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## MODELING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY, ETHNIC AND CONFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIETAL SECURITY IN RUSSIA'S ASIAN BORDERLANDS

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**Abstract:** The religion in a contemporary world still preserves strong cultural and social dimensions, ensuring diversity of modern societies, social integration, and spiritual development. In border territories, connecting culturally divergent countries, religiosity takes on fanciful shapes, reflecting historically driven patterns of resettlement of peoples and natural relationship with ethnic and confessional identities. Based on the results of sociological surveys in two regions of Russia (the Altai krai and the Republic of Altai,  $n = 981$ , structured interviews) and the Centrality Religiosity Scale (CRS), this study explores different facets of interdependence between subjectively defined and test-measured religiosity. Comparing the results with confessional and ethnic self-identification, various indicators of security allow not only the evaluation of similar tools with different functionality, but they also enable receiving insights about the congruity and divergence of religiosity, religion and ethnicity in societies with different ethnic composition. According to the results, the majority of the population in the two regions is rather "episodic" believers. In contrast, the level of high religiosity is more often found among women, residents of the national republic, and Buddhists. The highly religious Orthodox population is about 5.2%, and confessions differ not only by their dogmas and practices, but also by the configuration of dimensions of religiosity among adepts. In comparison with the CRS index, self-evaluation gives more smoothed results, showing that non-believers have higher degrees of personally defined religiosity. Statistical modeling shows that security is also a multidimensional construct, having different facets, and the salience of these facets depends on the importance of the religiosity dimension.

**Keywords:** religious identity; ethnicity; societal security; Altai krai; Republic of Altai

### 1. Introduction

In contemporary science, the evolution of religious life, formation and development of religious identity, and religiosity are conceptualized as a part of globalization and post-globalization discourse through ideas about the need of the revision of classic and modernist theories of secularization and reflection of new contours of religions. The renaissance of religion in politics and public life, the rise of conservative, traditional, and orthodox movements, strong anti-secularist discourse, and a complex character of interdependence between religion and

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modernization processes have necessitated the elaboration of theoretical models and search of empirical bases for explication and deeper understanding of religious phenomena.

Cross-national researches show that modern societies have not become atheistic. Post-secular era is characterized by deconstruction and revision of religious systems, appearance of new types of religiosities, such as civil religiosity, non-traditional religiosity, extra-confessional faiths, patchwork, religious hybridity (Schmidt-Leukel, 2020), marginal, fuzzy fidelity (Puga-Gonzalez et al., 2022; Storm, 2009), showing continuum between individual and collective, institutionalized, and informal religious practices (Antes, 2008). Davie (1990, p. 455) describes cultural practices spreading in contemporary Britain as “believing without belonging”, for which the preservation of the symbolic meaning of belonging to traditional religion is combined with reduction of participation in religious life of local communities, and even if patterns of religious behavior are not totally changed, religiosity has been transformed from obligation into commodity. Another important tendency is the rethinking of content of religious beliefs, construction of a new, often extra-confessional worldview in the format of bricolage, blurred religion, Sheilaism, leading to appearance of new “spiritual but not religious” (Fuller, 2001, p. 4) heterodox, passive or based on cultural tradition (ethnic) identities (Bellah, 2007; Watts, 2022).

Interdependence of religion and security has been clearly manifested at the beginning of the 21st century, launching the new era of research in the field of international relations, focused on religious extremism and fundamentalism, terrorism, illegal financial flows, and other phenomena related to international crime (Máté-Tóth & Povedák 2024; Seiple & Hoove, 2004). A decade later, with the spread of ideas of Peter Berger about the failure of secularization project and post-secular society, stipulating that “secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness” (Berger 1999, p. 3), the focus in the nexus “security-religion” was moved toward sustainable security, where its conceptualization was made not only through the absence of physical threats, but also through the social, economic, political, and spiritual conditions, necessary for a long-term stability and well-being, including the religious sphere (Price & Bartoli, 2012). The sustainable security paradigm was defined as holistic and synergistic, oriented toward the redesign of philosophical approaches, knowledge systems, management practices, behaviors under interconnected, turbulent, and unpredictable future, where the role of religion has become more beneficent (Trochowska-Sviderok, 2021; Seiple et al., 2012). Intersection of issues related to religion, religious identity and security go far beyond the framework of national and global agenda, penetrating into particular contexts, where security is manifested in social, cultural, and spiritual spheres of life. Insecurity has become related to fears, anxiety, and hesitations, appearing as a result of social exclusion, poverty, the spread of violence and injustice. Without understanding these contexts, where religious aspirations act as a mediator, it is impossible to understand the desirable side—security itself (Ashforth, 2010; Shi et al., 2025; Tkáčová et al., 2021).

