EUROPEAN HANDBOOK OF CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

History, Politics, and Societies

Eds. Jeroen Van den Bosch, Adrien Fauve, Bruno De Cordier

ibidem

Jeroen Van den Bosch, Adrien Fauve, Bruno De Cordier (eds.)

The European Handbook of Central Asian Studies

History, Politics, and Societies

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Ташкентъ.—Taschkent. № 13.
Улица Романовскаго.

(View of) Romanov Street.

Foreword

LIKE THE FILM SETTING of a good criminal or espionage thriller, this story starts one misty noon in October 2017 with a secretive two-person meeting in the Flemish city of Ghent, where ‘the Three Towers’ mark the skyline and the Scheldt and Lys meet. It takes an illustrious lunch in the back end of a brasserie in the medieval centre, about half a million euros, and a cunning plan. As the meeting progressed to that stage of twinkly eyes, extra napkins for notetaking and involuntary exclamations of “this is how we do it,” Bruno De Cordier and I left, strolled back to the premises of Ghent University with full stomachs and even fuller minds. It was time to convince the EU Polish national agency that the world needed this handbook, and we had to put “the team” together.

But, first of all, we needed a third editor (with a complimentary academic profile to ourselves). In the end, it was the ‘French Connection’ that put us in direct line with Adrien Fauve. This led to another meeting in Brussels in November 2017, and soon after, an online “Ocean’s 11” model of author recruitment. You know how this goes. A-scholar-knows-a-scholar who works on this, specializes in that, or has written some uncanny paper on a topic we needed. Our author headhunting struck gold when we encountered another scholarly syndicate eager to join the fray.

Then it was January 2018, the month of my doctoral defence that heralded there would be no more excuses to put off writing the enormous Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership in Higher Education grant application. ‘20 March 2018,’ that was the deadline, and I remember like yesterday, it was my first grant of this size, stakes or scope. A 150-page beast, with endless budget lines and several large sub-sections that – like Hannibal’s elephants – had to be prodded through the Alps, on time!

Of course, this would not have been possible without the input of the co-leads and authors, and the willingness of key partners to take on the responsibility for organizing complex events at their home institutions. This is where I am also much obliged to Katarzyna Hadaś, for showing me the ropes of how to edit and improve the grant proposal drafts.

A day before the deadline, *Eurasian Insights: Strengthening Central Asian Studies in Europe* (EISCAS) was submitted, and after the long wait for the final verdict, it would change my professional life forever.

Three years later, by now already accustomed to the relentless pandemic in the background, we feel like the editorial Volga boatmen, slowly hauling our proofread barge to our publisher, ibidem Verlag. Like the seemingly endless Volga itself, this has been a long and arduous road, with many different movie genres to describe the various project experiences on the way (*The Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Twelve Chairs*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, *Die Hard*, *The Revenant*, etc.).

If I look back, I realize that such an intense, collective effort like this has been an enormous opportunity for personal growth, that I have gained many interesting friendships, that the international Central Asian scholarly community is cooperative and supportive, and that I still strongly believe that this project we embarked on is relevant and necessary, and will continue to be so for a long time.

For this very reason, I would like to thank the EU grant committee and the Polish National Agency, as well as our publisher ibidem Verlag, for believing in this project and making all this possible.

My sincere gratitude goes to all our authors, anonymous reviewers, contributing scholars for the curriculum design and didactic team, hosting institutions, guest lecturers and teachers, Master Class applicants, my colleagues at AMU, our film crew, and volunteers, who together gave this project not only legs, but also wings.

Specifically for this handbook, a big thank you to our design firm for inventing the layout, and their patience and elegant solutions during the creation of the maps, and to our proofreaders. A warm 'merci' to Adrien and Bruno, for their editorial commitment and diligence, and for keeping the work fun. I loved working with you both!

Last but not least, to Nune Srapyan, my right hand to rule the bureaucratic equivalent of the barungar ('Right Wing'), if our university administration was a premodern Turko-Mongol polity (with the Polish National Agency being the 'Left Wing'). Without you, I would still be drowning in paperwork.

And finally, to my wife, who lived as much with this project as I did.

Poznań, 20 July 2021
Jeroen Van den Bosch

Images Speak Louder than Words? Historical Postcard Exhibition of Early-20th Century Central Asia

"The historian should show us that the past was, at the same time, trivial like every present, and fascinating like every past."

Nicolás Gómez Dávila
(1913-1994)

THE IMAGES between the different sections and chapters of this book are a selection of 31 postcards from different series that were published in the 1900s and 1910s, that were prepared for an exhibition named: *Catching the end, convergence or the beginning of (a) world(s)? The visualization of early-twentieth century Central Asia through postcards of Tashkent and its surroundings*, for the EISCAS conference in Ghent (September 2021).

The postcards show both general sights and more specific scenes in the city of Tashkent – which was the administrative-military capital of the Tsarist Governorate-General of Turkestan and Central Asia's largest city at the time – as well as in its nearby surroundings. The images show the 'old Oriental' and the 'new European' parts of the city. They look like very separate worlds but were in fact intertwined and complementary. More importantly, they reflect the transformation into different forms of modernity the Central Asian region went through at the time.

These postcards were not merely a gadget or collector's item published at the time in an ideological or political vacuum, but reflected notions of territoriality, national consciousness and the perception of and relationship to the 'Other' in this case, the 'internal Other' which is common and characteristic for all sufficiently large and culturally-sociologically diverse polities and societies. Do these images and postcards show life as it was, or what the makers, publishers and their audiences wanted to see? It varies. Although there are some exceptions, the chosen images somehow feel less like Orientalist and folkloristic setups than general views of the everyday surroundings in these areas.

