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THE PHENOMENON OF SACRED PLACES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL INTERCIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE

This article examines how sacred sites contribute to the preservation of national identity and function as instruments of intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue. Kazakhstan is used as the principal case, with Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain in Kyrgyzstan and the Routes of Santiago de Compostela in Spain serving as comparative examples. The study employs a qualitative research design combining theoretical synthesis, historical-logical analysis, and comparative case analysis. The cases are examined according to three criteria: preservation of historical memory, creation of shared cultural practices, and international representation of national heritage. The findings demonstrate that sacred sites support national identity by connecting communities with inherited narratives, cultural meanings, and practices of commemoration. However, sacred status alone does not automatically produce intercivilizational dialogue. Its development depends on inclusive historical interpretation, community participation, cultural mobility, and institutional support. The comparative analysis shows that Kazakhstan has established a strong symbolic framework through its sacred-geography initiatives, while its dialogical potential could be expanded through multilingual interpretation, regional cooperation, educational programmes, and sustained engagement with international visitors. The scientific contribution of the study lies in proposing a conceptual model in which sacred heritage influences intercivilizational dialogue through historical memory, shared cultural practices, and international representation. The practical significance of the findings lies in their application to heritage policy, cultural education, tourism, and regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Keywords: sacred heritage, national identity, intercivilizational dialogue, Kazakhstan, Central Asia.

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Киелі орындар феномені және ұлттық бірегейлік: жаһандық өркениетаралық үнқатыс контекстінде

Бұл мақалада киелі орындардың ұлттық бірегейлікті сақтауға қосатын үлесі және олардың мәдениетаралық әрі өркениетаралық диалог құралы ретіндегі қызметі қарастырылады. Негізгі зерттеу нысаны ретінде Қазақстан алынып, Қырғызстандағы Сүлейман-Тоо киелі тауы мен Испаниядағы Сантьяго-де-Компостела жолдары салыстырмалы мысалдар ретінде талданды. Зерттеуде теориялық синтезді, тарихи-логикалық талдауды және салыстырмалы кейс-талдауды біріктіретін сапалық зерттеу дизайны қолданылды. Таңдалған мысалдар үш өлшем бойынша қарастырылды: тарихи жадты сақтау, ортақ мәдени тәжірибелерді қалыптастыру және ұлттық мұраны халықаралық деңгейде таныту. Зерттеу нәтижелері киелі орындардың қауымдастықтарды тарихи әңгімелермен, мәдени мағыналармен және еске алу тәжірибелерімен байланыстыру арқылы ұлттық бірегейлікті нығайтатынын көрсетті. Алайда нысанның киелі мәртебесі өздігінен өркениетаралық диалог қалыптастырмайды. Мұндай диалогтың дамуы тарихи мұраны инклюзивті түсіндіруге, жергілікті қауымдастықтардың қатысуына, мәдени және қажылық қозғалысына, сондай-ақ институционалдық қолдауға байланысты. Салыстырмалы талдау Қазақстанда киелі география бастамалары арқылы ұлттық мұраның берік символдық негізі қалыптасқанын көрсетті. Сонымен бірге оның диалогтік әлеуетін көптілді түсіндіру, өңірлік ынтымақтастық, білім беру бағдарламалары және шетелдік келушілермен тұрақты өзара іс-қимыл арқылы кеңейтуге болады. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы киелі мұраның тарихи жад, ортақ мәдени тәжірибелер және халықаралық таныстырылым арқылы өркениетаралық диалогқа ықпал етуін түсіндіретін тұжырымдамалық модель ұсынумен айқындалады. Нәтижелердің практикалық маңызы оларды

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мұра саясаты, мәдени білім беру, туризм және Орталық Азиядағы өңірлік ынтымақтастық салаларында қолдану мүмкіндігімен байланысты.

Түйін сөздер: киелі мұра, ұлттық бірегейлік, өркениетаралық диалог, Қазақстан, Орталық Азия.

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Феномен сакральных мест и национальная идентичность: в контексте глобального межцивилизационного диалога

В статье рассматривается вклад сакральных мест в сохранение национальной идентичности, а также их роль в качестве инструментов межкультурного и межцивилизационного диалога. Казахстан используется как основной исследовательский случай, а священная гора Сулайман-Тоо в Кыргызстане и Пути Сантьяго-де-Компостела в Испании – как сравнительные примеры. В исследовании применяется качественная стратегия, сочетающая теоретический синтез, историко-логический анализ и сравнительный анализ кейсов. Выбранные примеры рассматриваются по трем критериям: сохранение исторической памяти, формирование общих культурных практик и международная репрезентация национального наследия. Результаты показывают, что сакральные места укрепляют национальную идентичность, связывая сообщества с историческими нарративами, культурными смыслами и практиками сохранения памяти. Однако сакральный статус объекта сам по себе не приводит к формированию межцивилизационного диалога. Его развитие зависит от инклюзивной интерпретации истории, участия местных сообществ, культурной и паломнической мобильности, а также институциональной поддержки. Сравнительный анализ показывает, что в Казахстане посредством инициатив в области сакральной географии сформирована прочная символическая основа национального наследия. Вместе с тем ее диалогический потенциал может быть расширен благодаря многоязычной интерпретации, региональному сотрудничеству, образовательным программам и устойчивому взаимодействию с зарубежными посетителями. Научный вклад исследования заключается в разработке концептуальной модели, объясняющей влияние сакрального наследия на межцивилизационный диалог посредством исторической памяти, общих культурных практик и международной репрезентации. Практическая значимость результатов связана с возможностью их применения в политике сохранения наследия, культурном образовании, туризме и региональном сотрудничестве в Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: сакральное наследие, национальная идентичность, межцивилизационный диалог, Казахстан, Центральная Азия.

