



“PLACES OF MEMORY” AS THE HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES OF THE KAZAKH CULTURE REGENERATION

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Abstract: The Kazakh national memory faced suppression during the 70 years of Soviet rule, leading to a risk of partial loss of national cultural heritage. In this period, Soviet policies often discouraged practices, such as visiting sacred places, a tradition integral to honoring ancestors and perpetuating national memory. Prior to this, during the Russian colonial period, similar policies served as a deterrent to these cultural expressions. It is important to differentiate between the Russian colonial policies pre-Soviet rule and the Soviet policies thereafter, although both had an impact on Kazakh national traditions. When Kazakhstan became independent, the lost historical memory was restored by space ideology formation and was a spontaneous “national canonization”. The initiators of the memory place renovation in the country, including sacred sites, were the holy ancestors’ and patriotic citizens’ descendants. In 2017, the state adopted the Rukhani Zhangryu program aimed at the restoration of historical places, which have the potential to national consciousness growth and national unification around living history. In this regard, the main scope of this work is to study the growth points of a new space ideology in Kazakhstan’s cultural landscape. The authors propose a classification of sacred place types, which shall contribute to the unification of all national identification layers into a single whole.


Keywords: Sacred places. “Places of memory”. Commemoration. Space ideology. “Memory of steppe”.

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Resumo: A memória nacional do Cazaquistão caiu no esquecimento, durante os 70 anos de regime soviético, o que levou à ameaça de perda parcial do patrimônio cultural nacional. A política colonial russa impediu a visita a lugares sagrados, como tradição, para honrar os antepassados e perpetuar a memória nacional. Quando o Cazaquistão se tornou independente, a memória histórica perdida foi restaurada pela formação da ideologia espacial e constituiu uma “canonização nacional” espontânea. Os iniciadores da renovação dos lugares de memória no país, incluindo os locais sagrados, foram os descendentes dos antepassados sagrados e os cidadãos patriotas. Em 2017, o Estado adotou o programa Rukhani Zhangryu, que visa à restauração de locais históricos com potencial para o desenvolvimento da consciência nacional e a unificação nacional em torno da história viva. A esse respeito, o principal objetivo deste trabalho é estudar os pontos de crescimento de uma nova ideologia espacial, na paisagem cultural do Cazaquistão. Os autores propõem uma classificação de tipos de lugares sagrados que contribuirá para a unificação de todas as camadas de identificação nacional num único todo.

Palavras-chave: Lugares sagrados. “Lugares de memória”. Comemoração. Ideologia do espaço. “Memória da estepe”.

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“PLACES OF MEMORY” AS THE HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES OF THE KAZAKH CULTURE REGENERATION

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Abstract: The Kazakh national memory faced suppression during the 70 years of Soviet rule, leading to a risk of partial loss of national cultural heritage. In this period, Soviet policies often discouraged practices, such as visiting sacred places, a tradition integral to honoring ancestors and perpetuating national memory. Prior to this, during the Russian colonial period, similar policies served as a deterrent to these cultural expressions. It is important to differentiate between the Russian colonial policies pre-Soviet rule and the Soviet policies thereafter, although both had an impact on Kazakh national traditions. When Kazakhstan became independent, the lost historical memory was restored by space ideology formation and was a spontaneous “national canonization”. The initiators of the memory place renovation in the country, including sacred sites, were the holy ancestors’ and patriotic citizens’ descendants. In 2017, the state adopted the Rukhani Zhangyru program aimed at the restoration of historical places, which have the potential to national consciousness growth and national unification around living history. In this regard, the main scope of this work is to study the growth points of a new space ideology in Kazakhstan’s cultural landscape. The authors propose a classification of sacred place types, which shall contribute to the unification of all national identification layers into a single whole.

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of the cultural landscape, defined as the composite of natural, built and intangible cultural elements that characterize an area, is crucial when considering how ideologies about space and place are formed. This is particularly relevant, in the contemporary discourse, on the state’s and individual’s evolving roles, as it provides a framework for understanding how our surroundings shape and are shaped by societal norms, values and governance structures. The cultural landscape is part of the World Heritage in the UNESCO

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Convention. In fact, it contains the basic and global concept of cultural heritage integration with the natural environment and place of origin. It is a special spiritual relationship between nature and culture. The modern global world is interesting, because the cultural landscape and space ideology unite the state with its politics and the person with their individual and national perception in a single context (Nora *et al.*, 1999, p. 56). A new ideology formation, in the cultural landscape, has a huge civic initiative potential in the context of modern challenges. Today, the world is in a system of a certain civilization breakdown, statehood crisis and an active search for identity against the background of globalization (Boiko; Kuleshov, 2023, p. 71). The identities of entire cultures, the nations' and peoples' collective and individual consciousness, are being eroded, an experience compounded by various other profound challenges. Every society encounters critical moments of testing—times that demand deep introspection and fundamental reassessment. This necessity for re-evaluation is universal, touching every facet of life, from philosophy to religion, from prevailing ideologies to the foundations of knowledge, and from economic systems, like capitalism or socialism, to the state's and its communities' very structure (Lefebvre, 2015, p. 124; Bazaluk, 2017, p. 11).

