



SOVYETLER BİRLİĞİ’NİN TÜRKİSTAN’DA EĞİTİM VE KÜLTÜR POLİTİKALARI: SOSYALİST DÖNÜŞÜM VE KİMLİK İNŞASI (1917- 1991)

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THE SOVIET UNION’S EDUCATION AND CULTURAL POLICIES IN TURKESTAN: SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION (1917-1991)

ÖZ Sovyetler Birliği, 1917 Bolşevik Devrimi’nden itibaren Türkistan coğrafyasında eğitim ve kültür politikaları aracılığıyla sosyalist ideolojiyi benimsetmeyi ve bölgeyi Sovyet sistemine entegre etmeyi amaçlamıştır. Eğitim, yalnızca okuryazarlık oranlarını artırmaya yönelik bir araç olarak değil, aynı zamanda Sovyet kimliğini inşa etmek için stratejik bir unsur olarak kullanılmıştır. Geleneksel eğitim kurumları kapatılmış, yerlerine ideolojik müfredatla donatılmış Sovyet okulları açılmıştır. Kültürel alanda ise İslami kurumlar ve geleneksel sanatlar yasaklanmış, yerine sosyalist anlayışıyla biçimlenmiş yeni bir kültürel yapı oluşturulmuştur. Stalin döneminde merkeziyetçi ve baskıcı politikalar yoğunlaşmış, yerel kimliklerin bastırılması sistematik bir hâl almıştır. Kruşçev ve Brejnev dönemlerinde bazı reformlar yapılmış olsa da Sovyet ideolojisinin temel yapısı korunmuştur. Gorbaçov dönemiyle birlikte Glasnost ve Perestroika politikaları kültürel özgürleşmeye kapı aralamış, yerel kimliklerin yeniden canlanmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu bağlamda, Sovyetler Birliği’nin Türkistan’daki eğitim ve kültür politikaları, yalnızca bölge halklarının yaşam biçimini dönüştürmekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda onların kimlik, dil ve kültürel miras üzerindeki etkilerini uzun vadede şekillendirmiştir.

Bu çalışma, Sovyet eğitim ve kültür politikalarının Türkistan halkları üzerindeki uzun vadeli etkilerini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Sovyetler Birliği’nin eğitim ve kültürü yalnızca kalkınma ve modernleşme aracı olarak değil, aynı zamanda ideolojik bir kontrol mekanizması olarak nasıl kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Eğitim sisteminin dönüşümü, bölge halklarının sosyalist sisteme entegre edilmesi için planlanmış ve yerel kimliklerin asimilasyonu hedeflenmiştir. Kültürel politikalar ise geleneksel unsurları bastırarak yeni bir Sovyet kültürel kimliği inşa etmeye çalışmıştır. Ayrıca çalışma, Sovyet eğitim ve kültür politikalarının modernleşme ile ideolojik kontrol arasındaki karmaşık ilişkisini değerlendirerek, bu politikaların günümüzdeki etkilerine ışık tutmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkistan, Sovyet Eğitim Politikaları, Kültürel Dönüşüm, Kimlik İnşası, Sosyalist İdeoloji

ABSTRACT

From the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 onward, the Soviet Union sought to impose socialist ideology and integrate the Turkestan region into the Soviet system through its education and cultural policies. Education was not merely a tool for increasing literacy rates but a strategic instrument for constructing a Soviet identity. Traditional educational institutions were abolished and replaced with Soviet schools structured around an ideological curriculum. In the cultural sphere, Islamic institutions and traditional arts were banned, giving way to a new cultural framework shaped by socialist realism. During Stalin’s rule, centralist and repressive policies intensified, systematically suppressing local identities. Although some reforms were implemented under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the fundamental structure of Soviet ideology remained intact. With Gorbachev’s tenure, the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika opened avenues for cultural liberalization, paving the way for the revival of local identities. In this context, the Soviet Union’s education and cultural policies in Turkestan not only transformed the lifestyles of the region’s inhabitants but also had lasting effects on their identity, language, and cultural heritage.

This study aims to analyze the long-term impact of Soviet education and cultural policies on the peoples of Turkestan. The article demonstrates that the Soviet Union employed education and culture not solely as instruments of development and modernization but also as mechanisms of ideological control. The transformation of the education system was designed to integrate the local population into the socialist order, with the ultimate goal of assimilating their identities. Cultural policies, in turn, sought to suppress traditional elements and construct a new Soviet cultural identity. By examining the complex relationship between modernization and ideological control, this study sheds light on the enduring consequences of these policies in contemporary times.

