

**THE POLICY OF COTTON MONOCULTURE: A REVIEW OF SELECTED
1986 ISSUES OF THE "QASHQADARYO HAQIQATI" NEWSPAPER****Suyarov Nurbek Rustamovich**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Department of Pedagogical Psychology, Turon University**Ergashev Furkat Fakhriddinovich**

1st-year Master's Student in History, Turon University

Abstract: This article analyzes the July and December 1986 issues of the "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" newspaper (July 22; December 18, 20, and 30) as primary historical sources. The Soviet state's cotton monoculture policy constitutes a totalitarian agrarian policy that inflicted severe social, economic, and ecological consequences upon the republics of Central Asia — and upon Uzbekistan and its Qashqadaryo region in particular. The article systematically examines the crisis indicators in cotton farming reflected in the newspaper, including misuse of land, water shortages, forced labor practices, food insecurity, deterioration of social infrastructure, corruption, and the disintegration of families. Published against the backdrop of the emerging glasnost (openness) policy, these newspaper materials represent a rare critical voice in the Soviet press, confirming the tragic consequences of cotton monoculture through concrete figures and documented facts. The article is aimed at reinforcing the evidentiary foundation of the master's thesis through primary sources.

Keywords: Cotton monoculture, monoculture, "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" newspaper, Qashqadaryo region, Soviet agrarian policy, forced labor, ecological crisis, cotton quota, glasnost, 1986, perestroika, primary source, agriculture, social consequences, corruption.

Introduction:

In the history of Uzbekistan, the "cotton era" — spanning from the early 1960s to 1991 — stands as one of the most complex and burdensome chapters in the country's socioeconomic and ecological history. During this period, the Soviet central government subordinated the agriculture of Central Asia, and Uzbekistan in particular, almost entirely to cotton production. The republic's economy was built around a single commodity — "white gold" — and all land, water, labor, and financial resources were directed toward this singular objective. As a result, food production, social infrastructure, the natural environment, and the standard of living of the population steadily deteriorated.

In researching this policy, primary sources — that is, press materials published during that era — hold particular scholarly value. The Soviet press habitually avoided full disclosure of real problems, remaining confined within the bounds of official ideology. However, beginning in 1986, the glasnost (openness) policy proclaimed by CPSU General Secretary M.S. Gorbachev enabled local newspapers to begin writing more openly about a range of acute problems.

The 1986 issues of "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" — in particular the editions of July 22 and December 18, 20, and 30 — belong precisely to this category of rare historical sources. These issues contain significant information about the discussion of decisions made at the June 1986 CPSU Central Committee Plenum, materials from the tenth session of the regional Soviet of People's Deputies, and problems in agriculture and the social situation. This article analyzes those sources in order to examine the multifaceted impact of the cotton monoculture policy on Qashqadaryo region.

The relevance of this subject lies in the fact that contemporary Uzbek historiography, in the process of reassessing the consequences of Soviet agrarian policy, is in need of diverse sources and approaches. Primary sources — newspapers and archival documents of that era — represent the most reliable method of demonstrating the real consequences of this policy through figures and documented facts. From this perspective, the materials of "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" hold great scholarly significance as a systematic regional account of cotton monoculture's impact.

The aim of this article is to analyze the 1986 issues of this newspaper from the perspective of source studies and to systematically uncover the ecological, economic, social, and political consequences of cotton monoculture.

Main Part

"Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" as a Primary Historical Source

"Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" was the official party-Soviet newspaper of Qashqadaryo region, published in the Uzbek language. As an official Soviet publication, it served, on the one hand, to convey party directives to the public and, on the other, to occasionally reflect local problems. The distinctive feature of 1986 was that, beginning with that very year, critical materials started appearing more frequently in the press under the glasnost policy.

Two important aspects must be considered when evaluating the newspaper's materials as a primary source: first, its inability, as an official Soviet publication, to fully reflect reality; and second, the necessity that arose — within the framework of discussions on CPSU Plenum

decisions — to write openly about certain problems. As a result, the newspaper contained both the ideological language typical of the Soviet system and real economic indicators and social issues. This dual-layered quality makes the source particularly interesting for historical analysis.

The Cotton Farming Crisis: Data from the July 22, 1986 Issue

The July 22, 1986 issue of the newspaper carried a major article dedicated to the tasks of the Qashqadaryo regional party organization in the wake of the June CPSU Central Committee Plenum. The article cited specific figures revealing the depth of the crisis in cotton farming. The newspaper openly acknowledged that, due to water shortages, cotton seeds had failed to germinate on 30,000 hectares, and that cotton plants were lagging behind in growth on one-sixth of all cultivated areas.

The target of delivering 188,000 tons of raw cotton and achieving a yield of 25 centners per hectare proved to be unattainable in practice. Despite the reclamation of 81,000 hectares of new land over the five-year period, yields fell 50 percent below plan, with only 627 soums of revenue obtained per hectare. This indicator reflects the economic expression of misuse of land resources.