Introduction

Globalization has intensified technological, economic, political, and cultural interdependence among states and societies. Although these processes expand opportunities for cooperation, they also create challenges for preserving national identity, spiritual values, and cultural diversity (Sheryazdanova & Abildina, 2020, p. 185).

Intercivilizational dialogue extends beyond political and economic cooperation; it also operates through culture, religion, language, historical memory, and spiritual heritage (Özkan et al., 2019, p. 206; Kamalova & Tungatova, 2021, p. 42). Sacred sites are especially relevant because they embody historical memory, reinforce collective values, and connect generations (Özkan et al., 2019, p. 204). In this context, national identity enables societies to preserve a distinct cultural foundation while engaging with other cultures on equal terms (Sharipova, 2020, p. 95).

For Kazakhstan, this issue is of particular relevance. Kazakhstan has historically been located at the crossroads of East and West, North and South, and for centuries has been influenced by the cultural, commercial, and religious traditions of different civilizations. Cultural exchanges along the Great Silk Road, the impact of Turkic worldview and Islamic civilization, as well as the historical experience of the Soviet period – all of these laid the foundation for today's Kazakhstan to become a nation open and ready for intercivilizational dialogue (Tsyrempilov et al., 2022).

At the same time, in the years of independence, Kazakhstan has developed a unique practice aimed at strengthening interethnic harmony and interfaith peace. Hosting the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, reviving historical and

cultural heritage, and implementing the "Madeni Mura" (Cultural Heritage) and "Ruqani Zhangyru" (Modernization of Spirituality) programs represent concrete steps taken to promote intercivilizational dialogue while preserving national identity (Sharipova, 2020, p. 98).

From this perspective, comprehensively examining the significance of intercivilizational dialogue in the era of globalization, the role of sacred sites, and the importance of national identity has become one of the key directions of contemporary philosophical, cultural, and social research. This topic is significant not only from a scientific standpoint but also as an essential condition for ensuring social stability and national security (Özkan et al., 2019; Tsyrempilov et al., 2022).

Justification and Relevance of the Topic

In the era of globalization, cultural, spiritual, and social interactions between civilizations have reached a new level. However, while this process brings nations closer together on the one hand, it also poses the risk of weakening national identity on the other (Kharkovenko, 2021). Therefore, a deep study of the content of intercivilizational dialogue, particularly the role of sacred sites and historical-cultural heritage in preserving national identity, is a pressing issue today (Kamalova & Tungatova, 2021).

The relevance of the research lies in the need to strengthen national identity in the context of globalization by preserving the spiritual values, cultural characteristics, and historical memory of the Kazakh people. Theoretically, the topic contributes to understanding the essence of intercivilizational dialogue, while its practical significance lies in promoting the harmonization of intercultural relations and ensuring interethnic harmony and stability in Kazakhstan.

Research aim

The purpose of this study is to examine how sacred sites contribute to the preservation of national identity and function as instruments of intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue, using Kazakhstan as the principal case and selected international examples for comparison. To achieve this purpose, the study: (1) examines theoretical approaches to national identity, sacred heritage, and intercivilizational dialogue; (2) analyses the role of sacred sites in preserving historical memory and cultural continuity in Kazakhstan; (3) compares Kazakhstan's experience with selected cases from Central Asia and other regions; and (4) proposes a conceptual model explaining the relationship between sacred sites, national identity, and intercivilizational dialogue.

Scientific Novelty

Previous studies have examined national identity in Kazakhstan, the social significance of sacred heritage, and the general principles of intercultural dialogue as largely separate areas of inquiry (Özkan et al., 2019; Sharipova, 2020; Tsyrempilov et al., 2022). However, within the literature reviewed for this study, limited attention has been given to the mechanisms through which sacred sites simultaneously preserve national identity and support interaction between cultures. The scientific novelty of this article lies in integrating these three dimensions–sacred heritage, national identity, and intercivilizational dialogue–within a single analytical framework. The study proposes that sacred sites contribute to intercivilizational dialogue through three interconnected mechanisms: the preservation of historical memory, the formation of shared cultural practices, and the international representation of national heritage. This framework is applied to Kazakhstan as the principal case and is further clarified through selected comparative examples.

Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design combining theoretical synthesis and comparative case analysis. The source base consists of peer-reviewed scholarship on national identity, sacred heritage, globalization, and intercultural dialogue; publications concerning Kazakhstan's historical and cultural monuments; official materials related to the "Madeni Mura," "Ruqani Zhangyru," and "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan" initiatives; and reports concerning international intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Kazakhstan serves as the principal case, while selected examples from Central Asia and other regions are used to clarify similarities and differences in the social functions of sacred heritage.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, philosophical and cultural-studies approaches were used to identify the principal concepts and scholarly interpretations of national identity, sacred heritage, and intercivilizational dialogue. Second, the historical-logical method was applied to examine how sacred sites acquire symbolic meaning and

contribute to the preservation of collective memory over time. Third, comparative analysis was used to examine the selected cases according to three common criteria: their role in preserving historical memory, their capacity to generate shared cultural practices, and their contribution to the international representation of national heritage. The systemic approach was then used to explain the relationship among these dimensions.

The study is based primarily on published literature, policy materials, and documented cultural initiatives. It does not include interviews, surveys, or direct observation at sacred sites. Consequently, its conclusions represent a theoretical and comparative interpretation rather than a measurement of visitors' attitudes or the social impact of individual sites. Future empirical research may test the proposed framework through fieldwork, interviews, and comparative audience studies.

Literature review

The essence of life's meaning resides in the depths of human consciousness as the most significant subjective value, serving as the primary motivator that directs one's actions and decisions. Human evolution reaches its peak not only through attaining optimal health of the physical body, but also through adherence to moral standards. This complex, intertwined path of self-discovery, achieved through interaction with others, grants people the invaluable gift of effective communication – a set of skills that not only facilitates social integration but also contributes to inner harmony and self-actualization.

The contemporary landscape of social philosophy emphasizes the enduring relevance of self-expression, portraying cultural exchange as a source of flourishing interpersonal dynamics and thereby broadening human cognitive horizons. Within this multifaceted process, the power of language and communication becomes a key factor that shapes cognition and adaptation to diverse environments while simultaneously fostering the development of practical life skills. In a multicultural context, the synthesis of civilized norms and the harmony of diverse traditions not only promote social unity, but also demand that scholars pay attention to national customs as a repository of profound knowledge (Ustyugova, 2003).

Cultural values occupy a central place in the structure of social norms of all civilizations, serving as the foundation of individual spirituality and moral consciousness that embody the collective wisdom of past generations. In the context of growing globalization, the science of philosophy pays particular attention to exploring ways for the individual to adapt to global civilization. At the same time, the importance of preserving the rich palette of diverse national identities takes on special significance. Such studies reveal the transformational potential of interpersonal interaction and effective communication, highlighting the philosophical importance of shaping socio-cultural identity (Kymlicka, 1995).

The subtle interplay between human action and social structures reflects the variability of sensitivity among people. Their acceptance of social responsibility defines the complex balance between individual autonomy and social obligations. Among the progressive ideologies of society, the eternal wisdom of ancestral tradition stands out – a legacy passed down from generation to generation, serving as a guiding light in the ever-changing landscape of human civilization.

Education, as the foundation of social progress, plays a multifaceted role in preparing individuals for meaningful participation in their communities. Its transformative power lies not merely in the acquisition of academic knowledge, but also in the integration of humanistic values, the cultivation of empathy, and the promotion of ethical conduct (Noddings, 2015). A deep understanding of the trajectory of social relationships – particularly the formative stage of childhood in personality development – sheds light on the complex process of individual self-construction within the framework of social norms.

In the context of globalization, preserving national heritage becomes a collective endeavor – an affirmation of strong commitment to safeguarding cultural identity and cherished traditions. In this regard, national education emerges as a multifaceted task: it involves not only the transmission of linguistic and historical narratives, but also the fostering of cultural consciousness and behavioral norms grounded in the rich convergence of local cultures and traditions (Kymlicka, 1995).

National cultural values consist of the social and cultural norms through which a nation expresses its collective identity, dignity, and historical experience. They encompass the spiritual and material heritage accumulated by a people over many generations. Cultural identity, in turn, refers to an individual's sense of belonging within a particular cultural environment. The psychological foundations of identification were examined in the work of Sigmund Freud, particularly in relation to the conscious

or unconscious imitation of significant figures. This approach subsequently influenced the studies of E. Erikson, E. Gorman, R. Linton, and T. Pearson (Astaf'eva, 2010).

Scholars who have explored the multifaceted nature of identification in greater depth have found that it manifests at different levels: from close relationships formed within kinship ties, to belonging within social groups, and further to the sense of affiliation with broader ethnic communities. In contemporary psychological discourse, identity is revealed through the interaction of three dimensions: first, as the process of forming emotional bonds and internalizing social norms and values; second, as self-presentation to others, fostering empathy and mutual understanding; and third, as a mechanism for adopting diverse perspectives and roles.

