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PRESERVING THE DESIGN IDENTITY OF UZBEK NATIONAL DRESS AMID GLOBAL FASHION TRENDS

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Abstract: This article examines the preservation of the design identity of Uzbek national dress amid globalization, digital fashion communication, and changing consumer demand. Using a theoretical and compositional approach, it conceptualizes atlas, adras, beqasam, velvet, the chapan, the doppi, and embroidery as an integrated system of silhouette, construction, materials, color, craftsmanship, and cultural meaning rather than merely decorative motifs. The study proposes a five-stage design framework involving cultural documentation, identification of essential characteristics, creative transformation, collaborative assessment, and cultural and environmental review. Its conclusions are theoretical and do not represent empirical testing.

Keywords: Uzbek national dress, design identity, globalization, atlas, adras, cultural heritage, fashion collections, composition, craftsmanship, sustainable fashion.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first-century fashion system, international trend platforms, social media, rapid production, and transnational trade increasingly shape clothing aesthetics. These developments offer Uzbek designers new technologies and markets, but may also encourage visual homogenization. Introducing national dress into contemporary fashion therefore requires more than applying ethnic patterns: it requires understanding historical construction, material practices, and cultural functions.

Design identity is understood here as a recognizable yet adaptable set of characteristics distinguishing dress within a particular cultural tradition. These encompass weaving techniques, silhouette, cutting methods, chromatic relationships, ornament placement, social conventions, symbolic meanings, and production knowledge. Such a definition avoids reducing national identity to a fixed decorative formula. Uzbek atlas and adras weaving traditions have received international recognition: in 2017 UNESCO included the Margilan Crafts Development Centre's safeguarding practices in its Register of Good Safeguarding Practices [1]. This recognition highlights the significance of intergenerational knowledge transmission, master–apprentice relationships, and community participation alongside the appearance of the textiles.

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The study aims to identify factors affecting the design identity of Uzbek national dress under global fashion trends and to propose methodological criteria for contemporary collections. Its objectives are to classify identity-bearing characteristics, assess opportunities and risks associated with globalization, and establish stages of culturally responsible transformation. The methodology combines historical-cultural, comparative, formal-compositional, and systems analysis. Historical-cultural inquiry relates dress to customs and regional practices; comparison distinguishes traditional and global design languages; formal analysis examines silhouette, proportion, rhythm, color, texture, and construction. As a theoretical study, it does not claim experimental validation.

Preserving identity differs from reproducing a historical garment. Reproduction seeks fidelity to a particular original; preservation can maintain the underlying cultural meaning, production knowledge, and structural logic while adapting form and function. Both approaches have value, but the latter creates greater opportunities for contemporary design.

The World Intellectual Property Organization recognizes ornaments, symbols, handicrafts, and design forms as traditional cultural expressions associated with community identity and intergenerational heritage[2]. Consequently, designers should treat inherited motifs as culturally situated expressions rather than context-free graphic resources.

The first component of Uzbek dress identity is material and technique. The ikat effects of atlas and adras, the striped rhythm of beqasam, and the light-responsive surface of velvet shape the garment's visual character. Digitally reproducing a textile pattern may retain its appearance but does not preserve the knowledge and labor embodied in traditional weaving.

The second component is construction. The chapan's loose cut, layered wearing conventions, belt-controlled volume, broad sleeves, and relaxed relationship to the body have functional and compositional significance. Their adaptation into modern coats, dresses, or transformable garments should retain recognizable structural principles, even when external decoration changes.

The third component is ornament and symbolism. Embroidery, doppi motifs, borders, and patterned fabrics vary across regions in meaning and stylistic treatment. A generic label such as "Uzbek ornament" obscures these distinctions. Designers should establish a motif's provenance, historical use, and compositional role before adapting it.

The fourth component is color and rhythm. Multicolored traditional fabrics are organized through direction, repetition, contrast, and proportional relationships. A contemporary minimalist palette may reduce the number or saturation of colors while retaining the original rhythmic organization.

The fifth component is social function. Ceremonial, everyday, occupational, and seasonal uses historically influenced fabric choice, length, and ornamentation. Understanding these functions helps contemporary designers adapt heritage forms to present-day needs without literal imitation.

