

Islamic Higher Education as a Part of Kazakhs' Cultural Revival

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Abstract: The Republic of Kazakhstan is currently going through a phase of national and cultural renaissance. This began in the 90s when political and spiritual independence had been obtained. The process of national or cultural revival entails a shift in the paradigm, a reevaluation of prior ideas, and a return to long-forgotten customs, beliefs, or traditions that are distinctive to contemporary Kazakhstani culture. Undoubtedly, a return to religious origins via freedom from the burden of the Soviet ideology of atheism and the expansion of Islamic education is the fundamental trend in the development of national-cultural awareness. Kazakhstan has experienced a spiritual vacuum because of the rapid shift from the ban of religion to religious freedom. This has resulted in a surge in the number of religious denominations and religious organizations in the nation and the emergence of radical movements. The issue is particularly significant for the post-USSR nations that are now experiencing hardships. Evidence of this is shown in two ways: (1). many people in the CIS countries have begun to show a keen interest in religious values and traditions, and (2). new sociopolitical and socio-cultural realities brought about by the fall of communism and the dissolution of the USSR have sparked the growth of national consciousness and altered spiritual guiding principles in the post-Soviet society, particularly in Kazakhstani society. The establishment of relations with the Muslim and non-Muslim world has incorporated the opening of borders, allowed for missionaries to enter freely, and allowed current citizens to go abroad for religious education and general education in both religious and non-religious oriented countries. In addition, the liberal legislation in relation to religion in general in the early 2000s, opened up new horizons for representatives of religious and pseudo-religious communities. Therefore, religious education, namely Islamic, given that population of the state is predominantly Muslim, is an absolute necessity.

Keywords: culture, religious education, Islamic education, Kazakhstan, Islamic studies

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Islam, the third largest and youngest world religion, is one of the most widespread religions around the globe. According to the data for 2023, the number of people practicing Islam reaches approximately 1.9 billion people, which is about 25.2% of the world's population and this number is projected to increase to 2.2 billion by 2030, which will be approximately 26% of the world's population (Wisevoter, 2023). More than 70% of the population of Kazakhstan profess Islam of the Hanafi madhhab, which is widely recognized as more liberal and open (Boltuc, 2023). The growing role of Islam in Kazakh society, mostly among Kazakhs, and accompanying traditions and rituals (holding halal celebrations, opening halal pools, beauty salons, spa centers, playing vouchers for *umrah*) can be explained by an increase in the number of practicing Muslims performing one or more postulates of Islam, including fasting in the month of *Ramadan*, performing the *Hajj*, attending Friday prayers. In fact, it is extremely difficult to separate the principles of secularism and religiosity, which is characterized by mobility. According to unofficial data, the proportion of those who perform all the rituals and observe the norms of Islam in their lives has been between 7-11% of the total number of Muslims in Kazakhstan over the past decades (Exclusive, 2023). This data shows that their level of religiosity significantly distinguishes Kazakhstanis not only from the Middle East and South Asian societies, but also from their neighbors in Central Asia who are historically more religiously oriented. Although Kazakhstan has officially proclaimed the separation of state and religion and its majority population does not profess one religion or another, it is difficult to implement the separation. For example, one of the key holidays in Islam, *Eid-ul-Adha* (the Feast of Sacrifice, *Kurban Ait* in Kazakh), is a public holiday according to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, unlike the second equally important *Eid-ul-Fitr* (festival of the breaking of the fast, *Oraza Ait* in Kazakh) which is not a public holiday. Despite maintaining strict control over religion in general and Islam in particular for 70 years in Kazakhstan, the Soviet Union was unable to convert the Kazakh people from Islam. The spiritual growth of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations, according to Jalilov (2016) "is impossible without correlation with religious aspects, not only because religion is an integral part of development but also because it is one of the most important elements of ethnic culture" (p. 112). The post-Soviet Islamic revival in Central Asia, according to Peyrouse (2007) highlights two opposing views of Islam in the region: (a) Islam as a traditional or societal religion rather than a way of life, and (b) Islam as a rediscovery of a 'neo-ethnic identity', entailing a redefinition of Islam as a 'rebirth' of ancient identities, which actually individualizes how people view religion (p. 253). The first mindset is the one that the state officials, who want to keep things as they are, accept. In other words, it appears that the Central Asian governments in power are attempting to reshape the public's perception of Islam in order to support the notion that it serves as the basis for culture and a source of national identity. The Islamic renaissance, however, seems to be supporting the universalist interpretation of Islam instead, which tends to personalize Islamic practice and link the people of Muslim Central Asia to a larger Islamic world.

After independence, Kazakhstan particularly was searching for its 'cultural heritage', which traditionally took the form of Islam or, as Khalid (2007) noted, "unprecedented interest in rediscovery of the past" (p. 126). The national or cultural revival began to be carried out through the revival of culture and religion. Jalilov (2016) noted that "in different countries the process of the revival of religion had and has a different form and content, which depends on the following main factors: (a) the demographic and national composition of the population; (b) a historical tradition, expressed in an ethno-cultural complex characteristic of a given country as a whole and for the peoples inhabiting it, in particular; (c) the level of socio-economic development, the nature and direction of economic processes in a given period; (d) features of the socio-political structure of society and the dynamics of its development; (e) the prevailing ideological climate and, in particular, the state and functioning of traditional religious systems; (f) the international situation both on the world stage and in the region under

study” (p. 29). Following the Republic of Kazakhstan’s enactment of the Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations on January 15, 1992, which protected the right to religious freedom and equality for all people regardless of their views on religion, the number of believers started to increase. This law had a collateral impact on the growth in the number of mosques (Beloglazov, 2013). For example, there were 68 mosques in 1991 and now it has reached 2752 in 2022 (Religious Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan, 2023) and for comparison in the post – World War II period 30 (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1986); 1975– 1989 40 –60, in 1993 was over 300, 1996– 600, 2005– 400 (Achilov, 2012). The dynamic growth of mosques in Kazakhstan by an average of 100% – 150% per year has led to the need for imams who have received local religious education (Achilov, 2012). On the other side, conditions have been established for an Islamic resurgence, including a rise in interest in religious roots (Melchert, 2014). In Kazakhstan, the resurgence of Islam is more closely associated with regional customs and traditions than with the restoration of core values. Given the historical context, Islam is becoming a more significant aspect of traditional culture in Kazakhstan, as well as in other nations in the area. It is also playing a bigger role in social and political debate. While Islam is unquestionably a significant component of ethnic Kazakh identity, it should be recognized that religion has not historically been a defining feature of their way of life. While the state’s policy was already compelled to pay particular attention to religion in general, the circumstances for the Islamic revival and the spike in interest in religious origins were established. In Kazakhstan, the Islamic revival is more closely related to national traditions and customs than it is to the restoration of fundamental principles. Rather, it is the rebirth of old Islamic principles known as hanafism (Melchert, 2014). Based on extensive fieldwork, Rorlich claims that one of the solutions to the desire for the empowerment and rebuilding of Kazakh society in the post-Soviet age is the process of ‘re-Islamization’ of its namesake people that is currently taking place in Kazakhstan (2003). In order to do this, it appears that the emerging civil society in Kazakhstan is mostly determined by Islamic revivalism (Achilov, 2012).

Literature Review

This paper examines the impact of Islamic Higher Education on the Kazakh cultural renaissance in the modern era via the lens of contemporary religious education, which despite its name incorporates aspects of secular education system. Contemporary religious education attempts to: (1) combine the teaching methods from religious and secular schools, (2) involve educators from various fields beyond conventional educators with a religious background, (3) teach students about ancestral ties of Kazakhstani culture, and (4) maintaining a variety of subjects and learning courses, including those from non-religious schools. Instead of further isolating students from their non-religious school counterparts, contemporary religious education teaches them the best of both worlds so that they are not left behind in the curriculum (Sabki & Hardaker, 2013). They will be fully prepared for higher education by the time they graduate, having gained balanced knowledge from numerous subjects.

