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# TURK ELI
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*This Special Issue presents selected papers from the International Scientific Conference*
Ijtimoiy fanlar va jamiyat taraqqiyoti:
barqaror rivojlanishning strategik yo‘nalishlari

Technical Editor
**Laziz Baxtiyorov**

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# Contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *A. A. Djumanqulov*<br>*A. A. Beknazarov* | Psychological and Methodological Principles of Effective Lesson Time Management by Teachers | 6 |
| *B. A. Khasanova*<br>*R. Abdullaev* | Digital Transformation in Central Asia: An Assessment Based on the Case of the Kyrgyz Republic | 8 |
| *Yu. Akhmedov* | The Strategic Importance of Crisis Communication in Ensuring National Stability in Polyethnic Societies | 13 |
| *O. F. Egamberdiev* | The Role, Determinants, and Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies in the Sustainable Development of the Transport System: Evidence from the Khorezm Region | 17 |
| *R. Sh. Ibrahimova* | Development History of Parasitology in Azerbaijan | 20 |
| *B. O. Turaev* | Ali Qushchi: The Scholar Who Introduced the Achievements of Ulugh Beg's Academy to the World | 22 |
| *H. Hamidov* | The History of Artists during the Reign of Amir Temur and the Timurid Period | 26 |
| *S. Dj. Saidova* | National Costume as a Historical and Spiritual Phenomenon | 30 |
| *K. M. Yuldoshev* | Innovation in Education | 33 |
| *A. S. Kaliev*<br>*N. B. Bazarbaev* | Political Development and the Transformation of Civil Identity in Uzbekistan: The 690th Anniversary of Amir Temur and the Politics of | 36 |
| *K. M. Yuldoshev*<br>*Z. Murodova* | Rabat-i Malik Caravanserai: A Key Waystation on the Great Silk Road | 39 |
| *D. S. Saparboeva* | Features of the Development of Logical Thinking in Primary School Mathematics Lessons | 42 |
| *Sh. O. Sayfullaeva* | Developing Reading Skills through Authentic Texts in Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language | 44 |
| *N. Kh. Kholyigitova* | The Role of Personal Values–Oriented Career Planning in Higher Education for Societal Development | 46 |
| *M. N. Inatov* | The Application of Sociological and Historical Analysis Methods in Letter Analysis | 48 |
| *M. G. Nazarova* | Socio-Psychological and Educational Strategic Directions for Preparing Future Engineers for Professional Activity in the Context of Societal Development | 51 |
| *I. H. Jabrayilov* | Common Turkish History: Research and Teaching Issues | 54 |
| *O. V. Kon* | Preparing the Next Generation of Social Educators in Higher Education: A Competency Model in the Context of Global Societal Challenges | 56 |
| *D. A. Egamberdieva* | The Semantic Characteristics of Nature Symbols in Uzbek and English Fairy Tales | 60 |
| *Q. H. Inoyatov* | The Scientific Legacy of Our Great Ancestors as a Source of Education and Moral Values | 64 |
| *A. J. Toshboboev* | The Integration of Social Sciences and the Education System for Sustainable Societal Development: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Approaches | 66 |
| *G. B. Ernazarov* | The Role of the Service Sector in the National Economy: Significance, Economic Analysis, and Strategies for Improvement | 69 |
| *Ə. M. Zeynalov* | Azerbaijan in French Literature | 72 |
| *K. M. Gulomova* | The Role of Modern Pedagogical Technologies in Enhancing Teachers' Professional Competence | 76 |
| *S. Ibrohimov* | Culture and Historical Heritage as Economic Resources: Innovative Management and Strategies for Sustainable Growth | 79 |
| *J. O. Kucharov* | Enhancing Workforce Potential in Small Business Enterprises in Uzbekistan | 82 |

# Political Development and the Transformation of Civil Identity in Uzbekistan: The 690th Anniversary of Amir Temur and the Politics of

**Kaliev Azamat Saiitovich** (Candidate of Political Sciences, Associate Professor)[1]
azakaliev50@gmail.com | ORCID: 0009-0000-3846-2049
**Bazarbaev Nyazaly Bazarbaevich** (researcher)[1]
niyazibazarbaev@gmail.com | ORCID: 0009-0000-3233-808X
[1.] International University named after K.Sh.Toktomamatov
Manas, Kyrgyz Republic

***Abstract.***
In 2026, the countries of Central Asia are marking the 690th anniversary of the birth of Amir Temur. This event brings issues of national identity and historical politics in the region to the forefront. Drawing on a comprehensive analysis, this article examines the mechanisms by which the figure of Amir Temur has been utilized in nation-building and the formation of civil identity in Uzbekistan. Particular attention is paid to the dichotomy between ethnic and civic identity, the role of cultural and linguistic policies, the influence of external factors, and the specific characteristics of each state's identity-building strategies. The Central Asian states exhibit divergent trajectories of identity formation, characterized by the coexistence of ethnocentric and civic models — with a predominance of the former — reflecting the complexity and multidimensionality of this process.

