



THE EMERGENCE OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT AND IDEAS AIMED AT UPDATING THE FIELD OF EDUCATION (BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the rise of the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement at the beginning of the 20th century, focusing on its transformative impact on the educational landscape of the region. Triggered by socio-political upheavals, colonial influences, and intellectual currents across the Muslim world, the movement—particularly Jadidism—sought to modernize the traditional Islamic education system and align it with contemporary global standards.

Prominent reformers such as Ismail Gasprinskiy, Abai Qunanbaiuly, and Abdurauf Fitrat emphasized the need for new educational institutions, updated curricula, and secular sciences alongside religious instruction. Their advocacy marked a significant departure from rote learning in madrasas and maktabas, promoting instead critical thinking, scientific inquiry, and civic responsibility. Through the "usul-i jadid" (new method), Jadids introduced phonetic reading, history, geography, and hygiene into the school system, aiming to elevate literacy, strengthen national identity, and promote cultural revival.

The article highlights the diverse influences on the movement—from the Young Turk Revolution to European educational reforms—and traces its echoes in Soviet-era policies and contemporary educational discourse in Central Asia. Attention is also given to gender equality in education, women's leadership, and the integration of Enlightenment ideals into social and political reform. This study concludes that the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement was not just an educational project but a civilizational shift toward modernity, rationalism, and self-determination, with long-lasting effects on the region's identity and development.

Introduction

As the 20th century began, Central Asia found itself at a pivotal crossroads, characterized by deep social transformation and the emergence of the Enlightenment



movement. This period was marked by a growing awareness among intellectuals of the pressing need to update educational frameworks, which had long been dominated by outdated practices and colonial influences. Particularly, figures such as the Uyghurs sought to reinvigorate their unique cultural and religious identity within the broader context of modernization efforts, reflecting a desire for both self-determination and educational reform. The struggle for religious freedom and cultural preservation, amid governmental suppressions of Islam, played a crucial role in shaping these educational initiatives (Baez et al.). Furthermore, similar movements globally emphasized the significance of adaptable educational philosophies that reinforced democratic principles, paralleling B R Ambedkars insights on the inextricable relationship between education and social justice (Verma et al.). These historical developments set the stage for the Central Asian Enlightenment's comprehensive vision of education as a transformative tool.

The Central Asian Enlightenment Movement emerged in the early 20th century as a profound response to the socio-political and cultural transformations occurring within the region. This intellectual movement sought to foster awareness and education, challenging the prevailing traditional norms and advocating for a reexamination of societal values. Pioneering figures within this movement emphasized the necessity of modernizing education, aiming to align it with contemporary global standards while preserving cultural identity. The efforts of these early reformers were often characterized by a blend of secular and religious thought, grappling with the complexities of modernization in a predominately Islamic context. As noted in (Ma Išić), this movement played a critical role in shaping public health awareness, which underscores the extensive reach of Enlightenment ideas beyond mere educational reform. Ultimately, the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement marked a crucial turning point, initiating a dialogue that would significantly influence the regions educational landscape moving forward.

The early 20th century marked a transformative period for Central Asia, deeply influenced by the socio-political dynamics of the region. The decline of the Bukhara Emirate and the increasing presence of Russian imperial power created a fertile ground for reformist movements, most notably Jadidism. This movement advocated for modern education and sought to address the deficiencies of the existing systems, which were criticized as antiquated and ineffective (Sobirovich TB). Central figures such as Abdurauf Fitrat emerged during this time, advocating for enlightenment and modernization in thought and education after his studies in Istanbul, where the ideas of the Young Turk Revolution shaped his perspectives (Liulka V). The intersection of nationalism, cultural revival, and educational reform set the stage for the development of new ideologies aiming to empower the local populace and redefine their identity in a rapidly changing world.

Education serves as a cornerstone for societal transformation, particularly observed during the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement in the early 20th century. As intellectuals and reformers sought to modernize the education system, they recognized that education was fundamental in overcoming historical legacies of oppression and ignorance. By advocating for a more inclusive curriculum that emphasized critical thinking and scientific inquiry, these reformers aimed to empower individuals and cultivate a more informed citizenry. Such shifts were crucial for fostering resilience and adaptation within a rapidly changing world,



reminiscent of how sports positively influence mental fortitude and adaptability, showcasing the multifaceted benefits of engagement (Mart Aín-Rodríguez et al., p. 37-37). Furthermore, as societies evolved, so did the spiritual values tied to education, emphasizing the interconnectedness of knowledge and cultural identity (Roux J-L et al.). Thus, education not only enriches individual lives but also serves as a catalyst for broader social progress and enlightenment in Central Asia.