The water problem took on a separately tragic dimension. In the Guzor, Kamashi, Yakkabag, and Kitob districts, water use remained unregulated. "Flooding irrigation" and the draining of water into collectors had become widespread practice — representing, at the very moment when the Aral Sea was shrinking most rapidly, the most acute manifestation of squandered water resources.

Technical infrastructure had also effectively ceased to function: only 16 of the 121 farms across the region possessed modern processing points needed to ensure the quality of cotton fiber. The quality problem had engulfed the entire industry — it was recorded that 90 percent of the 34 types of products inspected were being produced as defective goods.

The efficiency of mineral fertilizer use was also low, and the region's sharply lagging capacity to generate additional yields compared to other regions was openly criticized. This situation starkly illustrates the paradox of the cotton monoculture system — escalating resource expenditure accompanied by declining quality.

Forced Labor and Social Relations

One of the gravest consequences of cotton monoculture was the compulsory mobilization of the population for the cotton harvest. The 1986 newspaper materials provide concrete quantitative indicators of this practice: more than 4,000 people were mobilized for fieldwork in

the Kitob and Muborak districts alone, constituting one-third of the "able-bodied population" — that is, the working-age adult population.

The materials from the December 18, 1986 issue reveal an even broader scale of forced labor. Of the 143 cotton-producing farms in the region, 139 — or 97 percent — failed to meet their cotton sales quotas. Only 603 of 3,483 brigades (17 percent) fulfilled their quotas. The mechanized harvesting plan was fulfilled at a mere 37 percent; the remaining portion was picked by hand. These figures demonstrate that mechanized harvesting was effectively nonexistent — the main burden rested on manual labor.

District-level indicators were equally stark: in Guzgor district, only 33 percent of the cotton sales plan was fulfilled; in Chiroqchi district, 44 percent; in Bahoriston district, 46 percent. These outcomes demonstrate that neither unrealistic planning nor forced labor mechanisms managed to resolve the underlying problems.

Another manifestation of the systemic crisis in labor relations was the personnel problem. More than 20 percent of mid-level positions in the agro-industrial complex were occupied by unqualified trainees, and among farm directors, those who lacked knowledge of animal husbandry were numerous. This situation reveals that human capital was also being depleted in the course of implementing the monoculture policy.

The impact of cotton monoculture on food security was direct and severe. Planting only cotton on irrigated land while neglecting fodder crops fundamentally undermined the feed base for livestock. Newspaper articles specifically emphasized that "the fodder problem is becoming more acute with each passing year."

The results in the livestock sector were grievous: in half of the district's farms, the semi-annual milk production plan was not met; in one-third, the meat production plan was not met. Each cow yielded an average of 590 kilograms of milk — only 30 percent of the planned quota. These indicators reveal the extent to which the population of Qashqadaryo was living with food insecurity at the height of the cotton campaign in the mid-1980s.

The fodder crop problem had assumed a systemic character: late irrigation and insufficient attention — all of this occurred under the pressure of cotton production demands. As a result, a chain reaction emerged: fodder shortages → livestock decline → shortage of meat and dairy products.

Cotton monoculture channeled state resources primarily toward the agricultural sector, leaving social infrastructure neglected. Three main manifestations of this process — education, healthcare, and housing — are documented in the newspaper materials with concrete data.

In the field of education: 61 percent of the region's 770 schools were housed in unadapted buildings — premises intended for other purposes — and more students were being admitted than the established capacity allowed. Even the official newspaper acknowledged that the number and quality of educational institutions were failing to keep pace with the growing school-age population.

In healthcare, the situation manifested as a double-sided problem: on the one hand, there were insufficient hospitals; on the other, existing medical facilities were being used "unsatisfactorily." Despite the CPSU 27th Congress directive to provide every family with a separate apartment by the year 2000, housing construction was described as proceeding "very slowly." Over three five-year periods, more than 6 million square meters of housing needed to be commissioned.

The ecological data reflected in the December issues also exerted a direct impact on public health. The 65 industrial enterprises of the region were discharging approximately 300,000 tons of harmful substances into the atmosphere annually; wastewater from enterprises in Kitob city was flowing untreated into the Qashqadaryo, Oqsuv, and Tankhozdarya rivers. Specialists emphasized that the observed increase in viral hepatitis among children was linked to ecological contamination.

An article headlined "Do Not Be the Ruin of Your Children's Happiness!" published in the December 20, 1986 issue of "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" provides documented evidence of the direct negative impact of cotton monoculture on family life. In 1985, 279 families divorced; in the first ten months of 1986, 215 out of 1,179 newly married couples — 18.4 percent — broke up. The article clearly identified the causes: economic hardship, parents being compelled to spend much of the year harvesting cotton in the fields, and alcoholism among men.