**Keywords:** civil identity, political development, Central Asia, nation-building, ethnic identity, Amir Temur, Timurid legacy, politics of memory, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, post-Soviet space.

**Introduction.** The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 presented the newly independent states of Central Asia with the formidable challenge of forging national identity within multi ethnic societies and in the absence of deeply rooted traditions of statehood. As scholars have rightly noted, "the new states had to develop a new identification policy to cope with the multi ethnic reality" (Sadvokassova et al., 2025). One of the key instruments in this process has been recourse to historical heritage, above all to the figure of Amir Temur (Tamerlane), whose empire in the 14th–15th centuries encompassed much of Central Asia.

In 2026, on the occasion of the 690th anniversary of the birth of this great military commander and statesman, interest in the Timurid legacy and its role in contemporary nation-building acquires particular relevance. The President of Uzbekistan has signed a decree "On the Broad Celebration of the 690th Anniversary of the Birth of the Great Statesman and Commander, Patron of Science, Culture and Art – Amir Temur". The document provides for extensive celebrations throughout the year, as well as the introduction of a new symbolic and educational format: April is declared the Month of Amir Temur. The decree is not merely celebratory but also strategic, consolidating a state led effort to deepen understanding of the Timurid heritage as one of the key foundations of national identity and cultural development.

Yet the significance of Amir Temur extends far beyond Uzbekistan. The Temurid era is directly linked to the Golden Horde and Moghulistan, which existed on the territory of modern day Kazakhstan, making the study of this period evidently important (Sultanov et al., 2023). Moreover, as E. Paskaleva observes, "Uzbekistan seems to have appropriated the Timurid legacy for political purposes since Stalin's time. Timur's strong personality and his giant architectural ambitions, conducive to state legitimation, made him a popular figure among Soviet and post Soviet political elites."

The aim of this study is, through a comprehensive comparative analysis, to identify the principal models of interaction between political regimes and civil identity in the five Central Asian countries, to determine the factors that either facilitate or hinder the formation of trans ethnic civic unity, with a special focus on the use of the figure of Amir Temur in these processes.

**Theoretical and Methodological Approaches.** Research on identity in post Soviet Central Asia has predominantly drawn on the constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes the role of elites, institutions and discursive practices in shaping collective identities. As a study on the foreign policy orientation of Central Asian states underlines, "the constructivist approach allows us to trace the link between national identity and foreign policy, since the process of defining the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' is socially constructed" (Kim & Lee, 2024). Of particular relevance to the region is the theoretical framework proposed by R. Brubaker, who introduced the concept of "nationalizing nationalism" with reference to post Soviet states. Within this framework, the state bearing nation, perceiving itself as the "legitimate master" of the new state, seeks to advance its interests through policies aimed at consolidating its dominant position.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states of Central Asia found themselves engaged in constructing their own national "imagined communities". This was done to legitimize their existing territorial integrity, their claims to their titular ethnic groups, and the position of political elites. The process unfolded through the creation of specific symbols, myths and rituals that both distinguished the nation and were used to legitimize its right to exist (Kudaibergenova, 2018).

For the analysis of all five Central Asian countries, a comparative approach is methodologically productive, enabling the identification of both common features — post Soviet legacy, authoritarian tendencies, resource dependence — and national specificities — ethnic composition, historical experience of statehood, and foreign policy orientation.

**Historical Context: Amir Temur in Soviet and Post Soviet Historiography.** The perception of Amir Temur in Central Asia has undergone a significant evolution. During the Soviet period, the image of Timur was ambivalent: on the one hand, he was viewed as a feudal conqueror; on the other, his achievements in urban planning and culture were acknowledged. In 1970, the Uzbek SSR prepared to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the city of Samarkand. The despotic history of Samarkand was problematic for Soviet ideology, yet its architectural monuments, including the Gur Emir mausoleum, were international icons of which the Soviet state was proud (Crews, 2012).

After independence in 1991, the post Soviet republic of Uzbekistan sought a common foundation for defining its nation building discourse and national branding. The great

emperor Timur (r. 1370–1405), one of the few mortals whose name is linked to a globally recognized architectural style, was proclaimed the embodiment of Uzbek national identity.

