

# THE EVOLUTION OF EXISTENTIAL THOUGHT IN KAZAKH PHILOSOPHY: AN ANALYSIS OF KEY ASPECTS OF EXISTENCE

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## ABSTRACT

The study of human existence within a broad historical and cultural context represents a crucial and timely task for modern society, serving as a key aspect for addressing contemporary challenges and fostering a harmonious community. The objective is to explore the evolution of existential thought within the framework of Kazakh philosophy, as well as to investigate contemporary approaches to understanding the meaning of life within this cultural tradition and assess their relevance for modern society.

This research has revealed how the unique spiritual values and worldview principles of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia significantly shaped philosophical concepts concerning the meaning of life. The findings also highlight the deep influence of Islamic culture and Arab philosophy, which have permeated Kazakh identity and culture.

The study has shown that religious teachings and ethnic traditions interact, creating a distinctive way of life centered on harmony with nature and spiritual growth. Additionally, the research confirms that modern Kazakh philosophy reflects this rich cultural context by examining the meaning of life through the lens of cultural, ethnic, and social characteristics.

It was also found that the preservation of cultural heritage, harmony with the natural world, social responsibility, and spiritual development play a crucial role in the search for meaning and purpose in life within contemporary Kazakh philosophy. Furthermore, the research identified distinct differences between Kazakh and French cultures in their approaches to understanding the meaning of life, reflecting their unique historical, religious, social, and cultural contexts. The results of this study may be used to inform the development of programs and initiatives aimed at supporting spiritual development and self-awareness in Kazakh society.

**Key words:** Existentialism, Meaning of Life, Human Existence, Existential Thought, Philosophical Concepts, Spiritual Growth, Cultural Identity.

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## Қазақ философиясындағы экзистенциализмнің дамуы: өмір сүрудің негізгі аспектілерін зерттеу

**Аңдатпа.** Адам болмысина кең тарихи-мәдени контексте зерттеу жүргізу қазіргі қоғам үшін маңызды және өзекті міндеттердің бірі болып табылады. Бұл міндет қазіргі заманғы сын-қатерлерді шешүге және үйлесімді қоғам құруға ықпал ететін негізгі аспект ретінде қызмет етеді. Зерттеудің мақсаты – қазақ философиясы аясында экзистенциалды ойдың әволюциясын зерттеп, осы мәдени дәстүрдегі өмірдің мәнін түсінуге заманауда тәсілдерді қарастырып, олардың қазіргі қоғам үшін маңыздылығын бағалау.

Бұл зерттеу Орталық Азияның көшпенде халықтарының бірегей рухани құндылықтары мен дүниетанымдық қағидаттары өмірдің мәніне қатысты философиялық ұғымдардың қалыптасуына елеулі әсер еткенін көрсетті. Зерттеу нәтижелері ислам мәдениеті мен араб философиясының қазақ халықының мәдениеті мен бірегейлігіне терең ықпал еткенін де атап әтті.

Зерттеу діни ілімдер мен этникалық дәстүрлердің өзарға әрекеттесуі нәтижесінде рухани өсуге негізделген ерекхе өмір салты қалыптасқаның көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, заманауи қазақ философиясы осы бай мәдени контекстті бейнелейтінін және өмірдің мәнін мәдени, этникалық және әлеуметтік ерекшеліктер призмасы арқылы зерттейтінін растиады. Зерттеу мәдени мұраны сақтау, әлеуметтік жауапкершілік пен рухани даму қазіргі қазақ философиясында өмірдің мәні мен мақсатын іздеуде маңызды рөл атқаратының анықтады. Сонымен бірге, қазақ және француз мәдениеттерінің өмірдің мәнін түсінү тәсілдерінде айтарлықтай айрымшылықтар бар екені анықталды, бұл олардың тарихи, діни, әлеуметтік және мәдени ерекшеліктерін көрсетеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері қазақ қоғамында рухани дамуды және өзін-өзі тануды қолдауға бағытталған бағдарламалар мен бастамаларды әзірлеу үшін пайдаланылуы мүмкін.

