



CULTURAL ORIENTATION

TAJIK



*A small village in the Yagnob Valley, Northern Tajikistan
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

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*Pamir Mountains
Flickr / Lee Hughes*

Chapter 1 | Tajik Cultural Orientation

Profile

Introduction

Located in Central Asia, Tajikistan is a former Soviet Socialist Republic that gained its independence in 1991.¹ The total population of Tajikistan is 8,330,946, in 2016.² The majority of the country is made up of high mountains. Poor infrastructure and steep mountains make access to much of the country difficult.³ Cotton agriculture is important to the economy, and industry is limited to minimal aluminum production. Large numbers of Tajiks live abroad, supporting their families through remittances. Ethnic tensions exist in some border areas, particularly along the northern border with Kyrgyzstan.⁴

Important Elements of Geography

Area

Tajikistan is a small, landlocked, mountainous country located in Central Asia. Its total land area equals 144,100 sq km (55,251 sq mi), making it slightly smaller than Wisconsin. Approximately 2,590 sq km (1,000 sq mi) is water. Tajikistan shares borders with China to the east (414 km/257 mi), Kyrgyzstan to the north (870 km/541 mi), Afghanistan to the south (1,206 km/749 mi), and Uzbekistan to the west (1,161 km/721 mi).^{5, 6}



*Landscape of Tajikistan
Flickr / steynard*

Climate

Tajikistan has a continental, subtropical and semi-arid climate, depending on elevation. Summers are hot and dry in the lowlands where temperatures range between 27°-30°C (80°-86°F). In the mountain ranges, summer temperatures range between 5°-10°C (41°-50°F). Winters in the lowlands are usually mild, ranging in temperature from -1°-3°C (30°-37°F). Extreme cold settles on the mountain ranges during winter. Normal temperature ranges are between -15°--20°C (5°--4°F), although temperatures as low as -45°C (-49°F) are common in some mountain areas.^{7,}



*Dry climate in the summer, Hisor, Karategin
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Mountains

More than 93% of Tajikistan's total area is mountains, over half of which rise above 3,000 m (9,843 ft). The two major mountain ranges are the Pamir Mountains of the southeast and the Alay Mountain Range in the north. Known as "The Roof of the



*Pamir Mountains
Flickr / twiga269 FEMEN #JeSuisCharlie*

activity in the region causes frequent earthquakes, floods and landslides that injure and kill people and damage the poor infrastructure.¹¹

The Fann Mountains are located in the lower northwestern portion of the country; they are part of the Alay Mountain Range. The highest peak is Chimtarga (5,489 m/18,009 ft), which is one of many peaks in the region that rise above 5,000 m (16,404 ft).¹² Bare rocks and glaciers cover this area, which was once a popular destination for mountaineers from Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe. Only one road crosses the mountain range to the capital city Dushanbe.¹³

Valleys



*Gunt valley between Bachor & Yashilkul
Flickr / steynard*

Only 7% of Tajikistan's land area are designated as valley zones. There are two valley zones: The Fergana Valley of the northwest and the river valleys of the southwest. The valleys are important for water distribution, agriculture, and hydroelectric power production. The valleys are the most densely populated areas of the country.¹⁴ Cotton, fruit, and raw silk production are crucial to the economic security of the region. The Syr Darya River and Kairakum Reservoir are

key water sources that provide crop irrigation and power hydroelectric stations.¹⁵ The 25,000 sq km (9,653 sq mi) Fergana Valley runs through three countries—Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—which contributes to the ethnic diversity of the area.

Cultural differences and regional poverty destabilize the region, and violence erupts occasionally.^{16, 17, 18}

In southwestern Tajikistan, a series of river valleys along the Amu Darya River and its tributaries create a similar valley zone.¹⁹ The Vakhsh and Kofarnihon rivers—two tributaries of the Amu Darya—have carved out a series of valleys that have been dammed at different points along their courses to provide hydroelectric power. Their waters help irrigate crops grown in the region.^{20, 21}

Bodies of Water

Rivers

Tajikistan has an extensive river system. Snow and glacial melt from the mountains feed a system of more than 25,000 rivers. One of the most important rivers is the Syr Darya.²² Located in the Fergana Valley of northwestern Tajikistan, the river and its tributaries help irrigate densely populated farmland. Numerous hydroelectric power stations have been built along its course.^{23, 24}

The Amu Darya, located in southwestern Tajikistan, is also very important to the nation's survival.²⁵ Formed by the confluence of the Panj and Vakhsh rivers, the Amu Darya drains an enormous amount of water on its way to the Aral Sea, creating irrigation for agriculture and hydroelectricity.²⁶ The Amu Darya, the longest river in Central Asia, reacts delicately to changes in precipitation and glacier ice melt.^{27, 28}



*Vakhsh River
Flickr / Christian*

The Vakhsh River is another important river. Flowing 524 km (325 mi) in Tajikistan, it provides irrigation to cotton fields in the southwest. Although high mountains restrict the river's passage in places, glacier ice melt provides significant water flow during the summer months, powering five hydroelectric dams.^{29, 30, 31}

The dam at Nurak Reservoir, located in west central Tajikistan, is one of the highest in the world.³² In addition to providing energy to regional hydroelectric plants, the reservoir's waters are diverted 14 km (8.7 mi) through the Dangara irrigation tunnel

to irrigate almost 700 sq km (270 sq mi) of farmland. However, heavy snow and ice conditions often prevent the flow of water to and from the reservoir, negatively affecting electricity production and agricultural irrigation.³³ During the warm months the reservoir creates a surplus of electricity, which is sold to neighboring countries.³⁴

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The Kairakum Reservoir, located in the far northwest, is part of the Syr Darya River system. Built in 1956 as part of the hydroelectric power production system, it has limited electricity production capabilities.³⁶ Consequently, Tajikistan trades irrigation water with Uzbekistan in return for electricity during the winter months when hydroelectric power production slows down.³⁷

Lakes

Lakes are another important part of Tajikistan's hydrologic system. Karakul Lake, located in the Pamir Mountains of northeastern Tajikistan, sits at approximately 3,900 m (12,795 ft) above sea level. Fed by three small rivers and numerous streams, the lake has no real drainage, and consequently, the water is too salty for drinking or irrigation. It averages 8 km (5 mi) in length and 4 km (2.5 mi) in width. Its eastern portion averages 22 m (72 ft) in depth; its deepest point is 236 m (774 ft) in the western portion.^{38, 39}



Karakul Lake
Wikimedia / Caroline Gutman

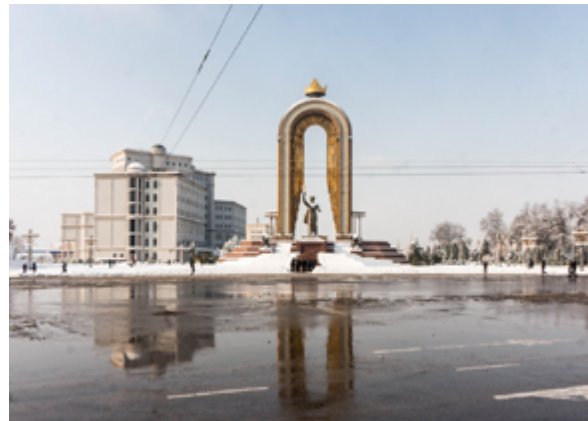
Located in the Fann Mountains of northwestern Tajikistan, Iskanderkul Lake sits 2,195 m (7,201 ft) above sea level. The lake is presumably named after Alexander the Great. Iskander is the pronunciation of Alexander, and Kul mean lake in Tajik. Accessible only by foot, the lake's vicinity is home to a wide variety of wildlife.^{40, 41, 42}

Lake Sarez is located in east central Tajikistan. The lake was formed in 1911 after an earthquake caused a landslide that blocked the Murgab River. Approximately 60 km (37 mi) long and up to 500 m (1,640 ft) deep, the lake is held by a natural dam, Usoi Dam, which is closely monitored. Seismic activity in the area is heavy and threatens to destabilize the dam wall. In case an earthquake creates a breach in the dam, a wave of water could extend as far as the Aral Sea.^{43, 44, 45, 46, 47}

Major Cities

Dushanbe

Dushanbe is the capital and the largest city of Tajikistan. Formerly known as Stalinabad, its estimated population as of 2016 is 822,000. The city is located in west Tajikistan, along the Varzob (Dushanbinka) River. Dushanbe was built during the Soviet period on the site of three settlements that were part of the former Uzbek Khanate of Bukhara.⁴⁸ From 1929 to 1991, it served as the capital of the new Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (S.S.R.) and was called Stalinabad, and experienced rapid industrial and population growth.⁴⁹ The city was badly damaged during the civil war (1991-1997).