Under the first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, the cult of Timur became a key element of state ideology. As one study notes, "Timur as a national hero who promoted the spread of Islam across his steppe empire enjoys mass popularity among the Uzbek public in a predominantly Muslim country with nomadic roots." Timurid architecture, in turn, was used to enhance a sense of belonging and pride among the Uzbek population in the process of ethno nationalization.

**Uzbekistan: Temur as the Core of National Identity**

Uzbekistan represents the most illustrative case of using the figure of Amir Temur in nation building. The 690th anniversary of his birth, celebrated in 2026, has become an important milestone in this process. The presidential decree provides for extensive celebrations and introduces a new symbolic and educational format: April is declared the Month of Amir Temur. During this period, the planned activities include scholarly conferences, creative meetings, exhibitions, cultural events and educational programmers' targeting both domestic audiences and the international academic community.

Particular attention in the decree is devoted to systematic work with the historical heritage. It provides for the elaboration and implementation of a "road map" until 2030, aimed at a comprehensive study of the Timurid era, expanding archival and archaeological research, supporting interdisciplinary scholarly projects, and actively promoting their results. A separate section is dedicated to the museum based and visual interpretation of the era: a large scale reconstruction of the State Museum of the History of Timurids using digital technologies and multimedia solutions is planned.

An important place in Uzbekistan's ideological policy is occupied by the Temur Tuzuklari ("Institutions of Temur"), a code of laws and rules of governance. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev notes, this text is a critical source for understanding the national heritage. The Temur Tuzuklari occupies a prominent place in the historiography of world civilization, and its authorship is attributed to a statesman of exceptional strategic and intellectual abilities.

However, in recent years a shift in Uzbekistan's national narrative has been observed. As D. Shlapentokh notes, after President Karimov's death and Shavkat Mirziyoyev's rise to power, there was a transition from an emphasis on Timur as the founder of Uzbekistan to the role of Alexander the Great in the country's history. Timur, as the founder of the Uzbek state, increasingly competed with the image of Alexander the Great, representing openness to the world — especially the West — and comparatively mild domestic policies. This change reflects a broader transformation of Uzbekistan's identity politics.

**Kazakhstan: Temur in the Context of Nomadic History**

In Kazakhstan, the figure of Amir Temur occupies a more complex and ambiguous place in national historiography. As one study notes, the era of Amir Temur is directly linked to the Golden Horde and Moghulistan, which existed on the territory of modern day Kazakhstan, making the study of this period evidently important (Sultanov et al., 2023).

In Kazakhstani discourse, Timur is often examined within the context of nomadic history, where he appears less as a founder of statehood and more as a figure linked to the history of the Golden Horde and Moghulistan. Symbolically, the country continued to be called the Motherland, but most symbols of power were represented by male figures — for example, Amir Temur in Uzbekistan or Ablai Khan in Kazakhstan (Kudaibergenova, 2018). Research shows that "the Uzbek nation building model, especially under Karimov, offered a past oriented telos, proposing the revival of Amir Temur's golden age in the future. As a result, the Soviet past was a debilitating experience that undermined the great trajectory of Uzbek history" (Torbakov, 2019). The Kazakhstani model, by contrast, is oriented towards a more inclusive approach.

**Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan: Different Trajectories**

In Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, the image of Amir Temur does not play as prominent a role in national identity, owing to various historical and political factors.

In Tajikistan, national identity formation has taken place in the context of post conflict reconstruction following the civil war of 1992–1997. Civic identity there is constructed around several key narratives: overcoming the north–south divide, restoring national statehood on the basis of the Samanid legacy (9th–10th centuries), and confronting the Islamist opposition. The Samanid period, which preceded the Mongol conquest, serves as a more significant historical reference point for Tajikistan than the Timurid era, which is associated with a Turkic rather than Persian cultural component.

In Kyrgyzstan, which stands out among Central Asian states for its relatively more liberal political system, historical narratives are also oriented towards other figures — above all, the national heroes of the Manas epic. As a study of domestic political risks notes, Kyrgyzstan displays "the greatest political fragmentation and vulnerability to external influences" among all countries in the region (Mehmood, 2026). Under these conditions, the theme of Amir Temur, associated with the creation of a centralized empire, finds little resonance.

