

THE SPIRITUAL-ENLIGHTENMENT ACTIVITY OF THE JADIDS A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS FROM SOVIET PARADIGMS TO POST-SOVIET REVISIONS

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Abstract

This academic work examines the historiography of the Jadid movement's spiritual-enlightenment activity, tracing its conceptual evolution from the Soviet period to contemporary post-Soviet and Western scholarship. The study analyses how the interpretation of Jadidism has shifted dramatically across different ideological and methodological contexts, reflecting broader transformations in historical writing and national identity formation.

Research Objective: To provide a comprehensive historiographical analysis of the Jadid movement, identifying the key paradigms, turning points, and critical debates that have shaped scholarly understanding of this reformist phenomenon among Russian Muslims in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Methodology: The study employs a combination of historiographical analysis, comparative textual examination, and critical review of secondary literature. It draws upon Soviet-era historical works, post-Soviet Russian and Central Asian scholarship, and contemporary Western academic publications. The research also incorporates corpus linguistic analysis and memory studies as supplementary methodological frameworks.

Structure: The work is organised into four interconnected chapters. Chapter One traces the periodisation of Soviet historiography, examining how Jadidism was successively framed as a bourgeois-nationalist movement, a counter-revolutionary force, and later, during Khrushchev's Thaw, as part of the national cultural heritage (mirasyzm). Chapter Two analyses the dominant trends in Western and post-Soviet scholarship, focusing on the foundational contributions of Adeeb Khalid and the revisionist critiques advanced by Devin DeWeese, Paolo Sartori, and Jeff Eden. Chapter Three explores contemporary research methodologies, including corpus-driven text analysis, digital humanities approaches, and the politics of memory in post-Soviet Uzbekistan's "Third Renaissance" narrative. Chapter Four examines critical debates surrounding the terminology, conceptual frameworks, and interpretative paradigms that continue to shape the field.

Key Findings: The study reveals that Jadid historiography has undergone three major transformations: (1) the Soviet period's ideological instrumentalisation, which reduced the movement to a class-based struggle between "progressive" and "reactionary" forces; (2) the post-Soviet reassessment, which reinterpreted Jadidism as a nation-building movement oriented towards European models; and (3) the contemporary revisionist critique, which challenges the coherence of Jadidism as a unified movement and questions the interpretative value of established terminology such as "Islamic modernism" and "traditionalism." The research also demonstrates significant regional diversity in reformist experience, with the North Caucasus, particularly Dagestan, exhibiting a distinctively Islamic framework compared to the more secularised Volga-Ural region.

Significance: This study contributes to the broader field of Central Asian intellectual history, Islamic reformism in the Russian Empire, and the methodology of historiography. It offers a critical synthesis of the major debates in Jadid studies and proposes new directions for future research, including the application of digital humanities methods and the integration of memory studies frameworks.

Keywords

Jadidism, historiography, spiritual enlightenment, Islamic reformism, Soviet ideology, post-Soviet studies, Central Asia, Volga-Ural region, Adeeb Khalid, Devin DeWeese, Paolo Sartori, modernism, traditionalism, corpus linguistics, politics of memory, Third Renaissance, national identity, Russian Empire, cultural reform.

Introduction

The phenomenon of Jadidism a reformist movement among the Muslims of the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has undergone a significant evolution in scholarly research. Beginning as a movement to reform primary education through "new method" (usul-i jadid) schools, it gradually expanded into a broad enlightenment (ma'rifat) movement aimed at modernising the entire Muslim society. A historiographical analysis demonstrates how knowledge about Jadidism has transformed over time, being continuously reshaped according to the prevailing political and ideological contexts.

The 1920s The Initial Stage of Research

The scholarly study of Jadidism in Russia commenced in the 1920s. During this initial period, the movement was understood as "a gradual breakthrough in the cultural life of the Tatars, bringing them closer to European civilisation and prompting them to reorganise their lives according to new necessities". At this stage, Jadidism had not yet been subjected to the stringent pressures of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The 1930s–1980s The Marxist Paradigm and Ideological Clichés

