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MODERN MECHANISMS FOR UTILIZING RELIGIOUS-EDUCATIONAL HERITAGE IN THE PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION

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Abstract.
This article examines the contemporary mechanisms through which religious-educational heritage is integrated into processes of social modernization, with particular attention to the post-Soviet Central Asian context and Uzbekistan in particular. Drawing on the theory of multiple modernities, the article argues that modernization should not be understood as a uniform, secularizing trajectory that necessarily displaces religious tradition, but rather as a plural process in which inherited religious-educational resources are reinterpreted, institutionalized, and redeployed to serve new social functions. The study identifies and analyzes four interrelated groups of mechanisms — legal-institutional, educational-pedagogical, sociocultural-media, and comparative-civilizational — through which religious-educational heritage is mobilized under conditions of rapid social transformation. The legal reforms of the Republic of Uzbekistan, including the 2021 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and the 2023 Constitution, are analyzed as an institutional case illustrating how state policy can simultaneously regulate and preserve religious-educational heritage. A brief comparative excursus into the Confucian experience of East Asian modernization is offered to demonstrate that the relationship between tradition and modernization is a recurring civilizational problem rather than a uniquely Islamic or Central Asian one. The article concludes that the effective utilization of religious-educational heritage requires a balanced mechanism combining legal safeguards, curriculum reform, public discourse, and comparative civilizational dialogue.

Keywords: modernization, religious-educational heritage, multiple modernities, Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, religious education, Uzbekistan, traditional values, social transformation, Confucianism, secularization.

1. Introduction

The relationship between modernization and religious-educational heritage has long occupied a central place in social philosophy, sociology of religion, and the comparative study of civilizations. For much of the twentieth century, classical modernization theory, associated with the work of scholars such as Max Weber and later restated in the secularization paradigms of the 1950s–1970s, treated modernization and religious tradition as fundamentally opposed: as societies modernized, religion was expected to retreat from public life into a privatized, residual sphere. The historical experience of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, has not confirmed this expectation in any simple way. In numerous regions of the world — East Asia, the Islamic world, and the post-Soviet space alike — modernization has proceeded alongside, and in some cases through, the active reappropriation of religious and educational traditions inherited from the pre-modern period.

This problem acquires particular significance in Central Asia, and in Uzbekistan specifically, where the Soviet period imposed an officially atheistic model of modernization that suppressed but did not eliminate the region's deep Hanafi-Maturidi religious-educational heritage. Since independence,

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and especially over the past decade, Uzbekistan has pursued a course of accelerated social and institutional modernization while simultaneously engaging in the systematic restoration, reinterpretation, and institutional integration of its religious-educational legacy — from the revival of madrasa-based education under state supervision to the rehabilitation of the legacies of al-Bukhari, al-Termizi, and Bahauddin Naqshband as components of national and civilizational identity.

The purpose of this article is to identify and systematize the principal mechanisms through which religious-educational heritage is being mobilized in the contemporary modernization process. The article proceeds in four parts. First, it situates the problem within the theoretical framework of multiple modernities. Second, it analyzes four categories of mechanism — legal-institutional, educational-pedagogical, sociocultural-media, and comparative-civilizational. Third, it examines the case of Uzbekistan's recent legal and educational reforms as an illustration of these mechanisms in practice. Finally, it offers concluding observations on the conditions under which religious-educational heritage can be productively, rather than reactively, integrated into modernization.

2. Theoretical Framework: Modernization and Religious-Educational Heritage

The classical sociological model of modernization, rooted in the work of Weber and elaborated by mid-century functionalist sociology, rested on the assumption of a single, convergent path of development along which all societies were expected to travel, with rationalization and secularization as its inevitable companions. This linear model has been substantially revised by the theory of multiple modernities, most influentially formulated by S.N. Eisenstadt, who argued that modernity is best understood not as a single civilizational program radiating from the West, but as a set of culturally specific programs in which different societies selectively appropriate, reinterpret, and recombine elements of the modern with their own civilizational and religious traditions [1; 9].

A parallel reassessment occurred within the sociology of religion itself. Peter Berger, one of the principal architects of the original secularization thesis, subsequently acknowledged that the empirical record of global religious vitality required a substantial revision of the thesis, concluding that the world is in many respects as furiously religious as it ever was, and that secularization is better understood as a regionally variable phenomenon than as a universal law of modernization [10]. Jürgen Habermas, approaching the problem from the standpoint of political philosophy, has likewise argued that so-called post-secular societies must develop institutional mechanisms allowing religious communities to translate their moral and educational resources into the shared idiom of public reason, rather than excluding them from public life altogether [2].