Keywords: Turkestan, Soviet Education Policies, Cultural Transformation, Identity Construction, Socialist Ideology

INTRODUCTION

With the occupation of Turkestan by Tsarist Russia, educational policies in the region began to be employed as a means of transforming the local population. The traditional model of education in Turkestan had been sustained through *madrasas* and *mektebs*. *Madrasas*, in particular, held a prominent position in society as centers for the teaching of religious and literary sciences. However, the Tsarist administration implemented various repressive measures to diminish the social influence of these institutions and initiated educational reforms through administrative restructuring in 1867. Russo-native schools were established to promote the integration of the local population into the Russian-language educational system; however, this process was widely regarded as an attempt at cultural assimilation. During this period, traditional educational institutions increasingly lost their influence, were deprived of state support, and were deliberately rendered ineffective. The control of education was perceived as a fundamental step in transforming society, and Russian-language instruction emerged as one of the most significant instruments of assimilation in the region (Carrère d'Encausse, 1963: 376-382).

During the Tsarist period, the education system in Turkestan was organized into three main categories. The most deeply rooted among these were the neighborhood *mektebs* affiliated with mosques and the *madrasas* where religious sciences were taught. Representing the traditional model of education, these institutions were regarded as fundamental components of the region's social fabric. However, Tsarist Russia's educational policies were shaped by a series of reforms aimed at weakening the influence of these traditional structures. In this process, Rus-Tuzem schools were established to promote the adaptation of the local population to the Russian language and cultural sphere. Nevertheless, neither type of school succeeded in improving the general educational level of the population or preparing them for the demands of modern life. These deficiencies gradually increased the need for a more modern and responsive model of education, ultimately leading to the emergence of Jadid schools, which reflected the cultural and intellectual aspirations of the Turkestani Turks (Hekimoğlu, 2024: 143).

The process of transformation in educational policies took a new direction with the emergence of the Usul-i Jadid movement. By the late 19th century, Jadid schools, which resonated throughout Turkestan, had developed as a model capable of replacing the traditional education system. Led by Ismail Gasprinsky, these schools adopted modern educational methods, incorporated the natural sciences into their curricula, and were grounded in a secular approach to education. The first Jadid school, opened in 1884 in the Crimean city of Bakhchisaray, rapidly spread to Turkestan and initiated profound changes in the region's educational landscape. Beginning in 1890, Jadid schools were established in various cities across the Fergana Valley, and one school in Karakol, Kyrgyzstan, was even named after Gasprinski. By the early 20th century, the number of Jadid schools in major centers such as Bukhara and Tashkent increased rapidly, and these institutions played a vital role in fostering national consciousness. During this period of expansion, approximately 100 Jadid schools were established within the jurisdiction of the General-Governorate of Turkestan and 57 within the Emirate of Bukhara between 1910 and 1915. However, the Tsarist administration perceived the Jadid movement as a potential threat, and thus took measures to close many of these schools and suppress their teachers. Particularly in the 1910s, the newly opened Russian-Tatar schools directly competed with Jadid institutions, as the Tsarist regime sought to accelerate the process of cultural assimilation in the region through its educational policies (Kadyrov, 2014: 162).

In the cultural sphere as well, Tsarist Russia's policies were shaped by pressures aimed at transforming the region's traditional structure. The Russian administration sought to weaken the influence of Islamic culture on society by restricting mosques, madrasas, and caravanserais to mere places of worship, thereby eliminating their educational and cultural functions. Toward the end of the 19th century, Russia established various censorship mechanisms to control artistic and literary activities in Turkestan. From the 1870s onward, the works of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbek poets were subjected to official scrutiny, with particular restrictions placed on nationalist and Islamic content. Press and publishing activities in Turkestan also faced severe limitations, and local newspapers were required to undergo supervision by Russian censorship institutions. Despite the repressive measures imposed by the Tsarist regime, the Jadid movement and the broader process of national awakening encouraged the preservation of cultural values and contributed to the safeguarding of traditional forms of art.

The process of cultural transformation in the region became more pronounced through changes in language policy. From the late 19th century onward, Russian was established as the official language of the state and was made compulsory in public institutions. The local population was encouraged to learn Russian in order to access education and participate in the bureaucracy, thereby restricting the use of Turkic languages. Nevertheless, traditional literary works, folk tales, and epics continued to be transmitted across generations through oral culture. Following the 1905 Revolution, there was a brief expansion of freedom of expression; however, by the 1910s, strict censorship had been reinstated, and the publication of works with nationalist content was particularly prohibited. The cultural repression policies of the Russian Empire became more systematic during the Soviet era, leaving a profound impact on the region's cultural identity (Voevoda et al., 2017: 127).