The scale of this tragedy was even more severe for children: in 1985 alone, between 500 and 600 children were left without a father or mother — orphaned. The majority of divorced families had two or three children. These figures demonstrate that the cotton policy produced not only economic and ecological, but also profound sociodemographic consequences.

Cultural institutions had also fallen into neglect. The majority of the region's 308 club facilities were not heated even in summer, required major repairs, and some were in a state of emergency. Libraries with holdings of 5.5 million volumes and arts schools were deprived of qualified specialists. The resources expended on cotton production had impoverished cultural life.

Corruption facts, which were ordinarily concealed in the Soviet press, were also reflected in "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati." In the context of the large-scale judicial proceedings known as the "cotton affair," the newspaper wrote that in the region, "bribe-takers and embezzlers of state property continue to be found."

A specific example was cited: 25 tons of rice were purchased from the Kitob district consumer society procurement office at 90 kopeks per kilogram, then resold at 1 rouble 8 kopeks, with more than 5,000 roubles embezzled. During the inspection, 26,000 roubles in cash and gold coins were found on the perpetrators.

Quality-related crimes were also uncovered at industrial enterprises: the Beshkent cotton ginning plant shipped sixth-grade fiber to the "Vostok" textile combine in Omsk instead of the contracted third-grade fiber, and as a result, despite having shipped 26 tons of fiber, incurred a loss of 10,190 roubles. The large gap between official prices and market prices created an environment conducive to speculation and corruption.

The December 30, 1986 issue stands apart in terms of its historical significance. On December 27 of that year, the fourth plenum of the Uzbek Communist Party Qashqadaryo regional committee took place. At the plenum, N.T. Turopov was relieved of his duties as first secretary, and I.A. Karimov — who had served as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR and Chairman of the State Planning Committee of the republic, and who would later become the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan — was elected in his place.

This political change occurred at the final stage of the cotton monoculture policy. Karimov's ascent to regional leadership and his subsequent attitude toward agrarian policy in the independence era are interconnected. The same pages of the newspaper also reflected the critical perspective of ordinary citizens toward the "perestroika" policy: a worker at the Qarshi asphalt-concrete plant voiced and published the opinion that "we hear talk of perestroika and acceleration, but very little is actually being done."

At the end of 1986, a CPSU Central Committee resolution on collective contracting and economic accountability was announced. However, the very same article noted that these changes were being implemented in many farms "without formalization and without broad dissemination" — meaning that even reform efforts were being curtailed in practice.

A comprehensive analysis of the 1986 issues of "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" yields a number of important scholarly findings regarding the impact of the cotton monoculture policy on Qashqadaryo region.

First, by 1986, cotton monoculture had given rise to a deep ecological crisis. The failure of seeds to germinate on 30,000 hectares, yields falling 50 percent below plan, and the careless exploitation of irrigated land — all of these are the consequence of excessive exploitation of land and water resources. These indicators represent a local manifestation of a problem characteristic not only of the region, but of the entire ecology of Central Asia.

Second, the practice of forced labor had assumed a systemic and widespread character. The mobilization of one-third of the working-age population for the cotton harvest, the failure of 139 out of 143 farms to meet their quotas, and the completion of the quota by only 603 out of 3,483 brigades (17 percent) — all of these confirm the coexistence of unrealistic planning and coercive mechanisms, while simultaneously demonstrating the very inefficiency of forced labor.

Third, the newspaper materials show that the reach of the cotton policy extended beyond agriculture, encompassing all spheres of social life. Industrial enterprises (22 of them failing to fulfill 26.8 million roubles' worth of plans), the trade network (9 organizations failing to fulfill 3.3 million roubles' worth of plans), families (279 divorces, 500–600 orphans), culture (the majority of 308 clubs in poor condition), and ecology (300,000 tons of harmful emissions) — all of these are manifestations of a systemic crisis linked to a single cause: cotton monoculture.

Fourth, the reflection of these problems in the press within the framework of the glasnost policy holds important historical significance. The publication of such critical materials in the Soviet press — albeit still in a limited form — was a sign of the system's beginning to criticize itself. This aspect requires accounting for the characteristic of "truth within censorship" when studying the press of that era as historical sources.

Fifth, the event of the final month of 1986 — the appointment of I.A. Karimov as leader of Qashqadaryo region — is directly connected to subsequent historical processes. This political change occurred at the apex of the cotton monoculture policy and constitutes a context linked to the beginning of its reassessment during the era of Uzbekistan's independence.

From a comparative analytical perspective, the July and December 1986 issues complement one another, revealing different dimensions: while the July issue presents direct indicators of the cotton crisis (yields, land, water problems), the December issues demonstrate the chain-like spread of that crisis across all sectors of society — industry, trade, family, culture, ecology, and healthcare. The July issue more fully captures the causes; the December issues, the consequences.

