

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Political Processes and The Transformation of Moral Values in Central Asia (A Case Study of the 20th Century)

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Abstract

This article examines the political processes that occurred in Central Asia during the 20th century and analyzes their impact on the system of moral values within society. The research highlights how the Soviet totalitarian system and its mechanisms of ideological control influenced the transformation of traditional moral norms. Furthermore, it provides a scholarly evaluation of the socio-political processes aimed at restoring national identity and spiritual values in the post-independence period. The article is based on historical-analytical, comparative, and sociological approaches, and reveals the interrelationship between political processes and moral transformation.

KEYWORDS

Central Asia, political processes, moral values, transformation, Soviet ideology, national identity, spiritual security.

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century stands out in the history of the peoples of Central Asia as a period marked by sharp turning points in political, ideological, and cultural processes. During this time, the region transitioned from the colonial rule of Tsarist Russia to the Soviet totalitarian system, and later to the stage of independent nation-states. These political transformations fundamentally altered not only the forms of governance but also the moral standards, value systems, and spiritual outlook of society.

During the years of Soviet rule, ideology was deeply embedded in all spheres of social life, and national traditions, religious beliefs, and historical moral norms were interpreted as "remnants of the past." As a result, a spiritual rupture, an identity crisis, and a moral vacuum emerged within society. This situation led to the necessity of restoring national values in the post-independence period.

In the context of contemporary globalization, where new

forms of ideological pressure are emerging, a scholarly analysis of the political processes of the 20th century and their moral consequences acquires particular relevance. Historical experience serves as an important source for ensuring spiritual security, strengthening national identity, and developing strategies for sustainable development in modern society.

The aim of this study is to provide a scientific analysis of the interrelationship between political processes and the transformation of moral values in Central Asia during the 20th century. Specifically, the study seeks to: analyze the impact of Soviet ideological policy on the moral system; assess the processes of restoring values in the post-independence period; and conduct a comparative examination of foreign and domestic scholarly approaches.

The 20th century in the history of Central Asia was marked by the transformation of political systems, ideological pressures, and the reconfiguration of the moral foundations of society.

These processes were closely associated with Sovietization policies, forced modernization, and ideological control, all of which demonstrate the fragmentation of the system of national values [1].

In Soviet historiography, political processes were interpreted as an "inevitable stage of socialist development," while moral values were regarded as a means of strengthening class consciousness [2]. In the works of Pokrovsky and Yakubovsky, national traditions were evaluated as "feudal remnants," and their elimination was interpreted as a sign of modernity [3]. In these works, issues such as repression, cultural discontinuity, and spiritual losses were largely overlooked due to ideological considerations [4].

Beginning in the 1990s, a process of reinterpreting history emerged in Central Asia. In the works of the first President of Uzbekistan, I. A. Karimov, as well as scholars such as S. Otamuratov and A. Abdullayev, Soviet policy is interpreted as a mechanism that led to a moral crisis [5]. According to their perspective, enforced atheism, collectivism, and the policy of creating the "Soviet person" contributed to the disruption of the traditional moral system [6].

In the works of O. Roy, S. Huntington, and E. Said, Central Asia is characterized as a "zone of ideological intersection" [7]. According to O. Roy, Soviet modernization artificially fragmented religious and national moral systems, resulting in an identity vacuum within society [8]. S. Huntington, in turn, interprets the region as a field of civilizational clash and emphasizes that political transformations destabilized moral norms [9].

The existing body of literature demonstrates that political processes in Central Asia during the 20th century led to a profound transformation of societal morality. Through ideological mechanisms, values were recoded, ultimately resulting in a spiritual rupture [10].

The 20th century was a period of profound transformation for the peoples of Central Asia, during which the rapid смена of political systems had a direct impact on the moral and normative foundations of society. The ideas of national awakening, shaped through the Jadid and enlightenment movements, promoted the principles of justice, human dignity, and progress, striving to renew the moral fabric of society. However, with the establishment of Soviet rule, this process was halted, and communist ideology was imposed as the primary moral framework of society [11].

