
INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN THE KAZAKHSTANI SECULAR SOCIETY

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(Received 17 June 2017, revised 30 November 2017)

Abstract

The article focuses on education and enlightenment policies in the context of the Islamic paradigm of secular Kazakhstan. The research relevance derives from the problem of preservation, tolerable combination and transfer of religious, cultural and national values through Islamic education. The authors attempt to illustrate methods, evolution and peculiarities of institutionalization of Islamic education using the case of modern Kazakhstan. Particular attention is paid to the key stages of Islamic education establishment, as well as social and geopolitical challenges, which have influenced the features of further developments in the Islamic educational process in the region.

Keywords: Islam, cultural, religious, values, society

1. Introduction

Kazakhstan is a predominantly Muslim country that declares itself as a secular nation. After getting independence, the country has been experiencing revitalization of traditionally Kazakh cultural patterns where Islam is assumed as an integral constituent. Unfortunately, during the 25 years of independence, the governmental policies concerning institutionalization of Islamic education as a response to the growing demands from population were chaotic, limited, restrictive and conventional being inherited from the Soviet legacy. The question of institutionalization of Islamic education is in the sphere of social, political and cultural problems, because the process is carried out as implementation of the Islamic cultural paradigm in the integrative process of society, state and individual. If institutionalization is understood only as transformation into an organizational, managed process, it becomes formally abstract, devoid of a profound fundamental meaning, which consists in the communicative practice of

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Islamic education, which includes: modes of activity, ways of cognition of the world, ways of life, cultural exchange, realization of freedom of creativity, etc. That is why institutionalization of Islamic education should not be carried out as a spontaneous process, but as a managed one, because the meaning of the word 'institute' in Latin means 'establishment', 'device' [1].

The institutionalization of Islamic education has become the subject of broad discussions in the humanitarian space. Philosophical, historical and sociological dimensions of the phenomenon of Islamic education are associated with the formulation of problems of genesis, transformation and dynamics of this process.

It is necessary to agree that European, German, British, French, Russian orientalists do not always bias the Islamic cultural heritage, applying Western methodological standards for revealing their phenomenological content. Moreover, the Islamic world presented in the works of Metz, Wüstenfeld, von Kremer, Hodgson, Corben and others, was revealed in all diversity and unity of the transcendence of morality and aesthetics.

Today the appeal to the Islamic heritage of Europe is very relevant, because different approaches are necessary for classical and non-classical humanities in order to reveal the content of the Islamic tradition in education, science, art, etc. Applied studies should also be based on the research experience of the past, in order to avoid the reproaches of bias, fragmentation, etc. in the future. It is gratifying that the studies of the problems of Islamic education are conducted from different perspectives, but with one goal, which is the disclosure of its content for the topical problems of our modern time. One of them is the article of T. Kucukcan: 'Community, Identity and Institutionalization of Islamic Education: The Case of Ikra Primary School in North London' [2]. The article, based on an ethnographic study among Turks who lived in London in 1994-1995, shows that Muslims were concerned about the religious education of their children and tried to legitimize the opening of private secondary schools, where would be taught not only compulsory secular subjects but also Islamic courses with permission to wear religious attributes and fulfil the prescribed norms of Islam (Namaz, Dua, etc.). The purpose of creating similar schools was to preserve the traditional values of religion and pass them to the next generation through Islamic education. The researcher notes that the opening of the first private Islamic school 'Ikra' with the load of Islamic courses (Koran, hadith, Arabic, etc.), which occupied 30% of the study hours and the remaining 70% were intended for the standard general education program, has only local significance. And in its essence, it was interesting only to the Muslim community.

The article argues that attempts to institutionalize Islamic education with the help of factional lines and a separate interpretation of tradition, apart from society as a whole, have little chance to succeed in the face of ever greater globalization and the transnationalization of the world. The institutionalization of Islamic education is a serious problem for Muslims in Europe. An increasing number of private and publicly funded Islamic schools are opening up to

counterbalance the cultural consequences of post-secular education, which adversely affect the younger generation, and how some Muslims think that private Muslim schools are important not only for religious education of children, but also for their cultural ‘survival.’

