

**JADIDISM AND MODERNISM IN CENTRAL ASIA:
INTELLECTUAL TRANSFORMATION, EDUCATIONAL
REFORM AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY**

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Abstract. This article examines the Jadidist movement as a distinct expression of modernism in Central Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rooted in Islamic reformism and influenced by pan-Turkic intellectual currents, Jadidism sought to reconcile traditional Muslim values with the imperatives of modern education, scientific rationalism, and civic transformation. Drawing upon archival sources, contemporary periodicals, and recent historiographical scholarship, this study analyzes the intellectual foundations of Jadidism, its pedagogical innovations through the *usul al-jadid* (new method) schooling system, its engagement with colonial Russian power, and its lasting impact on national identity formation across Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. The article argues that Jadidism constitutes a regionally specific variant of modernism that cannot be reduced to either Western liberal modernity or Soviet-imposed transformation, but rather represents an endogenous reformist tradition with profound contemporary relevance. The findings contribute to broader debates on non-Western modernities and decolonial intellectual history.

Keywords. Jadidism; Central Asian modernism; *usul al-jadid*; Islamic reformism; pan-Turkism; educational reform; colonial modernity; national identity; Bukhara; Samarkand

Introduction

The concept of modernism has long been theorized through a Eurocentric lens, treating Western industrialization and Enlightenment rationalism as the singular template against which other societies' progress is measured. Yet across the Muslim world, and most distinctively in the late nineteenth-century Russian-controlled territories of Central Asia, indigenous reformist movements emerged that challenged both the stagnation of traditional religious institutions and the cultural hegemony of colonial powers. The Jadidist movement — derived from the Arabic *jadid*, meaning 'new' — stands as one of the most intellectually sophisticated expressions of non-Western modernism [1] in this period, offering a compelling case study in the possibilities and contradictions of reform under colonial conditions.

The Jadidists, who included towering figures such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Abdulla Avloniy, Munawwar Qori Abdurashidkhanov, and Fitrat, were primarily urban Muslim intellectuals from the Fergana Valley, Samarkand, and Bukhara. They diagnosed the decline of Central Asian societies in the corruption and scholastic rigidity of the existing madrasa educational system [2], and Behbudi's pedagogical vision [3] in particular called for a transformed curriculum grounded in phonetic literacy, natural sciences, mathematics, and vernacular literature delivered through a network of reformed schools.

This article situates Jadidism within the broader scholarly conversation on multiple modernities and argues for its recognition as a genuine modernist current — not a derivative imitation of European models, but an autonomous intellectual movement shaped by local epistemologies, geopolitical pressures, and religious imperatives. The paper examines Jadidism's intellectual genealogy, its educational

methods and outputs, its political trajectories under Tsarist and early Soviet rule, and its decisive role in shaping Central Asian national identity [4] across the twentieth century and beyond.

Methods and Results. This study employs a qualitative historical methodology integrating textual analysis, comparative historiography, and discourse analysis. Primary sources include Jadidist periodicals — notably *Samarkand* (1913), *Oyina* (1913–1915), and *Shuro* (1908–1917) — alongside collected works of key Jadidist authors, Russian imperial administrative reports from the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, and published memoirs of movement participants [5]. Secondary sources encompass recent monographs in English, Russian, and Uzbek, with particular reliance on foundational revisionist scholarship on colonial Central Asia and the cultural reform framework established in contemporary historiography.

The analysis reveals three principal dimensions of Jadidist modernism. First, epistemological reform: Jadidist intellectuals fundamentally questioned the traditional Islamic curriculum's emphasis on memorization and classical Arabic commentary, advocating instead for empirical reasoning and phonetic reading methods. Fitrat's *Munazara* (Debate, 1909) [6] is a paradigmatic text in which the *usul al-jadid* school is contrasted with the old *madrasa* to demonstrate the superiority of enlightened education. Second, linguistic modernization: the Jadidists championed the development of a standardized Uzbek literary vernacular as a vehicle of mass enlightenment, producing textbooks, newspapers, and theatrical works that reached populations previously excluded from literary culture [7].