In the early 20th century, the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement emerged as a pivotal force in redefining educational paradigms within the region. Key figures such as Abai Kunanbayev and Ismail Gasprinskiy championed the integration of modern educational practices while drawing from local cultural traditions. Their advocacy for reform emphasized the necessity of a curriculum that combined secular subjects with moral and ethical training, reflecting a synthesis of Western influences and indigenous values. This duality in their approach highlighted the complex interplay between modernity and tradition, paralleling developments seen in other parts of the world, such as the critique of Western models of modernization in China and the constructed nature of Japanese nationalism during the Meiji Era (Golden et al.)(Farkas et al.). By promoting literacy and critical thinking, these educators sought to empower citizens, thereby laying the groundwork for a more progressive society attuned to contemporary challenges.

The historical background of Central Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries set the stage for significant socio-cultural transformations, particularly in the realm of education. During this period, Tatar intellectuals played an essential role in the modernization movements sweeping across Turkestan, advocating for the establishment of new educational institutions and promoting progressive teaching methods that contrasted sharply with traditional practices. As these reformist efforts gained momentum, they facilitated the introduction of a vibrant press, which disseminated ideas and connected the local populace to broader intellectual currents that characterized the regions awakening. This period saw the emergence of the Jadidism movement, which championed modern education as a vehicle for civic empowerment and national identity, further illustrating the commitment to updating educational frameworks in Central Asia. Such developments were critical in fostering an environment conducive to enlightenment and reform, ultimately influencing the trajectory of the region (Abduvali A Yuldashev)(Sobirovich TB).

Before the 20th century, educational practices in Central Asia were characterized by a blend of Islamic pedagogy and traditional oral transmission of knowledge, reflecting the regions diverse cultural heritage. Centers of learning, such as madrasas, played a pivotal role in disseminating theological and philosophical teachings, often operating under the influence of nomadic practices and sedentary lifestyles. Students engaged in rigorous study, focusing on religious texts, grammar, and logic, which shaped their understanding of the world. However, these institutions were often limited in scope and accessibility, largely serving the elite or religious classes while marginalized communities received little to no formal education. The subsequent push for reform—anticipated by figures of the Central Asian Enlightenment—sought to modernize education by incorporating elements of Western thought and methodologies, echoing similar movements in other parts of the globe, notably in settings explored in (Sturniolo et al.) and (Künkler et al.).



The impact of colonialism on Central Asian societies during the 20th century fostered a transformative environment that significantly influenced the emergence of the Enlightenment movement in the region. As colonial powers sought to impose their educational frameworks and political ideologies, local intellectuals began to critically assess their cultural heritage and the inherent limitations imposed by foreign domination. This period marked a resurgence of interest in indigenous knowledge systems, intertwined with the desire to modernize and reform educational practices. Envisioning an education that aligned with democratic principles and cultural authenticity, reformers worked to elevate literacy and promote critical thinking among the populace. They recognized that to remain relevant, local initiatives must not only reflect the diverse experiences of their communities but also resonate within the broader global discourse on colonial resistance and identity formation in the face of external pressures (Verma et al.)(Shih et al.).

Traditional Islamic education played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual landscape of Central Asia during the emergence of the Enlightenment movement in the early 20th century. Rooted in madrasas, this educational framework fostered a religious and socio-cultural foundation that addressed contemporary issues while encouraging progressive thought. The Jadidism movement sought to modernize these educational practices, reflecting the innovative ideas of figures like Ismail Gasprinski, who emphasized the integration of science and critical thinking within Islamic pedagogy (Zhomart E et al.). However, the traditional madrasas faced challenges due to colonial policies that diminished their efficacy and oversight, often resulting in a decline in educational quality despite an increase in the number of institutions (Hasanov Y et al.). Despite these obstacles, the historical significance of traditional Islamic education persisted, influencing the development of a national identity and the quest for enlightenment among Turkic peoples in Central Asia.