However, while identification enhances cohesion and a sense of belonging, it is not without challenges. O. L. Romanova (1994) cautioned that in multicultural societies, unchecked devotion to a single group may provoke separatism, warning of the risks of excessive identification. Indeed, people often inherit a pre-established system of values from their families, social circles, and ethnic groups, leaving genuine autonomy of choice primarily to creative and innovative individuals.

Ethnocultural consciousness, built on the dichotomy of "us" and "them," emphasizes the significance of historical and ethnic heritage in fostering self-esteem and mutual respect. Yet, reverence for tradition also carries drawbacks. Views inclined toward archaism may at times prioritize the preservation of past cultural norms and practices over progress and innovation.

The tension between preservation and innovation has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for generations. Scholars such as A. Toynbee (1939) have carefully analyzed archaic processes across different aspects of culture – from behavioral norms to artistic expression, language, religion, economics, and politics.

Historical appeals to the past have taken markedly different forms, including German nationalist invocations of Teutonic heritage, the Aryan ideology employed by fascist movements, the modern revival of Hebrew in Israel, and initiatives to revitalize Sanskrit. Although these cases differ substantially in their historical circumstances and political implications, they demonstrate how elements of the past may be mobilized in projects of cultural or national renewal. The rigidity of fundamentalist perspectives stands in stark contrast to the very foundations of life. E. Ray Lankester's (2024) evolutionary theory, based on the principles of natural selection, emphasizes that systems incapable of adapting to internal change inevitably undergo degeneration. Similarly, cyberneticist W. Ross Ashby (1947) observed that closed or semi-organized systems inevitably witness the intensification of entropy, which ultimately leads to collapse. While some attribute these phenomena to cultural determinants, it is essential to recognize that culture operates within worldly laws and is not an eternal mechanism. Archaic cultural markers become especially pronounced during transitional periods characterized by shifts in time and established ways of life. The decline of an old system of values does not necessarily mean the immediate emergence of new, stable ones; sometimes, rejecting the past is not simply a gateway to a new future, but rather a delicate act of revitalizing the cultural environment that preceded it (Stryker, 1987).

In the contemporary landscape of civilized nations, a complex structure of cultural integration has emerged: individual – family – local cultural community – ethnic culture – global civilization – humanity. Within this structure, there exists a legally recognized feedback loop between conceptual content and its formal logical meaning, thus placing particular emphasis on the primacy of the individual within the broader cultural context. However, as conceptual horizons expand, the degree of complementarity – defined as warmth toward others – tends to diminish. Now let us compare this modern paradigm with its archaic counterpart: community member – patriarchs and descendants – clan – tribe – region – nation. Within this archaic structure, the possibilities for future interaction appear vague, reflecting a rigid social order defined by hierarchical family and communal ties (Shul'gina, 2010).

A significant drawback of this archaic system lies in its limited capacity for assimilating others. A brief survey of Turkic history reveals considerable momentum in the spread of ethnic groups with high levels of assimilation (integration, disintegration), such as the Turks, Azerbaijanis, Uzbeks, and similar groups. This historical dynamic highlights the importance of addressing traditionalist tendencies that often manifest in proposals such as restoring the Kazakh khan and the election of a khan for each nation (Galiev, 1998), reinstating Sharia law and customary authority, or banning Western clothing. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that folk traditions are neither static nor isolated phenomena; rather, they are dynamic processes characterized by

the continual exchange and convergence of national customs within interpersonal dynamics. Through the exchange of customs, people gain insights into diverse socio-cultural environments, foster a more comprehensive understanding of themselves in different contexts, and thereby broaden their cognitive horizons.

Alongside the acquisition of practical and professional skills, linguistic and communicative abilities play a decisive role in shaping human consciousness and facilitating adaptation to the surrounding environment. In multicultural contexts, the integration of civilized customs and the harmonization of diverse traditions promote orderly and consistent social interaction, serving as evidence of human society's stability and adaptability. Thus, national customs and traditions have become the subject of scientific inquiry and practical knowledge, attracting the interest of scholars from various fields. Considering traditions as valuable objects has formed the basis of numerous studies that make it possible to understand the complexity of human society and its cultural structure. The concept of value – a notion imbued with complexity – has been reflected upon since ancient times. The sphere of values represents, in a broad sense, the cultural domain that encompasses people's spiritual aspirations, moral consciousness, and priorities, serving as a barometer of spiritual wealth. Each culture maintains its own unique set of values, usually classified according to the characteristics of human activity, which further enrich our understanding of the complex structure of human civilization (Pilipovich, 2022).

According to the intended criteria, values can be categorized into material, socio-political, and spiritual aspects. The traditional norms embedded in Kazakh culture and sustained over centuries – promoting civil, friendly, compassionate, and tolerant interpersonal relations – constitute invaluable social and cultural assets for humanity today (Aubakirova et al., 2014). Spiritual values include human knowledge, philosophical teachings, moral norms, and political views that encompass all aspects of global spiritual progress. Each person, as a social unit, can comprehend the significance of spiritual values through personal development. Taking into account that the system of values serves as the fundamental basis of human worldview, shaping one's perception of reality, the resolution of existential crises and questions of life's meaning becomes not only a civic duty but also a human responsibility – especially during periods when self-alienation prevails in society.

