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## Adaptation of students from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Tomsk universities

**Nikolay Pogodaev**

Educational migration is an integral part of the flow of youth from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Russia. The adaptation of students from these countries in the host society causes a number of problems. This commentary draws attention to the barriers arising for the adaptation of these students in the academic issues and everyday life. The migration of students from Central Asia implies that they not only partly change their typical behavior, but the host country, gradually understanding and taking into account the cultural characteristics of young people who come there, should also create conditions for their residence. Within the project “Transformation of higher education systems in Central Asian countries: new opportunities and challenges for Russian educational export” Tomsk researchers have analyzed the attitude of students from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to education and living in Tomsk. This publication is based on the interviews of students giving their insight about the reaction of young people to new realities. This commentary may be useful for the organizers of educational process and living conditions in those universities that consider the education of students from abroad a significant part of their activities.

### **Adaptation in the academic field**

The main goal of young people is to obtain better education than universities in their homeland may offer. Studying at the expense of the receiving country budget, the availability of places in dormitories, small scholarship, etc. minimize the expenses required as a contribution from their families in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the formation of future educational capital.

**Nikolay Pogodaev, Candidate of historical sciences, Associate professor of the Department of Social Work at the National Research Tomsk State University.**

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The Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia provides the following statistical data on students from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Russian universities:

<b>Number of students from Tajikistan in Russian universities</b>			
	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Bachelor's degree	15321	19185	19864
Specialist's degree	5225	5876	6103
Master's degree	2517	3117	2761
Total	23063	28178	28728

<b>Number of students from Uzbekistan in Russian universities</b>			
	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Bachelor's degree	37488	44803	39765
Specialist's degree	8115	9298	9399
Master's degree	3068	3891	4235
Total	48671	57992	53399

According to the Federal State Statistics Service for the Tomsk Region, in 2019/2020 academic year, there were about 6.7 thousand students from Kazakhstan in Tomsk universities (73.4% of Central Asian students in the region), from Uzbekistan – 1.8 thousand (19%), from Kyrgyzstan – 600 students (6.7%), from Tajikistan – about 200 students (2.2%) (Federal State Statistics Service for the Tomsk Region). In March 2024, out of 65.7 thousand students in Tomsk universities, 9 thousand came from neighboring countries, and 2.6 thousand – from other countries (so-called far-abroad region) (Ogorodova). According to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia in October 2023, 529 citizens of Tajikistan and 1,282 citizens of Uzbekistan studied at Tomsk universities (Form No. VPO-1).

There is no serious Russian language proficiency testing for school-leavers from Central Asian countries applying to Russian universities, and therefore not all of them speak it to the extent that makes it easy to comprehend the educational material. This is a significant barrier to rapid adaptation in the educational process. Incomprehension of materials creates emotional discomfort, frustration, and alienation from the educational process. But there are also many students who not only successfully use the original national-Russian bilingualism, but also speak English or Chinese.

Some students are poorly prepared in basic subjects, and admission tests are not always a barrier in their way. In future, it complicates the adaptation to university programs, and creates considerable problems for the lecturers who are faced with the need to teach classes, where some students need the explanation of everything in detail and slowly, while others are bored and resent “slow” students.

Need for adaptation to studying in Russia is caused by the difference between the models of everyday educational practices in the countries of origin and in the host country. According to students from Tajikistan, it is unacceptable for them to ask teachers a large number of questions about the materials of the current lesson, the distance between the teacher and the student does not lead to discussions and presenting alternative points of view. In Russian universities it is permitted to both ask questions and discuss issues. But due to their habit, foreign students may not use this opportunity and some materials remain incomprehensible to them. Russian students sometimes distance themselves from their migrant classmates by participating in small groups as they believe that there is little their classmates can do to complete a task. According to students from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, there is quite a common practice in their homeland to “buy” a test or exam marks. At Tomsk universities students inevitably have to adapt to quite high requirements and be assessed for knowledge, not money.

Some students consider admission to a Russian university either a kind of tourism, or an opportunity to get a job. This is often facilitated by very weak financial support for students from their families. In this case, low motivation to study also becomes a barrier to the adaptation in educational process.

### **Adaptation to everyday life**

A favorable condition for students’ adaptation is the availability of places in a dormitory, official registration there, and opportunities for organizing everyday life. This is of great importance both from an administrative and financial points of view. A student pays about 980 rubles per month for a dormitory at Tomsk State University while renting a one-room apartment in Tomsk costs at least 15,000 rubles. Even if 3-4 people live there, it is still much more expensive. It is much harder to get a place in a dormitory at the universities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and most non-resident students rent housing there.

One of the main barriers to adaptation to everyday life is differences with roommates. The capsule space of the room becomes a model and everyday reality of the cultural and personal intersections. The assumption that students from Central Asia should live in the same room with Russian students in order to learn Russian language quicker without negative consequences is far from fully confirmed. It is the capsule space of the room that makes people feel cultural differences acutely. Moreover, it is more likely to happen with girls, not guys. As girls are more sensitive to the subtleties of ethical and moral norms and are often more emotional.

However, we should separate the actual household culture of individual students, no matter what nationality they belong to, and the cultural features that are characteristic of a particular ethnic group or denomination. For example, a student from Central Asia wakes up at dawn, washes his face, turns on the light in the room, rolls out a special rug and performs prayer. This is a complete-

ly natural situation for him, which he got used to in his family and which he needs. For his roommates from Russia it is a completely unexpected moment of living together. Furthermore, a lot depends on whether they can negotiate the situation or not.