They document societies and lifestyles the imagery of which often leaves the impression that these changed little over the decades if not centuries, but which were in fact already being heavily

affected by modernity. Rather than showing the end of an era, they show the impact of a number of developments that had taken place in this part of the Central Asian region in the late 19th and early 20th century. As such, they are a useful tool and illustration for the teaching of modern Central Asian history, and trigger curiosity about the historical reality behind the images.

This exhibition is not meant as a moral or political judgement about the Tsarist system and about the region's local societies and cultures. The postcards are of course the product of subjective imaginary and of the way their makers and audiences wanted to show and look at the region. Yet they offer a powerful glimpse at worlds, lifestyles and environments which were to be heavily affected if not obliterated following the dramatic historical events – the First World War followed by the Bolshevik coup d'état and the Russian Civil War – that would occur only a few years after they were produced.

This exhibition was compiled by Bruno De Cordier, Ghent University, and Svetlana Gorshenina, CNRS-Eur'Orbem and Alerte Héritage international observatory, with the technical support from Anatolii Otlivanchik of Tashkent Retrospective, Moscow. The original postcards were produced and published between 1900 and 1916 by the Suvorin (Moscow), Bek-Nazarov (Tashkent), Kirshner (Tashkent), Khlubna (Tashkent) and Schneider (Odessa) publishing companies. The large majority (24) of the images come from the private postcard collections the late Sergey Priakhin (Kapchagai) and of Nizami Ibragimov (Moscow). The remaining are from the personal collections of François Guichard (3; Paris), Svetlana Gorshenina (3; Paris/Lausanne) and Yulia Pelipai (1; Moscow).

A Confusion of Tongues? On Non-Latin Scripts and Transliteration

THIS HANDBOOK uses a wide variety of literature sources, many of them not written in English or even in the more common European languages, and many do not use the Latin script. The book often mentions many names and terms from other languages than English – not in the least, in Russian – which are, on top of that, also not spelled using the Latin alphabet.

This multilingualism is part of the character of this book. The editors feel that the languages used in our region of interest have to be shown to the advantage of readers, some who read them or might happen to study them, or just take an interest. This, of course, brought with it its fair share of challenges in terms of transliteration and finding the right place for non-Latin scripts. So how did we proceed?

In general, the most common names in Russian (and other languages) were spelled according to the English form most often encountered in the literature and in the media: e.g. Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Kazakhs, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, etc. The same goes for rather common terms, such as: politburo, kolkhoz, khanate, emirate, etc.

Likewise, for present-day locations in either language, we used the available standard English transliterations: e.g. Tashkent instead of Toshkent, Uzen and not Özgön, Xinjiang and not Xīnjiāng or Shinjang, Kashgar instead of Kaxgar or Kashi, etc. Where deemed relevant, the actual, non-Anglicized name or any alternative name in use was put in brackets the first time such a name appears in a text: e.g. Kashgar – called Kāshí – 喀什 in modern Chinese. Our goal was to strike a balance regarding such exonyms or alternative names, a trade-off between exhaustiveness and readability to highlight this region's notorious complexity.

In the reference lists and in the bibliographies, the author names and the titles of works in Russian and in other languages which do not use the Latin alphabet have been left in Cyrillic or the respective alphabet in use, since these are, after all, the languages and alphabets these works are written in. To look these up and consult them, readers need to know these languages anyway. This means that Latinization is pointless. For the same reason, no translation of such book or article titles to English is provided in brackets – as

is sometimes, and in our view pointlessly, requested by international journals. Also, a bad translation could actually make it more difficult to track down such sources.

In the main text, cited terms from Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, etc., are all transliterated to Latin, and – where relevant, especially for key concepts – are presented with the original term in Cyrillic, Arabic, Chinese script, etc., which is added between brackets: e.g. *dār al-islām* (دار الإسلام); *sotsgorod* (соггород); ‘China Dream’ 中国梦 - (Zhōngguó mèng).

For these transliterations, we used the following systems:

Terms, names, titles of books and articles, etc. in Russian were transliterated according to the British BGN/PCGN Romanization of Russian system:

Russian

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807920/ROMANIZATION_OF_RUSSIAN.pdf

For the transliteration of terms, names, titles of books and articles, etc. from sources written in Central Asian languages using a modified Cyrillic alphabet (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, pre-1993 Turkmen and pre-2001 Uzbek), we used the respective BGN/BCGN Romanization systems:

Modified Cyrillic

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/romanisation-systems>

For the transliteration of Arabo-Islamic terms, we used the Brill Encyclopaedia of Islam.

Encyclopaedia of Islam 1 / 2 / 3

- <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-1>
- <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>
- <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3>

For the transliteration of terms, names, locations, etc. from sources written in languages using a modified Arabic script (Farsi, Dari, Uyghur, the Turkic languages and Tajik in the Soviet Central Asia

of the 1920s-30s, etc.), we used the BGN/BCGN and LOC Romanization Systems for these idioms:

Modified Arabic

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320079/Arabic_Romanization.pdf

Persian

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/858002/ROMANIZATION_OF_PERSIAN.pdf)

Uyghur

- <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/uyghur.pdf>

Finally, for transliterations from Chinese, we used the pinyin Romanization system for Mandarin:

