



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND INTELLECTUAL MODERNIZATION IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND TURKESTAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TANZIMAT REFORMS AND JADIDISM

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Abstract

This article examines the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire and the Jadid movement in Turkestan as interconnected processes of socio-economic and intellectual modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between infrastructural transformation, urban development, the emergence of new professional groups, and the transformation of systems of knowledge under conditions of increasing social complexity.

The study demonstrates that modernization processes were accompanied not only by educational reforms, but also by changes in public consciousness shaped by the growing practical demand for scientific, technical, and professional knowledge. The development of transportation infrastructure, banking institutions, elements of professional medicine, urban economic structures, and secular education contributed to the gradual expansion of the sphere of rational knowledge within the Turkic-Muslim cultural environment.

The research is based on comparative-historical and historical-philosophical approaches.

Keywords: Tanzimat, Jadidism, modernization, Turkestan, Ottoman Empire, intellectual culture, urbanization, education, Maturidism, social transformation.



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Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were marked by profound changes in the global socio-economic and political order. The development of industrial production, the expansion of international trade, the formation of transportation infrastructure, urban growth, and rapid scientific and technological progress gradually began to transform traditional forms of social life. These processes were accompanied by crises within old imperial systems, increased social mobility, and the growing complexity of social structures.

These transformations affected both the Ottoman Empire and Turkestan, although to different degrees. Despite the predominantly agrarian character of these societies, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of certain elements of socio-economic modernization associated with the development of railway infrastructure, urban economies, banking institutions, commercial relations, and new professional groups.

For a long period, public and intellectual life in both the Ottoman Empire and Turkestan was based primarily on traditional religious systems of knowledge. Madrasas functioned as the principal centers of education and worldview formation. Such a system corresponded largely to the agrarian structure of society and contributed to the stability of traditional social order.

A special role in shaping the intellectual environment of the Turkic-Muslim world was played by the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, which historically allowed a broader role for rational reflection and recognized the significance of reason in the process of cognition. However, under conditions of technological backwardness, weak scientific infrastructure, and limited systems of practical education, the intellectual potential of this tradition gradually weakened.

Changes in economic and social conditions generated new public demands. The development of transportation, trade, administrative institutions, financial systems, and urban infrastructure required specialists with practical skills, including translators, teachers, engineers, physicians, railway employees, technical workers, and modern bureaucratic personnel. The preparation of such specialists could no longer be effectively carried out exclusively within the framework of traditional religious education.



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Under these circumstances, education acquired not only cultural and religious significance, but also an important socio-economic function. It was within this context that the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire and the Jadid movement in Turkestan emerged.

In contemporary scholarship, these phenomena are often examined either as educational reforms or as separate intellectual movements. However, Tanzimat and Jadidism may also be understood as interconnected forms of modernization associated with transformations in social structure, urban development, and systems of knowledge within the Turkic-Muslim cultural sphere.

The Tanzimat reforms, officially initiated after the proclamation of the Gülhane Edict in 1839, represented a major stage in the modernization of the Ottoman Empire. Their principal aim was to strengthen the state under conditions of increasing military, political, and economic pressure from European powers. The reforms affected public administration, the military, legal institutions, finance, and education.

At the same time, processes of infrastructural and economic development intensified within the Ottoman Empire. Railway networks expanded, telegraph communications developed, and ports and transportation hubs were modernized. These new systems of communication accelerated the movement of people, goods, and information, strengthened economic ties between regions, and contributed to urban growth.

Urban environments witnessed the emergence of manufacturing enterprises, printing houses, processing industries, and commercial structures. Although industrialization remained limited, these developments gradually altered the social structure of society. The importance of civil servants, technical specialists, entrepreneurs, and wage laborers increased, while a new urban intellectual environment began to take shape.

Economic development was accompanied by the gradual expansion of financial infrastructure. The establishment of banking and credit institutions became an important component of modernization processes, since the development of trade, transportation, and state administration required new forms of economic management and monetary circulation.



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Transformations in the economic and administrative systems intensified the need for more practice-oriented education. The state increasingly required specialists capable of functioning within a more complex bureaucratic and economic structure. Consequently, educational policy became one of the central dimensions of the Tanzimat reforms. In 1846, the Ministry of Public Education was established, and in 1869 the Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi introduced a centralized educational system.

Educational curricula gradually incorporated mathematics, geography, history, natural sciences, and foreign languages. This represented not merely a change in academic disciplines, but also a transformation in perceptions regarding the social role of knowledge. Scientific and practical knowledge increasingly came to be regarded as a necessary condition for state administration, economic development, and professional training.

Another significant example of these changes was the emergence of professional medical education in the Ottoman Empire. In 1827, the Imperial School of Medicine (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Şahane) was established in Istanbul, primarily to train military physicians and state medical personnel. European-trained instructors, particularly those influenced by French medical education, played an important role in the development of this institution. Although such reforms remained limited and largely elitist, they reflected the growing importance of professional and scientific knowledge within the broader system of state modernization.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, modernization processes also began to spread to Turkestan, although under the specific conditions of incorporation into the Russian Empire. The Russian administration was interested not only in the development of cotton production, but also in the broader economic integration of the region into the imperial economic system.

Particularly significant was the construction of the Trans-Caspian and Orenburg–Tashkent railways, which strengthened economic and cultural connections within the region. Railway infrastructure stimulated urban growth and new forms of economic activity. Tashkent gradually developed into a major administrative, commercial, and cultural center.



