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HOW JADID PRINT CULTURE TURNED REFORM INTO SOCIAL PRACTICE

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Abstract:
This article examines how Jadid reformers in early twentieth-century Turkestan and Bukhara translated cultural critique into concrete social change by means of printed media. I treat "social development" not as an abstract slogan but as a cluster of observable shifts: the spread of functional literacy, the creation of a reading public, the legitimization of new school practices, and the emergence of public argument about knowledge, labor, ethics, and collective responsibility. Drawing on scholarship on Central Asian printing and publishing, I show why Jadidism was structurally tied to print: newspapers and magazines offered a repeatable, distributable format for persuasion, contestation, and agenda-setting under colonial surveillance. Close attention is given to the short but influential life of Taraqqiy (1906) and to later multilingual ventures such as Samarkand and Oyina, as well as to Boḵārā-ye Šarīf in the Bukharan protectorate. The argument is cautious about reach and impact, yet it demonstrates that Jadid publications functioned as a practical "civic technology" that reorganized how reform ideas circulated and became socially actionable.

Keywords: Jadid press, Turkestan, print culture, newspapers, magazines, social development, literacy, public sphere, reform discourse, Bukhara

Introduction

The Jadids did not invent "social development" as a term for Central Asia, but they made it speakable in public, week after week, in a format that could be copied, forwarded, argued with, and – crucially – remembered. A handwritten sermon can move a room; a printed column can move between rooms, cities, and social circles without asking permission each time. That difference is not poetic; it is infrastructural. Adeeb Khalid's study of printing, publishing, and reform in tsarist Central Asia makes the point sharply: the rise of Jadidism cannot be separated from the expansion of the printed word and the new public space it created for argument and moral contestation (Khalid, 1994).

To avoid a flattering but empty narrative, I use a narrow operational definition of Jadid "contribution." I am not trying to prove that a newspaper issue directly caused a new school to open or a new law to pass. Causality here is rarely linear, and surviving data on circulation, readership, and enforcement is uneven. Instead, I track the mechanisms by which Jadid publications made reform repeatable: they standardized topics (education, "ignorance," crafts, women's learning, scientific knowledge), normalized a style of public reasoning, and linked

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local problems to wider intellectual networks. When these mechanisms work, they do not look dramatic. They look like routine reading, routine discussion, routine borrowing of arguments.

A first constraint sits in the political economy of printing. Operating a press required capital and the permission of a colonial regime that was suspicious of local initiatives; unsurprisingly, many presses in Turkestan were Russian-owned, and local Muslim ownership was limited (Khalid, 1994). This matters because the Jadids' "development project" depended on access to a technology they did not fully control. It also explains a recurring pattern in Jadid press history: bold launches followed by abrupt closures, financial collapse, or censorship. The fragility of the medium, paradoxically, intensified its symbolic power. A paper that is shut down after a handful of issues signals to readers that words are being policed because they matter.

The case of Taraqqiy illustrates both the ambition and the vulnerability. According to a contemporary institutional summary prepared by the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, Taraqqiy ("Progress") appeared on June 27, 1906 under the editorship of Ismail Obidi; it promoted combating ignorance, advancing science and crafts, and awakening national consciousness, but was shut down after its twentieth issue amid accusations of inciting revolutionary sentiment (Rahmonova, 2026). Even if one treats such summaries cautiously – as secondary narration rather than archival proof – the structural fact remains consistent with the scholarly picture: early Jadid periodicals often lived short lives because they directly challenged how authority was organized.

What, then, did the press do during its brief windows of operation? First, it disciplined reform into topics that could be revisited. In oral debate, themes wander; in print, an editor chooses headings, repeats rubrics, solicits genres, corrects language, and implicitly trains readers in what counts as a public issue. "Ignorance" becomes a social problem rather than a private shame. "Science" becomes a practical resource rather than distant prestige. "Crafts" and labor become tied to dignity and national improvement. This is why it is not enough to say the Jadids "promoted enlightenment." The stronger claim is that they built a stable menu of reform questions and made that menu familiar to readers.

Second, the Jadid press converted education reform into an everyday discussion, not merely a pedagogical experiment. Khalid describes the Jadids' central educational aim as the creation of modern elementary schooling and functional literacy, including a phonetic approach to teaching reading, alongside secular subjects and new textbooks (Khalid, 1994). A textbook is already a kind of publication, but newspapers and magazines did something different: they built demand for the school by narrating why the old system was insufficient and what the new system promised. In that sense, the press worked as "pre-institutional" reform. It prepared the cultural ground on which a school could be seen as normal.

Third, print enabled organizational experimentation. The Jadids did not only write; they attempted to build publishing infrastructures that could outlive an individual editor. Khalid notes initiatives such as Jadid-associated bookshops and societies oriented toward publishing textbooks and disseminating books and periodicals among Muslims, even while these efforts struggled to raise capital and faced stark resource limitations (Khalid, 1994). This is a concrete contribution to social development: building an institution that coordinates money, printing,

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distribution, and readership. The attempt itself signals a shift from reform as personal morality to reform as collective logistics.

