

Uzbekistan's Journey: Transition from Soviet Republic to Independent Nation

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Abstract: This article discusses the soviet republic to the independent nation: a study of Uzbekistan's path to independence. Uzbekistan's path to independence from being a Soviet republic was defined by a complex interplay of factors, challenges, and achievements. The desire for self-determination, the emergence of independence movements, and the subsequent socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations all shaped the country's trajectory. By understanding Uzbekistan's history and the struggles it faced during its transition to independence, we gain valuable insight into its present-day policies and future prospects.

1 INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan holds a significant place in the history of Central Asia as a former Soviet republic. The country, which was once a part of the vast Soviet Union, embarked on a remarkable journey towards independence. In this article, we will explore the path Uzbekistan took to free itself from Soviet rule, examining the key factors, challenges, and achievements that marked its transition.

Uzbekistan's history as a Soviet republic began in 1924 when it was established as the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. As a member of the Soviet Union, the country underwent significant transformations in both its socio-political and economic spheres. Soviet policies heavily influenced Uzbekistan's development, shaping its industries, infrastructure, and society.

However, as time passed, a growing sense of nationalism and desire for independence emerged among the Uzbek population. The Soviet regime's policies and practices began to clash with the deep-rooted cultural identity and national pride of the Uzbeks. This dissatisfaction fuelled the flames of the independence movement, which gained momentum in the late 1980s.

Prominent Uzbek nationalist leaders and organizations played a crucial role in mobilizing the independence movement. These individuals and groups advocated for autonomy and sovereignty, making appeals for self-determination and the establishment of an independent nation-state.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Amidst this backdrop, Uzbekistan faced numerous challenges during its transition from a Soviet republic to an independent country. The establishment of new governance structures and legislative bodies was necessary for a smooth transfer of power. Efforts were made to democratize the system and ensure the protection of individual rights through the development of a new constitution.

Economic transformation was also a critical aspect of Uzbekistan's journey towards independence. The country had to shift from a centrally planned economy to a market-based system. Privatization of industries, liberalization of trade policies, and the attraction of foreign investments became pivotal steps in restructuring the economy. However, this transition was not without its obstacles,

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as issues like unemployment and income disparity needed to be addressed.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan had to navigate its way through the realm of international relations and foreign policy. Given its strategic geopolitical location, the country sought to establish diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, international organizations, and global powers. By doing so, Uzbekistan aimed to enhance its influence, maintain regional stability, and pursue its national interests.

In addition to the political and economic transformations, Uzbekistan focused on social and cultural developments during the transition period. Preserving and promoting Uzbek cultural heritage became a fundamental objective. Efforts were made to revive traditional arts, literature, and music, ensuring that the Uzbek identity would endure in the face of modernization and globalization. Education and cultural initiatives played a vital role in fostering a sense of national pride and identity among the Uzbek population.

The Soviet Union was established in 1922, following the Russian Revolution. It aimed to be a socialist state, guided by the principles of communism. As part of its territorial expansion, the Soviet Union incorporated various regions, including Uzbekistan, into the newly formed federation of socialist republics.

Uzbekistan, located in the heart of Central Asia, was designated as the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. This designation meant that Uzbekistan became a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, with its government and institutions subordinate to those of the Soviet central government.

The Soviet regime sought to establish a centralized system of governance that would ensure conformity to communist ideals. This involved the implementation of a planned economy, with agricultural and industrial production being directed by the state. Uzbekistan's economy was transformed to suit the needs of the Soviet Union, with an emphasis on cotton production, which became a key export commodity.

The Soviet era also brought several benefits to Uzbekistan. The Soviet government invested heavily in infrastructure development, modernizing transportation networks, and building schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions. The state-sponsored education system expanded access to education, resulting in increased literacy rates. Similarly, healthcare services improved, leading to better healthcare outcomes for the Uzbek population.