This study shows that institutionalization of Islamic education is in demand not only for religious education and enlightenment reasons, but also for preserving the cultural code of peoples and nations whose customs and traditions are closely intertwined with Islam. The methods of introducing Islamic subjects into the program of secondary schools, colleges and universities can be different, and primarily caused by the needs of society. Consequently, the process of institutionalization of Islamic education in societies significantly differs and depends on ‘demand.’

Existing standards of educational practices may not always have a universal content, which would fit all societies and would be a model, a paradigm. That is why, when we talk about institutionalization of Islamic education, it is necessary to take into account the spiritual and cultural mentality, the specifics and peculiarities of traditions, the national idea of the state, modern democratic processes and reforms in the educational sphere.

2. Historical stages of institutionalization of Islamic education in Kazakhstan

Historically, when we talk about religious traditions of the inhabitants of Central Asia, in particular the Kazakh ethnos, Islam of the Sunni direction is implied. Kazakhs are Muslims of Sunni worship of the Hanafi type. The Islamic religion found its place in the hearts of people at different epochs and times. Not only Arabs, Turks and Egyptians, but many other nations adopted Islam, turning it into a traditional way of life and contributed to its development and prosperity [3]. Today Islam is an inseparable part of the spiritual heritage of the Kazakh people. The revival of the spiritual and religious foundations of society, the culture of Islam, which accumulated a thousand-year experience of moral formation of the Kazakh ethnos, was an important step in the path of self-determination, the acquisition of historical memory, cultural and historical unity.

Behind each institution there stands its history of institutionalization, which determines the further features of its development. Historically, the process of institutionalization of Islamic education in Kazakhstan can be considered being divided into several stages, the last of which is the stage of formation.

1) The first of the stages and the most difficult for analysis because of the substantial volume of written works in the ancient languages of those times is separated by the timeframe from the advent of Islam to the territory of Central Asia and the formation of the Kazakh Khanate. During this period, the history of Islamic education on the territory of Central Asia is connected with such persons as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Yusuf Balasaguni, Mohammed Haydar Dulati and other scholars who contributed to the development of

religious centres in this region and is also connected with the period of reign of Emir Timur. At that time, the system of higher religious education in Central Asia was being formed in the form of such centres along the Silk Road as Balasagun, Turkestan, Otrar, Sairam, Sauran, Syganak, Ozkent, originating in the lands of Bukhara, Maverannahr, Farab, Sairam, etc.

The intellectual path of Kazakhstan from al-Farabi to our times can be understood through the educational content of philosophical, scientific, Sufi, theological treatises. The institutionalization of education is always an achievement by means of which we determine the significance of the era. For intellectuals of the Kazakh Steppe, the meaning and significance of education exceeded the utilitarian framework, in education it was seen the meaning of the eternal, enduring spiritual and moral truths necessary for a person to reveal his 'human' potential. The formation of an educated society was a condition for its development. That is why the efforts of intellectuals were aimed at forming the institution of Islamic education and the institution of teachers.

The main educational institutions were madrassas, mostly built near mosques. In medieval written sources it is mentioned that only in Balasagun there were 40 mosques and 20 madrasahs. The Islamic system of religious education was based on the tradition of the Hanafi madhhab and contributed to the creation of a layer of intellectually and spiritually developed personalities, which served to further objective development of spiritual education. The Islamic clergy played a great role in spiritual education. The following data on the education system in medieval madrassahs are given in the International Encyclopaedia 'Turkestan': "By level of education, Madrasahs are divided into four stages: 1) Ibtidiya (initial), term of training is 4 years; 2) Rusdiya, the term of study is 3 years; 3) Igdadiya (preparation for higher education), the term of study is 3 years; 4) Aliya (higher), the term of study is 3 years. The titles of 'Abyz' (sage, minister of the cult), 'molda' (mullah), 'half' (mentor in madrasah), 'mudarris' (fakiy, teacher of madrassas) were given to those, who finished the last stage of education. Taken together, the training process lasted 12-13 years." [4] The people from madrasah had extensive knowledge not only in religion, but also in Geography, Medicine, Astronomy, Mathematics and other sciences.

