

## **The Business of Constructing Female Identity Through Fashion in Uzbekistan**

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### **Abstract**

I am interested in how the practice of fashion and textile design intersects with notions of culture and capital in developing economies, and the relationships between cultural tourism, non-governmental agencies and global markets in establishing narratives about 'authentic' cultural production and the politics of style.

This paper looks at the complex evolution of national identities in Uzbekistan through examining representations of female dress practices and in parallel considers the gender asymmetry of the macro-structures that govern the fashion systems of the region.

Central Asia is one of the economically least-integrated regions of the world and there is considerable international support for further development of the region. Development aid and cultural tourism play significant roles in the economy of the region.

Consequently, these sources of income and resulting inter-agency dialogues influence and interact with 'traditional' textile design and production techniques and potentially generate a whole new design vocabulary for communicating national identity, that wavers between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. This supports the design and production of textiles, garments and portable souvenir products, which have a vital role to play in the construction and communication of identities internationally.

Complex hybrid national, trans-national, and regional identities through dress and textiles are thus continually being constructed and communicated throughout Central Asia, in continual conversation with global value chains. Although women account for the majority of the workforce in fashion and textiles industries globally, a very small proportion of these women have any decision-making power in business. Thus the agency of women in structuring their own dress practices is highly complex.

This paper examines theories, practices and politics of the business of fashioning female identity in Central Asia and how these relationships govern ideas of identity, tradition and modernity for women in Uzbekistan.