Concept of "Uzbek Intelligentsia" in historicalcultural and socio-philosophical discourse

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the evolution of the concept of "Uzbek intelligentsia" across historical epochs from Jadidist reformism and Soviet ideological structuring to post-independence digital civic engagement.

Research methodology: The research adopts a multi-layered qualitative method combining cultural-historical analysis, conceptual mapping, and critical discourse analysis using NVivo software.

Results: The study identifies intelligentsia as a dynamic and adaptive identity shaped by socio-political transformations. Key conceptual nodes such as marifatchi and xalqparvarlik persist across time, highlighting continuity in moral-intellectual responsibility.

Conclusions: The Uzbek intelligentsia is not a static class but a fluid identity dialectically formed through interactions with shifting historical conditions and evolving societal questions.

Limitations: The study is limited to qualitative interpretation, lacking quantitative generalization of public perceptions across broader demographics.

Contribution: This work offers a theoretical framework for analyzing intelligentsia as an ethical, socio-historical process bridging past traditions with present digital reform.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Digital Intellectuals, Discourse Analysis, Jadidism, National Reformism, Soviet Ideology, Uzbek Intelligentsia

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1. Introduction

The concept of "intelligentsia" in the Uzbek context occupies a central position in the construction of national consciousness and identity. Historically, the intelligentsia has not merely been understood as a group of educated individuals but as cultural mediators and ethical actors engaged in the social transformation of society. In Uzbekistan, this concept has undergone a dynamic transformation from its Islamic scholarly origins and Jadidist reformist currents, through the ideological reshaping of the Soviet period, to its recent evolution in the era of national revival and "New Uzbekistan." These transitions have produced a multifaceted and layered understanding of the intelligentsia that is deeply rooted in both historical experience and contemporary sociopolitical realities (Burkhanova, 2021; Ulugbekovich & Sobirovich, 2025).

In classical sociological and philosophical discourse, the intelligentsia is typically seen as the bearer of critical consciousness and moral authority, often placed in opposition to the dominant political order. However, this Western conceptualization does not fully align with the cultural and historical trajectory of Central Asia. The Uzbek intelligentsia is unique in its synthesis of Islamic ethics, national reformism, and post-Soviet pragmatism. Unlike the Russian intelligentsia of the 19th century, which often positioned itself in opposition to the state, the Uzbek intelligentsia historically engaged with state and religious institutions in a more integrative manner. It represented a form of engaged intellectualism that sought to balance tradition and progress (Bengtson & Nielsen, 2023).

This study is particularly relevant in light of contemporary developments in Uzbekistan. Since 2016, under the reforms introduced during the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has entered an era frequently referred to as "New Uzbekistan." This era emphasizes modernization, openness, and the strengthening of national identity (Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, 1999). In this socio-political context, the role of the intelligentsia has become even more critical. The state's focus on national development, technological progress, and civic engagement has reactivated debates on the purpose, function, and identity of the intelligentsia in society (Turdiev, 2024).

Despite this relevance, scholarly attention to the concept of "Uzbek intelligentsia" remains limited, especially from a socio-philosophical perspective. Most existing literature addresses historical narratives or biographical accounts but fails to interrogate the intelligentsia as a conceptual category embedded in power, identity, and ideology. This study seeks to fill this gap by framing the intelligentsia as both a discursive construct and a socio-historical actor. The research builds on the works and integrates contemporary tools such as discourse analysis and conceptual mapping to reveal how the idea of intelligentsia has been redefined across different epochs from Jadidism and Sovietization to digital-age intellectualism (Turdiyev Bekhruz Sobirovich, 2025).

The periodization of the Uzbek intelligentsia's development offers significant insight into the evolution of national consciousness. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Jadid movement emerged as a key force promoting Islamic enlightenment, educational reform, and cultural modernization. Figures such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and Abdurrauf Fitrat epitomized this movement, establishing newspapers, schools, and literary platforms that challenged traditionalist thought while respecting Islamic ethics. The term "marifatchi" or "enlightener" became a defining archetype of the intelligentsia, linking education with social responsibility (Burkhanova, 2021).

Under Soviet rule, the intelligentsia was restructured to serve ideological ends. While the state suppressed nationalist sentiments and religious expression, it simultaneously institutionalized an Uzbek cultural elite authors, scientists, and artists who were tasked with creating a "Soviet Uzbek" identity. This process was marked by paradox: while national culture was officially endorsed through state-sponsored publications and institutions, any deviation from Soviet ideology was harshly penalized. The intelligentsia was thus caught between collaboration and resistance, shaping a complex identity that persists in post-Soviet Uzbekistan (Odilov & Karimov).

