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## The spread and principles of the Ismatullah movement in modern Kazakhstan

Zhurgenbayeva Zhanna 

Minzu University of China, Pekin, Chinese People's Republic

(E-mail: [jannachka\\_87@mail.ru](mailto:jannachka_87@mail.ru))

**Abstract:** At present, one of the most pressing problems in religious studies is the emergence of religious cults, the spread of their teachings and the attraction of people to their ranks. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ismatullah movement has been actively spreading its religious teachings in order to gather its followers.

In the article, the concepts of dhikr and spirit discussed in the main works of the Ismatullah religious movement are explained by means of a hermeneutic and comparative analysis with the concepts of dhikr and spirit contained in the Holy Qur'an and the work of K.A. Yassawi. Using the theological, comparative-historical method, the author describes the principles, areas of dissemination and activities of the Ismatullah school of thought.

**Key words:** Sufism; dhikr; prayer; Ismatullah; Holy Quran; religion.

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## **Introduction**

After the Republic of Kazakhstan gained its independence, there was a need to review the history of the spiritual development of the Kazakh people. The importance of spiritual education for the Kazakh people who gained independence, including the spiritual manifestation of Islam that provides this education, explaining how necessary Sufism is for the people, thoroughly studying the most important values of education and promoting each of them among the people is one of the important topics of today's agenda. If we take a look at history, the signs of Sufism knowledge have been observed since the first era of human society and have left their own traces in the history of a number of civilisations. The period in which the internal and external characteristics of this phenomenon were defined and a unique systematic pattern emerged is the VIII-IX centuries. Before Sufism was fully developed in theoretical terms, its content was reflected in oral and written literary works. In Burt, this process was improved as much as possible, and the characteristic laws of Sufi literature emerged. The literature created by the Sufis, who followed the irrational way of perception and understanding of existence, had its own ideological direction, a unique artistic world, an established pictorial system and excellent aesthetic values. Arab-Persian and Turkish Sufism were unique poetic schools in the history of literature. And the leader of Turkish Sufi poetry was our scholar Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, who was known as the "Pear of Turkestan", "Sultan of Saints".

Islam and its holy book, the Sufis, who monitored and disciplined the interpretation of the Qur'an from a mystical point of view and how people live in society according to it, attached great importance to the activity of tabligh (deliverer, explainer). Sufis are mainly spreaders of Islam. Those who contributed to the spread and Islam and its holy book, the Sufis, who supervised and disciplined the interpretation of the Qur'an from a mystical point of view and the way people in society lived according to it, placed great emphasis on the activity of the tabligh (deliverer, explainer). Sufis are above all disseminators of Islam. Those who have contributed to the spread and establishment of Islam in many regions. One of the reasons for this is that the Sufi path has many benefits for the spiritual education of the individual and society. Sufism is the highest level of worshipping God, it forces you not to worry about anything around you, not to look at your possessions, not to look at what will happen tomorrow, what will my day be like, not even to look at children, family and friends. Sufis serve only to reach the truth, only to know the truth by asking for it with their whole soul and their whole being. For them, the light of five days says nothing about the world; it disappears in the blink of an eye. The only power that does not change, the truth is Allah. In addition to this foundation, the Sufi path also had the goal of seeing. Sufis are considered arifs (saints) who come into the world as temporary guests and are in a very high spiritual state. In the Sufi worldview of shari'ah, tariqa, enlightenment and truth, Prophet Muhammad said, "Shari'ah is my word, my actions are tariqa and truth is my state." Therefore, it is not wrong to say that these paths are the path to truth in Sufism. The path of Sufism has its own history, which began with the development of Islam and has continued from that time until today. Sufism first appeared in the Arabian Peninsula and soon spread to Iran, Khorasan, the Indian Peninsula, Central Asia and other regions. Sufism from K.A.Yassawi, Naqshbandi from Bahauddin Naqshbandi, and other Sufi movements was spread.

In the past, religion spread spontaneously in the Kazakh territories. That is, there was no religion that was subordinate to a center. Our religious scholars studied in Iran, Baghdad, Egypt, some in Turkey, Ufa, Kazan and Tashkent and spread religious knowledge on their own. This shows that there is no uniformity in the teaching of religion.