As a result of Soviet policies, religious and local values were restricted, while collectivism, партийность (party loyalty), and the model of the "new Soviet person" were forcibly inculcated. At the same time, centralized governance and repressive measures created a gap between official ideology and actual social practice, leading to the formation of a dual-layered moral consciousness within society [12].

After 1991, although the states of Central Asia adopted the ideas of democratic institutions and a market economy, their political systems largely retained authoritarian and neo-patrimonial characteristics. Constitutional reforms, elections, and multiparty systems often functioned more as instruments of external legitimacy rather than genuine mechanisms of democratic governance [13].

Although values such as freedom and democracy were present in the political consciousness of the population, there remained a strong tendency to prioritize stability and security. As a result, political legitimacy was grounded less in legal norms and more in moral-instrumental discourses [14].

After 2016, significant transformational processes began in the political system of Uzbekistan. In particular, constitutional reforms marked an important step toward strengthening legal legitimacy: the principle of "Human – Society – State" was prioritized; guarantees of human rights were expanded; the principle of a social state was reinforced; and the status of civil society institutions was strengthened.

The activation of civil society is forming a real social basis for political pluralism: the expansion of media freedom, the emergence of the blogger institution, and the strengthening of public oversight mechanisms.

The expansion of political legitimacy is becoming supported by additional sources: social justice, transparency, and the effectiveness of public services.

The transformation of political consciousness is intensifying. This serves as an important foundation for long-term democratic consolidation, fostering civic responsibility, legal culture, and public oversight within society.

At the same time, socio-economic crises, corruption, and growing social stratification have led to the predominance of moral norms oriented toward utilitarian and individual interests. Collectivism has gradually been replaced by pragmatic values aligned with market relations [15].

Alongside this, attempts to restore Islamic ethics, historical

heritage, and national identity have been observed through the process of national-religious revival. In Uzbekistan, the modernization process has been legitimized on a moral basis through the concept of "high spirituality" [16].

In the post-communist context, the mere introduction of political institutions has not been sufficient to transform societal mentality. Dislodging authoritarian values that were entrenched over seventy years is a long-term process. Political culture continues to develop based on personal loyalty, informal networks, and clan-patriarchal relationships [17].

Throughout the 20th century, political processes in Central

Asia repeatedly reshaped the moral framework of society. A complex trajectory emerged, ranging from the Jadid movement to Soviet collectivism, and from there to the synthesis of national-religious and market values in the post-independence period. Today, the moral sphere is characterized by a delicate balance between political stability, national identity, and the values of democracy.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis was aimed at a comprehensive study of social, philosophical, and political-moral transformations, integrating several methodological approaches:

1	Historical	The Jadid movement, the Soviet totalitarian period, and the post-independence stages were considered interconnected historical processes. The activities of the Jadids were interpreted as moral-political projects aimed at modernization while preserving tradition [18]. The Soviet period, in turn, was understood as a forced modernization that regarded tradition as a "deficiency" to be eliminated [19].
2	Systemic approach	The moral system was analyzed as a complex network of relations among political institutions, ideological apparatus, and social consciousness. Soviet secularization was interpreted not as the complete eradication of religion, but as a redefinition of boundaries between "secular" and "religious" spheres imposed by the state [20].
3	Comparative	Soviet collectivist values were compared with post-independence market-oriented and national-religious values. This approach enabled the comparison of political-moral concepts related to democracy, authoritarianism, and "stability" across different regions and historical periods [21].
4	Comparative	The use of concepts such as "spirituality," "stability," "democracy," "tradition," and "modernization" was analyzed in official rhetoric, ideological texts, and post-Soviet religious and civic activism [22]. Thus, it was demonstrated that reliance on tradition could simultaneously serve as a means of both legitimation and dissent [23].

