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## THE STAGES OF FORMATION OF THE RUSSIAN TOPONYMIC SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

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**ABSTRACT:** Toponymy, the study of place names, serves as a crucial tool for understanding historical, cultural, and social processes. This article explores the formation and evolution of the Russian toponymic system in Uzbekistan, focusing on the socio-political, historical, and cultural factors that influenced the development of place names in the region. Beginning with the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia in the 19th century, the paper traces the introduction of Russian toponyms, their proliferation during the Soviet era, and the post-Soviet efforts to reclaim national identity through the restoration of traditional Uzbek place names. The research examines the stages of Russian influence, from early colonization to the peak of Soviet Russification, and the subsequent de-Russification in the post-Soviet period. While many Russian toponyms have been replaced with Uzbek names, the lasting impact of Russian influence remains visible in contemporary Uzbekistan's topographical landscape.

### KEYWORDS

Colonization, cultural factors, convenience, historical identity, significant, cultural memory, linguistic diversity.

### INTRODUCTION

Toponymy, the study of place names, offers invaluable insight into the historical, cultural, and social interactions of various peoples. In the case of Uzbekistan, the Russian toponymic system provides a fascinating lens through which to explore the interactions between Russian colonization and local cultural identities. This paper aims to trace the stages of the development and evolution of Russian toponyms in Uzbekistan, examining the socio-political, historical, and cultural factors that have shaped the place names in the region.

The Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia during the 19th century laid the foundation for the introduction of Russian toponyms. The beginning of this process is generally attributed to the Russian conquest of the Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand in the 1860s. The establishment of Russian military outposts, administrative centers, and settlements led to the creation of new place names, often based on Russian traditions or named after Russian officials, military leaders, or saints. These initial toponyms were often simple and utilitarian, serving primarily as markers of Russian territorial presence.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Russian colonization efforts expanded further, with the establishment of Russian agricultural colonies, railways, and administrative cities. This period saw a marked increase in the creation of new Russian toponyms. As settlers moved into the region, they established towns, villages, and streets, many of which were named after Russian figures, such as Tsarist officials, military heroes, and imperial landmarks. Additionally, infrastructure developments like the Trans-Caspian Railway were accompanied by a range of new place names that blended Russian and Central Asian influences. These toponyms, however, were often associated with Russia's imperial ambitions and reflected its control over the region.

The Russian presence also led to the introduction of Russianized versions of local place names. Central Asian cities and towns, such as Tashkent and Samarkand, were often given Russianized names, which were easier for Russian speakers to pronounce and which aligned with Russian administrative convenience.

The Soviet period (1924–1991) was a crucial stage in the development of the Russian toponymic system in Uzbekistan. As the Soviet Union consolidated its power in Central Asia, the influence of Russian on local culture and language grew significantly. The Soviet policy of Russification encouraged the establishment of new Russian-style cities and towns while simultaneously renaming existing places. The establishment of new industrial centers, collective farms, and transportation hubs resulted in a proliferation of Russian place names.

During this period, many towns and cities in Uzbekistan were renamed to reflect Soviet ideology, often with the names of Marxist leaders, revolutionary figures, or heroes of the Soviet Union. For instance, cities such as Andijan and Navoi were renamed after prominent Soviet figures. These new names not only served to assert Soviet power but also promoted the Russian language and culture, reinforcing the dominance of Russian in public life and administration. In addition, many previously existing Uzbek toponyms were adapted or changed to align with the Soviet norms, thereby further embedding the Russian linguistic and cultural footprint.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the declaration of Uzbekistan's independence, the country embarked on a process of reclaiming its national identity. This led to the removal of many Russian toponyms and the restoration of traditional Uzbek names. The process of de-Russification of toponyms became one of the key components of the nation-building process. Many cities, streets, and public spaces were renamed to reflect the region's pre-Soviet heritage, and efforts were made to emphasize the use of the Uzbek language in place names.

For example, Tashkent, which had been known as "Tashkent" in both Russian and Uzbek, retained its name, but many Soviet-era street names were replaced with references to local historical figures, events, and landmarks. In some cases, Russian place names were completely removed, while in other instances, both the Russian and Uzbek names were used in tandem to respect the linguistic diversity of the population.

Despite the efforts to restore Uzbek toponyms, the legacy of the Russian toponymic system is still visible in Uzbekistan today. Many areas retain the Russian influence in their names, especially those related to the Soviet era or those that were originally established during Russian colonialism.

While the Uzbek government has made significant strides in reclaiming its national identity, Russian toponyms continue to play a role in Uzbekistan's topographical landscape. Russian remains a widely spoken language, especially in urban centers, and the legacy of the Soviet period continues to shape political, economic, and cultural ties between Uzbekistan and Russia. The use of Russian in official contexts, education, and inter-ethnic communication has contributed to the persistence of Russian toponyms in public discourse.

Moreover, many Russian toponyms still carry symbolic weight and are embedded in the cultural memory of the population. Places named after Soviet heroes, cities of industrial importance, or centers of political activity still evoke a sense of history and heritage for the people who lived through the Soviet era.

The Russian toponymic system in Uzbekistan represents a complex historical process shaped by colonial and imperial ambitions, as well as by Soviet policies of modernization and Russification. From the early stages of Russian colonization in the 19th century to the peak of Soviet influence in the 20th century, Russian toponyms became deeply ingrained in the landscape of Uzbekistan. While the post-Soviet period has seen efforts to restore traditional Uzbek names, the legacy of Russian toponyms remains an indelible part of Uzbekistan's cultural and historical identity. Understanding these stages of toponymic formation is crucial not only for historians and linguists but also for anyone interested in the broader socio-political dynamics of Central Asia and its relationship with Russia.

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