Within Islamic studies specifically, Adeeb Khalid's analysis of religion and politics in post-Soviet Central Asia demonstrates that the region's religious revival after 1991 cannot be reduced either to a simple return of pre-Soviet tradition or to a wholly modern invention; rather, it constitutes a complex negotiation between inherited religious-educational forms, Soviet-era institutional legacies, and new global Islamic currents, mediated by state policy [3]. This negotiation is precisely the terrain on which the mechanisms examined in the present article operate: religious-educational heritage is neither passively preserved nor simply discarded under modernization, but is actively selected, reformatted, and redeployed through identifiable institutional channels.

For the purposes of this study, religious-educational heritage is understood broadly as the accumulated corpus of doctrinal, ethical, pedagogical, and institutional resources transmitted within a religious tradition — including foundational texts, the methodologies of classical madrasa instruction, the ethical doctrines of canonical schools such as the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, and the accumulated biographical and hagiographical heritage associated with regional scholars and Sufi masters. Modernization, correspondingly, is understood not as secularization per se but as the structural transformation of social, economic, legal, and educational institutions toward greater rationalization,

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professionalization, and integration into global systems of knowledge and exchange — a process that, as the multiple-modernities literature demonstrates, can proceed through rather than against religious-educational heritage.

3. Mechanisms of Utilizing Religious-Educational Heritage in Modernization

On the basis of the theoretical considerations outlined above, four interrelated groups of mechanism can be identified through which religious-educational heritage is mobilized under conditions of modernization: legal-institutional, educational-pedagogical, sociocultural-media, and comparative-civilizational mechanisms. These groups are analytically distinct but operate in practice as a single, mutually reinforcing system.

3.1. Legal-Institutional Mechanisms

The first and most fundamental mechanism is legal-institutional: the codification, through constitutional and statutory law, of the boundaries and guarantees within which religious-educational heritage may be preserved, studied, and transmitted. Legal-institutional mechanisms perform two simultaneous functions: they protect freedom of conscience and the right of citizens to religious education, while also establishing the regulatory framework — licensing of religious educational institutions, certification of clergy, and oversight of curricula — that allows the state to manage the social risks associated with religious revival, including extremism and unregulated parallel education. In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, this mechanism has operated through successive iterations of religion law and, most recently, through constitutional reform, discussed in greater detail in Section 4 below.

3.2. Educational-Pedagogical Mechanisms

The second mechanism operates at the level of curriculum and pedagogy: the deliberate incorporation of religious-educational heritage into the formal structures of secular state education, including general secondary schools, universities, and specialized institutes of Islamic studies. This mechanism is distinct from the simple revival of traditional madrasa instruction; rather, it involves the translation of classical religious-educational content — the ethical doctrines of the Hanafi-Maturidi school, the biographies of regional scholars such as al-Bukhari and al-Termizi, and the methodological heritage of comparative religious studies (dinshunoslik) — into modern academic disciplines taught according to contemporary pedagogical standards, with standardized syllabi, examinations, and degree structures. The establishment and development of specialized academies of Islamic studies, alongside the integration of comparative religious studies as a discipline within technical and humanities-oriented higher education institutes, exemplifies this mechanism: religious-educational heritage is thereby rendered compatible with the institutional logic of modern higher education — credit hours, peer-reviewed publication, and degree certification — without being reduced to purely confessional instruction.

3.3. Sociocultural and Media Mechanisms

The third mechanism operates through public discourse and media: the circulation of religious-educational heritage through television, print and digital publishing, museums, commemorative events, and state-sponsored anniversaries of major scholarly and spiritual figures. Unlike the educational-pedagogical mechanism, which operates within formal institutions, the sociocultural-media mechanism shapes the broader public perception of religious-educational heritage as a component of national identity and civilizational continuity, rather than as a matter of private confessional belief alone. The designation of national observances connected to the anniversaries of major religious and intellectual figures, together with state support for restoration of historical madrasas and shrines as cultural-heritage sites rather than purely devotional spaces, illustrates how this mechanism reframes religious-educational heritage as shared cultural capital accessible to believers and non-believers alike.

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3.4. Comparative-Civilizational Mechanisms

The fourth mechanism is comparative-civilizational: the deliberate placement of one's own religious-educational heritage in dialogue with the analogous heritage of other civilizations undergoing or having undergone modernization, in order to draw lessons regarding the compatibility of tradition and modernity. The East Asian Confucian experience offers an instructive comparative case. Confucianism, like the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, constitutes simultaneously a religious-ethical system and an educational methodology centered on classical textual transmission and moral cultivation. Twentieth-century modernization theorists frequently treated Confucian heritage as an obstacle to economic and social modernization, given its association with hierarchical social relations and resistance to innovation. Tu Weiming's analysis of the so-called Singapore challenge, however, demonstrated that Confucian ethical heritage — particularly its emphasis on education, self-cultivation, and social responsibility — could be selectively reinterpreted as a positive resource for East Asian industrial modernization rather than as an obstacle to it [4]. The comparative-civilizational mechanism thus allows researchers and policymakers in Central Asia to draw on the East Asian experience as a heuristic for evaluating how Islamic religious-educational heritage might be analogously reinterpreted as a resource for, rather than an impediment to, modernization — a comparative perspective of direct relevance to the broader research problem of the relationship between traditional values and social transformation in Central Asia.

