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## TENGRISM IN HISTORICAL AND MODERN CONTEXTS

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**Abstract.** The article focuses on the history of Tengrism and reviews the definitions and scientific interpretations given to the concept of Tengri and the phenomenon of Tengrism. Tengrism is viewed as a socio-cultural and philosophical-spiritual phenomenon that is experiencing a revival in modern society. Tengrism formed the foundation of the spiritual worldview of the Turkic peoples for a long period of time, influencing their daily lives and spiritual culture. In recent years, interest in this topic has increased significantly, and researchers have begun to examine Tengrism from its historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects. Contemporary scholarly works and studies comprehensively analyze the role of Tengrism in society, its influence on national identity, and spiritual heritage. This study focuses primarily on the context of Kazakhstan, paying particular attention to the manifestations of Tengrism in modern society, including the phenomenon of neo-Tengrism, its revival, and its historical role in the formation of national values. Special attention is also given to the activities of Tengrism communities on social media during the development of a digital society. Furthermore, based on ancient monuments of the Turkic peoples and Chinese chronicles, a comparative analysis is conducted of the similarities and differences between Tengrism and the Cult of Heaven in Chinese civilization.

**Key words:** Tengrism; Tengri; Neo-Tengrism; Turkic culture; faith; Cult of Heaven; Blue sky.

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## ТАРИХИ ЖӘНЕ ЗАМАНАУИ КОНТЕКСТТЕГІ ТӘҢІРШІЛДІК

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## ТЕНГРИАНСТВО В ИСТОРИЧЕСКОМ И В СОВРЕМЕННОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ

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**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Тәңіршілдіктің тарихына назар аударылып, бүгінгі күнге дейін Тәңір ұғымы мен Тәңіршілдік феноменіне берілген анықтамаларға және ғылыми пайымдауларға шолу жасалады. Тәңіршілдік феномені қазіргі қоғамда қайта жанданып келе жатқан әлеуметтік-мәдени және философиялық-рухани құбылыс ретінде қарастырылады. Тәңіршілдік сенімі түркі халықтарының ежелгі рухани дүниетанымының негізі болған, олардың күнделікті өмір салты мен рухани мәдениетіне өз ықпалын тигізген. Соңғы жылдары бұл тақырыпқа деген қызығушылық артып, зерттеушілер оны тарихи, философиялық және мәдени тұрғыдан қайта зерттей бастады. Қазіргі таңда көптеген ғылыми еңбектер мен зерттеулерде Тәңіршілдіктің қоғамдағы орны, оның ұлттық сана мен рухани мұраға ықпалы жан-жақты талдануда. Бұл зерттеу негізінен Қазақстан контексіне бағытталып, тәңіршілдіктің қазіргі қоғамдағы көріністері, яғни неотәңіршілдік феноменіне тоқталып, оның қайта жандануы және ұлттық құндылықтарды қалыптастырудағы тарихи рөлі қарастырылады. Бүгінгі дамыған цифрлық қоғамда тәңіршіл топтардың әлеуметтік желілер көмегімен жүргізетін әрекеттеріне мысалдар келтіріледі. Сонымен қатар, мақалада түркі халықтарының көне ескерткіштері мен Қытай жылнамаларының негізінде Тәңіршілдік пен Қытай өркениетіндегі Аспан культі арасындағы ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылықтары салыстырмалы түрде қарастырылады.

**Түйін сөздер:** Тәңіршілдік; Тәңір; неотәңіршілдік; түркі мәдениеті; сенім; Аспан культі; Көк аспан.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается история тенгризма и анализируются определения и научные интерпретации понятия Тенгри и феномена Тенгрианства. Феномен Тенгрианства рассматривается как социально-культурное и философско-духовное явление, возрождающееся в современном обществе. Тенгрианство на протяжении длительного исторического периода составляло основу духовного мировоззрения тюркских народов, оказывая влияние на их повседневную жизнь и духовную культуру. В последние годы интерес к этой теме заметно усилился, и исследователи начали рассматривать Тенгрианство в историческом, философском и культурном аспектах. В настоящее время многие научные исследования всесторонне анализируют роль Тенгрианства в обществе, его влияние на национальное самосознание и духовное наследие. Данное исследование в основном сосредоточено на контексте Казахстана, уделяя особое внимание проявлениям Тенгрианства в современном обществе, включая феномен неотенгрианства, его возрождение и историческую роль в формировании национальных ценностей. Также отдельное внимание уделяется деятельности тенгрианских сообществ в социальных сетях в период развития цифрового общества. Кроме того, на основе древних памятников тюркских народов и китайских летописей проводится сравнительный анализ сходств и различий между Тенгрианством и Культом Неба в китайской цивилизации.