Several publications have looked into the idea, including one by Miedema (2014), who argued that the goal would be to combine teaching and learning about religions with teaching and learning from religions and worldviews. Moore (2014) proposed incorporating non-sectarian religious studies as central to all religious education initiatives, including those centered in religiously associated schools and departments, as well as re-configuring faculty appointments in religious educational programs to involve scholars from various disciplines.

Former residents of the Soviet Union began searching for individualized identities in various ways including religion. Studies by Bilal (2019), Erpay et al. (2014), Khalid (2007, 2021), Mussabekov and Seisenova (2013), Nadirova et al. (2016), Mustafayeva (2012), Tazmini (2001), and Zholaliev and Koylu (2022) support the notion that post-Soviet countries,

including Kazakhstan, are undergoing a process of developing national consciousness and shifting spiritual orientations. According to these studies, the process of promoting Islam as a potential ‘cultural authority’ and ‘moral direction’ has started to fill the gap left by the fall of Soviet communism, which dominated the ‘public expression’ of the region for about seven decades. Following independence, Kazakhstan sought its ‘cultural heritage’, which had traditionally taken the shape of Islam. As a result, the number of followers skyrocketed. According to Beloglazov’s (2013) research, a new law, ‘On Religious Activities and Associations,’ was passed, which greatly increased the number of mosques being built. According to Melchert (2014), the prerequisites for an Islamic resurgence have been formed, including an increase in interest in religious roots. In Kazakhstan, the revival of Islam is linked to regional customs and traditions rather than the restoration of essential ideals. They claim that it is instead a return to traditional Islamic ideas known as Hanafism. Kazakh culture saw major changes during the Soviet era of educational revision and the succeeding “reform era” affecting culture and religion. Despite that the collapse of the USSR provided fresh beginnings, the ramifications of the previous era were not completely abolished and continue to have an impact. Because of the Soviet era’s cohesion in all domains, it was difficult for a newly constituted country to find its identity – including in the educational sphere. The collaborative nature between the state and religion played a significant role in simplifying the progress of religious education after the collapse of the USSR (Badagulova, 2017).

Yemelianova (2018) and Podoprigora (2018) emphasized that certain characteristics, such as the historical heritage of Central Asian countries, played a role in their separation from the rest of the Muslim World. The problem has been exacerbated by the scarcity of Western scholars who are fluent in local languages and can use local sources. Other challenges include logistical and political barriers that prohibit historical research in countries such as Turkmenistan where access is restricted, limiting the full picture. Privratsky (1998) stated that the ethnic identity of Kazakhs was conceived from their Muslim identity. Zhussipbek et al. (2020) identified four key patterns that contribute to the continued rebirth of Islam in Central Asia: (a) de-modernized and ‘ethnicized’ Islam as a lasting legacy of the Soviet period; (b) Salafism’s infiltration; (c) state and non-state actors’ securitization of ‘non-official’ Islam; and (d) the emergence of conservative Islam, which goes in tandem with hand with re-traditionalization.

In the year 751 in Semirechie, during the Talas conflict, Muslim Arabs made their first encounter with the Turks of Central Asia (Abuseitova, 2008; Almukhametov & Mahmet, 2016). From that point of time, the Turks’ conversion to Islam happened very quickly and on a large scale. Research by Rashid (2000) came to a different conclusion regarding the religious issues in Central Asia, noting that Islam entered Central Asia around the end of the ninth century by the Arab forces headed by Qutayba Ibn Muslim. No other ethnic group in the region has remained nomadic for as long as the Kazakh tribes (Akiner, 1995). Islam began to expand in the Kazakh steppe around the eighth century. Due to the concerns that Islamic groups would someday transform into a paramilitary force to challenge the mostly Soviet atheistic worldview, the practice of Islam and religion in general was banned and monitored in the region during the establishment of Soviet control. Achilov (2012) noted that in the 1940s, both the Red Army and Joseph Stalin closed the majority of the Central Asian mosques and traditional Islamic schools as a result of early militia organizations that identified themselves as Muslims and fiercely opposed the communist-atheistic ideology. A number of other researchers, such as Suharyova and Bikdjanova (1955) and Baran et al. (2006), pointed to the negative consequences of the destruction of traditions, culture, and religious ideology of the people of Central Asia during the Soviet period.

Education and the pursuit of knowledge are highly valued in Islam. The Qur'an and Sunnah serve as the foundation for much of the Islamic educational approach. This is addressed in a study by Zarrinkub (2004) that indicated that mosques were the first educational institutions in the Islamic world. He continued on to state that the need to interpret the Qur'an and hadiths, the development of madhhabs, the study of doctrinal dogmas, the advancement of education and science, and the advancement of these ideas all contributed to the establishment of educational institutions in the form of madrasahs and universities in significant Muslim theological centers like Cairo, Fes, Basra, Mecca, Medina, Basra, and Kufa (Zarrinkub, 2004). Makdisi (1981) defined a *madrasah* as an Islamic institution of higher learning that concentrates on religious studies and related courses. Madrasahs are higher education institutions that are historically centuries older than any Western universities. Some of the Madrasahs, such as Baghdad's Nizamiya Academy, Morocco's Al-Qarawiyyin University, Egypt's al-Azhar University, and Malaysia's International Islamic University, are still in operation now. These Madrasahs each demonstrate traditional teaching practices. This drew attention to institutions that approach Islamic education from a *madrasah* perspective (Abu Dardaa et al., 2008). *Madrasahs* served as the equivalent of modern universities, where students studied theology and the humanities, according to the research of Murtazin (2019), who also mentioned the prevalence of *madrasahs* in Central Asia.

Seitakhmetova et al. (2015) investigated the Islamic studies system and its impact on intellectual identity. Within this paradigm, there are numerous arguments about ideas of dialogue, tolerance, and cultural compatibility. Otarbaeva (2016) suggested an additional point that the successes of Islamic educational facilities within Kazakhstan prior to the colonization by the Russian Empire and later the USSR had an impact on intellectual identity. Mirzageldiyev (2019) claimed that the interactions between Kazakhstan and the Russian Empire during the reign of Catherine II had an interactive character to them, rather confrontational, and it played a significant part in Kazakhstan's institutionalization of the Muslim clergy.

Shaykhutdinov (2013) took an alternative point of view on the matter by reviewing statistical data (specifically, the correlation between the number of mosques and state policies, among other things) and concluded that one of the largest factors has been the role of democracy in state tolerance of religious policies. Achilov (2012) further pointed out that the deficiency of Islamic education appears to be a result of (1) inconsistent government regulation of religion, (2) uninformed concerns regarding an Islamic revival, and (3) inadequate resource allocation.

The shortage of higher Islamic education and personnel in Kazakhstan was addressed in the early 1990s with the assistance of international Islamic colleges. However, while most graduates received standard Islamic education, others became subject to a warped assortment of Islamic views during their education, which was one of the causes of extremist movements. Begalinova (2022), Smagulov (2017), Kartabayeva et al. (2015), Bilal (2019), and Ohlsson (2014) backed up these findings. On the other hand, Sultangaliyeva (1999) highlighted a positive fact and considered the advantages of the nation's religious resurgence, pointing out that the traditional religion in Kazakhstani society cannot be replaced by the spiritual system of foreign origin. An in-depth examination of the literature on Islamic education in Kazakhstan has shown that the revival of Islamic traditions, institutions, and identities has expanded dramatically and continued to spread since independence. Myer (1999) discussed governments' concerns about potential 'militant Islam' that may have grown as a result of awareness and bias issues.

A thorough analysis of the literature on Islamic education in Kazakhstan reveals a shortage of studies that examine many facets of religious education in the geographical area as it relates to political, social, cultural, and other topics that are currently being researched. This represents the "literature gap" in the area since there are many materials surrounding the topic but a notable lack of materials that go deeper into the topic at hand.