Dushanbe
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav

Dushanbe is home to the nation's light industries, including the production of textiles, electric cables, and refrigerators. The Tajik Academy of Sciences and Tajik State University are also located in Dushanbe.^{50, 51, 52}

Khujand

One of the most ancient cities in Central Asia, Khujand is located in the extreme northwest of the country in the heavily populated Fergana Valley, along the old Silk Road that once ran from China to Europe. It was captured by the Arabs in the 8th century, by Ghenghis Khan in the 13th century, and by the Russians in 1866. Khujand is the second largest city of Tajikistan. Silk, cotton processing, and food canning are among the major industries in Khujand.^{53, 54}



Khujand
Wikimedia / Neu holland

Qurghonteppa



Rudaki in Qurghonteppa
Flickr / Christian

Qurghonteppa, formerly known as Kurgan-Tyube, is the third largest city in Tajikistan. The city lies in the Vakhsh River valley about 100 km (62 mi) south of Dushanbe. The city's economy relies on agriculture and animal husbandry, mostly cotton and sheep, and is home to food processing plants and textile manufacturers, a medical school, and a power engineering technical college.⁵⁵

Important Elements of History

Today's Tajiks are descended from the diverse groups of Iranians who lived in the Central Asian Tajikistan region for more than 2500 years. The area was conquered by Alexander the Great during the fourth century B.C.E.⁵⁶ By the third century, Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion and the Persian language and culture spread even further across the region. Islam arrived in the eighth century with the conquering Arabs and 100 years later became the dominant religion.⁵⁷ A number of successive invasions led by the Turks, Mongols, and Uzbeks between the 11th and 16th centuries resulted in the Uzbeks dividing the area of modern-day Tajikistan into a series of khanates. The Uzbeks continued to rule this area until the mid-19th century, when the Russians instituted cotton cultivation and began taking control of the region's economy.^{58, 59, 60}



Tajiks rallying shortly after independence, 1992
Wikimedia / RIA Novosti

Tajikistan became an autonomous republic as part of the newly formed Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan in 1924. By 1929, Tajikistan became a full Soviet Socialist Republic. Under Soviet rule, Tajikistan's irrigation capabilities were expanded, improving its agricultural output. Educational programs were also developed. Yet, despite improvements in the country, political life remained concentrated in the hands of a very few. In 1991, Tajikistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union.^{61, 62, 63}



Spetsnaz troopers during civil war
Wikimedia / Уссурийское суворовское военное училище

In 1992, regional forces vying for control of the new country erupted into civil war. The war waged until 1997 when the government brokered a peace agreement between the warring factions. After five years of fighting, more than 50,000 people were left dead and more than one tenth of the population became refugees. War related economic damage is still felt throughout the country, which has caused an increase in religious radicalization. Nevertheless, Russia has continued to

increase its economic influence across the region and maintains military presence in Tajikistan. The Chinese government also continues to strengthen its economic ties with Tajikistan, developing infrastructure and investing in oil, gas, and gold extraction.^{64, 65, 66}

Government

Tajikistan is a republic with three branches of government. The executive branch is headed by the president, who is elected to unlimited 7-year terms. The president is the chairman of parliament and appoints all members of the Council of Ministers, provided he receives parliamentary approval.^{67, 68, 69}

The legislative branch is the Supreme Assembly. It consists of two houses: The Assembly of Representatives and the National Assembly. The Assembly of Representatives meets year round and has 63 seats. Members are elected to serve 5-year terms; 41 representatives are chosen by direct popular vote and 22 are elected by the party. The National Assembly has 33 seats. Because the constitution provides equal representation, three-fourths of the assembly members are chosen by councils representing the four political regions of the country: Dushanbe, Khujand, Qurghonteppa and Khorugh). The remaining members are appointed by the president. The National Assembly meets at least twice a year.^{70, 71, 72, 73}



The Palace of Nations in Dushanbe
Wikimedia / VargaA

The judicial branch has a Supreme Court, a Supreme Economic Court, and a Constitutional Court. Judges are nominated to unlimited, renewable 10-year terms by the president, and must receive approval from the National Assembly. Tajikistan also has a Military Court.^{74, 75, 76, 77}

Media

Television is the most popular form of media in Tajikistan. Numerous private stations exist, as well as Russian and government-run channels. More than 200 newspapers are registered in the nation, although there are no daily papers. Government and political newspapers have a larger readership than private papers. Freedom of the press is limited, even though it is a constitutional right. Journalists are routinely harassed and intimidated. There are nearly 1.5 million internet users in the country. The government routinely blocks access to independent websites, including social media and news websites.^{78, 79, 80, 81}



*Press interview in Khovar
Flickr / VSO Ireland*

Important Elements of the Economy

Tajikistan has the highest poverty rates of any post-Soviet country, and remains the poorest nation in Central Asia.⁸² More than 70% of the nation's population relies on subsistence farming. The agriculture sector employs almost 50% of the population and generates approximately 30% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product).⁸³ Cotton is the most important commercial crop, which the Tajik government closely monitors and controls. Although Tajikistan has numerous natural resources, industrial output remains low. Gold, uranium, tungsten, and silver are largely unexploited. Industrial output is restricted to aluminum.^{84, 85} Hydroelectric power production also plays a role in the nation's economy. The government is currently trying to achieve food self-sufficiency, but growth has been slow. As many as 50,000 people migrate yearly



*TadAZ aluminium smelting plant, Tursunzoda
Wikimedia / Brybry26*

in search of work, mainly to Russia. Their remittances help support their families and account for nearly half of Tajikistan's GDP. Approximately one-third of GDP comes from the informal economy, which employs more than 40% of the working population. Extensive criminal networks run by clan leaders exist throughout the country. They are involved in activities such as the black market and heroin smuggling.^{86, 87, 88}

Information on Ethnic Groups / Languages

The three major languages spoken in Tajikistan are Tajik, Uzbek and Russian. Of the four major ethnic groups in Tajikistan, Tajiks make up approximately 80% of the population. Descendants of ethnic Iranians, Tajiks are distributed throughout the country.^{89, 90, 91,92} Uzbeks are the second-largest ethnic group in the country and are descendants of Turks who migrated to Central Asia. They live primarily along Tajikistan's western border and make up approximately 15% of the population. Underrepresented in parliament, Uzbeks have faced significant government oppression. Relations between Uzbeks and Tajiks are tense.^{93,94}



*Tajik girls during Navruz
Wikimedia / Franrasyan*

Russians have occupied portions of Tajikistan since the mid-nineteenth century, however, after Tajikistan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, many Russians left. After the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991, most of the former Russian population emigrated out of Tajikistan. The Russians who remained, however, continue to live in small urban pockets in the western part of the country, and generally, do not have the financial means to leave the country. Russians in Tajikistan are highly valued for their technical skills and education.^{95,96}



*Yaghnobi man and his sons
in the mountain village of Kirionte, Northern Tajikistan
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

their homes, roads, water sources, and villages are in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan.^{97,98,99} Small groups of Germans, Jews, Koreans, Turkmens, and Ukrainians are dispersed throughout the country, and make up a combined population of approximately 3%.^{100,101,102}

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Tajik Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile

Assessment

1. Tajikistan is a country of vast coastal plains and pastureland.
2. There is a large river network in Tajikistan.
3. Tajikistan's hydrologic system is important to its survival.
4. Russian influence has been strong in Tajikistan.
5. Tajikistan transitioned smoothly to independence following the collapse of the Soviet

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False



Tajik sunset
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav

Chapter 2 | Tajik Cultural Orientation

Religion

Introduction

Tajikistan is a secular nation with constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion.¹ But in reality, however, religious practice is severely restricted and the government has little tolerance for religious freedom. Groups must register to be considered legal. Persons under 18 and women are not allowed to participate in public religious services. The government fears religious extremism from any group and has implemented policies and bans to criminalize certain activities.²

Approximately 85% or 7.8 million Tajiks are Sunni Muslim, most following the Hanafi School of Islamic law. Ismaili Shiites, about 5% of Tajiks, are concentrated

in the remote mountainous terrain of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan.^{1, 2} The remaining 10% of the population are Christians, Baha'is, Jehovah Witnesses, and Jews. Christians make up the largest non-Muslim groups.^{3, 4, 5} Of the approximately 150,000 Christians, Russian Orthodox constitute the largest group.⁶ Baha'is have been in Tajikistan since the early 20th century, but face government opposition.⁷ Most of Tajikistan's Jewish population, divided between Bukharan and Ashkenazi Jews, fled the country during the civil war; today, there are fewer than 300 Jews in Tajikistan.⁸



Russian Orthodox St. Nicholas Church, Dushanbe
Wikimedia / AryanSogd

Overview of Major Religions

Sunni Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion and its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or *umma*, calls this deity Allah. *The Arabic term islam means “to submit” or “to surrender.”* So a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah.⁹ Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. Allah's message, as relayed by Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the Hadith, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunna*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.¹⁰ Most Tajik Muslims follow the Hanafi School of Islamic Jurisprudence, the most widespread school of Islamic law. The Hanafi School is considered relatively liberal regarding women and marriage contracts.^{11, 12}



Dushanbe Mosque
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav

Shi'a Islam

Shiites are characterized by their devotion to Muhammad's bloodline, their rejection of the first three caliphs that preceded Ali (The Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law), and their sentiment that the leadership of the Islamic movement was stolen from them.¹³ Shiite teachings emphasize the spiritual and supernatural dimensions of Islam, while elevating the spiritual authority of its founders, heroes, and leaders. This caused Shi'a Islam to develop a highly spiritualized and centralized hierarchy of authority.¹⁴

Shi'a Islam differs from other forms of Islam in one other fundamental aspect: they believe that only the family of the Prophet could establish the rules, precedents, and traditions of Islam.

