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JADID PERIODICALS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY TURKESTAN

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Abstract

This article surveys how Jadid intellectuals used newspapers and magazines as a practical instrument of social development in Turkestan and neighboring protectorates in the early twentieth century. Rather than treating “the press” as a neutral channel, I approach it as a social technology that reorganized who could speak publicly, what counted as credible knowledge, and how reform proposals circulated beyond narrow scholarly circles. Drawing on scholarship on printing and reform under Russian rule, I show that Jadid publishing expanded the social reach of enlightenment agendas by normalizing public debate about schooling, literacy, economic skills, ethics, and community responsibilities, while also exposing reformers to licensing regimes, censorship, and rapid closures. The short life of many periodicals did not mean weak influence: the press created reusable formats – editorials, appeals, polemics, and serialized instruction – that helped turn “education” from a private virtue into a collective project. The discussion ends by noting evidentiary limits and proposing cautious interpretation.

Keywords: Jadidism, periodical press, Turkestan, social reform, enlightenment discourse, colonial censorship, literacy, public debate, national consciousness, early Uzbek journalism.

Introduction


The Jadids are often remembered through dramatic biographies – editors arrested, teachers persecuted, plays banned, manuscripts seized. That narrative is not wrong, but it can hide the mechanism that made their program scalable. The mechanism was print: not simply “having ideas,” but building repeatable

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public forms that could carry those ideas across cities, classrooms, markets, and reading circles. Adeb Khalid’s historical account frames the point sharply: reformist Jadid work became possible at the moment when printed publication stopped being an exotic technique and started behaving like a cultural infrastructure with its own routines, costs, permissions, and audiences (Khalid, 1994).

In early twentieth-century Central Asia, “social development” did not mean a ministry program with stable funding and national reach. It meant persuading communities – often under colonial administration and local conservatisms – why literacy, school discipline, and practical knowledge mattered, and why the moral authority of inherited institutions could be questioned without collapsing social order. Printed communication mattered here because it enabled a new kind of address. A khutba speaks to a present congregation; a hand-copied treatise circulates slowly among specialists. A newspaper, even with modest circulation, performs a different act: it imagines an abstract public that can be argued with, corrected, warned, and mobilized. That imagination – “there is a public who reads, responds, and judges” – is already a social change. Khalid explicitly links the printed word to the rise of Jadidism as a reformist project that could challenge established cultural authority; he also shows why this project remained structurally vulnerable under licensing and censorship (Khalid, 1994). This vulnerability is visible in the life cycles of early periodicals. A state-linked historical overview from Uzbekistan’s Center of Islamic Civilization describes the 1906 newspaper *Taraqqiy* (“Progress”) as a landmark of Turkestan’s press, edited by Ismail Obidi and closed after its twentieth issue, officially accused of inciting revolutionary attitudes (Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, 2026). What is more analytically important than the closure is the agenda attributed to the paper: combating ignorance, encouraging science and crafts, and awakening national consciousness. Those are development claims stated in public form. In other words, the newspaper does not only report social problems; it proposes a curriculum for society.

A parallel picture emerges from research on the early Uzbek press that emphasizes how quickly the first “national publications” were pressured or shut

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down and how opposition came not only from colonial authorities but also from local actors worried about losing influence. In this account, newspapers such as *Taraqiyi*, *Khurshid*, *Shuhrat*, and *Osiyo* were closed within their early runs, and the press became a contested space where reformist critique, official surveillance, and local backlash interacted (Namazova, 2025). Even if one treats some of this rhetoric with caution, the underlying point fits broader scholarship: the Jadid press did not “reflect” public life; it reorganized it by making critique legible, repeatable, and attributable to named writers and editors.

To explain contribution to social development “through the scope of publications,” one has to look at what the press allowed Jadids to do those other channels did not. First, it gave reform a serial rhythm. A single pamphlet can preach; a periodical can sustain campaigns – week after week – on schooling, reading habits, hygiene, ethics, trade, or language. Second, it created genres that blurred instruction and persuasion: an editorial could argue for new-method schools, while a short notice could announce a new reading room, a charity collection, or a lecture. Third, it supported coalition-building among dispersed intellectuals. The CISC overview lists multiple short-lived newspapers and journals that followed *Taraqiyi* – *Khurshid*, *Tujjor*, *Shuhrat*, *Osiyo*, later *Samarkand* and *Oyina* – and explicitly frames them as platforms calling society toward enlightenment and reform (Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, 2026). Even without romanticizing their reach, the multiplication of titles suggests an effort to create a publishing ecosystem rather than a single heroic newspaper.