Methodology

This research used a descriptive-qualitative secondary data analysis method, which allowed it to describe the current situation of religious education in Kazakhstan with an emphasis on Islamic education at the higher level of education. The main materials in the form of secondary data were extracted from reports, articles, and websites, using keywords such as Islamic education in Kazakhstan; religious education; madrasah; Islamic education; Islamic university; Islamic studies; religious studies; religion and traditions of the Kazakhs etc. A qualitative approach was employed in this research to examine the problem of Islamic education in the context of the Kazakh people's cultural renaissance, with a temporal framework primarily focused to the time of independence in 1991 to the present. In qualitative research, historical changes, or "moments", and the idea of paradigms have been increasingly popular recently (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). The application of theoretical and empirical research methodologies, along with an analysis of peer-reviewed research articles, books, and statistical data, allowed for the implementation of a qualitative approach to the issue being studied. The key today is to examine the issue of professional religious education from both the religious perspective and non-religious perspective, maintaining a standpoint of non-bias and abstaining from prejudice. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach was used in this case to generate more precise data. Determining the theoretical foundation and guiding principles on which Kazakhstan's modern religion studies program would be based is of utmost importance. Based on this information, a content analysis of books, academic papers, publications in the national and international press, and statistics was conducted. A review and analysis was conducted of the official website of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (www.gov.kz), which includes all ministries, in particular the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (formerly were included in one ministry, which is used in this study as the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan). Other information was retrieved from public data located on official websites of organizations such as www.muftyat.kz of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), nmu.edu.kz of Nur-Mubarak University, www.kaznu.kz al-Farabi KazNU, [laws zakon.kz](http://laws.zakon.kz), www.adilet.zan.kz and others, as well as Internet data, and were ultimately transformed into qualitative factors of the studied sources into their quantitative characteristics.

In order to gain a general understanding of the topic of the transformation and development of Islamic education in contemporary Kazakhstani realities, synthesis methods were employed. After a thorough analysis of statistical information, namely, the data provided by the SAMK, and theoretical content, certain analogies in the development model of Islamic education in the post-Soviet space as a whole were discovered. One such phenomenon was described in the research of Shaykhutdinov (2013), where a correlation between the number of mosques and their impact on state policies was drawn. According to those findings, most Muslim institutions were prohibited from engaging in activities under Soviet legislation, which only allowed them to carry out the daily routine rituals. Each country took a slightly different approach to Islamic higher education, related to the established relationship between the state and religious groups (Abu Dardaa, et al., 2008). Through widespread Soviet education, the whole populace was effectively subjected to the imposition of literacy and secular Western education (Baran et al., 2006).

Islam in Kazakhstan: Before and After the Independence

The spread of Islam in the Kazakh steppe dates back to the eighth century, more specifically to AD 751, when the Arab troops with support of the Turks managed to defeat the Chinese in the battle of Atlakh (also called Talas). This is when Muslim Arabs made their first encounter with the Turks of Central Asia (Abuseitova, 2008). From this point on, the Turks' conversion to Islam happened very quickly and on a large scale. Rashid (2000) made a different assumption about this matter in his research on religious issues in Central Asia, noting that Islam entered Central Asia headed by Qutayba ibn Muslim around the end of the ninth century by the Arab forces. The only Arab-Chinese battle in the history of mankind took place on the Talas River near the city of Atlakh, which was surrounded by other Kazakhstan cities. During the Karakhanid and Seljuk empires, between the 10th and 13th centuries, the foundations of the Islamic religion were strengthened. Islam was gradually and unevenly institutionalized throughout the region. In comparison to the Central Asian tribes, Kazakhs adopted Islam much later during the nineteenth century where it spread throughout the Kazakh region. Compared to the nomadic Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Kazakh tribes, Islam acquired stronger historical roots among the non-nomadic Tajik and Uzbek communities (Rashid, 2000), with ramifications that are still felt today. No other ethnic group in the area has kept up a nomadic lifestyle as long as the Kazakh tribes have. Additionally, because these nomadic tribes were so far from having a fixed home, Islam did not expand in a mosque-centered, institutional way (Akiner, 1995). The adoption of the new faith by the nomads occurred in several important stages, including the importance of Sufism, which played a role in the spread of Islam. Full Islamization did not happen due to the conquest of the lands by the Mongol invaders, in particular Kazakhstan. Even after the liberation from the Mongols, the Kazakhs had difficulty accepting the new faith. The formation of a religious lifestyle was hindered by a nomadic way of life, the absence of religious institutions such as mosques, and the absence of clergymen, as bearers of rituals. Therefore, Islam, one might say, was formed gradually in medieval Kazakhstan, which contributed to the Kazakh people being able to preserve the traditional culture and some pre-Islamic beliefs as part of their culture.

Communism in the Soviet era saw Islam (and religion in general) as a danger to Soviet ideals and hence restricted the practice of Islam in Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, out of concern that Islamic movements may one day turn into a paramilitary force to oppose the dominant Soviet ideology. In reality, in the early 1920s, local militia insurgents fighting for independence led the first anti-Soviet rebellion. Early militia organizations strongly resisted the Communist-atheistic ideology and identified themselves as Muslims. As a result, the Red Army and subsequently Joseph Stalin's system in the 1940s suppressed the majority of Central Asian mosques and traditional Islamic schools (*madrasah*). Perhaps, among all the challenges that the Soviet Union experienced, the most significant for Moscow was the anti-religious policy of the Soviet era. Enormous amounts of resources were invested in programs for Soviet modernization. These included movements such as the secularization of religious consciousness, the closure of religious schools, a ban on religious rituals, the development of the film industry, and the emancipation of women. It was expected that major political transformation and industrialization would force the locals to throw religion into the historical landfill (Suharyova & Bikdjanova, 1955). Most Muslim institutions were suppressed by the Soviets, who confined them to performing life-cycle rituals. Literacy and secular Western education were effectively enforced on the whole population via mass Soviet schooling. The sole institution providing professional Islamic education up until the early 1990s was the Bukhara madrasah 'MirArab' in Uzbekistan, which was established soon after the end of the Great Patriotic War. There were just a few dozen students studying there because it was the only professional Muslim educational institution in the USSR.

In order to control and manage religious (Muslim) affairs throughout the Soviet Union, the Spiritual Board of Central Asian Muslims in Uzbekistan was founded in 1943. By the 1960s, it was possible to be a ‘Muslim’ in the sense of engaging in birth, marriage, and funeral ceremonies while still being completely integrated into society. This was simple since many of the world’s greatest intellectuals originated in Central Asia and had previously engaged in the same duality. The intellectuals of Central Asia and the Caucasus, it may be said, mostly conformed to this pattern, while the rest of the populace ingested heavy doses of Soviet popular culture at the price of a dwindling understanding of Islam (Baran et al., 2006). A number of other researchers point to the negative consequences of the destruction of traditions, culture, and religious ideology of the peoples of Central Asia in the Soviet period (Baran et al., 2006; Suharyova & Biddjanova, 1955).

Gorbachev’s *perestroika*, which helped to emancipate the religious identity of the people of the former Soviet Union, was the historical turning point between these two realities (Nogoibayeva, 2017). Due to a shift in the state’s perspective on religion in the mid-1980s, the resurrection of Islamic education was made feasible. People developed an interest in Islam as a religion. Mosques began to be visited by more individuals. It became feasible to freely instruct both adults and children in the fundamentals of Islam. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, former residents started looking for their identity everywhere, even in religion. A certified and well-educated Muslim priest was required. It was unable to meet the expanding demands of the several million-strong Russian Muslim population during the *perestroika* years. Gorbachev’s political reform of *perestroika* meant a ‘restructuring’, specifically of the Communist economy and political system. The process of *perestroika* exacerbated existing shortcomings and created political, social and economic tensions in the former Soviet Union. In addition, it is blamed for the political rise of nationalism and nationalist political parties in its constituent republics. Studies by Bilal (2019) and Khalid (2014) supported the notion that post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan, are undergoing a process of developing national consciousness and shifting spiritual orientations. According to them, the process of promoting Islam as a potential ‘cultural authority’ and ‘moral direction’ has started to fill the gap left by the fall of Soviet communism, which dominated the ‘public expression’ of the region for about seven decades. Nadirova (2014) described the current religious situation as practical models and innovations aimed at the development of Islamic education demonstrate critical pragmatism and the realization that any implemented model of Islamic education is based on Islamic traditions, empirical data of learning experiences for Muslim students in religious and secular schools, and the best ideas coming from non-Muslim educational theory and practice. However, this situation has not yet been thoroughly studied and warrants more investigation. Nearly a century after the start of the “successful” atheization, the current re-Islamization, however, reveals the reality that Islam has always remained an ether that pervades social connections and the worldview of people. It is fascinating to compare the quick post-Soviet process of re-Islamization (de-theization) with the steady de-Islamization (atheization) of the Soviet era. It was made possible to combine the spiritual and cultural values of each people in a short amount of time because of the *perestroika* years, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent establishment of independent former Soviet republics. A rebirth of spirituality and religious instruction started along with the fall of the USSR and the atheistic ideology. In particular, it was reflected in the formation of a cultural identity that was, on the one hand, religious and on the other ethnic.

