

## FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEAHOUSES IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract:** This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the emergence of teahouses in Central Asia, particularly in the territory of Uzbekistan, their historical stages of development, and their role in social life. It examines the initial formation of teahouses in connection with caravanserais and bazaars, their wide dissemination in the Fergana Valley, and their functions as social, cultural, and educational centers. In addition, the activities of “red teahouses” during the Soviet period, their reorganization as political and educational institutions, and subsequent processes of transformation are investigated. The article pays special attention to the volumetric-spatial structure of traditional Uzbek teahouse architecture, as well as to the issues of harmonizing national craftsmanship with modern design solutions in interior and exterior design. As a result of the study, the importance of applying innovative solutions while preserving national traditions in the design of contemporary teahouses is substantiated.

**Keywords:** teahouse, Central Asia, Uzbek culture, social space, national architecture, traditional interior, volumetric-spatial solution, red teahouse, public catering establishments, cultural heritage.

For many centuries, in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, teahouses have been considered one of the oldest forms of public catering.

Teahouses, understood as places for “public tea drinking” within society, are known from historical sources to have begun forming in China during the 7th–10th centuries (the Tang dynasty and later the Song dynasty). Particularly during the Song period, teahouses became centers for entertainment, storytelling, theatrical performances, and social gatherings<sup>1</sup>.

Teahouses initially became widespread in Eastern Uzbekistan, particularly in the Fergana Valley, which is likely connected to its proximity to India and China. It is no coincidence that the Fergana Valley is often called the homeland of teahouses—this beautiful region is difficult to imagine without them.

The earliest teahouses appeared in caravanserais and bazaars, where merchants brought the healing beverage—tea. At first, this custom did not exist in Bukhara. The few teahouses located in bazaars primarily served visiting guests. Later, teahouses began to appear in neighborhoods and villages, known as “mahalla teahouses” and “village teahouses.” In the Fergana Valley, almost every neighborhood and village had its own teahouse.

A significant role in the development of teahouses was played by Tula samovars brought to Central Asia from Tsarist Russia via Kazan. In the 19th century, a new type of teahouse that gained great popularity among the people came to be known as the “samovar teahouse”<sup>2</sup>.

In the research of ethnographic scholar O. L. Sukhareva, the following observations are presented: “When describing a city of Central Asia, it is impossible not to mention the teahouse. It is well known that the teahouse plays a very significant role in the lives of the inhabitants of Tashkent, Samarkand, and especially the cities of the Fergana Valley. It represents a kind of club where, in the evenings, men come to meet with friends, converse over tea, learn about the latest news, listen to music, read, or simply relax after a day of work”<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Benn, J. A. *Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History*. – Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015. – 288 p.

<sup>2</sup> Kasimov O. *Architectural Evolution and Developmental Phases of Chayxana Teahouses* \ The Second Pamir Transboundary Conference for Sustainable Societies- 2023 | PAMIR 2023. November 16 & 17, 2023. P 1477-1482

<sup>3</sup> Карабаев У. *Этнокультура (Традиционная народная культура)*. Т.: Шарк. 2005. с. 229

The earliest teahouses in Tashkent were located in the old city area (around Ichan-Qal'a and Chorsu) and were mainly built near bazaars, mosques, or caravanserais.

Uzbek teahouses served not only the local Uzbek population but also residents of the region and travelers alike, which allows them to be characterized as follows:

- a place for rest and communication;
- a space that brings people together based on shared interests;
- a social center of the neighborhood and the surrounding area;
- a cultural and educational hub;
- a place for preparing and consuming ceremonial meals;
- a home for guests, and so forth.

In many regions, the teahouse was the only public gathering place where people could rest from labor and household concerns and freely converse with their neighborhood neighbors. The teahouse was a place that united people based on shared interests; that is, teahouses provided favorable conditions for gatherings of enthusiasts of folk art, handicrafts, various games, and other interests.

In the early years after the establishment of Soviet power, gatherings of people in one place were prohibited, as a result of which teahouses became places with few visitors, and some were closed altogether.

In the 1920s, the new authorities realized that society should be built not by force of arms but through communication with people, and therefore began to intensify propaganda and outreach activities. In order to implement its political goals, the new government renamed existing teahouses as "red teahouses." In some cases, visiting a "red teahouse" signified that a person had "gone over to the Reds." Frequent visitors to teahouses were provided with free meals, and teahouses that acquired the name "Red Teahouse" were exempted from taxes.

In 1928, the "Regulation on the Unification of Red Teahouses of Uzbekistan" was adopted. According to this regulation, the main task was the promotion of party policy, and activist councils consisting of 7–11 people were established at teahouses.

In the 1920s–1930s, separate women's teahouses were opened in order to carry out propaganda and outreach work among women, and their clientele consisted exclusively of women.

Unlike traditional teahouses, "red teahouses" performed club functions. They were regarded as political and educational institutions and included a "red corner," a small library (mainly containing revolutionary literature), rooms for study circles, and spaces for propaganda and outreach activities. Conversations, special concerts, performances, revolutionary holidays (November 7, May 1, March 8), and lectures were held there.

Over time, the prestige of teahouses increased, and the number of "red teahouses" grew sharply: 87 in 1921, 514 in 1930, and more than 13,000 in 1939. This demonstrates the significant importance of teahouses in the political and social life of the local population. However, after the war, teahouses once again fell out of favor. In the 1950s, most of them were transferred to the public catering system, where traditional low dining platforms (hon-takhta) were replaced by tables and chairs. This led to the loss of their significance as socio-political centers. Some "red teahouses," where suitable buildings were available, were transformed into clubs, libraries, or other public institutions. Only teahouses managed by neighborhood committees retained their functions and preserved certain old traditions.