These findings align with the existing scholarly literature on cotton monoculture — including the works of Rumer (1989), Craumer (1992), Micklin (2007), and Uzbek researchers — while confirming them in documentary form at the local, regional level through primary sources.

Conclusion

The analysis of selected 1986 issues of "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" — the editions of July 22 and December 18, 20, and 30 — as primary sources clearly revealed the multifaceted and systemic consequences of the cotton monoculture policy.

In the ecological dimension: the failure of seeds to germinate on 30,000 hectares, yields falling 50 percent below plan, the careless use of irrigated land, and the squandering of water resources — all of these represent harm inflicted on nature by agrarian monoculture, and subsequently formed part of the Aral Sea disaster.

In the socioeconomic dimension: the mobilization of one-third of the working-age population into forced labor, a defective goods rate reaching 90 percent, the fulfillment of only 30 percent of livestock production plans, food insecurity, and a shortage of housing and hospitals — all of these demonstrate the impoverishment of the social sphere as a consequence of channeling state resources entirely into the cotton sector.

In the demographic and family dimension: the disintegration of hundreds of families annually, thousands of children separated from their parents, and the intensification of alcoholism and economic hardship — all of these must be assessed as direct harm inflicted on people's lives by the cotton policy.

In the political dimension: the change of leadership in the final days of 1986 and the critical voices of ordinary citizens in the glasnost environment — all of these signal the beginning of the system's process of self-reassessment. The appointment of I.A. Karimov to regional leadership constitutes an important political milestone in the subsequent historical context.

This research demonstrates that the Soviet-era press — although published within the boundaries of official ideology — holds great scholarly value as a primary historical source. Critical materials that emerged within the framework of the glasnost policy preserved a portion of the truth, and studying them today through systematic source analysis helps achieve a more complete understanding of the consequences of Soviet agrarian policy. This article constitutes part of the evidentiary foundation of the master's thesis on the topic "Coverage of the

Intensification of the Soviet State's Cotton Monoculture Policy in the Press (on the Example of Qashqadaryo Region)."

References

1. "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" newspaper. July 22, 1986. — Qashqadaryo: Qashqadaryo Regional Publishing House, 1986.
2. "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" newspaper. December 18, 1986, No. 242 (11183). — Qashqadaryo: Qashqadaryo Regional Publishing House, 1986.
3. "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" newspaper. December 20, 1986. — Qashqadaryo: Qashqadaryo Regional Publishing House, 1986.
4. "Qashqadaryo Haqiqati" newspaper. December 30, 1986, No. 249 (11190). — Qashqadaryo: Qashqadaryo Regional Publishing House, 1986.
5. Materials of the June 1986 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee. — Moscow: Politizdat, 1986.
6. Materials of the Tenth Session of the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies. December 17, 1986. — Qashqadaryo, 1986.
7. Karimov I.A. Uzbekistan: National Independence, Economy, Politics, Ideology. — Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1993. — P. 78.
8. Mirziyoyev Sh.M. We Shall Build Our Free and Prosperous Democratic State of Uzbekistan Together. — Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 2017. — P. 56.
9. Rumer E.B. Soviet Central Asia: «A Tragic Experiment». — Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. — P. 48-72.
10. Craumer P.R. Agricultural Change, Labor Supply and Rural Out-Migration in Soviet Central Asia // Geographic Perspectives on Soviet Central Asia / Ed. R.A. Lewis. — London: Routledge, 1992. — P. 132-180.
11. Micklin P. The Aral Sea Disaster // Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences. — 2007. — Vol. 35. — P. 47-72.
12. Tashkentov N. Socioeconomic Consequences of the Cotton Monopoly in Uzbekistan // History of Uzbekistan. — 2003. — No. 2. — P. 45-58.
13. Yusupov E. Cotton Monoculture and Its Consequences. — Tashkent: Fan, 1995. — P. 112.
14. Alimov R. Historical Analysis of the Agriculture of Soviet-Era Uzbekistan. — Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 2005. — P. 89.

15. Rashidova D. History of the Socioeconomic Development of Qashqadaryo Region (1960–1991). — Qarshi: Nasaf, 2010. — P. 67.
16. Northrop D. Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia. — Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. — P. 198-220.
17. Lubin N. Labour and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia: An Uneasy Compromise. — London: Macmillan, 1984. — P. 78-105.
18. Pomfret R. The Economies of Central Asia. — Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. — P. 45-60.
19. Glantz M.H. (ed.) Creeping Environmental Problems and Sustainable Development in the Aral Sea Basin. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. — P. 22-45.
20. Qodirov A. History of the Uzbek Press. — Tashkent: National University of Uzbekistan, 2008. — P. 156.