Islamic Education in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a polyreligious and, at the same time, a secular state, and the key characteristic of state-confessional relations is the absence of any official or compulsory religion. The Law of October 11, 2011, No. 483-IV “On Religious Activities and Religious Associations” states that “the system of education and upbringing in the Republic of Kazakhstan, with the exception of spiritual (religious) educational organizations, is separated from religion and religious associations and is of a secular nature” (Adilet, 2023a, p. 2) and, accordingly, no religion can be established as a state religion or mandatory one. Subsequently, the formation of knowledge about religion (or religions) in a secular state should not imply its propaganda, but rather should help overcome religious or atheistic fanaticism, and form immunity to destructive religiously colored ideology (Ualiyev, 2017) or so-called pseudo-religion. A secular state should not be perceived as atheistic (Ualiyev, 2017) and education in the field of religion is essential. The role of quality education becomes even more significant in the training of specialists in the field of religion – religious scholars, Islamic scholars, theologians. In the post-Soviet space, religious education, most often, means education within the framework of any one religion, where students are introduced to this faith. In Kazakhstan, the history of religion and religious education is also connected with the history of the development of Kazakhstani society. Receiving religious education or theology was banned in Soviet Kazakhstan and religious education was focused primarily on the theory of scientific atheism. Although in a secular state, religious education as a whole is equated with theological education. At the same time, religious studies education is considered as a non-religious education. Religious education is meant to be acquisition of knowledge about religions in general and in particular the history, development, distribution, and features. Therefore, as a rule, it is customary to distinguish between two concepts - religious education and religious studies, and respectively, Islamic education from Islamic studies. Today, both globally and in Kazakhstan, religious studies and religious education are receiving an increased amount of attention, and the topic is progressively turning into the subject of research. Given the growing impact of religion on different facets of public life, the issue of religious education in Kazakhstan is of great importance. Therefore, Islamic education is in the interests of not only the religious organizations themselves but also of state structures and different strata of society in Kazakhstan, where the majority of the population considers themselves to be representatives of Islam. Due to its effectiveness in preventing terrorism and extremism, such education has become increasingly vital as these phenomena have become more prevalent. Consequently, the Decree issued in 2000 ‘On measures to prevent and suppress manifestations of terrorism and extremism’ (Adilet, 2023b) considered the inclusion of the discipline ‘Fundamentals of Religious Studies’, and in 2004 the discipline was introduced as an additional optional subject in some schools. By 2009, it had already become a mandatory course in the ninth grade for one hour per week, and in the 2016-2017 academic year the name of the discipline was changed to “Secularism and the fundamentals of religious studies.”

State atheism was replaced with religious freedom shortly after the Republic of Kazakhstan gained independence, because of the Law of 1992, which sparked significant changes in the social fabric of religion. More precisely, the following significant modifications have taken place: there was an increase in the number of faiths and religious groups coexisting in society and religion began to have a big impact on many facets of daily life. Increased construction of new mosques and churches occurred throughout the country, and new religious movements became active. Taking advantage of the spiritual vacuum, the ‘new’ religious movements spread foreign religions and ideologies among the population. The formation of a new attitude towards religion in the Kazakh society awakened in three ways: first, the hidden religiosity of the population was legalized, religion came out of the ‘underground’, people

began to openly visit mosques and churches; second, former atheists and people who were previously neutral towards it began to show interest in religion; and third, active religious propaganda, missionary activity and religious literature began to spread (Beloglazov, 2013). This naturally led to an increase in religiosity among the population and an increase in religious associations. When religion became a significant factor in the formation of spiritual and moral values, as well as one's personality, these processes had beneficial impacts. However, religion was also employed to cause disintegration and devastation. A genuine reflection of seventy years of communism shows the abandonment of essential religious obligations by the majority of Central Asian Muslims, including Kazakhs. However, since independence, there has been a significant rise in the resurrection of Islamic values, traditions, institutions, and identity throughout the area, and this trend is continuing to grow horizontally (Khalid, 2014). In such a setting, it has become crucially important to not only understand how to navigate this kaleidoscope of religions but also to research religious processes, their nature, content, and the effects of religion on everything from the individual to society to the global scale utilizing scientific methods. This contributed to the demand for religious education, particularly Islamic education, in Kazakhstan. Domestic religious education can be defined as a transitional model from classical to post-secular, with a focus on giving it a Kazakhstani flavor, implying the legacy of Central Asian scientists and thinkers such as Balasaguni, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, Yassawi, and others. In Kazakhstan, Islamic education is represented by a hierarchical educational process, with primary Islamic education in madrasas, some of which have received the status of state colleges and higher education, which includes higher educational institutions and advanced training courses for Islamic studies specialists. When developing models of Kazakhstani Islamic education, it is vital to draw on historical experience, mentality, and traditional Islam, which emerged within the context of specific regional characteristics. At the same time, the presence of a broad scientific and global vision, as well as a modern theoretical and methodological foundation, are required. However, scientific research should not be limited solely to Islamic theology.

Students are assigned a set of competencies to master during the learning process, such as using theoretical and methodological tools of Islamic knowledge to solve urgent research problems, using modern knowledge to recreate the history of world religions in the process of mastering the spiritual heritage of the Kazakh people, the Turkic world, Islamic civilization, and the practical implementation of spiritual and moral values in modern Kazakhstani society. Today, Islamic scholars should be able to realistically apply their knowledge for an objective understanding of the Islamic component and its significance in contemporary multicultural processes. According to Baitenova (2014), when it comes to teaching Islamic studies in Kazakhstan, essential values such as scientific character, objectivity, and secularism should serve as a foundation. Not long ago, the discipline 'Islamic Studies' was added to Kazakhstan's State Classifier. Islamic studies, like religious studies, is the study of Islam's roots from the standpoints of science, objectivity, and secularism. Islamic studies are a secular discipline that explores Islam from a scientific perspective rather than a theological one. Religious education entails studying and learning about the nature of religion and religious processes from the perspective of religion itself, as well as teaching its flock the fundamentals of dogma (Baitenova, 2014).

In the post-Soviet countries, particularly Kazakhstan, modern religious education has undergone three distinct stages of development. The first stage, which lasted from 1990 to 1995, can be distinguished by the start of the revival following the collapse of the Union, when the local population started to look for their culture in various contexts, including through Islamic education. On the other hand, the grave scarcity of Islamic personnel in the nation persisted. The general public, which had previously experienced the atheistic repression of believers' thoughts and moods, joined the clergy in this process as well. They were searching for a way