The importance of the imam in Shi'a Islam is considerably different than in other forms of Islam. Whereas Sunnis consider an imam to be merely a leader of prayers in the mosques, Shiites use the term to refer to a spiritual leader of the faith who is from the bloodline of the Prophet.¹⁵ They believe that there were a fixed number of such individuals and that they are "endowed with the living spirit of the Prophet and, as such, [are] thought to possess a spiritual authority that sets [them] above any earthly ruler."¹⁶ Tajik Shiites follow the Aga Khan, an imam whom they consider the 49th spiritual leader directly descended from the Prophet Muhammad.^{17, 18, 19, 20}

Regardless of sect or school, all Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam, which captures the essential beliefs and rites of the Muslim faith.²¹ The first of these is the shahada, the declaration of faith that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is God's messenger." The salat is the requirement to pray five times a day. Sawm is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. Zakat is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the hajj, which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.^{22, 23, 24}

Care and Treatment of the Quran

All Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. It is thus important to treat Islam's holy book with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands and keep it off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do



*Praying at the mausoleum
Flickr / erikenmieke*

not place anything on top of it. (Muslims will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines.²⁵ Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable so long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.^{26, 27}

Role of Religion in Government

In 2012, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom designated Tajikistan a country of particular concern (CPC). Although Tajikistan's constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the country has no official religion, the government flagrantly violates citizens' right to religious freedom.²⁸ Religious organizations must register with the government to receive legal status. Failure to receive legal status forces religious organizations to operate illegally, and their clergy and practitioners face fines and incarceration. In 2011, the government created the Law on Parental Responsibility for Educating and Raising Children. This law makes it illegal for children under the age of 18 to receive religious training and instruction outside of government-run schools. Sending people abroad to receive religious instruction is also illegal.^{29, 30, 31, 32}



*Government building
Flickr/ myxabyxe*

Non-Muslims in the country face a double jeopardy. For example, no Protestant groups have state-licensed Christian schools; therefore, it is illegal for them to provide religious education for their children and at the same time, sending them abroad violates the law.³³

The Tajik government resists international pressure to relax its laws on religion. It claims that by severely regulating religion it reduces the possibility of religious extremism, a very real threat that Tajikistan faces because of its proximity to Afghanistan. Despite government efforts, Islamic radicalism has been on the rise across Tajikistan, especially among impoverished youth who have few employment opportunities.^{34, 35, 36, 37}

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Claims have been made that for Tajiks, Islam is less important as a religion than as a cultural heritage.³⁸ Polls suggest that in Tajikistan only around 50% of Muslims believe that religion is important and only a nominal number carry out the five pillars of Islam.³⁹ Even so, extreme poverty in the country has resulted in rising Islamization and Islamic radicalism. Tensions have erupted into violence.^{40, 41} There are laws against tattoos, wearing of jewelry, and giving Arabic names to children. Children under 18 and women are forbidden from praying in mosques. The government conducts raids on religious organizations; Jehovah's Witnesses have been fined, and numerous madrassas (Islamic schools) were closed. Religious covering for women and beards for men are prohibited in many schools and public buildings. Some of the limitations that were placed on religious instruction by the government have been bypassed through the informal economy. In many bazaars, for example, women can buy audiotapes that teach proper behavior to Muslim women.^{42, 43, 44, 45}

Religious Conventions and Gender Roles

Tajikistan's constitution guarantees religious freedom, yet the government regulates religious worship, dress, and education.^{46, 47} In recent years, however, the country has witnessed a rise in conservative Islamic values, resulting in a revival of patriarchal clan structures and traditional gender divisions of labor. In response, the government has strictly regulated the naming of children, as well as women wearing headscarves in schools, and men wearing beards in public buildings.^{48, 49} In 2004, the Tajikistan Ulema Council issued a fatwa (legal ruling by recognized religious authority) prohibiting women from praying in mosques. As of 2016, this fatwa remained in force.⁵⁰



*Field schools for women farmers
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and CIS*

Religious Events

The hajj—the holy pilgrimage to Mecca—is the fifth pillar of Islam and is required of all Muslims at least once in their lifetimes. Since Tajikistan is a majority Muslim country, the hajj is an important event. Regulated by the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), yearly pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia are arranged by the Tajik government. Bribery and corruption have been reported as a common practice in government management of hajj participants.⁵¹



Pilgrim at Mecca in Saudi Arabia
Wikimedia / Ali Mansuri

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are two important Islamic holidays, and the Tajik government recognizes them as national holidays.⁵² Beginning the first day after the holy month of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr is the “festival of fast breaking.” It celebrates the end of Ramadan and lasts for three days. During this time, ministries and other government offices shut down. People wear new clothes; engage in community prayers, and visit friends and relatives. Neighbors are invited for meals, and money and food are donated to local mosques as charity. Restaurants, cafes, and bakeries experience an upsurge in business as people flock to them for celebratory meals and dishes.^{53, 54, 55}



Celebrating Eid
Flickr / Steve Evans

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha occurs each year on the day after the Day of Arafat—a ritual on the hajj. Eid al-Adha commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son to God. The holiday lasts four days and begins with families going to public prayer wearing their finest holiday clothing. Families visit friends and neighbors, exchange gifts, and enjoy feasts. Those who have the money sacrifice a sheep or a goat and donate one-third

of the meat to the poor, while dividing the remaining two-thirds among family and friends. Charity is obligatory on Eid al-Adha.⁵⁶

Buildings of Worship

The small Jewish population in Tajikistan formerly had one synagogue, which was demolished in 2008 to make room for a planned presidential palace. In 2009, a building was donated to the Jewish community of Dushanbe to use as a synagogue.⁵⁷ Christian groups face difficulties in maintaining their buildings of worship. Only officially registered Christian groups are allowed to operate churches. Churches that operate without official status are closed down. Dushanbe’s



Central Mosque, Dushanbe
Flickr / leiris202

Baptist church was forcibly closed by the Tajik government in 2009.^{58, 59, 60} Mosques remain ubiquitous throughout Tajikistan. According to a statement by the deputy chairman of the committee for Religious Affairs, Tajikistan has more mosques than schools, with 45 more planned for construction. The biggest mosque in Central Asia is being built in the capital, Dushanbe, and financed by Tajikistan and Qatar, which is expected to donate 70% of the 100 million US dollars project.^{61, 62}

Behavior in Places of Worship

Mosque Etiquette

Etiquette for male visitors to mosques throughout Tajikistan remains much the same as for any mosques in the rest of the world. Women and children, however, are banned from mosques in Tajikistan.^{63, 64} The dress code for males visiting a mosque requires modesty and dignity. Clothing should always be loose fitting. As a rule of thumb, the more rural the region, the more one should be covered. While it is not necessary for males to cover their heads, it is a good idea to wear a long-sleeved shirt.⁶⁵

▶ May I enter the mosque?			
Visitor:	May I enter the mosque?	Ман метавонам ба масҷид дароям?	maan metaavonam baa maasjid daRoyaam?
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Нее

Exchange 1

Male visitors and worshippers must wear clean, modest clothing free of images. Shoes must always be removed before entering a mosque and left in a storage area at the entrance. Shirts should have sleeves no shorter than those of a standard T-shirt.⁶⁶

▶ Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?			
Visitor:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	Барои даромадан ба масҷид ман бояд пойафзоламро кашам мӣ?	baaRoy daaRomaadaan baa maasjid maan boyaad poyaaf-zolaampo kaashaam mee?
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Haa

Exchange 2



*Morning prayer at the mosque
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Once inside the mosque, there are certain things that non-Muslims should not touch, including books or walls (especially the western corner where people direct their prayers). Some mosques also have a shrine that should not be touched. Visitors should remain silent while prayers are in progress, and all electronic devices must be shut off or silenced. Food and drink are prohibited in mosques. Do not interrupt or walk in front of anyone who is praying. This invalidates their prayer and it will upset the worshippers. These rules apply in all situations where someone is praying, whether inside or outside the mosque.^{67, 68, 69}

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Tajik Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion

Assessment

1. Tajikistan is a secular state.
2. Sunni Muslims are a minority in Tajikistan.
3. Christian communities run separate schools to educate their children.
4. The ban on hijabs and beards was intended to reduce Islamic radicalism in Tajikistan.
5. It is illegal in Tajikistan to provide children with religious education.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True



*Tajik children dancing
Flickr / ST. Blaize*

Chapter 3 | Tajik Cultural Orientation

Traditions

Introduction

The extended family (oilai kalon) is central to Tajik society, which has never been organized by tribal affiliation.^{1, 2} Many of the customs and traditions of the Tajik people stem from their Islamic religious tradition. Under Soviet rule religious practice was stifled and Soviet-style culture dominated many aspects of life. Gender equality issues followed the Soviet model, as did politics and agricultural and infrastructure development.³

Following independence in 1991, a revival of traditional Tajik culture and religion began in earnest. Fears also emerged among government officials that Islamic extremism

would prevail and plunge the country into a state of instability, similar to what it had experienced during its 1992-1997 civil war. As a result, religious and cultural traditions are closely monitored by the government in an attempt to forestall any extremism or societal rifts.⁴ In some areas of the country women are banned from wearing the Islamic headscarf (hijab) in public places, such as bazaars, public buildings, and schools.⁵ Additionally, Tajik officials claim that long beards are an outward sign of Islamic radicalism and issued regulations limiting access for men with beards in some places.⁶

Over 80% of Tajiks live below the poverty line and food is scarce.⁷ Yet, hospitality and generosity continue to be important values in Tajik culture. Gift-giving is common in Tajikistan.⁸ Lipioshka (bread) is very important to Tajiks, and a meal is never eaten without it. Lipioshka is considered a sacred symbol of life and is treated respectfully. It is taboo to place bread face down, and leftover bread or nan crumbs are used to feed animals.^{9, 10, 11} Since Tajikistan is a predominately Muslim country, eating pork is taboo.^{12, 13, 14, 15}