Third, civic and political engagement: as the Russian imperial crisis deepened during World War I and the subsequent revolutions of 1917,

Jadidist intellectuals moved from cultural reform toward explicit political demands for autonomy. The short-lived Autonomous Government of Turkestan (1917–1918), known as the Kokand Autonomy, drew heavily on Jadidist leadership. These results demonstrate that Jadidism was not a monolithic phenomenon — tensions between those who collaborated with the Bolsheviks and those who joined the Basmachi resistance [8] reveal the movement's dynamic, internally contested character and its genuine engagement with the dilemmas of modernity rather than a simple adoption of externally imposed categories.

DISCUSSION

The Jadidist movement invites comparison with contemporaneous reformist currents in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Iran, all of which grappled with the challenge of articulating modernity on indigenous terms. What distinguishes the Central Asian case from these parallel movements in the broader Muslim world [9] is the particular configuration of pressures it faced: Russian colonial domination rather than direct Western colonialism, and a Persianate-Turkic cultural heritage that was neither Arab nor Ottoman, making the movement simultaneously more isolated and more internally coherent than its counterparts elsewhere.

Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities, which posits that different societies develop distinct institutional and cultural programs in response to the shared challenges of rationalization, individualization, and the transformation of collective identity [10], provides a useful framework here. Jadidism represents precisely such a regional modernity — one in which the universal aspiration to scientific knowledge and civic participation was refracted through a specifically

Central Asian Islamic prism, and in which true Islam was seen as demanding, rather than opposing, intellectual progress.

The Soviet period complicated this legacy enormously. After 1917, many Jadidists initially cooperated with the Bolsheviks, who appeared to offer anti-colonial solidarity and material support for literacy campaigns. Figures such as Fayzulla Khodzhayev and Abdurauf Fitrat occupied leading roles in the early Soviet governments of Bukhara and Uzbekistan. Yet by the late 1920s and through the 1930s, the Stalinist purges systematically liquidated the Jadidist intelligentsia, condemning them as 'bourgeois nationalists,' banning their works and transforming their schools into instruments of Soviet ideology. This suppression did not erase Jadidism's influence; it drove it underground into cultural memory and folk literature, from which it re-emerged powerfully following independence in 1991.

The post-independence rehabilitation of Jadidism in Uzbekistan has been both scholarly and political. Governments have invoked Jadidist figures as proto-national heroes and founders of modern Uzbek literary language, while scholars have engaged more critically with their ambivalent relationship to colonialism, religion, and gender. The question of women's education and emancipation — largely marginalized in classical Jadidist discourse — has become a significant site of historiographical revision in contemporary academia, confirming that Jadidism remains a living intellectual resource for ongoing debates about modernity, Islam, and national identity in the region.

CONCLUSION

Jadidism constitutes one of the most significant and underappreciated modernist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Operating in a colonial context, drawing on Islamic

reformism and pan-Turkic intellectual networks, and expressing itself through educational innovation, literary production, and political mobilization, the Jadidists articulated a vision of modernity that was distinctively Central Asian in its cultural content and genuinely universal in its humanistic aspirations. This article has argued that Jadidism cannot be adequately understood as either a pale reflection of Western liberalism or a precursor to Soviet communism, but must be recognized as an autonomous intellectual tradition with its own logic, tensions, and legacy.

The relevance of this tradition extends well beyond the region. In an era when dominant narratives of modernization continue to privilege Western models and when Muslim societies are frequently framed through the lens of resistance or adaptation to external pressures, the Jadidist example demonstrates the capacity of non-Western intellectual movements to generate sophisticated, internally complex programs of social transformation. Future research should deepen the comparative analysis of Jadidism with contemporaneous reformist movements across the Muslim world, examine more systematically the gendered dimensions of Jadidist thought, and explore the movement's legacy in contemporary civil society and religious reform debates in Uzbekistan and neighboring states. Such scholarship will not only enrich our understanding of Central Asian history but contribute to a genuinely pluralistic global intellectual history.

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