**Ключевые слова:** Тенгрианство; тенгри; неотенгрианство; тюркская культура; вера; культ Неба; Голубое небо.

## Introduction

In the modern era of globalization, many people are experiencing a process of returning to their historical roots, spiritual and cultural heritage. For the Turkic peoples, one of the most important elements of this phenomenon is Tengrism, which played a central role in shaping their spiritual and cultural foundations.

According to N. Abayev, Tengrism is a worldview system of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples. It simultaneously incorporates religious, philosophical, moral and ethical teachings, psychological, bioenergetic, psychodiagnostic, prognostic and astrological aspects, as well as cult, mantic (witchcraft), meditative and magical practices. N. Abayev emphasizes that the fundamental concepts of Tengrism originated in deep antiquity, approximately between the eighth and sixth millennia BCE. These ideas emerged among the pastoral and nomadic communities of Central Asia, who were the common ancestors of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples (Abayev, 2016: 25).

Tengrism is a belief system of the ancient Turkic peoples, based on the veneration of the sky, nature, and the spirit. Its central concept is Tengri, the lord of the sky (sky deity), the origin of all creation. Tengrism emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature, spiritual purity, and conscience.

Originating from the ancient traditions of Turkic-Mongolian peoples, Tengrism has undergone significant changes throughout history, reflecting the cultural and political development of these groups. In the early stages of this faith, Tengrism featured a diversity of gods, with Tengri being regarded as the supreme deity representing the spiritual identity of nomadic tribes. Over the years, it incorporated elements of neighboring religions, especially Islam, resulting in a syncretic practice among the Turkic peoples. The term “Tengrism” was first introduced by Sh. Ualikhanov and was later adopted by Jean-Paul Roux and O. Suleimenov. The idea of Tengrism as a monotheistic belief system of the ancient Turks is presented as a theory by historian Murat Adji. In the work “The Turki and the World: The Secret Story”, Adji states that “the Turks introduced the belief in the Sky God”, describing this god as the cult of the “Eternal Blue Sky” (Bulan et al., 2025: 197).

## Identification of the research problem

In the conditions of contemporary globalization, interest in national identity, spiritual values, and historical-cultural roots has been steadily increasing. Within Kazakh society, recent years have witnessed a growing positive attitude toward ancient worldviews, particularly Tengrism, both at the public and academic levels. This trend reflects an emerging perception of Tengrism not only as a relic of the past but also as an element of cultural heritage and a source of spiritual and ideological orientation. The active discussion of this phenomenon, the presence of various interpretations in the public arena, and the growing cognitive demand among young people make the study of Tengrism not only a religious belief but also a socio-cultural phenomenon relevant. Therefore, the phenomenon of Tengrism was chosen as an important object of research that allows for a scientific explanation of the spiritual and cultural changes of the modern period. The aim of the study is to comprehensively analyze the content of Tengrism in modern Kazakh society, its socio-cultural manifestations, the dynamics of its spread, and its place in public consciousness; to determine the role of the Tengrism phenomenon in the

formation of modern national identity. One of the objectives set is to describe the historical foundations and worldview of Tengrism and analyze the reasons for the new interpretation and revival of Tengrism.

### **Research methodology**

The methodological framework of this research is based on philosophical-cultural, phenomenological, and historical-comparative approaches. In line with the research objective to examine Tengrism not merely as a belief system but as a spiritual-cultural phenomenon and a worldview system, the study employs a multi-level methodological approach. First, the phenomenological approach is applied to reveal the essence of Tengrism as a principle of harmony between humans and nature, society, and the cosmos. This method allows for an interpretation of how Tengrism is reflected in contemporary spiritual practices and systems of meaning within modern society. Second, the historical-comparative method serves as a basis for analyzing the evolution of Tengrism from the ancient Turkic period to the present day, as well as its interactions with modern spiritual movements. Third, cultural and sociological methods are employed to explore the socio-cultural manifestations of Tengrism in the modern context, including its representation in mass media, social networks, and forms of spiritual engagement among young people. In addition, elements of hermeneutic interpretation, content analysis, and the examination of materials from open sources are incorporated into the research process. The use of these methods allows us to comprehensively reveal the complex, multifaceted nature of Tengrism as a modern phenomenon.

