

Establishing the Basis for Uzbekistan's Anthropology and Personnel Issues

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Abstract: This article presents a comprehensive historical overview of the development of anthropology in Uzbekistan, focusing on its institutional foundations and personnel training across three major periods: the Russian Empire, the Soviet era, and the period of independence. It highlights the pioneering expeditions of Russian and foreign scientists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which laid the groundwork for anthropological studies in the region. The Soviet period is characterized by the establishment of academic structures and significant contributions by scholars such as L.V. Oshanin, while the independence era marks a revival and modernization of anthropological research and education in Uzbekistan. The article also examines the role of national institutions in promoting the study of ethnogenesis, physical anthropology, and cultural anthropology, thereby ensuring the continuation of scientific inquiry and training in this field.

Keywords: Anthropology, Uzbekistan, Soviet era, Russian Empire, ethnogenesis, ethnography, personnel training, Central Asia, L.V. Oshanin, scientific expeditions, historical anthropology, physical anthropology.



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Introduction. The formation and development of anthropology as a scientific discipline in Uzbekistan have passed through complex and transformative historical stages. From the late 19th century, when the first anthropological and ethnographic expeditions were conducted under the Russian Empire, to the systematic institutionalization during the Soviet period, and finally to the revitalization and modernization efforts in the years following independence, anthropology in Uzbekistan has gradually established itself as an important field of academic inquiry. Understanding the origins and evolution of anthropological research in the region is essential, not only for recognizing the historical context in which knowledge about the peoples of Central Asia was produced, but also for assessing the contributions of both foreign and local scholars in shaping this field. Furthermore, the training and development of professional anthropologists have played a crucial role in sustaining scientific progress and ensuring the continuity of research on ethnogenesis, human diversity, and cultural history.

This article aims to provide a periodized analysis of the foundations of anthropology in Uzbekistan, focusing on key developments during the Russian Empire, the Soviet era, and the

independence period. Through a historical lens, it explores scientific expeditions, the emergence of academic institutions, the contributions of prominent researchers, and the ongoing challenges related to the preparation of qualified personnel in anthropology.

METHOD. The study of anthropology in Uzbekistan can be systematically divided into three distinct historical periods: the Russian Empire period, the Soviet era, and the period of independence. Each of these stages contributed significantly to the establishment and institutionalization of anthropology as a scientific discipline.

1. The Russian Empire Period

During the second half of the 19th century, the Russian Empire initiated several scientific expeditions to Central Asia, driven by interest in the anthropology and ethnic composition of the region's diverse populations. Scholars such as A.P. Bogdanov, I.L. Yavorsky, A. Kharuzin, and V.E. Paisel collected valuable anthropological and ethnographic data on Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Tajiks, and other ethnic groups. Although their research was shaped by imperial objectives, the data they gathered laid the groundwork for future anthropological studies in Central Asia. Their findings, particularly in craniology and descriptive ethnography, remain relevant for comparative historical analyses today.

2. The Soviet Era

The Soviet period marked a significant advancement in anthropological research, characterized by the institutionalization of scientific practices and the emergence of local scholarly traditions. A key figure during this period was L.V. Oshanin, whose contributions to anthropological education and fieldwork were instrumental in shaping the discipline in Uzbekistan. Research during this era was conducted through organized expeditions, laboratory work, and academic programs established at institutions such as Central Asian State University and the Institute of History and Archaeology.

Studies focused on physical anthropology, ethnogenesis, dermatoglyphics, and serology. Soviet anthropologists also contributed to the analysis of ancient skeletal remains, the classification of ethnic types, and the documentation of cultural practices. Institutions in Moscow and Leningrad provided methodological support and training for Uzbek scholars, strengthening the academic foundation of the field.

3. The Period of Independence

Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, a renewed focus was placed on national identity, indigenous research, and the development of human capital in anthropology. Universities and research institutes introduced specialized programs and courses in cultural, historical, and physical anthropology. The National University of Uzbekistan, the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, and the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies have played central roles in training a new generation of anthropologists.

Modern research has expanded to include topics such as ethnoecology, medical anthropology, visual anthropology, and pilgrimage tourism. Contemporary scholars continue to build on the legacy of their predecessors while also engaging with global anthropological debates. The use of interdisciplinary methods combining archaeology, linguistics, genetics, and historical sources has enriched the scope and depth of anthropological research in the country.

RESULTS. The research into the historical development of anthropology in Uzbekistan has yielded several key findings:

Foundational Role of Russian Expeditions: The anthropological and ethnographic expeditions conducted by Russian scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries served as the first scientific attempts to document the ethnic and physical characteristics of the peoples of Central

Asia. These expeditions provided a large volume of primary data that continues to serve as a comparative basis for contemporary anthropological research.