At present, many religious movements are spreading in the country. One of them is the "Ismatullahist religious movement", which was founded on the basis of the cult of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, but registered as a public association (Faith. Education. Life). This religious movement has started to spread its religious teachings in the country since 2000. The number of followers of the Ismatullah cult grew from year to year. Many young people, including poets and writers, joined this religious doctrine. Therefore, today it is necessary to scientifically investigate and analyse the activities of the religious movement of the "Ismatullahists" and draw conclusions.

### **The main part**

#### **Sufi doctrine**

Sufism (Arabic: tasawuf-tazalik) is a spiritual value derived from the source of Islam, a teaching that reflects the worldview, moral-ethical and esoteric aspects of the Islamic religion and enables the development of human self-awareness and spiritual morality. The definition of Sufism was shown in the works of the famous Sufis Sari al-Saqati (865) "Sufism is artistic morality (morals)", Abu Hafs al-Naisaburi (883) "Sufism is completely moral (ethics)", Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri (907) "Abandoning the passions and demands of Sufism". Some Western scholars try to argue that Sufism was introduced into Islam from Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism, especially Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. The appearance of Sufism on the stage of history coincides with the beginning of the earliest dialectical movement in Islamic philosophy in general. At the beginning of this movement, we can mention Abu ad Darda, Abu Zar al Ghifari and other companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the history of Islamic philosophy, the period from companions like Abu Zar Ghifari to Hasan al-Basir (728) is called the era of the first zuhd, (piety) of Sufism. In this era, Sufism was a doctrine that propagated a rational and artistic morality rather than the study of philosophical and metaphysical questions. The second period of Sufism covers the time from Hasan al-Basir to Imam Ghazali (1055-1111) (Muhammed, 2005).

The Sufi philosophy, which began with Hasan al-Basri, was gradually moulded and divided into two main branches: 1. the Malamatiyya 2. the Probatiyya school. The doctrine of Malamatiyya (the founder of Bayazid Bistami (874)) was formed and developed on the basis of the traditional Turkic worldview. Malamatiyya was a Sufi worldview based on the realisation and mastery of the deep secrets of human psychology. Since service to the Creator in Malamatiyya is a service to human beings, its main principle was based on love for human beings. Malamatiyya Sufism is primarily about controlling one's sensuality and recognising the Creator through love. The second is Junayd al-Baghdadi (909), the founder of the Isbatiya school. Isbat is the presence of mind of a person during worship, the frequent repetition of dhikr (Taevsky, 2007)

Physiological and psychological control processes among the Sufis are continuous practices such as little sleep, little food, fasting, cutting off contact with people for a certain period of time, keeping all sensory organs away from external contact and controlling the entire faculty

of imagination and thought by freeing oneself from phenomena and fantasies in the inner world and focusing only on the Creator. The dhikr in Sufism is an aid in carrying out these activities. In this way, he detaches himself from the worldly passions and accepts the truths directly and becomes a pious person. A Sufi feels harmony with the universe in spiritual peace, perfection, attains the mystery and essence of being a servant of the Creator. This is the state of spiritual perfection of a human being. Sufism is the inner meaning and content of the Islamic religion, its main goal is human, noble and spiritual perfection (Idris, 1994).

In Sufism, the heart is the seat of faith, the boundlessness of love for the great Creator. It is generally known that Sufism can be found in the poetry of Abai and Shakarim. For example: poet Dulat, an outstanding representative of Zhyrau poetry: "My sin is devastating, my repentance is small, what have I found in life?" The world is an offal, I am a dog, what have I cared for?" There are verses that say that the one who kneels before the Lord, realizes his mistake and repents, "a fervent heart, with a sincere heart", as Abai says, supplicates and worships the Lord. This is why it is not easy to follow the Sufi path. This is probably why the poet Kerderi Abubakir thought: "Sufism is a difficult path, if you follow it, it is a good path, if you seek Sufism, be a scholar who has studied a lot." Here the poet explicitly warns that one must become a scholar who has mastered Islamic science, the hadiths of the Qur'an and the basics of Sharia in order to enter the path of the Sufis. "The "Perfect Man", as the great poet Abai said, "is a noble man who comes as close as possible to his qualities. He is a person who has been purified and purged of his immoral behaviour, whose inner life has been enlightened and who has attained spiritual qualities. Dana Abay Kemel mentions syddyk, karam, gaqil as the qualities of Adam (Kynanbayev, 1977). Here authenticity is confused with justice, karam - intercession and gakyly - science. One of the most important principles of Sufism is dhikr. In Sufism, dhikr is the remembrance of Allah.

