

The Contextual Understanding on the Development of Central Asian Capitals

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Abstract: The transformation of social and physical landscape of Central Asia can be analyzed through the prism of Central Asian major cities, the multiethnic core of the former Central Asian Socialist republics and independent new central Asian countries. Contemporary Central Asian cities began to develop during the Soviet period and these processes subordinated to the command economy directed from Moscow. Presently Central Asian countries build a ‘concentration model’ of urbanization. The urbanization of Central Asian cities is an unfinished process in spite of its accelerated tempo during soviet period.

Keywords: Central Asia, Capital, City, Tashkent, Almaty

1 Introduction

The transformation of the social & physical landscape of Central Asia is analyzed through the prism of Central Asian major cities, the multiethnic core of the former Central Asian Socialist republics and independent new central Asian countries.

Most Contemporary Central Asian cities developed during the Soviet period and were subordinated to the command economy directed from Moscow. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Central Asian countries were primarily agro-industrial economies with predominantly rural populations.

Table 1. Urban Area of central Asian countries 1950-2000 (%)

Country	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Kazakhstan	36.36	44.20	50.24	54.14	56.27	56.28
Kyrgyzstan	26.48	34.18	37.47	38.63	37.78	35.19
Tajikistan	29.38	33.17	36.88	34.29	31.66	26.49
Turkmenistan	44.96	46.41	47.78	47.08	45.08	45.80
Uzbekistan	28.87	33.98	36.71	40.78	40.17	37.43

http://www.geohive.com/earth/pop_urban2.aspx

The composition of Urban & Rural areas in contemporary central Asian countries show that central Asian countries still have been in the rural-dominated communities

by the statics of urban/rural division of central Asian countries for the year 2010.¹ The social and culture experience of Central Asian cities in key historical stages symbolize separate periods: Pre-soviet & pre-industrial, Soviet socialism and industrial, post-Soviet & post-industrial. The social and cultural processes, including urbanization, change significantly in each period.

2 Sovietization of Central Asia

2.1 Creating Soviet Central Asia

Central Asian major cities provide an interesting focus because it is located outside the core Slavic republics of the Soviet Union and because Soviet officials - including party leaders in Moscow and local cities, city planners, architects, and factory directors - embarked on massive effort to create a socialist urban center in Asia at the time of revolutionary change. This effort had a significant impact on the everyday lives of Central Asian residents, including both indigenous groups and various migrants that either lived in the region or arrived there since imperial Russia.

The drive to make Central Asia 'socialist' was part of a broader campaign of rebuilding cities to create a new socialist society and to transform an ethnically diverse population into 'new Soviet Central Asians.' Communist party leaders in Moscow and local central Asian city officials sought to create a carefully planned urban space by destroying public reminders of the non-Soviet past (e.g., mosques, single-family houses, and traditionally narrow streets) and replacing them with architecturally elaborate theaters, apartments buildings, modern factories, and hospitals – all allegedly built for the benefits of the peoples in Central Asian countries. Here in the whole of the main tasks of the Soviet city construction had been providing houses. This is why micro-rayon(districts) planning, composed by small format apartments in panel-concrete house, had been carried in the all territories of Soviet union, regardless of urban or non-urban areas. The residents of the city responded in multiple ways, with some resisting the destruction of their hometown, others actively accepting the new urban areas, and the majority gradually adapting to the changing environment of the new soviet Central Asia in which they lived, often trying to fuse some traditional practices or customs with the new soviet culture that was taking root in Central Asian cities.

While transforming the Central Asian capitals were outwardly about city development, Soviet urban renewal campaign had a much more important purpose, namely, bringing about the breakdown of traditional and social relations and increasing the state's ability to monitor its citizens. Building "soviet cities" was not the end goal in itself, but the means to change the society it housed. New socialist cities were to provide Soviet central Asian citizens with unique urban areas that the

¹ Percentages of urban/rural division of 2010 Central Asian countries show as follows; Kazakhstan 58.5/41.5, Kyrgyzstan 34.5/65.5, Tajikistan 26.3/73.7, Turkmenistan 49.5/50.5, Uzbekistan 36.2/63.8 http://www.geohive.com/earth/pop_urban.aspx

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state deemed superior to those anywhere else in the world, particularly in the colonial and postcolonial societies of Asia and the Middle East. This extensive planning would create the optimal environment for building ideologically and physically healthy citizens of the Soviet States, who could participate in socially productive labor, appreciate high culture, and willingly lay down their lives for socialism.²

