity on the basis of idealized myths, it is important to form cultural and civic values such as tolerance, humanism, and patriotism.

### **1.4. Path to Humanity and Patriotism**

Identity formation should not be limited by historical or ethnic boundaries. As Ilevova notes, “the diversity of identifiers in society will only increase in the future” [9]. In these conditions, it is important to strengthen the ideas of humanism, civic responsibility and tolerance in society. For example, educational programs should focus on universal values, such as respect for other cultures and religions, the development of critical thinking and awareness of one’s role in the global community.

Patriotism, based on respect for one’s own history and culture, should also be aimed at creating a common vision of the future that includes all citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious or social background. It is important that public policy promotes the integration of different groups, rather than reinforcing their division.

Identification processes in Kazakhstan remain multi-layered and dynamic, which emphasizes the need for in-depth analysis and an interdisciplinary approach. Sociology, together

with history, can be an important tool for understanding changes in society and creating a stable national identity. However, the success of this process will depend on how well a society can balance respect for historical roots and orientation towards universal humanistic values.

## **2. Formation of National Identity in Kazakhstan: Historical Myths, Pride, Language and Religion as Key Factors**

Kazakhstan’s national identity is a complex, multi-layered and dynamic phenomenon, with roots both in the depths of its historical heritage and in its contemporary socio-political reality. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan faced a challenge: building a new identity that could unite the country’s multi-ethnic population around common values, while preserving cultural and historical diversity. Historical myths, language, religion and a sense of national pride play a key role in this process, acting as factors of consolidation and possible conflicts.

Historical myths in Kazakhstan serve not only as a retrospective justification for statehood, but also as a projection of images of the future. An example of this is the celebration of the 555th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate in 2020. This event, initiated at the state level, emphasized the continuity of modern Kazakhstan with the era of Kerey and Zhanibek, the founders of the khanate. This narrative helps to create a sense of belonging to a great historical tradition, which is especially important for post-Soviet society, where the search for a national idea and cultural identity remains a pressing task. However, there is also a danger here: excessive mythologization of history can lead to the simplification of complex historical processes, the exclusion of alternative narratives and the marginalization of non-native ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the Kazakhstani model of identity formation seeks to maintain a balance between the ethnic basis and multiculturalism. Pride in Kazakhstani citizenship is another important aspect of national identity. According to research conducted by Dina Sharipova in 2016, 93% of surveyed Kazakhstanis are proud to be citizens of their country, and the share of those who are “very proud” has increased from 50% to 78% since 2006. This positive trend is associated with the country’s economic success, its international positioning and the growth in the standard of living of the population. However, it is worth noting that pa-

triotism in Kazakhstan has its own specifics: it is based not on superiority over other nations, but on responsibility to one's country. This perception of patriotism contributes to the formation of an active civic position, which is important for social and economic development.

Language plays a central role in the process of constructing identity. After the collapse of the USSR, the Kazakh language became a symbol of national culture and statehood, but its use in everyday life remains limited. The program to switch to the Latin alphabet, launched in 2017, is aimed at strengthening the position of the Kazakh language, but it has also sparked public debate. Many fear that this transition will exacerbate the language gap between generations and create additional barriers for ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan continues to develop a bilingual model, where Russian retains the status of the language of interethnic communication, and the Kazakh language is gradually acquiring the status of the main means of communication in government and educational institutions. This language policy reflects the desire to maintain a balance between national identity and multilingualism, which is part of the cultural code of Kazakhstanis.

Religion, like language, is closely linked to ethnic identity. Islam occupies an important place in the self-awareness of ethnic Kazakhs, although the level of religiosity in the country remains relatively low. The connection between religious and ethnic identity has deep historical roots. In the pre-Islamic period, the Kazakh steppe was the site of the spread of shamanism and Tengrism, which left their mark on cultural traditions and worldview. Islam, which came to the territory of modern Kazakhstan in the 8th–9th centuries, did not displace these beliefs, but organically blended into them, which created a unique syncretic cultural landscape. Today, Islam continues to play the role of a symbolic marker of Kazakh identity, but its influence on everyday life is limited. Many Kazakhstanis perceive religion more as an element of cultural heritage than as a guide to action. This allows the secular nature of the state to be preserved and social harmony to be maintained in a multi-ethnic society.