to express their spiritual values in the context of religion and faith. This is why during the 1990s in Kazakhstan, there was an increased demand of skilled experts in the field of religious studies. An initiative from the government beginning in the early 1990s sent the best students to study at prestigious Islamic educational institutions. In the middle of the 1990s, the first professional cadres of Islamic scholars returned to the nation and were involved in teaching. The number of students attending international Islamic universities rose from year to year. This resulted in unauthorized entrance into Saudi Arabian, Libyan, Kuwaiti, and other Islamic nations' colleges and universities by certain young individuals. Thus, in the 1990s, Islamic personnel were mostly trained in Islamic states. In addition to Salafi views, representatives of other denominations, including those of Turkish descent, such as *Suleimenshiler*, *Tarihatshylar*, *Nurshiler*, and others, implanted these beliefs in the populace (Begalina, 2022). The second stage, from 1995 to 2000, saw the creation of madrasahs, as a secondary religious specialized institution, as well as the simplest forms of Islamic education, such as evening courses on the study of the Qur'an, the fundamentals of Islam, and the Arabic language. To establish a national model of Islamic education in Kazakhstan, it is important to establish domestic Islamic higher education institutions. The Concept for the Development of Islamic Education is being developed and adopted for this reason by the SAMK. The provision that Islamic knowledge would be offered in equal measure with secular courses was critical. New specializations (educational programs) in institutions, including 'Religious studies' and 'Islamic studies' were added as early as the third stage, from the 2000s to the present. Similar to the Islamic education, the process of the revival of Islam can be divided into three phases (Begalina, 2022) in chronological order: from 1990 to 1995, which was the time of revival and the search for one's culture in various contexts, including through Islamic education, and furthermore, a radical trend. Islamic institutions were developed during the second stage, which lasted from 1995 to 2000. From 2000 to the present, Islamic higher education institutions are still being established. Numerous non-religious subjects are studied at an Islamic educational institution, including the history of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh or Russian language, philosophy, pedagogy, psychology, etc. Since mosques were now frequented not only by members of the older generations, as was the case during the Soviet era, but also by a sizable number of young people, including those with higher education, it was possible to provide a higher level of training for modern religious ministers. These religious ministers must have a set of scientific knowledge to respond to the demands of their religious audience. In these educational institutions, secular studies often predominated, while the study of the Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqh*, dogma, and other disciplines was of a supplementary aspect. Since they were established within state universities or with the direct involvement of several state entities, institutes of higher professional education frequently enjoyed the legal status of state institutions. The Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak (hereafter Nur-Mubarak University or NMU) in Kazakhstan, the Tashkent Islamic University in Uzbekistan, and the Tajik State Islamic Institute in Tajikistan are a few examples. NMU was formed by an agreement between the presidents of the two nations back in 1993, intended to be a significant and ambitious undertaking, but its educational operations did not start until 2010. Murtazin (2015), in turn, identifies three stages in the development of Islamic education as follows: 1990-2000 – a period of active growth; 2000-2010 - period of structural organization; 2010-current - a period of stagnation.

Madrasah in the Past and Present

Islam places a high value on education and the pursuit of knowledge, and the Islamic model of education is largely based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. *I'lm*, which is Arabic for knowledge or science, is referenced 779 times in the Qur'an (Al-Ansari, 2023), placing it third in terms of mentions behind the words 'Allah' (Allah, God) and 'Rabb' (God, Lord). Early

Islamic institutions of learning were quite informal. Mosques served as community gathering spots where people gathered and learned from elders. The first Islamic institutions were *kuttabs* (in some regions *maktabs*), which were founded in mosques, caliphs' palaces, and instructors' homes after the Prophet Muhammad passed away. The *madrasah*, on the other hand, served as a place of spiritual instruction for the development of Muslim community leaders, theologians, and specialists in Islamic law. A location where one learns to write is known as *maktab* (religious primary school), which is derived from the term *kataba*, which means to write. Now, the *madrasah* is Islam's institution of higher learning focused on the religious sciences and their ancillary subjects. *Madrasahs* of higher learning predate Western universities by several centuries (Makdisi, 1981) and some continue to operate and provide insight into traditional teaching methods. For example, al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco (established in 859), University of al-Azhar in Egypt (970 – 972), Nizamiyya Academy in Baghdad (1091), and the more recent the International Islamic University of Malaysia (1983) provide an insight into institutions that have followed a *madrasah* perspective towards Islamic education. The tenth and eleventh centuries represented an important period for teaching Islamic knowledge, with *madrasahs* becoming an important place of study. The institutions (*kuttab*, *maktab*) are similar to *madrasahs* in Kazakhstan, but in reverse. A reformist movement known as Jadidism emerged in Central Asia at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th centuries. Its adherents aimed to change the methods of instruction in Muslim schools (*madrasahs*) through the secularization of education. The newly developed 'new method' *maktabs* or *usuli jaded* (lit. 'new method') included both secular and religious disciplines. In Central Asian countries, a mekteb is now a secular school with 11 grades, whereas a *madrasah* is the name for the religious institutions that are typically attached to mosques. As a result, the word *maktab* gradually changed.

The reform of the *madrasah* with the specialty '0112000 – Islamic Studies', upon which graduation confers the qualifications '0112013 – *Imam Khatib*', and '0112023 – Teacher of the Basics Islam' was one of the tasks of Kazakhstan's Concept for the Development of Religious (Spiritual) Education of the SAMK until 2020, which was adopted in 2015. Secondary vocational education is in the early stages of development, as per Article 12 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 'On Education' dated July 27, 2007 No. 319-III. Adambosynov (2003) underlined the uniqueness of the *madrasah*, which was previously established in Kazakhstan, is the teaching of both religious, cultural and social subjects. Thus, at the end of this educational institution, the student has attained a level of comprehension in religion, the Kazakh and Russian languages, arithmetic, geography, the history of the Kazakhs, sketching, and *dombra* playing (a musical instrument of the Kazakhs) (Adambosynov, 2003). There is evidence concerning the first two *madrasahs*, which were both built in Arab cities – one in Baghdad during the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809) and the other in Rabat – we could dispute Abdirasilkyzy's claim in the ninth century (Lykoshina & Muhammad, 1897). At first, religious education in the Kazakh steppes was carried out by teaching specific individuals to children from wealthy families. To comprehend and interpret the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, one needed to be fluent in Arabic and to be knowledgeable in other areas of the religious spectrum (Erzhan & Mahmet, 2014). Islam cannot be taught without the study of Arabic, as well as the Qur'an, which forms the cornerstone of any educational process within the Islamic framework. This was the fundamental and important direction of Islamic education. Early on in the history of Islam, the *sheikh* (teacher, instructor, who must be a man, would sit close to one of the columns that supported the mosque's vaults, with a group of listeners gathering around him in *halaka* (circle). Many of these listeners would subsequently become his students. The teacher made the students repeat what he read and said while also explaining challenging passages as he recounted information to them from memory or read from a book. Later, the oral style of teaching developed into writing down the information, and subsequently, primary schools known as *kuttabs* started to appear in mosques. They were available to

everyone, but the major topics of study were reading and memorizing the Qur'an, learning the phonetic principles for reading the Arabic language, or tajwid, reading hadiths (quotes of the Prophet Muhammad), and a few other topics, including secular ones like math, geography, and logic. Nowadays, the reading of the Qur'an, the interpretation of hadith, *shariah* (Islamic law), English, computer science, and Arabic – although the latter is primarily based on religious examples – are often the only subjects taught at *madrasahs*. It is important to emphasize the significance of Arabic in the educational process across the Muslim world because education there was primarily conducted in this language, whose position is similar to that of Latin in Europe (Murtazin, 2015). There was no standardized curriculum, and each *kuttab* chose the topics and depth of instruction for its students. Following the *kuttab*, *madrasahs* evolved into second-stage educational systems that were more specialized.

