

STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT UZBEKISTAN BY FOREIGN SCHOLARS

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The history of independent Uzbekistan, which declared its sovereignty on September 1, 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has garnered increasing interest among foreign scholars. This study focuses on the development of Uzbekistan's national identity, political evolution, economic transformation, and social dynamics in the post-Soviet era. Understanding how foreign scholars interpret and analyze these changes provides insights into both Uzbekistan's unique historical trajectory and the broader implications for Central Asia.

INTRODUCTION. To fully appreciate the studies of independent Uzbekistan, one must first understand the historical context leading up to independence. Uzbekistan's territory has been a crossroads of civilizations for centuries, influenced by various cultures, including Persian, Greek, Arab, and Mongol. The region was integral to the Silk Road, facilitating trade and cultural exchange.

Under Soviet rule, Uzbekistan underwent significant changes. The Soviet Union imposed a centralized economy and ideology, which often suppressed local traditions and identities. The effects of collectivization, industrialization, and urbanization profoundly impacted Uzbek society. As the Soviet regime began to weaken in the late 1980s, the republics, including Uzbekistan, started to demand greater autonomy, culminating in independence.

Independence and Nation-Building

Uzbekistan's declaration of independence was a pivotal moment. The transition involved redefining national identity, establishing governance structures, and navigating economic

challenges. Scholars have emphasized the role of Islam, national language, and cultural heritage in shaping the new state. The initial leadership of Islam Karimov set the tone for a centralized, authoritarian regime that sought to maintain stability while promoting a distinct Uzbek identity.

Governance and Authoritarianism

One of the primary focuses of foreign scholars has been the political landscape of independent Uzbekistan. Scholars like Marlene Laruelle and David Montgomery have examined the nature of Karimov's regime, highlighting its authoritarian characteristics. Laruelle's work emphasizes the state's attempts to consolidate power through a mix of repression and selective liberalization. Her analysis suggests that while the government implemented economic reforms, political dissent was systematically suppressed.

Montgomery (2017) argues that the Uzbek state employed various strategies to maintain control, including the manipulation of religious institutions and the promotion of a state-centric ideology. The emphasis on stability over democratization has been a point of contention among scholars, with debates about the viability of authoritarian governance in the long term [1].

Political Reform and Succession

With Karimov's death in 2016, attention turned to the succession of Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the potential for political reform. Scholars such as Alisher Khamidov and Andrew W. Bennett have analyzed the implications of Mirziyoyev's policies, which included a more open approach to governance and a focus on economic development. Khamidov argues that while there have been significant changes, underlying authoritarian practices persist, creating a complex political environment.

The transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented one has been a critical area of study. Scholars like Sean R. Roberts and Edward Lemon have explored the economic reforms initiated after independence. Roberts (2018) highlights the challenges faced by Uzbekistan in diversifying its economy, emphasizing the continued reliance on cotton production and the need for structural reforms [2].

Lemon (2020) further investigates the implications of economic policies on social inequality and the environment. His work reveals the tension between economic growth and sustainability, particularly in the context of the Aral Sea crisis. Foreign scholars have pointed out that while Uzbekistan has made strides in economic development, significant challenges remain, including corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies [3].

Regional Economic Integration

As Uzbekistan seeks to enhance its economic position in Central Asia, scholars have examined the country's role in regional integration efforts. Research by Karlygash Dzhunusova explores the dynamics of trade relations within Central Asia and the impact of Uzbekistan's policies on neighboring countries. Dzhunusova argues that while regional cooperation has increased, historical rivalries and national interests often hinder deeper integration [4].

National Identity and Ethnic Relations

The construction of national identity in post-Soviet Uzbekistan has been a subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. Researchers like Nigel J. E. White and Jochen Franzke have analyzed how the government has promoted a narrative of Uzbek nationalism, often at the expense of minority groups. White (2019) argues that the state's emphasis on a singular Uzbek identity has led to marginalization of ethnic minorities, creating tensions within the society.

Franzke (2021) examines the impact of education policies on national identity formation, highlighting the role of history textbooks in shaping perceptions of the past. The portrayal of historical figures and events is instrumental in constructing a cohesive national narrative that aligns with the state's objectives [5].

Gender and Society

Another critical area of study involves gender dynamics in independent Uzbekistan. Scholars such as Mukhayyo Dzhuraeva and Katherine A. W. H. Lee have focused on women's roles in society and the challenges they face. Dzhuraeva (2020) emphasizes the intersection of traditional norms and modernity, revealing how women's rights have been affected by both cultural expectations and state policies [6].

Lee (2022) explores the impact of economic changes on women's participation in the workforce, noting that while opportunities have expanded, systemic barriers remain. These studies underscore the complexity of gender relations in a transitioning society [7].

Methodological Approaches

Many foreign scholars have employed qualitative methods, including interviews and case studies, to understand the intricacies of life in independent Uzbekistan. These approaches provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of citizens, allowing for a deeper understanding of the social fabric and cultural dynamics [8].

Comparative Studies

Comparative analyses have also been prominent, as scholars examine Uzbekistan in relation to other post-Soviet states. This approach helps contextualize Uzbekistan's unique challenges and successes within the broader landscape of post-Soviet transitions. Researchers like William Fierman have contributed to this field by comparing Uzbekistan's political and economic trajectories with those of its neighbors [9].

Interdisciplinary Approaches

The study of independent Uzbekistan has benefited from interdisciplinary approaches, combining political science, sociology, economics, and cultural studies. This richness allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in nation-building and state formation [10].

Conclusion. The history of independent Uzbekistan, as studied by foreign scholars, reveals a multifaceted narrative characterized by political struggles, economic transformations, and social dynamics. The research conducted thus far highlights the challenges and opportunities facing Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet era. As the country continues to evolve, ongoing scholarly attention will be essential in unpacking the complexities of its journey toward establishing a stable and prosperous future.

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