Spirituality essentially serves as a measure that reflects justice, morality, compassion, and goodwill in a person, encompassing the idea of individual being. Fundamentally, it signifies a person's formation, evolution, life purpose, and diverse ways of living. The purpose of preserving national customs and traditions is to develop the cultural and spiritual capacities of all peoples in accordance with the current era. At present, some cultural trends in the Republic of Kazakhstan deviate from their inner essence, promoting a Western-imitating culture that may dilute the national taste of the younger generation and distance people from their traditional heritage. Passing down one's history, spiritual legacy, values, and traditions to future generations is an act of national self-preservation.

The sphere of forming historical consciousness is of particular importance, for without understanding the past, one cannot step into the future (Balpanov et al., 2018). Thus, the ways of protecting national interests and spiritual values include: developing a system of values in culture and art based on national sentiment and public good, fostering cultural development through civic organizations and political structures, and upholding aesthetic norms, national ethics, and ethnic advantages.

Results and discussion

Many people around the world perceive globalization as a continuous process aimed at developing a universal culture, yet hidden within this perception is the assumption that such uniformity is unattainable. Proponents of this view often argue that cultures of the world were initially absolutely diverse, but over time, as ethnic groups interacted and intermingled, their differences began to diminish. This perspective assumes that the relentless course of scientific and technological progress will gradually eliminate these residual differences, paving the way for the creation of a common foundation that encompasses political, economic, and cultural dimensions alike. Essentially, this argument suggests that despite the visible, superficial differences among various ethnic groups, there exist structural similarities that drive societies along comparable developmental trajectories, ultimately uniting them into a single global society – into a universal culture, if you will.

At the core of this discourse lies the belief that Western civilization represents the vanguard of the future universal culture. Moreover, the historical legacy of imperialism is often cited as the primary

driving force behind the spread of cultural norms. Nevertheless, there are also opposing viewpoints. They argue that portraying the cultural dominance of the West serves as a hidden mechanism for preserving power structures within the Western world, thereby perpetuating the status quo and softening the contradictions and limitations inherent in the capitalist system. This process also affects various economic factors, ranging from production dynamics to market mechanisms and the accumulation of capital (Volova, 2012).

Amid these debates, public discourse is filled with propaganda streams that portray globalization as an inevitable ideological transformation – an anticipated evolution that promises the ultimate end of terrorism and war, and the dawn of a new era characterized by unprecedented peace and harmony. Proponents of this view often claim that future conflicts will no longer manifest as large-scale international confrontations, but rather as primarily regional and ethnic disputes. Consequently, they advocate for the dissolution of traditional nation-state structures, as well as the erosion of national identity and culture, which are perceived as obstacles to the smooth integration of global systems. Instead, emphasis is placed on supporting regional structures and facilitating their seamless absorption into the comprehensive framework of globalization.

In the case of Kazakhstan, protecting against being subsumed by globalization requires the development of strong national policies that actively foster and preserve national consciousness and identity. As the specter of globalization intensifies, Kazakh identity stands at a critical juncture, while globalization advocates declare that traditional notions of national unity and sovereignty are becoming obsolete. Therefore, priority must be given to efforts aimed at clarifying and strengthening the fundamental principles of Kazakh culture and identity.

In its broad sense, culture encompasses a complex network of values, beliefs, and traditions that shape individual and collective identity. Formed through the interplay of environmental influences and historical heritage, culture serves as a lens through which people navigate and interpret the surrounding world. The foundation of preserving culture lies in safeguarding language – the vital channel that transmits cultural heritage from generation to generation. However, the erosion or decline of mother tongues not only blurs thought and suppresses cultural expression, but also poses a serious threat to the essence of "national consciousness" and identity.

The symbiotic relationship between language and "national identity" highlights the central role of language in defining social status and cohesion. A nation's attachment to cultural values and traditions is a defining feature, while language functions as the vessel through which these values are transmitted and preserved. The collective memory and historical consciousness of a people are expressed through language, shaping the cognitive framework and worldview of future generations. Therefore, undermining or diluting mother tongues is not merely a loss of linguistic diversity, but also a grave danger to the complex body of cultural heritage that defines a nation's uniqueness (Mukha & Tuzhba, 2013).

The concept of globalization is examined from different perspectives in scholarly literature. On the one hand, it refers to the integration of the world economy, the development of information and communication technologies, and the "shrinking" of the world; on the other hand, it signifies the adaptation of national cultures to global processes. Scholars view globalization not only as a process that establishes a uniform culture, but also as a new form of interaction and dialogue among different civilizations.

Intercultural dialogue is a universal tool that ensures the peaceful coexistence of diverse cultures, religions, traditions, and worldviews. From a philosophical standpoint, it is the act of accepting, understanding, and finding common values with an "other" culture. For example, Hans Küng's (1999) concept of a "Global Ethic" proposes universal principles that unite all religions and civilizations.