During this transformation process, the October Revolution of 1917 marked the beginning of a deliberate effort to reshape the social and cultural structure of Turkestan. The Bolsheviks regarded education and culture as fundamental components in the construction of a socialist society and turned these fields into instruments of ideological propaganda. In the early 1920s, reforms were implemented in the local education system: traditional madrasas were closed, and the Soviet curriculum was introduced. In the cultural sphere, works published in local languages were restricted within the framework of socialist realism, and artistic and literary activities were reorganized to serve Soviet ideological objectives. The Russification policies of the Tsarist era were replaced by efforts to construct a Soviet identity, a process that left lasting effects on the cultural and historical identity of the local population.

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine the Soviet Union's education and cultural policies in Turkestan within a historical context. Based on archival documents, periodical press sources, and scholarly research, the study investigates how these policies were shaped and implemented. Particular attention is given to various journals and newspapers that provide significant insights into Soviet practices in the region. Through these sources, the transition from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet period is comprehensively analyzed within the framework of education and cultural policies and the broader historical process.

In this context, the study aims to fill existing gaps in the literature by systematically examining the historical development of the Soviet Union's education and cultural policies in Turkestan. Through a comparative analysis of the policies pursued by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union in the region, the transformation processes of education and cultural strategies are explored in detail. By analyzing archival documents from

various journals and newspapers that offer significant data on the Soviet period, the study also sheds light on local responses to Soviet policies. In doing so, it contributes to the academic literature by documenting the reactions of the Turkestani population to educational and cultural transformation, and by providing a comprehensive evaluation of the Soviet era's impact on education and culture.

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION AND EARLY SOVIET POLICIES (1917-1930)

The education policies implemented by the Soviet Union in Turkestan entered a systematic process of transformation following the Bolshevik Revolution. Prior to 1917, the region's educational structure consisted of traditional schools, madrasas, and Russian institutions established under Tsarist rule. During this period, Jadid schools promoted by Ismail Gasprinsky spread across the region through the adoption of modernized educational methods. However, after the October Revolution of 1917, these institutions were dismantled by the Bolsheviks. The new regime restructured all educational institutions to align with the Soviet system, closed religious centers of learning, and established new schools based on Soviet pedagogy. In this context, education was viewed as a primary tool for integrating the masses into the socialist system, with a particular focus on raising the younger generation in accordance with the socialist worldview (Köseoğlu, 2021: 390-392).

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet Union launched comprehensive educational reforms in Turkestan aimed at increasing literacy rates. Prior to the revolution, literacy levels in the region were remarkably low, and educational opportunities for the broader population were extremely limited. For instance, in Kazakhstan, the literacy rate among men was only 5%, and among women, it was below 1% (Güngör, 2011: 85). To address this issue, large-scale literacy campaigns were initiated throughout Turkestan under the Decree on the Elimination of Illiteracy (Likvidatsiya Bezgramotnosti- Likbez), signed by Lenin in 1919. In order to accelerate this educational mobilization, the Soviet administration built new schools, opened literacy courses, and brought education under state control, making it compulsory (Krupskaya, 1928: 835). As part of these education policies, the 1926 Baku Turkology Congress adopted the decision to transition to the Latin alphabet, gradually replacing the traditional Arabic-script-based education system in the region with a new Latin-based curriculum. The adoption of the Latin script was presented by the Soviets as a necessity for modernization and was simultaneously viewed as a tool to facilitate the integration of the population into the Soviet socialist system. With this change, the curriculum was reorganized in accordance with the fundamental principles of socialist ideology, and the understanding of history and culture was reshaped from a Soviet perspective. Thus, while a rapid increase in literacy was achieved, education also became a key instrument in molding the population according to Soviet identity (Aslan, 2009: 360-361).

