



ETHNIC IDENTITY AND PROCESSES OF SELF-AWARENESS IN NEW UZBEKISTAN DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

The years of independence have represented a significant period of transformation in the development of ethnic identity, national self-awareness, and cultural consciousness in Uzbekistan. The formation of a sovereign state created new social, political, cultural, and psychological conditions for the reconsideration of historical heritage, national values, language, traditions, and collective identity. In contemporary Uzbekistan, these processes have acquired additional significance within the framework of the concept of the “New Uzbekistan,” which emphasizes human dignity, social cohesion, cultural diversity, and the development of civic identity. This article examines the transformation of ethnic and national self-awareness during the years of independence and analyzes the relationship between ethnic identity, historical memory, cultural heritage, language, globalization, and civic consciousness. Particular attention is devoted to the interaction between ethnic identity and the broader idea of national unity in a multiethnic society. The study argues that contemporary identity development in Uzbekistan increasingly combines the preservation of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness with the formation of an inclusive civic identity. The article concludes that balanced development of ethnic self-awareness, respect for cultural diversity, and civic solidarity constitutes an important psychological and sociocultural foundation for sustainable development in New Uzbekistan.

Keywords: New Uzbekistan, ethnic identity, self-awareness, national identity, national consciousness, historical memory, cultural heritage, civic identity, multiculturalism, independence.

Introduction

The achievement of independence created fundamentally new conditions for the social and cultural development of Uzbekistan. The transition from a Soviet political and ideological system to an independent national state stimulated processes of historical reconsideration, cultural revival, and transformation of collective identity. Questions concerning who people are, which historical and cultural values they identify with, and how ethnic identity relates to national and civic belonging became increasingly important. Self-awareness is a multidimensional psychological and social phenomenon. At the individual level, it reflects an individual's understanding of personal characteristics, social belonging, cultural background, and values. At the collective level, ethnic and national self-awareness involves shared historical memories, language, traditions, cultural symbols, and perceptions of belonging to a particular community.

For Uzbekistan, these processes have particular importance because the country is characterized by considerable ethnic and cultural diversity. Uzbek society includes representatives of numerous ethnic communities whose historical experiences and cultural traditions contribute to the country's social and cultural landscape. Consequently, strengthening national unity requires not the elimination of ethnic differences but the creation of conditions in which different identities can coexist within a common civic framework. The contemporary concept of the “New Uzbekistan” has further strengthened discussions about identity, social cohesion, human dignity, and cultural development. In this context, ethnic self-awareness is increasingly considered together with civic consciousness and a shared sense of responsibility for the future of the country. The purpose of this article is to examine the principal transformations in ethnic and self-awareness processes during the years of independence and to identify their significance for the development of contemporary Uzbek society.

Methodology

The article employs a theoretical and interdisciplinary methodology combining approaches from social psychology, ethnic psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and identity studies. The analysis is based on the conceptual examination of ethnic identity, national consciousness, historical memory, cultural heritage, language, and civic identity. A historical-comparative approach is used to examine changes in

identity formation from the early years of independence to the contemporary period. A sociocultural approach is applied to understand the relationship between ethnic identity and cultural practices, while a social-psychological approach is used to explain the mechanisms through which collective memory, social categorization, and group belonging influence self-awareness. The analysis also considers globalization and digitalization as contemporary factors influencing identity formation among younger generations.

Ethnic Identity as a Component of Social Self-Awareness

Ethnic identity represents an individual's psychological and cultural sense of belonging to a particular ethnic community. It may involve language, cultural traditions, family history, historical memory, customs, values, and symbolic representations. Ethnic identity should not be understood as an isolated phenomenon. It develops through interaction with family, educational institutions, community organizations, cultural practices, and wider society. In this sense, ethnic self-awareness is both personally experienced and socially constructed. During the Soviet period, ethnic identities existed within a broader ideological framework that emphasized Soviet supranational identity. Independence created an opportunity to reconsider the relationship between ethnic, national, and civic dimensions of identity. For many members of Uzbek society, this transformation involved renewed interest in national history, traditional cultural practices, literary heritage, historical personalities, and the Uzbek language. Such processes contributed to the strengthening of cultural continuity and historical consciousness.

Transformation of Self-Awareness after Independence

The early period of independence was characterized by significant changes in collective self-perception. The emergence of an independent state provided a new political and symbolic framework for understanding national identity.

Historical events and personalities that had previously received limited attention were reconsidered. Cultural heritage became an important resource for constructing a contemporary national narrative. Traditional celebrations, historical monuments, literature, music, architecture, and national customs acquired renewed public significance. This process had an important psychological dimension. Collective self-esteem is often strengthened when a society develops a positive understanding of its

historical and cultural contribution. At the same time, an objective approach to history is necessary to avoid excessive idealization or exclusionary interpretations. The development of national self-awareness therefore involved a combination of cultural revival and the formation of new civic orientations.