However, the Soviet era was not without its challenges and controversies. The planned economy

stifled innovation and entrepreneurship, leading to inefficiencies and stagnation. Government control over resources and decision-making limited the economic autonomy of Uzbekistan. Additionally, Soviet policies and practices interfered with Uzbekistan's cultural identity and traditions.

Despite these challenges, Uzbekistan experienced significant socio-cultural changes during its time within the Soviet Union. The Uzbek language, which had been written in Arabic script, was adapted to Cyrillic script to align with the Soviet Union's linguistic policies. Russian, as the lingua franca of the Soviet Union, gained prominence alongside the Uzbek language.

Moreover, the Soviet era witnessed the rise of industrialization and urbanization in Uzbekistan. New cities emerged, and the urban population grew as industries expanded. This led to the migration of people from rural areas to urban centres, resulting in demographic shifts and changes in the social fabric of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan's inclusion within the Soviet Union also impacted its geopolitical standing. The Soviet Union wielded significant influence on the global stage, particularly during the Cold War period. Uzbekistan's strategic location made it an important player in Central Asia, and its position within the Soviet Union enabled it to maintain regional stability and influence.

The independence movements in Uzbekistan were largely influenced by a combination of historical, cultural, and political factors. This article aims to explore the key factors that contributed to the growth of these movements and ultimately led to the independence of Uzbekistan.

Under Soviet rule, Uzbekistan, like other Soviet republics, experienced the suppression of local cultures and the imposition of Russian influence. This led to a growing sense of frustration and a desire to reclaim their cultural identity and heritage.

The centrally planned Soviet economy caused economic stagnation and significant inequalities in Uzbekistan. The region's rich agricultural resources were often exploited for the benefit of other Soviet republics, leading to a lack of development and unequal distribution of resources. These economic challenges fuelled dissatisfaction and a search for alternative economic models.

The authoritarian rule in Uzbekistan under Soviet governance, particularly during the regime of Islam Karimov, was marked by political repression and human rights violations. This created a climate of fear and discontent, motivating individuals and groups to

advocate for greater political freedoms and human rights.

The late 1980s witnessed the emergence of national revival movements in Uzbekistan. These movements aimed to reconnect with Uzbek cultural heritage and traditions, promoting the use of the Uzbek language, and advocating for greater autonomy from the Soviet government. National pride and a renewed sense of identity became strong driving forces behind the independence movements.

The independence movements in neighbouring countries, such as the Baltic states and the other Central Asian republics, also played a role in inspiring and influencing the growth of independence movements in Uzbekistan. The successful struggles for independence in these regions provided a model and a source of inspiration for Uzbek activists.

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) further fuelled the desire for independence in Uzbekistan. Gorbachev's reforms encouraged political dialogue and a more open society, which allowed for discussions about the possibility of independence and self-governance.

The final and most significant factor that led to the growth of independence movements in Uzbekistan was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The dissolution of the Soviet state created a power vacuum and uncertainty, prompting Uzbekistan and other Soviet republics to seize the opportunity and declare their independence.

The pursuit of independence has been a long and arduous journey for many nations throughout history. Uzbekistan, a former Soviet republic, experienced a significant shift in its path towards independence due to various external events. In particular, the collapse of the Soviet Union served as a catalyst for Uzbekistan's pursuit of autonomy.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a new era of uncertainty and opportunity for Uzbekistan. As the once-powerful Soviet state disintegrated, Uzbekistan found itself at a crossroads, faced with the choice of whether to remain part of the Soviet system or to assert its independence. The external event of the Soviet Union's collapse had an undeniable impact on the course of Uzbekistan's history.

One of the immediate consequences of the Soviet Union's collapse was the dissolution of centralized power. With Moscow's authority waning, Uzbekistan, like other Soviet republics, saw an opportunity to break free from the control and interference of the Soviet government. This newfound freedom allowed Uzbekistan to develop its own political, economic,

and cultural systems according to its own aspirations and needs.