In recent years, the discourse about restoration and strengthening of the spiritual-moral security in Russia has been intensified due to the geopolitical issues, changes in the national self-conscience of citizens, elaboration of national policy aimed at the preservation of spiritual unity and cultural distinctiveness of the Russian nation. Studies of spiritual components of the Russian mentality are closely related to religiosity, religious identity, individual and collective religious and spiritual norms (Ponomarev, 2023). However, contemporary evaluation of religiosity is limited. The recognition of fact that religiosity still represents a very important but ambiguous

characteristic of social behavior of individuals, acting as an important factor in the social life (Berger, 1974), “transforming contemporary secularized world inside and outside” (Lebedev, 2020, p. 4962), prompts scientists to search relevant components of religiosity and their empirical indicators (Breskaya, 2011; Khlopko, 2020). In the search of criteria and typologies of religiosity, scholars try to define borders between secular and religious, pose questions on the distinction between wearers and mediators, professional ethics, correlation with family, ethnic, demographic, social, and other determinants (Borisova & Pavlyutkin, 2019; Divisenko, 2017).

In border regions of Russia, where cultural processes related to ethno-confessional identification and religious behavior of population are salient due to the closeness to border, historically contingent processes of dispersal of population, actual migration, and demographic issues. There is a need in the actualization of empirical data, elaboration of new methods of measurement of religiosity and religious identity, analysis of peculiarities of their construction in different sociocultural conditions. Conducting an interregional study on the relationship between religiosity, the characteristics of religious identity, and the state of security in the border regions of Russia will contribute to a broad interdisciplinary field of religion and security studies. Additionally, it will provide a deeper understanding of how these factors, dynamically interacting, can significantly influence social stability, interethnic relations, and the sustainable development of these territories.

## 2. Methodology and study area

Contemporary methods of applied research on religiosity stray from traditional focus on belonging to religion, interiorization of values, norms and patterns of behavior, discrete dichotomous representation of religiosity/non-religiosity. In particular, Bullard (2016) writes about importance of social differences and social attitudes of the reference group, Davie (1990, p. 455) reveals such phenomena as “implicit religion”, while other authors explore peculiarities of construction heterodox, extra-confessional world-view (Voas & Day, 2010). For example, within the European social survey, apart from categories of believers and non-believers (those, who identify themselves as agnostic or atheistic), a group with blurred religiosity describes those who are living out of confessions, treat themselves as “spiritual, but not religious” (Fuller, 2001, p. 4), are passive or “ethnic” believer, conflating ethnic identities with particular faiths (Karpov et al., 2012). Other international surveys (Haerpfer et al., 2020; Smith, 2021), use several indicators, including identification, theistic/non-theistic characteristics of religious beliefs, self-evaluations about the value of religion, religious behavior. There is a consensus about multidimensional character of religiosity, reflected in different approaches to its evaluation (Faulkner & De Jong, 2011).

Russian scholars generally rely on the ensemble of indicators, offered by international agencies, and adapted for Orthodox population. Some authors (Bogatova, 2016; Lebedev, 2020) pay attention to the persistent influence inherited from the Soviet past scientific atheism, relying on vague and unspecified indicators of attitude to religion “as such”, “on the whole”, along with principle of atheization. The analysis is usually made based on individual characteristics of religiosity, while the depiction of religious communities and corresponding methodologies are sparse (Oreshina, 2016; Zabaev & Prutskova, 2012). Evaluating of relationship between religiosity and social well-being, security is not often considered, whereas the presence of such link, direct or mediated by different actors, is examined by foreign authors (Holt et al., 2014; Joshanloo & Daemi, 2015).

The most important and difficult moment in the measurement of religiosity is to determine its criteria and indicators. Within different approaches, objective and subjective, internal and external, static and dynamic properties of religiosity are used to describe religious conscience and behavior of people. This research relies on the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), proven in 25 countries with more than 100,000 respondents, including those living in Russia (Huber et al., 2020; Huber & Huber, 2012, 2018). The CRS is based on the multidimensional model, proposed by Glock (1962, 1973) in co-authorship with Stark (Stark & Glock, 1968), measuring centrality (importance) of five distinct facets of religiosity and religious life of individuals—public and private practices, religious experience, ideological and intellectual components. The test norms for Russia are an average of 2.45 points and 0.96 points of standard deviation. The higher score an individual has by this index, the more important, central role in his/her life is played by the system of religious constructs. Several versions exist—with 15, 10, and 5 questions, having the same structure, but requiring less time and processing. In the current research, the CRS with 20 questions was used including three questions for each dimension and five additional questions, allowing making inter-confessional comparisons. This version had the highest discriminative capacity and allows assessing essential dimensions with better accuracy and reliability. In the study, where this scale was used, the reliability coefficients for separate dimensions varied from 0.80 to 0.93, and for the overall scale from 0.92 to 0.96 (Huber & Huber, 2018, p. 156).