Historical figures and heroes occupy a special place in the process of identity formation. Kenesary Khan, Ablai Khan, Abay, Alikhan Bo-

keikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynov — these figures are not only symbols of national revival, but also play the role of ideological reference point for the education of a new generation. Their images are actively used in educational programs, cultural events and state propaganda. However, it is important to remember that the mythologization of these figures should be supported by historical objectivity in order to avoid turning them into an instrument of political manipulation.

Kazakhstan's identity is formed at the intersection of many factors: from historical and cultural to political and economic. This process is complex and ambiguous, which is typical for all post-Soviet countries. The national identity of Kazakhstan, on the one hand, is based on the ethnic identity of the Kazakhs as the titular nation, and on the other, it strives to be inclusive, embracing all ethnic groups living in the country. However, an important challenge remains the creation of a unifying national idea that would be attractive to all social groups. The programs "Rukhani Zhangyru", *Ulttyq Quryltay* and other state initiatives are aimed at developing cultural consciousness and modernizing social values, but their effect is limited so far.

In conclusion, the formation of national identity in Kazakhstan is a process that requires taking into account many factors and balancing between traditions and modernization. Historical myths, language, religion and a sense of pride in citizenship - all these elements play an important role in the consolidation of society, but their use must be thoughtful and responsible. The future of Kazakhstan's identity depends on the ability of the state and society to find common ground between different groups, respecting their uniqueness and simultaneously promoting common values.

### **3. Comparative Analysis of National Identity Formation in Central Asian Countries: The Unique Experience of Kazakhstan**

The formation of national identity in Central Asian countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union reflects a diversity of approaches based on the historical, cultural, and political characteristics of each state. Kazakhstan, as part of this region, stands out for its desire to integrate the Soviet legacy with national traditions, which creates an inclusive civic identity. A comparative analysis with neighboring countries reveals the uniqueness of the Kazakh experience and its fea-



tures in the context of state strategies and public perception.

#### **Kazakhstan: Balance of Tradition and Modernization**

With a multi-ethnic population, Kazakhstan has chosen a model that integrates historical heritage, cultural diversity, and modern socio-political challenges. The celebration of the 555th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate in 2020 was an important stage in the formation of a national narrative emphasizing the historical continuity and significance of the Great Steppe. This approach has strengthened a sense of pride in the past and the consolidation of the population around a common idea.

#### **Uzbekistan: Identity through the Figure of Tamerlane**

Uzbekistan has focused on elevating the figure of Amir Temir (Tamerlane) as a symbol of national identity. This decision, taken in the 1990s, was aimed at creating a powerful historical narrative emphasizing the greatness of the Uzbek nation. Amir Temir, despite his Turkic-Mongol origins, was presented as a national hero personifying power and independence.

However, this approach has its limitations. Historical ethnocentricity and an emphasis on one key figure exclude the contribution of other ethnic groups to the development of Uzbekistan. This can contribute to the strengthening of social divisions and hinder the integration process. In contrast, Kazakhstan emphasizes inclusion and recognition of the contribution of all ethnic groups, which helps strengthen unity.

#### **Turkmenistan: Personality Cult and Closed Identity**

Turkmenistan built its national identity on the personality cult of its first president, Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi). His book, *Ruhnama*, became a symbol of state ideology, combining elements of history, religion, and cultural traditions. However, this isolationist approach has led to the formation of a closed national identity, devoid of integration with the outside world.

The Kazakh model, on the contrary, demonstrates openness to global processes. Cultural and educational exchange programs, as well as participation in international initiatives, strengthen the country's role as a link between the East and the West.