The Soviet Union's transformation policies in the field of education were not limited to increasing literacy rates; they also profoundly influenced the social structure and the conception of identity. In this context, Soviet education policies were shaped by the strategy of korenizatsiia, which aimed to integrate the local population into the Soviet system through the use of native languages in education. In the 1920s, national schools were established in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan for each ethnic group to receive instruction in their mother tongues. However, this practice gradually lost its effectiveness with the increasing spread of the Russian language. The ideological dimension of education required students

to be raised in line with Soviet patriotism and communist ideology, transforming the education system into a tool for building a socialist society (Saraç, 2020: 88–31). During this period, literacy rates rose rapidly: for example, in Uzbekistan, the literacy rate increased from 2.2% in 1926 to 71.7% in 1939, while in Kazakhstan it rose from below 1% in 1917 to 43% in 1939. As education became more widespread, the Soviet regime further consolidated its ideological dominance in the region, thereby constructing a Soviet identity (Köseoğlu, 2021: 403).

The aim of transforming the social structure through educational policies also brought about reforms to increase women's participation in education. Women's education became one of the key components of the Soviet Union's early educational strategies. The "Hujum" campaign launched in 1927 aimed not only to encourage women to abandon traditional clothing but also to promote their greater involvement in social and economic life. Bolshevik leaders viewed women's access to education not merely as an individual right, but as a means of advancing socialist development. However, the campaign provoked strong reactions from conservative segments of society in Turkestan, and in some areas, women were subjected to social pressure and even violence. In regions such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Soviet educational reforms progressed gradually due to local resistance, and access to education for women in rural areas advanced at a much slower pace (Ubiria, 2015: 196).

During this period, increasing literacy rates was placed at the center of efforts aimed at the social transformation of women. In the early 1920s, the female literacy rate in the Turkestan region ranged between 2% and 5%; however, as a result of educational reforms implemented up to 1930, this rate showed a significant increase (Edgar, 2007: 87). Nevertheless, progress in education occurred more rapidly in urban areas, while access to education for women in rural regions remained limited. The Soviet administration encouraged not only basic education for women but also promoted their enrollment in vocational and technical training. As part of the broader collectivization process, the regime sought to organize women's labor through education. By 1930, the educational programs established not only helped women become literate individuals but also served as a means to cultivate citizens aligned with Soviet ideology. These educational reforms accelerated the transformation of traditional social structures and laid the groundwork for women to become more visible in the public sphere.

The delineation of educational policy in Turkestan laid the foundation for broader Soviet cultural policies. As education was reorganized in accordance with Soviet ideology, cultural life was simultaneously reshaped along socialist principles, leading to profound transformations that permeated all aspects of society. While efforts were made to detach the local population from their traditional identities and integrate them into the Soviet system, significant changes occurred in art, literature, and everyday life. The reduction of Islam's societal influence, the ideological direction of artistic production, and the adaptation of cultural heritage to align with Soviet identity constituted key components of this process. The use of education and culture as complementary ideological tools served to consolidate Soviet control over Turkestan. Through education, society was transformed in a manner that aimed to incorporate the local population into the socialist system; however, the long-term effects of this transformation were shaped by local resistance and efforts to preserve cultural identity.

THE STALIN ERA (1930-1953)

With the rise of Joseph Stalin to power, centralization policies in the Soviet Union were significantly reinforced, and the education system was restructured accordingly. From the late 1920s onward, education ceased to function merely as a means of academic development and instead became one of the primary instruments for instilling Soviet ideology. The localization and native-language education policies implemented during the Lenin era were gradually abandoned in favor of a uniform and centralized model. This transformation aimed to eliminate regional and cultural differences while reinforcing a unified Soviet identity. Educational institutions were brought under direct state control, curricula were restructured to reflect the Marxist-Leninist worldview, and teachers were trained to prioritize ideological instruction. During this period, history textbooks were revised to remove critical references to the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia, and a new narrative was constructed in which the Soviet Union was portrayed as a “liberator” of the region’s peoples. Under Stalin, education policy evolved into an ideologically driven transformation process designed not only to transmit academic knowledge but also to ensure full conformity of society to the Soviet system (Fitzpatrick, 2002: 37-39).

This ideological transformation was reinforced by language policies, most notably through the establishment of Russian as a fundamental component of education. In this context, the Stalin administration treated education not merely as a process of instruction, but as a strategic tool for shaping the identity perceptions of the Soviet peoples. In accordance with a decree issued in 1938, Russian was made a compulsory subject in all Soviet schools, and educational institutions in Turkestan were placed entirely under Soviet control. In newly established schools across Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, Russian-language instruction was prioritized over native-language education, a policy that gradually distanced the population from traditional mechanisms of cultural and knowledge transmission. Although literacy rates increased even in rural areas as a result of these educational reforms, in the long term, this process led to profound shifts in how local populations perceived their own identities.