There are public and secret kinds of dhikr and inter-dhikr. It is known that Sufism had a great influence on the introduction of Islam to the Kazakh steppe. Thus, thanks to pious souls who dedicated their whole lives to the religion, Islam has firmly established itself in the everyday life of the Kazakh population. As proof of this, it can be said that the poetry of the priests and priestesses, which goes back to the poems of Khoja Ahmad Yassawi, and our songs since Korkyt have a touch of Sufism. Sufism, which had a great influence on the establishment of the Islamic religion in the Kazakh steppe, had a great influence on the formation of the spiritual values of traditional Kazakh society and on the development of culture and civilisation. There are many theories about the origin of the term Sufism. At first, Muslims called "pious people who wore woollen caps "Sufi". One of the first Sufis, Hasan al-Basri, for example, wore a camel hair cap. Over time, Sufism, which does not give in to worldly desires and appetites, restrains the ego, gives up the pleasures of the worldly world, observes the forbidden and suspicious things, even the mubah (not forbidden and not commanded actions and halal (righteous) things permitted in the religion and leads a pious life, became such a concept).

Dhikr is the soul companion of the Sufis. In ancient times, Zikr was erected in the cemeteries of many saints, in holy places. This is because prayer houses, mosques and madrasas were built in such places for the poor and dervishes who travelled through the land. Their inhabitants lived off the alms of the people. Such schools at the tombs of each saint had their own characteristics. In this way, they had the opportunity to choose a teacher according to their needs. In the Sufi

schools, which are widespread in the southern regions of Kazakhstan, the dhikr, which consists of words, is combined with movements, accompanied by music and even a sacred instrument such as the kobyz.

Such positions are reflected in the states of the Central Asian region and in the southern regions of Kazakhstan.

Sufi cults are widespread in Central Asia: Kubraviyya, Yasaviyya, Mawlawiyya, Naqshbandiyya.

Yassawiyya - founded by Khoja Ahmad Yassawi (562/1166). Based on this Sufi school, he was guided by the teachings of Yisuf al Hamadani. K.A. Yassawi is the leader of the disseminators of Sufi teachings in the Turkic steppes. The teachings of K.A. Yassawi encompassed many religious, social and cultural aspects. These teachings contributed to the spread of Islam in the Turkic steppes. The followers and propagators of this doctrine were homeless wanderers. The Way of Yassawi is the secret path to the realisation of truth. Nomadic monks spread the Yassawi order throughout Turkestan, among the Kyrgyz, in Khorasan, in the western part of Azerbaijan and in Asia Minor. In this order, special attention was paid to ascetic seclusion (Yassawi,1995).

### **The Ismatullah Movement: History and religious teachings**

The Ismatullah movement has been active in the Republic of Kazakhstan since 1990. This movement is also known as "Iassauis" or "Zikirs". Its spiritual teacher is Ismatullah Maksum, an ethnic Kazakh who was born in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In 1997, he came to the Karasu Mosque near Almaty and began training students. Ismatullah is called "Pir" and "Lord" by his students. The students undergo a special 40-day training programme. The study regulations in the madrasa are strict, the students are preferably isolated, i.e. they are forbidden to speak to outsiders, leave the madrasa, read daily newspapers and books in other areas without the permission of the pir. They perform dhikr in a group under the guidance of a pir (teacher). The dhikr of the reciters is public dhikr, and this public dhikr is divided into two parts: "alkadhikr" and "ara dhikr". The psycho-technique and method of dhikr, which lasts two to three hours, is based on saying the words "Alla Hu", "AllaHai" aloud, turning the head to the right and left and moving in a certain rhythm. Modern Sufi meditation is hypnosis. Hypnosis puts a person into a trance state. A person who goes into a trance several times will be in a state where he needs dhikr. Therefore, only a teacher can bring a student out of this state. A disciple in a trance state obeys every command of the teacher. This is the dangerous part of psycho-technique and the method of doing "zikr". The meaning of dhikr in the Qur'an is remembrance, i.e. remembrance of God through prayer, fasting, worship and prayer. In the Qur'an - Karim: "Indeed, this Qur'an is nothing but an exhortation in the world" (Altay,2001) (Surah Qalam, verse 52). "Allah has sent down a dhikr for you (the Qur'an)" (Divorce Surah 10 - verse). In their propaganda, the dhikrshilis use popular literature, legends and extracts from the works of the honourable people of our nation, Abay, Shakarim, and use them for their purposes. They attract educated, qualified young people, public figures and scholars with their ideas.