#### **Kyrgyzstan: Epic as the Basis of Identity**

Kyrgyzstan relies on cultural and literary traditions, in particular the *Manas* epic. This epic serves as a symbol of national unity and a heroic past. However, ethnic and regional disunity creates additional challenges for the formation of a civic identity. Unlike Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan takes a more comprehensive approach, combining historical and cultural elements with modern political strategies, which contributes to the formation of a more inclusive identity.

#### **Tajikistan: Return to Persian Heritage**

Tajikistan turns to the heritage of the Samanids as a fundamental element of its national identity. President Emomali Rahmon actively uses the figure of Ismail Samani to strengthen national consciousness. However, limited resources and the consequences of the civil war hinder the realization of the integrative potential of this model.

Kazakhstan's experience shows that combining historical heritage with modern elements can become the basis for the successful consolidation of a multi-ethnic society.

#### **4. Sociological analysis through the concept of collective memory**

To analyze the formation of national identity in Central Asia, we can turn to the concept of collective memory by M. Halbwachs. In each of the countries of the region, collective memory is formed through the creation of national narratives that integrate myths, historical events and cultural traditions.

In Kazakhstan, collective memory is built on the basis of historical myths about the Great Steppe, the Kazakh Khanate and nomadic culture, which helps to strengthen national identity. In Uzbekistan, the emphasis is on the figure of Tamerlane, symbolizing power and greatness. In Turkmenistan, collective memory is focused on the figure of Niyazov and national traditions.

However, differences in approaches are due not only to historical but also to social factors. The Kazakhstan model demonstrates the ability to adapt collective memory to the challenges of modernity, maintaining a balance between traditions and innovations.

Comparative analysis shows that the formation of national identity in Central Asia is conditioned by historical heritage, political strategies and socio-cultural factors. Kazakhstan stands out for its inclusive approach, which helps con-

solidate a multi-ethnic society. The future of successful state-building in the region depends on the ability of countries to integrate historical heritage with modern values, promoting the principles of tolerance, mutual respect and social justice. The Kazakhstan model can serve as an example for its neighbors, demonstrating that national identity can be based on dialogue and inclusion, rather than exclusion and ethnocentrism.

#### **Conclusion and results of the study**

The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that historical myths are not only a means of strengthening national identity, but also an important instrument of political legitimation, especially in the context of post-Soviet, multi-ethnic societies of Central Asia. The analysis showed that each of the countries of the Central Asian region, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, uses unique approaches to constructing national identity, conditioned by historical, cultural and political peculiarities.

The Kazakh experience stands out due to its inclusive approach aimed at integrating a multi-ethnic population, preserving historical heritage and creating a civic identity that includes elements of the Soviet past, national culture and modernization. Celebrations of historical events, such as the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate, and projects such as Ul'tyq Quryltay, similar to the Rukhani Zhangyru program, strengthen a sense of national unity, while maintaining respect for cultural and ethnic diversity. In contrast to Kazakhstan, the countries of the region demonstrate varying degrees of ethnocentrism in their national narratives. Uzbekistan builds an identity around the figure of Tamerlane, which emphasizes the greatness of the Uzbek nation but excludes the contribution of other ethnic groups. Turkmenistan uses the personality cult of the first president and pseudo-historical narratives, which strengthens national consciousness but isolates the country from the international community. Kyrgyzstan relies on cultural heritage through the Manas epic but faces challenges of regional and ethnic fragmentation. Tajikistan, using its Persian heritage, seeks to consolidate society, but limited resources and the consequences of the civil war slow this process. The answer to our research question - "How do historical myths influence

the formation of national identity and public perception of state building in Kazakhstan?" - received a clear answer. Historical myths play a key role in the formation of collective memory and identity in Kazakhstan, uniting the population around common values and historical images. A distinctive feature of the Kazakhstani model is the desire for a harmonious combination of historical and modern elements, which helps maintain stability in a multinational society.