The formation of a large religious class from various representatives of the Muslim clergy in Kazakhstan took place until the end of the XIX century. What is interesting under the Muslim clergy of that time is that it was understood that all who possessed more or less knowledge of Muslim faith and law, like: kazi, muddaris (teachers in madrassas), damulla (teachers of mektebas), imam (students of madrassas), hadji (who made pilgrimage to Mecca) and maddah (storytellers at bazaars and other meetings of Muslim people about cases from the life of saints). It is not a secret that only a certain part of the Muslim clergy had a basic religious education. We note the significant spread among the Kazakh society of the words mullah and imam. According to etymology they come from the Arabic 'maula' - mister, lord and 'imam', which mean the standing in front, the rector of the mosque, i.e. an expert of Muslim ritual, a minister of religion, a teacher of a religious school, a

literate scholar [5]. Religious education was also associated with the phenomenon of ‘Hodja’ and ‘Ishan’, which were perceived among the population as a mentor, teacher.

2) The next stage can be called the period when the system of religious education was perceived as one of the components in the upbringing of the child, up to the acquisition of the Independence of Kazakhstan. To put it in a nutshell, a certain transformation of the religious system took place in the period of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. In the period of Tsarist Russia, the role of educational institutions in Kazan and Ufa, which had an impact on the system of religious education in present-day Kazakhstan, was particularly strengthened. At that time, the first confrontations of Jadidite and Kadimit ideas about the feasibility of Islamic education reforms appeared. And in the Soviet Union, due to the atheistic nature of the state, religious education was not perceived as an important element for satisfying the needs of society.

3) Finally, the modern stage, in which the believers having relied on previous experience and taking into account the world situation of Muslims, are forced to develop Islamic education in a secular state in search for an optimal model of interrelations between religion and the democratic values. It can be called the last at the moment, but not the final one, because the model of Islamic education, like society under influence of various factors (historical, political, social) and the tide of time are mutating, correlating, each time choosing the appropriate vector for spiritual and cultural development, which are fixed in the region. The reason for this is the fact that initially the Islamic culture and traditions of the peoples living here (were) closely intertwined and it is impossible to imagine the culture of the Kazakh people without Islam, as well as it is difficult to imagine development of Islamic education in Kazakhstan outside the framework of Kazakh traditions.

After gaining independence, one of the key stages of institutionalization of Islamic education in Kazakhstan is the emergence of the need to increase religious literacy of population. The sociological surveys of the past years showed that despite the predominance of atheistic sentiments during the Soviet times, more than 75% of Kazakhs of the independent country considered themselves as believers [6]. Another clear sign was a sharp jump in the number of parishioners in mosques, the vast majority of which had no religious education, even at the level of madrassas or Sunday schools, but only limited to generalized knowledge and mental notions of religion.

The modern Kazakhstani system of Islamic education is divided into five stages:

1. religious literacy courses (primary education);
2. centres for preparation of reciters of the Qur’an (primary vocational education);
3. madrassah (secondary vocational education);
4. Institute for Advanced Studies (retraining courses);
5. university (higher education).

The organization of educational activities is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of education. Religious education includes secular subjects in compliance with the national standard of curriculum. Textbooks, literature and the educational program are approved by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan in accordance with the principles of the Hanafi school. The term of study is 3 years. After graduation the graduates become full-fledged imams, and also have the opportunity to continue their studies from the second year at the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture ‘Nur-Mubarak’.