The study area included two culturally different regions of the Asian borderlands of Russia located in the South-Western Siberia—the Altai krai and the Republic of Altai (Figure 1). The Altai krai has a surface area of 168,000 km<sup>2</sup> and borders to the south and west with the East Kazakhstan and Pavlodar regions of Kazakhstan (the length of the border is 843.6 km). The population is 2.11 million people (in 2024, the fifth place in Siberia and 23rd in Russia). It is a predominantly urbanized region (56.7%) with significant proportion of rural population (43.3%, in Russia—25.3%). The ethnic structure (in 2020) is represented by Russian population (95%), while other numerous ethnic groups are Germans (1.3%), Ukrainians (0.5%), Kazakhs (0.28%), Tajiks (0.27%), Armenians (0.26%), and Tatars (0.18%; Federal State Statistics Service for the Altai Territory and the Republic of Altai, 2024). The economic-geographic position is characterized by peripheral location and remoteness from the important economic centers and maritime ports, compensated by dense network of road and railway transit routes, linking Russia with Mongolia and Central Asian countries. The economy of the region is multisectoral, with significant contributions from industry, trade, and agriculture to the Gross Regional Product (GRP). It is one of the leading producers of agricultural goods and environmentally friendly foods (the proportion of agriculture in the GRP is among the highest in the country, at approximately 13%) (Kuzovenko & Mischenko, 2021).

The Republic of Altai is entirely situated in a mountainous area, has a population of 210,700 people (in 2024), 71% of which are settled in rural areas. To the southeast, it shares a border with Mongolia (extending 223.8 km) and the China (55 km), while to the southwest, it borders Kazakhstan (517.6 km). According to the ethnic composition (Federal State Statistics Service for the Altai Territory and the Republic of Altai, 2024), 53.7% of the population belongs to the Russian ethnic group. The second largest, “title”, group are the Altai people, including Altai-Kizhi, Kipchaks, Oirots, Chapty, and Shor (37.1%), followed by Kazakhs (6.5%). Additionally, the region is home to indigenous small-numbered peoples, such as the Tubalars (Altai-Tuba, 1.7%), Telengits (Altai-Teles, Altai-Telengits, 1.3%), Chelkans (0.6%), and Kumandins (0.05%). The economy of the

region is based on agriculture and tourism. In agriculture, livestock farming predominates, accounting for 82.8% of total production. A distinctive feature of the republic is the well-preserved traditional practices of gathering, hunting, and fishing. The leading branch of crop production is fodder production. Grain crops are cultivated primarily for fodder grain. Additionally, annual and perennial grasses as well as corn for silage are grown (Manankova, 2017).



**Figure 1.** Geographic position of the Altai krai and the Republic of Altai.

Confessional mosaic in both regions is characterized, on the one side, by the revitalization of religious conscience and intensification of inter-ethnic relations because of migration processes, and, on the other side, by high diversity of religious beliefs, incongruence between religious identifications and objective characteristics of religious behavior. However, the republics of Southern Siberia have been historically developed as polyethnic, with diverse ethnic composition, including Altaians, Tuvans, Kazakhs, Russians, and other peoples, and, simultaneously, as intrinsically polyconfessional, with different branches of Christianity, Islam Buddhism, and traditional beliefs (shamanism, tengrism, pagan cults). In the regions with dominant Russian population (the Altai krai), the religious sphere is under considerable influence of dominant religious organization—the Russian Orthodox Church.

The religious palette is complemented by other orthodox (old-believers) and Christian organizations (Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, Lutherans), new religious movements and organizations of neo-oriental wing, activated as a result of formation of peculiar cultural traditional way of life, voluntary or forced displacements (Maximova, Omelchenko, et al., 2024), development of Siberian, soviet and post-soviet ideological and cultural transformations (Maximova, Surtaeva, et. al., 2024).

The empirical data were collected by authors in 2024 by means of structured face-to-face and online interview ( $n = 981$ , respondents' age from 17 to 83 years) for the scientific project "Religious landscapes of the Russian-Mongolian borderland: institutional and network mechanisms for constructing religious and ethnic identities and security in a post-secular

reality” (2024–2026). The proportional quota sample was used to represent general socio-demographical and economic patterns of population (Table 1). The questionnaire, in addition to the CRS index of religiosity and the socio-demographic section, included scales of ethnic identification (categorical variable), self-assessment of religiosity (10-point scale), personal physical and spiritual security (5-point scales), threats to spiritual security (17 items assessed on a Likert scale), as well as social sentiments and optimism. The data were processed using the SPSS software and R language. Statistical modeling was made within the structural equation modeling methods and the JASP program.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic, educational and economic structure of the sample

Category		Region (%)	
		Altai krai (N = 519)	Republic of Altai (N = 462)
Sex	Female	61	59
	Male	39	41
Age	Under 30	43	27
	31–49 years	36	38
	50+	21	34
Education	Secondary school (10–11 classes)	13	9.6
	Primary vocational (vocational or technical school)	6.3	6.1
	Secondary vocational education (college)	33	28.5
	Higher education	47	56
Economic position of household	Live in poverty, with money only enough for modest meals or worse	9.8	11.2
	Live modestly, with enough money for food and inexpensive clothing	59	65
	Live comfortably, with savings and the ability to purchase all needed goods	27	21
	Wealthy	5	2.5