Language and National Identity

Language occupies a central position in the development of ethnic and national self-awareness. It functions not only as a communication instrument but also as a carrier of cultural memory, traditions, values, and collective experience. The strengthening of the Uzbek language within the framework of independence contributed to the development of national cultural consciousness. Language became an important symbol of sovereignty and cultural continuity. At the same time, the multilingual character of Uzbek society requires respect for linguistic diversity. Representatives of different ethnic communities may preserve their native languages while participating in the broader civic and social life of Uzbekistan. Therefore, language policy and cultural policy should balance the development of the state language with respect for the linguistic rights and cultural traditions of other communities.

Historical Memory and National Self-Awareness

Historical memory is one of the most important mechanisms through which collective identity is reproduced. Societies construct their understanding of the past through educational systems, public commemorations, museums, monuments, literature, family narratives, and media. During the years of independence, historical memory in Uzbekistan underwent substantial transformation. Greater attention was devoted to the country's ancient civilizations, scientific and cultural achievements, and historical figures. The restoration of historical memory contributes to a stronger sense of cultural continuity. However, historical consciousness becomes socially constructive when it encourages dialogue, critical reflection, and respect for different historical experiences. A mature national identity therefore requires both appreciation of historical heritage and an objective understanding of historical complexity.

Cultural Heritage and Ethnic Self-Awareness

Cultural heritage constitutes an important psychological resource for maintaining ethnic identity. Customs, traditions, crafts, music, literature, architecture, cuisine,

family rituals, and national celebrations transmit cultural meanings from one generation to another. In contemporary Uzbekistan, cultural heritage has increasingly become associated with national development and cultural diplomacy. The preservation and promotion of heritage can strengthen younger generations' connection with their cultural background. At the same time, heritage should not be treated as a static collection of traditions. Culture is continuously transformed by technological development, urbanization, globalization, and intercultural interaction. Consequently, contemporary ethnic identity represents a dynamic combination of inherited traditions and new cultural experiences.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that the years of independence have significantly transformed processes of ethnic and self-awareness in Uzbekistan. The restoration of historical and cultural memory, development of the Uzbek language, increased attention to national heritage, and formation of new civic values have all contributed to changes in collective identity. However, identity development remains an ongoing process. Globalization, migration, digitalization, generational change, and international cultural exchange continue to influence how individuals understand themselves and their communities. A particularly important issue is the relationship between ethnic identity and civic identity. The development of one should not require the weakening of the other. A stable society can accommodate multiple forms of belonging when they are integrated into an inclusive civic framework. The psychological maturity of society is therefore reflected not in the absence of ethnic differences but in the ability to manage these differences constructively. Respect for one's own cultural heritage can coexist with respect for other communities.

Practical Recommendations

Several recommendations can be proposed for strengthening constructive processes of ethnic and self-awareness in contemporary Uzbekistan:

1. **Strengthen intercultural education** in schools and universities through programs emphasizing cultural diversity and mutual respect.
2. **Develop historical literacy** by encouraging objective and evidence-based approaches to national history.

3. **Support cultural heritage programs** that involve young people in traditional arts, crafts, literature, music, and cultural activities.
4. **Promote inclusive civic identity** as a common framework connecting citizens with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
5. **Strengthen multilingual cultural initiatives** that allow ethnic communities to preserve and develop their linguistic and cultural traditions.
6. **Improve digital media literacy** among young people to help them critically evaluate global cultural content and online representations of identity.
7. **Encourage intercultural dialogue** through academic, cultural, educational, and community-based projects.
8. **Integrate psychological approaches** into policies concerning social cohesion, cultural adaptation, and interethnic communication.

Conclusion

The years of independence have played a decisive role in the transformation of ethnic and self-awareness processes in Uzbekistan. The revival of historical memory, national culture, language, traditions, and cultural heritage has strengthened the psychological foundations of national identity. At the same time, contemporary identity is increasingly influenced by globalization, digitalization, international communication, and generational change. The concept of the “New Uzbekistan” creates new conditions for combining ethnic and cultural belonging with an inclusive civic identity. Ethnic identity and civic identity should therefore be viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive dimensions of social consciousness. The preservation of cultural diversity, combined with social solidarity and mutual respect, is an important condition for sustainable development. Educational institutions, cultural organizations, families, and public institutions all have an important role in supporting constructive identity formation. A balanced model of self-awareness can help Uzbekistan preserve its cultural heritage while remaining open to global social and cultural processes.

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