In the interviews students evaluated positively life in dormitories, omitting those details that are rather intimate. Although some interviewees mentioned them. Especially when it comes to the “cultural shock” they have experienced. For example, a student of about seventeen from Tajikistan, who had settled into the dormitory the night before, left the room in the morning to wash his face: “I look, and there's a girl washing her face and her shorts are shorter than my underpants. We don't have that; we have all the girls covered. ...I ran into the room and went out to wash my face when everyone was gone”. A girl from Tajikistan: “I feel uncomfortable in the shower, all the booths are open there. We are not used to showing our charms even in front of girls”.

It happens quite often when students from Tajikistan persistently asked to live with their fellow countrywomen, or two Russian girls with two Tajik girls. Craving for emotional comfort, without which studying even at a good university is not a joy, requires, apparently, the presence of a person of the same cultural code nearby. Especially it is true for freshmen students. But living in a room with their fellow countrymen, students learn Russian slower. It is one thing when unavoidably people have to communicate with their neighbors in Russian for every little thing, and it is a completely different situation when people can talk about various things in their native language.

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, young people are under quite strict control by the family, all representatives of the older generation. These are the conditions of a traditional society, the postulates of which are still strong. Once in Russia, some young people, especially boys, find themselves in a situation where there is no external control anymore, but the self-control, replacing it, has not been formed yet. The rules of behavior in the society of origin and the host society are different. And therefore, some young people, losing clear behavioral norms, are brought to marginalization. This may include skipping classes, academic backlog to perform tests, and violations of dormitory rules, including alcohol consumption.

The situation when students from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were unable to adapt to the conditions of study and residence at TSU can be assessed by the number of expulsions. The reasons are different: someone could not pass the exams, someone decided that the conditions did not suit him, someone seriously violated the dormitory rules, and so on. According to the TSU Educational Department for five years, the situation at all levels of education is as follows:

**Students – citizens of Tajikistan 2019-2023, people**

<b>Enrolled</b>	<b>Expelled (%)</b>
312	110 (35,3)

**Students – citizens of Uzbekistan 2019-2023, people**

<b>Enrolled</b>	<b>Expelled (%)</b>
994	395 (41,8)

A quite high percentage of expulsions indicates that the university, creating all the necessary conditions for students from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is zealous about their academic performance. The university takes responsibility for the level of training of specialists in campus, and also strictly controls behavior in the dormitories.

**Quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur**

**Whatever is received is received in the manner of the receiver**

**(Thomas Aquinas)**

In order to be successful, the adaptation of migrant students must be considered not only from the perspective of host society traditions, but also taking into account the culture of the society they originate from. This is one of the conditions for the implementation of “soft power”, when the interaction of the parties is based on trust, making Russia attractive in general and its education system in particular. Such cooperation is based not on the subject-object approach, but on an understanding of the values and cultural attitudes of migrant students. According to Joseph Nye, the author of “soft power” term, educational system is one of its priorities (Lebedeva 2017). While this does not always work out. For example, complaints from the student council and the head of one of Tomsk dormitories related to frequent gatherings of male students from Tajikistan late in the evening in one of the dormitory rooms with loud conversations and noise. Some participants were made remarks, others were asked to leave the dormitory.

None of the locals knew that in the native culture of the guys who came from the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, men from time immemorial gathered in the evenings in aloukhon (hearth house). Sometimes men of different ages came there, sometimes they were only youth associations of dastai-chagito (boys' parties). The age cohorts of teenagers and young men of 10-15 people were headed by elected miri-bozi (headman of the game) (Tajiks 2021). Young people at such parties discussed their affairs (and sometimes in high tones that could be mistaken for shouting), had potluck dinner, played, had fun, gained intelligence and wisdom from those who are older and more experienced. There were special houses in some regions of Tajikistan where young men gathered – lavahnd-khona (youth house) (Bobokhonov 2012). In some areas, such places of communication were called gaphona (house for conversations). On Fridays and Saturdays in some villages in aloukhon a feast was held in honor of the arvokhs, the spirits of the ancestors. In the same room, some of the residents and guests of the village could spend the night. In the second half of the 20th century, clubs replaced aloukhon.

Nowadays such gatherings are often held in private houses, but the form and content of youth communication is the same. In Tajikistan communication with girls before marriage is prohibited not only in the evenings, but also during the day. Young people don't walk there in couples under the moon. Girls stay at home under the supervision of their mothers, while boys gather together. These customs, representing the social and ceremonial side of the men's associations, are part of Tajik cultural code and an important mechanism for the socialization of youth in their homeland.

These traditions arrived at Tomsk dormitories together with their native speakers. Some of them were not paid much attention to, somewhere they were biased and regarded as an unconditional violation of rules. Zealous administrators could throw the remarks "about the wild people who came down from the mountains". It is difficult to abandon those traditions imbibed from birth. There are no teahouses where people can sit around a teapot with green tea for hours. Gatherings in cafes are too expensive. But affiliation – the craving for communication, for trusting relationships – is particularly acute at a young age, it seeks the realization both in the mountains and in the dormitory. In the described situation, this occurs on the background of a mental and semantic gap with the native environment of the society of origin.

Thus, behavior accepted as the norm in the society of origin may be perceived as deviation in host society. High-level "life navigators" of migrant students are not understood sometimes. Representatives of different cultures perceive the same situation through the prism of their own stereotypes, as the medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas warned us about.

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