The ideals of the Soviet regime promised enormous benefits; improve standards of living, racial and ethnic equality, liberation from colonial oppression, economic prosperity, industrial growth, expansion of water resources, and educational or socioeconomic opportunities for individual citizens. Many of Soviet officials, who were based in Russia or past Russian culture, aimed to reorient traditional community structures toward new Soviet ideals but often ignored the importance of locality, causing many residents-and even some city officials and urban designers in Moscow-to view the urban transformation plan as assaults on local neighborhoods and cultures, all the name of building for the public good and the Soviet future.³

Creating ideal modern capitals for central Asian SSR was as much about creating a vision of new Central Asian Soviet national identities as it was about building streets, establishing new schools, installing plumbing, or improving the living standards of these distant outposts of socialism in Asia, which grew into one of the larger and more important urban centers in the Soviet Union over the course of the twentieth century.

Soviet officials created 'imagined' Central Asian republics, just as they imagined and then created a variety of other ethnic and national groups. In Central Asia Sovietization was accepted as the same word like 'modernize,' 'civilize,' and 'free' central Asian peoples from the allegedly negative aspects of their past and push them into a happy soviet future. Architects and urban planners sought to create new cities, in the process, a new Soviet Central Asian national identity. This project included the creation of an urban center that combined 20th Century building designs with purported local and ethno-national architectural details.

In the period of global decolonization, these efforts emphasized the fact that the Soviet regime strove to solve to clear ethnic differences among residents in Central Asia by providing formerly colonized minorities with cities that mirrored the prosperity of Russia, but with minor allowances for cultural differences. Political and cultural leaders in Moscow and Central Asian cities developed their views of Central Asian Indigenous identity and tied these identities closely to the image of a prosperous Soviet state. Soviet officials were determined to build the modern urban infrastructure that was needed to establish a socialist society and create ideologically sound Soviet citizens in the Central Asia.

The Soviet system gradually gained a support base in the region, particularly during times when the top down pressure of Stalinism decreased-temporarily during World War II and more noticeably in the late 1950s, after Stalin's death, when Central Asian

² Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet city, 1930-1966*, University of Pittsburgh Press(2000), p.4.

³ J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith, *Domicile: The Global Destruction of Home* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet city, 1930-1966* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p.8.

Indigenous groups interacted more closely with the Soviet institutions that had taken root in the city.⁴

2.2 Society of Soviet Central Asia

Since 1924, Soviet officials divided Central Asia into individual republics and established Central Asian Republics. Concurrently communist party leaders criticized pre-existing Central Asian cultural or historical traditions, particularly the purported low status of women, high illiteracy rates, poor health standards, the strong influence of Islam, and local customs: polygamy, underage marriage, and circumcision. All of these backwards traits were eventually to be overcome through rational Soviet science, the creation of modern health-care and education systems, and productive factory labor.

While in some ways this creation of new national groups began as a top down process initiated by Party leaders in Moscow, recent archival based studies indicate that new national identities and cultural traditions were much more the result of a complex negotiation between indigenous residents on the ground in Central Asia and top Party ideologists sent out from Russia to help construct socialism in the region. Although Soviet policies introduced to Central Asia a number of features unique to socialist societies, in many ways they continued the project launched by the tsarist regimes, which also viewed traditional Central Asian society as stagnant and resistant to change.

Soviet leaders in Central Asian SSR decreed that revolution liberated Central Asians from colonial oppression and imperialism, but their efforts to enlighten the local population, their goals of creating a modern European-style urban environment in Central Asia, and their propagandistic use of the region's transformation to showcase state power remind one of similar programs of late-nineteenth century Russian administrators in the newly conquered territories of Turkestan. In Central Asia and the Russian Empire as a whole, these similarities show that certain ideas about cities, urban life, and the means of ruling urban spaces spanned the revolutionary divide, despite the clear ideological break of 1917.⁵

3 Historical Understanding on Central Asian two Models of Urbanization

For much of Central Asian history, the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand dominated the region, while Tashkent and Almaty were a minor commercial town or settlements. Both Samarkand and Bukhara have strong Persian influences in language, culture and ethnic composition, a fact that is reflected in their Soviet and post-soviet populations.