From the 1930s onward, Soviet scholars began to interpret Jadidism through the lens of the Marxist theory of socio-economic formations. During this period, the movement received a wide range of pejorative labels: it was characterised as bourgeois-liberal, bourgeois-nationalist, counter-revolutionary, pan-Islamist, or pan-Turkist. Soviet historians largely disregarded the Islamic context of the debates between the Jadids and their opponents (the qadimists), framing them instead as a struggle between "progressive" and "reactionary" forces. In the post-war years, scholarly interest in the subject waned significantly. Islam was perceived by Soviet historians and sociologists as a "feudal-spiritual element" alien to communist ideals, and was predominantly discussed in critical terms. During Khrushchev's "Thaw" in the 1950s–60s, a reassessment of Jadid history began to emerge in Soviet literature. Scholars introduced a new approach known as "mirasyzm" (from miras – heritage), which reinterpreted Islam as part of the Tatar national cultural heritage, rather than merely a reactionary ideology. Within this framework, Tatar scholars developed a growing interest in pre-revolutionary Tatar literature, Oriental manuscripts, and archival documents. However, these sources were examined in a largely secularised context, with their religious content being systematically overlooked.

Consequently, classical Muslim theologians and scholars of the 18th–19th centuries were sometimes portrayed as forerunners of socialist transformation who had supposedly fought against

"mediaeval obscurantism". This approach entirely erased the Islamic parameters of the debates, and Jadidism came to be perceived primarily as a "progressive" movement with a secular character.

Following the dissolution of the USSR, Jadid studies underwent a qualitative transformation. In the new post-Soviet paradigm, Jadidism began to be interpreted as a social movement of Russian Muslims aimed at constructing a modern nation along European models. Contemporary Western scholarship has produced two contrasting approaches to Jadidism

The Adeeb Khalid Approach: Khalid argues that the Jadids' activities led to the secularisation of society and a shift among Muslims from an Islamic identity to a national one. In this interpretation, Islam was marginalised and ceased to play a significant role in the cultural life of Muslims. **The Devin DeWeese and Paolo Sartori Approach:** These scholars contend that the Jadids themselves were a marginal group, and that Islam was not displaced by Soviet modernisation but rather maintained its traditional resilience. They critically challenge dichotomies such as "progressive" vs. "backward" Islam and "enlightenment" vs. "stagnation", viewing them as ideological clichés that obscure the complex realities of Muslim societies.

A crucial aspect of Jadid studies is the recognition that this phenomenon took significantly different forms across various regions of the empire. Western scholars have emphasised that we should not speak of a single "Jadidism" but rather of "multiple forms of Jadidism". Although the term *usul-i jadid* (new method) does appear in Dagestani sources, one must be cautious in labelling local reformers as "Jadids". It is more appropriate to speak of Islamic reformism in the Dagestani context, since the debates there were conducted entirely within the framework of Islamic theological tradition. Dagestani reformers did not advocate the secularisation of society nor did they call for the adoption of European culture. On the contrary, their discourse reflected a call to return to the early period of Islam, to the era when Muslim society was flourishing. While the discourse of the Volga-Ural Jadids was expressed in European forms, the Dagestani reformist discourse remained firmly embedded in Islamic forms. Consequently, in the Volga-Ural region, the religious and cultural identity of Muslims was gradually transformed into a national identity, whereas in Dagestan, the Islamic framework remained largely intact.

The historiography of Jadidism was heavily shaped by the ideological constraints of the Marxist-Leninist paradigm during the Soviet period, which framed the movement in binary terms of "progressive" vs. "reactionary". The post-Soviet era brought a radical reassessment, reinterpreting Jadidism as a nation-building movement. Regional studies have further revealed that Jadidism was not a uniform phenomenon but rather a diverse movement with distinct local characteristics. The Dagestani case, in particular, highlights the fundamental differences between Islamic reformism and the European-style enlightenment movement that prevailed in other parts of the empire. If you need the translation to follow the exact paragraph structure of your original Uzbek text more literally, or if you need the introduction and conclusion parts expanded, please let me know.

Adeeb Khalid, in his seminal work *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (1998), offers the first extended examination of cultural debates in Central Asia under Russian rule. Khalid argues that following the Russian conquest in the 1860s–1870s, the region came into contact with modernity. The Jadids, as influential Muslim intellectuals, sought to safeguard indigenous Islamic culture by adapting it to the modern state. Through education, literacy, the use of the press, and close ties with Islamic intellectuals from the Ottoman Empire to India, the Jadids established a place for their traditions within both the changing culture of their own land and the larger modern Islamic world. Khalid utilises previously untapped literary sources in Uzbek and

Tajik, as well as archival materials from Uzbekistan, Russia, Britain, and France to explore Russia's role as a colonial power and the politics of Islamic reform movements .