Institutionalization During the Soviet Era: The Soviet period marked a turning point in the professionalization and institutionalization of anthropology in Uzbekistan. Academic departments, laboratories, and systematic training programs were established, enabling the growth of a national school of anthropology. Uzbek scientists such as L.V. Oshanin played a central role in adapting Soviet anthropological methodologies to the regional context.

Diversification of Anthropological Studies: Research in this period expanded beyond physical anthropology to include ethnogenesis, dermatoglyphics, serology, and the study of cultural practices. Expeditions covered various regions of Uzbekistan, including Khorezm, the Fergana Valley, Surkhandarya, and the Pamirs, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the region's anthropological diversity.

Post-Independence Revival and Modernization: Following independence, Uzbekistan witnessed a resurgence of interest in national identity and heritage, reflected in the development of new academic curricula, research centers, and scientific projects focused on indigenous populations. Modern Uzbek anthropology now incorporates interdisciplinary approaches, including cultural anthropology, visual anthropology, and ethno-ecological research.

Sustainability of the Mentor-Scholar Tradition: The continuity of anthropological research has been ensured through the mentorship tradition, where leading scholars train a new generation of researchers. This has allowed Uzbekistan to maintain and expand its anthropological expertise and actively contribute to regional and global scholarship.

Establishment of Leading Institutions: Institutions such as the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology at the National University of Uzbekistan and the Center of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Institute of History have become key hubs for scientific inquiry, offering specialized training and conducting fieldwork throughout the country.

These results collectively demonstrate that anthropology in Uzbekistan has developed through a complex, multi-stage process, shaped by historical events and institutional frameworks, and has matured into a dynamic and evolving academic field.

DISCUSSION. The historical trajectory of anthropology in Uzbekistan reflects both the challenges and achievements of developing a scientific discipline within a shifting socio-political context. From the early efforts of Russian imperial scientists to the modern-day institutions operating in an independent Uzbekistan, anthropology has evolved into a multidisciplinary field that engages with physical, cultural, and historical dimensions of human existence.

One of the critical themes emerging from this research is the interconnectedness of anthropology and state ideology, particularly during the Soviet era. Anthropological studies were often directed at shaping narratives of ethnogenesis and national identity that aligned with Soviet political goals. While this facilitated institutional support and funding, it also introduced constraints on independent research. However, Uzbek scholars such as L.V. Oshanin skillfully used these opportunities to conduct in-depth studies of Central Asian populations, setting a foundation for local expertise.

Another important discussion point is the legacy of colonial knowledge production during the Russian Empire period. Although many early expeditions were motivated by imperial interests, they unintentionally created a valuable corpus of data that modern anthropologists continue to analyze. Re-evaluating this legacy through a postcolonial lens remains an essential task for contemporary scholarship in the region.

The post-independence era has allowed for a reorientation of research agendas towards national priorities, including the exploration of indigenous cultural heritage, the revival of historical memory, and the training of a new generation of anthropologists. The diversification of research topics — such as ethno-ecological practices, medical anthropology, and pilgrimage studies — shows that Uzbekistan's anthropological community is actively engaging with global academic trends while preserving its regional focus.

Moreover, the continuity of the mentor-student tradition has proven crucial in maintaining academic excellence and research integrity. Institutions such as the National University of Uzbekistan and the Institute of History have become leading centers of anthropological scholarship, where collaborative work between senior and junior researchers sustains the discipline.

Finally, the integration of anthropology with archaeology, linguistics, genetics, and digital technologies offers new opportunities for holistic understanding of the region's complex past and present. However, there remain challenges related to methodological innovation, international collaboration, and the digitization of existing data — areas that future research must address.

In summary, the discussion highlights that anthropology in Uzbekistan is not merely a legacy of past academic traditions, but a vibrant and evolving field that continues to adapt to new scholarly paradigms and national needs.

CONCLUSION. The historical development of anthropology in Uzbekistan illustrates the evolution of a scientific discipline shaped by imperial, Soviet, and independent state contexts. From the pioneering expeditions of Russian and European scholars to the institutional foundations laid during the Soviet era, and finally to the post-independence revival of national research priorities, anthropology in Uzbekistan has undergone a complex yet steady progression.

The contribution of prominent figures such as L.V. Oshanin and the continued efforts of post-Soviet scholars have been instrumental in preserving and advancing anthropological knowledge. The establishment of dedicated academic departments, the organization of field expeditions, and the publication of key monographs and research papers have contributed to building a robust body of scientific work.

In the years following independence, Uzbekistan has placed greater emphasis on developing national schools of anthropology, enriching the field through interdisciplinary approaches and fostering new generations of researchers. This transformation demonstrates the country's commitment to scientific progress and cultural self-awareness.

Moving forward, it is essential to expand international collaborations, digitize historical anthropological records, and further integrate anthropology with other disciplines such as genetics, archaeology, and digital humanities. By doing so, Uzbekistan can continue to contribute meaningfully to global anthropological discourse while preserving its unique historical and cultural heritage.

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