The Ismatullahists carried out their ideological work in the public association "Glaube. Education. It is run on the basis of the public association "Umir", which was registered with the Ministry of Justice in May 2002. Several ideological and educational discussion clubs promoting

the religious positions of the Ismatullahs have been opened and are actively working. For example: "Abjat" spiritual and worldview club works at the Kazakh National Polytechnic University named after Kanysh Satbaev in Almaty. About 700 young people take part in the meeting evenings organised by the club (the main topics are national consciousness, moral education, regional studies, meetings with famous intellectuals of our country and the science of religious studies, etc.). The number of Ismatullahs has increased in Almaty, Semey and Aktau. According to the findings of the researcher of the Ismatullah movement, journalist O. Alimbekov, the number of young people in the said movement has increased in Almaty, Semipalatinsk, and Turkestan regions (Alimbekov, 2005).

Ismatullahists luring students of higher educational institutions into their ranks could have a negative impact on the religious unity and solidarity of our nation in the future. Ismatullah teachers held a press conference to promote Ismatullah Maksum's books "Proof of Public Zikr" and "The Alphabet of Quranic Secrets". The author of the book did not come to this press conference and his disciples replied to the journalists' question that "a religious person does not like praise". A series of articles about Ismatullahists were published in the mass media. The official decision of the Religious Council of Muslims of Kazakhstan that the attitude of the reciters contradicts the principles of Islam has been announced. According to this decision, public dhikr is defined as alien to Islam. Religious experts from Kazakhstan, who examined the book "The Alphabet of the Secrets of the Quran" by Ismatullah Maksum, came to the conclusion that the followers of the Ismatullah movement in the said book consider the method of dhikr to be superior to praying, that they can do without praying, that they believe that it is better to focus only on dhikr, and that the said rules contradict the rules of orthodox Islam. In 1999, the law enforcement authorities closed the madrasa near the Karasu Mosque and the followers of the religious teachings were expelled.

### **Distribution areas of the Ismatullah cult**

The Ismatullahists in Kazakhstan are widespread in the regions of Almaty, Semey, Aktau, Turkestan and Mangistau. Sufism in the modern Ismatullah teachings should be distinguished from classical Sufism. It is difficult to find out exactly which religious organisations support the Ismatullah movement financially. There may be political and religious interests here. In our opinion, some political organisations could use the "Ismatullahs" as a tool to achieve their goals. It is necessary to constantly monitor the activities of the Ismatullahists in order to recruit young students into their ranks.

Ex President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev pointed out that "religious fanaticism does not arise from the abundance of beliefs, but from the lack of true religious culture" (Nazarbayev, 1999). According to Sufism, human feelings need spiritual education, it is necessary to train the feelings and desires.

There is no doubt that Sufism calls for piety and self-cultivation, because all these actions are present in Islam. Islam recommends these things and calls to action. However, some Sufis have many non-Islamic practices, such as the belief in khulul and ittihat - the coming of Allah and union with man - and the assertion that the way of tariqa is to torment the body. Such

practices have travelled from Hinduism, Greek philosophy and Christianity into Sufism. Ismatulla Maksum is a spiritual teacher and priest of the Kazakh Sufis. He is called "Master" and every member of the association is subordinate to him. Some sources of information about Ismatullah Maksum indicate that he was a religious ideologue of the military garrison led by Ahmad Shah Masud during the Soviet-Afghan war, but there is not much information about him personally. According to the information in his book "The Alphabet of the Secrets of the Quran" published in Kazakhstan, his father Abdilali Maksum was a disciple of Akmyrza Damolla Ahun, who started the national liberation uprising in the Syr region in the 1930s. There are reports that Akmyrza Akhun brought his followers to Afghanistan after he was shot. At the time of Ismatullah Maksum's great-grandfather, there was a MaimakIshan who returned to Mecca twice and whose name is still respected in Kazaly in the Karmakshi region. Activities: "The useless residues of the products used by the inhabitants of paradise are burnt and poured into hell, and their pure vapours return to heaven" and also that the useless residues of the products used in heaven are burnt and then poured into hell, and then their pure vapours return to heaven from hell.