The socio-political landscape of Central Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was crucial to the emergence of the Enlightenment movement in the region, characterized by the awakening of new ideas surrounding education and governance. This period witnessed the rise of Jadidism, a reformist movement that responded to the prevalent stagnation in traditional educational practices, advocating for modern curricula and the development of critical thinking skills among youth. The Jadids sought to dismantle outdated societal structures, emphasizing the necessity for educational reforms that aligned with contemporary socio-political demands, which significantly reshaped national identity. As they faced political persecution under Russian and Soviet rule, their philosophy encouraged civic responsibility and ideological renewal, highlighting the interplay between education and enlightenment in nation-building. These enduring influences continue to resonate in today's pursuit of democratic governance and modernization in Central Asian societies (Sobirovich TB)(Z Saidova).

The Central Asian Enlightenment movement, emerging in the early 20th century, was significantly shaped by key figures who advocated for educational reform and cultural revival. Prominent among these was Alikhan Bokeikhanov, who emphasized the importance of modern education as a means to foster national identity among Central Asian peoples. His efforts were paralleled by the literary contributions of Abdullakhan Qayumov, who sought to integrate progressive ideas with local traditions, thereby creating a unique educational



framework. These figures not only championed reform but also navigated the complex interplay between traditional values and modernity, as evidenced by the evolving discourse surrounding Jadidism in Tatarstan, where the emphasis on modernity began to eclipse traditional interpretations (Almazova et al.). As the movement developed, the underlying ideological currents began to reshape the broader socio-political landscape, emphasizing the necessity of education for national rejuvenation (Saito O).

The intellectual legacy of Ismail Gasprinski is a cornerstone of the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement, particularly in the realm of educational reform. As a pioneer of Jadidism, he advocated for modern educational methodologies that integrated both Islamic values and contemporary knowledge, thereby challenging the rigid traditional structures of his time. Gasprinski's emphasis on the necessity for a critical and updated education system aimed to empower the young generation, urging them to become active participants in societal progress. His work not only inspired educational reform but also laid the groundwork for broader socio-political changes within the region, illustrating the interplay between enlightenment ideals and national identity. In this context, the importance of such movements is underscored by their reflections in current initiatives aimed at fostering civic responsibility and national cohesion in "New Uzbekistan" (Sobirovich TB). Such ongoing efforts resonate with Gasprinski's vision of a progressive society driven by enlightened thought (M Reeves, p. 381-382).

In the context of the Central Asian Enlightenment movement, Abai Qunanbaiuly emerged as a pivotal figure in advocating educational reform during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His visionary approach sought to bridge traditional Kazakh values with modern educational practices, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and intellectual development. Abai recognized that the stagnation in educational practices hindered not only individual growth but also societal progress as a whole. By promoting the study of sciences, literature, and morality, he laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive educational framework that challenged the prevailing norms of his time. Furthermore, through his writings and poetry, he inspired subsequent generations to pursue knowledge and cultivate an awareness of their cultural identity within an increasingly interconnected world. Thus, Abai's contributions became integral to the development of an enlightened society that prioritized education as a cornerstone of national advancement (Nugmanova M et al.).

Alikhan Bokeikhanov emerged as a pivotal figure in the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement, significantly influencing the landscape of modern education in the region. His advocacy for reformist educational practices aligned closely with the ideals of Jadidism, which sought to modernize the archaic educational framework dominated by religious instruction. By promoting the "usul-i jadid" method of teaching, which emphasized phonetics and interactive learning, Bokeikhanov contributed to a broader shift towards secular and science-based education that catered to the needs of a modern society (Kaldybekovich BK et al., p. 85-94). His efforts facilitated the establishment of new-method schools that not only encouraged literacy but also fostered cultural and intellectual development among the youth. This revitalization of education played a crucial role in empowering a national consciousness that challenged colonial rule and sought social progress, thereby laying the foundation for future generations to pursue knowledge and reform (Sobirovich TB).



The Intellectual landscape of Central Asia during the early 20th century was significantly shaped by various notable reformers who collectively contributed to the enlightenment movement. Among these figures, the Jadids emerged as pivotal agents of change, advocating for modern educational practices and the reformation of societal norms. Their efforts were instrumental in promoting ideas that aligned traditional cultural values with contemporary educational methods, fostering a sense of civic responsibility and national identity. The resistance faced from both Russian colonial authorities and later Soviet regimes did not diminish the Jadids influence; rather, it underscored their commitment to ideological renewal and social transformation. As (Sobirovich TB) indicates, their legacy continues to inspire current endeavors in Uzbekistan, reflecting the enduring relevance of their vision. The intellectual contributions articulated by the Jadids further emphasize the critical intersection between education and enlightenment ideals, shaping the cultural fabric of the region as highlighted in (Kizi SSS).