### **Results and discussions**

#### **Historical foundations of Tengrism.**

The theme of Tengrism as one of the earliest universal religious ideas of Turkic and Mongolian peoples has been addressed in the works of numerous scholars, including M. Kashgari, Jean-Paul Roux, L.N. Gumilyov, S.G. Klyashtorny, N.G. Ayupov, O. Suleimenov, M. Adji, N.V. Abayev, and others. Tengrism is considered a variety of religious ideas, for example, the idea of monotheism, with Tengri being regarded as a single God; The worship of the sky and natural phenomena as a manifestation of natural religion; The idea of the transcendence of Tengrism. Many scholars acknowledge that the origins of Tengrism date back to ancient times and that it influenced other religious systems.

The term “tengri” or “tergir”, known as “tänri” in Old Turkic language, means “sky” in the Turkic-Mongolian languages. The cult of the sky or the worship of related deities is attested by numerous written and archaeological sources dating back to the era of the Siberian Turkic kingdoms in the 6th and 8th centuries. These sources confirm that this faith was one of the syncretic religions practiced by the people during the Turkic Khaganate period, before they adopted Buddhism, Manichaeism, or Islam. In some ancient Muslim texts written in Turkic, the word Tengri is associated with Allah, which confirms its use as a synonym for the word God. This concept was introduced into the Russian language in the 19th century after the discovery of the Orkhon monuments and the interpretation of the runic inscriptions by Wilhelm Thomson. The name “Tengrism” was used to describe the religious system of the ancient Turks, including in the works of Sh. Ualikhanov (Laruelle, 2007: 204).

Jean-Paul Roux, defining the word Tengri, emphasizes that this name is one of the most important divine names used by a significant part of humanity. Almost all people speaking Turkic and Mongolian languages use this word, with minor dialectal differences, most often to designate the Supreme Being or those possessing mystical power. It is known that the word Tengri is common to both Turkic and Mongolian languages, but for a long time, it was not clearly determined from which language it originated. The results of the research of P. Pelliot and V. Vladimirov indicate that the Mongolian form is derived from the ancient Uyghur version of t(ä) ngri. On this basis, researchers advance the hypothesis that the concept was likely transmitted into the Mongolian language from a Turkic linguistic environment rather than developing independently within Mongolic speech (Roux J.-P., 1956: 49, 59).

Shokan Ualikhanov's research considers Tengrism, which occupies an important place in the worldview and customs of the ancient Turks, as an ancient belief of the Kazakh people. He noted that even before they were introduced to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, Kazakhs worshipped both Allah and Tengri. They performed rituals such as sacrificing to Muslim saints and respect shown to Khojas, as well as worshipping fire and appealing to both angels in Islam religion and shamanic spirits. Shokan Ualikhanov positively accepted this syncretism and saw it as a harmonious integration of religious traditions in Kazakh society (Mukan, 2024: 63).

The foundations of the religious teachings of Tengrism were transmitted orally as secret teachings and encoded in archaic texts of the epic heritage of the Turks and Mongols. They describe the creation of the world and people, as well as the history of the establishment of divine order on earth by the first ancestors for the habitation and prosperity of their descendants. Within this symbolic framework, the spiritual and moral principles guiding the human path toward the Creator, Tengri, are articulated and preserved. Due to the great antiquity of these traditions and the symbolic, encoded language in which the teachings were expressed, the identities of individual authors have not been preserved. However, given that the primary mode of transmission was oral collective narration, authorship may be attributed not to a single figure but to the Turkic-Mongolian ethno-cultural community as a whole (Adji, 1999). There is no complete and unanimous consensus among researchers on the meaning of Tengrism. One group of researchers views it as a multifaceted system encompassing several dimensions: ontological belief in a singular divine entity, cosmological concepts emphasizing the interconnection of the inner world, mythological narratives, and the recognition of ancestral spirits and natural forces (Kasabekova et al., 2021: 62).

