

# METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN HISTORICAL STUDIES OF ETHNO-NATIONAL IDENTITY OF CENTRAL ASIAN PEOPLES

Valeriy S. Khan\*

## Abstract:

The identity of various ethnos in Uzbekistan gets complicated when methodological principles and criteria are substituted by ideological speculations during analytical studies. The stereotype Uzbek identity unless dynamic and glued to a set of behavioural expectation, heterogeneous or homogenous cultural setting, it remains abstract and static and eludes analysis. Historically Soviet period consolidated specific Uzbek identity and at present its characteristic is preservation and differentiation. Although ethnic and national identities have been incongruous, however, wrongly used interchangeably at different epochs of history. In those studies element of politico-administrative considerations were mostly left out. Likewise unity of natural historical and constructionist principle has to be given a serious attention while formulating components of Uzbek identity. In the last 30 years we witness substantial growth of ethno-national consciousness, expressed through effectuated national ideology intertwined with symbolic cultural revival.

## Keywords:

Uzbekistan, Central Asia, Soviets, ethnic identity, Uzbek, Turkic, national consciousness.

## Introduction:

History of Central Asian peoples and their ethnic roots is today the subject of academic discussions. Social scientists are debating the time of formation of their ethnic or national identity, (Tajik, Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen, Kirghiz) the ethno genetic components and the ethnic nucleus of one or the other identity with arguments about the reasons of their transformation.<sup>1</sup> While speaking about the Uzbek identity, it is necessary to formulate methodological principles of the subject analysis which otherwise is frequently substituted for ideological speculations and myths. From our standpoint, there might be the following closely interrelated principles.

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\* **Institute of History, Academy of Sciences, Uzbekistan.**

<sup>1</sup> In case of Uzbek identity, Dr. M. A. Halwai from University of Kashmir writes: "The present status of the problem of ethnicity and identity in Uzbekistan is somewhat confused; mostly due to wide divergence of opinion with regard to the origin, distribution and number of ethnic groups, owing to the varying criteria which each group adopts to distinguish it from the other"; M. A. Halwai, *Ethnicity in Uzbekistan: A Study in Culture and Identity*, Srinagar, 2008, pp.7-8. See also: Масанов Н. Э. Мифологизация проблем этногенеза казахского народа и казахской номадной культуры. - Масанов Н. Э., Абылхожин Ж. Б., Ерофеев И. В. Научное знание и мифотворчество в современной историографии Казахстана. – Алматы, 2007.

### **Principle of Historicism and Dynamic Nature of Ethnic Identity:**

Since the 1990s, due to the orientation of the state policy of Uzbekistan toward the revival of national (ethnic) values, Uzbek identity (Uzbekchilik – or Uzbekness) come into common use, which is understood as a traditional ethnic model of mentality, values and behaviour of the Uzbeks. This model actually represents an important part of the Uzbek identity; that is, it is not only a similar appearance, similarity of language or cuisine, but it encompasses the presence of identical paradigms in psychology (specific feature of national consciousness) and behavioural expectations. And this identity should be aimed at strengthening of national unity and homogeneous identification components in it.

It is noteworthy that ethnic identity is not abstract and static. It has a dynamic nature, existing in specific forms and within the limits of a certain historical context. Prior to the examination of identity of a specific ethnic group, it is a prerequisite to ask which identity is spoken about. Whether it is identity in historical context; under varied political system; of parent ethno or diaspora; of homogeneous or multi-cultural social setups; or specific age, sex and professional groups?

Regarding historical approach, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Uzbek identity was impacted by the socio-political processes of revolution, civil war, collectivization, industrialization, World War II, new forms of national culture, by way of nativization, long co-residing with the Slavic and other non Muslim people and new structure of social stratification. In addition new language script emerged as a determining factor for transforming traditional Uzbek identity.

Within this framework traditional and modern Uzbek identity or its multilayer system can be studied in terms of time-related, territorial, social-stratification parameters, and even personality dimension.

As regards formation and development of modern Uzbek identity we come across two significant stages; a) formation and development of national Uzbek identity within the limits of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (1920s – 1980s) and b) development of Uzbek identity within the frames of an independent state of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1991-till date). The first marked for consolidation and the second for differentiation: characteristics of a preservation, modernization, revival, and transformation of traditional identity elements.