### 3. Results

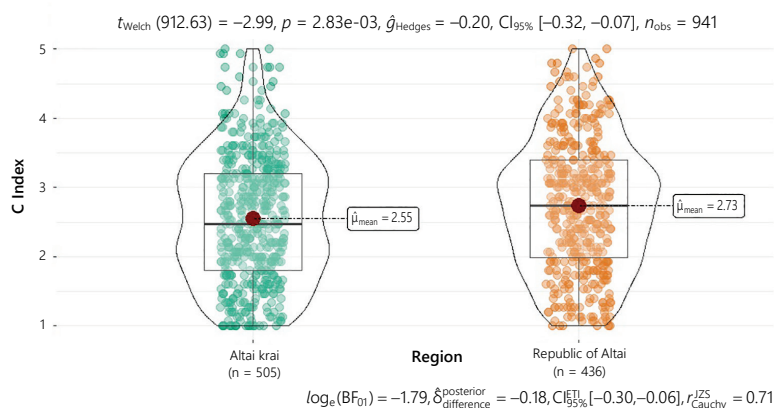
#### 3.1. General evaluations of the religiosity of the population of the two regions

The research results show that only one third of participants in the survey did not consider themselves believers, whereas all the others were followers of a particular religion and system of beliefs, or possessed a blurred religious identity. In general, the population of the border area was inclined to Orthodoxy (about 44% in united data), but regional distributions differed by several categories of believers. Thus, in the Altai krai, the relative majority (51%) belonged to the Orthodox Church, 33.3% identified themselves as non-believers, 5.5% believed but could not say exactly in what religion. Islam was not sufficiently represented and it was followed by 3.7%, as well as other Christian confessions (2.7%) and Buddhism (1.4%). Less than 0.5% of the population belonged to new religious movements, Pentecostalism, or Adventism, 1.2% explained their special position (usually philosophic views as believing in yourself as a creator of life). In the Altai Republic, along with the Orthodox faith (36%), the so-called “Altaic faith” (Burkhanism) was rather widely represented (18%), about 3% combined practices of Buddhism in its Altaian variation and Shamanism, and there was at least 1.5 times greater a community of Muslims (5.0%), while the number of non-believers was significantly fewer (23.8%, here and

after all differences were tested by means of chi-square and z criteria,  $p < 0.05$ ). Some cult or religiously related manifestations of public behavior may be good external markers of the population's religiosity, as well as indicators of the formation of a social image of a spiritually and religiously developed person.

On average, almost one fifth of borderland residents had experience of religious pilgrimages, traveling to holy places for religious purposes, and another 15.2% had aspirations for sacred travel. In the Altai Republic, the share of people with experience of pilgrimage was higher—19.7%, in Altai krai—14.4%, the proportion of people with corresponding intentions was similar. At the same time, only a fifth part of residents do not celebrate religious holidays, i.e. they refuse to celebrate them with any frequency, nor do they follow those traditions that have already become part of the secular culture of society (for example, Christmas, Easter, etc.). At the same time, half of the residents always celebrate such significant events. The number of those who know well and always follow religious traditions of celebrating religious holidays in general amounted to 11%, the highest in the Altai Republic (15.3%), and in Altai krai—6.3%.

Religious beliefs and representations can differ significantly from each other by the complexity of religious systems and institutions, content, forms of rituals, the degree of regulation of believers' life, but all religions share a common representation about the division of the world into the earthly and "heavenly" (or the beyond). In addition, the basis of all religions is the faith in God or gods, deities, divine entities, supernatural forces, as well as in their participation in "earthly", "natural" processes, in people's lives. It is this belief that is reflected in the concept of "religiosity" and is, unlike religion, objective in nature, is a measure of the centrality, importance, or expression of religious meanings for the individual, that is, it is a character trait. Religiosity marks the worldview, behavior, way of life, mediates evaluations of social processes and phenomena. Accordingly, the degree of religiosity describes the extent to which an individual has internalized religious ideas and norms, and values of religion.



**Figure 2.** Comparison of mean values of the CRS index in the Altai krai and the Republic of Altai, statistical inference.

After the summarization of frequencies for all the 20 items of the CRS and recoding, the index values were found along with self-evaluation of religiosity by 10-point scale, where 0 points denoted the absence of religiosity and 10 points is the highest value. In general, for the total sample, the index of religiosity of the population amounted to 2.63 (sd = 0.94),

which is higher than the test norm for the Russian Federation, recorded in the study of S. Huber (Huber & Huber, 2018). The most religious is the population of the Republic of Altai, where the index value amounted to 2.73 points ( $sd = 0.95$ ), the index values close to the Russian test norm were recorded in the Altai Territory—2.54 points ( $sd = 0.93$ ). The reliability of scale scores 0.94 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ; Figure 2).

Then, primary index values were divided into three categories to find groups of population with different expression of religiosity centrality. In the united data, 8.4% of all the inhabitants can be called highly religious people ("church-going", "devout" believers). These are those individuals for whom religion is of central and determining importance in the system of personal constructs, deeply integrated into the personal "Me", acts as the basis for self-regulation of behavior and value-driven attitude to the world. Non-religious residents can be cumulatively referred to as 29.0% of the population of the four regions, while the majority (59.1%) were religious people, for whom religion and belief in the divine, spiritual life are rather important. Another 3.5% had uncertain answers and were excluded from the further analysis.