Integration educational project on the basis of the Al Farabi Kazakh National University and the Institute for Philosophy, Political Science and Religion Studies of the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, within which the PhD students in the field of Islamic Studies have been (prepared) since 2014, it has become one more step further in the development of academic part of Islamic education.

The new round for the development of Islamic education in the secular state was a series of crisis moments and problems with non-traditional destructive religious associations of radical and extremist persuasion. After some acts of terrorist character took place in several regions of the country, the government fully realized that a danger can be posed by foreign preachers of radicalism, backed by the support of young people who do not have constructive religious education.

Low level of religious literacy of the population of Kazakhstan, which became one of the causes for terrorist acts in the West and South of Kazakhstan, showed how the state and society could lose their position without developing Islamic education, and accelerated adoption of a decision on an integrated approach to eradicate an emerging extremist threat. It included short-term and long-term measures. The creation of information and propaganda groups aimed at working with population, which in one way or another contacted and shared views of extremist currents, can be regarded as the primary preventive measure. However, it was obvious that these are only temporary measures after the fact, similar with ‘the treatment to the already sick with the virus of radicalism’, unable to save the next generation. Therefore, in the long term it was decided to introduce general religious education in the secondary schools program, which will help to develop immunity against extremist views or, as the president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev expressed, to develop an ‘internal filter’. Naturally, an important role in the current education is played by Islamic education pursuing the goal to show the difference between traditional beliefs and pseudo-religious Islamic movements. In this respect, in 2013 the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan introduced a standard curriculum for the course ‘Secularity and the Basics of Religion Studies’ for the 9th grade of basic secondary education, which is relevant for religious education in a secular state.

3. Why the institutionalization of Islamic education is currently important

Islamic education was institutionalized in the context of a general cultural and educational process, which was the main humanitarian project of the Muslim Middle Ages. Since the 7th century, a classical version of Islamic education has been created, which is still a model of the hierarchy of theological sciences. The ontological intention for the priority of knowledge in the life of every Muslim, which is embedded in the Quranic texts, contributed to the fact that the process of Islamic education was non-formalized, moreover, the tradition of 'Teacher-Apprentice' deconstructed controllability and therefore in various Islamic educational practices, it was, rather, self-governing and self-structured. For example, it can be traced to the Sufi examples of teaching and upbringing.

Today institutionalization of Islamic education is going through an evolutionary process with necessary transition from quantitative establishments (emergence of a multitude of Islamic educational organizations like madrassas and Islamic centres) towards qualitative essence grounded on the development of optimal modern curricula of non-conventional projects and improvement of teaching methods to enlighten masses about Islam within the national paradigm of secularism, interethnic and interreligious tolerance and the construct of Kazakhstani nation. The outdated traditional state's willingness to control religious education through centralization of religious legal entities does not work in the modern realms as numerous interpretations of Islam are brought from different angles of the Islamic world. Kazan does not fulfil its function as a traditional centre for Islamic enlightenment to centralize control over religious facilities as it was in previous times. In the post-secular society, the emerging demand for religious education is fulfilled by optimal modelling of secular religious education [7].

The Islamic education of modern Kazakhstan requires reformation and rearrangements. Of course, in a secular country like Kazakhstan, the problems of education relate to the processes of integration in Science and technology, and therefore, it may seem that Islamic education is irrelevant and outdated. However, the modernity and timeliness of Islamic and, in general, religious education, is a spiritual component, which should be realized by the modern concepts of open societies and societies with sustainable development where it is crucial to have a policy to form a stable religious consciousness. By stable religious consciousness we understand the stability of the ontological religious tradition, which has been formed in the socio-cultural historical space of Kazakhstan and which is unchanged in its content. Religious traditionalism as a process, of course, undergoes reforms, but remains unchanged, retaining its original spiritual source, which determines the vitality of the Islamic tradition in the Kazakh society.