It should be emphasized that these four mechanisms do not operate independently of one another. Legal-institutional guarantees create the space within which educational-pedagogical integration becomes possible; pedagogical integration in turn produces the scholarly cadre capable of participating in sociocultural and media discourse; and comparative-civilizational reflection provides the theoretical vocabulary that legitimizes the entire process before both domestic and international audiences, including international bodies concerned with the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage [8].

4. Case Study: Recent Legal and Educational Reform in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's recent legal reforms provide a clear illustration of the legal-institutional mechanism described above operating in conjunction with the educational-pedagogical and sociocultural mechanisms. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” adopted in its renewed redaction on 5 October 2021, replaced the previous 1998 law and introduced a more liberalized, though still carefully regulated, framework for religious education and the activity of religious organizations, including provisions concerning the registration of religious educational institutions and the conditions under which religious instruction may be conducted [6]. The adoption of the 2023 Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, approved by national referendum and entered into force in May 2023, further consolidated this framework by reaffirming, within the constitutional text itself, both the secular character of the state and the guarantee of freedom of conscience and religious belief for all citizens [5]. Taken together, these two legal instruments exemplify the dual function of the legal-institutional mechanism identified in Section 3.1: they simultaneously safeguard religious-educational heritage as a constitutionally protected sphere of individual conscience and establish the regulatory architecture — separation of religion from the state apparatus, licensing of religious educational establishments, and prohibition of forced religious instruction of minors outside approved frameworks — that allows the state to manage the social and security risks historically associated with unregulated religious education in the region.

At the level of higher education, the establishment and expansion of specialized academies of Islamic civilization and Islamic studies, together with the introduction or strengthening of comparative religious studies (dinshunoslik) as an academic discipline within technical and humanitarian institutes

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such as Andijan State Technical Institute, illustrates the educational-pedagogical mechanism in practice. Within such programs, the Hanafi-Maturidi heritage is studied not as confessional instruction directed toward religious practice, but as an object of comparative academic analysis alongside other world religious traditions, situated within a curriculum that also addresses constitutional law, the sociology of religion, and the history of religious-state relations — thereby fulfilling the broader social function of producing graduates capable of analyzing religious phenomena with academic rigor rather than confessional partisanship.

Finally, state-supported commemorations of the anniversaries of major religious-intellectual figures and the restoration of historical religious-educational sites as components of the national cultural-heritage infrastructure exemplify the sociocultural-media mechanism, reframing religious-educational heritage as an element of shared national identity accessible across the population, irrespective of individual religiosity.

5. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article suggests that the relationship between modernization and religious-educational heritage in the contemporary Central Asian context, and in Uzbekistan in particular, is best understood neither as a relation of simple opposition nor as an uncritical revival of pre-modern forms, but as a structured process of selective reappropriation operating through identifiable institutional mechanisms. Four such mechanisms have been distinguished: legal-institutional mechanisms, which establish the constitutional and statutory framework within which religious-educational heritage may be safeguarded and regulated; educational-pedagogical mechanisms, which translate that heritage into the disciplinary structures of modern higher education; sociocultural-media mechanisms, which circulate it as shared cultural capital; and comparative-civilizational mechanisms, which situate it within a broader, cross-civilizational dialogue exemplified by the East Asian Confucian experience of modernization.

The Uzbek case demonstrates that these mechanisms function most effectively when they operate in coordination rather than isolation: legal reform alone, without corresponding educational and discursive mechanisms, risks producing merely formal guarantees without substantive cultural integration; conversely, educational or media initiatives without a stable legal-institutional foundation risk political and social vulnerability. For the broader research problem of the relationship between traditional values and social transformation, the principal implication of this analysis is that religious-educational heritage should be approached by policymakers and educators not as a residual category to be managed or tolerated, but as an active social resource whose productive integration into modernization requires deliberate, coordinated institutional design across the legal, educational, and cultural domains. Further research is needed to assess, through empirical and comparative methods, the relative weight of each mechanism in shaping public attitudes toward the compatibility of tradition and modernization in the Central Asian context.

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