The collapse of the Soviet Union also had significant economic implications for Uzbekistan. As part of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan's economy was intertwined with the larger Soviet economic system. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan had to chart its own economic course. This external event forced Uzbekistan to confront the challenges of building a self-sustaining economy and establishing trade relations with other nations on its own terms.

Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union created a power vacuum in the region. This vacuum led to a reconfiguration of geopolitical dynamics and a shift in alliances. Uzbekistan, recognizing the need to establish its place in the international arena, sought external partnerships and alliances that would support its pursuit of independence and safeguard its interests. This included engaging with neighbouring Central Asian republics, as well as seeking cooperation with other nations on various fronts, such as security, trade, and development.

Another external event that influenced Uzbekistan's pursuit of independence was the global trend towards democratization. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent discrediting of the socialist system created a wave of political change worldwide. This wave of democratization inspired and emboldened Uzbekistan's pro-independence activists and reformists to push for greater political freedoms and democratic governance.

External events, particularly the collapse of the Soviet Union, played a pivotal role in Uzbekistan's pursuit of independence. The dissolution of centralized Soviet power, coupled with the economic, geopolitical, and global political shifts that followed, prompted Uzbekistan to seize the opportunity and assert its autonomy. The external events created a favourable environment for Uzbekistan to break away from the Soviet system and chart its own path towards independence, leading to the establishment of a sovereign nation.

Transitioning from a Soviet republic to an independent nation was not without its challenges for Uzbekistan. As one of the fifteen republics that made up the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan faced numerous obstacles as it embarked on a path towards autonomy. The process of disentangling itself from the centralized Soviet system and establishing itself as an independent nation was complex and arduous, requiring it to address both internal and external challenges.

One of the key challenges faced by Uzbekistan was the task of building new political and governance structures. Under the Soviet system, the political power and decision-making were concentrated in Moscow, leaving little room for autonomy at the republic level. As Uzbekistan declared its independence, establishing a functioning government that could effectively serve the needs of its people became a top priority.

Another significant challenge was the need to develop a self-sustaining economy. As a Soviet republic, Uzbekistan's economy was deeply intertwined with that of the larger Soviet Union. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union upended this economic relationship, leaving Uzbekistan to confront the task of building its own economic system. This required reconfiguring production and trade networks, attracting foreign investment, and implementing economic reforms to create a stable and prosperous economy.

Moreover, Uzbekistan faced the challenge of managing its diverse population. The country is home to various ethnic and linguistic groups, each with its own cultural traditions and historical ties. The transition to independence necessitated finding a balance between fostering a sense of national unity and respecting the rights and identities of different ethnic and cultural communities within the country. This involved creating policies and institutions that could accommodate and empower the diverse population of Uzbekistan.

Additionally, Uzbekistan had to redefine its place in the international arena. As a Soviet republic, its relations with the outside world were primarily conducted through Moscow. Transitioning to independence required establishing new diplomatic relationships, joining international organizations, and negotiating its position among the community of nations. This necessitated a diplomatic effort to assert Uzbekistan's sovereignty while also promoting regional stability and cooperation.

Furthermore, the transition to independence brought about the need for legal and institutional reforms. The Soviet legal system was based on socialist principles and was ill-suited to the demands of an independent nation. Uzbekistan had to undertake the task of developing a new legal framework that would uphold the rule of law, protect individual rights, and provide a solid foundation for the functioning of the state.

Lastly, Uzbekistan faced social challenges during its transition to independence. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to economic hardships and social dislocation for many, as the previous support systems

and structures crumbled. The government had to navigate these social challenges and address issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality while simultaneously managing the political and economic aspects of the transition.

The journey from a Soviet republic to an independent nation was not without its challenges for Uzbekistan. From building new political and governance systems to developing a self-sustaining economy, managing diversity, redefining international relations, undertaking legal and institutional reforms, and addressing social challenges, Uzbekistan had to confront numerous obstacles. However, despite these challenges, Uzbekistan persevered and made significant progress towards establishing itself as a sovereign and independent nation.