A different layer of impact appears when we consider language and geographic reach. The Jadid press was not monolingual, and it did not live inside a single city's concerns. The same CISC summary notes that in 1913 Mahmudkhoja Behbudi edited Samarkand, published in Uzbek, Persian, and Russian; due to financial constraints it was replaced by the magazine Oyina ("The Mirror") (Rahmonova, 2026). This multilingualism is not an ornament. It signals an attempt to speak across audiences: local readers in Turkic and Persian registers, and administrators or educated intermediaries in Russian. Social development here includes boundary-work – deciding who is addressed as "we," who must be persuaded, and who is monitored.

The magazine Oyina is particularly useful for understanding "scope," because its genre logic is broader than a single-topic reform leaflet. Egamqulova's study describes Oyina as founded by Behbudi on August 20, 1913 and notes that it carried materials in Uzbek and Tajik, with Russian used for advertisements and announcements; its pages included varied content (messages, scientific articles, poetry, prose, satirical pieces), and the balance of genres shifted over time (Egamqulova, 2019). Even if one does not accept every evaluative phrase in such accounts, the descriptive details matter: a magazine that mixes science, satire, and literature creates a broader "reform public" than a purely instructional bulletin. It invites participation from different competencies – teachers, poets, polemicists, readers writing letters – and thus expands the social base of reform talk.

At this point, a methodological temptation appears: to treat "scope" as simply "more readers." That is too narrow. Scope also means the range of social roles that print makes available. When a reader sees a letter to the editor, a satirical vignette, or a short scientific explanation, they are offered scripts for speaking and thinking in public. They learn how critique can be phrased without becoming a personal insult; how disagreement can be framed as evidence and reasoning rather than status. Such scripts are developmentally significant even when circulation is modest, because they train a small but influential layer of mediators – teachers, clerks, aspiring writers – who transmit these scripts into classrooms and associations.

The Bukharan case adds a further complication: print reform could be simultaneously enabled and constrained by imperial structures. Encyclopaedia Iranica's entry on Boḵārā-ye Šarīf identifies it as the first Central Asian newspaper published in Persian, with its first appearance dated March 24, 1912 and its last issue in January 1913; it was published in Novaya Bukhara (Kagan), and its launch was approved by the Russian political agent, partly because it was expected to propagate Russian culture and serve economic interests such as cotton expansion (Zand, 1989/2016). This is not a minor footnote. It shows that Jadid print initiatives could operate inside negotiated spaces where "modernist" aims overlapped with colonial agendas. The social contribution of such a newspaper, therefore, must be read in two directions: it opens a channel for local modernists, but it also demonstrates how reform could be pressured to align with imperial priorities.

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One might ask: does this undercut the Jadids' developmental role? Not necessarily. It clarifies the environment in which they worked. Developmental discourse is rarely pure; it is mediated by power. In practice, Jadid editors had to decide when to speak directly, when to code critique, and when to foreground "safe" topics (crafts, hygiene, schooling) that nonetheless shifted social practices over time. A newspaper that can only survive by appearing "useful" to the authorities may still be highly useful to its readers – just in a different register.

Networks matter here as well. Kamp, in discussing reform debates and women's issues, links similarities across Muslim reform settings not only to religion but to colonial domination and "networks of intellectual exchange … through the press and through travel for trade and education" (Kamp, 2006). This observation helps explain why Jadid publications often feel simultaneously local and global: a column about girls' schooling in Turkestan is also an entry in a transregional conversation about modernity, ethics, and community survival. Print accelerates that conversation by stabilizing arguments and making them portable.

Still, restraint is needed. The Jadid press did not reach "everyone," and in many places it did not even reach "most." Literacy rates, subscription costs, distribution barriers, and the uneven geography of printing all limited diffusion. Khalid notes the difficulty of determining the scale of the print trade because records are incomplete and available figures may understate totals (Khalid, 1994). That limitation has a direct interpretive consequence: I treat the Jadid press as a driver of elite-to-middle social development – forming teachers, writers, and civic intermediaries – rather than as a mass medium in the modern sense. Yet even within that narrower reach, its contribution is tangible: it redefined what counted as a social problem and who had the right to propose solutions.

When the press repeatedly argues that ignorance is a collective enemy, that knowledge is actionable, and that schooling is not merely religious duty but civic necessity, it changes the moral grammar of society. It relocates responsibility. The individual is no longer only accountable to tradition and family; the individual is also accountable to a future community imagined through shared reading. That imagined community is not a metaphor. It is built line by line, issue by issue, often under threat of closure.

So the most defensible conclusion is also the least theatrical: Jadid publications contributed to social development by turning reform into routine public practice – reading, debating, learning, organizing, and writing back. Their newspapers and magazines functioned as civic technologies: imperfect, fragile, sometimes compromised, but capable of coordinating minds across distance and time. In the end, this coordination is what makes social change durable. A school can be shut; an editor can be arrested; an issue can be confiscated. The learned habit of public reasoning is harder to confiscate.

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