In the Republic of Altai, the share of highly religious people was notably higher at 11.7%, linked to the recent revival of ethnic self-awareness among indigenous residents and the symbolic expression of religion tied to ethnic identity. The proportion of population with moderate religiosity was also high—more than half of the republic's population (61.7%) could be categorized as religious, while almost a third (26.6%) had low values of the index. In the Altai krai, the share of the highly religious population was significantly lower—6.1%, whereas non-religious were more numerous—33.1%, and 60.8% could be categorized as moderately religious people. Comparison of CRS values with the results of self-evaluation has shown that both instruments led to concordant conclusions: the Spearman correlation in the Altai krai was  $\rho = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , in the Republic of Altai  $\rho = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Thus, the religion and spirituality played an important role in the life of the population of Russian border regions. The expression of religiosity manifested differently in the regions, and found its peculiar refraction not only along the axis of ethnic republics—half-ethnic regions with a "Russian core" traditionally gravitating toward Orthodoxy, but also represented a more complex diversity, which undoubtedly required more careful and in-depth study, presented in the next sections.

### *3.2. Comparison of religiosity with confessional belonging*

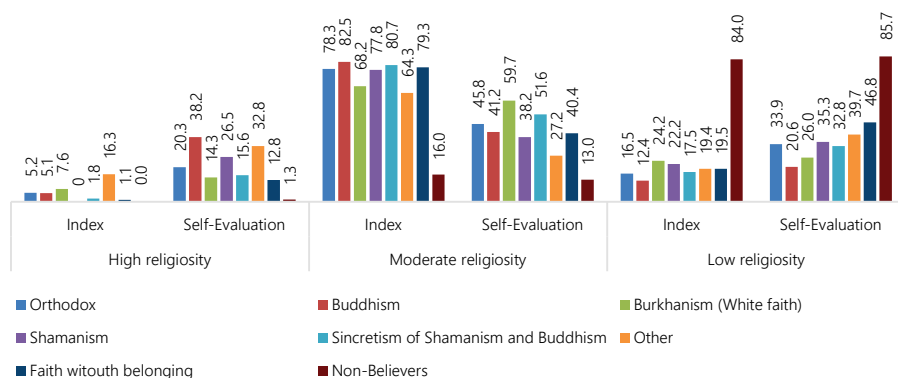
The further step of analysis consisted of the evaluation of religiosity in groups of the followers of certain religions: Orthodox Christianity, Burkhanism (which included representatives of the Altai faith'—White faith), Buddhism, Shamanism and Syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism, represented mainly in the Altai Republic. All other identifications, traditional (Islam, Judaism, Catholicism) and non-traditional (Protestants, Christians of the Evangelical Faith, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Scientologists, etc.) for regions, including indeterminate versions were numerically negligible and formed the subgroup "other traditional and non-traditional beliefs, without affiliation". The fifth group included respondents who considered themselves as non-believers.

In the group of highly religious people, based on self-evaluation scale, the majority were representatives of Buddhism, "other" religions, adherents of shamanism, and Orthodox respondents, while adherents of syncretistic views and Burkhanists were less numerous. The values of the CRS were significantly lower and reflected different aspects of faith in the



supernatural. Thus, adherents of shamanism were more socially demonstrative and superficial in expressing religious beliefs, while representatives of the White faith and Orthodox were closer to accepting and expressing faith.

Moderate group according to index almost equally included representatives of all religious directions—from 64.3% of adherents of other beliefs to 80.7% of those practicing syncretism, and only in the rarest cases of the religious population group was recorded a non-believer part of the respondents (16%). The self-evaluation was similar—from 27.5% of representatives of other faiths to 59.7% of those who professed Burkhanism and the White Faith. Given that self-evaluation had no reference to any evaluation criteria, it was difficult to interpret how participants of the study measured their own attitudes. In the group of non-religious respondents, non-believers prevailed, both in terms of CRS index (84.0%) and self-evaluation (85.7%). The low levels of religiosity by the CRS were more often found among those who identified themselves with Burkhanism and White faith (24.2%), while evaluations were the highest among believers without religion (46.8%; Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Levels of religiosity in different groups of believers and non-believers, %.

The analysis compared different aspects of religiosity among adherents of the most widespread religions in two regions, aligning closely with the local ethnic and religious makeup. Burkhanism, shamanism, and syncretism were more typical among Altaians, while Orthodox Christianity was predominant among Russians. In the structure of religiosity among all highly religious Orthodox, the dominant was the ideological component (44.0%), followed by a large gap of the intellectual component reflecting cognitive activities (16.2%) and, only then personal religious practices (10.1%), and equally pronounced public practices and spiritual experience (about 8%). The moderately religious Orthodox had strong accent on personal religious practices and appeal to a higher power (72.1%), spiritual and religious experiences (63.1%) and, to lesser extent, on knowledge of religious dogmas (59.9%), belief in God and the divine (44.9%), and especially public demonstration of faith (43.4%). As for the non-religious Orthodox (cultural belonging), in the structure of their religiosity, the strongest part was taken by the public practices (48.6%).