Uzbekistan's transition to independence from the Soviet Union was marked by a series of economic reforms aimed at building a self-sustaining and prosperous economy. These reforms were necessary to address the challenges posed by the collapse of the Soviet economic system and to lay the groundwork for the country's development as an independent nation. Under the leadership of President Islam Karimov and his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan implemented a range of reforms that focused on liberalizing the economy, attracting foreign investment, and diversifying the country's industries.

One of the key elements of Uzbekistan's economic reforms was the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system. Under the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan's economy was heavily regulated and controlled by the state, with limited private enterprise and market mechanisms. However, the country recognized the need to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity of its people by creating an environment that encourages private sector development. As a result, various reforms were introduced to reduce state intervention and promote market competition. This included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the liberalization of prices, and the removal of bureaucratic barriers to starting and operating businesses.

To attract foreign investment and promote economic growth, Uzbekistan also implemented policies to improve the business climate and reduce barriers to entry. This involved simplifying and streamlining administrative procedures, reducing bureaucracy, and enhancing transparency and accountability in the public sector. The government also established special economic zones and free industrial zones to provide additional incentives for

foreign investors, such as tax breaks, favourable regulations, and streamlined customs procedures.

In order to diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on traditional sectors such as agriculture and raw material exports, Uzbekistan also focused on developing new industries and sectors. The government implemented policies to promote innovation, research and development, and technological advancement in sectors such as information technology, telecommunications, manufacturing, and tourism. Special attention was given to the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as engines of economic growth and job creation.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan implemented measures to improve its transportation and logistics infrastructure to facilitate trade and attract foreign investment. This included the modernization and expansion of transportation networks, such as roadways, railways, and airports, as well as the establishment of new logistics hubs and trade corridors.

In addition to these reforms, Uzbekistan also prioritized human capital development by investing in education, healthcare, and skills training programs. This aimed to ensure that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the modern economy.

Overall, the economic reforms implemented during Uzbekistan's transition to independence played a crucial role in laying the foundation for a self-sustaining and prosperous economy. These reforms focused on liberalizing the economy, attracting foreign investment, diversifying industries, improving the business climate, and investing in human capital. As a result, Uzbekistan has made significant progress in building a dynamic and competitive economy that has attracted increased foreign investment and created new opportunities for its people. The country continues to pursue further reforms and initiatives to drive sustainable economic growth and improve the quality of life for its citizens in the future.

Uzbekistan's Efforts to Establish Diplomatic Relations Following Independence In the wake of its independence from the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan faced the critical task of establishing diplomatic relations with other nations. This process was vital for the country's transition to a fully-fledged independent state and for securing its place in the global community. Uzbekistan approached this challenge with determination and embarked on a diplomatic journey that aimed to foster cooperation, enhance

international partnerships, and promote peace and stability in the region.

One of the key objectives for Uzbekistan was to establish diplomatic ties with as many nations as possible, prioritizing its neighbouring countries, particularly those within Central Asia. Recognizing the shared history, culture, and interests, Uzbekistan sought to build strong bilateral relationships based on mutual respect and cooperation. It actively engaged in dialogue with its neighbours, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, to foster regional cooperation and address shared challenges. This was achieved through the signing of bilateral agreements, establishing trade and economic partnerships, and strengthening cultural and educational exchanges.

Uzbekistan also made significant efforts to engage with major regional players, such as Russia and China, to deepen ties and expand avenues for cooperation. These diplomatic relations were of particular importance given the geopolitical significance of the region. The country actively pursued strategic partnerships with these nations, focusing on areas such as trade, energy, security, and cultural exchange.

Beyond its immediate neighbourhood, Uzbekistan engaged with other countries across the globe. It sought to expand its diplomatic reach by establishing relations with countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. These efforts were instrumental in enhancing economic cooperation, attracting foreign investment, and promoting cultural diplomacy.

Uzbekistan strived to present itself as a reliable partner in the international arena, committed to promoting peace, stability, and regional integration. It actively participated in international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), among others. Through its engagement in these platforms, Uzbekistan voiced its positions on global issues, contributed to regional security, and sought to advance its national interests.