Crucially, Khalid's approach posits that the activities of the early Soviet Jadids ultimately led to the secularisation of society and a shift in Muslim identity from an Islamic to a national one. In this interpretation, Islam was marginalised and ceased to play a significant role in the cultural life of Muslims .

A revisionist approach, represented by scholars such as Devin DeWeese and Paolo Sartori, challenges the Khalidian narrative. DeWeese critically questions the dichotomy of "progressive" versus "backward" Islam, as well as the "enlightenment" vs. "stagnation" paradigm, arguing that these categories have become ideological clichés and are analytically meaningless . DeWeese also doubts the appropriateness of applying the concept of "modernism" to Jadid activities, explaining that researchers have poor awareness of earlier reformist movements and insufficiently studied the intellectual history of the region. He argues that Western scholars' fascination with the Jadids is simply because they appeared to be the most intellectually and culturally comprehensible to them . Paolo Sartori, while not denying the influence of Jadidism on the development of national consciousness, maintains that Islam, despite being challenged by the discourse of an openly anti-religious state, remained a source of knowledge, ethics, morality, and spirituality for many Muslims in the USSR . Sartori further contends that the assumption that a relatively small, homogeneous group of progressive intellectuals was the sole agent capable of contributing to a changing cultural scenario must be critically reconsidered . Both DeWeese and Sartori regard the Jadids themselves as marginal figures, asserting that Islam was not displaced by Soviet transformations but rather continued the same traditions that had been characteristic of the pre-Soviet era . Russian historiography in the post-Soviet period began to reinterpret Jadidism as a social movement of Russian Muslims aimed at forming a European-type nation . However, regional studies reveal significant disparities in the depth of research.

While works on the history of the Jadid movement in the Volga-Ural region are more comprehensive, the history of Muslim reformism in the North Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan, remains practically unstudied, with no special work dedicated to this region . Soviet historiography of the 1930s–1960s was heavily politicised. The official historiographical task was to debunk Jadidism and assert the theory of a "single-stream" historical process, demonstrating the international social-class nature of all-Russian historical developments . Party and state control over historical research intensified significantly, reaching its peak in the late 1940s to early 1950s . Despite the deformation of scientific research, national historians succeeded in preserving scientific traditions and continued to investigate the problems of Jadidism. Contemporary Jadid historiography is defined by a fundamental divide between the secularisation-nationalisation paradigm championed by Adeeb Khalid and the revisionist Islamic-framework approach of DeWeese and Sartori. Post-Soviet Russian scholarship has adopted a more integrative view of Jadidism as a nation-building movement, though regional imbalances in research persist. The Soviet period's legacy of political instrumentalisation of history continues to be critically reassessed, opening new avenues for objective analysis of the Jadids' intellectual and cultural reform activities.

One of the most innovative developments in Jadid studies is the application of corpus linguistic methods to the movement's literary and journalistic outputs. Madina Dalieva, a Doctor of Philology at the Uzbek State World Languages University, has demonstrated how modern corpus-based approaches provide novel avenues for exploring Jadid literature, uncovering nuanced patterns of discourse, rhetorical devices, and sociocultural content embedded within these texts . By employing

corpus methodologies, researchers can yield more robust insights into the reformist ideas of the Jadids and their linguistic styles, strengthening collective understanding of Uzbekistan's intellectual heritage .

The movement emerged in the late 19th century among Turkic-speaking intellectuals in Central Asia, primarily in regions comprising modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan . Reformers sought to replace traditional madrasa-based instruction with new-method (usuli jadid) schools, promoting the study of modern subjects such as geography, science, and literature alongside religious disciplines . Texts produced by Jadid authors often feature reform-oriented discourse, interlacing classical poetic forms with modern rhetorical flourishes, and their works became conduits for social critique, national consciousness, and educational advancement .

The methodological framework involves systematic collection and computer-assisted analysis of textual data to identify patterns of usage, frequency, and collocation . Software tools such as AntConc, Sketch Engine, or Python-based text-mining libraries facilitate the construction of specialised corpora, enabling concordance analysis that provides micro-level examination of semantic prosody, rhetorical strategies, and discursive shifts . For instance, keyword analysis comparing the Jadid corpus to a reference corpus of general Uzbek or Turkic texts from the same era can identify statistically significant terms that signal central topics education, reform, ethics and reveal rhetorical constructs or borrowed terminology. Collocation analysis deepens the inquiry; observing which words frequently co-occur with "ma'rifat" (knowledge/enlightenment) can reveal subtle ideological motifs, showing whether it collocates with terms relating to modern science, moral guidance, or communal welfare .