Some researchers considered the ancient Turkic belief system to be monotheistic. However, neither Muslims nor Christians historically recognized any significant similarities between their own faiths and this tradition. Tengrism was so distinct from Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity that meaningful spiritual exchanges between adherents of these religions were virtually impossible. The system exhibits an intricate and remarkably coherent integration of monotheism, ancestor worship, pantheistic reverence for natural spirits, magical practices, shamanism, and even elements of totemism (Bezertinov, 2006: 6).

N.G. Ayupov considered the ancient Turkic culture to be a monotheistic religious system in comparison with other Central Asian religious systems. In his later works, exploring this scientific issue, he came to the conclusion that Tengrism should be considered as a whole as an open, universal worldview.

A. Kodar, who plays an important role in justifying the monotheistic nature of Tengrism, identifies two levels of it:

- Imperial level: At this level, Tengrism had a purely monotheistic character. Tengri is the only supreme power that controls the world and the fate of the khagan.

- Folk level: Although elements of worship of ancestral spirits and the owners of Earth and Water (Yer-Su) are preserved at this level, this, according to Kodar, does not contradict the basic monotheistic concept (Kodar, 2009: 222).

However, M. Isakhan makes a different conclusion regarding the monotheistic nature of Tengrism. Despite some peculiarities, it can be concluded that the ancient Turks' understanding of the original Kök (Blue) Tengri was based on monotheism. Although the ancient Turks initially believed in a single deity, their understanding of God seems to have changed over time. As a result of various integrations, the adherents of the belief in Tengri later lost the fundamental meaning and religious content of the monotheistic belief (Isakhan & Mukatay, 2023).

If we turn to the word “Tengri” itself and its etymology, the word “Tengri” is written as “tenri (тәңри)” in ancient Turkic written monuments and in Mahmud Kashgari's work “Divan Lugat at-Turk”. Among the Tuvans, it is written and pronounced as “Tengir (тәңгир)”, among the Altaians as “Tengri (теңри)”, and among the Yakuts as “Tanra (таңра)”. In the Kazakh language, it is pronounced as “Tangir (Тәңір)”. In the ancient Turkic language, the word “Tan (таң)” means sunrise, dawn, the beginning of everything. It conveys the idea of the moment when light spreads across the world, symbolizing awakening, renewal, and the emergence of life (Sapashev, Shargynova, 2016: 146). Another scholar who made a significant contribution to the study of Tengrism is M. Adji. In the work *The Kipchaks: An Ancient History of the Turkic People and the Great Steppe*, he writes: “Tengri is an invisible spirit that dwells in the sky. A giant. As big as the sky, as big as the whole world. Therefore, the ancient Turks respectfully called him “Eternal Blue Sky” or “Tengri Khan”. The title “Khan” indicated his primacy in the universe.” (Adji, 1999).

The religion of the Turks, which worshiped Tengri, was the first cognitive concept of a person who was completely united with nature. The ancient beliefs, customs, and traditions of the Turks were closely connected with the concept of Tengrism, the actual principles of the Tengrian religion. Most researchers, such as L.N.Gumilyov, S.G. Klyashtorne, and others, describe Tengrism as the main worldview system of the ancient Turkic civilization. The frequent occurrence of the concepts of Tengri and Yer-Su in the monuments of Kultegin and Bilge Kagan proves that this belief played a major role in the political and spiritual life of the Turks. For example, the texts of the Bilge Khagan inscription refer to Tengri, stating that the Khagan was “created by Tengri” and rose to power by divine will. The inscriptions also describe the Heaven above and the Earth below, between which humanity is placed, and emphasize the role of Tengri in granting power, authority, and military success to Turkic rulers. These inscriptions reveal the respect of the Turkic peoples for Tengri.

M. Eliade states that the Turks consider Tengri as the creator of both visible and invisible things and of human beings. Among the Turks, Tengri has never been considered a material being. The Turks had no concept of the image and form of Tengri; Tengri was regarded as abstract. In the writings of the Göktürks, there are concepts such as “Tengri-Teg-Tengri”, which means “Tengri who resembles Tengri”, “God who resembles Himself”. According to these data, the Turks did not liken Tengri to anything created (Abylov et al., 2022: 131).

