

## **Machine-Sewing Traditional Clothing in Tajikistan: National Fashion, Individual Artistry**

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### **Abstract**

In today's Tajikistan, custom-made, self-consciously "national" clothes for women are the rule, rather than the exception. Consisting of a long dress or tunic and a matching pair of pants worn underneath, these contemporary and highly popular garments are known locally as *libosi milli*—national clothing. In this paper, I give an overview of the system of creating and wearing "national clothing" in contemporary Tajikistan, arguing that this clothing's grounding in tradition in no way negates its equally firm location in modernity. Using modern techniques and materials (of which I give a sampling), Tajik designers create clothing that is simultaneously modern, traditional, and highly personalized. I suggest that within this clothing system, tradition--incorporating both religious and national identities--and fashion are inseparable. I present the work of several female designers from Tajikistan--not famous fashion designers, but women who sew for themselves and their families or for customers who pay the equivalent of a few dollars for their services. I analyze how these artists synthesize multiple aesthetic preferences--national, religious, personal, historical, fashion-conscious--to create unique garments that situate their wearers firmly within Tajik national identity. This paper is based on my own fieldwork conducted in the summers of 2011, 2012, and 2013, as well as library-based research.