This Sovietization in Central Asia is neither a simple case of Soviet identity being imposed on the region from Moscow through Russification nor simply an example of

⁴ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet city, 1930-1966*, University of Pittsburgh Press(2000), P. 5

⁵ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet city, 1930-1966*, University of Pittsburgh Press(2000), p.6

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popular resistance to this process from the residents of Tashkent or Almaty. With urban planning the multiethnic Soviet state sought to create common identities for Central Asia's diverse inhabitants and to concentrate power and decision making around Moscow.

The Central Asian 'urban revolution or urban planning', which had been launched in the Soviet period, continues in new conditions, could be classified as that of traditional settler community and that of traditional nomadic community. After independence of Central Asian countries previous regulatory and managerial role of the soviet state was demolished, but this simultaneous destruction of the system of the state social and economic welfare, socio-cultural development of the Central Asian urban population began significantly to lag behind its mechanical growth.

3.1 City of Central Asian Settler Community: Tashkent

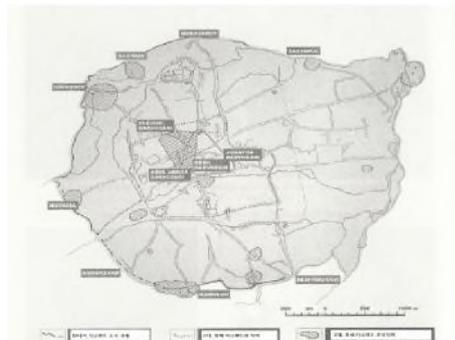


Fig. 1. Territory of Old Tashkent Citadel

The traditional urban development pattern in Central Asia was radial-circular layout of citadel has been remained in Tashkent, Uzbekistan today. Among central Asian major cities Tashkent was particular importance to the Soviet regime as a symbol of socialism and a beacon of hope for Asian peoples who lived under western colonial domination. In many ways, Tashkent was to become Moscow's show-case of the

adaptability of Soviet-style socialism in the East. With the new city of Soviet Tashkent, Moscow hoped to show that the

light of socialism and help spread its revolutionary ideology around the globe, especially to the post-colonial new countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

This creation of a model socialist city in Asia was an important goal of all Soviet leaders immediately upon the establishment of the UzSSR in 1924, but it grew in importance during the cold war, when the Soviet Union and United States competed intensely for influence in the decolonizing world. This transformation included European socialists efforts to bring enlightenment to oppressed classes and peoples of the world, which was one aspect of broader twentieth-century attempts to create ideal citizens in modern states. Tashkent was effectively a city situated at the crossroads of colonialism and an ultra-centralized socialist state.



Fig. 2. Russian Tashkent Location in 19C

For most of the pre-soviet modern period, Tashkent was a city of trading center in Silk-road. The Russian conquest of Turkestan in 1865 spurred the growth of modern Tashkent. Russian armies seized the town from the Kokand khanate in that year, making it the center of tsarist regime in Central Asia and reorienting the region toward Moscow and thus to

European culture, philosophies, and ideologies.

Imperial administrators quickly set up a military fortress in the new territory of old town Tashkent, and the new region grew in political and economic importance to become the de facto capital of Russian Central Asia. This growth brought in large numbers of migrants from Russia, who lived in European style settlements built alongside the traditional Central Asian ethnic city. The establishment of Russian Central Asia was accomplished in ten years and was undertaken largely for economic and foreign policy reasons to demonstrate Russia's status as imperial power.⁶

After the Bolsheviks won the civil war and after the creation of national borders in Central Asia in 1924, Tashkent lost some of its symbolic importance, particularly after Soviet officials designated the historically Central Asian Samarkand as the first capital city of the newly established UzSSR. By 1930 Tashkent regained its official claim as the political center of the republic, a symbol of the Soviet Union's march toward the future and toward communism. City



Fig. 3. Tashkent in 1913

planning of Soviet central Asian cities was an ever-changing interaction between central authorities, republic-level officials, and local Tashkent planners to develop images of both the Soviet state and Uzbekistan that were modern and progressive.⁷

⁶ Robert D. Crews, "Civilization in the City: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Colonization of Tashkent," in *Architectures of Russian Identity: 1500 to the Present*, ed. James Craft and Daniel Rowland (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) p.118-125.

⁷ Most studies of urbanization have focused on the Slavic main cities of the Soviet Union. Svetlana Boym, *Common places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Andrew Elam Day, *Building Socialism: The Politics of the Soviet Cityscape in the Stalin era* (PhD diss., Columbia university, 1998).