*Sharing pastries
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and CIS*

Formulaic Codes of Politeness



*Tajik men greeting guests
Flickr / Brian Harrington Spier*

Tajik men typically greet each other by shaking their right hands, often placing their right hand over their hearts before or after the handshake. Women usually greet other women with a handshake and nod of the head. Rural men and women do not touch in public. Consequently, rural men typically greet women in public by offering a nod of acknowledgement or a verbal greeting. Conversely, urban men and women may greet each other with a handshake, but women should initiate the handshake.^{16, 17}

Tajik friends of the same gender will often embrace and kiss each other on alternate cheeks three times. Within a family, males and females will kiss each other on different parts of the body—the forehead,

hands, eyes, lips, or cheeks—based on seniority or clan-generational hierarchy.¹⁸ Both rural and urban men and women customarily use the Islamic greeting *asalaam aleikum* (Peace be with you) when they meet. The reply is *wa ‘alaikum assalaam* (And upon you, peace).^{19, 20}

▶ **May peace be upon you.**

Local:	May peace be upon you.	Салом Алейкум!	saalom aaleykum!
Visitor:	And upon you be peace.	Буалейкум Ассалом.	voo-aaleykum aasaalom

Exchange 3

Close friends will often simply say *Salom* (Tajik for “Peace”). Another common Tajik greeting is *Chee khel shoomo?* (How are you?). Russian Tajiks might greet friends by asking *Kak dela?* (How are things?). When leaving, Tajiks say *Khayr* (Good-bye) or *To didana* (See you later).^{21, 22}

Male/Female Interactions

Gender roles differ greatly between rural and urban areas. Religiously observant Muslims in all areas of Tajikistan will avoid contact with the opposite sex in their homes, as well as in public.²³ Progressive urbanites usually follow Soviet-style gender equality norms, whereby males and females have at least the outward appearance of equality. In rural areas, people follow highly formalized traditional gender roles. For example, some women may refuse to answer questions posed to them by an unknown man. Gender division of labor is strict, and men exert a high degree of control over all aspects of family and community life.²⁴



*Tajik men and women in conversations
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and CIS*

Regardless of location, men and women refrain from physical contact. Young people in cities are beginning to push the boundaries of this custom, but not without resistance from older and more traditional Tajiks. Public displays of affection might be countered aggressively by locals, especially in rural areas. Same sex relationships are not prohibited by law, but attitudes remain conservative.^{25, 26}

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Socializing is an important aspect of Tajik society, and meals served on special occasions can last for hours, and be followed by dancing. A traditional Tajik home includes a special room for entertainment, which is used for male socializing and on special occasions when men and women socialize together.²⁷



*A Tajik man having a meal with his guests
Flickr / Luigi Guarino*

Hospitality and generosity are important values in Tajik culture. Gift-giving is common in Tajikistan. When Tajiks present a gift, the courtesy should be returned in the near future. Visitors to a Tajik home customarily bring a gift to the host. Locals bring chocolates, fruit, or flowers. Sweets, or something from one’s home country are appreciated, such as toys for children and postcards.²⁸ Inappropriate gifts include pork products and alcohol.²⁹

▶ This gift is for you.

Visitor:	This gift is for you.	Ин тӯҳфа ба шумо.	een tooh-faa baa shoomo
Local:	I cannot accept this.	Раҳмат лозим нест.	Raah-maat lozeem nest
	*Note: He/she may reject your gift 2-3 times, so just to be polite, you should offer your gift several times.		

Exchange 4

Before entering a Tajik home, it is customary to remove one’s shoes at the threshold and slippers, if provided, should be worn. Guests in Tajik homes are treated with great respect and Tajiks greet new arrivals by shaking hands. Guests will be directed to sit on thick cushions called kurpacha. Men typically sit cross-legged while women sit with both legs tucked under and to the side. The eldest male guest is seated in the place of honor, which is the seat farthest from the door.³⁰

It is customary for Tajik hosts to offer tea, fruits and nuts. Tajiks serve guests a cooked meal, whether or not it is mealtime. Before eating, a prayer is sometimes offered even though the main prayer occurs after the meal.³¹ Saturday and Sunday are the most common days for visiting friends and relatives, although anytime is acceptable.³²

Eating Habits/Types of Food

Breakfast typically consists of tea and bread, but more prosperous families might add butter, jam and eggs or porridge to the meal. Soup made from a meat-based broth with vegetables, such as carrots, onions, and potatoes, is typically served for dinner. Rice dishes, such as osh made with carrots, onions, and meat, are served two or three times a week. Other typical dishes are pastries filled with meat and onion, pasta, and tomato and cucumber salad.³³ The Tajik national dish is kabuli pulao, a rice dish with shredded yellow turnip or carrot, meat, and olive oil.³⁴



Tajik cuisine
Wikimedia/ Ibrahimjon

Lipioshka (bread) is very important to Tajiks, and a meal is never eaten without it. Tajiks bake large, flat round loaves that can be prepared using any number of grains and ingredients. If lipioshka is not available, a person will claim to have no food no matter how much food he or she has. All lipioshka is treated with reverence. Lipioshka is considered a sacred symbol of life and should be treated respectfully; it is never thrown away or placed on the ground. It is set upright and carefully broken, and never cut with a knife.^{35, 36} It is taboo to place lipioshka face down. Leftover lipioshka or lipioshka crumbs are never thrown away or allowed to fall to the ground. People usually use leftover lipioshka and lipioshka crumbs to feed animals.^{37, 38, 39}



Lipioshka
Flickr / Steve Evans

► The food tastes so good.

Visitor:	The food tastes so good.	Ин хӯрок, хеле бомаза аст.	een KhooRok, Kheley bomaaza aast
Local:	Thank you.	Раҳмат.	Raah-maat

Exchange 5

Because Tajikistan is a predominantly Muslim country, eating pork is taboo. Meat usually consists of mutton and goat. Fruit is also a traditional part of Tajik cuisine. Meals are served on a low table known as a dastarkhan. Green tea is common at meals, and tea is served almost continuously throughout the day. Tajik men frequent teahouses (chaikhana) almost daily.^{40, 41, 42, 43}

Dress Codes

Tajik men and young people working in the public and non-profit sectors typically wear Western-style clothing.^{44,}
⁴⁵ Tajik women, however, commonly wear traditional curta (dresses) made of cotton or silk with aezor, or jomas (baggy, wide colorful pants) underneath. The traditional outfit is complete with a head covering that varies, depending on marital status, region, tribal affiliation, and time of year. Girls and young unmarried women might wear intricately detailed and brightly colored skull caps.^{46, 47}



Tajiks wearing traditional dresses
 Flickr / UN Women Europe and Central Asia

▶ Is this acceptable to wear?			
Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	Инро пӯшидан иҷозат ҳаст мӣ?	eenRo poosheedaan eejozaat haast mee?
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Нaa

Exchange 6

Women are banned from wearing the Islamic headscarf (hijab) in public places, such as bazaars, public buildings, and schools. In an effort to curb Islamic extremism, Tajik officials have launched a campaign encouraging women to wear traditional Tajik clothing, which is quite different from Islamic clothing. For example, the Islamic headscarf covers the entire head, neck, and chest area, and sometimes the face. Islamic clothing may include gloves as well.^{48, 49, 50, 51}

Some Tajik men continue to wear traditional round or four-cornered hats called topq or tupi, which vary by region. In rural areas, village elders often wear a long open coat called a joma or chapan that is tied around the waist with a sash called a meeyonband or chorsi, or with a kerchief called a romul decorated with embroidery. Toki kallapush

(skullcaps) are also worn. The most popular toki kallapush is the black and white chusti, which is embroidered. Some men also wear a solid colored curta that is similar to, but shorter than, the woman's curta.^{52, 53}



*Tajik men wearing tupi
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Men have also fallen under bans on facial hair. Tajik officials claim that long beards are an outward sign of Islamic radicalism and in some places they have issued regulations limiting access for men with beards. Schoolteachers below age 50 may not wear beards of any length, while those above 50 may not grow a beard longer than 3 cm (1.2 in). Bearded men report difficulties finding work. Many men have been detained by security forces, beaten, and fined because of their beards.^{54, 55, 56}

Non-Religious Celebrations

Traditionally, New Year's Eve is the largest holiday in Tajikistan. Symbolizing the secular nature of the Tajik state, it is celebrated across the country by people of all ethnicities and religions.⁵⁷ In the past, Tajiks gathered in town squares to celebrate New Year's Eve, watching official fireworks and taking pictures with Bodoi Barf (Father Frost), Russia's version of Santa Claus.⁵⁸ In recent years, however, New Year's celebrations are questioned by those who do not accept that it should be a national holiday in a Muslim-majority country, thus placing celebrants in danger.⁵⁹ On New Year's Eve in 2011-2012, a man was stabbed to death outside his home after he had dressed in the traditional Tajikistan Bodoi Barf costume. Bodoi Barf has been banned from television since 2013.^{60, 61, 62}

Nevertheless, New Year's Day (January 1) remains the nation's first official holiday of the year.⁶³ Most Tajiks now celebrate the holiday quietly in their homes with friends and family. Tajiks hang garlands and decorate fir trees in their homes and light their own fireworks. Gifts left under the tree earlier in the evening are exchanged around midnight.^{64, 65}

Tajik National Army Day (known in other former republics of the Soviet Union as Defender of the Fatherland Day) is celebrated on 23 February in honor of Tajikistan's military forces. It is also a day honoring all Tajik men, who are congratulated and given gifts.^{66, 67} International Women's Day, celebrated on 8 March, is a new holiday

during which men give flowers and gifts to women. Many Tajiks consider this new holiday a revival of an ancient Tajik spring celebration that was devoted to the veneration of women.^{68, 69}