Chinese

- <http://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/i10279.pdf>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ADB – Asian Development Bank
 AfDB – African Development Bank
 AIIB – Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (China)
 ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations
 ASSR – Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (less-rankings, either a subunit of or preceding the formation of a constituent SSR)
 bcm – billion cubic metres
 BOMCA – Border Management Programme in Central Asia (EU project)
 BRI – Belt and Road Initiative – see also: Map 16.1.
 CACO – Central Asian Cooperation Organization – see also: Table 17.1.
 CADAP – Central Asia Drug Action Programme (EU project)
 CAEU – Central Asian Economic Union – see also: Table 17.1.
 CANWFZ – The Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone – see also: Table 17.1.
 CAREC – Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program
 CASA-1000 – Central Asia-South Asia Power Project
 CAU – Central Asian Union – see also: Table 17.1.
 CBO – Community-based organization (plural: CBOs)
 CCTSS – Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States
 CCWAEAC – China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor – see also: Map 16.1.
 CDB – China Development Bank
 Centrasbat – Central Asian Battalion (for joint NATO exercises)
 CIC – China Investment Corporation
 CICA – Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
 CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States
 CMEC – China-Myanmar Economic Corridor – see also: Map 16.1.
 CNPC – China National Petroleum Company
 COP – Conference of Parties (a body of the UNFCCC)
 CPC – Caspian Pipeline Consortium (Russian-Kazakh oil transportation project)
 CPEC – China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – see also: Map 16.1.
 CSO – Civil Society Organization
 CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization (Tashkent Treaty)
 DCK – Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK in Russian)
 EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union – see also: Box 17.3.
 EAPC – Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
 EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
 ECO – Economic Cooperation Organization (under UN charter, founded by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan)
 EMS – Eurasian Migration System
 EurAsEC – Eurasian Economic Community – see also: Table 17.1.
 FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization
 FBO – Faith-based organization (plural: FBOs)
 FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
 FMS – Federal Migration Service (Russia)
 FP – foreign policy
 FPA – Foreign Policies Analysis
 FPE – Foreign Policy Executive (Plural: FPEs)
 FSU – Former Soviet Union
 FTA – Free Trade Agreement
 GBV – Gender-based violence
 GDPR – the EU's General Data Protection Regulation
 Gosplan – State Planning Committee (USSR)
 HOTS – Higher order thinking skills
 HSR – High-Speed Railway
 IBRD – International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
 ICBC – Industrial and Commercial Bank of China
 ICO – Islamic Cooperation Organization – synonym for OIC
 ICT – Information and Communications Technology
 IDB – Islamic Development Bank
 IDP – Internally Displaced Person (plural: IDPs)
 IFAS – International Fund to save the Aral Sea
 IJU – Islamic Jihad Union
 IMF – International Monetary Fund
 IMU – Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
 IO – international organization (plural: IOs)
 IR – International Relations (as an academic discipline)

- IRP or IRPT – Islamic Renaissance Party (of Tajikistan)
- ISAF – International Security Assistance Force (NATO operation)
- ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also known as IS, ISIL or by its Arabic acronym ‘Daesh’
- ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (synonym for ISIL)
- JV – Joint Venture(s)
- K2 – Karshi-Khanabad (US military airbase in Uzbekistan)
- LDPR – Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
- LEICA – Law Enforcement in Central Asia (EU project)
- LLDC Landlocked Developing Country (Plural: LLDCs)
- LO – Learning Outcomes, short form of ‘Intended Learning Outcomes’ within the context of student-centred education or ‘Outcomes-Based Teaching and Learning’ (OBTL).
- MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- MMTs – Multifunction Migration Centres (in Russia)
- MSR – 21st Century Maritime Silk Road – see also: Map 16.1.
- NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NDPT – People’s Democratic Party (Tajikistan)
- NELBEC – New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor – see also: Map 16.1.
- NIS – newly independent states
- OBOR – ‘One Belt One Road’ development strategy – see also: BRI
- OBTL – Outcomes-Based Teaching and Learning
- OECD – Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
- OIC – Organization of Islamic Cooperation – synonym for: ICO
- OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- PCA – Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (with the EU)
- PfP – Partnership for Peace (a NATO program)
- POW – prisoner of war
- PRC – People’s Republic of China
- RATS – Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (created by the SCO)
- RCD – Regional Cooperation for Development (predecessor of ECO)
- RE – renewable energy
- REE – Rare earth element (plural: REEs)
- ROC – Russian Orthodox Church
- RoL – Rule of Law
- RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
- SADUM – Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims (USSR)
- SAFE – State Administration of Foreign Exchange (China)
- SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization – see also: Box 17.2.
- SDG – Sustainable Development Goal (plural: SDGs)
- SREB – Silk Road Economic Belt
- SRF – Silk Road Fund
- SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic (Plural: SSRs)
- TAPI – Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline
- TDP – Democratic Party of Turkmenistan
- TEU – twenty-foot equivalent unit (standard for transport containers)
- TFEC – total final energy consumption
- TIC – territorial-industrial complex (plural: TICs)
- TİKA – Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
- TRACECA – Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
- TURKSOY – International Association of Turkish Culture
- UN DESA – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
- UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme
- UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNFCCC – United Nations Climate Change Framework Convention
- UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund, (formerly: the United Nations Fund for Population Activities)
- USAID – United States Agency for International Development
- USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- UTO – United Tajik Opposition
- VPN – Virtual Private Network
- ZAGS – Civil Status Registration Office (*zapis aktov grazhdanskogo sostoyaniya*) (USSR)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

3-D jobs – dirty, dangerous and degrading jobs.