In addition to establishing diplomatic ties, Uzbekistan aimed to enhance its soft power through cultural diplomacy. The country showcased its rich heritage, traditions, and artistic achievements through cultural events, exhibitions, and exchanges. This played a vital role in fostering deeper mutual understanding and forging lasting friendships with nations around the world.

Uzbekistan's efforts to establish diplomatic relations following independence have borne fruit

over the years. The country has succeeded in cultivating a network of strong partnerships and alliances that have contributed to its economic growth, regional stability, and global recognition. By pursuing a policy of open dialogue, cooperation, and engagement, Uzbekistan has demonstrated its commitment to playing an active and constructive role in international affairs.

As Uzbekistan continues its diplomatic journey, the country remains focused on deepening existing partnerships and forging new ones. It strives to be an advocate for peace, stability, and sustainable development, not just within the region but on a global scale. Through its diplomatic efforts, Uzbekistan aims to create a favourable environment that promotes economic growth, enhances cultural exchanges, and fosters mutual understanding among nations.

Uzbekistan's efforts to establish diplomatic relations following independence have been marked by determination, openness, and a commitment to international engagement. By actively pursuing bilateral and multilateral partnerships, the country has secured its place in the global community and positioned itself as a key player in regional affairs. The journey continues as Uzbekistan strives to deepen ties, promote cooperation, and contribute to global peace and prosperity.

The geopolitical location of a country plays a crucial role in shaping its foreign policy. Uzbekistan, situated in the heart of Central Asia, is no exception. The country's unique position has had a significant impact on its approach to international relations, regional cooperation, and the pursuit of national interests.

Uzbekistan's geographical location, bordered by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, places it at the crossroads of important trade routes, strategic transportation corridors, and valuable resources. This has influenced Uzbekistan's foreign policy priorities, focusing on fostering regional stability, enhancing economic cooperation, and strengthening partnerships with neighbouring nations.

First and foremost, Uzbekistan's geopolitical location has shaped its approach to regional security. Situated between Russia and China, two major global powers, the country seeks to maintain a delicate balance in its foreign policy. Uzbekistan has historically maintained friendly relations with both nations, leveraging its strategic position as a neutral mediator and facilitator in regional conflicts and disputes. Recognizing the importance of stability in its neighbourhood, Uzbekistan actively engages in

regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to promote security cooperation and address common challenges such as terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking.

The landlocked nature of Uzbekistan also presents unique challenges and opportunities. The country has limited access to seaports, making it reliant on transit routes through its neighbouring countries for international trade. As a result, Uzbekistan has focused on improving its transportation infrastructure and developing strong economic ties with its neighbours to ensure smooth trade flows. The country has actively pursued initiatives to enhance connectivity, such as the construction of railways, highways, and energy pipelines, to facilitate the flow of goods and resources between Central Asia and global markets. By leveraging its central location, Uzbekistan has positioned itself as a key transit hub and an attractive investment destination for foreign investors looking to tap into the region's potential.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan's geopolitical location has also influenced its approach to cultural and educational exchanges. The country, rich in history, traditions, and cultural heritage, has actively sought to promote its cultural diplomacy in the region and beyond. Recognizing the power of soft power, Uzbekistan has organized numerous cultural events, exhibitions, and artistic exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and foster people-to-people contacts. Its location at the crossroads of various civilizations has enabled Uzbekistan to showcase its unique blend of influences and strengthen cultural ties with nations near and far.

Uzbekistan's geopolitical location has left a profound impact on its foreign policy. Situated at the heart of Central Asia, the country's approach to international relations is shaped by its quest for regional stability, economic development, and cultural diplomacy. Uzbekistan's position between major global powers necessitates a delicate balancing act, maintaining friendly relations with both Russia and China and leveraging its neutral status as a mediator in regional conflicts. Its landlocked nature has also prompted Uzbekistan to prioritize connectivity and infrastructure development, enhancing trade routes and transit opportunities. Ultimately, Uzbekistan's strategic location continues to shape its foreign policy as it seeks to establish itself as a regional leader and a key player in global affairs.