What is the significance of this issue for the society? It is very important to link it to the prospect of quality Islamic education capable to resist boundless formalism often becoming a fertile ground for religious radicalism. If we solve

the issue of institutionalization of Islamic education, a number of key problems will be resolved. Firstly, Islamic domestic education will leave the sphere of marginality, become competitive, and secondly, it will be possible to adopt a balanced concept of Islamic education, which will correspond to the modern realities of life, promote integration with Science.

Foreign experience of studying Islamic education is also aimed at clarifying the ultimate meanings of education and realizing their opportunities in the sociocultural and political modern realities. For instance, modern foreign scholars such as Yusef Waghid [8], Eric Hilgendorf [9], Mustafa Tuna [10] and others consider the phenomenon of Islamic education in the light of globalization of the educational process. The concern of scientists about the future of Islamic education is associated, in general, with Islamic problems and Islamic values, which are discussed in detail in the works ‘Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Kazakhstan’ [11], ‘Community, Identity and Institutionalization of Islamic Education’ [2], ‘Tradition and Future of Islamic Education’ [12] and others. For us, this problem is also relevant in the context of institutionalization of Islamic education.

The study of the phenomenon of institutionalization of Islamic education requires fundamental approaches and the search for new methodological guidelines, including non-linear guidelines and even the guidelines of postmodernity. Over the past decades, there were many problems around Islamic education associated with promotion of the idea of synthesis of the secular and the Islamic in modelling of educational programs of higher educational institutions, with an attempt to model non-repressive Islamic discourse in a secular society.

The relevance of modelling Islamic education has increased not only in the countries with Islamic traditions, but also in the post-secular countries historically established by Christian traditions. Because of the migration trend in the Western Europe, the integration of Islamic education into educational frames contributed to the resuscitation of ‘high’ orientalism, which was once criticized for Eurocentric content. Today due to the revision of postcolonial studies, an attempt is made to restore the ‘presumption of innocence’ of classical Orientalism.

4. Problems of institutionalization of Islamic education

Undoubtedly, the main function of the institution of Islamic education is to develop a regulatory mechanism with a certain modelling of behaviour, norms and values in accordance with religious texts of the Qur’an and the Sunna. In our case, it is viewed as a social element of control over the relationships between all members of society. In fact, we are witnessing the social upbringing of the society by the graduates of Islamic spiritual schools, who, according to the specifics of preaching, instil spirituality, moral values and norms of Islam [13], strengthening national and cultural identity.

According to V.I. Andriyash the shortcomings of institutionalization of Islamic education are rooted in its conservatism and standardization including depersonalization, de-individualization, formalization that can become an obstacle to the development of innovative processes because the society has already established the institutional forms of Islamic education and the new requirements are not always taken into account [V.I. Andriyash, *Institutionalization: phenomenon and content*, 2014, <http://web.snauka.ru/issues/2014/11/39534>, accessed 13.10.2016]. The issue of institutionalization of Islamic education and the development of Kazakhstani standards for teaching the basics of Islam in the republic is quite an urgent problem, but today it is discussed only in narrow circles of expert theologians. Most often, the society raises issues of secular education, its level and quality, as well as the transition to new methods of teaching, such as double degree or distance learning online education and other formats. In our opinion, this is primarily due to the irrelevance and low level of demand for Islamic education among young people and their parents.

At the turn of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Muslim scholars began to mark the levelling of spirituality in Islamic education, the appearance of 'inert religiosity', the non-reflective challenges on spiritually deprived of the Western post-secular society from the religious point of view, the lack of a deep semantic understanding of religion, its foundations, texts and emasculation of the Islamic worldview. The modern spiritual situation of the Kazakh Ummah is not particularly different from the past. The reasons for inert religiosity and the low level of religious literacy in the Muslim world can be divided into several aspects:

- 1) intellectual and spiritual crisis among practicing Muslims;
- 2) loss of internal intellectual dynamism, continuity of knowledge from the Teacher to the Disciple;
- 3) backwardness, stagnation of religious sciences and religious education, their irrelevance in the modern technologically advanced society;
- 4) loss by Muslim thinkers (mufakkir) of their independence from politics and political elite.