**Түйін сөздер:** экзистенциализм, өмірдің мәні, адам болмысы, экзистенциалды ой, философиялық ұғымдар, рухани өсү, мәдени бірегейлік

## Развитие экзистенциализма в казахской философии: исследование основных аспектов существования

**Аннотация.** Человеческое бытие в широком историко-культурном контексте является важной и актуальной задачей для современного общества, играя ключевую роль в решении современных вызовов и создания гармоничного сообщества. Целью данного исследования является изучение эволюции

экзистенциальной мысли в рамках казахской философии, а также анализ современных подходов к пониманию смысла жизни в этой культурной традиции и оценка их значимости для современного общества. Исследование показало, как уникальные духовные ценности и мировоззренческие принципы кочевых народов Центральной Азии существенно повлияли на формирование философских концепций, связанных со смыслом жизни. Результаты также подчеркивают глубокое влияние исламской культуры и арабской философии, которые проникли в культуру и идентичность казахского народа. Исследование выявило, что религиозные учения и этические традиции взаимодействуют, создавая уникальный образ жизни, основанный на гармонии с природой и духовном развитии. Кроме того, современная казахская философия, как подтверждает исследование, отражает это богатое культурное наследие, рассматривая вопросы смысла жизни через призму культурных, этических и социальных особенностей. Также было установлено, что сохранение культурного наследия, гармония с природой, социальная ответственность и духовное развитие играют ключевую роль в поиске смысла и цели жизни в рамках современной казахской философии. Исследование также выявило значительные различия между казахской и французской культурами в подходах к пониманию смысла жизни, которые отражают их уникальные исторические, религиозные, социальные и культурные контексты. Результаты данного исследования могут быть использованы для разработки программ и инициатив, направленных на поддержку духовного развития и самосознания в казахском обществе.

**Ключевые слова:** экзистенциализм, смысл жизни, человеческое существование, экзистенциальная мысль, философские концепции, духовный рост, культурная идентичность.

## Introduction

The study of the evolution of existential thought in Kazakh philosophy is of fundamental importance for understanding the meaning of life in the context of the cultural, social, and religious characteristics of this people. Researching the philosophical concepts of Kazakh culture allows us to delve into its historical and cultural heritage, which significantly influences modern thinking and views on the meaning of life. The analysis of the evolution of philosophical thought helps to identify the core values, beliefs, and worldview of the Kazakh people. Shedding light on the evolution of existential thought in Kazakh philosophy enables the tracing of sociocultural changes in this society over time.

Studying Kazakh philosophy presents a complex challenge, given the diversity of historical periods and cultural influences, spanning numerous eras and movements. This multilayered context complicates access to primary sources, particularly regarding the archaic periods of history. Limited availability of historical documents and texts creates obstacles for researchers, reducing the volume of accessible information and requiring a deep analysis of the available data. The study of Kazakh philosophy also demands an understanding of the cultural and linguistic features of this people. Not only is it necessary to grasp the nuances of the lexical and grammatical aspects of the Kazakh language for a proper understanding of the texts, but it is also essential to consider the cultural norms, traditions, and values that shape philosophical thinking. One of the key challenges is the need to translate texts and interpret the terminology inherent to Kazakh philosophy. Such translations must be not only lexically accurate but also consider the context and semantic nuances, requiring highly skilled translators and specialists in Kazakh culture and philosophy.

It is worth noting the uniqueness of personal philosophy in Kazakh culture, which differs from Western and Eastern approaches to the dissemination of values. For instance, B. Zhaksybaeva [1] argues that the understanding of the individual in ethnic culture is more

dynamic and inherent in the interaction with the ethnocultural context that shapes it. This type of culture implies not only the recognition of values but also their creation and collaboration. Scholars I. Ozdemir and A. Keldinova [2] also analyze the long-term relationship between man, God, and nature in Kazakh philosophy, highlighting three main categories: the relationship between the world and nature, man and nature, and nature and God. These concepts help to understand the philosophical and religious ideas in Kazakh culture and its representatives. Further research into the philosophical foundations of the individual in Kazakh culture is necessary, deepening the analysis of its influence on the formation of individual and collective consciousness. It is also advisable to expand the study of the relationship between philosophical concepts of nature and man in Kazakh culture and their reflection in mythological and literary works.