Print also mattered because it interacted with other technologies of modern life. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*’s overview of twentieth-century Central Asia notes that Russian colonial presence brought railroads, telegraph/telephone, and printed communication, which then shaped reform movements unevenly across the region (Allworth, 1990). The press should be read inside this wider modernization package: faster transport and communication made it easier for texts, people, and arguments to travel; at the same time, these same infrastructures strengthened administrative control. That duality – expanded

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circulation, expanded surveillance – helps explain why Jadid publishing could be simultaneously influential and fragile.

The most direct social-development vector was education. Khalid’s analysis ties the emergence of “new genres of publishing” to the Jadids’ attempt to disseminate modern elementary education through new-method schools (Khalid, 1994). This is not only a statement about curriculum; it is a statement about medium. If a movement wants to spread schooling practices, it needs printable materials: primers, readers, schedules, public arguments, and model lessons. Periodicals contribute by normalizing the vocabulary of education in everyday discourse – turning “school” into a public topic rather than a private family decision. In that sense, the Jadid press helped create demand for education by making education discussable, comparable, and criticizable in public.

A second vector was moral and civic reorientation. Many reform programs fail because they remain abstract (“be enlightened”). Newspapers can operationalize abstraction by tying it to concrete roles: teacher, parent, craftsman, student, editor, reader. When Taraqqiy frames “salvation” as perseverance and righteousness (as reported in the CISC overview), it is not simply moralizing; it is proposing a civic ethic fit for a modernizing society where individual discipline and collective progress are linked (Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, 2026). The editorial voice becomes a substitute for institutions that do not yet exist: it performs public accountability (“we are behind,” “we must learn,” “we must work”) even when there is no democratic forum to enforce accountability.

A third vector was the “women’s question,” which functioned as a test case for how far reform could go without breaking social consensus. Kamp’s historical study situates Central Asian reform in a broader late nineteenth–early twentieth-century pattern of colonial domination and Muslim intellectual exchange “through the press and through travel,” which helped generate similar reform debates across regions (Kamp, 2006). Even though Kamp’s main focus is later Soviet-era transformation, her framing is useful here: press networks did not merely transmit neutral information; they transmitted reform problems and


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reform vocabularies, including debates about girls’ education and women’s roles. When such debates enter printed space, they become harder to keep local and private; they become arguments that can be cited, opposed, and reprinted. That shift itself is a form of social development – contentious, yes, but developmental because it expands the domain of legitimate public reasoning.

Language choice and multilingual publishing further widened the press’s social scope. The CISC overview notes that Behbudi’s Samarkand appeared in Uzbek, Persian, and Russian, and that Oyina followed it after financial constraints (Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, 2026). Multilingualism here is not cosmetic. It indicates strategic audience design: addressing local Turkic readers, Persianate intellectual traditions, and Russian-speaking administrative or educated circles. Kamp likewise remarks – using a later period as illustration – that the language people read shaped the borders of their world, because different language publications carried different perspectives (Kamp, 2006). For Jadid publishing, the implication is straightforward: the press could segment audiences while still coordinating them around shared reform themes. That is how a small elite project begins to resemble a social movement.

At this point, a limitation has to be stated carefully. Many discussions of Jadid journalism rely on indirect evidence: later memoirs, archival references, and scholarly reconstructions rather than full, easily accessible runs of each periodical. Rapid closures, uneven preservation, and selective digitization make quantitative claims about circulation and readership risky. Khalid’s study itself highlights structural constraints such as poverty in an agrarian economy and the political power of the authorities to control output through licensing and censorship (Khalid, 1994). These constraints suggest a disciplined interpretation: the Jadid press contributed to social development less by “mass reach” and more by establishing durable repertoires – ways of arguing for schools, criticizing ignorance, describing progress, and naming social problems. Repertoires can outlive a newspaper’s short life.

The afterlife of this press-based development is visible in the way later institutions narrate it. The CISC text explicitly calls the Jadid press a foundation of modern Uzbek journalism and speaks of exhibitions built around original

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copies and facsimiles preserved in national collections (Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, 2026). That commemorative framing is not neutral, but it signals recognition of a historical fact: the Jadids used periodicals to design social imaginaries – educated citizenry, public debate, reform as collective duty – at a time when formal political mechanisms for such imaginaries were limited or absent.

So, what exactly was the Jadids’ contribution to social development “through the scope of their publications”? It was not a single reform, and it was not simply “spreading enlightenment.” Their distinctive contribution was infrastructural. They turned social improvement into a public genre with recurring slots: problem diagnosis, moral critique, educational argument, practical instruction, and calls for collective action. The colonial state could shut down an issue; it could not fully erase the habit of thinking in those printed forms once readers and writers had learned them. That is why short-lived newspapers still matter historically. They trained a society to imagine itself as improvable – and to argue about how.

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