The transition to independence is a critical phase for any nation, as it brings opportunities and challenges in various aspects of society. For Uzbekistan, the preservation and promotion of its rich

cultural heritage became a paramount concern as the country embarked on its journey towards autonomy. Recognizing the importance of cultural identity in shaping a nation's identity, Uzbekistan has made significant efforts to safeguard and showcase its cultural heritage.

Uzbekistan boasts a diverse and vibrant cultural heritage, spanning centuries and encompassing multiple civilizations. From the ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, which stand as a testament to the country's historical significance along the Silk Road, to the traditional arts and crafts that have been passed down through generations, Uzbekistan's cultural heritage is a source of pride and a symbol of national identity.

One of the primary initiatives taken by Uzbekistan to preserve its cultural heritage was the establishment of institutions dedicated to the protection and promotion of its art, architecture, music, and traditional crafts. The State Museum of History, the State Museum of Fine Arts, and the UNESCO World Heritage sites are just a few examples of the institutions and sites that have been established or designated to preserve and showcase Uzbekistan's cultural treasures. These institutions not only collect and display artefacts but also conduct research, conservation efforts, and educational programs to raise awareness and appreciation among the public.

Another significant aspect of preserving Uzbek culture has been the revitalization of traditional crafts and skills. Uzbekistan has a rich tradition of craftsmanship, including ceramics, embroidery, woodworking, and silk weaving, among others. To ensure that these traditional skills are not lost, the government has taken steps to support artisans and provide them with opportunities to showcase their craftsmanship domestically and internationally. Crafts festivals, exhibitions, and training programs have been organized to encourage the continuation of these traditional practices and to generate interest and market demand for these unique products.

Furthermore, the promotion of Uzbek culture has extended beyond the borders of the country. Uzbekistan recognizes the power of cultural diplomacy in fostering international relations and promoting a positive image of the nation. Cultural exchange programs, festivals, and performances have been organized both within the country and abroad to showcase Uzbekistan's vibrant arts and traditions. This has not only led to a greater appreciation of Uzbek culture by people from different backgrounds but has also contributed to the country's tourism industry by attracting visitors from around the world.

The transition to independence also brought challenges in preserving cultural heritage. Economic development and modernization, while necessary, can sometimes pose a threat to traditional practices and historical sites. Uzbekistan has been mindful of this delicate balance and has implemented policies to ensure sustainable development that respects and protects cultural heritage. The integration of heritage conservation principles into urban planning, the establishment of protected areas, and increased awareness campaigns have all contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage during the transition to independence (Rahimov, 2007- Fazendeiro, 2017).

3 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's path to independence from being a Soviet republic was defined by a complex interplay of factors, challenges, and achievements. The desire for self-determination, the emergence of independence movements, and the subsequent socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations all shaped the country's trajectory. By understanding Uzbekistan's history and the struggles it faced during its transition to independence, we gain valuable insight into its present-day policies and future prospects.

The growth of independence movements in Uzbekistan was driven by a combination of historical, cultural, and political factors. The suppression of local cultures, economic stagnation, political repression, national revival movements, the influence of neighbouring independence movements Fazendeiro, the introduction of perestroika and glasnost, and the fall of the Soviet Union all played vital roles in shaping the aspirations of the Uzbek population and ultimately leading to the independence of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan's transition to independence brought with it a commitment to preserve and promote its cultural heritage. Recognizing the significance of cultural identity in shaping national pride and a positive image abroad, Uzbekistan has taken comprehensive measures to protect its historical sites, support traditional crafts, and showcase its vibrant cultural traditions. By prioritizing the preservation of cultural heritage, Uzbekistan has ensured that future generations can connect with their roots while also fostering an appreciation for Uzbek culture worldwide.

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