The importance of cultural traditions in preserving and transmitting identity cannot be overstated. Many scholars, including G. Reddy and R. van Dam [3], note that these traditions are integrated into people's daily lives for various reasons, such as cultural promotion, convenience, and the pursuit of diversity. According to researchers J. Wang, G. Cheng, T. Chen, and K. Leung [4], the diversity of cultural environments contributes to a deeper understanding of oneself in a given context. In the book by D. Sue, D. Sue, H. Neville, and L. Smith [5], concepts such as "cultural humility," "social justice," and other important aspects of the preservation and development of culture are examined. In turn, C. Jimenez-Gomez and L. Beaulieu [6] consider the importance of highlighting the cultural characteristics of different peoples. Beyond the research already conducted, there remain several unexplored aspects that could make a significant contribution to understanding the impact of cultural traditions on the formation of identity and ideas about the meaning of life. It is worth studying in greater detail the relationship between cultural traditions and existential thinking in various contexts of Kazakh society. A comparative analysis between modern ideas about the meaning of life in Kazakh

culture and similar ideas in other cultures should also be conducted, which will help identify the unique features of Kazakh philosophy and compare them with global trends. This approach will contribute to a better understanding of the specifics of Kazakh existential thinking and its place in the global context.

Many researchers hypothesize that one of the main sources of the crisis in the social sciences is their insufficient connection with one another, particularly between sociology and moral philosophy. For example, H. Segvic [7] emphasizes that restoring these connections can help overcome the positivist orientation of these disciplines and develop clear methods, normative foundations, and forms of interaction. S. Hanafi [8] believes that one of the main tasks of modern moral philosophers is to develop criteria for determining the unique characteristics of moral statements. According to J. Cottingham [9], this will allow distinguishing moral statements from other types of statements and conducting a more accurate analysis of their content and meaning. Such an approach, according to J. Nado, D. Kelly, and S. Stich [10], contributes to the development of moral philosophy and its applications in modern society. It is worth taking a closer look at which social conditions and phenomena shape ethical values and norms, as well as how these norms affect social structures and relationships. Studying how various cultural and historical contexts shape ideas about morality and ethics in different societies will help better understand which factors determine ethical norms and values in different cultural and social environments.

Through the method of analysis, the influence of the unique worldview principles and spiritual values of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia on the formation of philosophical concepts and ideas about the meaning of life among the Kazakh people was studied. The impact of Islamic culture and Arab philosophical thought on the worldview and culture of Kazakhstan was also explored. These studies have helped to understand which philosophical concepts had the most significant influence on Kazakh society and continue to shape its cultural identity.

Using the comparative method, differences between Kazakh and French cultures in their approaches to understanding the meaning of life were examined. Their historical, religious, social, and cultural features were analyzed, as well as how these factors influence the formation of ideas about the meaning of existence. The rootedness in traditions, religious influences, and respect for nature were considered as factors in shaping the meaning of life in Kazakh culture, while secularization, philosophical inquiries, and an emphasis on individualism were identified as key features in the French approach to the meaning of life.

As part of the study, the evolution of existential thought in the context of Kazakh philosophy will

be analyzed, as well as contemporary approaches to understanding the meaning of life within this cultural tradition and their role in modern society will be explored.