The transformation of the education system was a key component of the Soviet regime’s efforts to ideologically shape the populations of the region. Not only the content of education, but also the ideological loyalty of those delivering it, was strictly controlled. In this regard, teacher training programs were placed under tight supervision, and any deviation from the curriculum determined by Moscow was strictly prohibited. Throughout the 1930s, the number of teacher institutes in Turkestan increased rapidly; however, only individuals loyal to the Soviet administration were permitted to serve within these institutions. This policy laid the groundwork for the emergence of a new intellectual class drawn from the local population—one that internalized Soviet ideology and remained loyal to the regime. Education thus became not merely a medium of knowledge transmission, but a tool for reinforcing the ideological legitimacy of the Soviet state.

This process of ideological shaping was not limited to the restructuring of the education system; it was also reinforced by the purge of intellectual elements who could potentially oppose the regime. The “Great Purge” (Repression) policies implemented across the Soviet Union in 1937–1938 directly targeted intellectuals, teachers, and scholars in Turkestan. During this period, thousands of Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen intellectuals were declared “enemies of the people” and either executed or exiled to labor camps in Siberia. In Kazakhstan, literary figures such as Saken Seifullin, Beimbet Mailin, and Ilyas Jansugurov were executed, while in Uzbekistan, prominent intellectuals like Abdurauf Fitrat and Cholpon met the same

fate under accusations of nationalism. Many teachers and academics who had served in the Soviet education system were purged on charges of being “bourgeois nationalists,” as the regime sought to construct a fully loyal cadre in the fields of education and culture. As a result of Stalin’s repressive policies, traditional ties to education and cultural identity were largely severed, and with the elimination of local intellectuals, the absolute dominance of Soviet ideology was firmly established (Çetin & Topsakal, 2023: 15).

Another significant aspect of Stalin-era educational policies was their connection to the collectivization process. The collectivization of agriculture in the early 1930s accelerated the forced sedentarization of nomadic populations. In Kazakhstan in particular, a devastating famine occurred, resulting in the death of nearly one-third of the population. During this period, many villages and towns were depopulated, and educational institutions suffered severe losses in student enrollment. However, by the late 1940s, state-sponsored educational programs accelerated the return to schools, and teaching staff were reinforced through teacher training institutes. Education, rather than serving solely as a means of transmitting knowledge, became a tool for ideological formation—part of the Soviet administration’s long-term vision for educational policy. In rural areas, educational infrastructure was expanded, and the scope of compulsory education was significantly broadened. By the early 1950s, literacy rates in Turkestan had reached approximately 90%, but this achievement came at the cost of severing local populations from their cultural heritage (Keller, 2001: 206-210).

Significant progress was made in women's education during the Stalin era. By the mid-1930s, female participation in education had increased substantially, with literacy rates among women surpassing 80%. In order to integrate women into the labor force, the Soviet government established specialized educational programs in fields such as engineering, medicine, and teaching, and actively encouraged women’s involvement in public life, particularly in regions like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. However, while these policies supported women’s education, they also contributed to the dissolution of traditional family structures and were employed as extensions of broader Soviet modernization projects. Women’s access to education was not only viewed as a means of individual emancipation, but also as a strategy for shaping new individuals who would play an active role in building Soviet society. In this context, women’s participation in the workforce was made compulsory, and various incentive programs were introduced to ensure the enrollment of girls in schools (Northrop, 2004: 128-129).

THE KHRUSHCHEV AND BREZHNEV ERAS (1953-1985)

Nikita Khrushchev, who came to power after the death of Josef Stalin, carried out certain reforms in education and cultural policies in the Soviet Union. Within the framework of Khrushchev’s ‘*De-Stalinisation*’ policy, a partial relaxation was provided against the repressive practices of the previous period and modernisation in education and orientation towards technical fields were encouraged. With the Education Reform Law enacted in 1958, the duration of compulsory education was increased and vocational schools were popularised. New vocational high schools and technical education institutes were opened in Turkestan republics such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, aiming to train qualified labour force for agriculture and industry sectors. In this process, education has become more accessible and enrolment rates have increased significantly, especially in rural areas. In addition, the infrastructure of

village schools was strengthened and academics from Moscow and Leningrad (Sankt-Peterburg) were sent to the region for teacher training (Smith, 2017: 988-995).