#### **Achieving the goals and objectives of the study**

The goals and objectives of the study have been achieved:

1. A literature review of key concepts of historical and collective memory (M. Halbwachs, J. Assmann, P. Nora) was conducted, which allowed us to lay the theoretical basis for the study.
2. An analysis of secondary data revealed the dominant national narratives in Central Asia and their influence on public consciousness.
3. A content analysis of official documents and media sources confirmed the importance of historical myths in state ideology and education.

The analysis was conducted using the concept of collective memory proposed by M. Halbwachs. Kazakhstan demonstrates the ability to adapt its collective memory to the challenges of modernity, maintaining a balance between historical roots and innovations. Unlike the ethnocentric models of its neighbors, Kazakhstan strives for inclusion, which strengthens social stability and political legitimacy.

#### **Recommendations**

To further strengthen the national identity of our country, Kazakhstan should:

- Continue to develop programs aimed at promoting tolerance, patriotism and interethnic harmony.
- Focus on a critical approach to historical narratives, avoiding excessive mythologization.
- Strengthen educational initiatives that support the study of the Kazakh language, history and culture, while maintaining multilingualism.

Thus, the Kazakh model of nation-building demonstrates a successful example of a harmonious combination of tradition and modernization, which makes it a unique phenomenon in the context of Central Asia. It can serve as a guide for neighboring countries seeking to cre-



ate a sustainable and inclusive identity.

### Discussion

The results of the study confirm that historical myths play a key role in shaping national identity and public consciousness in Kazakhstan. Historical narratives, such as the myths of the Great Steppe and the Kazakh Khanate, not only strengthen collective memory, but also contribute to the legitimization of state power. This is consistent with the theoretical approaches of M. Halbwachs and J. Assmann, who emphasize the importance of collective and cultural memory in the processes of identification and consolidation of society.

Unlike the ethnocentric models used in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, Kazakhstan demonstrates an integrative approach aimed at creating an inclusive civic identity. This approach becomes especially important in a multinational society, where the balance between ethnic and civic components plays a decisive role in social stability.

The reasons for the success of the Kazakh model lie in a combination of several factors. Firstly, the use of historical myths is not limited to the glorification of the past, but is aimed at building links between traditions and modern challenges. Secondly, a language policy that focuses on preserving the Kazakh language and promoting bilingualism helps to harmoniously unite different ethnic groups. Thirdly, programs such as “Rukhani Zhangyru” and UlTTYq Qurylytay serve as a platform for promoting common national values.

*The practical significance of the results* is that the Kazakhstani model can be used as an example for other Central Asian countries. An integrative approach to identity formation helps to strengthen social stability, reduce ethnic tensions, and increase trust in government institutions. Inclusion-oriented policies can be adapted for regions with similar demographic and cultural characteristics.

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*Limitations of the Study* Limitations: The main limitations of the study are related to the use of primarily secondary data and content analysis of official sources. This may limit the depth of analysis of public perceptions of national narratives, especially in relation to certain age and ethnic groups. The limitations of the empirical data may have affected the completeness of the interpretation. For example, the results may not fully reflect regional differences in the perception of national identity within Kazakhstan. For a more accurate analysis, it is necessary to use primary data, such as sociological surveys and interviews.

### Directions for Further Research

#### Proposals

1. Conducting interdisciplinary research that includes historical, sociological and political analysis to better understand the role of historical myths in identity formation.
2. Studying the perception of national narratives among different age, ethnic and social groups in Kazakhstan.
3. Analyzing the effectiveness of educational programs and their impact on the formation of civic identity.

*Development of ideas:* Future research could focus on comparing the Kazakhstani model with approaches in other multi-ethnic societies outside of Central Asia to identify universal and unique features of the use of historical myths.

*Concluding remarks:* The study confirms that historical myths are an important tool for the formation of national identity and political legitimization in Kazakhstan. The uniqueness of the Kazakhstani model lies in its integrative approach that combines historical heritage with modern values. The Kazakhstani experience demonstrates that the formation of an inclusive identity is possible even in the context of a complex historical heritage and a multi-ethnic society. This makes it a valuable example for study and adaptation in the global context.

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