### **Methodology**

The research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, combining philosophical, historical, and comparative methods to analyze the development of existential thought in Kazakh philosophy. The historical method allows for a thorough examination of primary texts, while the comparative approach facilitates an analysis of Kazakh existentialism in relation to other philosophical traditions, particularly Islamic thought. The hermeneutic method is employed to interpret key concepts such as the meaning of life, fate, and spiritual development. Ethnographic data, particularly from Kazakh nomadic culture, is also integrated to examine the cultural context that shaped existential views. Moreover, a sociocultural analysis is applied to understand how historical events, cultural norms, and religious teachings influenced the evolution of philosophical thought in the region. This research also draws on secondary literature to connect philosophical traditions with broader cultural and religious practices, emphasizing how concepts of nature, community, and spirituality are embedded in Kazakh nomadic heritage. By employing these methodologies, the study aims to offer a holistic understanding of the existential foundations of Kazakh philosophy, exploring the interaction between traditional beliefs, Islamic teachings, and philosophical discourse.

This comprehensive approach provides a structured framework to address the research questions and ensure a deep exploration of the philosophical landscape in Kazakhstan.

### **Main part**

Kazakh philosophy, rich with millennia of history, reflects the nomadic spirit and unique cultural heritage of Central Asia. Unlike many sedentary civilizations, Kazakh thought evolved in a constantly shifting environment, where the relationship between humans and nature was central to survival. These nomadic roots created a philosophical framework that emphasized adaptability, communal harmony, and a deep reverence for the natural world. The foundation of Kazakh philosophy is built upon ancient worldview principles shaped by the religious, social, and cultural influences of various civilizations that interacted with the Kazakh steppe over centuries, such as the Turks, Persians, and Arabs [1, p. 270-279].

The development of existential thought in this context allows us to understand the evolution of the Kazakh perspective on the meaning of life, human values, and spiritual development.

The interaction with multiple belief systems, including Tengriism, Islam, and elements of shamanism, contributed to a syncretic approach to philosophy that sought to reconcile human existence with both the earthly and the divine [2, p. 14-21]. This blend of influences, coupled with the nomadic way of life, made Kazakh philosophy distinctively practical yet deeply spiritual, reflecting a worldview that sees life as a journey toward balance, justice, and fulfillment.

### ***The Role of Ancient Traditions***

In ancient Kazakh philosophy, core principles emerged through the nomadic lifestyle, where survival depended on understanding and living in harmony with nature. The steppe, with its vast and unforgiving landscape, shaped a worldview where time and space were perceived as fluid, and human existence was seen as transient. The philosophical teachings of Kazakh nomads were profoundly influenced by traditions, customs, and the cyclical patterns of the natural world [3, p. 104]. Seasonal migrations, the care of livestock, and the reverence for ancestors were central to their understanding of life and its meaning. One of the key aspects of this period was the role of the Tengri, the sky god, who was believed to govern all aspects of life, particularly fate and natural phenomena. Kazakh thinkers of this era, though not philosophers in the traditional sense, developed a sophisticated system of thought that emphasized the unity of nature, humanity, and the divine. The importance of community and kinship, reflected in the clan system, reinforced values such as loyalty, honor, and respect for the elderly, which continue to resonate in modern Kazakh society [1, p. 270]. Furthermore, the oral tradition played a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of philosophical ideas. Epic poetry, such as "The Tale of Korkut," offered metaphysical reflections on life, death, and destiny, providing insight into the early Kazakh understanding of the universe and humanity's place within it.

### ***Islamic Influence in Medieval Kazakh Philosophy***

Kazakh philosophy during the medieval period was profoundly shaped by the introduction of Islam, which brought with it a new set of metaphysical and ethical ideas. The spread of Islam through Central

Asia, primarily during the 8th century, introduced concepts of monotheism and divine justice, which were integrated into the existing nomadic belief system. Islamic teachings, particularly the concept of tawhid (monotheism), affirmed God's unity and omnipresence, influencing Kazakh views on the meaning of life and the role of humans in the cosmos [2, p. 14-21].