Today, the former USSR's national states, which overcome the formal points of the Soviet era crisis, are in an intense search for growth points of the national marker revival, including the cultural landscape commemoration. Overcoming the imposed styles of thinking of the Soviet era (which are still professed by part of the Kazakh society), aimed at the national identity leveling, including the cultural landscape deformation, opens up the perspectives for the new space ideology formation and the re-nationalization of such identifiers, as the memory of steppe, national cultural code and sacred places (Gumilyov, 2010, p. 86).

Independent Kazakhstan promotes the new space ideology formation initiatives. The new space ideology formation was spontaneous at the first stages and expressed in active mosque construction, regeneration of local places of memory, national and local hero monument construction, etc. As a rule, the initiators of these processes were patriotic citizens. In 2017, the state adopted the Rukhani Zhangyru program (Spiritual Development). One of its special projects, the “Kazakh nation return to itself” one, is aimed at the systemic revival of national ideologies through the regeneration of historical places and historical memory commemoration in it (Yekimbaeva, 2019, p. 43).

“Places of memory”, within Kazakh culture, serve as vital touchstones for the collective remembrance and ongoing regeneration of its historical and spiritual values. These sites, ranging from the vast steppes that once echoed with the nomadic horsemen's hooves to sacred mausoleums, encapsulate the resilience and continuity of the Kazakh spirit. They act as repositories of oral traditions, holding stories about great leaders and events that shaped the nation's destiny. The reverence for ancestors and the deep connection to the land, as

embodied by these memory places, infuse a sense of identity and belonging among the Kazakh people (Doszhan, 2023). Ceremonies and traditional practices, performed at these locations, reinforce communal bonds and transmit cultural wisdom across generations. The preservation of such places is akin to keeping the embers of Kazakh culture alight, allowing the past to illuminate the present and guide future paths. Ultimately, these memory places are not mere geographical spots, but are woven into the very fabric of Kazakh identity, underscoring their timeless value in the nation’s cultural regeneration.

Thus, the main scope of this work is to study the growth points of a new space ideology in Kazakhstan’s cultural landscape and regeneration of the national spirit concepts in the unity of the state, national and personal search.

The comprehensive study of the new space ideology, in the cultural landscape of the Kazakhs’ memory of steppe, required the application of the comparative method, historical analysis method, case-method, etc., along with the general scientific systemic methods. The comparative method, used in this article, enables to analyze the study, preservation of the cultural landscape and the famous scientists’ space ideology, as well as the philosophers’ one, such as Pierre Nora (Nora *et al.*, 1999), Henri Lefebvre (2015), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1999), and Dmitry Likhachev, the applied research of the cultural research center “Aigine” (Kyrgyzstan) and the one of the scientific center “Sacral Kazakhstan”, and the Kazakh scientists’ research, such as K. Medeuova (2019) and Z. Naurzybayeva (2018). This method enables to make the applied research of such ideas as “The Places of Memory” by Nora *et al.* (1999), “Space Production” as the cultural phenomenon and Lefebvre’s (2015) world. The understanding of space, as a vital, real and everyday phenomenon in Berger and Luckmann’s (1999) views, is of very interest. Likhachev (Zubok, 2017, p. 54) offers a new understanding of a person’s role with creative abilities in the cultural space. L. Gumilyov (2010, p. 92) studies the problem in the context of the relationship of living space, “places of memory” and “feeding” landscape.

The historical analysis method is required for the historical retrospective review of the cultural landscape, from the past to the present and future. Case-method, conversations with pilgrims, text and visual material analysis are used for the certain situation analysis in the cultural landscape.

1 DISCUSSION ON THE SPACE IDEOLOGY FORMATION

1.2 MEMORY AND IDEOLOGY: TRACING THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE THROUGH THE ANNALS SCHOOL AND LEFEBVRE’S SPATIAL THEORY

The school of “Annals” has the special interest in the study of memory, as the identifier in the cultural landscape, and its impact on the space ideology formation. Exactly

this school established the actual and vital provisions, which currently confirm that the memory continuity is the guarantee of confidence. This knowledge is subject to the general sacral rules and values of “commonly experienced past” (Assman, 2004, p. 135).

So, the French historian of the “Annals” school, Pierre Nora, puts forward the initiative to reconcile history and national memory in the “Places of Memory” concept. The search for authentic history and self-identity emerged at the end of the 20th century, a period now referred to as the “Epoch of Doubts”. The thinker strove to move away from subjectivity and untruth in history, from the state’s or statesman’s paternalism. The “Places of Memory”, by Pierre Nora *et al.* (1999), are the integral part of a new understanding of the cultural landscape and scape ideology formation. Pierre Nora underlines the dominant and dominated “places of memory”. The dominant “places of memory” are identified by the state. They shall be visited; they are purposefully paid attention to and they are under the patronage of the state. These “places of memory” are visited by people forcibly to honor persons or national events formally. The dominated “places of memory” are selected by people themselves and conditioned by people’s collective memory. These are the shelter places, “collective memory” sanctuaries of the national wealth and places of silent pilgrimages. The state may approve or prohibit the memory about these places. However, they are vivid and have the greatest value in the modern practices. These places are considered by people as the symbolic space where the essence of historical events and individual experience are inextricably intertwined (Nora *et al.*, 1999, p. 102). Lefebvre’s (2015, p. 168) scientific initiative includes the new understanding of space not as the physical phenomenon, but as the cultural matrix proposed in his work “Space Production”. The author says that each society, born within the frameworks of the historical production means with all peculiarities, forms its own scape (Lefebvre, 2015, p. 169).