Global fashion also creates opportunities for constructive exchange. Capsule wardrobes, unisex silhouettes, digital patternmaking, modular design, and customization can bring traditional elements into everyday use. A lightweight coat derived from the chapan, for example, may retain its structural memory while employing modern closures and materials. However, rapidly changing trends can reduce national features to short-lived visual effects. When a collection relies solely on a fashionable ethnic print, its cultural identity remains fragile. More durable identification depends on coherence among materials, construction, techniques, and the narrative surrounding the garment. A further risk is regional stereotyping. Combining distinct weaving and embroidery traditions under a generalized "Eastern" aesthetic diminishes cultural specificity. A design dossier documenting geographic origin,

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object type, technique, workshop, and extent of transformation could improve both research transparency and brand communication. Cultural appropriation and inadequate attribution present another challenge. WIPO discussions of fashion emphasize respect for traditional cultural expressions, acknowledgement of sources, dialogue, and collaboration with relevant communities[3]. These are ethical principles for responsible practice rather than evidence that one uniform legal regime applies to every traditional design. Digital reproduction intensifies these challenges. Graphic software and artificial intelligence can generate many variants of a motif while obscuring its provenance. Design documentation should therefore record source images, permissions where relevant, and the contributions of artists and craftspeople.

A first preservation strategy is creative continuity of silhouette. The chapan's volume may be retained while shoulders are geometrically reconfigured, sleeves become detachable, or the garment acquires multiple functions. Identity then emerges through construction rather than surface ornament alone.

A second strategy is meaningful ornament stylization. Enlarging, fragmenting, relocating, or translating embroidery into seam and relief structures can generate new compositions, provided that the original motif's provenance and symbolic associations are understood.

A third strategy combines traditional and contemporary materials. Atlas or adras may be juxtaposed with smooth, translucent, or recycled fabrics, but thickness, elasticity, weight, durability, and care requirements must inform the construction. Traditional cloth should function as an active structural material rather than an incidental decorative insert.

A fourth strategy adapts regional color systems to contemporary palettes. Designers can preserve relative color proportions while moderating saturation or balancing vivid hues with neutral grounds. Such changes should be traceable to documented historical examples.

A fifth strategy ensures narrative coherence. The collection's concept, sketches, material sourcing, production, labeling, and presentation should communicate a consistent cultural account. Information about textile provenance and craft techniques can strengthen identity beyond runway imagery.

Craftspeople are essential partners in this process. Subtle color transitions, weaving density, and hand embroidery depend on accumulated practical expertise. Collaboration can improve technical quality, prevent misinterpretation, and support the return of economic value to local producers. UNESCO materials on the Margilan centre describe the role of training, exhibitions, festivals, and workshops in transmitting atlas and adras knowledge. Design education can build on these practices through joint studio projects with craftspeople, field observation, and documented textile sample collections[4].

Environmental sustainability must also inform modernization. According to UNEP materials published in 2025, approximately 92 million tonnes of textile waste are generated globally each year[5]. This reinforces the need to assess material efficiency, repairability, product longevity, and opportunities for reuse alongside visual qualities. Nevertheless, locally made or handwoven cloth should not automatically be considered environmentally superior. Its impact depends on raw materials, dyeing, water and energy use, transport, and service life. UNEP advocates a transition from linear production toward circular systems emphasizing reuse, recovery, and recycling.

Potential applications include modular components made from offcuts, repair-friendly construction, enduring silhouettes, and small-batch production. Their economic feasibility also requires attention to costs, fair compensation for craftspeople, and consumer accessibility.

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Stage 1—Cultural source identification and documentation. Record the selected garment's or textile's regional provenance, historical function, techniques, and symbolic meanings. Distinguish museum evidence, workshop observations, scholarship, and craft practitioners' testimony.

Stage 2—Identification of the identity core. Determine which characteristics must remain recognizable and which may be transformed. For instance, the chapan's loose silhouette may be essential while the exact position of decoration may be adaptable.

Stage 3—Compositional transformation. Reinterpret silhouette, proportions, color, rhythm, texture, and construction for contemporary use. Document the relationship between each proposed innovation and its historical source, avoiding dependence on a single decorative sign.

Stage 4—Prototyping and collaborative assessment. Develop selected designs as mock-ups or prototypes and assess material compatibility, comfort, and compositional coherence with input from craftspeople, designers, specialists, and intended users. This stage is proposed for future research and was not empirically conducted in this study.

Stage 5—Cultural, environmental, and communication audit. Review source attribution, collaboration, material use, anticipated lifespan, and clarity of the garment's cultural narrative. Record findings in a collection dossier describing traditional and innovative elements.

The model links identity to source documentation, construction, material, technique, and social relations rather than ornament alone. It is a methodological proposal, not a universally validated standard; regional and product-specific testing remains necessary.

The analysis suggests that global fashion is not inherently opposed to national identity: it can enable new communication and constructive experimentation. The decisive issue is whether design processes preserve the cultural meaning, regional specificity, and embodied knowledge of their sources.

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