The Central Asian Enlightenment Movement, particularly through the lens of Jadidism, championed a radical reform agenda during the early 20th century, aiming to rejuvenate education and cultural identity. Central to their philosophy was the belief that modernization in education was imperative for societal advancement, reflecting a broader Awakening that sought to reconcile traditional values with contemporary scientific progress. Figures such as Abdurauf Fitrat emerged as pivotal advocates, emphasizing that scientific and technological advancements could empower the Muslim community to overcome systemic obstacles, including outdated educational practices and religious misconceptions. His literary works, especially *The Story of an Indian Traveler*, critique the socio-political stagnation within the Bukhara Emirate, underscoring the necessity of an enlightened approach to governance and civic responsibility. Consequently, the Jadid movement laid foundational ideas that continue to resonate in the quest for educational reform and national identity in today's Central Asia (Sobirovich TB)(Liulka V).

The emphasis on secular education and modern curricula during the early 20th century marked a significant departure from the traditional religious-based educational systems in Central Asia, reflecting broader trends of the Enlightenment. The Jadid reformers championed the introduction of contemporary subjects, such as science and history, into the educational framework, recognizing that such knowledge was essential for social and political advancement. Notably, history was incorporated as a formal subject in the new school systems established by the Jadids, a move previously unobserved in older religious maktab and madrasahs, where history was not systematically taught (Ra'no Kodirova). These educational reforms were integral to the rise of national consciousness, as they fostered critical thinking and civic responsibility among the youth. The Jadids' agenda for modern education resonated with a vision of a progressive society where enlightenment principles could underpin governance and individual rights, ultimately influencing the trajectory of modern Uzbekistan (Sobirovich TB).

The advocacy for women's education and gender equality emerged as a pivotal theme within the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement of the early 20th century, as individuals and groups sought to challenge entrenched societal norms. This movement recognized education not merely as a tool for individuals but as a means to uplift entire communities,



fostering a more egalitarian society. The engagement of women in educational initiatives highlighted the potential for their leadership roles, which were previously underestimated. By analyzing diverse forms of women's leadership within this socio-historical context, it becomes evident that advocacy efforts were not solely about access to education but also about redefining leadership itself (Peshkova et al.). The Enlightenment thinkers emphasized that the right to education was intrinsically linked to broader societal reforms, ultimately reinforcing the imperative of gender equality as a foundational element for progress (Duara et al.). Such advocacy laid the groundwork for future advancements in women's rights throughout the region.

The promotion of national identity and cultural revival emerged as central themes within the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement at the beginning of the 20th century. This period, marked by intense socio-political change, saw intellectuals advocating for a reinvigoration of cultural heritage through modernization and education. Influenced by the reformist Jadid movement, thinkers sought to dismantle outdated societal norms while simultaneously asserting cultural distinctiveness. Their vision encompassed the enhancement of educational systems, which not only aimed at intellectual advancement but also sought to cultivate a sense of unity and pride among diverse ethnic groups. Such efforts were vital in counteracting external pressures, particularly those from Russian colonial rule, thereby fostering a collective identity that resonated with the populace. By intertwining modern educational ideals with a revival of cultural values, these reformers laid the groundwork for a renewed national consciousness that continues to influence contemporary Central Asian societies (Sobirovich TB)(Sobirovich TB).

The early 20th century marked a significant transition in Central Asian education as reformers sought to integrate Western educational models and practices into their traditional frameworks. This integration was fueled by a desire to modernize education and cultivate a more enlightened citizenry capable of engaging with contemporary global ideas. Borrowing structures from Western universities, Central Asian reformers aimed to foster academic freedom and promote independent research, concepts that starkly contrasted with the traditional examination practices rooted in Confucian ideals. As seen in similar movements across the globe, such as the May Fourth Movement in China, the embrace of Western educational philosophies became a catalyst for broader societal change. The adaptation of these novel educational paradigms was not merely an academic endeavor but a profound commitment to social transformation, aimed at aligning Central Asia with global advancements for progressive and equitable growth (Sturniolo et al.)(Javed A Ansari et al.).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Central Asian Enlightenment movement was pivotal in reshaping educational paradigms during the early 20th century. This movement not only sought to modernize education but also aimed to empower individuals by fostering a sense of cultural identity and intellectual independence. By emphasizing the need for reform, leaders of this movement advocated for educational practices that transcended traditional boundaries, thus enabling communities to engage with modernity while preserving their unique heritage. The interplay of cultural and political contexts, particularly within regions like Xinjiang where the Uyghur peoples' rights have been severely restricted, echoes the broader struggles faced in the