### **Heterogeneous Nature of Ethnogenetic Components:**

The territory of modern Uzbekistan, as well as of Central Asia at large, since the remote ages has been the zone of migration flows for being transport corridor between western and eastern frontiers of Eurasia;

resulting in multiculture contact. On the one hand, there was forming a unique ethnocultural distinctiveness of Central Asia on the other hand, the succeeding ethnocultural layers brought about the new transformations in the ethnic mosaic and identity of the region. The blending of a multiple and diversified character can be seen in types of co-existing writing or replacing each other (Khorezmian and Sogdian writing systems, the Greek script and Indian Kharoshti, the Arabic script, Cyrillic and Latinic alphabet), polyconfessionalism (tribal cults, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity with Islam in various versions, atheism) and polyethnicity of the region and a multitude of state formations in the given territory.

The principles of historicism and of the heterogeneous nature of ethnogenesis are closely related to one of the major methodological principles of current (synergistic) treating of complicated systems - a nonlinearity principle. With reference to ethno-national development, it implies the absence of direct and unequivocal (linear) dependence between this or that historical ethnic community and the nation. Ethnic and national identities being incongruous, however, in publicist and even academic writings they are used interchangeably which results in treating modern Uzbeks (the Uzbek nation) and the local population of the region in antiquity, first of all, in the territory of modern Uzbekistan, as one ethnos (one people), divided in time.<sup>2</sup> It contradicts historical format of ethnic communities and their heterogeneous nature, and is based on the out-of-date classical principle of linear consideration of social phenomena.<sup>3</sup> The population of the region prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>2</sup> Making ethnic history to be of more ancient is one of characteristic features of historical science in the Central Asian countries. The state leaders were engaged in the process to justify the fact of thousand-year-old history. In particular, presidents of Tajikistan (E. Rakhmonov) and Turkmenistan (the late president S. Niyazov) in their writings and speeches repeatedly declared that the history of the Tajiks and Turkmen accounts for 5,000 years (<http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/ruhnama/ruhnama-rus.html>; <http://www.prezident.tj/rus/vistupleniy040906.htm>). Taking into account the features of political systems of these countries, it is not difficult to imagine, that these figures start to be duplicated in textbooks and scientific editions. However, the renowned archeologist E.V. Rtveladze, academician of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, in his article "The Historical Science and Pseudo-History of Central Asia" writes the following regarding this figure, "However, it completely contradicts all the data of historical and other sciences. Up to now, the science has no data at all not only on the language of tribes of Central Asia at that time, but also about the names of the peoples living here, which appeared as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and were mentioned in "Avesta", in works of Ancient Greek historians and in petroglyphic inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings. As to names of the modern peoples of Central Asia, they appeared only during the Middle Ages". [http://www.uzbekistan.de/ru/2003/r\\_n0908.htm](http://www.uzbekistan.de/ru/2003/r_n0908.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The nonlinearity principle assumes that: "To the multiplicity of decisions of a nonlinear equation there corresponds a multitude of ways of evolution of the system

represented a mosaic of various Turkic as well as non Turkic clan-and-tribal formations<sup>4</sup>, united in the unions, in the first instance, not according to the ethnic identification, but politico-administrative consideration.

As the historical-ethnologic studies have shown, before the arrival of the Russians to Central Asia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, self-identification of the regional population was formulated in accordance with different grounds, which were not reduced to ethnic identity. These are class, religious, economic-cultural, regional, clan-and-tribal and other grounds.<sup>5</sup> “In each state formation and in each region there was their own nomenclature and hierarchy of status positions or categories into which the population was divisible”.<sup>6</sup>

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described by these equations”. - Князева Е. Н., Курдюмов С. П. Синергетика как новое мировидение: диалог с И. Пригожином // Вопросы философии, 1992. № 12. – С. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See in detail on tribes, clans or families and sub-family groups Шаниязов К. Узбеки-карлуки (историко-этнографический очерк). Ташкент, 1964; Шаниязов К. К этнической истории узбекского народа (историко-этнографическое исследование на материалах кипчакского компонента). Ташкент, 1974; Файзиев Т. Узбеки-курама (в прошлом и настоящем): Автореф. дис. канд. ист. наук. Ташкент, 1963; Ахмедов Б. Государство кочевых узбеков. Москва, 1965; Каюмов А. Узбекские племена и рода. // Этнический атлас Узбекистана. 2002. – С. 320-338; Ильхамов А. Археология узбекской идентичности // Этнический атлас Узбекистана. 2002. – С. 303-311.