In the era of globalization, the significance of intercultural dialogue is determined by several factors:

– preventing international conflicts;
– preserving cultural diversity;
– promoting interfaith tolerance;
– helping youth harmoniously embrace both global and national values.

Moreover, intercivilizational dialogue is reflected not only at the level of political elites, but also through everyday culture, art, the education system, and tourism. In this regard, the programs of international organizations such as UNESCO and the UN, aimed at supporting intercultural understanding, play an important role (United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, 2021).

Sacred sites hold special significance in preserving the historical memory and national identity of every people. Sacred places are not only areas of religious or historical importance, but also cultural-

symbolic spaces that embody the spiritual experience of a nation. They honor the past of a people while also shaping their confidence in the future.

Sacred sites are an essential part of intercivilizational dialogue, as they serve as spaces that bring together representatives of different religions and cultures. For example, the city of Jerusalem is the meeting point of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In this holy city, the complex history and interconnections of civilizations are vividly reflected.

Kazakhstan, too, has traditionally placed great value on its sacred sites. Within the framework of the project "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan," hundreds of historical and cultural monuments have been studied and their importance for national consciousness identified. The city of Turkistan, the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, the Beket Ata Mosque, and Ulytau are spiritual centers not only for the Kazakh people but for the entire Turkic world.

The role of sacred sites in intercivilizational dialogue can be considered from three perspectives:

– preserving historical memory and ensuring generational continuity;

– strengthening mutual respect and tolerance among different religions and cultures;

– contributing to the development of cultural diplomacy through spiritual tourism.

Today, sacred sites are not only objects of religious belief but also factors that define national identity and strengthen Kazakhstan's cultural image at the global level.

Comparative Analysis of Sacred Heritage

The relationship between sacred heritage, national identity, and intercivilizational dialogue can be clarified by comparing Kazakhstan's experience with selected cases from Central Asia and Europe. The cases are considered according to the three criteria identified in the methodology: preservation of historical memory, creation of shared cultural practices, and international representation of national heritage.

In Kazakhstan, the "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan" project has transformed selected historical and cultural sites into publicly recognized symbols of collective memory. The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkistan is especially significant because it connects Kazakhstan's national heritage with the broader historical and spiritual traditions of Central Asia and the Turkic-Islamic world. Through pilgrimage, historical education, cultural tourism, and scholarly preservation, the site supports both the continuity of national identity and interaction with visitors from other cultural backgrounds. At the same time, the selection and official interpretation of sacred sites demonstrate that sacred geography is not merely inherited but is also institutionally organized and assigned contemporary national meaning (Tsyrempilov et al., 2022, pp. 704–718).

A comparable Central Asian case is Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. The mountain stands at a historical crossroads of the Central Asian Silk Roads and contains ancient places of worship, petroglyphs, ritual paths, and later Islamic religious structures. Its continuing veneration combines pre-Islamic and Islamic beliefs, demonstrating how a sacred landscape can preserve several historical layers within a living cultural tradition. Sulaiman-Too therefore supports historical continuity while also providing a shared symbolic space through which different religious and cultural traditions can be interpreted in relation to one another (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.-b).

The Routes of Santiago de Compostela in Spain illustrate a more institutionalized and transnational form of sacred interaction. The pilgrimage routes connect religious buildings, settlements, hostels, bridges, and communities across an extensive geographical network. Over several centuries, the movement of pilgrims along these routes facilitated encounters between travellers and local populations and supported the exchange of knowledge, cultural practices, artistic forms, and economic activity. In this case, sacred heritage functions not only as a marker of religious identity but also as an infrastructure for sustained cultural dialogue between people of different national and social backgrounds (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.-a).

The comparison demonstrates that sacred sites do not automatically produce intercivilizational dialogue. Their dialogical potential becomes visible when three conditions are present: historical meanings are interpreted in an inclusive manner, recurring practices such as pilgrimage and cultural tourism bring different communities into contact, and institutions make local heritage accessible to international audiences. Kazakhstan resembles Sulaiman-Too in the importance assigned to layered Central Asian historical memory, while the Santiago example demonstrates a more developed transnational network connecting pilgrimage, heritage management, and cultural exchange. Kazakhstan's experience could therefore be strengthened by combining the symbolic mapping of sacred geography with multilingual interpretation, educational pro-

grammes, regional pilgrimage routes, and sustained engagement with international visitors.

Conceptual Model

On the basis of the theoretical discussion and comparative cases, this study proposes a conceptual model in which sacred heritage contributes to intercivilizational dialogue through three interconnected mechanisms. The first mechanism is historical memory: sacred sites connect present communities with inherited narratives, events, values, and cultural symbols. The second mechanism is shared cultural practice: pilgrimage, commemoration, education, tourism, and public rituals transform the symbolic meaning of a site into repeated forms of social participation. The third mechanism is international representation: heritage institutions, scholarly research, cultural diplomacy, and international recognition make local and national meanings accessible to audiences beyond the community in which the sacred site originated.