*Table prepared for Navruz
Wikimedia / Ibrahim Rustamov*

One of Tajikistan’s most cherished holidays, Id-i-Navruz (also called Nowruz), is celebrated on 21 March. Although occurring on the spring equinox and rooted in an ancient Zoroastrian agricultural festival, most Tajiks associate this holiday with the Islamic New Year.⁷⁰ The festival honors new life and rebirth, friendship and renewal.⁷¹

▶ Will you be celebrating Naurooz?			
Visitor:	Will you be celebrating Naurooz?	Шумо Наврӯзро чашн мегиред?	shoomo naavRoозRo jaashn megeeRed?
Local:	Yes!	Ҳа.	Haa

Exchange 7

People pay their debts and forgive those they feel have insulted them. Dressed in clean clothing, people ritually light torches to symbolize hope.^{72, 73, 74}

Tajik Independence Day falls on September 9, and commemorates the country’s independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.^{75, 76} Young people in traditional dress ride on the floats in parades. Traditional dance performances are staged, and the president and local officials give speeches.⁷⁷ National Unity Day falls annually on 27 June, commemorating the signing of the 1997 peace agreement that ended the nation’s 5-year civil war. To celebrate, the president and other government officials host a number of state functions, including large charity events. In 2012, the government paid all marriage related expenses for 60 couples and sponsored a massive birthday party for children born on National Unity Day.^{78, 79, 80, 81} One of the nation’s most important holidays is Constitution Day, which commemorates the 1994 signing of the country’s constitution.^{82, 83, 84}

Other Cultural Customs

Pointing the bottoms of one's feet to others when sitting down is offensive, as is blowing one's nose in public. Also, never step over a person's legs or step in front of others who are sitting. If you step on someone else's foot, an apology is required. Never use your left hand during interactions and exchanges. The left hand is considered "unclean" since it is used for personal hygiene after using the latrine. Only use your right hand to exchange money or gifts, or when shaking hands or passing food. Placing a thumb through a middle and index finger is considered obscene.^{85, 86}



Kurutob eating with right hands
Wikimedia / Zlerman

Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- **Do** shake hands with a person of the same sex when meeting.
- **Do** accept offers of food and drink.
- **Do** dress conservatively.
- **Do** make eye contact when talking with someone.
- **Do** apologize if you step on someone's foot.
- **Do** bring a gift when visiting a Tajik home.

Don'ts

- **Don't** point the bottoms of your feet at anyone when you are sitting (usually on the floor).
- **Don't** make physical contact with Muslims.
- **Don't** wear revealing clothing.
- **Don't** display affection in public.
- **Don't** use obscene gestures, such as placing the thumb between the index and middle fingers.
- **Don't** use the left hand for exchanges and handshakes; it is considered unclean.
- **Don't** blow your nose in public.
- **Don't** give gifts of pork products or alcohol.

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Chapter 3 | Traditions

Assessment

1. A man may initiate a handshake when meeting a woman in Tajikistan.
2. Gender roles in Tajikistan are the same in urban and rural areas.
3. Gift-giving is a common practice in Tajikistan.
4. Bread is very important to the Tajiks.
5. Pork is eaten frequently in Tajikistan.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False



*Urban apartments
Flickr / St. Blaize*

Chapter 4 | Tajik Cultural Orientation

Urban Life

Introduction

Tajikistan is a marginally urbanized country. Approximately 27% of the country's 8.3 million people live in urban areas. Urbanization took hold during the Soviet era, mostly due to an influx of settlers from the Soviet Union. Urban growth stalled after independence in 1991.¹ The resulting civil war, lasting through the 1990s, devastated the infrastructure of Tajikistan's cities. Roads, apartment blocks, and schools were damaged or destroyed. Poverty kept the government from implementing effective urban development programs after the civil war. In recent years, China, Iran, and Russia see business opportunities in Tajikistan. They have begun investing in the country and helping to develop its infrastructure.^{2, 3}

Urbanization Issues



*Plov for lunch
Flickr / Luigi Guarino*

Tajikistan is the poorest of the 15 former Soviet Republics, where the average annual income is \$2,780. About 21% of Tajikistan's urban residents are severely food insecure. These families consume poor diets of limited nutritional value, resulting in child malnutrition and poor general health.⁴ More than 90% of urban Tajiks have access to clean drinking water and hygiene, but in recent years droughts have negatively impacted water supplies, and some hospitals have suffered from a lack of clean water.^{5, 6}

Employment Issues in Urban Areas

Since the end of the civil war in 1997, Tajikistan's economy has experienced sustained and consistent growth. Yet, the nation continues to suffer from high unemployment rates and poverty. As recorded with the Tajikistan Agency on Employment and Social Protection of Population in 2014, the official unemployment rate was 10.9%.⁷ Unofficial unemployment data, however, suggest that unemployment varies from 30-45% due to a shortage of skilled labor.^{8, 9, 10, 11}



*Construction
Flickr / Brian Harrington Spier*

Privatization of business has been on the rise since the end of the civil war. Numerous businesses have opened, and employment in the private sector has continued to grow. But only around 70% of private businesses in Tajikistan function properly.¹²

Healthcare and Health Issues

Although Tajikistan has achieved the status of polio free for 13 years, a serious outbreak occurred in 2010. In 2015, USAID donated oral polio vaccines to prevent another outbreak.¹³ Medical care and supplies are far below Western standards and many hospitals and clinics reuse disposable medical supplies out of necessity. There is also a severe shortage of anesthetics, prescription drugs, and antibiotics. There have been outbreaks of hemorrhagic fever, hepatitis B & C (transmitted through medical or dental procedures), malaria, multidrug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and rabies. Typhoid was also reported in Dushanbe and the south.¹⁴



*A hospital in Dushanbe
Wikimedia / Каримов Сиёвуш*

► Is there a hospital nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	Дар наздики ягон беморхона ҳаст мӣ?	daaR naazdeekee yaagon bemoR-Khonaa haast mee?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	Ҳа, дар маркази шаҳр.	haa, daaR maaRkaazee shaahR

Exchange 8

Due to frequently intermittent electric and gas service during the winter months, the country's hospitals and clinics may be unable to offer medical services during outages. Poor infrastructure also has a negative impact on healthcare; waterborne parasites and sewage often contaminate waters supplies. Malaria in the south and tick-borne illnesses in most regions of the country pose real health risks.^{15, 16, 17, 18, 19}

Education and Schools in Cities

Nearly 99.8% of Tajiks are literate.²⁰ Prior to independence, the language of instruction in Tajikistan was Russian. Today, however, Tajik is used in most schools, followed by Uzbek, Russian, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen.²¹ Primary and secondary education are free and compulsory. The Tajik government does not have sufficient funds to implement the law guaranteeing compulsory basic education.^{22, 23} Students attend 4 years of primary school (grades 1-4), 5 years of general secondary school (grades 5-9), and 2 years of upper secondary school (grades 10-11).²⁴ After completing the 5-year course of



Children in school
Flickr / EC / ECHO / J. George

general secondary education, students can choose an academic track (grades 10-11) or vocational training.²⁵ The Tajikistan Ministry of Education is planning to change to 12 years of compulsory education by adding one year of primary school in 2020.²⁶ In 2013, there were approximately 30 institutions of higher education in Tajikistan, but they are not free and government funding of this sector is only about 212 USD per student per year.²⁷ One of the country’s largest and oldest university, Khujand State University, was founded in 1932.²⁸

The quality of Tajik education is low.²⁹ Teachers are paid very little for their work, and this has contributed to the country’s shortage of teachers. Those who do enter the teaching profession have little incentive to pursue additional teaching credentials. Government funding is sporadic and has decreased in recent years. Corruption is rampant in Tajikistan’s educational system. Teachers routinely accept cash payments in return for grades. Grade buying occurs regularly at every level of education, and many students are admitted to colleges only after providing hefty payments to members of admissions boards.^{30, 31, 32, 33, 34}

Restaurants

The average Tajik does not dine out very often, but formal business dinners are common. When dining in a restaurant, the host is typically the person who looks after the well-being of guests. Hosts will customarily serve guests themselves to ensure that certain cuts of meat are reserved for specific guests. Goat or sheep’s heads will frequently be served to honored guests. It is considered a deep offense to refuse food offered to you.^{35, 36}

▶ What type of meat is this?			
Visitor:	What type of meat is this?	Ин гӯшти чӣ?	een gooshtee chee?
Local:	It’s lamb.	Ин гӯшти гӯсфанд.	een gooshtee goosfaand

Exchange 9

Foreign guests should refrain from eating pork products or drinking alcohol. Although Tajikistan was greatly influenced by Soviet eating habits and alcohol consumption, it remains a Muslim country; eating pork and drinking alcohol may offend some people. Tea is very important to Tajiks. Guests should never refuse to drink tea that is offered to them. Eating with utensils is common in restaurants. When eating communally, diners should always use their right hand because the left hand is considered unclean. If utensils are provided, one should use them.^{37, 38}



A local restaurant, Khorugh, Kuhistoni
Flickr / Guillaume

Marketplaces and Street Vendors

In urban Tajikistan, much of people’s daily shopping is conducted at their neighborhood, in the local bazaar or the street market.³⁹ Numerous bazaars exist in each Tajik urban area, and they provide locals with a variety of items, such as food, clothing, personal hygiene products, religious gear, and automotive parts. Bargaining with a merchant at a bazaar is acceptable.⁴⁰



Marketplace, Khujand
Flickr / Anton Ruiter

▶ Do you sell toqi*?			
Visitor:	Do you sell toqi*?	Шумо тоқӣ мефурӯшед?	shoomo toqee mefRooshed?
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Haa