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Building Soviet Tashkent was neither top-down nor bottom-up process. Local officials and residents themselves participated in this effort to shape local identities and the urban environment, often responding to events either on the ground in Tashkent or in distant parts of the Soviet Union that could indicate fundamental changes in the direction of society.



Fig. 4. Navoi Street in Soviet Tashkent

Although Tashkent was never destroyed in WWII, in this period the Sovietization process in the Uzbek capital was facilitated tremendously. Its urban layout and ethnic composition

were fundamentally altered by the millions of refugees who came through the city during the war years. While Stalingrad, Kiev, and Minsk were almost destroyed, the Soviet cities in Central Asia and Siberia experienced rapid industrial, economic, and population growth during this period. In Central Asia, the rapid wartime industrialization exposed the uneven prewar economic development of the Soviet Union because the region lacked the infrastructure for military industrial production. Party officials decreed to create hierarchies of importance among institutions, cultures, political priorities, and socioeconomic and ethnic groups to mobilize & maximize all things for assisting war in against Nazi-Germany.



Fig. 5. Tashkent Mahalla in 1950ties

The early postwar liberalization and sheer necessity enabled city planners to reinterpret traditional Uzbek architecture, neighborhoods (mahallas) and local life style, ultimately calling for the adaptation of Central Asian towns. Because of constantly changing decrees from Moscow, construction was delayed or executed in an uncoordinated fashion. As a result, the Soviet citizens of Tashkent, who identified much more closely with the socialist system after the war and desperately hoped for a higher standard of living after WWII, did not see much improvement in their lives in the early

postwar years, despite sacrifices they had made between 1941 and 1945.

It is important to consider how urban planners in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras promoted the idealized image of a victorious multiethnic state. Central Asian cities were fast becoming symbol of the Soviet Union's global aspirations. Tashkent, the largest urban center in the region, served as de facto ambassador to the postcolonial world. The earthquake of 1966 hit Tashkent and it caused a slight delay in the push to display the city as a model of postcolonial socialism. That earthquake damaged large parts of the city but conveniently provided capital into a truly high

modern city that would showcase socialism in Asia and created the contemporary urban landscape that forms the backbone of Tashkent today.

3.2 City of Central Asian Nomadic Community: Almaty

Modern Almaty was founded in 1854, when the Kazakhs were still nomads, as a Russian frontier fort named Verniy on the site of the Silk Road Oasis Almatu which had been laid waste by the Mongols.

On 4 February 1854 the modern history of the city began with the strengthening of the Russian piedmont Fort *Verniy* near the Zailiysky Alatau mountain range between the Bolshaya and Malenkaya Almatinka rivers. The construction of the Verniy Fort was almost finished by the autumn of 1854. Main facilities were erected around the large square for training and parading. Since 1856 Russian peasants moved into Verniy. They founded the Bolshaya Almatinskaya Stanitsa (Cossack village) near the Fort. Increasing of migrants (mostly from Russian mainland) led to construction of the

Malaya Almatinskaya Stanitsa and Tatarskaya (Tashkentskaya) sloboda. It was the place of settlement for Tatar merchants and craftsmen. The new city area was divided into residential sectors and it became into districts (rayon) by the first city plan.

In 1918 Soviet government was established in Verniy. The city and the region became part of the Turkestan Autonomous Republic (RSFSR). On

Verniy renamed as Alma-Ata. In 1926 the construction of the Turkestan-Siberia Railway was approved. The Turkestan-

Siberia Railway had a decisive economic impact that strongly

influenced the destiny of Alma-Ata as the capital of the Kazakh ASSR. Transformation of small town into the capital of the Kazakh SSR was accelerated by the large-scale construction of new administrative and government facilities and housing.

During the transfer of the status of capital city from Kyzyl-Orda to Alma-Ata, a 1936 plan by the Architecture and Planning Bureau aimed to remodel Alma-Ata as the new cultural capital of the Kazakh SSR. The plan was based on the existing rectangular system of districts that would further be strengthened and reconstructed.