Due to the highly specialized nature of madrasah education, it is possible that students would develop a conservative worldview rather than the perception of other's secular lifestyles. In contrast to secular educational institutions, Islamic educational institutions only offer highly specialized education, which is the main barrier to diploma recognition and graduate employment. Additionally, Islamic educational institutions do not always promote religious tolerance education, which may lead to a stereotypical view of secular life and the conservatism of religious thought. It is also necessary to discuss the history of the development of Islamic education and its specifics as current higher Islamic education develops in Kazakhstan. The construction of a personality appropriate to the society in which he (or she) lives was the aim of religious education in Kazakhstan, as well as Islamic education worldwide. A comprehensive educational philosophy that encompassed three primary functions – the functions of education (*tarbiya*), learning (*ta'alim*), and re-education (*ta'adib*) – was created in the Middle Ages to accomplish this purpose (Brylov, 2013). *Madrasahs* operated as the equivalent of contemporary universities, where students studied theology and the humanities. A madrasah was a term that described a traditional educational facility, whether it be religious or secular. It directly translated from Arabic to 'a location where learning and studying are done' (Achilov, 2012). Murtazin (2019) also mentioned how commonplace *madrasahs* are in Central Asia. He also focuses on the fact that there was no set length of time for study in the *madrasah*; rather, each student underwent a basic course of instruction that included learning Arabic, which virtually replaced all other languages as the language of theology and science for all Muslim peoples, as well as *hadith* (quote of the Prophet Muhammad), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and the Qur'an and its *tafsir* (interpretation). Today, religious houses of worship can be built on the foundation of madrasahs. Various madrasahs-colleges began to be established in Kazakhstan to address the critical demand at the time for religious leadership education and training. Presently, under the SAMK, there are courses dedicated to religious literacy and for the preparation of readers of the Qur'an (*qariy* in Kazakh), madrasahs, advanced training institutes for imams (Muslim clerics) and a university. There are 13 religious educational institutions in the country, of which 11 are Islamic. They are one university (Nur-Mubarak University), nine madrasah-colleges, and one Islamic institute for advanced training of imams. Seven of the Madrasah (The Abu Hanifa Madrasah College, the Abu Bakir Syddyk Madrasah College, the Aktobe Madrasah College, the Astana Madrasah College, the Ural Madrasah College, the Saryagash Madrasah College, and the Ibatulla Terazi Madrasah College) are directly related to the SAMK. In addition to teaching religious themes, they also address topics that adhere to Kazakhstan's Ministry of Education and Science requirements. *Madrasahs* in Kazakhstan have licenses for the right to conduct educational activities under the programs of general education, technical and vocational education. Admission is made on the following categories: the basis of basic general education (grade 9), the basis of secondary general education (grade 11) in the specialty of Islamic studies, and the qualifications of *imam-khatib* and a teacher of the basics of Islam. Two years and ten months are spent in training for those who entered after grade nine and three years

and two months after grade 11. The main goal is to train highly qualified specialists competent in the fundamentals of Islam and its directions, to provide assistance in improving the skills of specialists in mosques, religious educational institutions, etc. Those who complete the madrasah are awarded a Religious Studies certificate (Derbisali, 2012; Erpay et al., 2014). Madrasahs admit students on the recommendation of their district and local imams. Items like the Moral Foundations of Religion History, the Arabic Language, the History of Islam, Religious Dogmas, the Qur'an, the Tajwid, the Foundations of Worship, the Sharia, the Hadith, Teaching Religion Methods, the Tafsir, the History of Madhhab, the Oratory, and the Fiqh are combined with general topics like the Basics of Economics and Rights, Ecology, Pedagogy, Pedagogy and Psychology, Cultural Studies, and the Basics of Philosophy. 60% of the curriculum is made up of religious disciplines, while 40% is made up of general courses. The main goal of the establishment of madrasa education is to create a network of young people with an understanding of Islam who can: (a) communicate the discourse of synthesis between religious and secular to youth, the generation that represents the aspiration of modern, secular, and democratic Kazakhstan; (b) contextualize the interpretation and application of Islamic teachings within the rapidly changing sociopolitical environment; and (c) campaign for 'official' Islam as a cultural countermeasure to religious intolerance, violence, radicalization, and terrorism.

Higher Islamic Education in Kazakhstan

To uphold the formal relationship between the state and Islam the SAMK (*Qazaqstan Musylmandary Dini Basqarmasy* in Kazakh), on January 12, 1990, in accordance with the inaugural Congress of Muslim Scholars of Kazakhstan. The *muftiate* (another name for the SAMK) orchestrated post-Soviet Muslim consciousness and the religious worldview of Kazakh Muslims in order to assist the formal institutionalization of Islam. For religious topics, social issues, inter-community ties, and state-society relations, it offers guidance and gives fatwa (legal judgments). For instance, in response to the discourse on political Islam, SAMK has repeatedly argued for a 'moderate' understanding of Islam that is conciliatory with the nation's multi-ethnic makeup and secular goals. The SAMK has also unconditionally rejected the theory of 'political Islam' or establishing an Islamic state. The SAMK's main areas of activity are: 1) spreading Islamic knowledge in post-Soviet Kazakhstan; 2) producing religious experts capable of advancing synthesis between scriptural knowledge and 'Kazakh urf (custom)' and secular goals of the nation; 3) arranging production, publication, and distribution of Islamic literature; 4) promoting multi-faith and multi-ethnic relations with the Islamic sense of coexistence; and 5) promoting the spread of Islamic knowledge. The method by which SAMK conducts its business reveals much about Kazakhstan's routinization of Islam in both private and public life (Derbisali, 2012). The SAMK in addition with the state and society, are interested in maintaining the continuity of generations of 'Kazakh Islam', especially in the face of the onslaught of Salafi sentiments, which are increasingly covering Islamic education on a global scale. The four fields of study that make up higher education's religious foundation are History and Religious studies, religious studies, Theology and Islamic studies. According to Appendix 2 of the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on approval of the Model rules for admission to study in educational organizations that implement educational programs of higher and postgraduate education dated October 31, 2018 No. 600 (Adilet, 2023c), the applicant must also pass world history for admission to the first specialty. For the remaining three, a creative exam in the relevant field is required.

Only the undergraduate level of the specialty 'History and Religious studies' is offered at the five higher educational institutions of the pedagogical direction (South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical University, Kostanay State Pedagogical University, Kazakh National Women's

Pedagogical University, Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, and Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University). Graduates receive certification as religious studies teachers and become qualified to teach history and ‘Secularism and the Foundations of Religious Studies’ in schools.

Only some of Kazakhstan’s 146 universities offer courses in theology or religious studies. Two universities, NMU and Yassawi University, of which the first is for undergraduate and graduate programs in Nur-Mubarak University and the second is for undergraduate studies, provide training for specialists in the specialty ‘Theology’. Since 1992, the Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University (Yassawi University), where a number of specialties in Islam and Islamic culture were established (Begalinova, 2022), and in 2002 at ENU, have been training one of the first experts in religious studies. Since its inception, religious education in higher education institutions has gradually advanced to the point where it is now taught at three levels in universities throughout Kazakhstan. Religious Studies were originally established as a field at higher education institutions in Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states in the early 1990s, with a variety of courses to select from, such as History of Religions, Religious Studies, World Religions, etc. More specifically, the history of religious studies in Kazakhstan began in 1992, the year when Yassawi University introduced the major of ‘Religion and Freedom of Thought’. In 2007–2009, the sub-department was known as ‘Philosophy and Religion’, and then in 2009–2010, it was known as ‘Archaeology, Ethnology, and Religion’. The sub-department joined the history and pedagogy department in 2011, changing its name to ‘Religious Studies and Theology.’ This university chose to offer religious studies using the interplay between religion and theology after looking for a suitable model. The sub-topics department of inquiry demonstrates that Religious Studies are primarily focused on the study of Islam since theology is always about religious beliefs in four ways: (1) The current issues with Islam; (2) The Islamic roots of Kazakh cultural traditions; (3) The intellectual issues and history of Turkic Islam; and (4) The spiritual legacy of religion. Yassawi University thus provides instruction in Theology and Religious Studies (graduate and postgraduate studies) (graduate course) (Kartabayeva et al., 2015).

