

THE PERIODICAL PRESS AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE SURKHANDARYA REGION (UZBEKISTAN), 1930s–2020s

Zubayda Hamidovna Yuldosheva

Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Foundations of Spirituality, and Legal Education, Pedagogical Institute of Termez State University

Abstract

This article examines the periodical press as a primary historical source for the study of regional development, using the Surkhandarya region of southern Uzbekistan as a case. Through a qualitative thematic content analysis organized around three domains — social, economic and cultural life — the study traces how the regional press represented the region from the 1930s to the 2020s, drawing chiefly on the regional flagship newspaper (Zarya Surkhana, today Surxon tongi, published since 1935). The analysis treats the newspaper simultaneously as a mirror of regional life and as an instrument of ideology, and it foregrounds the methodological problem of censorship and selective framing under different political regimes. The findings show that the relative weight of the three thematic domains shifted systematically across the Soviet, independence and post-2017 periods, and that the medium itself — its format, ownership and platform — is itself a form of historical evidence. The paper contributes a source-critical framework for using regional newspapers in the socio-economic and cultural history of Central Asia.

Keywords: Periodical press, historical source, content analysis, regional press, Surkhandarya, Uzbekistan, media history, source criticism, socio-economic history, cultural heritage.

Introduction

Newspapers are often described as the first draft of history. Beyond reporting events, the periodical press records the everyday textures of a society — its labour, anxieties, festivals and aspirations — and in doing so leaves a dense, dated and locally specific archive that other sources rarely match. For historians of regional development, the local newspaper is therefore both an object of study and an instrument of inquiry: it tells us what happened, but also what a given regime considered worth publicizing.

In Central Asian historiography, the republican and capital-city press has received considerable attention, whereas the regional press remains comparatively understudied as a systematic



source. The Surkhandarya region — Uzbekistan's southernmost province, bordering Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, with Termez as its centre — offers a productive case, both because of its strategic border position and because it possesses a continuously published regional newspaper dating from 1935. This paper pursues two aims: first, to analyse how the periodical press represented the social, economic and cultural life of the region across nearly a century; and second, to assess the value and limits of such regional periodicals as historical sources.

2. Materials and Methods

The principal corpus is the regional flagship newspaper, founded in 1935 as Zarya Surkhana and later renamed Surxon tongi, situated within the wider trajectory of the Uzbek press (from the early Soviet organs through to the post-1991 national newspapers). Encyclopedic, statistical and secondary-scholarly sources were used for contextual triangulation.

The method is qualitative thematic content analysis combined with historical source criticism. Press material was coded into three thematic domains — social, economic and cultural — and the salience of each domain was compared across four chronological periods. Crucially, the analysis is reflexive: rather than reading the press as a transparent record, it interrogates the conditions of production (ownership, censorship, ideological mandate) that shaped what could be represented and how.

3. Results

3.1. The social domain

In the Soviet period the social agenda of the press centred on literacy campaigns, the expansion of schooling and public health, and the mobilization of labour. After independence, the social register broadened to include questions of national identity, demographic change and, reflecting the province's border location, sensitive social problems such as human trafficking and narcotics. Since 2017 the social coverage has foregrounded employment programmes, education reform and targeted family-support measures, reported across print and digital channels.

3.2. The economic domain

Economic coverage was historically dominated by cotton — the collective and state farms, land reclamation and irrigation projects that reorganized the regional economy under the Soviet plan. In the independence era this gave way to reporting on the transition to a market economy, private enterprise and local development initiatives. The press thus offers a near-continuous, if ideologically framed, chronicle of the region's economic structure and its transformation.

3.3. The cultural domain

Cultural reporting moved from Soviet-era accounts of theatre, literature and state festivals toward a post-1991 emphasis on local heritage and identity: the archaeological legacy of Termez, the intangible cultural traditions of Boysun, regional literature and folklore. This shift illustrates how cultural coverage tracked the broader politics of memory and nation-building.



3.4. The medium as evidence

The newspaper's own evolution is itself a historical datum. Its successive titles, its shift from an ideological organ to a provincial socio-political paper, its re-registration in 2017, and its move onto an online platform and social-media channels all index changing relations between the state, the region and its publics. By the mid-2010s the province hosted more than thirty newspapers, two magazines and several broadcast outlets, signalling a pluralization of the regional mediascape.

Table 1. Shifts in the framing and thematic salience of the Surkhandarya regional press (author's analysis).

Period	Dominant framing	Salient themes by domain
1930s–1991	Ideological mouthpiece (centralized)	Economic: cotton, collectivization, irrigation; Social: literacy, health; Cultural: state festivals
1991–2016	Provincial socio-political paper	Cultural: heritage, identity; Social: border problems; Economic: market transition
2017–present	Multi-platform regional outlet	Social: employment, reform; Economic: development programmes; Cultural: local events

4. Discussion

The case confirms a central proposition of media history: the regional press functions simultaneously as a mirror and as an instrument. It reflects the social, economic and cultural life of the region while also setting the public agenda according to the priorities of those who controlled it. The systematic shift in thematic salience — from economic and ideological themes under the Soviet plan to heritage and identity after 1991 — makes the press a sensitive indicator of wider political transitions.

These same properties impose methodological caution. Soviet-era coverage was filtered through official ideology and silenced whole categories of experience; representativeness cannot be assumed, and absence is itself meaningful. Used critically, however, regional newspapers remain an exceptionally rich source for socio-economic and cultural history, preserving granular, dated, place-specific detail unavailable elsewhere. The Surkhandarya case thus offers a transferable, source-critical template for the comparative study of post-Soviet regional media.

5. Conclusion

From the 1930s to the 2020s, the periodical press chronicled the social, economic and cultural life of the Surkhandarya region while itself evolving from a centralized ideological organ into a pluralistic, multi-platform mediascape. Read through a reflexive, source-critical content analysis, this body of material is a valuable but non-neutral historical source whose framing must be interrogated alongside its content. Future research employing systematic quantitative



content analysis of digitized newspaper runs would allow the thematic shifts identified here to be measured rather than inferred.

References

1. Editorial materials of the regional newspaper Zarya Surkhana / Surxon tongi (since 1935). Termez. surxontongi.uz.
2. History of the Tashkent press and the formation of the Uzbek periodical press (Ishtirokiyun – Qizil O‘zbekiston – Sovet O‘zbekistoni – O‘zbekiston ovozi).
3. On the history of private newspapers in the Uzbek press. Zenodo, 2024.
4. Socio-economic changes in Uzbekistan in 1920–1950 (the case of the Surkhandarya region). Zenodo, 2025.
5. A review of the mass media of the Surkhandarya region. Hurriyat newspaper, 2016.
6. Surxondaryo Region: administrative-territorial and statistical data. en.wikipedia.org; surxondaryo.uz.
7. Toponyms of the Surkhandarya region and their analysis. Zenodo, 2025.
8. Krippendorff, K. Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology. SAGE Publications.