One of the most notable aspects of Khrushchev-era educational reforms was the emphasis placed on scientific and technological education. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union's rivalry with the United States heightened the need for a qualified workforce in the fields of space and technology. In line with this objective, significant investments were made in engineering, physics, and mathematics departments at universities in Turkestan, and students from the region were encouraged to attend scientific academies located in major centers such as Moscow and Leningrad. By the early 1960s, the number of technical universities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had doubled, and scientific research was actively supported by the state. However, while these developments advanced scientific capacity, the use of local languages in education declined significantly, and Russian further consolidated its dominance in academic life. Students who did not receive education in Russian were increasingly marginalized within higher education, and the use of native languages in technical disciplines diminished over time (Matthews, 1982: 6-10).

Under Khrushchev's leadership, policies regarding women's education were expanded beyond those of the Stalin era, with increased emphasis on female employment and participation in higher education. By the 1960s, women made up approximately 40% of students in medical and engineering faculties in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and state-funded scholarship programs supported the continued schooling of girls. However, these reforms also contributed to changes in traditional gender roles and provoked resistance among conservative segments of the population, particularly in rural areas. While the Soviet government promoted women's education, it primarily viewed their advancement through the lens of labor force integration, thereby incorporating female labor into socialist economic planning. The employment of women in industry, agriculture, and technical fields became a key component of the Soviet regime's development projects (Ilić, Attwood & Reid, 2004: 7-12).

The educational reforms implemented during this period also laid the groundwork for a transformation in Soviet cultural policy. Although cultural repression eased somewhat in the post-Stalin era, the dominance of Soviet ideology persisted, and local cultural expressions were shaped under state supervision. In the fields of literature and the arts, the doctrine of "socialist realism" remained in force, while limited tolerance was granted to traditional folk literature and music. However, this cultural permissiveness was carefully confined within strict boundaries, and any works that exceeded the limits set by the regime were subject to censorship. Although the number of literary works published in local languages increased during this period, their content was shaped in alignment with Soviet propaganda.

Although the Khrushchev era allowed for relatively greater flexibility in artistic and cultural policies, by the end of the period, the Soviet state's ideological control over cultural life had intensified. In Turkestan, traditional art forms such as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek music were permitted to a certain extent, but only when they were represented in accordance with the Soviet Union's "multiethnic people" policy. While state support for folk music and traditional theater increased, these forms were required to incorporate elements that served socialist thought. Artists and writers enjoyed more creative freedom compared to the Stalin era, yet their works were still closely monitored to ensure alignment with Soviet values. In the early 1960s, Kazakh and Uzbek cinema began to develop through state-sponsored projects, but these films were produced primarily to serve the purposes of Soviet propaganda (Allworth, 1994a: 529-530).

With the rise of Leonid Brezhnev to power in 1964, a renewed emphasis on strict centralization was adopted in the Soviet Union's education and cultural policies. In contrast to the reformist agenda of the Khrushchev era, Brezhnev's administration tightened ideological control over the education system and reinforced themes of Soviet patriotism. During the 1970s, the dominance of the Russian language in education was further consolidated, and schools offering instruction in local languages in the Turkestan republics began to decline. In state-supported schools, Russian-language education became mandatory, and the use of native languages was increasingly restricted. Rigid ideological oversight was reintroduced in the education system, and subjects such as history and the social sciences were fully aligned with official Soviet historical narratives (Kalinovsky, 2018: 185).

Throughout the Brezhnev era, increasing emphasis was placed on technical and vocational education. During the 1970s, new technical institutes were established in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and engineers were trained to serve the needs of agriculture and heavy industry. In an effort to boost industrial production, the Soviet government strengthened cooperation between vocational schools and factories. During this period, faculties of engineering gained prominence, particularly in response to the demand for specialists in the energy and mining sectors. However, the education system increasingly became a mechanism for serving Moscow's centralized economic plans, while local populations experienced a decline in influence over the administration of education.

During the Brezhnev era, state pressure on the cultural sphere intensified significantly, and independence in the fields of art and literature was increasingly restricted. In Turkestan, works that contradicted Soviet cultural policies were banned, and writers and artists who emphasized national identity were subjected to strict surveillance. In particular, theatrical and literary productions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were carried out under direct state supervision, and the glorification of collective socialist values was mandated over individual artistic expression. By the late 1970s, the cultural sphere in the Soviet Union had become fully shaped by state ideology, and individual artistic freedom had largely disappeared (Suny, 1998: 453).