In the Orkhon inscriptions, the “Secret History of the Mongols”, and the Oguz-Name (Oguznama) inscriptions of the Uyghur people, Tengri occupies a special place and is used in the sense of “Sky god”. However, there are also notable differences in the texts. For example, in

the Orkhon inscriptions, Tengri is described with the epithet *kök* (blue); a complex form of the *kök* Tengri is found in the *Oguznama*, but in the “Secret History of the Mongols” Tengri is called *möngke* “eternal”. This is not found in the two sources mentioned regarding Tengri. The Orkhon inscriptions do not mention praying to Tengri nor do they clearly associate divinatory practices with Tengri, but it is mentioned in the two inscriptions mentioned above (Dallos, 2019: 68).

Chinese chronicles mention that the Huns believed in a single deity identified as Tengri. The famous thinker Confucius, who lived in the 5th century BC, used the Chinese equivalent *Tian* for the word Tengri in his works. The Huns believed in *kök* Tengri, and as Mahmud Kashgari later noted, Turkic peoples called him Tengri, a word that denotes both the sky and God (Zatov et al., 2023).

Since the Zhou Dynasty, Heaven has become the main deity in Chinese tradition. During the Zhou Dynasty, *Tian* (Heaven) embodied the main attributes of the god *Shandi* and assumed a supreme position as a symbol of justice and divine wisdom. Emphasizing their connection with Heaven, the Zhou rulers called their state *Tian Xia* (All under Heaven) and themselves *Tian Zi* (Sons of Heaven). Thus, the cult of Heaven worship became the leading religious and ideological system in China. In Tengrism, it was believed that everything happens by the will of Heaven. In Chinese tradition, it was believed that if a ruler became corrupt or evil, Heaven would withdraw its support, leading to his downfall. It was also believed that If the Son of Heaven's rule proved successful, after his death he would join the revered lineage of ancestors, who even after his death, continued to rule the rulers of the earth from heaven (Burkitbayeva et al., 2025: 88). According to Abaev and Feldman, Tengrism arose during the period of the ancient Aryan nomadic civilization, dating back to the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC. According to many researchers, the concept of Heaven (*Tian*), the heavenly divine power, appeared during the Zhou era (9th-3rd centuries BC), which happened much later. The idea that *Tian* entered the Chinese tradition only with Zhou was first expressed by H.G. Creel. Despite these chronological differences, a number of significant parallels can be identified between Tengrism and the Chinese Cult of Heaven. In both Tengrism and the Cult of Heaven, the supreme deity is Heaven. Everything that happened, whether good or bad, was considered the will of Heaven. Heaven could reward or punish disobedience. Moreover, it is known that in Tengrism, there were no human sacrifices, whereas among the predecessors of the Zhou people, in the Shang dynasty, cases of human sacrifice were not uncommon (Sapashev, Shargynova, 2016: 148).

The tradition of belief in Tengri was one of the central worldview concepts in both the Turkic world and Chinese civilization. The Turkic belief in Tengri and the Chinese concept of *Tian* were conceptually close to each other, and in both cases, the Supreme Power was perceived as the main symbol of justice, order, and legitimacy of power. The concept of the Mandate of Heaven, which has been in existence since the Zhou era, defined the political ideology of Chinese rulers, while the Turkic worship of Tengri formed the basis of their state structure and worldview. In both cultural systems, the supreme divine authority was perceived as an absolute force capable of both sustaining and withdrawing political power. Rulers were considered legitimate only insofar as they acted in accordance with heavenly principles, and failure to do so could result in the loss of divine support. Thus, although the concepts of Tengri and *Tian* emerged within distinct civilizational contexts, they produced closely related interpretations of a transcendent authority responsible for maintaining justice, social harmony, and moral governance.

Many researchers point out that the Tengrian faith is structured around a tripartite cosmological model consisting of upper, middle, and lower realms. The upper world is

associated with Tengri as the supreme celestial authority, the middle realm is identified with Yer-Su, and the lower world is governed by Erklik. In addition to this three-layered structure, Tengrism incorporates a diverse range of spiritual forces and cultic elements. These include the veneration of Umay Ana, often mentioned alongside the group of female protective spirits known as the “five mothers”, as well as reverence for the sun, the moon, fire, totemic symbols, and ancestral spirits (Isakhan & Mukatay, 2023).