<sup>5</sup> Describing the multitude of the identification grounds, Russian scholar S.N. Abashin writes, “The main and daily necessary identities were based on estate (a “white bone” and a “black bone”), religious (Sunnites, Shiites and Ismailites, adherence to various Sufi orders), economic-and-cultural (sedentary, nomadic and seminomadic, mountainous), regional (dwellers of Bukhara, Samarkand, Khodzhent, Darvaz, etc.) kindred, clan-and-tribal and other subdivisions. (S.N. Abashin, Z.Kh. Arifkhanova, I. Dzhabbarov, A. Ilkhamov, J. Schoeberlein-Engel), J. S. Schoeberlein-Engel *Identity in Central Asia: Construction and Contention in the Conceptions “Ozbek”, “Tajik”, “Muslim”, “Samarqandi” and Other Groups*, Ph. D. Dissertation. Harvard University, 1994; Шоберлайн-Энгел Д. Перспективы становления национального самосознания узбеков // Восток. 1997, № 3; Ильхамов А. Археология узбекской идентичности // Этнический атлас Узбекистана. Ташкент, 2002; Абашин С. Н. Население Ферганской долины (к становлению этнографической номенклатуры в конце XIX – начале XX века) // Ферганская долина: этничность, этнические процессы, этнические конфликты. Москва, 2004; Абашин С. Н. Национализмы в Средней Азии: в поисках идентичности. Москва, 2007; Джаббаров И. Узбеки. – Ташкент, 2007. – С. 34; Арифханова З.Х. Политические процессы 20-30-х г. и их роль в складывании узбекской нации // Отчет отдела этнологии АН РУз за 2009 г. по гранту «Этническая идентификация узбеков: формирование, особенности, трансформация». – С. 48.

<sup>6</sup> Абашин С. Н. Население Ферганской долины (к становлению этнографической номенклатуры в конце XIX – начале XX века) // Ферганская долина: этничность, этнические процессы, этнические конфликты. – М., 2004.

For example, in 1937, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic A. Ikramov characterized the situation with population self-identification in the territory of the republic before its formalized establishment as follows; “Toiling masses of Uzbeks did not realize themselves as a single nationality. The Fergana Uzbeks were usually referred to as Kokanlyks in accordance with the khanate’ name; the Uzbeks from Zerafshan, Kashkadarya, and Surkhan-Darya were called the Bukharians. Nomadic Uzbeks from Kashkadarya, and Surkhan-Darya were not considered Uzbeks by the Uzbek population of our cities. The Khorezmians, for example, for some reason called all the Uzbeks coming from other parts of Uzbekistan as Tajiks, and Russian colonizers named all of them as Sarts”.<sup>7</sup>

But if we speak of the Uzbeks as of the nation, they, as well as any other nation is the product of formation of the national state (the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic), which with all attributes (the same borders, the uniform legislation and economic complex, a literary state language, the educational system, the information space etc.) arises only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is meant here is the formation of a unitary Uzbek national identity emerging out of the pluralistic ethnic clan-and-tribe identity.

Formation of the Uzbek nation gradually replaced clan-and-tribe formations and ethnographic groups from the registration statistics and passport categorization by the uniform ethnic categorization in passports in which it was written “Uzbek” as a national identity. An ethnocultural variety was becoming gradually to comply with logic of development of national integrity and unity. That tendency was shown in all possible areas: self-identification, anthroponymy, clothes, ceremonies, etc.

### **Principle of Unity of Natural-historical and Constructivist Factor:**

During the Soviet period, the history of the peoples, as a rule, was considered in the natural-historical aspect, where stratifications and transformations in development of ethnic identity were viewed as a result of the natural evolution and necessary consequence of ethnocultural interactions (primordial approach). The recent investigations (constructivist approach) frequently underline the role of constructing in the ethnohistorical process and such circumstance that the vectors of ethnic identity development had been caused not only by the natural character of ethnocultural contact zones, but also by the direct

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– С. 39. Он же. Национализмы в Средней Азии: в поисках идентичности. – М., 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Икрамов А. О проекте Конституции Узбекской ССР: Из доклада на Чрезвычайном VI съезде Советов Узбекской ССР 12 февраля 1937 г. // Революция и национальности. 1937, № 4 (86). – С. 42.

constructing, first and foremost, in connection with inclusion of the region in various state formations (the Persian Empire of the Achaemenids, Alexander the Great's Empire, Turkic Kaganate, Arab Caliphate, Russian Empire, the USSR, etc.) . The foundation of the given constructing was laid by the respective ethnocultural policy which together with constructible historical memory has affected multilayer structure and vectors of changing the identity of the people occupying the region.