Where did Ismatullah Maksum get this data from? There is no such evidence in any verse of the Qur'an or in the hadiths of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Firstly, there will be no useless residue in "Paradise", which cannot be measured by the laws of this world and whose wonders the mind cannot see, hear or imagine. Secondly, the righteous servants who are blessed with God's incomparable blessings in heaven have no need for the pure vapour of hell. Ismatullah Maksum, who claims to be one of the successors of the teachings of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, propagates the teachings of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi with proofs that do not exist in the Sufi teachings. Even our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who constantly received revelations (messages) from God, not to mention the scientists, did not give complete information about the spirit. For the Qur'an itself says about the spirit: "They ask you about the spirit, tell them: The spirit is by Allah's command, you have received little information about the spirit." And Ismatullah says: "The spirit of human generations is the key to the two worlds, or the one who reaches the goal in both worlds is called a 'rocket'." The human spirit, which is full of marvellous and countless mysteries, has never been associated with a rocket of iron in the Islamic religion (Ismatulla,2004).

The lowest speed of the human spirit was set at 300,000 km/s (Ismatull Maksum, 2006), since the spirit is a special marvellous being whose speed corresponds to the lowest level of the speed of light (300,000 km/s). Little is known about the essence and nature of the mind, but the speed of the human mind has never been clearly defined. At the same time, he made another mistake on the 37th page of the book when he said that the body carries the spirit, not the body, but the body carries the spirit. In Islam, however, the body is not the soul, but the soul carries the body. This is proved by the fact that after the soul has left the body, the body remains motionless on earth. Galym Bokash is the person who induced Ismatulla Maksum to come to Kazakhstan (Alimbekov, 2005). G. Bokash - held official positions in state institutions: he headed the Directorate of Information and Expert Programmes of the national TV channel "Kazakhstan", hosted the weekly programme "Mezgil". In 1997, G. Bokash graduated from the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the Kazakh National University and went to Peshewar University in Pakistan for an internship. Then he met Ismatullah Maksum. Later, Ismatullah invites the prince to Kazakhstan. Ismatullah Maksum comes to the Karasu Mosque in Almaty, opens a "madrassa"

and begins to train students. The apprentices undergo a special 40-day training programme. It is called "kyryktyk (40-day) ", "shilkhana".

The activities of the Ismatullah movement cause an unpleasant panic in society. The son of B. Fazylova, a resident of Torgai, who has sent his son to the madrasa of the Ismatullahs and studies there, comes to the madrasa to enquire about the condition of Almas, but she cannot find her son for several days. Finally, the help of the law enforcement authorities is enlisted. In order to save Ismatullah's from Maksim's upbringing, the Internal Affairs Department of the Zhetisu District of Almaty City organises a special operation. A police unit entered the madrasa and broke up the meeting. Two undocumented Afghan citizens were arrested, except Ismatullah Maksim. Ismatullah Maksim says he is spreading the religion and preaching the faith in the country and showing some resistance. And Almas told police officers and reporters that madrasa staff had beaten him, bent his hands and torn out his tongue. These stories are stored and shown in the archives of NTK and 31 television stations. The public prosecutor's office has initiated criminal proceedings and suspended the activities of the public fund "Tole bi" disguised as "Ismatullahs" (Zikrists). This put an end to Ismatullah Maksim's missionary activities in Kazakhstan. However, the "Ismatullah" movement, which had already taken root and built up a network, did not disappear forever. Ismatullah's work was continued by Narymbai Razbek kazhi. His students who had remained in the country held underground meetings in student dormitories, and some of them began to write articles about the master. Bazarbek Atygay's articles "We did not know the value of a holy man" were published in the newspapers "Kazakh Literature" and "Zhas Alash". His murids (disciples) Sanzhar Kerimbay and Eldos Emil visited the southern and western regions and conducted campaigns (Alimbekov.O.,2011). The address of the Ismatullahs in Almaty is house 240, Shkolny - 2 district. Now this place is the headquarters of the Dhikr Ismatullahists and a "madrasa" where they conduct a 40-day course. Meetings are held there to approve plans for future activities, a gathering they call a "small meeting". The leaders of the Ismatullah movement spend their working hours at the above address.