* Traditional Tajik hat

Exchange 10

Prices for goods can be high by Tajik standards, yet local artisans and craftspeople continue to do a thriving business. Importing goods into Tajikistan remains costly. Local goods are available when the country is not experiencing shortages.^{41, 42}

Money, Credit Cards, and ATMs

The national currency of Tajikistan is the Somoni (TJS). There are 100 dirham in 1 Tajikistan Somoni (also pronounced as Somani). In January 2017, 1 USD was equal to about 7.8 TJS.^{43, 44} Tajikistan has a cash only economy. Credit cards are rarely accepted (Visa and MasterCard), except at some high-end hotels and traveler’s checks cannot be cashed.⁴⁵ ATM machines are located in the Dushanbe Airport, in the main office of Agroinvestbank, in some large hotels, and department stores.⁴⁶ They are also available in some of the country’s larger cities such as Khujand, Istaravshan, Khorog, and Qurghon-Teppa, but not in Murghab, the capital of Murghob District. ATM machines do not always take the cards shown on the machine and some have very low withdrawal limits, so it is advisable to bring cash, especially US dollars, which are relatively easy to exchange. Bills should be minted after 1996 and display no tears, writing, or other marks.⁴⁷



Tajikistan Somoni
Wikimedia / National Bank of Tajikistan

Urban Traffic and Transportation

Tajikistan has an extensive transportation infrastructure that was built during the Soviet rule. After independence in 1991, the poverty of the new nation made it impossible to maintain and upgrade the existing infrastructure. Today, foreign investment has resulted in limited improvements that have allowed Tajikistan to ship and receive goods.⁴⁸ Because the country is remote and mountainous, most roads outside main cities close in late November and remain closed until the following May.⁴⁹

▶ Is there a train station nearby?			
Visitor:	Is there a train station nearby?	Дар наздики стансияи поезд ҳаст мӣ ?	daaR naazdeekēe staansey po-ezd haast mee?
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Haa

Exchange 11

Urban areas, therefore, remain isolated from one another for much of the year. In some cities, the urban infrastructure is adequate, although it falls below the standards of developed Western nations. Most people cannot afford their own automobiles, but public transportation services abound. Buses, private-hire cars, and taxis move

people around within and between cities. Armed police and military personnel at checkpoints frequently stop drivers to check documentation. They are notorious for exacting bribes. Drivers in vehicles with government-issued license plates often speed, ignore traffic lights, and refuse to stop at checkpoints. Public transportation is generally unreliable, unsafe, and overcrowded. Travel should be done during daylight and on routes that are known to the travelers or their escorts. Accidents are common and traffic police pay little attention to safety issues.^{50, 51, 52}



*Public bus, Dushanbe
Flickr / Veni Markovski*

Street Crime and Solicitations

Urban areas are relatively stable and safe, but petty crime occurs on a regular basis. Muggers, pickpockets, and thieves have been known to target foreigners or those who appear affluent. Passports are attractive targets for thieves, who use them to commit more crimes. Women must exercise greater care than men, since some criminals have targeted women specifically. Threats to women range from verbal and physical harassment to rape, often involving “date rape” drugs. All visitors should exercise great caution while in Tajikistan. Avoid going out alone. Unless it is necessary, do not go out after dark, which is when criminal activity increases. Criminals often operate in groups and may be violent and undeterred by resistance. Tajik police are poorly funded and poorly trained. They often offer no assistance to victims.^{53, 54, 55, 56}



*Conversation between a woman and a policeman
Flickr / myxabyxe*

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Tajik Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life

Assessment

1. Tajikistan's growing economy attracts many families to the cities.
2. Urban Tajiks have access to abundant supply of drinking water because of the rich water sources of the country.
3. The agricultural sector employs more people than the service sector.
4. Women often work in the informal economy in Tajikistan. In Tajikistan, it is safer to use traveler checks than cash.
5. Tajikistan has a modern medical system.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



*Inhabitants of the isolated mountain village of Pastigov, Leninobod
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Chapter 5 | Tajik Cultural Orientation

Rural Life

Introduction

Tajikistan is an agrarian country where poverty is endemic and food insecurity is a way of life for most rural Tajiks.¹ Inadequate infrastructure in the mountain regions makes it nearly impossible to access and cultivate agricultural and grazing lands most of the year. Cold weather conditions and electricity shortages prevail in the winter, and landslides and flooding occur in the spring. Children have become a vital source of labor, and have to work instead of attend school. Limited healthcare facilities make getting quality care difficult. The central government does not legally recognize traditional forms of governance, which are most frequently used in rural areas.

Minefields contaminate large areas along the southern border with Afghanistan and the northern border with Uzbekistan and make the region very dangerous for the local population. Smugglers operate extensively in these areas, and violence erupts often.^{2, 3, 4}

Land Distribution/Ownership



A farmer working
Flickr / EC / ECHO / H.Veit

Approximately 74% of the Tajik population lives in rural areas. Because agricultural land is scarce and agricultural output is considered crucial to the nation’s survival, the vast majority of Tajikistan’s limited agricultural resources belongs to the state. When the Soviet era ended in 1991, the Tajik government gave unused and underutilized farmland in the Pamir Mountain Region to Tajiks who were willing to become farmers. Limited access to pasture and farmlands, severe weather conditions, mountainous

terrain, limited and disintegrating infrastructure, and insufficient energy supply make farming very difficult.⁵ Soviet-era collective farms were restructured into small private holdings across Tajikistan. Called dehkan farms (peasant farms), these small, privately-owned farms became the new model for agriculture, although about a third of dehkan farms have merged into collective farms. Although private land ownership increased from 1% to around 50% of agricultural land, many of the dehkan farms are only private in name. The reality of farming in Tajikistan is that agricultural production remains severely limited. Despite owning and living on arable land, 76% of rural Tajiks are food insecure.

▶ Do you own this land?			
Visitor:	Do you own this land?	Соҳиби ин замин шумо ҳастед мӣ?	soheebee een zaameen shoomo haasted mee?
Local:	No.	Не.	neh

Exchange 12

Today, because of legal reforms, women increasingly co-own land with their husbands. Women are also less likely to lose their land after divorce. In 2012, women owned 13.4% of farms, up from 2% in 2000.^{6, 7}

Rural Economy / Typical Sources of Income in Rural Areas

Agriculture is the primary source of income in rural Tajikistan, employing more than half of the nation's labor force.^{8, 9} Private plots, small farms, and small herds of animals provide a subsistence existence for many rural Tajiks. But few people have the resources to save or produce a surplus of food or goods. As a result, they are often forced to sell portions of their limited resources.¹⁰ By necessity, many rural Tajiks cultivate cotton, Tajikistan's main agricultural export crop. Government regulations and subsidies provide the resources necessary to employ large numbers of people. In reality, government corruption permeates the industry. Many farmers have been forced to plant cotton to the exclusion of other crops, leaving people without sufficient food supplies. The resulting poverty has forced families to resort to child labor; children earn money by picking cotton to help their families survive the long winters. The country also exports limited quantities of fruit, vegetables, and silk products.^{11, 12, 13}



Cotton fields
Flickr / Peretz Partensky

Rural Transportation Issues

More than 90% of Tajikistan is mountainous, making its extensive network of roads too expensive for the cash-strapped nation. Roads are unevenly distributed throughout the country; they are concentrated in the western portion of the nation where mountains are lower and populations are more concentrated.¹⁴ Moreover, extreme weather conditions bring torrential rains, freezing temperatures, and heavy snowfalls each year, which can lead to landslides that destroy the primitive roadways in the rural areas. Often it takes months for roadways to become passable after landslides. The civil war that took place in the 1990s severely damaged the rural transportation infrastructure.¹⁵



Rural Road
Flickr / Mats Skölvling

In most rural areas, four-wheel drive vehicles are necessary to access small mountain towns. Many rural roads are open for vehicular traffic only during the summer months. They are inaccessible or too dangerous the rest of the year. In some rural areas, such as the southwest near the Afghan border, travel poses serious risks because of criminal activity and landmines. Poorly defined borders complicate the risks when traveling near international borders.^{16, 17} There are many military checkpoints on the roads, and armed security guards have been known to respond forcefully to real and perceived threats.