These mechanisms strengthen national identity by supporting cultural continuity and providing communities with a shared understanding of their historical experience. A clearly articulated national identity can then support intercivilizational dialogue because communities that understand and preserve their own heritage are better positioned to present it to others, recognize cultural differences, and identify shared values. Sacred heritage does not, therefore, influence dialogue directly; its influence is mediated by historical interpretation, social participation, and institutional representation.

Sacred heritage → historical memory and shared cultural practices → strengthened national identity → intercivilizational dialogue

The model also includes a feedback relationship. International recognition and intercultural contact may generate new interpretations of sacred heritage, increase public interest, and provide additional resources for preservation. At the same time, international promotion may result in commercialization or the simplification of complex historical meanings. Effective heritage policy must therefore balance international accessibility with historical accuracy, community participation, and respect for the cultural and religious significance of sacred sites.

The First President of Kazakhstan N. A. Nazarbayev, in his programmatic article "Course Towards the Future: Modernization of Kazakhstan's Identity", emphasized the importance of the concept of national sacred sites. In his programmatic article, President Nursultan Nazarbayev wrote: *"The Cultural and Geographical Belt of Kazakhstan's holy sites represents such symbolic protection and is a source of pride that invisibly binds us through the centuries. It is a key element in the framework of our national identity"* (Nazarbayev, 2017, "Agenda for the Coming Years" section, paras. 58–59). He also noted that within the framework of "Course Towards the Future: Modernization of Kazakhstan's Identity", a project entitled "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan" would be launched.

The concept of "Sacred Geography" was formed relatively recently. In April 2017, the Head of State published the article "Course Towards the Future: Modernization of Kazakhstan's Identity", which introduced a new national program on "Ruqani Zhangyru". The program was aimed at preserving Kazakhstan's cultural and spiritual values and adapting them to contemporary conditions. Among other priority initiatives proposed by the First President within the "Ruqani Zhangyru" program was the project "Kazakhstan's Sacred Sites", directed at preserving geographically significant objects of regional and national importance and raising public awareness. Later, it was renamed "Kazakhstan's Sacred Geography" (Tsyrempilov et al., 2022, p. 718).

The essence of the "Kazakhstan's Sacred Geography" project lies in the creation of a unified field – a single network – of Kazakhstan's culturally and geographically sacred places (Nurkamal, 2022).

Two principal interpretations of the "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan" project can be distinguished. The official policy perspective presents sacred sites as symbols that connect citizens with national history, preserve the national cultural code, and support patriotic education. From this perspective, the identification and promotion of sacred places are necessary elements of cultural modernization because modernization can remain sustainable only when it is connected to historical memory and spiritual heritage (Nazarbayev, 2017).

A more critical scholarly interpretation examines how sacred geography is institutionally constructed. Tsyrempilov et al. (2022) demonstrate that the project does not simply document an already established collection of sacred places. It also selects, classifies, and assigns national meaning to particular locations. This process strengthens the symbolic relationship between national identity and territory, but it may also privilege certain historical narratives while giving less attention to others.

These interpretations should not be treated as mutually exclusive. The official approach explains the intended social and educational functions of sacred geography, whereas the critical approach reveals the institutional choices involved in defining national heritage. In the authors' view, sacred-geography policy can strengthen national identity while supporting intercivilizational dialogue only when the selection and interpretation of sites acknowledge Kazakhstan's religious, ethnic, and historical diversity. An inclusive approach allows sacred heritage to function as a shared cultural resource rather than as the expression of a single, closed interpretation of national identity.

National identity is a system of values based on each nation's unique cultural and spiritual essence and historical memory. It serves as a spiritual core that unites a people into a cohesive nation. In the era of globalization, preserving national identity is a key condition for resisting cultural homogenization and harmonizing with global civilization without losing national values.

In Kazakhstan, national identity has been considered one of the main priorities of state policy since the years of independence. The ideas of "Madeni Mura" by President N. A. Nazarbayev and the "Ruqani Zhangyru" program are important steps in this direction. These initiatives are aimed at renewing national consciousness, studying historical heritage, and promoting the traditional culture and values of the Kazakh people (Kadrimbetova et al., 2021).

The significance of national identity in intercultural dialogue can be considered from three perspectives:

– Cultural-spiritual aspect: recognized through a people's language, religion, traditions, and art;

– Socio-political aspect: strengthens social unity, stability, and trust in the state;

– International aspect: allows establishing dialogue with other civilizations on an equal footing by showcasing national uniqueness.

National identity is a guarantee against being absorbed in the flow of global culture. In intercultural dialogue, the voice of a nation without a distinct historical and cultural identity is weak. Therefore, preserving the uniqueness of national culture is not only about protecting the past but also about strengthening the spiritual foundation of future generations.

In Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language is considered one of the main factors in strengthening national identity. This is because language is the cornerstone of a nation's spiritual heritage. In addition, Kazakh traditional arts, folklore, handicrafts, and music also belong to the values that express the national essence. From this perspective, national identity and intercultural dialogue are complementary and mutually interactive phenomena.