Among highly religious Burkhanists, the dominant component was ideological as well (34.2%), while both the intellectual (11.8%) and other components of religiosity were weakly represented (less than 8%). The moderately religious followers of Burkhanism expressed their

faith in a different manner—all components were represented almost equally with a slight predominance of personal religious practices (68.4%), whereas public side of religiosity was not widely represented (38.4%). Non-religious Burkhanists were more focused on public religious practices (58.9%) and personal spiritual experiences (52.6%), were rather poorly informed about religion (31.6%), had rare personal practices (23.7%) and ideological convictions (13.2%).

The religiosity of highly religious shamanists was based on strong faith (32.4%), while its other components were expressed by no more than 8.8%, with the public component of faith being the least represented (3.6%). Moderate shamanists had almost equally distributed components of religiosity, while their non-religious part was rather inclined to public religious practices (39.3%), experience the sacred (35.3%), and information about religion (29.4%), but not to confidence in the existence of gods, a higher power (11.8%), and practice of private prayers and mental dialogues with gods (15.2%).

Considering regional comparisons of self-evaluations and results of CRS index, the population cannot be described as strictly religious or non-religious. Self-perception of religious involvement was rather high, and respondents generally felt themselves immersed in the sphere of faith and religion. Meanwhile, even if evaluations by the CRS index marked the relevance of religious constructs, the majority of them were not fully activated, and inhabitants of two regions usually manifested themselves as believers “from time to time” (Huber & Huber, 2018, p. 153). The salience of religious constructs in the groups of highly religious, according to the CRS, was the most manifested among adherents of Buddhism and Shamanism in the Altai krai (10% with high religiosity), while on the territory with its more traditional spreading, the proportion of highly religious Buddhists and Shamanists was absent. Apparently, moving away from the familiar environment and preserving traditional religious views, the adherents of this religion try to more strictly observe the canons of faith. Thus, the major part of population are “episodic” believers, and the CRS scale, in comparison with self-evaluation, is capable to capture the absence of constructs, marking high degree of involvement in religious questions and corresponding practices in the group of non-believers. At the same time, 2.3% of the respondents in the Altai krai and 2.0% in the Republic of Altai among non-believers received high values by self-evaluation of religiosity, so that their religious identification does not coincide with internal feelings.

In their personal representations, believers of all confessions were more inclined to treat themselves as religious people, and even gave high evaluations. That was rather logical, because the participants chose freely the criterion of his/her religiosity—religious practices, knowledge of religious canons, or psychological perception of the sacred world, while the CRS scale averaged, neutralized different manifestations of religiosity. It represented different components as equally significant and important in the real life and activity, whether it is a matter of religious feelings, knowledge of dogmas, public or personal behavior in accordance with religious prescriptions, internal spiritual life, etc.

It should also be noted that, according to CRS, there were fewer truly non-religious individuals within all the confessions under consideration than in the group of self-evaluation. In all the regions and within all the confessional preferences, the share of respondents who had low values of religiosity was twice higher in the group of non-believers, while, according to CRS values, there were signs of religiosity in the groups of non-believers, which the respondents themselves apparently do not identify due to their non-referent character. The only exception were the adherents of Burkhanism in the Altai

Republic—the shares of the non-religious (or rather, those who associate themselves with Burkhanists, but for whom the sacred does not play any significant role in life) were almost identical within both assessment scales (Table 2).

**Table 2.** The level of religiosity of population with different religious identities: CRS values vs. self-evaluation

Region	Confession	Scale	Level of religiosity (%)		
			High	Moderate	Low
Altai krai	Orthodoxy	CRS	3.9	76.4	19.7
		Self-evaluation	12.3	48.8	38.8
	Buddhism, Shamanism, Syncretism	CRS	10.0	80.0	10.0
		Self-evaluation	11.1	22.2	66.7
	Non-believers	CRS	–	15.7	84.3
		Self-evaluation	2.3	21.6	76.0
Republic of Altai	Orthodoxy	CRS	7.6	78.8	13.6
		Self-evaluation	21.5	51.3	27.2
	Buddhism, Shamanism, Syncretism	CRS	–	87.5	12.5
		Self-evaluation	28.6	46.4	25.0
	Burkhanism	CRS	7.6	68.2	24.2
		Self-evaluation	14.3	59.7	26.0
	Non-believers	CRS	–	17.7	82.3
		Self-evaluation	2.0	12.1	85.9

As it was demonstrated above, the data on religiosity did not have significant variations depending on the region of residence, and preliminary analysis of the united showed that religious identifications of the population were usually associated with ethnic ones. For example, ethnic Russians in both regions prefer Orthodoxy, ethnic Altaians more often—Burkhanism, Buddhism, or Shamanism, although, of course, this is not a dogma, and we can observe the whole palette of confessional preferences of the indigenous inhabitants of the borderland regions.