At the same time, the space is constantly subject to dialectics. It is modified and created. People, in this space, are constantly producing their life, history, consciousness and world, that is, the space around them. In addition to the space production, there is the space representation, realized by the figurative language of signs and symbols or cultural code (Kulgildinova *et al.*, 2018, p. 335). Production and representation are connected and synthesized in the space, which already represents the society’s natural habitat, created by the cultural practices or cultural codes. Space by Lefebvre (2015) has a reflection which goes through perception, comprehension and living. Lefebvre (2015, p. 129) considers the space as the dialectical process, an extensive transitional period caused by a number of great faults. In general, Lefebvre’s (2015, p. 131) trilogy: production – representation – space and perception – understanding – living are interrelated and may transit to each other. Space does not cancel other tools and resources of social and political mechanism – from raw materials to the most sophisticated products, from the industrial enterprises to the “culture” (Lefebvre, 2015, p. 133; Teymurova *et al.*, 2023, p. 7).

The representatives of the social reality construction, such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1999, p. 83), continue the space ideology problem in the cultural landscape, described in the work *Social Reality Construction*. They consider the space ideology as the lifeworld (Lebenswelt) and everyday reality. They think that the world of human consciousness consists of many realities where the highest reality is everyday life. Space ideology, by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1999, p. 96), is the correlation how people create the social reality and how this reality creates people. Society, where discrepant worlds become publicly accessible as in the market, contains the special combination of the subjective reality and identity. All world's common relativity consciousness grows, including the proper world which is now perceived as one of the worlds, but not as the World (Berger; Luckmann, 1999, p. 97).

The everyday life's world is considered as a social practice of human activity, and a social knowledge reserve, expressed in the accumulation of information, on the surrounding world, and in the transmission from generation to generation. Each person complements the existing reality with his social experience, making their own contribution into the social construction. At the same time, as the author emphasizes, societies have stories resulted in the establishment of specific identities; but these stories, however, are created by people endowed with specific identities (Berger; Luckmann, 1999, p. 103).

1.3 CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL REALITY: IDEOLOGICAL SPACES AND IDENTITY IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Space ideology is a dynamic system, which includes the cultural heritage. The researcher D. Likhachev noted that the culture is a person's essential manifestation in the world. The result of syncretism, as the fusion and interaction of nature and man, is a person with colossal and unrealized creative possibilities. Gradually implementing these possibilities, the mankind creates works of the highest culture and monuments. Likhachev understands the culture as the “integral environment”, “spiritual environment” and “sacred space” (Zubok, 2017, p. 63). Culture tends to not only develop, accumulate, assimilate, but also not assimilate, go into “irrelevant forms” and be lost. Thus, the past may not disappear without a trace, it is not “replaced” by the present, but it continues in it, just renewing and taking other forms.

The Russian researcher L. N. Gumilyov (2010, p. 126) emphasized the close relationship between ethnos and nature and argued that the human collectives, referring to the nomads of the Eurasian steppe, have strong relations with the “feeding landscape”. The founders of the “Annals” school come to the same conclusions: “A person is a group to which he belongs: some individuals leave it, others are included into it, but the group remains tied to this space, to the familiar lands” (Braudel, 1986, p. 158). Thus, according

to L. N. Gumilyov (2010, p. 131), the places of memory appear initially as the necessary living space which architectonics is initially determined by the feeding landscape. Thus, the importance of the cultural space discourse, at the micro-level and macro-level, is determined by the regeneration potential of the collective and individual memory, actual survival models, successfulness, society competitiveness and possibility of “national return to itself”.

In general, in unison with Pierre Nora’s (Nora *et al.*, 1999), Henri Lefebvre’s (2015), Peter Berger’s and Thomas Luckmann’ (1999) ideas, the intense search for the current ideology is going on in Kazakhstan through the commemoration of the steppe cultural landscape meanings and the revival of such identifiers as the Kazakh nation’s “memory of steppe” and “sacred places”. These identifiers are gradually filling the new space ideology.