During this period, Sufi mysticism also began to take root in Kazakh philosophical thought. Sufism, with its emphasis on personal spiritual development and the inner journey toward divine truth, found a natural fit in Kazakh culture, which already valued individual integrity and the search for existential meaning. Sufi poets like Khoja Ahmed Yasawi left a profound legacy, influencing Kazakh spiritual life with their meditations on the nature of God, the soul, and the universe [4, p. 693-708]. Concepts of destiny, predestination, and submission to divine will, central to Islamic theology, were integrated into Kazakh philosophical discourse, creating a rich tapestry of existential thought that blended the old with the new.

### ***Cultural and Ethnic Factors in Existential Thought***

Religious traditions, particularly Islam, deeply influenced the Kazakh worldview, but so too did the cultural and ethnic traditions that had long been part of Kazakh life. Central to this was the Ata Zang (ancestor law), a set of unwritten rules and practices that governed social life, especially with regard to family, inheritance, and land [5, p. 650-673]. These laws connected individuals to their ancestors, providing a sense of continuity and purpose that transcended the individual and linked generations through a shared cultural and spiritual heritage.

Kazakh existential thought is thus inseparable from its communal ethos. Life was not seen as an individual journey but as part of a larger, collective experience. This idea is reflected in the concept of Zheti Ata (seven ancestors), which required Kazakhs to know their lineage back seven generations. This cultural practice reinforced the importance of family, history, and the continuity of life, shaping a collective existential identity that prioritized community and tradition over individualism [6, p. 250-270].

**Table 1 – Kazakh Philosophy: Modern Interpretations of Life's Meaning**

Aspect	Description
Respect for cultural and ethnic characteristics	Kazakh philosophy emphasizes the importance of respecting and preserving cultural heritage and traditions. Maintaining one's cultural and ethnic identity can help individuals feel connected to both society and the world around them.
Harmony with nature	Philosophy recognizes the importance of harmonious interaction with nature. Maintaining ecological sustainability and caring for the environment contribute not only to the well-being of the planet but also to the inner peace and harmony of the individual.

Social responsibility	Awareness of one's social responsibility to society and contributing to its well-being are important aspects of the meaning of life. Supporting social and charitable initiatives can give human existence additional meaning
Spiritual development	Philosophy emphasizes spiritual growth and self-improvement. The practice of self-reflection, meditation, and spiritual growth can help individuals understand their values and priorities, as well as find deep meaning in life.
Community and support	It is important to strive for supportive relationships within the community. Support and interaction with close individuals and social networks can become sources of comfort, inspiration, and meaning during difficult times.

Source: Compiled by the author

### **Comparative Study: Kazakh and French Views on Life**

When comparing Kazakh and French philosophical traditions, we find key differences rooted in their historical and religious contexts. Kazakh philosophy, as previously discussed, is deeply intertwined with Islam, Tengriism, and a nomadic worldview, while French philosophy has evolved within a largely Christian framework that has been significantly secularized since the Enlightenment. French culture, particularly since the 18th century, has emphasized reason, individualism, and secularism, contrasting with the communal and spiritual nature of Kazakh thought [9, p. 561-584].

For example, while Kazakh culture places great importance on familial ties, the French philosophical tradition, particularly in the modern era, emphasizes personal freedom and self-determination [10, p. 1005]. Similarly, Kazakh existential thought is deeply concerned with harmony with nature, reflecting the nomadic experience of living closely with the land. In contrast, French philosophy, particularly in urbanized settings, often focuses more on abstract notions of liberty and individual rights, though there has been a growing concern with environmental issues in recent decades [11, p. 355-372].