THE GORBACHEV ERA (1985-1991)

With the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev to leadership in 1985, significant transformations were initiated in the Soviet Union's education and cultural policies. Within the framework of the Glasnost and Perestroika reforms, the centralized structure of the education system was gradually relaxed, and broader powers were delegated to local administrations. In particular, in the Soviet republics of Turkestan, the central authority's direct control over educational decision-making was reduced, allowing local governments to play a greater role in shaping policy. Efforts were launched in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan to develop regionally specific curricula; however, the influence of Soviet ideology remained strongly present within the education system. This reform process made regional differences more visible and accelerated the erosion of Soviet centralism. The localization of education laid the groundwork for the reconstruction of national identities and contributed to a strengthened sense of cultural belonging (Kalinovsky, 2018: 205).

Another significant reform implemented in the education system was the reduction of emphasis on Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a core component of the curriculum. Previously regarded as the fundamental ideological framework in all Soviet schools, these courses began to be gradually removed from the curriculum starting in 1988, with the aim of establishing a more scientifically grounded and objective model

of education. However, this transformation process led to differing approaches among local administrators in Turkestan. In some regions, traditional teaching methods and local history curricula were reinforced, while in others, educational policies continued to be shaped under Moscow's supervision. The diminishing influence of Soviet ideology in educational institutions created space for the spread of nationalist ideas. As a result, the growing prominence of national identity elements led to a shift in students' social and political consciousness. This process contributed to a detachment of the younger generation from the Soviet identity and fostered an increased awareness of their local identities (Allworth, 1994a: 562-564).

With the influence of the Glasnost policy, academic freedom in universities increased, and topics that had previously been subject to censorship began to be openly discussed. From 1989 onward, universities in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan witnessed a surge in research focusing particularly on national identity and local history. Soviet historical narratives were gradually replaced by studies exploring Turkestan's own historical development. As a result, local intellectuals and academics were given the opportunity to reexamine the cultural heritage of their own societies. This process also led to growing criticism of the official Soviet historical discourse and contributed to the strengthening of national identity consciousness among the peoples of Turkestan. The inclusion of critical perspectives on the Soviet period in history education fostered a more distanced and skeptical attitude toward Moscow's authority among the general population (Kurt, 2021: 1353).

In the area of women's education, the Perestroika reforms brought about notable changes. By the late 1980s, while women's participation in education remained at high levels, a tendency toward the revival of traditional values began to emerge in certain regions. In particular, conservative attitudes against women's extended education started to resurface in rural areas. Nevertheless, state policy continued to support women's access to education, and additional incentives were introduced to prevent a decline in school enrollment rates among girls. In Turkestan, some educational programs were restructured to promote women's vocational training and to facilitate their continued integration into the workforce. However, with the weakening of the Soviet regime's centralized control, the resurgence of traditional family structures within local communities made it increasingly difficult to sustain the progress achieved in the field of women's education (Allworth, 1994b: 579-580).

The changes in education during this period also paved the way for a transformation in Soviet cultural policy. With Glasnost, many previously banned cultural and artistic elements resurfaced, and state control over local cultures was significantly loosened. During this time, in contrast to the uniform cultural model promoted by Soviet ideology, each republic was given greater space to emphasize its own cultural heritage. For example, in Kazakhstan, decisions were made in 1988 to increase the public use of Kazakh Turkish, while in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, traditional music and artistic activities began to receive greater support. The shift in official policies enabled a redefinition of cultural identity among the population, and pre-Soviet histories and traditions started to become more visible and publicly acknowledged.

One of the most significant cultural transformations during this period was the relaxation of censorship. Numerous literary works that had previously been banned or suppressed were republished, and authors who had been marginalized during the Soviet era were rehabilitated. Greater space was given to local literature and historical writing, and in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, national heroes and literary figures began to regain prominence. Many aspects of cultural heritage that had been lost due to Soviet repression in the 1930s were rediscovered and officially recognized during this time. The liberalization of literature

and the arts played a crucial role in the reconstruction of local identities and contributed to the unraveling of the Soviet Union's ideological boundaries.

The Perestroika policies also brought about major transformations in the fields of cinema, theater, and music. By the late 1980s, artists in Turkestan began to move beyond the confines of Soviet socialist realism and express their cultural heritage with greater freedom. In 1990, new decisions were made in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to promote traditional music and folk dance through state support, allowing cultural activities to gain increased visibility in public life. Moreover, traditional holidays such as Nowruz, which had previously been excluded from official celebrations, were reintroduced in 1988 through state-sponsored events. The revival of cultural activities accelerated the process of self-definition in pre-independence society and laid the groundwork for the post-Soviet era (Grenoble, 2003: 62-63).