The post-independence era witnessed a reconfiguration of the intelligentsia's role. With the collapse of ideological uniformity, new discourses emerged around nationalism, Islamic heritage, and global integration. Intellectuals found new platforms ranging from traditional print media to digital spaces like blogs and Telegram channels to express diverse perspectives on culture, politics, and identity (Haydaraliyeva, 2023). These shifts necessitate a rethinking of what it means to be an intellectual in contemporary Uzbekistan. Is the intelligentsia still defined by its educational background and moral authority? Or has it become more fragmented, influenced by market dynamics and state co-optation?

The present study proposes a conceptual framework that positions the intelligentsia not as a static group but as a dynamic intellectual identity. This identity is dialectically formed through interactions with societal conditions responding to crises, reforms, and shifts in political regimes. Drawing on philosophical notions of temporality, the study argues that the intelligentsia is best understood as a process of becoming, shaped by the "questions of existence" posed at each stage of national development. In other words, the intelligentsia embodies the ethical and cognitive responses of society to its historical challenges (Baert & Morgan, 2018; Tabeikyna, Kamalova, Hasanov, Dzhumagaliyeva, & Demeuova, 2021).

In doing so, the research also addresses the broader implications of intelligentsia in post-authoritarian societies. The reconstruction of civil society, the struggle for intellectual freedom, and the resurgence of national culture are all areas where the intelligentsia plays a pivotal role. Moreover, in the context of globalization and digitalization, new forms of intellectual labor are emerging that transcend traditional categories. These include online influencers, digital educators, and civic journalists individuals who

shape public discourse without necessarily fitting the classical definition of the intelligentsia (Roberts & Oosterom, 2024; Yilmaz, Akbarzadeh, Abbasov, & Bashirov, 2025).

In sum, the relevance of this research lies in its attempt to historicize and theorize the Uzbek intelligentsia as a cultural, political, and epistemological category. By combining historical-cultural analysis, conceptual mapping, and discourse analytics, the study provides a comprehensive and nuanced account of how this category has been produced, challenged, and redefined. It invites scholars to reconsider the intelligentsia not merely as a legacy of the past but as a critical actor in shaping the future of Central Asian societies.

2. Literature Review

The concept of "intelligentsia" has historically played a central role in shaping national identity and guiding sociopolitical transformation, particularly in post-colonial and post-Soviet societies. In the context of Uzbekistan, the intelligentsia cannot be understood merely as a class of educated elites; it is more appropriately conceptualized as a socio-cultural formation deeply embedded in national reformism, Islamic values, and post-Soviet reconfiguration. This section reviews key academic discussions surrounding the intelligentsia in Uzbekistan and similar societies by drawing upon philosophical, historical, and discourse-analytical perspectives.

In Western scholarly traditions, the intelligentsia is often associated with critical opposition to dominant regimes, particularly in the Russian and European contexts of the 19th century. The role of intellectuals in Central Asia differs significantly due to their integration with religious and state structures, particularly during the Soviet era. While the Russian intelligentsia tended to position itself as antagonistic to autocracy, the Uzbek intelligentsia embraced a more integrative posture, seeking reform from within existing structures (Askarov, 2019).

Scholars such as emphasize the foundational influence of Jadidism a reformist movement that synthesized Islamic education with Enlightenment ideals. The Jadids, including Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and Abdurrauf Fitrat, were not merely educators or writers; they were architects of modern Uzbek thought. As noted by Ziyodova (2022), these figures embodied a form of hybrid intellectualism, wherein Islamic ethics served as the moral compass for modernization efforts. Their legacy continues to influence contemporary discourse on national identity (Lazzerini, 2023; Turdiyev Bekhruz Sobirovich, 2025). The Soviet period marked a drastic shift in the structure of the intelligentsia. The Soviet state instrumentalized intellectual labor by institutionalizing a state-sanctioned cultural elite. Uzbek writers, artists, and academics were simultaneously empowered and restricted. They were expected to promote Soviet ideology while preserving national characteristics. This paradoxical relationship created what calls a "double consciousness" in Uzbek intellectual life: an oscillation between national authenticity and ideological conformity (Salimov, 2022).

