

FASHION IN THE FERGHANA VALLEY

KAYLA KIM

kayla.kim@new.ox.ac.uk

BACKGROUND

Women's national dress characterizes Tajikistan. Since Soviet development of this 'national dress' in the 1920s, the invented cultural heritage has served as a tool to unite a nation whose ethnic population does not match its borders (Harris 2004, Suyarkulova 2016, Lemon and Thibault 2018).

I aimed to learn how and why women in Tajikistan's second city, Khujand, select their dress.

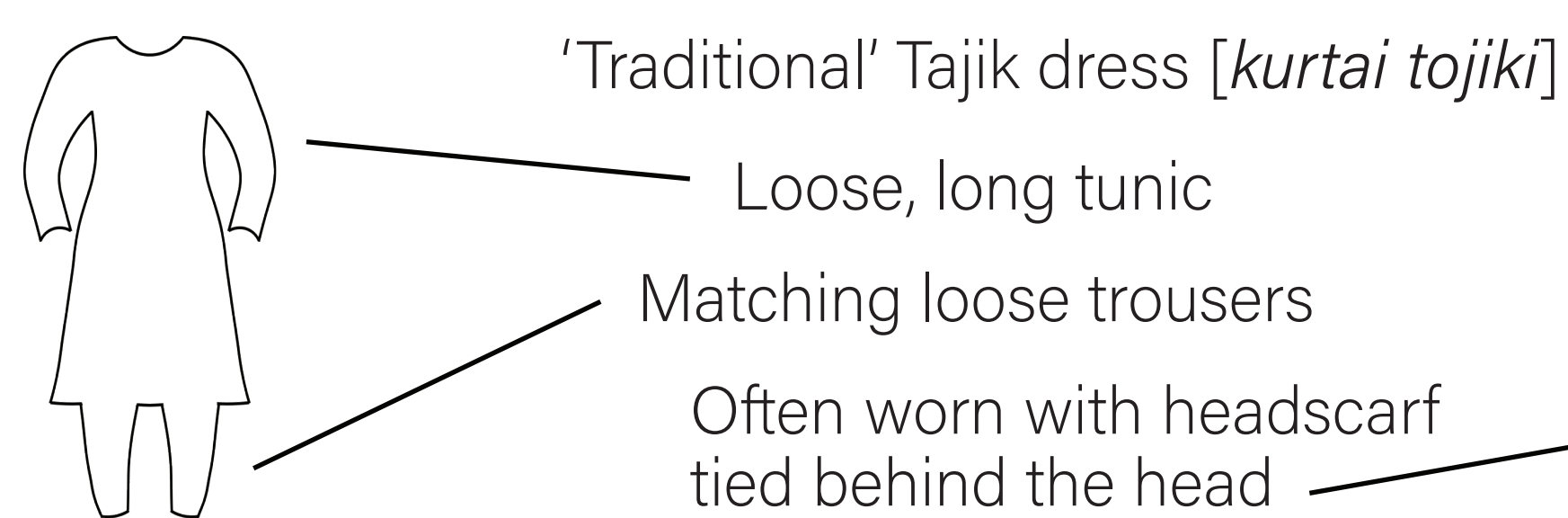


Photo: Kim 2019

“A sense of admiration for the foreign and imitation regarding clothing, behavior, communication among women and girls may have a negative effect on the strength of the foundations of national culture

~ President Emomali Rahmon, Women's Day 2015 (Miles 2015)