The sub-department of Religious and Cultural Studies at al-Farabi Kazakh National University established a Religious Studies section in 1999 as a part of the Department of Philosophy and Political Science. This section promotes the study of religion as a cultural phenomenon through a variety of courses in the curriculum and faculty research interests. Since 2003, there have been steadfast efforts to find a suitable model for Religious Studies as an academic discipline. In particular, plans for the introduction of a new major, Theology, and a PhD course in the discipline of Religious Anthropology were put into motion, signaling a change from the model where Religious Studies and Theology were divided to a model of coexistence and collaboration. Despite that the sub-faculty departments members varied in academic specialties and scientific interests, international collaboration demonstrates that Islamic orientation is a priority, with Turkey and Malaysia being the primary participants (Kartabayeva et al., 2015). In universities run by Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Education and Science, departments of Theology and Religious studies were opened. According to the Ministry of Education and Science’s standards, social science departments offer bachelor’s degrees in religious studies and theology (5B020600 and 5B021100, respectively), master’s degrees in religious studies and theology (6M020600 and 6M021100), and doctoral degrees in religious studies and theology (6D020600 and 6D021100, respectively). Universities that have made the decision to open certain specialties in their organizational structure should first prepare the requisite professionals, teachers, and facilities before submitting an application to the Ministry of Education and Science. The ministry will only provide a license if the university meets all the set conditions. Religious studies should be studied from a scientific perspective using theories and scientific arguments rather than from an atheistic or pseudo-political perspective. Religious scholars and madrasah graduates have different perspectives on religion,

so if the first approaches it from a scientific perspective, the second does so from a religious one (Abdirasilqyzy, 2023). However, there is a discipline within religious studies at the university that deals with the interpretation of texts from the Torah, the Qur'an, and other sacred texts, so religious scholars are also familiarized with religions directly from a theological point of view. This contrasts with Islamic scholars who thoroughly study Islam only from the theological side, using only hadiths and madhhabs, but without relying on fundamental sciences. In universities, it is important to train specialists who can resist the so-called Islamic radicalism and extremism, and more importantly, prevent the spread of the wrong Islamic ideology. One of the main reasons for the spread of religious extremism and terrorism is religious illiteracy or superficial knowledge about religion. Religious studies is a secular education based on the principles of science and critical thinking. It considers religions as a social phenomenon, while the content of the curriculum is devoid of atheistic or anti-religious orientation. Universities do not hold worship services and do not conduct spiritual practices. The study of religions comes from a scientific point of view. Religious Studies is currently a specialty studied at the al-Farabi KazNU Department of Religious Studies and Cultural Studies, the Gumilyov ENU Department of Religious Studies, the Nur-Mubarak University Department of Religious Studies, the Department of Political Science and Social and Philosophical Sciences of Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University, and Department of Religious Studies of Yassawi University; Buketov Karaganda State University's Department of Philosophy and Theory of Culture. Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral studies are completed in three stages of education for the first four of these (al-Farabi KazNU, Gumilyov ENU, Nur-Mubarak University, Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University), bachelor's and master's degrees for Yasawi University, and Bachelor's degree for the latter (Buketov Karaganda State University).

In 2001, the Department of Islamic Studies was first opened at NMU, and the specialty 6B02202 Islamic Studies was officially introduced into the classifier of specialties of higher and postgraduate education of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2011 and in 2014 this specialty was opened at the Department of Religious Studies at the al-Farabi KazNU. Currently, the specialty 'Islamic studies' is being implemented at three levels of education (bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral studies) at the above two universities, in respectively, four, two and three years progressively. After graduating from a madrasah college with a degree in 'Religious studies' and 'Islamic Studies', the period of study is three years in the bachelor's degree. The same two approaches that can be seen in religious studies can also be seen in Islamic studies: on the one hand, secular, it is as part of religious science, using religious tools, but focused on the Islamic religion; and on the other hand, as part of Islamic education, it is confessional education or it or 'higher system of madrasahs' (Abdirasilqyzy, 2023). Islamic studies are acquiring a post-secular and modernist status since the change in religious consciousness in the post-secular period is associated with a socio-cultural change in the life principles and situations of Muslims. In the study and teaching of religion between the two areas, there are significant differences in methods and methodological norms. If the theological approach to studying the Holy Scripture prevails in the first one, then the second one is based on the secular methodology of parsing the Qur'anic texts. Between the two approaches, one can observe not only theoretical and methodological differences, but also the conceptual and categorical base, since the researchers are representatives of different Islamic education or Islamic studies schools (Satershinov & Moldakhmet, 2015). For example, the list of subjects covered for the bachelor's degree in "Islamic Studies" at al-Farabi KazNU includes *Akida*; sacred texts are written in Arabic; simple Arabic Islamic civil relations; *Hajj* and *Zakat*; Practical issues relating to Islam in Kazakhstan; History of Islam, history of Islamic civilization, history of religions, and interreligious dialogue; the Caliphate's past; Logic and religious argumentation; The Qur'anic science; basic principles of *ahual shahsiyya*; Islamic studies

terminology used professionally; current issues with *fiqh*; *Hadith* research, *Fiqh* of worship, *Sira*, *Tajweed* and the Qur'an, *Tafsir* and the teachings of the Qur'an, Qur'anic reading (Al-Farabi KazNU, 2023a). Islamic Studies at NMN teaches the following disciplines: *Zakat* and *Hajj*; *Hadith* studies; Islamic theology; Fundamentals of *fiqh*; *Akida* and logic; *Akida Matrudia*; Introduction to Islamic Philosophy; Introduction to Islamic Philosophy; Methods of Hadith scholars; four different courses in the study of the Arabic language, etc. After completing the entire list, a graduate of al-Farabi KazNU should be able to: classify from a scientific point of view the basic concepts related to the main areas of Islamic studies; read the Qur'an in accordance with the rules of *Tajweed* and describe the main criteria for *Tafsir* verses, freely interpret the scientific and religious knowledge of the Qur'anic; determine the truth of the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, use them as sources in religious matters, give a scientific explanation for them (*sharh*); analyze and describe the basic values in religion, having mastered the texts of the classical rules in Islamic theology; analyze the positions of existing and emerging religious movements, identify socio-ethical values and socio-ethical values based on tolerance for various religious and denominational traditions; develop and disseminate appropriate responses to the ideology of illegal political and religious movements that arise in society in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan; explain the main themes of Islamic Sharia in explaining modern religious issues using the methods of *fiqh* madhhabs; apply the received theoretical knowledge for the analysis of sacred texts, their study, explanation of religious civilization; use the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the effective implementation of professional qualifications; effectively implement the results of teaching Islamic ethics, morality and devotion in solving social problems, combating non-traditional trends; use theoretical knowledge in the field of Islamic studies, and be able to apply the methods of Islamic science in practice; approve the results of the theoretical course in professional (industrial) practice on the basis of an agreement with the practice bases in accordance with the profile (Al-Farabi KazNU, 2023a).

A graduate of NMU, in turn, must know the history, methodology and foundations of the Qur'an, hadith, dogma, interpretation and Islamic law from the first steps to the present day; correctly read the Qur'an in accordance with the rules of *tajweed* and Arabic, also master both oral and written Arabic; know Islamic philosophy, the philosophy of religions, the philosophy of Sufism and the causes of the emergence of religious sects and destructive movements and their main features; Know the basics of Islam and the traditions of the Kazakh people; the ability to perform religious rites and use religious knowledge in necessary situations; be able to conduct an examination of religious texts and prove social and ethical values based on social and legal norms and various religious tolerance to situations related to religion in society; work in a group, the ability to propose new solutions, the ability to compare one's opinion with the opinion of the team, resolve conflicts and organize time effectively, take responsibility, comply with safety regulations, protect the environment; To be able to critically evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of information, to think, to be able to prove one's point of view and offer new solutions, to be able to freely express one's point of view in a public environment, to be able to establish positive psychological relationships with people in various situations; know social and ethical values based on social norms and application in professional activities; be tolerant of other cultures. Graduates of the 'Islamic studies' specialty have the qualification to be employed in: Akimats (equivalent of a mayor's office) of cities and regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Department of Culture; Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies and etc. (Al-Farabi KazNU, 2023b).

Master program '6M021500 – Islamic Studies' prepares graduates for the types of professional activities, such as study of various aspects of Islam, methodological problems of Islamic studies and methods of interpretation of Islamic sources; study of the problems of

Islamic cultural heritage, religious communication (Islamic), the relationship of Islam with modern and postmodern civilization; specialist in Islamic studies in the digital society. The list of disciplines in al-Farabi KazNU includes such disciplines as the Classical texts of *usul ad-din* (lit. the foundations of religion); Methodological problems of Islamic studies; *Hadith* methodology; General provisions in Sharia; Contemporary *Fiqh* Studies; Ways of issuing rulings in *Sharia*, etc., and at Nur-Mubarak University Methods of understanding the verses of the Qur'an; *fiqh* of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*; Principles and theories of *fiqh*; Modern problems in Islamic *Sharia*; *Sharia* goals; The financial system in Islam; The system of government in Islam, etc.