To summarize, it can be said that the Ismatullah movement is still active in Kazakh society today. The founder of the movement is Ismatullah Maksim. Most of the followers of this movement are young people, so it is spreading rapidly. Although it is forbidden by law to spread the activities of this religious cult, there are religious organizations that change the name of the religious cult and spread their activities in secret. According to the results of expert studies, the number of young people joining the Ismatullah movement is increasing, the majority of young people work in the civil service, and investigating the activities of this religious movement is one of the most urgent issues.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, it can be said that mankind, regardless of the century in which it lived, did not live without religious knowledge. From the years of Kazakhstan's independence to the present day, around 5,000 religious organizations have been active in the country.

One of them, the Ismatullah cult, spread its religious teachings with the help of the oral folk literature of the Kazakh people, the works of K. A. Yassawi, A. Kunanbayev, Sh. Kudaiberdiuly.



The rules of the Islamic religion correspond to the origin of the life and worldview of the Kazakh people. The followers of the Ismatullah cult are of the opinion that it is permissible to disregard the basic rules prescribed in the Islamic religion. Since 70% of our population follow Islam, such views are controversial. Therefore, I believe that it is necessary to conduct religious studies on the doctrinal material and teachings of every religious movement that carries out its activities in the country. The activities of religious movements that threaten the security and stability of our people and our worldview should be restricted by law.

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**Жүргенбаева Жанна Айдарқұлқызы  
Орталық Ұлттар Университеті, Пекин, ҚХР**

### **Қазіргі Қазақстандағы Исмадулла ағымының таралуы және ұстанымдары**

**Аңдатпа.** Қазіргі таңда Дінтану ғылымында діни ағымдардың шығуы, ілімдерін қоладануы, өз қатарларына адамдарды тартуы өзекті мәселердің бірі болып келеді. Қазақстан Республикасында Исмадулла ағымы өз қатарына ілімгерлерін жинау үшін діни ілімдерін белсенді таратып келді.

Мақалада Исмадулла діни ағымының негізгі еңбектерінде талқыланған зікір, рух ұғымдарына Құран Кәрімде және Қ.А.Яссауидің еңбегінде жазылған зікір, рух ұғымдарымен герменевтикалық, салыстыру талдау арқылы түсініктеме берілген. Дінтанулық, салыстырмалы-тарихи әдісті қолдана отырып арқылы автор Исмадулла ағымының діни ілімінде ұстанатын қағидаттары, таралу аймақтары мен қызметтерін баяндап көрсетеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** сопылық; зікір; намаз; Исмадулла; Құран Кәрім; дін.

**Жургенбаева Жанна Айдаркуловна**

Центральный Университет Народностей, Пекин, КНР

### Распространение и принципы течения Исмадуллы в современном Казахстане

**Аннотация:** В настоящее время в религиоведении одной из актуальных проблем является выход религиозных течений, учений, привлечение людей в свои ряды. В Республике Казахстан поток Исмадуллы активно распространял свои религиозные учения, чтобы собрать преданных последователей. В статье дается объяснение понятий зикр, дух, обсуждаемых в основных работах религиозного течения Исмадуллы, путем герменевтического, сравнительного анализа с понятиями зикр, дух, написанными в Коране и в труде К. А. Яссауи. Используя религиоведческий, сравнительно-исторический метод, автор излагает принципы, регионы распространения и функции, которых придерживается в религиозном учении течения Исмадуллы.

**Ключевые слова:** суфизм; зикр; намаз; Исмадулла; Коран Карим; религия.

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#### Авторлар туралы мәлімет/ Information about authors/ Сведения об авторах

**Жұргенбаева Жанна Айдарқұлқызы** – Дінтану мамандығы бойынша PhD докторанты, Орталық Ұлттар Университеті, Пекин, ҚХР

**Zhurgenbayeva Zhanna Aidarkylkizi** – PhD student in religious studies, Minzu University of China, Pekin, Chinese People's Republic

**Жұргенбаева Жанна Айдаркуловна** – PhD докторант по специальности религиоведение, Центральный Университет Народностей, Пекин, КНР



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