Abbasid caliphate – third caliphate and second great dynasty to succeed (750-1258) the original Islamic empire of the Prophet.

adat (*Arab.*) – codified customary law.

ahl al-dhimma (*Arab.*) – a state of legal protection for non-Muslims, guaranteeing property rights and ascribing their duties and rights in historical times.

akim – from *Arab.* ‘hakim,’ regional administrator in local government in Central Asia.

aksakal (*Turkic*) – (male) elder – also transliterated *aqsaqal* or *acsacal*, *lit.* “white-beard” – an informal position in local social (and political) hierarchies.

al-Khurāsān (*Arab.*) – “Eastern Lands” referring to Central Asia, from the perspective of the Umayyads, later became a province under the Abbasids with Merv and Nishapur as main political-military centres.

al-Khwārizm (*Arab.*) – Central Asian province south of the Aral Sea in the Abbasid caliphate, with Kat as its capital.

al-Nusra Front – ‘Jabhat al-Nusra’ or “front of supporters” – a Salafist, jihadist organization and rebel group that took up arms against the Syrian regime of Bashir al-Assad during the Syrian Civil War (2011-) with the aim to create their own Islamic State in Syria.

Al-Qaeda – also spelled ‘al-Qaida’ and ‘al-Qa’ida’ – translated as “the Base” – is a widespread Salafist-Takfiri jihadist terrorist organization founded by Osama Bin Laden in the late 1980s.

Alty Shahr – (also spelled *Altishahr*) translated as “six cities” in the Uyghur language. The region covers the Tarim Basin, and was later called Kashgaria. It is now on the territory of southern Xinjiang.

‘āmil (*Arab.*) – an office in historic Islamic polities, responsible for fiscal-financial affairs and tax collection.

Amtscharisma – ‘charisma of office’ or ‘institutional-charismatic rulership’ – in Weber-derived classifications – *see also* ‘Herrschaft.’

apparatchiks – *lit.* “the apparatus people” – derived from Soviet slang, the term designates career bureaucrats and communist party cadres who were perfectly inter-exchangeable between functions, and often abide by typical personality types, lifestyles and career tracks.

Asar – ‘All Together,’ political party in Kazakhstan, created by Dariga Nazarbayeva, later merged with ‘Nur Otan.’

ashar (*Arab.*) – (also spelled *hashar*) – collective work on voluntary basis, usually for one’s community coordinated by a traditional, informal social structure like mahalla or council of elders.

Ashkenazi Jews – often also called ‘European Jews,’ these were Jews from Central and Eastern Europe, who traditionally often spoke Yiddish as their internal ‘lingua franca’ and mostly settled in Central Asia in the 20th century. Most now live in Israel, the US, and in Western Europe.

ashrāf (*Arab.*) – aristocratic lineages tracing their descent to early Arab conquerors, or even directly to the Prophet or members of his entourage

aul (*Turkic*) – nomadic (fortified) village in the Central Asian Steppe. From Turkic/Kazakh ‘auyl’ – meaning ‘kin-village.’ Auls are subunits of a clan.

avlod (*Arab.*) – Tajik (and Uzbek) clan networks.

awliy (*Arab.*) – “Friends of God” – Islamic saints

Bey (*Turkic* – *maybe from old Persian*) – head of a clan; Kyrgyz: ‘Biy,’ Uzbek, Kazakh: ‘Bek,’ Turkmen: ‘Beg,’ Tajik: ‘Be’

Birlik – (Unity) – Declaredly nationalist-democratic political party in Uzbekistan, led by Abdurahim Polat. Banned in 1994.

Bukharan Jews – Ancient Oriental Jewish group of Iranian origin that was historically present in what is now Uzbekistan and traditionally spoke a Judeo-Tajik dialect. Most now live in Israel and the US.

Caesaropapism – a system of rule that merges religious and political power, with religious institutions answering to the political powerholders. It has many variations and State-Church relations altered over time, oscillating between an interdependency of ‘symphony’ between the two, to a dependency where rulers acted as the supreme judge in religious affairs.

caliph – from *khalifah* (Arab.) meaning “successor” – Islamic title, ruler of a ‘caliphate’

caliphate – an Islamic state (in line with theocratic doctrine), ruled by a temporal ruler, a caliph, who wields political and spiritual authority, but does not have prophetic power and thus cannot exercise power in matters of religious doctrine.

Centrasbat – The ‘Central Asian Battalion’ put together for conducting multinational military (peacekeeping/humanitarian) exercises in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (other participating nations include Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, United Kingdom, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Mongolia) aimed at training exercises on regional security and strengthening military-to-military relationships.

chachvan see ‘parandji’

chaikhana – “teahouse,” a place for public debate on a range of political, social and community topics.

Charisma – the exceptional sanctity or heroic qualities or exemplary character of a person, and of the orders that this person proclaims or creates (cf. Max Weber) – see also ‘Herrschaft.’

Chishtis – also ‘Chishtiyya,’ Sunni Sufi order, which was founded near Herat in the 10th century,

but built an especially large following in India and (present-day) Pakistan and Bangladesh.

dahaqin (Arab.) – landowner class in Islamic Central Asian and Iranian society.

dār al-‘ahd (Arab.) – “realm of truce” (or covenant), where non-Muslims are recognized by an Islamic authority after a treaty.

dār al-ḥarb (Arab.) – “realm of war,” where non-Islamic laws are enforced, or territory that is not or no longer adjacent to any Muslim territory

dār al-islām (Arab.) – “realm of Islam,” where Muslims are in the majority or politically sovereign

dār al-kufr (Arab.) – “realm of unbelief,” see ‘dār al-ḥarb.’