Discourse analytical studies highlight how this legacy persists in the post-independence period. Since 1991, Uzbekistan has witnessed multiple phases of national identity reconfiguration, with intellectuals playing a key role in legitimizing or contesting dominant narratives. Particularly after 2016, under the political shift toward "New Uzbekistan," public intellectuals have been re-empowered through digital platforms such as Telegram, YouTube, and independent news outlets. These platforms facilitate pluralistic discourse, allowing for the emergence of non-traditional intellectuals such as digital educators and civic influencers. Underscores the importance of reconceptualizing intelligentsia not as a static entity but as a dynamic category responsive to shifting socio-political structures. They advocate for a framework that understands the intelligentsia through temporality and transformation, wherein each historical epoch presents new "questions of existence" that the intelligentsia must address. This perspective resonates with philosophical traditions of existentialism and pragmatism, which prioritize human action in response to contextual challenges (Knox & Kurmanov, 2024).

In a regional comparative context, compares the role of the intelligentsia in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, noting that while both countries experienced similar Soviet legacies, the Uzbek case is distinguished by

the enduring influence of Islamic reformism. He argues that this has led to a more cohesive form of national intellectual identity, albeit one still constrained by authoritarian modernization. How digital transformation has reshaped intellectual labor, allowing for new forms of participation and critique beyond traditional academic and state-sanctioned channels (Azimzhanov & Myssayeva, 2025).

An important methodological contribution to this field is provided by (Burkhanova, 2021), who integrates NVivo-based content analysis of media discourse with conceptual mapping. Her study reveals that terms such as "Xalqparvarlik" (populist humanism) and "Marifatchi" (enlightener) are consistently evoked in Uzbek public discourse to legitimize the intelligentsia's moral authority. These micro-concepts help bridge historical periods from the Jadid reformers to contemporary bloggers by emphasizing continuity in ethical commitments. Recent scholarship also interrogates the gendered dimensions of intelligentsia. Examines the marginalization of female intellectuals during the Soviet and early post-Soviet eras. Although prominent women participated in the reformist and nationalist movements, their contributions have been largely erased from mainstream narratives. In the current digital age, female influencers and educators are increasingly reclaiming their place, thereby expanding the boundaries of intelligentsia to include gender equity and feminist epistemologies.

Lastly, philosophical contributions by (Turdiev Bekhruz Sobirovich, 2024) conceptualize intelligentsia as a dialectical force that both shapes and is shaped by sociopolitical crises. They argue that intellectual identity is best understood as a process of becoming one that evolves in response to historical ruptures and cultural shifts. This aligns with the present study's aim to define the intelligentsia not through rigid criteria such as education level or occupation but through ethical responsiveness and discursive relevance. In summary, the literature suggests that the Uzbek intelligentsia is a historically contingent, ethically engaged, and structurally dynamic formation. It cannot be reduced to Soviet or post-Soviet categories but must be understood as an evolving cultural and intellectual phenomenon. This study seeks to build upon existing research by offering a more integrated theoretical framework bridging historical-cultural analysis with discourse analysis and philosophical interpretation.

3. Methodology

This research employs a multi-layered qualitative methodology that integrates cultural-historical analysis, conceptual mapping, and critical discourse analysis to investigate the intellectual trajectory and socio-philosophical role of the Uzbek intelligentsia. The aim is to situate the intelligentsia not only as a historical category but also as a living conceptual process shaped by national reformism, ideological transitions, and evolving digital landscapes.

The study began with a cultural-historical approach, which served to trace the formation and evolution of the intelligentsia from the late 19th century to the present day. This included the analysis of primary historical sources such as Jadid press materials, Soviet-era documents, and post-independence media publications. These sources were categorized chronologically into three phases: Jadidist reformism (1870–1920), Soviet ideological structuring (1920–1991), and post-independence reconfiguration (1991–2025). This stratification allowed for diachronic analysis, offering a clearer view of how different political and cultural regimes influenced the self-perception and function of the intelligentsia (Salimov, 2022; Turdiyev Bekhruz Sobirovich, 2025).

The conceptual analysis component drew on the method proposed but was updated using recent frameworks of semantic field analysis and micro-conceptual mapping (Wodak, 2016). In this stage, the central concept "Uzbek intelligentsia" was disaggregated into constituent micro-concepts such as "marifatchi" (enlightener), "xalqparvarlik" (people-centeredness), "Islamic enlightenment," and "digital civic engagement." These sub-concepts were then mapped semantically to analyze their relationships and transformation across different historical epochs.