Crucially, this approach bridges quantitative data with robust sociohistorical contextualisation . A discovered frequency spike of the term "haqiqat" (truth) must be grounded in the socio-political environment in which the authors operated, analysing how "truth" was discursively framed as a moral imperative or as a counter-discourse to prevailing authority . From a pedagogical perspective, integrating corpus-based investigations of Jadid literature into language classrooms can deepen students' appreciation for Uzbek linguistic heritage and textual analysis, fostering critical thinking about how meaning shifts across eras, cultural contexts, and translation strategies .

Contemporary research has increasingly focused on how Jadid memory is mobilised in post-Soviet Uzbekistan's state-sponsored metanarrative. A recent study published in the Directory of Open Access Journals analyses how the memory of Uzbek Jadid reformers is reworked and mobilised as part of the narrative of the "Third Renaissance" and "New Uzbekistan" . This research examines three key dimensions: (1) the core semantics of the political narrative about the Jadids, (2) the actors and institutional channels that produce and circulate this narrative, and (3) the ways in which a "reinvented" Jadid past is translated into commemorative policy and practices .

The dominant official reading foregrounds the Jadids' reformist and "democratic" potential, presenting the movement as a culturally rooted yet innovation-oriented model of non-Western modernisation . Within this framework, Jadid "ancestors" are positioned as initiators of a renaissance interrupted by the Soviet period but continued in the 21st century through contemporary reforms. This narrative is further personalised by depicting the current head of state as a "neo-Jadid" and reinforced by affective idioms of "blood", "spiritual strength", and the "energy of generations" .

Methodologically, this research combines narrative analysis and memory studies, focusing on the interaction between political storytelling, academic historiography, and memorial governance. The empirical base includes public statements of the Uzbek political leadership, memorial legislation and policy documents, with particular attention to the expanding regulatory and institutional infrastructure of memory. The study also draws on Uzbek historical scholarship on Jadidism since the early 2000s, demonstrating how the "useful past" functions as a legitimacy resource for sovereign statehood and national identity-building. Extensive state efforts ranging from institutional support for Jadidology to museums, memorial sites, educational initiatives and digital platforms – stabilise the narrative in both law and public space. Notably, the 31st of August is observed as the Day of Remembrance of Repression Victims, and the "Shahidlar Xotirasi" (Martyrs' Memory) complex in Tashkent stands as a powerful symbol of this commemorative policy. The Uzbek government has posthumously awarded leading Jadid figures, including Abdulla Avloniy, Mahmudkhodja Behbudiy, and Munavvarkori Abdurashidkhanov, the Order "For Great Services" for their contributions to the national education system. The documentary film "Armon: Jadidchilik Tarixi" (The Dream: History of Jadidism), released in 2023, further exemplifies this cultural memorialisation.

Beyond corpus linguistics and memory studies, contemporary Jadid research increasingly incorporates broader interdisciplinary methods drawn from the digital humanities. *Tarixiy tadqiqotlarning metodologiyasi va zamonaviy usullari* (Methodology of Historical Research and Contemporary Methods), a textbook from Chirchiq State Pedagogical University, highlights the growing importance of interdisciplinary approaches that emerged in the mid-20th century and became standard practice after the Second World War. The text emphasises the role of historical anthropology in moving away from linear views of human development and examining the differences between traditional social history and new social history. Recent scholarship has also applied the framework of "Third Renaissance" to position Jadidism within a broader narrative of Central Asian cultural renewal. This approach often presents Jadidism as the most successful non-Western reform project, drawing a tangible symbolic boundary between Uzbekistan as "the East" and an imagined "West", even as the renaissance vocabulary itself remains rooted in Western conceptual heritage. Contemporary research methodologies in Jadid studies reflect a significant departure from earlier ideological frameworks. Corpus-driven linguistic analysis provides empirical, quantifiable evidence for interpreting Jadid discourse, revealing patterns of rhetoric, ideology, and cultural hybridity. Meanwhile, memory studies and political narrative analysis illuminate how Jadid heritage is strategically mobilised in contemporary state-building and national identity formation. Digital humanities approaches, including computational text analysis and historical anthropology, further expand the methodological repertoire. These diverse methodological innovations collectively enable a more nuanced, multi-dimensional understanding of the Jadid movement, its intellectual legacy, and its continuing relevance in shaping post-Soviet Central Asian identities.

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