Speaking in the historical context, it shall be noted that the space, development by the Kazakh nation, has always been determined by the traditional and natural syncretism of its thinking and the principle of adaptation to the steppe landscape. As a result, the historically extensive nomadic pastoralism was adopted as the most successful form of adaptation to the steppe zone and economic production model. As a result of the annual nomadism, Kazakh clans covered distances of up to 2000 km, but, as a rule, had the established traditional nomadic routes. However, after political and environmental challenges, the nomadic routes could change (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 48). Thus, in order to preserve the identity, the Kazakh nation developed two fundamental identifiers: the Oral Word (for example, Kazakhs should know up to seven generations of ancestors) and holy sacred places. In this regard, the restoration of historical memory places in Kazakhstan, which had one of the most tragic and long-lasting lessons of social deformation and marginalization in 18th-20th centuries, is practically the only real opportunity to awaken and restore the national consciousness and memory, to overcome the Kazakh nation’s increasing fragmentation and the internal fracture of consciousness. The places of memory may and shall become points of growth of national consciousness and of, national unification around the living history, which reconstruction involves people, events, facts and destinies directly related to the modern Kazakhs’ origins.

Thus, the “Sacral Geography” project is aimed at the regeneration of the national identity, through the renaissance of the Kazakh “sacred places”, and the restoration of the “sacred memory” map as the actual space ideology in the cultural landscape.

2 CLASSIFICATION OF TYPES OF SACRED PLACES

The special project “Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan” of “Rukhani Zhanryru” program (Yekimbaeva, 2019, p. 79), initiated in 2017 by Kazakhstan’s President, N. Nazarbayev, is aimed at the regeneration of the “sacred places”, as “places of historical

memory”, and the formation of a sacred geographical belt, which shall become the frame of the common national identity.

A significant program growth point was the presumption of trust in the Kazakh population’s sacred experience and knowledge. For the first time in the 20th century, ordinary Kazakhs began to be actively involved in the revival of national history. Especially, this contributed into the growth of the “historical memory” commemoration of the Kazakhs’ older generation, who bit by bit, through family legends, zhyry (musical legends) and kyuis (musical storytelling heritage), restore a living, multivariate and dialogical history. Thus, the phenomenon of “sacred places”, from the marginal closed practice of the colonial period in the 18th-20th centuries, become an open and demanded action. Thus, the new national commemorative policy is aimed at the formation of the actual space ideology through such key ideas, as the “national cultural code”, “national identity frame”, “small homeland”, “cultural and geographical belt of sanctuaries of Kazakhstan”, ‘sacred geography of Kazakhstan” and through the restoration and preservation of historical and cultural monuments, and scared places.

The research center “Sacral Kazakhstan” has identified more than 600 sacred places – places of commemoration in Kazakhstan, which may become the growth points of the national consciousness (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 56). However, there are many more of them in real terms. Today, there is a process of spontaneous national “canonization” and sacred space network establishment. National memory pulls out new names and places of memory, which acquire their real and virtual ancestors. Locals, from the West-Kazakhstan region, say about 360 saints (Kondybai, 2008, p. 144). This “places of memory” growth boom tendency is largely provoked by the previous decades of the Soviet violent atheization and denationalization policy. The Soviet Union’s aggressive atheization and denationalization policies, driven by Marxist-Leninist ideology that viewed religion, as a societal opiate, and national identities, as a threat to communist unity, sought to secularize society and suppress diverse cultural identities. This repression led to a post-Soviet revival of “places of memory”, as these sites became crucial in reclaiming and affirming cultural and religious heritage that had been stifled. In the aftermath, these memory places burgeoned, as symbols of restored national consciousness and spiritual continuity, amidst the ideological void, left by the collapse of the Soviet regime.

The research center “Sacral Kazakhstan” has classified the sacred objects according to six criteria: especially revered monuments of natural heritage; archaeological sites and medieval urban centers; religious and cult objects – places of worship; sacred places associated with historical figures; sacred places, associated with historical; and political events (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 85). This classification also includes the sacred objects of national and regional levels.

Taking into account that “sacred places” represent the conceptual space where elements of national identity converge into a unified entity, the authors suggest the following typology for these sacred places.

2.1 “SACRED PLACES”, WHICH RECREATE THE KAZAKHS’ NATIONAL AND STATE IDENTITY

This includes Kazakh khans’ and great political figures’ burial places (tombs), and memorable places of Kazakh history (fields of bloody battles, places of strategic decision-making, etc.). Such “places of memory” are featured, by the preservation, as the cultural and material objects during the period of Russian colonization and Soviet power. As a rule, the spiritual memory about them was deformed. The natural and historical complex “Ulytau” (Figure 1), forgotten in the Soviet period, has acquired historical relevance from the date of independence. “Ulytau” is translated, from the Kazakh language, as the “Great Mountain”. But since these mountains are actually not very high, this name has a sacred meaning, because these are the “main revered mountains” where the nomads’ sanctuaries have been hidden since the ancient times (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 89).