Rural Health Issues

Like many other services in Tajikistan, rural healthcare services fall below Western standards and, consequently, the majority of rural Tajiks lack access to basic healthcare. Economic devastation resulting from the civil war had severe effect on rural healthcare. Many rural areas lacked healthcare professionals, and people were required to travel to urban areas to seek medical care. The problem persists today, despite programs aimed at improving rural residents’ access to healthcare professionals and services. The World Bank has funded the Basic Health Project since 2006 in an effort to provide quality family care to rural Tajik communities.^{18, 19}



*Training the local Emergency Response Team
Flickr / ECHO / J. George*

▶ Is there a medical clinic nearby?			
Visitor:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	Дар наздики ягон духтурхона ҳаст мӣ?	daaR naazdeekē yaagon dooKhtooR-Khonaa haast mee?
Local:	Yes, over there.	Ҳа, дар онҷо.	haa, daaR onjo

Exchange 13

Basic medical supplies are also lacking in most areas. Travel to and from clinics is impeded during much of the year when roads are impassable. Frequent shortages of electricity and water impede services. Pharmaceuticals are often in short supply as well. When available, many brand-name drugs are almost certainly counterfeit. Food- and waterborne illnesses are common, and tuberculosis, typhoid, and malaria strike as a matter of course in rural areas.^{20, 21, 22, 23, 24}

Rural Education

The pervasive poverty in Tajikistan makes it difficult for families to educate their children. Parents are often too poor to cover expenses related to education, such as buying shoes, clothing, books, and school supplies. Furthermore, in recent years, economic hardship has forced many rural men to migrate abroad to find work so the labor of children is required to help feed families. This situation creates a gender gap in the schools. When forced to choose, parents prefer to educate their boys rather than their girls.^{25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30}



*Child working in watermelon field
Flickr / Feed My Starving Children*

Preschool attendance in rural areas has decreased, which in turn leaves many children unprepared for further schooling. The result is high dropout rates. Administration of the rural education system is a function of the central government, but the government cannot develop overreaching educational reforms because they do not meet the needs of rural school districts. The population of Tajikistan is growing rapidly, especially in rural areas. These growth trends suggest that Tajikistan will not be able to meet the growing educational demands. Rural schools are poorly built and teachers are poorly trained and remunerated. Resources for rural schools are outdated or, more often than not, nonexistent.^{31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36}

Village Life

The government in Tajikistan is designed to allow varying levels of self-governance. The central government is meant to focus on national issues. Oblasts, the divisional regions of the country, deal with regional issues. Oblasts are divided into rayons and cities, each has its own executive body (khkukmat) and council (majlis). The lowest level of government is the jamoat. This tier is legally recognized in Tajikistan's constitution and functions as



*A Tajik shepherd
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

local self-government. These formally recognized levels of government are designed to provide for government decentralization so that local communities can implement policies for their own benefit. In reality, Tajikistan’s culture of nepotism and favoritism ensures that the hierarchy of control extends in a direct line from the president.^{37, 38, 39}

▶ Does your Raisi Mahalla* live here?			
Visitor:	Does your Raisi Mahalla* live here?	Хонаи раиси маҳалла дар инҷо мӣ?	Khoney Raa-eesee maa-haalaa eenjo mee?
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Нее

*government appointed village leader

Exchange 14

Local governance is overseen by groups called mahallas. Although mahallas are not legally recognized in Tajikistan, they have a long history in the culture. A revival of the mahalla took place in rural areas during the Soviet era. Today, they are losing ground but still function as part of the cultural identity of rural Tajiks. The mahallas are governed by a council of elders known as shura aksakal and deal with all issues relevant to the daily lives of people in a particular community.⁴⁰

▶ Respected Raisi Mahalla, we need your help.			
Visitor:	Respected Raisi Mahalla, we need your help / advice / opinion.	Мӯҳтарам раиси маҳалла ба мо кӯмаки / маслиҳати /фикри шумо лозим аст.	muh-taaRaam Raa-eesee maahaalaa, baa mo kuma-kee / maasleehatee / fikRee shoomo lozeem aast
Local:	Yes.	Ҳа.	Нее

Exchange 15



Rural village life
Flickr / Christophe Chenevier

Mahallas make decisions concerning the resolution of disputes among family members and neighbors; they decide on marriages, divorces, and other family issues. They also organize public works and services, such as the building and repair of irrigation systems, the building of schools and other public and religious structures, and the care of widows and the elderly. Issues involving agriculture, herding, grazing, and water access are all

dealt with in the mahallas.⁴¹ Funding for projects comes through local contributions of money, supplies, and labor. Because mahallas have no legal status in Tajikistan, participation and adherence to the rulings of the mahalla are strictly voluntary. But Tajiks demonstrate a high level of trust in their local governing bodies. They actively participate in mahallas and go to their village elders first in times of need, crisis, and legal jeopardy. Only when the mahallas fail to resolve an issue do locals turn to the jamoat.^{42, 43, 44}

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Tajikistan is a landlocked country that shares borders with four countries: Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Cultural differences, poverty, crime, natural disasters and long-term international conflicts necessitate numerous armed guards in military checkpoints and border crossings. Some border crossings can be closed without notice so checking the weather and planning ahead is advisable. It is advisable to find out which border crossings are closed to foreigners as well.⁴⁵



Tajikistan-Uzbekistan border
Flickr / upyerno

An important checkpoint/border crossing is the Kulma (or Qolma) Pass border crossing between Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan and China. It is the only border crossing between these two countries. In 2012, it began operating year round. Previously, it had operated from May-November, excluding weekends. The border crossing is located between mountain passes that rise more than 4,000 m (13,123 ft) above sea level.^{46, 47}

► Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Visitor:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	Пости наздиктарин дар кучо?	postee naazdeektaaReen daaR koojo?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	Аз инчо ду киллометр.	aaz eenjo doo keelometR

Exchange 16

Four border crossings operate between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but because the two countries continue to dispute their border in the Isfara Valley, transport across the Tajik-Kyrgyz border can be denied without cause. Similar conflicts exist between

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Although relations between the two countries have improved, crossing the borders can be difficult. Uzbeks must purchase exit visas to enter Tajikistan, and Tajik vehicles are routinely turned away.^{48, 49, 50, 51}

▶ Show us the car registration.			
Visitor:	Show us the car registration.	Ба мо ҳуҷҷатҳои мошинро нишон диҳед.	baa mo hoojaat-hoy mosheenRo neeshon deehed
Local:	Right away.	Ҳозира худаш.	hozeeRaa Khoodaash

Exchange 17

Border crossings along the Tajik-Afghan border are understandably sensitive. Because of the long-standing war in Afghanistan, greater controls have been placed on cross-border trade and relations. Smuggling and other criminal enterprises have sprung up in the region, and violence erupts regularly along the border. Westerners are strongly advised by their governments not to travel in this region. Most of the checkpoints between these two countries cross the Panj River, making crossings increasingly treacherous.^{52, 53}



Tajik-Afghan border, Wakhan valley road, Gorno-Badakhshan
Flickr / Timon91

Landmines

Tajikistan became a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 1999 and has since developed the Tajikistan Mine Action Center (TMAC). The government committed to remove all anti-personnel mines by 2010, but since then request an extension of ten more years to complete the removal of mined areas on the Tajik-Afghan border and the Central Region. Tajikistan is also party to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) but has not fulfilled the protocols demanded by the CCW.⁵⁴ Landmines,



Mine clearance demonstration
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and Central Asia

cluster munitions, and explosive remnants of war (ERW) are problematic in Tajikistan. The official stance of the Tajik government is that it has never produced or exported antipersonnel mines and that it destroyed all its stockpiles of antipersonnel mines, leaving none for training purposes. However, the Tajik government states that Russian and Uzbek forces mined numerous border locations at the beginning of the century. Russia maintains active military posts in Tajikistan, which are reported to have stockpiles of various kinds of antipersonnel mines. The Russian Ministry of Defense has not disclosed to the Tajik government the number and kinds of mines it has stockpiled in the country.^{55, 56, 57, 58, 59}

▶ Is this area mined?			
Visitor:	Is this area mined?	Дар ин минтақа мина ҳаст мӣ?	daaR een meentaaqhaa meenaa haast mee?
Local:	No.	He.	Neh

Exchange 18

Tajikistan has failed to comply with the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The government claims that it does not produce, use, or stockpile cluster munitions, although they were used frequently during the civil war between 1992-1997. The Tajik government blames the use of cluster munitions during this time on Uzbek military forces that operated inside Tajik territory. Tajikistan’s Ministry of Defense and the TMAC are working with the Commission on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law, Swiss Foundation for Mine Action, Norwegian People’s Aid, Humanitarian Demining Team, and Union of Sappers of Tajikistan to create a mine-free country.^{60, 61, 62, 63}

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Tajik Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life

Assessment

1. Most of the population of Tajikistan lives in rural areas.
2. Rural Tajiks grow their own food and do not suffer from food insecurity as poor families who reside in the cities.
3. Women have won land ownership rights in recent years.
4. Agriculture plays a small role in Tajikistan's overall national economy.
5. Government corruption exists in the cotton industry.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True



*Tajik family
Flickr / Brian Harrington Spier*

Chapter 6 | Tajik Cultural Orientation

Family Life

Introduction

The family is the cornerstone of social and cultural life in Tajikistan. Article 33 of the constitution proclaims the family as the primary unit of society, with the right of protection by both the state and society.¹ Despite attempts by the Soviet Union to undermine the family's traditional role and importance, the traditional family remains strong in Tajikistan.²

The Family Code of Tajikistan states that men and women have equal rights within the family.³ Nevertheless, Tajik families remain strongly patriarchal, with men as the

undisputed heads of the households. Women are responsible for raising children and taking care of the home.^{4, 5}

Oilai kalon (extended family) is a core cultural value central to Tajik identity. Tajiks, therefore, base their identity on the character and reputation of their relatives. Such collectivist identities also oblige individuals to share their material goods with their oilai kalon, thus contributing to the economic welfare of everyone.^{6, 7} In rural areas, families typically have between three to five children. The president, Emomali Rahmon, declared 2015 as the “year of the family,” outlining a number of programs designed to support and strengthen Tajik families.^{8, 9}

Family Structure

Families in Tajikistan tend to be large, although family size has begun to decline in recent years. The nuclear family is the basic family unit. When families have more than one son, the youngest son remains at home with his parents after he marries. In this family structure, the father rules the family, and the daughter-in-law falls under the authority of the mother.^{10, 11, 12, 13}



Mother and her son
Flickr / Steve Evans

▶ Are these people part of your family?

Visitor:	Are these people part of your family?	Ин одамон аҳли оилаи шумо мӣ?	een odaamon aah-lee o-eeley shoomo mee?
Local:	No.	He.	Neh

Exchange 19

Labor migration is common among Tajik men, which has given rise to a phenomenon known as “distance families.” Many men live and work abroad and do not see their families, sometimes for years at a time.