The literature considered in this study suggests three broad approaches to national identity under conditions of globalization. The protective approach emphasizes the danger of cultural homogenization and regards the preservation of language, historical memory, and inherited traditions as necessary for maintaining national continuity (Mukha & Tuzhba, 2013; Sheryazdanova & Abildina, 2020). Its strength lies in drawing attention to cultural vulnerability; however, when taken to an extreme, it may present identity as fixed and external cultural influence as inherently destructive.

The pluralist approach treats cultural membership as compatible with participation in a wider political and social community. From this perspective, the protection of cultural identity does not require isolation. It requires institutions that allow different communities to preserve meaningful cultural practices while participating on equitable terms in shared public life (Kymlicka, 1995). This approach is particularly relevant to intercivilizational dialogue because it connects cultural continuity with recognition, participation, and mutual respect.

A social-interactionist approach further suggests that identity is not preserved solely through inherited symbols. It is continually formed and reinforced through social roles, relationships, and interaction with others (Stryker, 1987). Intercultural contact therefore does not necessarily weaken national identity. When communities possess stable institutions of memory and cultural transmission, interaction may encourage them to articulate their values more clearly and reinterpret their heritage in response to new circumstances.

The authors adopt a relational rather than an exclusively defensive understanding of national identity. National identity should be understood as a dynamic form of cultural continuity: it preserves historical memory and core cultural meanings while allowing their interpretation within changing social conditions. Sacred sites support this process because they connect inherited narratives with contemporary practices such as education, pilgrimage, commemoration, tourism, and international cultural exchange. Preservation without active interpretation may turn heritage into a static symbol, whereas openness without historical grounding may weaken its cultural meaning.

Nevertheless, globalization also creates tensions between openness and cultural distinctiveness. Critical approaches argue that contemporary processes of integration may reproduce unequal economic and cultural power relations inherited from colonial and imperial systems (Volova, 2012). For smaller national cultures, the challenge is therefore not to reject international interaction, but to participate in it without losing the historical memory, language, and cultural practices that sustain collective identity. Preserving cultural continuity while remaining open to intercultural dialogue offers a more balanced response to these pressures.

Globalization should therefore be understood neither as an unavoidable process of cultural destruction nor as an automatically beneficial form of integration. Its consequences depend on the institutions through which cultural exchange occurs, the participation of local communities, and the manner in which heritage is interpreted. Sacred sites can mediate between continuity and change by providing a stable connection to historical memory while also creating spaces in which national heritage can be communicated to others. This position forms the analytical basis for the conceptual model proposed in this study.

Conclusion

This study examined how sacred sites contribute to the preservation of national identity and function as instruments of intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue, with Kazakhstan as the principal case. The analysis combined theoretical perspectives on identity and globalization with comparative examples from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Spain.

The analysis produced four principal findings. First, sacred sites preserve national identity by connecting communities with historical memory, inherited cultural meanings, and practices of commemoration. Second, their social significance depends on active participation through pilgrimage, education, cultural tourism, public rituals, and heritage interpretation. Third, the comparative cases demonstrate that sacred heritage can support cultural dialogue when institutions make its meanings accessible to different communities. However, sacred status alone does not automatically create dialogue. Inclusive interpretation, community participation, and sustained interaction are necessary. Fourth, Kazakhstan's sacred-geography initiatives have successfully increased the symbolic visibility of national heritage, but their dialogical potential could be strengthened through multilingual interpretation, regional cooperation, educational programmes, and greater engagement with international visitors.

The scientific contribution of the study lies in the proposed conceptual model connecting sacred heritage, historical memory, shared cultural practices, national identity, and intercivilizational dialogue. The model demonstrates that sacred sites influence dialogue indirectly. Their influence is mediated by the ways in which communities interpret historical meanings, participate in cultural practices, and represent their heritage to external audiences. It also identifies a feedback relationship in which international recognition can generate new interpretations, public interest, and resources for preservation.

These findings have practical implications for cultural-policy institutions, heritage organizations, educational establishments, and tourism authorities. Programmes concerning sacred sites should combine physical preservation with historically accurate interpretation, community participation, and opportunities for intercultural exchange. In Kazakhstan, this could include multilingual educational materials, regional pilgrimage and heritage routes, collaboration with neighbouring Central Asian states, and training for guides who present sacred sites to culturally diverse audiences. International promotion should be balanced with protection against commercialization and the oversimplification of complex historical meanings.

This study is limited by its reliance on published scholarship, policy materials, and documented heritage initiatives. It does not measure the attitudes of pilgrims, tourists, local communities, or heritage professionals. Future research should test the proposed model through interviews, visitor surveys, participant observation, and comparative fieldwork at sacred sites in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries. Such research could determine how different groups interpret sacred heritage and whether encounters at these sites produce measurable changes in cultural understanding, national identification, or attitudes toward other communities.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

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