Figure 1 – The natural and historical complex “Ulytau”



Source: Ulytau National Park (2023)

In the 17-18th centuries, Ulytau mountains were the political center of the entire Kazakh steppe. There are several factors. Firstly, the vicinity of Ulytau is a unique natural object: it “[...] has 21 dams, 91 springs, 21 lakes” (Seidembek, 2011, p. 164). This land is most suitable for cattle breeding and was the Kazakh state’s main economic resource. Secondly, this land is a source of natural resources, required for the economy. There are the indisputable

evidences of a high-level metallurgical production in the territory of Ulytau. The famous Arab geographer, al-Idrisi, wrote that, in the vicinity of Ulytau, skillful craftsmen created items of gold, silver and copper, which were sold to Eastern and Western peoples (Volin *et al.*, 1939, p. 147). Thirdly, even today, Ulytau is the modern Kazakhstan’s geographical center. The historical utilization of Ulytau as a political hub, in early eras, reflects the territorial identity associated with the Kazakh Khanate, other historical states, within present-day Kazakhstan’s boundaries and contemporary Kazakhstan itself.

The Ulytau land keeps many sacred objects, which may become “places of memory”. One of the most significant objects is the “Tanbaly Tas” monument. This is a stele with Kazakhs’ images of generic signs (tamga). The concentration of Kazakh clans’ symbols, in one place, indicates the sacredness of this place - the place of national spirit unity. Perhaps, oaths were taken and decisions fateful for the state were made in this place. These signs were a reminder of the entire Kazakh people unity (Seidembek, 2011, p. 173). Dzhuchi Khan’s and Alasha Khan’s tombs were erected in Ulytau (12th century). Legend holds that Alasha Khan is esteemed as the leader who unified the nomadic Turkic tribes and founded the inaugural state of Alash, regarded as the precursor to the Kazakh state. (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 90). Records suggest that Alasha Khan’s tomb serves as a pantheon where notable khans and sovereigns of the era, such as Yedige, Tokhtamysh, Agen, Khaknazar and Tauekel, were laid to rest. (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 92). Thus, the concept of “Alash”, in the national memory, is associated with unity: “We are all descended from Alasha, as the latticed skeleton of the Kazakh house is made of wood”. Dzhuchi Khan’s headquarters, Genghis Khan’s eldest son, was stationed in Ulytau, where Batu Khan, Genghis Khan’s grandson, began his conquest to the West. The great Tamerlane (ruler of Samarkand) left the memory about his stay on the stone slab of Ulytau mountain, Altyn Shoky, in spring of 1391 (Seidembek, 2011, p. 175).

The greatness of events, took place on these ancient mountains, is reflected in place-names and hydronyms. These are “Tanbaly Tas”, “Khan Election Place”, “Convocation Place”, “Topyrak Suyrkan”, “Altynshoky”, “Khan’s Headquarters”, “Khan’s Wintering”, “Khan’s Territory”, “Khan Basy”, “Principal Trade Place”, “Place of Yedige Biy” and many others (Seidembek, 2011, p. 183). There are approximately 636 monuments in Ulytau territory. Botanical and geographical studies revealed 617 types of plants, where 90 types are medicinal plants (Seidembek, 2011, p. 184). Ulytau district fulfilled the special strategic tasks on USSR defense, during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), where manganese ores were mined for the production of tanks and armor plates. The evidence of the existence of the original metallurgy history is the Maken Toregeldin Mining and Smelting Museum established, in 1988, as the Kazak production culture monument (Yermaganbetova *et al.*, 2017, p. 332; Tserklevych *et al.*, 2021, p. 221). Thus, Ulytau is the place with the unique natural and cultural landscape. It has the huge cultural and symbolic value, which

may be the basis for the Kazakh culture narrative revival: unity, spiritual and political independence, steppe democracy.

2.2 “SACRED PLACES” FORMING THE REGIONAL (CLAN) IDENTITY

Despite the fact that the process of the unified Kazakh statehood formation began in the 15th century, for many reasons (first of all, the nomadic way of life), the Kazakhs have always kept two vectors of values in the spiritual life: national interests, including land integrity and people unity, and a particular clan's interests and localities of autonomous residence that reflect the local community's feelings and experiences. Clan was the main link of socialization in the Kazakhs' life. The Kazakh traditional society placed the values of clan affiliation above the clan identity. Accordingly, the main conglomerate of “places of memory” in Kazakhstan is associated with places of memory of the clan identity. There are some features of localization of the “places of memory” of clan identity. In general, such places of memory are situated along the traditional routes of nomadic clan migration. The spatial localization of such places of memory permits to determine where and what clan passed the winter and summer, and when the clan strengthened and enlarged its habitat and vice-versa. “Places of memory” of the clan identity are the silent witnesses of clan history.

Therefore, “Rukhani Zhangyru” Program is aimed at the identification of “hidden”, “displaced” and local senses and, based on the aforesaid, the restoration of the Kazakhs' historical, national and religious consciousness integrity. There are up to 360 places of memory in Mangystau (Western Kazakhstan where Junior zhus clans live) (Kondybai, 2008, p. 147). The significant part of sacral objects and legends was forgotten after 1930, when the greatest part of adai (clan of the Junior zhus) left the home lands after the suppression of anti-Soviet riot. Therefore, their restoration today is as “the search of themselves” for such people. One of such objects, renewed during the independence period, is the memorial complex “Otrpan-Tau” (Figure 2). Subject to the philosopher Zira Nauryzbayeva's (2018) opinion: “[...] just over a few years it has become the ‘new’ symbol of the national unity”.