The Orkhon stele texts name only three deities: Tengri, Umai, and Yduk Yer-Sub. The explicit emphasis on Tengri and the universality of his functions prompt some researchers to consider the ancient Turkic religion a distinct faith, close to monotheism, which can be described by the term Tengrism, although they acknowledge the presence of more ancient elements within it. In this regard, G. Doerfer suggests that ancient Turkic religion can be understood as a composite system consisting of multiple historical layers. According to his view, it includes a totemic layer, a shamanistic layer, and a tengrian layer (Klyashtorny, 1981: 124).

Although the term Yer-Su does not explicitly appear as a fixed concept in early Turkic written sources, its presence is clearly reflected in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, which constitute one of the most significant sources on the history of the Göktürk Khaganate. Within the worldview of the ancient Turks, the Yer-Su cult manifested itself through the reverence of natural elements such as fire, water, forests, and mountains, all of which were endowed with particular symbolic and spiritual significance (Zatov et al., 2023). Yer-Su is the combination, the unity of “earth and water spirits”. This definition of the ancient Turkic term was first proposed by W. Thomsen (Abylov et al., 2022: 128).

In the discussions about Tengrism, the cult of ancestors is also mentioned. The cult of ancestors is a belief in the forces of nature, a phenomenon that has been present in various societies throughout the history of religions, such as naturism. The cult of ancestors (*culte des ancetres* or *manism*) is especially common in patriarchal societies. According to this faith, the belief that the spirits of deceased ancestors can do good or evil to those left behind, and the feeling of indebtedness to them, form the basis of the cult of ancestors (Zatov et al., 2023).

G. Yesim formulates his opinion about the continuity of Tengrism from generation to generation and its continuous preservation of national spirituality as follows: “The Turks' view of the world as a whole is an unattainable secret. Worship of the Tengri leads a person not to be arrogant and preaches a philosophy of heroism” (Imanmoldayeva, 2020: 54).

Scholars commonly regard Tengrism as one of the earliest religious and belief systems to emerge on the Kazakh steppe. Prior to the adoption of world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, the distinctive indigenous faith of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples was centered on the worship of Tengri. Research based on ancient Turkic monuments dating from the 6th to the 10th centuries, as well as evidence drawn from Manchurian materials, Chinese chronicles, and early Arabic and Iranian written sources, demonstrates that the original religious worldview of the ancestors of the Kazakh people was grounded in Tengrism. Since the blue sky was the most visible thing, the ancestors regarded it as the spirit of the Tengri (Kasabekova et al., 2021: 61).

For the Kazakh people, Tengrism was not just a belief, but also a complex moral and ethical foundation that influenced their daily lifestyle, social norms, and established practices. The basis of Tengrism is clearly reflected in folk music, poetry, and oral narratives, where themes of connection with the natural world and respect for ancestors are emphasized (Bulan et al., 2025: 198).

*The revival of Tengrism in modern society.*

In contemporary research, Tengrism is interpreted not only as a religious belief, but also as a philosophical system that promotes the harmony between humanity and nature, conscience, as well as justice. According to this worldview, human is considered as a part of nature, and Tengri is the source and regulator of all life. At present, especially after independence, interest in Tengrism is associated with the search for the national identity of the Turkic peoples. Kazakh scholars consider this phenomenon to be an important element of national consciousness and spiritual revival. The emergence of communities and movements advocating Tengrian ideas within digital spaces – especially on the internet and social media platforms – demonstrates the adaptation of this belief system to modern cultural realities.

In Kazakhstan, online communities dedicated to Tengrism began to emerge around 2015-2018. The activities of these communities are presented on various digital platforms, including Facebook, VKontakte, Youtube and the Telegram messenger, etc., offering a wide range of informational and explanatory content. The *tengrism.kz* internet portal provides information on the scientific foundations of Tengrism, the activities of its adherents, current projects, and also works of scientists and artists. One of the main aspects of the Tengrian activities here is the study of the history, culture, and worldview of the peoples of the Great Steppe (Temirbayev et al., 2023: 7).