Political Processes and Moral Transformation Trajectories

No	Stage / Process	Key Moral Trends (Concise)
1	Jadidism and Early Modernism	Enlightenment, reform, synthesis of religious and modernist ethics
2	Soviet Totalitarian Period	Tradition interpreted as "backward," secular moral coding imposed
3	Post-Soviet Political and Religious Revival	National-religious revival, conservatism, tensions between rights and traditions
4	Contemporary Globalization and Neo-	Reconstruction of national identity and gender roles

№	Stage / Process	Key Moral Trends (Concise)
	Traditionalism	through "tradition"

In the 20th century, the succession of political regimes in Central Asia repeatedly reshaped the moral framework of society. The enlightenment-oriented Islamic modernism of the Jadid movement, the coercive secular collectivist ethics of the Soviet period, and the post-independence synthesis of national-religious and market values intersected, creating a multi-layered moral space. Today, political legitimacy is often grounded in the discourses of "tradition," "spirituality," and "stability," while tensions between the Soviet legacy, globalization, and religious revival contribute to the instability of moral norms. This complexity underscores the necessity of placing the transformation of moral values at the center of understanding political processes in Central Asia.

Analyses indicate that the succession of political regimes in 20th-century Central Asia produced three major sequential transformations in the system of moral values. First, during the Jadid period, a reformist moral concept emerged, oriented toward modernization while preserving religious and national heritage, reflecting a growing need for renewal within traditional society [18].

Second, under the Soviet totalitarian system, tradition was interpreted as "backward" and a "feudal relic," while a secular moral code based on collectivism, class consciousness, and atheism prevailed. This led to a separation between official and unofficial norms, resulting in a dual-layered moral consciousness [21].

Third, in the post-independence period, a complex moral space emerged in which national identity, Islamic values, and market relations were intertwined. In this process, religious revival and the discourses of "tradition" and "spirituality" became key resources for political legitimacy [24].

Empirical and theoretical studies, including research on political mentality, political culture, and the dynamics of values, indicate that in Central Asian societies, internal tensions persist between authoritarian values oriented toward stability and security and ideas of freedom and democracy [25].

Processes of spiritual awakening, Islamic identification, and "return to tradition" partially fill the moral vacuum, yet

simultaneously generate new tensions related to human rights and the construction of an inclusive society [26].

Furthermore, the formal democratization of political institutions is often carried out not in accordance with genuine democratic values, but rather relying on notions of authoritarian stability, "stability" (stabil'nost'), and authority [27].

The findings indicate that the moral transformation in Central Asia cannot be adequately explained solely through the lens of "tradition-modernization." The example of the Jadid movement shows that modernization initially took shape as an internal reform through a reinterpretation of religious and national heritage, and this stage remains an important historical source for contemporary spiritual policy. In contrast, the Soviet period implemented modernization primarily as an external, coercive, and secularizing project, negating tradition and causing a profound spiritual rupture within society. This legacy occupies a central place in explaining the post-Soviet moral vacuum and identity crisis.

In the post-Soviet period, appeals to religion and national heritage have frequently become key instruments of political legitimacy. Research shows that "tradition" is mobilized in different ways by both the state and elites, as well as by civil society and religious actors: on one hand, it serves as a symbol of stability, social cohesion, and moral renewal; on the other hand, it functions as a means to reinforce gender roles, hierarchies, and authoritarian governance. From this perspective, the transformation of moral values should not be seen as a passive consequence of political processes, but rather as an independent factor that both legitimizes and constrains them.

As a limitation, it can be noted that most existing studies focus primarily on certain countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan), while comparative moral analyses across the entire region remain insufficient. Furthermore, empirical research often relies on surveys and analyses of official discourse; deeper investigation into everyday moral practices, as well as micro-level analyses of local religious and civic initiatives, is needed. For future research, examining the formation of new moral norms under the influence of political

processes, religious revival, globalization, and digital media—particularly through the experiences of youth and women—represents a promising direction.

The experience of 20th-century Central Asia demonstrates that the succession of political regimes transformed not only the forms of state governance but also the moral-normative system of society. The stages of Tsarist colonial rule, the Soviet totalitarian system, and post-independence nation-building were interconnected, yet often produced conflicting moral paradigms.