By itself, the formation of the Uzbeks as the nation took place as a result of its construction within the framework of the national-state delimitation of Central Asia in 1924-1929 - the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (within the limits of a wider federation - the USSR). Among the most active participants of the process of new Uzbek identity construction at its initial stage, the researchers name the following three forces: the Jadids, national-communists and the Central Party-and-political machine.<sup>8</sup>

Among the factors of construction of national identity within the limits of the established Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, a specific place is occupied by censuses and pertinent techniques to account the population. As the ethnologists from Uzbekistan Z. Kh. Arifkhanova and O. Artykov write, "Necessity of the population accounting and taking censuses required a particular classification of peoples and unification of ethnic subgroups. The Soviet system continued the policy of the Russian state on liquidation of hierarchy of the polyethnic population. Modern standards of ethnic division of the population were introduced during the censuses accomplished in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and simplification of the national structure took place".<sup>9</sup> Examining the statistical data from 1897, 1926, 1939, and 1959 censuses we can see how the registration ethnographic nomenclature changed. In the 1926 census the Sarts disappeared, though they were registered as the largest group in the census of 1897 and in all current statistics in the period between those censuses. Following the results of the 1939 census, such groups as Kipchaks, Kurama and Turks were excluded from the lists, etc. Finally, all tribe-and-clan and ethnographic groups were combined in one category - the Uzbek.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ильхамов А. Археология узбекской идентичности // Этнический атлас Узбекистана. Ташкент, 2002. – С. 288.

<sup>9</sup> Арифханова З. Х., Артыков О. Этнический состав населения Узбекистана в XX веке // Отчет отдела этнологии АН РУз за 2009 г. по гранту «Этническая идентификация узбеков: формирование, особенности, трансформация». – С. 43.

<sup>10</sup> See: Абашин С. Н. Национализмы в Средней Азии: в поисках идентичности. – СПб. – С. 94-176, 179-195; Бушков В. И., Зотова Н. А. Сельское население

Construction of new historical memory became another major factor of modern Uzbek identity and, as a consequence, of the nation-constructive historical symbols meeting the problems of the Soviet nationality policy and new national elites.<sup>11</sup>

It is also possible to see the Uzbek identity construction during the years of independence. It is the policy for revival of national values and ethnic consciousness. Based on the growth of national (ethnic) consciousness, this process began in the last years of the perestroika, and consolidated when the republic gained independence. This found its expression in revival of traditional value orientations, ritual ceremonies, and festivals, names of outstanding figures of the past and rehabilitation of their contribution to the history of Central Asia and world civilization, to religious revival, language adoption, and newly contemplated history.<sup>12</sup> The contemporary process of nation construction is based on the state effectuated national idea and ideology of national independence closely intertwined with the idea of traditional culture revival. Whereas during the Soviet period the process of nation construction was guided by transformation and, in a certain measure, criticism of traditional identity, in the period of independence it is associated with the idea of national rebirth.

The highlight in consideration of the modern national processes is the problem of correlation and interrelationship of the ethnic and civil nation.<sup>13</sup> The problem has become of current interest especially in conditions of globalization. Uzbekistan, in which nation genesis in the ethnic sense was brought to maturity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is faced with the problem on formation (construction) of the civil nation that is one of the basic requirement in the development of states in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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Наманганского уезда на рубеже XIX-XX веков (по статистическим данным) // Ферганская долина: этничность, этнические процессы, этнические конфликты. – М., 110-137.

<sup>11</sup> Ильхамов А. Археология узбекской идентичности // Этнический атлас Узбекистана. Ташкент, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> See on construction of new historical memory in Central Asia today: S. Amsler, *The Politics of Knowledge in Central Asia. Science between Marx and the Market*, New York, 2007; Масанов Н. Э, Абылхожин Ж. Б., Ерофеев И. В. Научное знание и мифотворчество в современной историографии Казахстана. – Алматы, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See. Тишков В. А. О нации // Этнология и политика. Научная публицистика. М., 2001.