Dasht-e Qibchaq – (or ‘Dasht-i-Kipchak’) translated as the ‘Plains of the Kipchak’ from Persian, was later referred to as ‘the Kazakh Steppe’ from the 15th century onwards. It refers to the enormous grassland steppes and deserts extending from the lower reaches of the Syr Darya and Lake Balkhash to the mouth of the Danube.

dawāwīn (Arab.) – (single: diwān, sometimes spelled divan or dewan) – derived from ‘log-book’ or ‘register,’ this came to mean the administrative departments in charge of specific fields like the judiciary, taxation, irrigation, etc. in Islamic polities.

dekhanstvo – Russian term based on the Persian term for peasant. Refers to the Central Asian peasant class and individual or family-based peasant households.

Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (TDP) (in Turkmen: ‘Türkmenistanyň Demokratik Partıýasy’) – ruling party in Turkmenistan since 1991.

dinar – Islamic medieval gold currency; still the name of the national currency in a number of Arab countries and in Serbia.

djizya (Arab.) – yearly tax paid by a non-Muslim (Dhimmi) to uphold their privileges and protected status in Islam-dominated polities.

Dzhungaria – lit. “lands of the left hand” in Mongolian, Dzhungaria is a sub-region of north-western China, and one of the Turko-Mongol

political homelands, coinciding with contemporary northern Xinjiang. (Other spellings include Dzungaria, Djungaria, Jungaria, Zhungaria and Zungaria)

Dzhungars – also known as ‘Oirat,’ a Mongol tribal confederation inhabiting and maintaining a khanate in what is now northern Xinjiang between 1635 and 1755. This khanate, which also vassalized the city-states of what is now southern Xinjiang, was one of the last expansive Mongol polities. The Dzhungars, who mostly professed Tibetan Lamaism, were in a near-constant state of war with the neighbouring Kazakhs, until they were defeated and almost exterminated by the Chinese empire.

East Turkestan *see* Dzhungaria.

emir – (from *amīr* – *Arab.*) provincial governor in Islamic polities, responsible for political-military matters (and also fiscal-financial affairs before the creation of the separate office of ‘*āmīl*). Emirs enjoyed far reaching autonomy and often only nominally pledged allegiance to caliphs. Dynasties of emirs cannot trace back their lineage to royalty (like khans), nor to lineal descent from the Prophet (like caliphs).

emirate – the office of, and polity led by, an emir.

Erbsharisma – ‘hereditary charisma’ – a form of traditional rulership in the writings of Max Weber – *see also* ‘Herrschaft.’

Eurasianism (in Kazakhstan) – a geostrategy developed under N. Nazarbayev, portraying Kazakhstan as a “Eurasian land bridge” with the aim to underline Kazakh multi-vector foreign policy.

Eurasianism (in Russia) – was a political (geo-) ideology and movement created in the 1920s among Russian émigrés that had fled the Russian revolutions. Adherents presented Russia as a unique (leading) civilization spanning two continents, its culture being a ‘mix’ born of the fusion of Slavic and Turko-Muslim peoples, and as an alternative to Western modernity, building on and reinterpreting many elements from Orientalist and Westerners-Slavophile debates.

fiqh (*Arab.*) – Islamic jurisprudence.

Genossen – ‘traditional associates’ or ‘staff’ of a ruler who derive their legitimacy from tradition (cf. Max Weber) – *see also* ‘Herrschaft.’

ghāzī – volunteer Islamic warrior engaged in a holy war for the protection and propagation of the faith.

Glasnost – Closely associated with and popularized by the personality of Mikhail Gorbachev, refers to the process of ‘new openness’ and ‘transparency’ in governance and international relations in the Soviet Union between 1986 and 1991. Often mentioned in the same breath as ‘perestroika’ (‘reconstruction’), which referred to a series of 1980s reforms aimed at making the Soviet command economy more effective.

Gorno-Badakhshan – *lit.* ‘Highland Badakhshan.’ Autonomous region of Tajikistan, added to what was then the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in early 1925. Encompasses the western Pamirs and the Murgab plateau.

Gosplan – ‘Gosudarstvennyy Planovyy Komitet’ (*Rus.*), meaning ‘State Planning Committee’ – the USSR main central planning and implementation committee responsible for steering the Soviet state-led economy at the behest of the Communist Party and its republics’ leadership.

Hajj (*Arab.*) – Pilgrimage to Mecca – one of Islam’s five pillars.

Hanabali – the smallest and most traditional of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Does not allow jurist discretion nor customary interpretation by a community.

Hanafi – the largest Sunni school of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*); widespread in Central Asia, it is considered the most liberal of all four schools allowing jurist discretion.

hashar *see* ‘ashar.’

Herrschaft – ‘Rulership’ (also translated as ‘Authority’ or ‘Domination’) – a theory by Max Weber – *see also* Box 11.1.

hijab – head covering worn by Muslim women.

Hizb ut-Tahrir – an international, pan-Islamist political party founded in 1952 in what was

then still Jordan-occupied Jerusalem, pursuing the goals to restore the Caliphate and unite the Muslim community under proper Islamic governance.

Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston see 'Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.'

Hujum – (also spelled 'hudjum') – Soviet policy of defeudalization and labour mobilization by eradicating gender inequality, forbidding (Islamic) female veiling and seclusion. The term is derived from the Arabo-Turkic term for 'assault,' and originates from the 1920s communist 'women's liberation' campaign aimed at Muslim Central Asian women. Although popularly associated with veil burning ceremonies, its more general purpose was to radically extirpate traditional ethnic-Islamic customs and institutions, instil socialist class consciousness among Muslim women, and bring women into the labour force. Eventually proved counter-productive. Similar campaigns took place in the Caucasus and among the Tatars.

Iftar – "breaking of the fast" – the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset.

Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan – in *Tajik*: 'Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston' – Sunni Islamist party founded by Said Abdullo Nuri in 1991 (though the group who founded the party has a history dating back to 1973) as the Tajik branch of the pan-Soviet Islamic Renaissance Party. Was the main component of the 'United Tajik Opposition' during the Tajik Civil War of 1992-97. After the 1997 peace agreement, it was represented in parliament and government and was active with a social wing and quite large membership base, until it was banned in 2015. Until then, it was post-1991 Central Asia's only and largest legal Islamist party.

Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan – (*Uzbek*: O'zbekiston islomiy harakati) – a militant organization created in 1998 aimed at installing an Islamist regime in Uzbekistan, later radicalizing and pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and also ISIS. In former Soviet Central Asia their actions were related mostly with violent kidnappings (for ransom), in Afghan-

istan they conducted terrorist activities and fought alongside the Taliban. Was initially led by Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldash.

Ismaili Shia – one of the three largest Shia branches existing today. It differs from Twelver Shia by bestowing the rightful imamate succession to a different son (the eldest, Ismail) instead of the third son (Musa al-Kadhim) after the death of their father, Imam Jafar ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq, of the line of Ali. The Ismailis also differ in their Quranic interpretation, drawing upon both exoteric and esoteric sources of knowledge.

Jacobites – pre-Islamic Christian religion, see Box 4.1.

Jadidism – Reformist political movement founded in Bakhchysarai on the Crimea in 1883 by Ismailbey Gaspirali, a Tatar publicist and publisher who was inspired by reformist movements in the Ottoman empire. Often self-designated as *Taraqqiparvarlar* ('the progressives'). Its aim was to uplift and emancipate the Turkic Muslims of the Russian empire through, first, the propagation of a common Turkic lingua franca (Chagatai Turkish) and, second, an educational network based on the *üsül ul-jad* ('new teaching method' in Arabo-Turkic, whence the name) that would combine modern subjects and sciences with proper understanding of Islam. It also propagated proper translations of the Quran into the Turkic languages. The movement eventually spread into Central Asia through Tatars from Kazan. The number of schools in Central Asia that were somehow influenced by Jadidism by the year 1911 is estimated at 100. A number of Jadids and alumni of Jadid schools later played active roles in Pan-Turkic nationalist movements in Russia, Central Asia and Xinjiang, and even in the early-Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia. See also Box 7.2.

jamoat (*Turkic*) – council of elders or village council.

Jungaria see Dzhungaria.

kalyam – bride price, paid to the fiancée's parents as a "refund" for bringing up their daughter.

Kamolot – an Uzbek public youth association.

kanat – the Kyrgyz, like other Turko-Mongol societies, encompassed a supra-tribal grouping that in various times was subdivided into two or three wings: ‘Ong kanat’ (Right wing), ‘Sol kanat’ (Left wing), and sometimes ‘Ichkilik’ (Internal or Middle wing).

Kara Kum – *lit.* ‘black sand,’ desert in Turkmenistan.

Karakalpak – Central Asian Turkic ethnic group of the Kipchak-Nogai branch, related to the Kazakhs. Traditionally live in the Aral Sea basin, currently a recognized minority in Uzbekistan, with their own Autonomous Republic in northwestern Uzbekistan (capital Nukus) – see also Map 8.3 and 8.4.

Kara-Kirgiz – *lit.* ‘Black Kyrgyz,’ name used in the Tsarist and early-Soviet era (1880s-1920s) to designate the forebears of the Kyrgyz of the Tien Shan and Alay highlands in what is now Kyrgyzstan, in order to distinguish them from the ‘Kirgiz of the steppe,’ which were the forebears of the Kazakhs, see ‘Kirgiz’

kazi – (Also ‘Qadi’) – Islamic magistrate or judge of a sharia court.

kelin (*Turkic*) – (young) bride, daughter-in-law, the social status of a newlywed married woman in regard to her husband’s family, with whom she moves in until she has (older) children of her own, according to custom – see Box 13.4.

Khalwa (*Arab.*) – “solitude” – Islamic (Sufi) practice of retreat or withdrawal from the world.

khan (*Turkic*) – title of lord (or prince) attributed to chiefs of nomadic confederations in Eurasia since the 13th century, also used, thereafter, in other languages.

Khorasan – province in Iran, translated as the ‘eastern province’ in Persian, located in the northeast of the country, and historically part of the Central Asian culture complex, see also ‘al-Khurāsān’ and ‘Transoxiana’

Kirgiz – Name used in the Tsarist and early-Soviet eras for the various groups of the Kazakh steppe, which now form the Kazakhs. Sometimes also called ‘Kirgiz-Kaysak.’ Not to be

confused with ‘Kyrgyz,’ which is the common name for the titular nation of modern Kyrgyzstan.

kolkhoz (*Rus.*) – collective farm and organizational unit during Soviet times; contraction of ‘kollektivnoye khozaystvo’ (*Rus.*).

kompromat – Russian abbreviation for ‘compromising material’ used for the blackmail or character assassination of politicians or public figures.

Komsomol (*Rus.*) – A communist youth movement – abbreviation for the ‘Kommunisticheskii soyuz molodyëzhi’ (*Rus.*) – itself an alias for the ‘Vsesoyuzny Leninskii kommunisticheskii soyuz molodyëzhi’ (*Rus.*) – for youths aged 14 to 28.

Korenizatsiya – *lit.* “rooting in” – a process of integration (1930s to 1950s) of members of the titular Turkic and Tajik majorities into the republican Communist party sections and into the administrative structures and governments (especially in symbolic functions, and in the local-level echelons), as well as in some sections of the security apparatus of the respective Soviet republics. The aim was to create a sustainable support base for socialism and communism among the population, and enhance its Sovietization. Was also applied in the Caucasus, Ukraine and Belarus. This Soviet policy of indigenization was limited under Stalin and intensified under Brezhnev.