Considering the stages of institutionalization of Islamic education, we cannot ignore the translating function, which is caused by the transfer of social experience through the expansion of the social boundaries of the institution, as well as the change of generations. To this end, any institute has a mechanism, which allows new members to adapt to its values, norms and roles. Today, the process of expanding social boundaries is observed in the Kazakhstani Islamic education, taking into account the historical and value paradigms of the development of religion in Central Asia.

In the transfer of social experience and the arrival of new people in Islamic education, the key role is played by the teaching staff of all levels of spiritual education, starting from Sunday schools, madrasahs and ending with a higher educational institution. The main part of the teaching corps of Islamic educational institutions is formed of young people who have received the appropriate religious education in domestic and foreign Islamic universities.

While the main obstacle in the development of professional cadres from the graduates of the University of Nur-Mubarak is the lack of teaching experience, which is replenished during the years of teaching, the key problem in the activity of graduates of foreign Islamic universities is the adaptation of their knowledge to the Kazakhstani realities, traditions and development features and the modern situation of Islamic dogma in the republic. No doubt, in foreign educational institutions, a special attention is not paid to traditions and history of the development of Islam in the territory of Kazakhstan, which forces young teachers to go through certain levels of adaptation, to accommodate to the realities of our society and the level of its spiritual development and religious literacy. However, as the experience shows, due to the fact that young cadres are the indigenous inhabitants of the region, this process takes place (at a succinct time) and does not cause any special difficulties.

The pace of institutionalization of the domestic Islamic education is significantly influenced by the way the communicative function is carried out, how dissemination of information is produced within the institution for the purpose of managing and monitoring compliance with norms, and transferring it in interaction with other social institutions [13]. Immediate influence has the legitimization of Islamic education in public relations, the awareness of applicants and their parents about the functioning and future prospects of a social institution. Unfortunately, for the potential consumers of the educational sciences, there is a stereotype concerning Islamic education as an irrelevant and non-modern sphere of social activity. In the public consciousness, the clergymen are primarily positioned as an imam, a mullah, who simply does religious rites of the population as they are in demand and only a small part perceives Islamologists as the scientific elite of modern Theology. Of course, this fact cannot affect the pace of institutionalization of Islamic education, which today is largely stimulated by the state and the initiative of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan.

5. Conclusions

The study of the specifics of the institutionalization of the domestic Islamic education has shown that the existing problems are completely solvable and it is always possible to come to the consensus over emerging controversial issues. For instance, there is a difficulty for further forecasting the demand of graduates from religious educational institutions of various levels, from Sunday schools to universities, determining the scope of their activities, increasing the prestige of obtaining religious education. The main pursued goal is to integrate social institution of Islamic education into the structure of social relations of the Kazakh society in the process of solving educational, methodological, organizational, facilities-related and other issues concerning the organization of the educational process. We are talking about integration of Islamic values, educational content in society, about new forms of socialization of Islamic education in the secular society. This socialization presupposes both gender

equality in education and new forms of employment. It has to be said that the principles of the Islamic economy could play a big role in this process.

Briefly summarizing, it can be said that until the attainment of independence, the institution of Islamic education in Kazakhstan was virtually destroyed. Therefore, Islamic education is in the stage of institutionalization, but it has already taken into account the previous experiences, traditional foundations of the Kazakh people, the culture, lifestyles and the needs of modern realities. Today's Islamic educational system of Kazakhstan includes an educational process, which is carried out by educational institutions and has a level structure. The organization of training is conducted in accordance with the educational state standards, with the issuance of the relevant document on completion of the respective educational institution. However, the need for further development of institutionalization should be linked to formation of communicative practices of the Islamic model of education, its relevance, adaptation to and integration with the general educational process in Kazakhstan.

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