Figure 2 – Otpan Tau Historical and Cultural Complex



Source: Naurzybayeva (2018)

Otpan Tau is the second highest point in Mangystau. The history of this place has both the political and geographical significances. There are several versions of its name origin. According to the archaeologist A. Astafyev, a sanctuary was on the top of the mountain in ancient times, where a Sufi lived – kalandar Otman-Baba; this area was named after him. “Otman-Baba is a native of Central Asia, came to Asia Minor with the troops of Timur and lived in Bulgaria which was a part of the Ottoman ports” (Averyanov, 2011, p. 47). Otman-Baba lighted up a sacred fire and performed the religious rites. According to the another version,

Otman (Otpan) in Kazakh historical memory, is a guard mountain where the signal fire ‘Uran Ot’ was lighted up in the event of an enemy attack; this fire was visible from a significant part of the peninsula and called on the warriors to gather and fight with enemies, and called on the civilian population to hide. In Soviet times, Otpan-Tau was an ordinary geographic object. Some clans kept the tradition to visit this mountain occasionally, climb it and arrange a memorial dastarkhan (death feast) for relatives of dead person (Naurzybayeva, 2018).

In 2007, the reconstruction and establishment of a memorial complex “Adai-Ata – Otpan-Tau” began on the mountain at the expense of local companies’ and residents’ donations. A 37-meter tower, dedicated to the Adai clan’s ancestor, Adai-Ata, and two smaller towers, dedicated to his sons Kudaike and Kelimberda, were installed at the top of the mountain. A bowl was installed near the mausoleum, where the Unity Fire is lit on the

holiday of Amal (the holiday of the spring equinox and people unity) on the night of March 13-14. The bowl is supported by a tripod which symbolizes three hands - the three Kazakh zhuzes' (clans) unity.

To strengthen the sacral significance of the events, the great Kazakh zhyrau Kalniyaz's (1816-1902) remains were brought from Hissar, Tajikistan, in 2015. Zhyrau Kalniyaz was forced to move off from his Motherland after the riot defeat in 1870. His remains were re-buried on Otpan-Tau. Currently, the memorial complex is a cult place, the "place of memory", which forms a new national identity. One of the main holidays, Amal, is held there. Representatives of all local ethnical and cultural centers of different diasporas, scientists and cultural workers, public figures from the country's other regions and representatives of Kazakh diasporas from other countries are invited to the Amal holiday on Otpan-Tau. To establish new traditions of the Kazakh people's unity, competitions of zhyrau - storytellers, the holiday of burkutchi "Sonar", etc. are held at Otpan-Tau. Thus, the restoration of the sacred places of the clan identity organically merged into the national and state construction, and became the first step of the "return of the Kazakhs to themselves".

2.3 "PLACES OF MEMORY" WHICH RESTORE THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

The next layer of sacred places, in Kazakhstan, is associated with the spread of Islam and other religions, spiritual practices and traditions. The search for God, the spiritual need for faith, is among the most common reasons for pilgrimage. "In 2005, one of the pilgrims, in Talas (Kyrgyzstan), formulated a wonderful definition: 'Mazar is a gift from God to the mankind. It is impossible to see God, but we can see a divine place'" (Aitpaeva, 2019).

In Kazakhstan, there are several revered sites known as "places of religious memory". These sites hold special significance for the people. They include the mausoleums of influential persons:

1. the founder of the Sufi brotherhood Yasaviyya H.-A. Yasavi (14th century);
2. Yasavi's mentor and descendant of one of the righteous caliphs Omar – Arystan Baba (12th century, South Kazakhstan);
3. the Kazakh poet Mashhur Zhusup (20th century, Northern Kazakhstan);
4. Sufi, and active defender of the interests of Beket-Ata people (18th century, Western Kazakhstan);
5. Sufi and theologian Baba-Ata (14th century), etc.

Sacred Islamic places have the special connective concept. Being all Turkic nations' general religious heritage, in the Central Asia, “places of the religious memory” establish the single civilization unity field. They become the Turkic ethnic groups' places of pilgrimage, in the Central Asia. It shall be noted that the sacred Islamic places are located throughout Kazakhstan. They almost continuously belong to 12-20th centuries in chronological order. They are equally revered by all residents from Kazakhstan, regardless of the geography of their location. These arguments directly testify the civilizational continuity of the Kazakhs' Islamic identity. Thus, “places of religious worship” are included not only in ethnic, but also in country and general civil identity.

Places of the religious identity memory are especially revered. Here, the human experience becomes more significant than the establishment of facts and events. Such objects become the points of Kazakhs' spiritual growth and revival. Visiting of such places is strictly regulated. K. Roger (2003, p. 167) emphasizes that “[...] you cannot live in the sacred place; you can only visit it from time to time – with caution and observance of precautionary measures”. There is a basic set of rules for visiting mazars and it includes measures aimed at the physical and moral restraint and purification. The trip to such objects begins long before the event itself. Almost all sacred places have springs with a holy water and guest houses with ascetic decor, but there is everything you need for circumcision. The Shirakshy (caretakers) explain that the arrived pilgrims shall spend the night there and, in the morning, after completing the necessary ritual actions, they shall make a pilgrimage.