### *3.3. Relationship of religiosity and ethnicity accounting for gender and confessional belonging*

One of the widespread interpretations of globalization relies on the unification of cultural environment, favorable for the functioning of economic mechanisms, but detrimental to cultures, national interests, ethnic and confessional identities. The push toward multiculturalism has also influenced the growing interaction between religions and cultures. In an identity crisis, rejecting unique spiritual and cultural heritage—justified by the need for universal values—cannot solve the problem, while the issue of population religiosity becomes even more pressing (Villani et al., 2019; Wixwat & Saucier, 2021). The extent to which adherence to a particular religion is related to religiosity, personality traits, well-being, and socio-demographic characteristics is unclear due to the varying results obtained.

Many works are focused on the peculiarities and nature of the relationship and interrelation of different types of identity in combination with religious identity, especially the ethnic dimension of identity (or synthesis in the form of etno-confessional identity).

Ethnic and religious identities are interdependent in many respects, as well as, for example, related to national-civil identity, which is confirmed by the presence of nation-states with their state religions, as well as peoples gravitating toward one or another confessional or religious trend, such as, for example, the Russian population traditionally chooses Orthodoxy, i.e., religious culture quite often acts as a factor of ethno-national differentiation.

In general, women demonstrated a higher level of religiosity (2.5) than men (2.2). This tendency was relevant for the population in all the regions, and is consistent with the data from other studies, showing that the relationship of religiosity and gender is culture-specific, and contingent on the measurement method used (Loewenthal et al., 2002; Schnabel, 2018). In the Republic of Altai, with a total value of the religiosity index of 2.5 points, women's religiosity had a mean value of 2.6 points, while among men it was 2.3. In the Altai krai (the mean value for the sample was 2.4), women were also more religious than men (2.5; Table 3).

**Table 3.** Levels of religiosity by the CRS depending on ethnicity, confession and gender

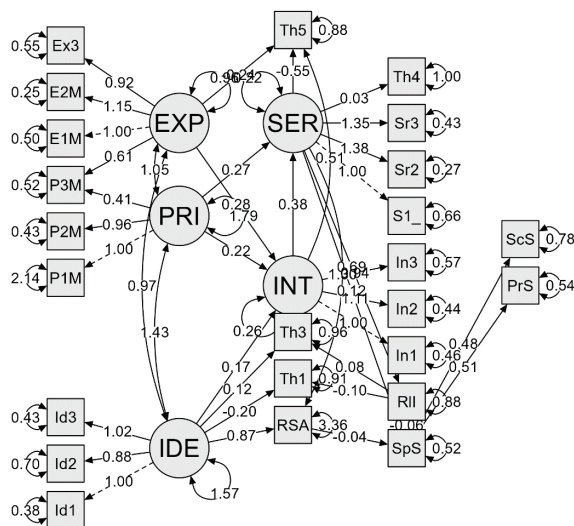
Ethnic identification	Religious identification	Gender	Level of religiosity (%)		
			High	Moderate	Low
Russians	Orthodoxy	Women	4.1	84.5	11.4
		Men	4.2	74.3	21.5
	Buddhism, Shamanism, Syncretism	Women	–	90.0	10.0
		Men	20.0	80.0	–
	Burkhanism	Women	–	100.0	–
		Men	–	–	100.0
	Non-believers	Women	–	15.5	84.5
		Men	–	11.0	89.0
Altaians	Orthodoxy	Women	25.0	50.0	25.0
		Men	–	75.0	25.0
	Buddhism, Shamanism, Syncretism	Women	–	80.0	20.0
		Men	–	100.0	–
	Burkhanism	Women	5.9	82.4	11.8
		Men	5.6	61.1	33.3
	Non-believers	Women	–	25.0	75.0
		Men	–	14.3	85.7

The largest number of highly religious women was found in the group of Orthodox Altai women—25%, among Orthodox women this share amounted to 4.1%, and among followers of traditional Russian Orthodoxy no gender differences were revealed—the share of men with a high level of religiosity amounted to 4.2%. At the same time, among Russian men identifying with Orthodoxy, there are twice as many truly non-religious (according to CRS) as among women (21.5%, 11.4% of women). And in the groups of non-believing Russian men and women, similar index values were obtained. As for non-traditional for Russians confessional identities, more peculiar to Altaians, in this case, as noted above, gender differences were statistically insignificant. Among the followers of the ideas of “White faith”, traditional for Altaians, high religiosity manifested similarly, both in the groups of men and women (5.6% and 5.9%, respectively), but the differences are obvious in groups of non-

religious Altai Burkhanists: the share of “superficial” believers among men is three times higher (33.3%) than among Altai women believers (11.8%); elements of religiosity are inherent to some degree in a quarter of non-believing Altai women (25%) and only 14.3% of Altai men.

### 3.4. Structural equation model of relationship between religiosity, religious identity, and security

Ultimately, all the aforementioned indicators were integrated into a single statistical model, which was used to test hypotheses about the influence of religiosity and religious identity indicators on security assessments. The indicators of security included: assessments of perceived personal and spiritual security (5-point scales), assessments of threats to spiritual security (17 items measuring the prevalence of such phenomena as indifference and irresponsibility, domestic and family violence, low quality of education and school upbringing, value-based division, lack of national unity, the gap between the rich and the poor, social inequality, rising crime, etc.), and indicators of social sentiments. A preliminary factor analysis was conducted on the threat scales, and the generalized factor scores were saved as separate variables using the regression analysis. The correlation analysis with religiosity indicators has revealed that religiosity was closely associated with the perception of three types of threats—threats to family values (first factor), external informational threats (third factor), and threats to cultural development (fifth factor). These integral variables were included in the statistical model (Figure 4).