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Cities witnessed the emergence of cotton-processing enterprises, oil mills, printing houses, trading structures, and artisan workshops. Alongside cotton production, silk trade, handicraft industries, and the expansion of the raw material base also played an important role. Although society largely retained its agrarian character, these developments created new professional and social demands.

An important role in these transformations was also played by the emergence of banking and credit institutions. By the end of the nineteenth century, branches of Russian banks and financial institutions had opened in the major cities of Turkestan, serving trade, railway infrastructure, and regional commercial networks. Financial infrastructure became one of the principal mechanisms integrating Turkestan into a broader economic space while simultaneously contributing to the formation of new economic relations and urban commercial culture.

Gradually, groups of civil servants, translators, teachers, medical workers, technical specialists, and laborers began to emerge. Public demand increased for the training of local personnel possessing practical and professional skills.

The development of railway infrastructure, administrative institutions, and urban economies created a growing need for local specialists capable of working in transportation, printing, translation, and technical maintenance. Under these conditions, Russo-native schools and elements of practical education began to emerge, largely connected to the administrative, transportation, and economic needs of the region.

A particularly important role in changing public perceptions of knowledge was played by the spread of practical medicine and the appearance of professional physicians. Initially, medical infrastructure primarily served military personnel, officials, and representatives of the imperial administration. Gradually, however, elements of professional medicine also began to spread among the local population.

Contact between traditional society and practical medicine became one of the factors transforming attitudes toward scientific and professional knowledge. People increasingly encountered the practical effectiveness of medical treatment, sanitation, and professional education, which contributed to growing public interest in secular education and the natural sciences.



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It was under these conditions that the Jadid movement emerged as one of the most significant intellectual movements in early twentieth-century Turkestan. Representatives of Jadidism advocated educational reform, the dissemination of scientific knowledge, and the development of secular disciplines. However, Jadidism represented a much broader phenomenon than a purely educational reform movement.

The Jadids sought to adapt Muslim society to changing socio-economic conditions through the formation of a new intellectual environment. They regarded education not merely as a means of spreading literacy, but as a crucial mechanism of social transformation. Considerable attention was devoted to moral education, social responsibility, national self-awareness, and the formation of individuals capable of functioning within a modernizing society.

In the writings of Mahmudhoja Behbudi and Abdullah Avloni, special importance was attached to the relationship between practical knowledge, enlightenment, and social benefit.

The new-method schools introduced accelerated teaching methods and incorporated mathematics, geography, history, natural sciences, and foreign languages into their curricula. Through education, the Jadids sought to prepare society for new professional and social realities.

Newspapers, publishing initiatives, theatrical performances, and translation activities also played an important role in disseminating new ideas. As a result, a new sphere of public discussion emerged, expanding the intellectual horizons of urban society.

Mahmudhoja Behbudi and Abdullah Avloni became among the most prominent representatives of Jadidism, viewing education and scientific knowledge as essential conditions for social development. At the same time, the Jadids did not seek to destroy Islamic cultural traditions. Their activities were aimed at finding mechanisms through which traditional society could adapt to changing historical conditions.

Despite differences in historical context, the Tanzimat reforms and the Jadid movement shared several common features. Both processes were associated with gradual transformations in social structure and the expansion of practical knowledge. The development of infrastructure, urban economies, financial



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systems, and new forms of economic activity generated demand for new forms of education and professional training.

The issue was not simply the spread of literacy, but the preparation of specialists capable of functioning within a modernizing society. Consequently, education acquired an increasingly practical orientation.

At the same time, important differences existed between Tanzimat and Jadidism. Tanzimat represented a state-centered model of modernization initiated by the Ottoman bureaucracy and primarily aimed at strengthening the state. Jadidism, by contrast, emerged as a socio-intellectual movement developing through the activities of urban intellectuals, publishing initiatives, and educational reforms.

Moreover, modernization processes in Turkestan remained more limited and contradictory. The region largely preserved its agrarian structure, while urbanization and economic modernization were concentrated mainly in a few urban centers. Nevertheless, this period created important preconditions for the subsequent transformation of systems of knowledge, urban culture, and public consciousness.

Conclusion

The Tanzimat reforms and the Jadid movement were associated not only with educational transformations, but also with broader processes involving changes in social structure, urban development, and systems of knowledge in the Ottoman Empire and Turkestan.

The development of infrastructure, the expansion of practical education, the formation of financial institutions, the emergence of new professional groups, and the spread of scientific culture gradually created the foundations for the intellectual modernization of traditional society.

These processes acquired a particular specificity within the Turkic-Muslim cultural environment, where religious traditions continued to exert considerable influence over public consciousness and forms of social identity. Under such conditions, modernization assumed the character of a complex and often contradictory search for balance between the preservation of cultural identity and the necessity of adapting to new economic, scientific, and technological realities.



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An important role in this process was played by the Hanafi-Maturidi intellectual tradition, which historically recognized a broader role for rational knowledge and reason in understanding the world. At the same time, the incomplete nature of modernization processes and the weakness of stable scientific and educational institutions often contributed to the persistence of closed and dogmatized forms of social thinking.

In the contemporary context of accelerating global socio-economic and technological change, the problem of intellectual and educational modernization has once again acquired particular significance. Global competition is increasingly determined not only by economic resources, but also by the quality of scientific institutions, the level of education, and society's capacity for intellectual renewal and adaptation to new historical challenges.

In this context, the experience of Tanzimat and Jadidism may be understood not only as historical reformist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also as reflections of the continuing search for ways to adapt traditional societies to the changing conditions of the modern world.

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