A distinctive character can be observed in the interior decoration of teahouses. The walls of teahouses consisted of niches, which were decorated with various utensils (bowls, beautifully ornamented trays, teapots, and tea bowls), and these items were used when necessary. Simple straw-based plaster was considered the main interior material. The decoration was highly traditional: carpets were laid, and low platforms (supa) were installed. When entering a house or

a teahouse, shoes were removed<sup>4</sup>. The proportions of rooms and their configuration are of great importance, as random architectural solutions disrupt the spatial organization of the interior environment and make the orderly arrangement of furnishings difficult<sup>5</sup>.

By 1966, as a result of the Tashkent earthquake, under the slogan “We will build a new city,” teahouses—like many other structures—were demolished, including those that had not even been damaged by the natural disaster.

In some settlements, due to a shortage of public catering facilities, teahouses were furnished in the 1950s style with tables and long benches. This practice became widespread in other regions of the republic as well. In order to prevent public dissatisfaction caused by the reduction and closure of teahouses in Tashkent, only a few of them were preserved.

In the 1970s–1980s, new large teahouses began to be constructed with a certain harmony of traditional architectural elements. Examples include the “Kok Gumbaz” (“Blue Domes”) in the center of Tashkent, the “Samarkand Darvoza” in the old city of the capital, and the “Fergana” teahouse in the Qoraqamish residential area. However, unlike traditional teahouses, these functioned as cafés equipped with tables and chairs and gradually became profit-oriented establishments.

National traditions and characteristics shaped by natural-climatic factors and the lifestyle of the Uzbek people determine a distinctive approach to the design of cultural and everyday facilities. In Uzbekistan, the teahouse is widely распространено and clearly reflects the specific features of folk architecture that arise from practical functionality. In Tashkent, the teahouse project of the “Bedana-bedana” (“Perepelka-bedana”) can be highlighted, designed by the young architect Rustam Valiev, where numerous interesting planning solutions and distinctive plastic-compositional approaches are evident. This is a single-story building whose terraces open onto a garden, with groups of raised platforms (supas) suspended above water basins<sup>6</sup>.

In the early 1990s, during a period of major social transformations, conditions were created for the revival of folk customs and traditions.

Issues related to teahouses began to be considered not only in newspaper and magazine articles, radio, and television programs, but also as works of art and architectural heritage.

Open spaces are highly effective in attracting visitors. This is because on hot days, finding a cool and comfortable place to eat often becomes a problem. Under the climatic conditions of Uzbekistan, dining inside enclosed spaces during the heat of the day is generally unpopular. For this reason, the older generations were not mistaken in establishing teahouses along riverbanks in the past. However, if attractive and comfortable interior conditions are created and quality service is provided, visitors tend to frequent such places more often. In addition, the interior decoration of teahouses should be visually pleasing and aesthetically satisfying for guests.

The interior of teahouses can be designed according to the principle of full isolation from the surrounding environment. If a teahouse is intended to host events, it usually adopts a modern appearance. If the seats and halls are intended for quiet relaxation and conversation, various design techniques are applied to separate these areas from the general space. These include the use of decorative partitions, plants and shrubs, changes in floor levels, and the grouping of furnishings. Since teahouses are national public dining establishments, their interiors naturally acquire a distinctive character.

Today, the revival and further development of all spheres of national culture and art, alongside the continuous adoption of progressive universal values, while preserving the most effective national traditions and harmonizing them with contemporary demands, is considered a pressing

<sup>4</sup>Асамов Р.Д. Современные типы чайханы для Республик Средней Азии (Архитектурно-типологическая практика Узбекистана) Автореф. дис. канд. архитектуры. 1982г.

<sup>5</sup>Тосунова. М.И. Архитектурное проектирование. “Высшая школа” 1968 г.

<sup>6</sup>Т.Ф.Кадырова. Архитектура советского Узбекистана. Москва: Стройиздат, 1987, с. 234

task. One of such areas of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan is modern teahouse architecture, which reflects a стремление toward development through the reinterpretation of traditional national craftsmanship<sup>7</sup>.

The most important element of the program for developing social and cultural services for the population in public catering enterprises consists of expanding and improving the network<sup>8</sup>.

In public catering establishments, particularly teahouses, elements of traditional architecture are highly compatible with national cuisine, and art and craftsmanship or interior styles in the national spirit are widely used<sup>9</sup>.

Indeed, teahouses are one of the informational and social centers of Central Asia, embodying the tranquility of the East, an integral part of the markets, and the bustling yet calm environment of the streets. In Central Asia, teahouses are considered the most popular and frequently visited places after mosques. Today, Central Asian culture stands out worldwide, and teahouses can be found in many countries across the globe<sup>10</sup>.

### Conclusion

In volumetric-spatial solutions, architectural and design harmony is achieved by adopting forms that are suitable for exposure to sunlight, wind, and precipitation. Achieving architectural and design harmony is possible through a comprehensive approach to various types of craftsmanship, allowing a synthesis of national values and modernity in both exterior and interior solutions.

As a result of the scientific analysis of the spatial composition and main elements of traditionally developed teahouses, the characteristics of Eastern teahouses and options for placing modern industrial samovars in teahouses were identified.

Today, traditional Eastern-style restaurants in the form of 'teahouses' are very popular worldwide. They can be found not only in Central Asia, Turkey, and Middle Eastern countries but also in Russia and Western European countries. In Moscow, such establishments are in high demand and continue to develop actively.

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