The revival of Tengrism in Kazakhstan can be divided into two periods:

1. Initial period. This period includes the efforts of scholars aimed at collecting information from various sources, such as historical, mythological, folklore, and ethnographic sources. A leading figure in this stage is N.G. Ayupov, whose foundational works include “The Religious System of the Ancient Turks”, “Tengrism as an Open Worldview”, etc. Despite their importance, these works of N.G. Ayupov were distributed primarily in academic circles and did not reach a wide audience.

2. The Modernist period. This period is characterized by the efforts of Tengrism adherents to revive their beliefs in modern contexts (Bulan et al., 2025: 199).

The phenomenon of neo-tengrism is used as a modern manifestation of the theme of Tengrism. Researchers and supporters of neo-Tengrism in Kazakhstan consider the works of Sh. Ualikhanov – a military officer, diplomat, orientalist, and scholar of Central Asian culture during the Tsarist era – as a key historical source. He has worked on the topic of religion, including the features of pre-Islamic beliefs, such as “Tengri (God)”, “Remains of Shamanism among the Kyrgyz”, “On Judicial Reform”, etc. The works of N.G. Ayupov are also widely recognized as scientific sources among supporters of neo-Tengrism in Kazakhstan. N.G. Ayupov's works, *The Religious System of the Ancient Turks* and *Tengrism as an Open Worldview*, have become especially popular among adherents of neo-Tengrism (Kikimbayev et al., 2022: 187, 190).

Modern domestic researchers pay attention not only to the history of Tengrism in Kazakhstan, but also to its current difficulties. Although interest in local religious practices is growing in our country, there are also obstacles to the development of this phenomenon.

The revival of Tengrism in Kazakhstan is also attracting the attention of international researchers. For example, Li-Xue notes a significant cultural revival movement among Kazakh intellectuals. This movement is not simply a revival of historical traditions; it involves a critical reexamination of those traditions in light of modern influences, such as Western secularism and the limited influence of Christianity. The researcher concludes that the religious identity of

the Kazakh peoples is complex and shaped by various factors, originating from local practices such as Tengrism and Shamanism, as well as the revival of Islam. This complexity reflects the continuous development of the Kazakh people's uniqueness as they strive to reconcile their historical roots with the realities of modern life (Bulan et al., 2025: 202).

S. Kondybay is another important author who has influenced modern Kazakh neo-Tengrism, and whose work is primarily devoted to the study of archetypes of traditional consciousness in pre-Kazakh mythology. According to the researcher, these archetypes have become deep and significant elements of national identity and are still reflected in geographical names (toponymy) and ethnic consciousness at both worldview and everyday levels, forming the fundamental basis of the modern material and spiritual culture of the Kazakhs. (Kikimbayev et al., 2022: 190).

## Conclusion

The research conducted revealed the place of Tengrism in the ancient Turkic worldview and its complex role in modern social processes. The foundation of the spiritual culture of the ancient Turks is a faith based on the Tengri, whose etymology lies deep. The modern phenomenon of Tengrism is relevant not only as a historical tradition, but also as a means of modern spiritual revival and the formation of national consciousness. Its basis lies in the harmony between humanity and nature and the appreciation of the spiritual world. Tengrism should not be understood as a monotheistic religion in the conventional sense. Rather, it represents an ancient faith that forms the foundation of Turkic spiritual culture, incorporating elements of religious perception, moral guidance, and ethical conduct. It is based on submission to the Supreme Power (Tengri), the Universal Order, and harmony with nature.

The elements of Tengrism and the cult of Heaven in Chinese tradition clearly demonstrate ancient Turkic-Chinese cultural integration. It is also possible that the revival of neo-Tengrism in Kazakhstan was a reaction against the Islamization of society and the search for a national religious and cultural foundation. The activities of neo-Tengrian groups, their attempts to change the tenets of Tengrism and their critical stance of other religions may contribute to religious divisions in society. In conclusion, Tengrism can serve not only as a window into the spiritual heritage of the Turkic peoples but also as a framework through which modern societies can reflect on the relationship between humans, nature, and the cosmos.

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### Contribution of the Authors

**Ryskiyeva A.** – verification of scientific content of the article, improving the methodological approach, interpreting the findings, scientific editing of the article, and preparation for publication.

**Latipova S.** – development of the research content and analytical framework, conducting the main research activities, development of key arguments and conclusions, outlining the overall research approach and integrating the final results.

**Conflict of interests**

The authors of this work declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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