

TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL
LITERATURE AND GRAPHIC JOURNALISM IN
UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: The thesis offers a chronological overview of the evolution of visual literature and graphic journalism in Uzbekistan. The author provides case studies from the history of Jadid journalism, book publishing, and comics related to the media landscape of Uzbekistan.

Key words: visual literature, graphic journalism, comics, Uzbekistan, Uzbek comics

The Uzbek visual narrative has its roots not only in the visual arts but also in satirical journalism, particularly in the publications of the Jadids. We would be remiss if we did not mention the magazine «Mushtum». In the 1920s, the activities of «Mushtum» demonstrated a clear alignment with the principles of the «new journalism», which was established in the United States in the second half of the 19th century by J. Pulitzer. The magazine also features several notable cartoons, including the first comic strips. The visual language of the cartoons and strips in the inaugural issues was relatively straightforward. Furthermore, dialogues and monologues featuring cartoon and comic strip characters can be found in issues published after 1929.

The provision of state support for blogging and social activism has resulted in the emergence of independent artists who address current social issues in their writing. Notable creators in this field include Habikatura, Rais Buva, Uzbekistan Illustrated, and Inkuzart. The content produced by these online personalities varies considerably in terms of its thematic focus. The visual narratives created by «Habikatura» tend to address serious socio-political issues and incorporate journalistic elements. Inkuzart provides an example of street art (a form of monumental fine art) and alternative media. Furthermore, the pages of «Rais buva» and «Uzbekistan Illustrated» demonstrate a greater focus on everyday humor.

In addition to cartoons and comics, Uzbekistan is also experiencing a revival of related sequential visual narratives. However, while the government is encouraging cartooning as a means of promoting freedom of speech and media transparency, the growing interest in comics and graphic novels in our country is related to the growing influence of the mass culture of South-East Asia, especially Japan, South Korea, and China. Additionally, there is a growing interest in the products of the U.S. comic

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industry. Over the past five years, the audience for visual stories in Uzbekistan has grown significantly in terms of numbers. As a result, the assortment of comics and graphic novels in some bookstores is becoming more diverse, and online trading platforms are offering services for ordering such works from abroad. A significant concern is the lack of local media content that aligns with the interests of this audience.

The practice of creating narratives in comic and graphic formats is not a new phenomenon in Uzbekistan. However, in contrast to graphic journalism, which emerged in close connection with satire and comics, visual or graphic literature is considered a field in which progress is significantly behind schedule. It is important to note several key milestones in the evolution of graphic narrative:

1) In 1996, the former publishing house «Chulpon» released a comic book titled «The History of the Motherland in Pictures» (Mahkamov & Sodiqov, 1996). This book, authored by A. Mahkamov and A. Sodiqov, comprises 22 narratives on the history of Uzbekistan.

2) In 2001, the former publishing house «Yozuvchi» published «Shum bola sarguzashtlari» This work is a graphic adaptation of an excerpt from the story «Shum bola» by the renowned Uzbek writer Ghafur Ghulom. The publication consisted of 16 pages. The images of various plans, created using black and white graphics, lack sufficient detail (Ghulom, 2001).

3) In October-November 2011, the Fund Forum of Culture and Art of Uzbekistan, which has since ceased operations, conducted a training seminar on comic creation with the participation of the renowned French comic artist A. Clériss. This was accompanied by an exhibition of his works and a special exhibition on «Comics in Uzbekistan» (Французский, 2011).

4) In 2013, the U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan initiated the publication of the book «Two Rivoyats of Uzbekistan». The publication, made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of State, draws upon two legends from Uzbekistan's rich national folklore. The two legends are «Kirk Kiz» (Forty Virgins) and «Honatlas» (Kalder, 2013; Benjamin, 2013).

5) The state initiated a program to enhance reading proficiency, with a particular focus on children's literacy. On September 13, 2017, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued Decree PP-3271, which established a program of comprehensive measures to develop the system of publishing and distribution of book products and to improve the culture of reading (Kitob, 2017). On May 4, 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued Decree 335, which outlined measures to be taken to support and further improve the system

of publishing children's and youth literature (Bolalar, 2018). Following this, there was a notable increase in the activity of children's publications and publishers in the Uzbek media segment. The first children's comics and picture books were published.

6) In 2018, the work *Neon and Red* was announced (B Uzbekistane, 2018), which promised to become the first superhero comic book in Uzbek. However, due to the unpopularity of the professionally designed comic book, low demand after the first issue in 2019, the project was suspended.

7) In 2021, the first manga studio in Uzbekistan, Tokyogroup (formerly Gstudio), opened its doors in Tashkent. The studio unites amateur illustrators and authors in one place, offering them a platform to showcase their talents.

In 2023, a platform for the comic series «Perezvon» was launched. The inaugural issue of the series was unveiled in October 2022, and distributed in both printed and electronic formats (mobile app). In 2023, the platform underwent a name change to «Doodleverse».

Many factors contribute to the uneven development of visual narratives in Uzbekistan. 1) The media environment is dominated by text-centric and video-centric approaches. The social survey of 228 men and women of different ages conducted as part of the research revealed that respondents primarily receive content in text (88.9%) and video (55.6%) formats. However, in terms of age demographics, respondents aged 18-20 and younger have indicated a preference for visual formats, including photos and graphics, over text formats. Consequently, it is anticipated that the audience share of static visual narratives will increase over the next decade. This highlights the necessity to create content in this format. 2) The cost of content is high. This is largely due to another issue: a shortage of visual creators. The editorial fee schedule does not currently accommodate visual narrative formats other than cartoons. Furthermore, the fee schedule does not differentiate between single-panel cartoons and comics with two or more panels. As a result, creative professionals who can produce high-quality visual content, including graphic narratives (such as cartoons, visual interviews, and comics), tend to prefer freelance work and temporary media collaborations. This results in an increase in the cost of visual content.

The results of the survey conducted during the study indicated the following:

—The survey revealed that 58.9% of respondents expressed a desire to read graphic adaptations of popular fiction.

— Additionally, almost equal numbers of respondents indicated that visual narratives should be used to create entertaining (56.5%) and educational (55.9%) content.

— Furthermore, the legitimacy of using visual storytelling, especially comics, in journalism was confirmed by 32.2% of respondents.

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