**Table 2** – Comparing Kazakh and French Philosophical Perspectives

Aspects of ideas about the meaning of life	Kazakh culture	French culture
Religious Influence:	Kazakh culture blends Islam with traditional Tengriism teachings, showing respect for Muslim rituals and holidays.	French culture has seen a reduction in religion's role in daily life, with society moving toward secularization.
Family and Community Values:	Kazakh culture is strongly influenced by patriarchal and clan traditions, with a focus on family relationships and respect for elders.	French culture has seen an evolution in family structures, emphasizing individualism and freedom of choice.
Attitude toward Nature and the Environment:	In Kazakh culture, there is a traditional respect for nature as part of the spiritual world, with environmental themes woven into cultural values.	In French culture, there is significant attention to environmental issues, though it is not as deeply integrated into the cultural philosophy as in Kazakh traditions
Existential Questions and Search for Meaning:	In Kazakh culture, there is a deep-rooted connection to traditions and spirituality, with a strong focus on predestination and fate.	In French culture, there is a wide range of individual approaches to the meaning of life, with an emphasis on philosophical inquiry and personal freedom.
Economic and Social Aspects:	In Kazakh culture, social and economic factors greatly influence perspectives on the meaning of life, especially in the context of rapid development and globalization.	In French culture, there is greater attention to social justice and overall well-being, along with a high level of individual freedom and comfort.

Source: Compiled by the author

### **Discussion**

Kazakh philosophy, deeply intertwined with its Islamic roots, remains a significant force shaping modern identity and existential thought. While traditional elements remain strong, modern Kazakh thinkers have also begun to address the challenges of globalization, modernization, and technological change [13, p. 194-207]. As society

evolves, modern Kazakh thinkers are integrating these traditional values with contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability, social justice, and economic development. This approach aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of ecological sustainability in maintaining balance between human activity and nature [31, p. 34-52]. Moreover, the concept of social responsibility, rooted in communal values,

plays an essential role in Kazakh philosophical thought. Contributions to society, as well as the emphasis on family and community, continue to be key factors in how individuals perceive their purpose [1, p. 270-279]. These communal ties are often seen as fundamental to maintaining cultural identity in the face of rapid societal changes. For instance, the value placed on intergenerational respect within Kazakh culture reflects an enduring connection between the past and present [6, p. 250-270]. In contrast, French philosophy, with its roots in Enlightenment rationalism, continues to emphasize secularism and individualism. The contrast between French secularism and Kazakh religious and communal identity highlights the diversity of human responses to existential questions [9, p. 561-584]. French thinkers focus more on personal autonomy and moral responsibility, often within the context of secular humanism, which differs from the collective, tradition-driven Kazakh context. However, both traditions share a deep concern for human dignity, justice, and the search for meaning in an increasingly complex world [28, p. 194-207]. In both cultural contexts, philosophy serves as a means to navigate modern challenges while remaining anchored in core beliefs. This balance between tradition and modernity is a key theme in Kazakh philosophical thought as the country faces globalization, and similarly, French philosophy continues to grapple with issues of freedom and societal justice.

### Conclusion

The unique worldview principles and spiritual values of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia have significantly influenced the formation of philosophical concepts and views on the meaning of life in Kazakh culture. Islamic culture and Arab philosophy played a key role in shaping these ideas, which continue to inspire Kazakh identity today. Modern Kazakh philosophy explores the interplay between tradition, cultural identity, personal meaning, morality, and social responsibility, adapting these ideas to contemporary challenges like sustainable development. This comparison with European cultures, particularly French, highlights distinct approaches to life's purpose. Further research should focus on how technological advancements influence contemporary Kazakh philosophical thought, offering new insights into the ongoing development of life's meaning in an evolving world.

### Study Findings

This study highlights the significant impact of nomadic values and Islamic teachings on the philosophical views of the Kazakh people. Key findings reveal that Kazakh philosophy places great emphasis on harmony with nature, spiritual growth, and cultural identity. The integration of

Islamic thought has provided a unique worldview that influences not only existential questions but also social responsibilities and ethical standards in modern society.

### Prospects of Further Research

Further research can delve into the effects of modern technological advancements on Kazakh philosophy. Understanding how modernity and globalization reshape Kazakh values and existential beliefs could provide insights into the evolution of cultural identity in a rapidly changing world. Additionally, more systematic analysis of available data is needed to better organize and compare Kazakh philosophy with other global traditions. A particular focus could be placed on exploring the role of education and modern communication in preserving and adapting these philosophical teachings for future generations.

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