Kubraviyya – Central Asian Sufi order, see Box 7.1.

Kurban bayrami – Islamic feast of sacrifice.

Kut (*Turkic*) – see ‘Mandate of heaven.’

kutlugh (*Turkic*) – see ‘Mandate of heaven.’

kyz ala kachuu (*Kyrgyz*) – translates as: “take the girl and run” – bride kidnapping, mostly associated with contemporary Kyrgyzstan – see Box 12.2.

Kyzyl Kum – *lit.* ‘red sand,’ desert located between the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers, currently on the territory of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Mā warā' al-Nahr (*Arab.*) – province in the Abbasid caliphate with Samarkand as its capital.

Mahalla (*Persian*) – territorial unit: urban district or dense rural settlement in southern, sedentary Central Asia. Simultaneously, the term refers to the informal social institution for local governance, at the level of city districts or villages – see also Box 13.2.

Maliki – Sunni school of Islamic jurisprudence ('fiqh'), more liberal than *Hanabali* or *Shafi'i* in that it allows interpretation of Islamic law based on the customs of the Medina (city) tradition.

Manat – Turkmen currency.

Mandate of heaven – ('kut' in *Turkic*, 'tiānmíng' in *Chinese*) – the moral right to rule by khans, emperors or other monarchs, which are considered 'Fortunate' or 'Heaven-favoured' (*Turkic*: 'kutlugh') by the skygod (Tengri) or cosmic order.

Manicheism – pre-Islamic religion, see Box 4.1.

mawālī (*Arab.*) – non-Arab (primarily, though not exclusively, Iranian) converts to Islam.

Melkites – pre-Islamic Christian religion, see Box 4.1.

Mestnye (*Rus.*) – autochthonous Muslim Central Asian populations.

Mikrorayon – Soviet-Russian, *lit.* 'micro-district,' a basic (sub)urban-organizational unit that became characteristic for Soviet cities. Originally conceived to each provide housing, utilities and social services for 5,000 inhabitants. Usually modern (i.e. 1960s-80s-built) neighbourhoods of socialist apartment blocks along streets laid-out in checkerboard pattern – see also Box. 22.1.

Muftiate – legal and administrative territorial unit (in parallel fashion to Christian dioceses) with the purpose of regulating Islam, led by an Islamic jurist (*mufti*), who oversees the local boards, clerics, mosques, and trusteeships (*waqf*). Such directorates emerged in South-Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Naqshbandiyya – Central Asian Sufi order, see Box 7.1.

Navruz – Iranian New Year, celebrated around 21 March.

Near Abroad (*blizhneye zarubesh'e* – *Rus.*) a geopolitical term for former Soviet states neighbouring Russia, claimed as a natural zone of influence by Russian policy-makers.

Neo-Eurasianism (in Russia) – A revival of Russian 'Eurasianism' in geopolitical terms, functions as an anti-Western geo-ideology in Russian foreign policy under Putin, mostly developed by Alexander Dugin and based on his writings.

Neo-Ottomanism / Osmanism – a Turkish, nationalist, imperialist geo-ideology that sees Turkey as a model of transformation in its region, reappraising Ottoman values (and its 'natural right' to rule).

Nestorianism – pre-Islamic Christian religion, see Box 4.1.

Nur Otan – 'Light of the Fatherland' – People's Democratic Party (ruling party in Kazakhstan since 2006).

O'zlidep – **Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party** (*in Uzbek*: 'O'zbekiston Liberal Demokratik Partiyasi') – ruling party in Uzbekistan.

oblast' (*Rus.*) – subnational Russian administrative unit at the level of region, province or county.

Old believers – Followers of the liturgical and ritual practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church as practised before the reforms of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow in the 17th century. They were branded heretics at the synod of 1666-1667, leading to a schism in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Orgnabor (*Rus.*) – state-organized labour recruitment.

Otan – 'Fatherland' – predecessor of 'Nur Otan' (ruling party in Kazakhstan from 1999 to 2006)

parandji (*Arab.*) – (also 'paranja,' sometimes spelled 'parandja') – Central Asian robe or integral veil for women and girls, similar to the Afghan burka or the Arab abaya. It covers the

whole body while the face is hidden behind a (heavy, black) veil, traditionally made from horsehair, called a *chachvan*.

patent (*Rus.*) – a work permit in the Russian Federation.

Perestroika (*Rus.*) – economic reformist policy introduced by M. Gorbachev in 1985, aimed at restructuring the command-economy to counter the economic stagnation in the late Brezhnev years.

Pioneers – A Communist youth organization, alias for the All-Union Pioneer Organization of V. I. Lenin ('Vsesoyuznaya pionerskaya organizatsiya imeni V. I. Lenina' – *Rus.*) for youths aged 9 to 15.

polity – generic term for any self-organized political entity (size and organization may range from independent duchy to vassal state to empire).

Pomest'e system (*Rus.*) – an early (15th century) Muscovite institution of land tenure, where parcels of land – inhabited by serfs or worked by semi-free indentured peasants (*smerdy*) – were 'granted' by princes (later tsars) to holders (not owners) in exchange for their temporary (but in practice often life-long) service. Each serviceman (*pomeshchik*) had military or sometimes administrative obligations to the tsars, and the allotted lands were to be used for maintaining their family and the serfs (and not for gathering taxes for the crown or sub-letting (subinfeudation) like in Western feudal systems). The 'pomest'e system (in contrast to the 'votchina' counterpart) was not hereditary, and probably an autonomous Russian invention. Since only tsars could exempt noblemen from their service, the system did become hereditary over time, blending *votchina* and *pomest'e* systems by the early 17th century.

posrednik (*Rus.*) – an intermediary who can expedite the bureaucratic process of obtaining a permit (usually for a fee or bribe).

praetorians – originally the praetorian guard (*cohors praetoria*) or household guards of Roman emperors, later used more universally

for elite bodyguards or protective military units of rulers in other world regions.