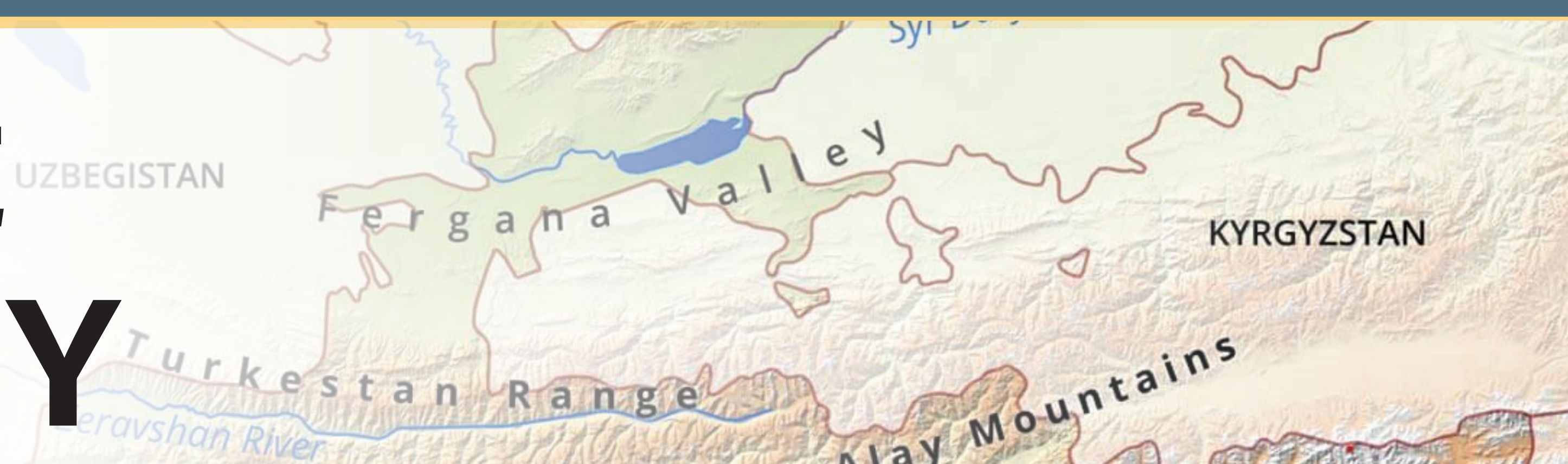
TRADITION and MODERNITY



- ~ 'Traditional' dress, so key to Tajik pride, was never defined by the women I encountered, as it was implicitly understood
- ~ Women constantly strive towards **modernity**
 - ~ New fabrics enter the bazaar weekly, women update their wardrobes each season
- ~ 'Modernity' often associated with international imports
 - ~ Fabrics from Dubai and Turkey are coveted
 - ~ Adras and Atlas (Tajik national fabrics) found in bazaars: typically Uzbek imports!
- ~ For example, a trousseau dressmaker, gained popularity and runs her business through Instagram! She further takes inspiration from Samarkandi and Dubaiski trends on the platform—as long as the fashions resemble Tajik national dress.



'Old-fashioned' Khujandi Atlas | 'Modern' Uzbek Adras



METHODOLOGY

WHO

Khujandi women in the fashion industry: Designers, Fabric Sellers, Dressmakers, Artisans
(I have omitted names below to protect privacy of respondents.)

HOW

Semi-structured interviews across July and August 2019, conducted in women's workplaces and homes.



Photos: Kim 2019

DUSHANBE is FAR AWAY

- ~ Artistic inspiration from Dushanbe: women cite capital city designers as influences, and photos of their work are sold in bazaars to be copied
- HOWEVER
- ~ Women's pride in this 'tradition' often manifested less in national pride than in **regional pride**.
- ~ Khujandi embroidery resembles that of Samarkand and Bukhara (UZ) more than Dushanbe
- ~ Khujandi dressmakers praised the freedom of their city
- ~ When asked to characterize southern dress, for example, one dressmaker mimed the high necklines by pretending to choke herself.
- ~ Another woman asserts that Khujandi women are 'more proactive': that even when they are stay-at home mums, they start small businesses, drying apricots or making embroidery to sell online.

A 2017 government hand-book of 'recommended outfits' for women (Irby 2018). Some see it as cultural research into 'traditional' Tajik dress, and others as anti-hijab propaganda. As one interviewee described, it is 'a tool to show people: *"This is how Tajik dress looks, and Arabic/Islamic dress is not part of our look."*

SOCIAL FACTORS

- ~ **Social networks** act as extensions of the state to enforce each individual's appropriate adherence to tradition.

A dressmaker's daughter shares: 'Last year my mom bought me a jagged jeans top that was on trend. When I went to school in it, my male friends all said bad things about my top: that it was vulgar. They told me not to wear it again, so I didn't.'

A mid-twenties dressmaker prefers to wear Western dresses with short sleeves and short skirts. However, as she is getting divorced, she states that she needs to dress conservatively to maintain social standing. 'If I was married, those clothes would be fine.'

An embroiderer notes that her mother, who used to wear some European clothes, switched to wearing only national dress, with long sleeves. Why? Because she says, 'I'm old!'

Photos: Kim 2019



CONCLUSIONS

Despite a uniform national conception of what 'Tajik dress' represents, traditional clothing further expresses each woman's region and position in life. This 'tradition' remains both ever-changing, due to internal and international influence, and ever-reinforced by social networks.



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