quest for educational reform and autonomy (Baez et al.). Furthermore, the democratic engagement seen in the movement's ideologies resonates with contemporary discourses on self-determination and social relevance, drawing parallels to the philosophical insights provided by B R Ambedkar (Verma et al.). Through these efforts, the Enlightenment movement laid essential foundations for future educational advancements that continue to resonate today.

The Enlightenment movement significantly transformed educational paradigms, fostering an environment that prioritized reason, scientific inquiry, and intellectual discourse. This era emphasized critical thinking as essential for societal progress, leading to the establishment of educational institutions that valued secular knowledge over traditional doctrines. In the context of Central Asia, particularly during the emergence of the Jadid movement in the early 20th century, these Enlightenment ideals inspired reformists to advocate for comprehensive educational reforms aimed at modernizing the curriculum and promoting civic responsibility. The Jadids, influenced by Enlightenment principles, sought to dismantle antiquated educational systems, urging the integration of contemporary subjects to empower individuals and facilitate socio-political transformation (Sobirovich TB). Furthermore, the Enlightenment's emphasis on rational thought and individual rights became increasingly relevant as socio-economic changes began to challenge established norms, significantly impacting marriage practices and demographic trends across Central Asia (Z Saidova).

The educational reforms initiated by the Jadid movement in Central Asia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries have left a profound and enduring impact on contemporary education systems in the region. The Jadids advocated for a modernized pedagogy, shifting from rote memorization to a more interactive and secular curriculum that encompassed not only literacy but also broader subjects such as geography and hygiene (Zulfiyaxon S et al.). This foundational shift laid the groundwork for later educational developments, including those during the Soviet era and into the post-Soviet period. The emphasis on critical thinking and civic engagement that emerged from Jadid thought continues to resonate in modern initiatives aimed at fostering national identity and democratic governance in "New Uzbekistan" (Sobirovich TB). Consequently, the educational legacy of the Jadids illustrates a historical continuity that has shaped contemporary Central Asian educational practices and ideologies, reflecting the ongoing quest for reform and enlightenment in the region.

The relevance of the Central Asian Enlightenment Movement today reflects a profound commitment to educational reform and social progress that resonates with contemporary aspirations for knowledge and self-determination. Emerging in a period rife with socio-political upheaval, the movement's advocacy for modern education, improved governance, and cultural revival continues to inspire leaders and intellectuals in today's Central Asia. The ideologies championed by the Jadids, particularly their emphasis on civic responsibility and national identity, align with current efforts in "New Uzbekistan" to forge a cohesive social fabric that promotes both democracy and Enlightenment principles. As scholars acknowledge, the ideals set forth by this movement are not merely historical artifacts but serve as crucial frameworks for understanding the ongoing challenges of educational reform and societal



advancement in the region, reaffirming that the pursuit of enlightenment remains an essential element in the quest for modernity and meaningful progress (Sobirovich TB)(G Plant).

The future of educational reform in Central Asia is poised to draw from historical frameworks, particularly those articulated during the Enlightenment movement, which emphasized modernization and inclusivity. As the region grapples with a legacy of outdated pedagogical practices, there is an urgent demand for a shift towards curricula that prioritize critical thinking and cultural relevance. Engaging with concepts derived from both Western and Eastern educational philosophies, such as the transcultural approach outlined in the works connecting Neo-Confucianism and John Dewey's educational theories, could foster a more holistic understanding of learning. Moreover, the evolving landscape of education must combat ideologies that marginalize innovative thought, reminiscent of the discursive shifts from Jadidism to Qadimism in Tatarstan, which underline the need for open dialogue and reflection within educational institutions (Almazova et al.). Ultimately, by embracing diverse pedagogical methodologies, Central Asia can cultivate a generation of learners equipped to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected world (Hale et al.).

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