The typical ritual practices in such sacred places are bypassing the saint's grave (analogous to tawaf in Mecca); lighting candles; leaving food or money; sacrifice of any animal; tying pieces of fabric; divination practices and magical actions such as throwing stones; water pouring; scooping up earth from a source, performing namaz and reading Koran; worshipping a tree at the saint's grave; navel exposure (for women wishing to become pregnant); touching gravestones; fingering the rosary; prostration prone, drinking water with dissolved earth from the saint's grave and others (Alekseev; Ivanova, 2012, p. 75).

Beket-ata's (18th century) underground mosque, who was a Sufi, educator, architect and healer, carved in a mass of chalk rocks in the Western Kazakhstan, has a special narrative. “According to the legends, just the mention of Beket-Ata name, in a conversation, may ward off a trouble, and prayer in a mosque may accomplish a miracle” (Abdigaliuly, 2017, p. 93)

The name of Beket-ata became the battle cry of the Kazakh clan Adai. His grave turned Mangystau from a conquered territory into the sacred homeland of the Adais. Migrated from the peninsula after the repressions of 1920-1930, the Adai returned to the harsh desert, because the spirit of Beket-ata called them (Kondybai, 2008, p. 152).

The popular expression “In Medina – Muhammad, in Turkestan – Khoja Ahmed, in Mangystau – Saint Beket” is the evidence of the people’s deep respect for Beket. Tens of thousands of pilgrims come to his mosque annually.

2.4 “SACRED PLACES” WHICH RESTORE THE CIVILIZATION UNITY OF TURKIC WORLD

All these monuments are evidence that the Turkic peoples, from the Eurasian steppe, have a deep layer of common cultural matrices, demonstrating high culture, common values and language. Nomadic cultures lived on Kazakhstan’s territory for several millennia and participated in the ethnogenesis of a large number of nations not only in Central Asia, but also in Eastern Europe, Russia and the Caucasus. Due to the high mobility and the predominance of light cultural objects in the material culture and, accordingly, practically disappeared artifacts, the study and recreation of the cultural and geographical belt of sacred objects of this period will expand the understanding of the cultural and intellectual history of the Eurasian continent in the future.

2.5 “SACRED PLACES” ESTABLISHING THE NEW PAGE OF INDEPENDENT KAZAKHSTAN’S HISTORY

This layer of the sacred places is born from the practice of “[...] co-existence, emotional practice of glorification of the most important actors of modern culture” (Medeuova, 2019, p. 25). These are the “sacred places”, which establish Independent Kazakhstan’s history.

In Kazakhstan, a new place of memory, which may become the democratic Kazakhstan’s ideology growth point, is the museum-memorial complex “Alzhir” (Figure 3) – “Akmola camp for wives of traitors to Motherland”, where more than 18 thousand women were imprisoned in the Soviet period (Museum-memorial complex..., 2021).

Figure 3 – Alzhir - Museum and Memorial Complex of Victims of Political Repressions and Totalitarianism



Source: (Museum-memorial complex, 2021)

This complex was opened on May 31, 2007, at the initiative of Kazakhstan’s President, N. Nazarbayev, on the place of the former “26th point” of labor settlement, 14 km from Kazakhstan’s capital, Nur-Sultan. The complex architecture has tremendous symbolism: it is a “Stalinist carriage”, or “heated freight car” so called by the prisoners, where convicted women, from all over the USSR, were transported; the “Arch of Sorrow” monument, passing under which, visitors remember those who died at this place; the compositions “Despair and Powerlessness” and “Struggle and Hope”; the park “Alash”, restored in the fruit garden grown by camp prisoners; and two mournful commemorative steles in the place where the prisoners of “Alzhir” camp were buried namelessly (the burial places were found with great difficulty).

Thus, the places of memory of the independence period have no national and religious patterns. This is the unified Kazakh people’s new history, who survived the horrors of totalitarianism, appreciating the independence, freedom and justice. There are more and more such “places of memory”. However, the tendency of Kazakhstan’s ideological revival makes the appeal mostly to the national pre-Soviet history.