▶ Is this your entire family?

Visitor:	Is this your entire family?	Ин ҳамаи оилаатон мӣ?	een haamaay o-eelaaton mee?
Local:	No.	He.	Neh

Exchange 20

Still, they are considered husbands, fathers, and heads of households, although women carry out the role of heads of households in the absence of their husbands or other males in the family. Female-headed homes are becoming increasingly common in Tajikistan, especially in rural areas.^{14, 15}

Male/Female Interactions

Poverty and high unemployment have changed traditional Tajik gender roles. Men and teenage boys frequently travel to urban areas or abroad (mainly to Russia) to find work. Thus, women must take on additional roles around the house, with extended families partially taking on the responsibilities of absentee husbands. When the husband is present, Tajik mothers are the disciplinarians, while the fathers take action only in cases of severe punishment. Married rural women do not work outside the home, unless they work in their family's business. Urban women have greater freedom to work outside the home. Although Tajik women are equal under the law, the law is not enforced. Tajik women continue to face considerable difficulties, such as a lack of access to education and loans and domestic violence.^{16, 17}

Status of Elders, Adolescents, and Children

Elders

Elders receive respect from their children and a place of honor in the family. In rural areas, elders finalize family decisions, which are considered binding. Grandparents often help care for their grandchildren, passing along their knowledge and teaching them culturally appropriate behaviors. Grandmothers teach their granddaughters female social traditions, while grandfathers teach their grandsons male social traditions. Respected male village and neighborhood elders hold local positions of authority and governance.^{18, 19, 20}



*An elderly man walking
Flickr / Veni Markovski*

Adolescents

Adolescents play a strong role in the Tajik family. Although many teens attend school, a large number have left school and entered the workforce. Because of extreme poverty across the country, teenage boys often have no choice but to leave home to find work. For some teenage girls, life can become very difficult. Some girls are married off to older men. Still others find themselves lured by false promises of lucrative employment abroad, only to be sold into sexual slavery in places like Russia or the United Arab Emirates. Some teens try to keep up with Western trends. Many wear Western clothes, listen to Western music, and enjoy spending time with friends.^{21, 22, 23}



*A group of university students
Wikipedia / Faizanalivarya*

Children

Children are expected to care for and be obedient to their parents. Young people are told that it is “their parent’s duty to marry them off, while their duty is to bury their parent.”²⁴ Tajik children are respected and loved, but poverty has created hardships for them. Their access to quality healthcare, nutrition, and education is limited. Often they are kept out of school to work, especially in rural areas closely tied to the cotton industry.^{25, 26, 27, 28}



*Tajik children
Flickr / joepyrek*

Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

Marriage

Rural parents often arrange marriages for their children. In urban areas, however, it is much more common for young men and women to choose their own marriage partners, with their parents’ consent.^{29, 30}

▶ Are you married?			
Visitor:	Are you married?	Шумо оиладор мӣ?	shoomo o-eelaadoR mee?
Local:	Yes.	Ҷа.	Haa

Exchange 21

Marriage between first cousins is common in all regions of the country. Young brides join their husband’s family, and their role and behavior are strictly regulated. They must prove themselves through silence, diligence, and hard work. They are referred to as kelin, which denotes their provisional status until they have proven themselves, usually by bearing sons.^{31, 32}



Tajik bride
Flickr / Jeremy Weate

Divorce

Economic instability and poverty forced many men to migrate to find work, which has directly influenced the rise in divorce across Tajikistan.³³ Men who cannot afford to support their families also initiate divorces, and once divorced, women are frequently turned out of their in-laws’ homes. To complicate matters further, if a divorced woman cannot support herself, she cannot return to her parent’s home; thus, many women are forced into the labor market to support themselves and their children. Women remain second-class citizens in Tajikistan .^{34, 35}

Birth

The birth of a baby is cause for family and close friends to gather for a celebration where the mullo (religious leader) formally welcomes the child into the community. Guests will typically come together over a meal and bring gifts that tend to be more

extravagant if the baby is a boy. A sheep will be slaughtered for the celebration if the baby is a boy. If the family is Russian, the family will generally have the baby baptized within the first few days after birth.³⁶



Mother and her baby
Flickr / erikenmieke

Family Events

Weddings

Weddings are elaborate affairs that last up to seven days. They begin with separate banquets for the bride and groom that last for three days. On the fifth day, friends and family of the groom accompany him to the bride's house, where the two take their oaths before an imam. At this point, the marriage is complete. Singing and dancing take place until the bride's family comes to spend the night at the groom's home. The purity of the bride is of the utmost importance. She must prove her purity to her mother-in-law after the conjugal night. Weddings are costly, and many people in Tajikistan have to save for years to pay for them or be forced into serious debt. As a result, in 2007 President Emomali Rahmon introduced new legislation that puts limits on the cost of weddings and the number of guests that can be invited to the festivities.^{37, 38, 39}



Tajik wedding
Flickr / Brian Harrington Spier

Funerals

Tajiks are predominantly Muslim and follow Islamic traditions when a person dies. Autopsies are forbidden, and preparations for burial take place the same day a person dies. Family members wash the body and wrap it in a white cloth. The body is placed in a simple coffin, which is carried in a procession to the cemetery. Custom dictates that burials take place on the day of death. Tajiks celebrate anniversaries for the deceased on several occasions after the death: after 7 days, 20 days, 40 days, 6 months, and 1 year. Each anniversary celebration is an organized affair that requires the family to conduct separate ceremonies for female and male guests. Food and drink must be

provided for the large numbers of people who attend. The cost for funeral ceremonies and their anniversaries places an enormous economic strain on families.^{40, 41}

Rites of Passage

Circumcision is a rite of passage for Tajik boys. At the age of five, an elaborate ceremony is conducted at which a local religious leader performs the circumcision. However, some parents wait until their son is around the age of 14 so they have enough time to save money for the celebration. Tajik females are considered adults once they start menstruating, while sexual maturity defines adulthood for males. Eighteen is the legal age of adulthood in Tajikistan. A young female is not considered a woman, however, until she has given birth.^{42, 43, 44}



*Young Tajik boys
Flickr / Steve Evans*

Naming Conventions

Traditionally, because of their Zoroastrian and Iranian roots, Tajik names took on Persian forms. During the Soviet era, Slavic endings became common, and people added them to their names. The current president of Tajikistan, formerly known as Emomali Rahmonov, removed the Slavic ending of his name and now formally uses Rahmon. The president decreed in 2007 that all Tajiks should follow suit to reflect the ties to the Persian culture. He has also strongly encouraged people to avoid names that relate to war, insisting instead that people choose names for their children from the Persian epic poem Shahnameh (Book of Kings). But Islamic names have become fashionable in the country. Some young people are changing their Persian and Tajik names to Islamic names, and many new parents are giving Islamic names to their newborns.^{45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50}



*Tajik toddler
Flickr / Steve Evans*

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Tajik Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life

Assessment

1. Tajik families tend to be small.
2. In Tajikistan, all children are expected to leave the family home after they marry.
3. Female-headed households are becoming increasingly common in Tajikistan.
4. Females have equal status in the Tajik family structure.
5. Elders are highly respected in Tajik families.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True

Tajik Cultural Orientation

Further Readings and Resources

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Tajik Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment

1. The government of Tajikistan is a dictatorship.
2. Tajik journalists suffer harassment and censorship.
3. Tajikistan's economy relies on the export of minerals and metals.
4. Cultivation of cotton is the most important agricultural activity in Tajikistan.
5. Ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajik villagers live in harmony in mixed communities along the Tajik-Kyrgyz border.
6. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union gender equality has improved.
7. Women and children pray in mosques only on Friday.
8. The Tajik government arranges for Muslims to participate in the hajj pilgrimage each year.
9. The Jewish community is not allowed to worship in Tajikistan.
10. Tajikistan is spending millions of dollars to build a mosque in Dushanbe and is planning the construction of more mosques in the future.

11. Western dress is very common in Tajikistan.
12. The Tajik government controls the way people dress.
13. Non-religious celebrations are banned in Tajikistan.
14. Tajiks drink large amounts of coffee.
15. It is offensive to point the bottom of the feet at another person when sitting down.
16. Tajiks' consumption of alcohol increased after independence from Soviet rule.
17. Literacy rate in Tajikistan is very low.
18. The quality of education improved significantly after the civil war.
19. Tajiks enjoy the road system that was built by the Soviets, which keeps rural communities well connected to large urban centers to this day.
20. The Tajik Police forces in urban areas act aggressively to reduce crime.
21. Tajikistan has an extensive, well-developed system of roads.

22. The majority of rural Tajiks lack basic healthcare services.
23. Most rural Tajik children are sent to school from a young age.
24. Rural villages make use of traditional forms of local government to resolve conflicts.
25. Russia maintains active military bases in Tajikistan.
26. Tajik teenagers are crucial to the economic survival of their families.
27. Tajik parents are generally permissive with their children.
28. Arranged marriages continue in Tajikistan.
29. Divorce is on the rise in Tajikistan.
30. Tajikistan's president has stipulated how Tajiks should name their children.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False; 6. False; 7. False; 8. True; 9. False; 10. True; 11. False; 12. True; 13. False; 14. False; 15. True; 16. False; 17. False; 18. False; 19. False; 20. False; 21. False; 22. True; 23. False; 24. True; 25. True; 26. True; 27. False; 28. True; 29. True; 30. True