In Turkmenistan, which occupies a unique place in the region due to its policy of neutrality and international isolation, identity policy has been shaped under the decisive influence of the first president, S. Niyazov (Turkmenbashi), who created a personality cult and developed the concept of the "Turkmen nation" as a unique cultural historical phenomenon. Turkmenistan's ethnic structure is the most homogeneous in the region: the share of the titular nation exceeds 85%. This creates favorable conditions for promoting an ethnocentric model of identity without significant risks of alienating non titular groups. The image of Amir Temur, linked to Uzbek history, is not central to the Turkmen national narrative.

**Comparative Analysis of the Five Countries**

A comparative analysis of the five Central Asian states reveals both common patterns and national specificities in the processes of civil identity transformation linked to the use of historical figures, above all Amir Temur.

**Common features:**

1. Use of historical heritage (ancient civilizations, imperial experience) to legitimize contemporary statehood.
2. Key role of the presidency in shaping identity narratives.
3. Predominance of ethnocentric models of identity, alongside a formal adherence to civic principles.
4. Language policy as an instrument for strengthening the position of the titular nation.
5. Vulnerability to external influences and geopolitical rivalries.

**National specificities:**

1. **Uzbekistan:** Central role of Amir Temur in national identity, active use of Timurid architectural heritage, large scale anniversary celebrations (690th anniversary).
2. **Kazakhstan:** More complex and ambiguous attitude towards the Timurid legacy, connection with the history of the Golden Horde and Moghulistan, orientation towards its own national heroes (Ablai Khan).
3. **Tajikistan:** Orientation towards the Samanid heritage, which is earlier than the Timurid era, reflecting the Persian cultural component.
4. **Kyrgyzstan:** Orientation towards the Manas epic and other pre Islamic traditions, political fragmentation, which reduces the role of a unified historical narrative.
5. **Turkmenistan:** Maximum ethnic homogeneity, policy of isolation and neutrality, personality cult and ideologized identity with an emphasis on its own historical

figures.

**Discussion.** The analysis of the above evidence shows that the use of the image of Amir Temur in the formation of civil identity in Central Asian countries follows three main models.

1. **Central symbol model (Uzbekistan).** This model is based on the use of Amir Temur as "father of the nation", "founder of statehood" and "symbol of power". It is characterized by an active state policy of popularizing the Timurid legacy, including anniversary celebrations, restoration of architectural monuments, and incorporation of relevant themes into educational curricula.

2. **Background element model (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan).** In this model, the image of Amir Temur is present in historical discourse but is not central. In Kazakhstan, it is examined in the context of the history of the Golden Horde and Moghulistan; in Tajikistan, as part of the broader Persian Islamic civilization, but it gives way to the Samanid heritage.

3. **Absence model (Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan).** In these countries, the image of Amir Temur is scarcely used in nation building processes. In Kyrgyzstan, this is linked to political fragmentation and orientation towards other historical narratives; in Turkmenistan, to isolationist policy and an emphasis on national uniqueness.

It is important to note that experts point out that the celebration of the 690th anniversary of Amir Temur fits into Uzbekistan's broader strategy of reinterpreting historical heritage as a "soft power" resource, strengthening cultural diplomacy and shaping a positive international image of the country. The celebration of the anniversary is seen not as a one off event but as a long term project integrating history, science, culture and state development ideology.

**Conclusion.** The analysis of all five Central Asian countries allows several conclusions to be drawn regarding political development and the transformation of civil identity in the region in the context of the 690th anniversary of Amir Temur.

First, identity processes in the region are characterised by a transitional state in which ethnocentric and civic models coexist, with a clear predominance of the former. The use of the figure of Amir Temur in Uzbekistan is a striking example of an ethnocentric model, where a historical figure becomes a symbol of the titular nation.

Second, state policies in the spheres of history, culture and memory play a key role in identity formation. The celebration of the 690th anniversary of Amir Temur in Uzbekistan demonstrates how anniversary events can be used to strengthen national unity and legitimize state power.

Third, the perception of historical figures and events varies across the region depending on ethnic composition, political regime and foreign policy orientation. What is a central symbol in one country (Amir Temur in Uzbekistan) may be marginal or entirely absent in others?

Fourth, regional conflicts and historical divisions continue to influence identity formation. The shared historical heritage, including the Timurid era, can both unite and divide the countries of Central Asia.

Fifth, the construction of a supranational Central Asian identity faces serious obstacles, including nationalist narratives, external influence and historical divisions. Nevertheless, recourse to a shared historical heritage, including the Timurid era, may become one potential avenue for regional integration.

Prospects for further research include the need for deeper comparative analysis of identity policies across all five states, study of the role of social media in identity transformation, assessment of the impact of the geopolitical crisis of 2022–2026 on identity processes, and analysis of the long term effects of demographic changes on civil identity in the region.

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