2.6 SACRED PLACES RECONSTITUTING THE METAL SPACE OF THE KAZAKH CULTURE

These are the sacred places dedicated to mothers, daughters, the older generation, etc. As it is known, Kazakhs belong to those nations for whom family relations are of a key importance. The traditional Kazakh family, as a rule, still consists of three generations: the older generation, their children and grandchildren. The Kazakhs have a special wish

(bata) given by the older generation to the young people: “Enjoy the joy of communication with great-grandchildren”. The preservation of the mental space of family relations is a special narrative of Kazakh culture. These narratives are symbols of the Kazakh people unity (Qazaqstan Tarihy, 2021). A great number of “places of memory” contain the words – markers of the traditional Kazakh values in their names: “Ata” – father, ancestor, “Ana”, “Apa” – mother, grandmother, “Kyz” – daughter, girl, etc. Once these places, possibly, were associated with specific personalities, however, names are gradually supplanted from the popular memory, but the symbolic meaning and functional binding remain. Therefore, such places of memory are equally revered by all Kazakhs. Such “places of memory”, for most pilgrims, are the Kazakh people’s evidence of mental unity in the space-time continuum. The burial Domalakana (Figure 4) (burial of Baidibek biy’s wife, 14th century) enjoys the special reverence in the Southern Kazakhstan. People respectfully called her the “Mother of the clan” for deep knowledge of traditions, Koran and skillful mastery of Oral Word. The original appearance of this structure had not been preserved. There is an inscription on the wall at the entrance: “Monument in honor of the Great Mother Bibijar, daughter of Aksultan”. Further, there is a call to honor mothers. Women from all over Kazakhstan, who wish to have children, health and family well-being, visit her tomb.

Figure 4 – The burial Domalakana



Source: The Burial Domalakana (2023)

A large number of people literally stand behind the establishment of many sacred “places of memory”. Alfred Schütz (2013, p. 64), the founder of ethnomethodology, singled

out the “first-level constructions”, that is, constructions established directly by the social actors and culture carriers, in this context – the keepers of sacred places. Objects, established by scientists, were called, by Schütz, “second-level constructions” or “constructions of structures” (Schütz, 2013, p. 67). These ideas are confirmed by the fact that, even in Soviet times, when the sacred places of memory were consigned to oblivion, most of them were supported by the population and local Shirakshy, who were either direct descendants of protected saints, or religious figures, or simply aksakals (the older men) from a particular locality.

Thus, commemoration, being the indicator of the national self-consciousness growth process, on the one part, and the stimulator of the civil self-consciousness development, on the other part, establishes the basis constructs of the unified national identity formation. They are special features of the cultural and geographical landscape of the Kazakh Steppe. There are various types of cultural landscapes in the nomadic steppe. Firstly, they concentrated in the most fertile natural zones with many water sources, good pastures and fertile land serving as the environmental niches. The second feature of sacred spaces is that they are related with the nations’ migration routes and caravan routes of ancient cultures and civilizations. Therefore, transcultural regions are distinguished by the depth and density of historical memory, expressed in various cultural artifacts of different eras: in mounds and menhirs, ritual complexes and petroglyphs, chapels and monasteries, mazars, kamals, memorial signs and zirat (Medeuova; Sandybaeva, 2018, p. 429).

The sacred places also played a demarcation role. They were signs, in space, to designate the ancestral territories and directions of migrations. Totem attributes, tamga images, kamals, balbaltases and ulyptases are used in such places. “Bricks with imprints of special totem signs were used in the construction of mazars. Such sacred places may be the informal centers of certain regions and perform a communicative function” (Medeuova; Sandybaeva, 2018, p. 430). The cultural landscape of the Kazakh steppe perfectly reflects the historical essence of heritage. Based on localization and concentration of cultural monuments, one cannot fail to notice that a reasonable and balanced attitude to the habitat has been present for centuries in the Kazakh nomads’ consciousness and life. Consequently, efforts to preserve the historical heritage, on the Kazakh land, also include the studies of the environmental nomad behavior model experience, ensuring the reproduction of a successfully competing nomadic economy. The beneficial effects of natural sacred places, on people, are used in medical practice. The well-known Kyrgyz drug therapist, Dzh. Nazaraliyev, established a sacred place near the capital, developed a pilgrimage ritual and introduced it as the obligatory element at the final stage of medicinal treatment of alcoholism and drug addiction (Aitpayeva, 2019, p. 102).

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the cultural landscape of the Kazakh Steppe confirms the presence of significant cultural and symbolic capital today. Space ideology is formed in this cultural landscape step-by-step. This space ideology is based on more than two thousand years of people's successful living. The ideological space has always been dynamic, common and complete. At the same time, the steppe memory takes a special place in Kazakhstan's space ideology. The evolutionary path of steppe memory was quite difficult, especially in the conditions of civilizational rifts (Dzungarian threat, colonialism of the 18-20th centuries), and in the destruction of the Kazakh people's sacred and spiritual values. At the end of the 20th century, a deep transformation of the different generations' national consciousness occurred, and the Kazakhs strived to learn their true history, identity and culture, based on "steppe memory" and "places of memory", which preserve thousands of years of achievement and value experience. Today, there are the equal, compromise and harmonic relations between the state's perception and the individual's one of places, considered sacred by humans, as the national identifier in Kazakhstan. Once forgotten, sacredness is reborn again.

Thus, the new space ideology, based on the steppe cultural landscape, includes the Kazakhs' integral world. It is composed of the sacred places forming the national and state identity, regional (clan) identity, restoring the Turkic world's religious identity and civilizational unity, creating a new page in Independent Kazakhstan's history and relaying the values of Kazakh traditional clan relationships. However, Kazakhstan's territory, with so many places of memory, requires the further study in the post-colonial discourse.

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