In conclusion, the education and cultural policies of the Gorbachev era introduced reforms that loosened the centralized structure of the Soviet Union while simultaneously strengthening national identity movements. The liberalization of education allowed for more open discussions of local history and identity, which, in turn, led to increased criticism of Soviet rule. In the cultural sphere, this newfound freedom contributed to the emergence of independent national identities beyond the Soviet framework within the Turkestan republics. This process culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the post-Soviet period, the countries of Turkestan began the process of establishing their own independent cultural and educational systems.

CONCLUSION

During the period of the Bolshevik Revolution and early Soviet policies, the Soviet regime implemented radical transformations in the fields of education and culture. This process aimed to bring the entire education system under state control, close traditional educational institutions, and establish a new curriculum aligned with Soviet ideology. Large-scale literacy campaigns were launched to increase literacy rates; however, the cultural and historical heritage of local populations was largely disregarded in the process. In the cultural sphere, socialist realism was adopted as the dominant framework, and traditional art and literature were extensively reshaped. Islamic educational institutions were shut down, and efforts were made to diminish the influence of religious and traditional values, thereby reinforcing the cultural dimension of Sovietization. The policies implemented during this period consolidated the core principles of the Soviet system but significantly weakened the historical and cultural identities of local communities.

The Stalin era was marked by the most rigid implementation of centralized educational and cultural policies. During this period, ideological control over the education system reached its peak, and the primary objective of education became the cultivation of citizens loyal to the Soviet regime. The significance of local languages steadily declined, and the promotion of Russian as the core medium of instruction fostered cultural homogenization among the diverse populations. In the cultural sphere, repressive policies led to the widespread suppression of traditional forms of art, music, and literature, while artists who failed to conform to the official Soviet ideology faced persecution. The purges of 1937–1938 resulted in the elimination of numerous local intellectuals, writers, and academics, accelerating the intellectual and cultural rupture within Turkestani societies. One of the most significant outcomes of the Stalin period was the Soviet effort to establish absolute dominance of Soviet identity over local identities.

The Khrushchev era marked a relatively liberal phase in the fields of education and culture following the post-Stalin reforms. The duration of compulsory education was extended, and emphasis was placed on vocational and technical training in order to enhance individuals' participation in the socialist production process. Investments in science and engineering contributed to the development of the technical capacities of universities in Turkestan. In the cultural sphere, state pressures on art and literature were partially relaxed; however, the influence of Soviet ideology remained dominant. The partial revival of traditional celebrations such as Nowruz increased public interest in national cultural elements. Nevertheless, even during this period, state control over the cultural domain was not fully relinquished, and artistic and literary production was supported only to the extent that it aligned with Soviet ideology. Although the Khrushchev era introduced a degree of flexibility in education and culture, it did not allow for the full revitalization of local cultural identities.

In contrast to Khrushchev's reformist policies, the Brezhnev era marked a return to ideological rigidity in the fields of education and culture. During this period, one of the primary goals of the education system was to reinforce Soviet patriotism, and the imposition of Russian-language instruction significantly diminished the role of local languages in education. Investments in technical and vocational education continued, with a focus on training skilled labor for industry and agriculture. In the cultural sphere, socialist realism once again became dominant, and conformity with Soviet state policies was made a requirement for artistic and literary production. Although traditional arts appeared to receive some recognition during this period, they were tightly regulated under state ideology and often utilized as tools of official propaganda. The Brezhnev era symbolized a return to Stalinist centralization in education and culture, greatly restricting the ability of local populations to freely express their cultural identities.

The Gorbachev era marked the beginning of liberalization in education and culture during the final phase of the Soviet Union's existence. With the introduction of Glasnost and Perestroika policies, efforts were made to reduce ideological rigidity within the education system and to promote scientific thinking. During this period, criticism of the Soviet historical narrative increased, and educational curricula began to be revised. Academic freedom expanded in universities, allowing for new research on national history and culture. In the cultural sphere, the lifting of censorship and the encouragement of local language use significantly relaxed the Soviet regime's cultural restrictions. Traditional holidays and national literary works resurfaced, and local artists and intellectuals were able to create freely without state repression. The Gorbachev era initiated a process of educational and cultural liberalization, which, while expanding freedoms, also accelerated the dissolution of the Soviet system and laid the foundation for the Turkestani peoples' path toward independence.

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