Unlike the master's course, the doctoral course of '6D021500 – Islamic Studies' prepares graduates for the following types of professional activities, such as theoretical and methodological research in the field of Islamic studies and Islamic science; study of methods, methodological and conceptual approaches of Islamic studies; research of traditional and innovative approaches to the development of modern Islamic studies. At the doctoral level at al-Farabi KazNU, such disciplines as the Basic Texts of Islam, the *Hanafi madhhab* as a path of dialogue in the religious tradition of Islam, Islam and globalization: the main trends of mutual influence, Islam and globalization: the main trends of mutual influence, Islamophobia and religious stereotypes, Origins and the history of the Islamic religion, Sufism in a historical perspective, etc., and in NMU – the system of state administration in Islam; Comparative *fiqh*; Rational thought in Islam.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan, from the moment of its independence, has been going through a stage of cultural revival. It is also a national revival, which is the revival of Kazakhstan's culture, and religion, which is characteristic of traditional Kazakh society. Therefore, both culture and religion of foreign origin are not able to take the place of traditional religion in Kazakhstani society (Jalilov, 2016). The leading role of the revival of Kazakhstani culture belongs to religious education. Religious studies and religious education are relevant for many countries of the world regardless of the level of economic and social development and the nature of the religion or religious denominations. The modernization of religious education is of interest to both mono- and poly-religious societies. Religious education in Kazakhstan in secondary education system (schools) is considered through the discipline 'Secularism and the foundations of religious studies', and religious, in particular Islamic through the specialty 'Islamic studies' in the secondary vocation education systems (*Madrasahs-colleges*), and in higher education through specialties as religious studies, Theology, History-Religious studies and Islamic studies. The latest educational program, carried out at NMU and al-Farabi KazNU universities, is considered part of religious studies and religious education, as well as Islamic education and Islamic studies. The educational program Islamic studies, which is currently being implemented at the aforementioned universities in Kazakhstan and has the same group of educational programs, has different goals, objectives and the list of disciplines which gives differing final results. Islamic education within the framework of the programs at higher educational institutions are included not only at religious universities, but also secular ones. In particular state universities train religious scholars and Islamic scholars in an academic plan, that is, not clergymen, but scholars and practical functionaries who most likely deal with the problems of religion as a social and cultural phenomenon from the standpoint of science, state building and functioning, culture and cultural heritage. As a result of following the introductory questions with a predominantly theological focus, the list of disciplines and acquired skills according to the program, it can be emphasized that Islamic studies in NMU are closer to the religious type, and al-Farabi KazNU is closer to the secular type of Islamic studies. The introduction of

scientific Islamic content into the content of Islamic education remains a necessity, especially in a secular state, given that there is not an absence of other subjects that are not related to religion. In the educational programs of universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, disciplines such as the history of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh or Russian language, philosophy, pedagogy, psychology, the fundamentals of law, etc. are taught. For example, there is the inclusion of disciplines of academic Islamic studies in Islamic educational institutions in order to develop objective knowledge about the history of Islam, its doctrinal sources, the multi-vector development of Islamic culture, etc. Another important requirement for a secular society is that teachers should not use the opportunity to convert students. Since a given educator (an instructor) may be a follower of a certain faith or religious belief, religious scholars, namely Islamic scholars, must first instruct students to analyze faith at their spiritual component while upholding the norms of impartiality and objectivity. In this sense, instructors must be knowledgeable of the main religions' texts as well as adept at non-denominational instruction. An unethical course of action cannot be tolerated and should not promote social cohesion. The policy should be founded on democratic social norms that do not conflict with Islam's ethical traditions or the core spiritual and moral teachings of other major global faiths. The link between national, ethnic customs, and the religious and spiritual qualities of all major global faiths must thus be emphasized while teaching religious and Islamic subjects. Since the security of the nation and its prosperity depend on it, the study of Islam's core spiritual concepts in educational institutions should foster understanding between representatives of many cultures and denominations and guarantee that the educational process is broadly humanized. It should be mentioned that the country continues to invite foreign academic staff (from Egypt, Turkey, and other countries) to offer lectures in universities and madrasahs-colleges. This process of experience exchange is closely monitored by Kazakhstan's SAMK and the Ministry of Education and Science, which prevents the flood of representatives with non-traditional viewpoints for Kazakhstan. Teaching by a foreign professor is accompanied by two local educators – foreign and domestic – who are assigned to the same subject, so that after each lecture of a visiting foreign professor, a seminar is held by a domestic educator, which takes into account the characteristics and history of the country, in order to help students avoid having a one-sided perception of Islamic sciences. Kazakhstan is a secular nation. The progression of the integration of Islamic education into the educational process is progressing well with excellent outcomes in terms of enhancing the level of local theologians and religious elite. In recent years, the number of students desiring to pursue Islamic education at foreign Islamic universities has significantly decreased, while demand for traditional Islamic education in the country has increased. Obtaining a higher religious, particularly Islamic, education abroad while a conceivable prospect, it is sometimes a perilous venture given that in some cases, they return with dividing ideas and became supporters of extremist pseudo-religious organizations. However, it was made possible to establish a distinct system of religious education in the Kazakh nation because of the strategy of development of religious education in Kazakhstan and the implementation of a number of measures in this respect. In addition, qualified Islamic scholars are being trained using efficient, cutting-edge methods of international experience. Exchanges of experience and knowledge are being established with foreign educational institutions whose philosophies and practices align with those of Muslims in Kazakhstan. In other words, during the past several years, Kazakhstan's religious education system has undergone significant modifications. Madrasahs were therefore renamed into madrasah-colleges, which offer secular education in addition to religious instruction and serve as training grounds for Islamic studies professionals. In addition to these nine *madrasah-colleges*, there are two more educational institutions that are directly affiliated to the SAMK, including one university and one center for advanced imam training. Thus, Islamic education, both in the *madrasah-college* and at the university, has adopted a new educational model in which secular

topics coexist with theological subjects. As a result, this model of religious education addresses various issues that have emerged in the past for Islamic educational institutions in Kazakhstan, the first of which is the issue of the legitimacy of the degrees earned, and the following employment of graduates. Mosques have also started offering religious literacy classes, participating in religious education, which is the fundamental building block that enables the bulk of the populace to obtain spiritual instruction. Additionally, training programs for Qur'an recitation have been established in a number of areas.

There is no universally approved religious education program in the global education system since each country follows its own model which is built in accordance with the country's particular path of growth in historical, political, economic, cultural, and other aspects. At present, there is no single definition of Islamic studies in the Kazakh scientific studies. An examination of the evolution of Islamic education models in Kazakhstan revealed that the country followed the model of licensing and conformity of Islamic educational institutions with state educational standards, resulting in a synthesis of Islamic and secular education. The Nur-Mubarak University is Kazakhstan's top official Islamic educational institution, academically affiliated with Egypt's al-Azhar University, which is the oldest university in the Muslim world and represents the Sunni school of Islam, with the practical part carried out through international experience in spiritual personnel training. The SAMK considers, first of all, the al-Azhar University as the most acceptable source of Islamic knowledge, since its attitudes are distinguished by tolerance for the ideological diversity of movements in Islam and the absence of a rigid imposition of one of the four madhhabs (Wilkovsky, 2014). In addition to the Nur-Mubarak University, the Islamic Institute for the Advanced Training of Imams of the Republic of Kazakhstan under the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan in Almaty, opened in 2002, are two additional illustrious Islamic educational institutes that are listed with SAMK. Regarding the latter institution – its primary goal is to teach imams by raising their level of Islamic literacy and developing their knowledge of the Qur'an, Fiqh, Tajwid, the history of Islam, the philosophy of Islam, *Tafsir*, *Hadith*, religious dogma, Islamic science, the foundations of worship, and moral principles. The mosque, which is connected to the Nur-Mubarak University, represents the relationship between theory and practice in the Islamic tradition. Religious studies have been conducted at various universities since the 1990s, although Islamic studies at the university level have just recently begun in two universities (Nur-Mubarak University and al-Farabi KazNU).

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