To enhance analytical precision, the study utilized NVivo qualitative analysis software. A corpus of media texts, blog posts, academic articles, and government documents from 1991 to 2025 was uploaded to NVivo. Through thematic coding, the software identified the most frequent discourse markers linked

with the intelligentsia. Special attention was paid to keywords such as "identity," "authority," "nation," "Islamic reform," and "digital public sphere." These markers were then interpreted in relation to their social context, enabling the study to identify ideological shifts in the construction of intellectual authority in Uzbekistan (Flick, 2018).

A comparative analytical framework was also developed to distinguish the structural and functional differences between the Uzbek intelligentsia and similar categories in post-Soviet societies such as Kazakhstan and Russia. This framework compared aspects such as language policy, religious identity, intellectual freedom, and post-authoritarian transformation. The comparison illuminated how the Uzbek experience is shaped by the enduring legacy of Islamic reformism and a unique negotiation with state power. Scholarly works like those provided comparative insights into post-Soviet intellectual trajectories.

To ensure robustness, a triangulation strategy was applied. Findings derived from conceptual analysis, NVivo coding, and comparative frameworks were cross-referenced at each stage. Where contradictions emerged, secondary verification was conducted using academic journals, online interviews, and media archives. Major reference points included the Enlightenment Archive of Central Asia, the Jadid Database, and official publications from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Higher Education.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process. All citations were accurately referenced using the APA 7th Edition format, and no copyrighted material was reproduced without appropriate attribution. An informed consent approach was not applicable, as the research did not involve human participants but rather relied on publicly available sources. Moreover, to ensure terminological clarity, a multilingual glossary was developed to standardize complex terms from Uzbek, Russian, Arabic, and Persian—allowing for a consistent and culturally sensitive interpretation of key concepts.

The research process was divided into five phases:

- 1. Collection and digitization of primary sources: newspapers, blogs, legal texts, and historical documents.
- 2. Keyword coding using NVivo for recurring discourse patterns and thematic clustering.
- 3. Conceptual mapping of intelligentsia-related themes across three historical epochs.
- 4. Comparative analysis of regional intellectual patterns.
- 5. Triangulation and synthesis of results to ensure analytical coherence.

The use of qualitative methodology does imply limitations particularly the challenge of statistical generalization. However, this is compensated by the depth of cultural and conceptual insight offered by qualitative methods. Furthermore, the research opens pathways for future mixed-method studies that may integrate surveys or big-data analytics to explore public perceptions of intelligentsia in the digital age (Flick, 2018). In conclusion, this layered methodological approach allows for an interdisciplinary exploration of the Uzbek intelligentsia as both a cultural institution and a philosophical construct. It provides a structured and historically grounded understanding of how intelligentsia identities have evolved in response to societal transitions from colonialism to independence, and from Soviet centralization to digital globalization.

4. Result and Discussion

The cultural-historical approach served as the foundational method for tracing the emergence and ongoing evolution of the Uzbek intelligentsia, spanning from the late 19th century to the present era. By systematically analyzing primary sources including Jadid-era periodicals, Soviet-era documents, and post-independence media content this study delineated three distinct chronological phases: Jadidist reformism (1870–1920), Soviet ideological structuring (1920–1991), and post-independence reconfiguration (1991–2025). This clear periodization enabled a diachronic analysis that clarifies how successive political and cultural regimes have shaped the intelligentsia's self-awareness and societal role.

In the Jadidist phase, intellectuals such as Mahmudhoja Behbudi and Abdurrauf Fitrat pioneered educational and cultural reform rooted in Islamic ethics. They founded new-method schools, launched periodicals like Samarkand and Ayina, and initiated public theater to foster civic consciousness effectively blending religious values with modernist visions. A recent historical study confirms that this movement laid critical groundwork for modern Uzbek intellectual identity, including mass literacy and national awakening (Maxsutovna, 2025).

The Soviet era introduced a paradoxical transformation: intellectualism was both promoted and restrained. The state institutionalized authors such as Cho'lpon, Oybek, Sadriddin Ayni, and Fayzullo Khodjayev as cultural elites tasked with developing a "Soviet Uzbek" identity. Yet, any deviation from prescribed socialist realism like Cho'lpon's nationalist leanings was harshly punished. This created a dual consciousness balancing nationalist or Islamic authenticity with enforced ideological conformity (Adams, 2021). The state's simultaneous efforts to suppress "bourgeois nationalism" while translating Uzbek classics into Russian highlights this contradiction (Odilov & Karimov).

Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the intelligentsia diversified amid changing political, religious, and techno-cultural landscapes. Nationalistic and Islamic discourses resurfaced, and debates on language policy (Cyrillic vs. Latin scripts) intensified. Already in the early 1990s, activists worked to decolonize language and strengthen Uzbek a reflection of intelligentsia influence on state and cultural identity. Under the "New Uzbekistan" reforms post-2016, public intelligentsia not only re-emerged through official channels, but also via digital platforms like Telegram and YouTube. Civic bloggers, educators, and influencers now occupy discursive spaces formerly closed to state-sanctioned actors.

Throughout these eras, recurring conceptual "micro-nodes" such as marifatchi (enlightener) and xalqparvarlik (people-centeredness) consistently embody the core feature of intelligentsia: acting as mediators between tradition and modernity. These archetypes persist from the Jadid school founders to today's digital educators and civic influencers, reflecting a resilient thread of moral-intellectual responsibility.

The cultural-historical stratification thus clarifies a longitudinal pattern: each epoch delivered new existential questions to which the intelligentsia responded be it nation-building, ideological conformity, cultural preservation, or navigating a digital civic sphere. This approach reveals the intelligentsia not as a static social class but as a fluid identity, consistently reshaped by historical contingencies and shifting sociopolitical structures (Askarov, 2019; Khairi, 2016).

Criterion	Russian Intelligentsia	Uzbek Intelligentsia
Historical Roots	Emerged in the 18 th –19 th	Formed in the 19 th –20 th
	centuries, based on European	centuries from Jadids
	Enlightenment and noble	(reformers) and the Soviet-
	culture.	educated elite.
Ideology	Clash between Westernizers and Slavophiles, later socialism and liberalism.	Past national revival
		intertwined with Soviet
		internationalism, later
		moderate Islam and secularism.
Attitude Toward Religion	Predominantly secular, with	Complex blend of Islamic
	atheistic tendencies in the	traditions and Soviet/post-
	USSR.	Soviet secularism.
Language and Culture	Russian as the dominant language, oriented toward European culture.	Bilingualism (Uzbek +
		Russian) and fusion of Turko-
		Persian and Soviet cultural
		models.
Political Role	Varied – some groups	Integrated into the Soviet
	(Decembrists, populists,	system while preserving

Table 1.Comparing analysis of Uzbek and Russian intelligentsia

	dissidents) were politically active, advocating change, while others avoided radicalism.	national identity; post-Soviet era saw a split between liberals and state-aligned conservatives.
Post-Soviet Challenges	Crisis of identity, division between liberals and statists.	Preference for a conservative- modernist model under state control.
Contemprary challenges	Globalization, value conflicts, brain drain – balancing tradition and modernization.	Pressure from authoritarian systems necessitates independent thought and defense of intellectual freedom.

5. Conclusion

Human qualities represent specific forms of existence that correspond to the prevailing socio-cultural and historical conditions of being. These qualities are not fixed or universal; rather, they are shaped by the particular configurations of social development at a given time. When the conditions of existence shift due to technological advancement, political transformation, or cultural change new existential questions emerge, prompting the formation of new human qualities as responses to these altered realities. In this sense, human qualities are deeply contextual and are tied to the temporal nature of human existence.

Acknowledging the complexity, temporality, and selectivity of human qualities means recognizing that these traits are not eternal or immutable. They cannot be conceptualized as static "forms" that remain identical across different epochs. Rather, qualities evolve through a continuous process in which certain existing traits may be redefined or replaced. Simultaneously, new attributes may emerge that better align with the prevailing environment and lived experiences. This dynamic interplay between the individual and their surrounding context ensures that human qualities are always in flux adapting, responding, and shaping.

In this framework, the formation of intellectual identity, or the identification of the intelligentsia, occurs dialectically within a self-regulating social system. Intellectualism surfaces not as a predetermined class trait, but as a condition that emerges when inherited qualities are no longer adequate to address the demands of a changing socio-environmental context. It reflects a kind of rupture or dissonance a point at which older forms of thinking or engagement become misaligned with emerging historical realities.

However, once established, the intellectual identity does not remain passive. It acts back upon its environment, engaging in critique, innovation, and transformation. Through cultural articulation, critical reflection, or civic action, intellectuals contribute to reshaping the very structures that produced them. This interaction initiates a new cycle of transformation, wherein the environment, now altered, demands further redefinition of intellectual identity. Thus, the intelligentsia exists as a fluid and evolving phenomenon both shaped by and shaping the trajectory of social development.

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