The results of modeling confirmed the hypotheses that assessments of personal security and social sentiments largely determined the feelings of security in the spiritual sphere ( $\beta_{PrS} = 0.456, p < 0.001$ ,  $\beta_{ScS} = 0.370, p < 0.001$  for the social sentiment indicator). In turn, assessments of spiritual security were significantly influenced by three factors: the factor of public manifestation of religiosity ( $\beta_{SER} = 0.134, p < 0.001$ ), closeness to fellow believers ( $\beta_{RII} = 0.094, p < 0.001$ ), and religious self-assessment ( $\beta_{RSA} = -0.14, p < 0.001$ ). The signs of these factors were different, which should be interpreted considering the coding of the dependent variable. The spiritual security had an inverted coding, high values corresponded to a state of insecurity and low values to security. This meant that the external manifestation of religiosity (participation in religious services, listening to sermons, working in the community) was associated with a loss of spiritual peace than with its restoration. Internal religiosity, in contrast, had a positive impact on security perception (as indicated by the negative sign of the coefficient).

The perception of threats to family values (Thrt1) was influenced by factors of closeness to fellow believers ( $\beta_{RII} = -0.113, p < 0.001$ ) and the ideological factor of religiosity ( $\beta_{IDE} = -0.158, p < 0.001$ ), which, given the inversion of the factor, indicated a positive relationship (the more important religious ideology was, the more family values were perceived as threatened). A similar effect was relevant for the third factor of threats (Thrt3). Regarding the fifth factor of threats (Thrt5), three significant determinants were identified—the intellectual dimension ( $\beta = 0.455, p < 0.001$ ), the dimension of public practices ( $\beta_{SER} = -0.440, p < 0.001$ ), and religious experience ( $\beta_{EXP} = -0.231, p < 0.001$ ). The correlations with intellectual dimension (INT) corresponded to higher perceptions of threats in the sphere of science, culture, and education. In contrast, public manifestations of religiosity and direct interaction with the transcendent were more aligned with the threats of indifference and irresponsibility. Thus, the modeling confirmed that security is a multidimensional construct in which individual and social manifestations are closely intertwined with assessments of the situation in the country and region. The assessment of various threats to spiritual security depends on most affected dimension of religiosity, while religiosity itself and religious identity serve as important protective factors for the spiritual security of individuals and, through them, the population as a whole.

#### 4. Conclusion

Religiosity is an integral part of personal and social identification of the population of the Asian borderland regions, regardless of which religion, confession or religious movement they belong to and whether they belong to it at all. In the broad sense, religiosity marks thoughts about the transcendent, the division of the worlds into sacred and profane, and belief in the divine essence(es) in general, and not only and not so much about knowledge of the basics of religion and worship. The general tendency of its manifestation in all the regions and ethno-confessional groups is its moderate expression, orientation to personal perception and experience of the religious, with an obvious tendency to superficial demonstration of religious affiliation at a low level of religiosity and peculiar to all ethnic groups.

Ethnic composition and level of urbanization, as well as economic development determine regional variability in religiosity of population. In ethnic republics, the population is more involved in religious sphere and religious behavior, while “Russian” regions are more secularized, especially among young generations. Despite confessional self-determination or

refusal to recognize one's own religiosity, rejection of the ideas of any religion, and the concept of God (divine) itself, the CRS values show that cognitive, emotional, or behavioral elements of religious personality, and the inclusion of a religious worldview are characteristic of women to a greater extent. Believing men, both Russians and Altaians, more often than believing women are not such in the true content of this phenomenon—for men, more often than for women, faith has a declarative character and is not associated with a way of life, thoughts, and even ritual behavior.

Given conclusions can be extrapolated to the geography of our study: traditional ethnic republics have a population which is more involved in religious sphere and practicing religious behavior, while Altai krai demonstrates a greater orientation toward secularization, but at the same time retains a significant proportion of traditionally minded population, which brings it closer to the neighboring nationally specific region. It is evident that our study encompassed only those religions, denominations, and faiths that enjoyed significant public approval, legal status, the presence of registered organizations, public events, and an established informational presence. We practically did not include new religious movements, occult groups, or religious organizations whose activities are prohibited. These facts should undoubtedly be taken into account when interpreting the results and forming further generalizations.

In the context of the need to ensure societal security, the characteristics of the population's religiosity in relationship with ethnic and other social factors can represent both a significant resource for social integration of the population (observed in the public sphere during joint cultural, educative, or charity events of various ethnocultural and religious organizations) and, in the case of increased interethnic tensions and local conflicts, will strengthen negative trends of ethnic and religious polarization, the use of religiosity in political mobilization. Meanwhile, the absence of a significant number of highly religious citizens in both regions indicates that the scenario in which security in the regions will be determined solely by religious factors is doubtful.

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