During the Soviet period, policies of forced modernization, atheism, and collectivism restricted traditional religious and moral values, giving rise to a “dual-layered moral consciousness” within society: a divide emerged between official ideological morality and informal, traditional moral practices. After independence, the restoration of national and religious heritage, the promotion of “high spirituality,” and the strengthening of national identity became key sources of political legitimacy. At the same time, market relations, social stratification, and global ideological influences contributed to the rise of individualistic and pragmatic values.

Thus, in Central Asia, the transformation of political processes and moral values is not linear but complex, multi-layered, and often contradictory, with Soviet legacies, national-religious revival, and global trends intersecting. The challenge in the contemporary period is to develop a moral model that ensures spiritual security, based on a balance between political stability, national identity, and democratic and universal human values.

Analyses based on historical-axiological and political-discursive approaches indicate that the political transformations in Central Asia throughout the 20th century had a multi-layered and profound impact on the system of societal moral values.

Initially, within the framework of the Jadid movement, ideas oriented toward justice, enlightenment, human dignity, and progress emerged as the first modern concepts aimed at renewing social consciousness. However, with the establishment of the Soviet regime, this approach was replaced by coercive ideological collectivism, disrupting the natural development of national and moral values.

In the subsequent stage, the moral environment under the Soviet period manifested through a sharp divergence between official ideology and everyday social practice. Under these

conditions, a flexible moral model based on conformity, double standards, and informal norms emerged. Observations suggest that this pattern continued to some extent in the political culture of the post-independence period as well.

Moreover, the democratic institutions introduced after independence were insufficient to bring about a fundamental shift in societal moral consciousness. In political behavior, citizens prioritized stability, security, and paternalistic relations over legal equality and individual freedom. This led to the consolidation of political legitimacy more through moral and instrumental discourses than through legal foundations.

During the transition to a market economy, individual interests and utilitarian values strengthened, while traditional norms based on social justice and collective responsibility became secondary. At the same time, the process of national and religious revival emerged as an alternative mechanism aimed at filling the moral vacuum in society.

Additionally, a model in the political mentality that relies on personal loyalty, informal networks, and clan-patriarchal relations continues to prevail. This has resulted in democratic values remaining largely symbolic rather than being firmly institutionalized.

In conclusion, the transformation of values in Central Asia is not a linear or uniform process, but a complex, multi-layered, and often contradictory system. Soviet legacies, national-religious revival, and global modernization factors simultaneously influence this process, shaping the intricate nature of today’s political and moral space.

It is therefore essential to develop and implement academic subjects and modular programs within the education system that ensure alignment between political consciousness and moral values.

Ideological and moral initiatives carried out by state and public institutions should move away from one-sided propaganda and be organized in interactive formats based on open dialogue, debate, and collective discussion.

It is also necessary to increase the proportion of high-quality content on mass media and digital platforms that promotes national values, social responsibility, and active civic engagement.

In the process of implementing political reforms, it is important to consider not only legal mechanisms but also their moral grounding and social acceptance as key criteria.

Among the younger generation, supporting spiritual and educational initiatives that help balance historical memory, national identity, and democratic principles is advisable and strategically important.

The findings of this study indicate that political processes in 20th-century Central Asia transformed the system of societal moral values in a complex and often contradictory manner, rather than along a linear trajectory. The national-educational awakening initiated during the Jadid period was forcibly halted by the Soviet ideological regime, resulting in a deep divide between official ideology and actual social practice.

Although the collectivist moral model developed under the Soviet system appeared externally stable, internally it produced a "dual-layered moral consciousness," harmonizing informal norms and adaptive behaviors with official ideology. In the post-independence period, despite the introduction of legal-democratic institutions, political mentality continued to be dominated by paternalism, personal loyalty, and informal networks.

During the transition to a market economy, individual interests and utilitarian approaches strengthened, while social justice and collective responsibility were relegated to a secondary position. Simultaneously, the national-religious revival emerged as a compensatory mechanism aimed at addressing the moral vacuum in society.

As a result, contemporary Central Asian societies exhibit a complex model of balance between political stability, national identity, and democratic values, which reflects the defining characteristic of the region's moral value transformation.

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