In the period of World War II the territory of Alma-Ata was reshuffled.⁸ After 1941, due to

⁸ Alma-Ata hosted over 30 industrial facilities removed from the European section of the USSR, 8 evacuated hospitals, 15 institutes, universities and technical schools, and around 20

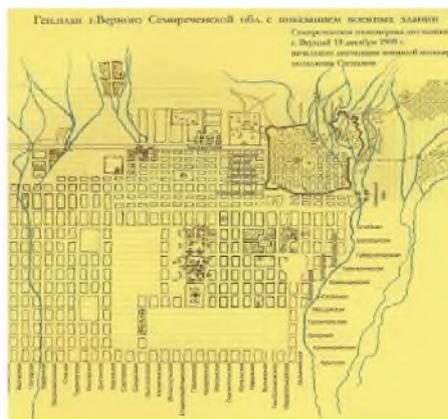


Fig. 6. Almaty City Plan in 1909

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Fig. 7. Almaty City Plan 1936

the mass evacuation of factories and workers from the European part of the Soviet Union during World War II, Alma-Ata became an administrative and trading center and although it had an underdeveloped industrial base it became one of the largest industrial centers of the Soviet Union. In 1967 the city had 145 enterprises, with the bulk of these being light industrial and food industries, which was slightly different from a typical Soviet city where the bias was usually towards heavy industry and capital goods production.



Fig. 8. Almaty map in 1990ties

After independence of Kazakhstan the new General Plan of Almaty for 2030 was developed in 1998, aiming at creating ecologically safe, secure, and socially comfortable living conditions. The main objective is to promote Almaty's image as a garden-city. The area of the city has been expanded during recent years with the suburban settlements. Numerous apartment blocks, and office skyscrapers have transformed the face of the town, which climbs higher and higher up the mountains.

The city of Almaty is experiencing a double dynamic of suburbanization and urban sprawl. The bazaars of Barakholka are featured by a seemingly disordered spatial configuration. From another point of view this reveals the capacity that Kazakh citizens showed to shape the urban space in a profitable way during the period of absence of public planning.

cultural institutions. State Motion picture production companies from Leningrad, Kiev, and Moscow were also moved to Alma-Ata at this time.

4 Contextual Understanding of Contemporary Central Asian Urban Areas

In the Previous researches or analysis on Central Asian urban areas focused on change of demographic composition, because it has been assumed that demographic characters could explain ethno-cultural trends in Urban Areas. Of course demographic processes have always played a leading role in urban development. Against background of the aging urban population the level of new births remains low. On the one hand, this due to the inertia of urban process during the Soviet period, but at the same time, it is impossible for the majority of the urban population to support a relatively acceptable life style and the level of new births sufficient even for simple reproduction. But at the post-soviet stage of urban development in Central Asia a quantitative approach, that is to say an increase of in the urban population, is not problematic. Indicators of urbanization gradually increase, albeit not as rapidly as during Soviet period. The question is, will existing imbalances and strains be smoothed-out in urban development? Thus most likely we need to talk about its qualitative parameters, in particular, socio-cultural ones. And this means, attention must be paid to 'human capital' as the basis for urban development in Central Asian Regions.

Arbitrary divisions of Soviet history - WWII, the Stalin-Khrushchev break, and the cold war - limit ability to see the continuities, particularly in Central Asian Urban areas. In the case of Central Asian cities Stalinism was a central component of both the Central Asian Soviet experience in the 20th century and the urban planning officials, just it was throughout the Soviet world. Although the Stalinist stress on building grand public structures lost influence during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, the construction of model cities continued to the end of the Soviet era and controlled the lives and habits of Soviet Central Asian citizens.

Generally it is clear that the socio-cultural transformation of the Central Asian cities is still underway. This is tied to the continuing adaptation of the entire urban infrastructure to market conditions and to ethno-cultural demographic changes. The demise of Soviet system meant the end of an economy organized to support heavy industry production. Present Central Asian countries practice a 'concentration model' of urbanization, under which population and economic growth are centered in big cities, as the region becomes increasingly cognizant of the need to shift from an agrarian to an industrial-agrarian type of economy. Cities and their agglomerations under this new economic model must act as drivers of growth, but they are having trouble handling the massive influx of people from underdeveloped areas. This economic transition requires better management of urbanization and industrialization processes.

In real urban life there exist several modes of life simultaneously, pre-industrial, socialist, capitalist, industrial and post-industrial. Each of them has its own values and patterns of behavior, from the archaic and traditionally conservative to modern and extremely western-oriented. In the post-Soviet social and cultural transformation of urban life we talk not simply about a single-line transition from one state to another, from the simple to the complicated, from authoritarianism to democracy, or from a

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closed to an open society. At the same time the established tendencies of urban development in the Soviet period continue to effect on the present. Because the modern central Asian city formed in the Soviet period and the legacy of pre-soviet urbanism cannot serve as an example because of its remoteness.

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