Prishlye (*Rus.*) – litt. 'the arrivals'. Non-native Central Asian populations (non-Muslim and Muslim).

propiska (*Rus.*) – a residence permit during Soviet times.

Przhevalski horse – Latin name: *Equus ferus przewalskii*. Also called Mongolian or Dzhungarian horse. One of the main horse races in Central Asia (one of the others is the Arabo-Turkmen horse), originally native to the Central Asian-Mongolian steppe region. Has a somewhat stockily-built appearance. Named after the Russian-Polish explorer and geographer *Nikolay Przhevalsky* (1839-1888), who described it during his 1878 expedition to Central Asia.

Qadim – Hanafi Sunni school of Islam that was one of the earliest to spread in China and is traditionally especially present among the Muslim Hui population there.

Qadriyya – Sufi order founded in Baghdad in the 12th century, see Box 7.1.

qishloq (*Turkic*) – (also spelled 'kishlak') – a fortified or winter 'kin-village' for semi-nomadic tribes in southern Central Asia, (translates as 'winter pasture' from Uzbek and other Turkic languages).

Quriltai (*Turkic*) – a political/military council, mostly in the form of a cyclical conclave (assembly) in Turko-Mongol political culture, and one of the few supra-tribal institutions in Central Asian Steppe polities. While they were not used to produce laws, such assemblies pursued unanimity to bestow legitimacy to rulers and their decisions.

Rastokhez – (Revival) – declaredly secular-nationalist and liberal-democratic political party in Tajikistan, founded in 1989 and led by Tahir Abdujabbor. It joined the 'United Tajik Opposition' during the civil war and ceased to exist in 1997.

rayon (*Rus.*) – Russo-Soviet administrative unit at the level of a district (one level lower than *oblast*’).

Rentierism – a concept from political economy theory that seeks to explain state-society relations, performance, sustainability and inclusiveness in states that generate a large proportion of their income from rents, or externally-derived, unproductively-earned payments, like from the sale or transit of resources like oil, gas or minerals, and in some cases includes income from foreign and military aid or even remittances.

ribāt (*Arab.*) – Islamic system of complex frontier fortifications.

ru (*Turkic*) – Kazakh clan networks.

Saffarid emirate – Iranian independent Sunni dynasty (861-1003) in Khorasan and especially Sistan.

Salafism – Sunni puritanical-reformist movement that came into being in Egypt in the 1880s as a reaction against the corruption and decadence of Islam, as well as European imperialism. Maintain that Muslims ought to rely solely on the Quran, the Sunnah (the traditions and personal examples attributed to the Prophet) and the consensus of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, or first three generations of Muslims, and especially the companions of the Prophet. Now manifests itself, depending on location and movement, in pietist, non-violent politically activist, missionary, and armed-jihadist forms.

Samanid emirate – Iranian/Persian independent Sunni dynasty (819-999) in eastern Iran and Transoxania (*Mā warā’ al-Nahr*).

Sart – originally, and until the early 20th century, a name for the settled inhabitants and especially town-dwellers of Central Asia, who primarily identified with their town or locality. During the creation of the Soviet national republics in the 1920s and 1930s, the Sart were absorbed into the Uzbek and Tajik nationality categories. Nowadays, ‘Sart’ is a derogatory term for Uzbeks (and sometimes Tajiks and Uyghurs).

Seleucid empire – a successor state (311-63 BC) to the empire of Alexander the Great which encompassed portions of Central Asia

Shafi’i – traditional school of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), rejects customary interpretation by communities, but does allow guidance by aid of the *ijma* (consensus of first generation(s) of legal scholars) and analogical reasoning.

Shattāris – or Shattāriyya, Sufi order, which was founded in Iran in the 15th century but especially developed in India.

siloviki (*Rus.*) – political agents affiliated with (Russian) security services, ‘securocrats’

Som – sometimes ‘sum,’ Uzbek and Kyrgyz currency.

Somoni – Tajik currency.

sootchestvenniki (*Rus.*) “compatriots” – former Soviet citizens identifying with Russian language and culture, seeking residence permits and legal status in the Russian Federation after the collapse of the USSR.

Sotsgorod – Soviet-Russian abbreviation for ‘socialist city.’ Originally Soviet new towns built in a uniform format that came into being close to large factories, mines and dams during the 1930s industrialization move. More than mere employee housing, they were considered incubators for the Soviet socialist societal project – see also Box. 22.1.

sovkhoz (*Rus.*) – a state-owned and -led farm and organizational unit during Soviet times; contraction of ‘sovetskoye khozyaistvo’ (*Rus.*).

spravka (*Rus.*) – in Soviet bureaucracy, a common name for a document which confirms or attest to something (civil status, official address, etc.).

Table of Ranks – (*in Russian*: ‘Tabel’ o rangakh’) – a new bureaucratic hierarchy for the service nobility, introduced by Peter the Great. It abolished the old nobility hereditary property rights under the ‘Pomest’e system’

Tablighi Jamaat – A non-political global Islamic proselytizing movement, originating from the

Indian subcontinent, urging Muslims to return to practicing their faith as during the time of the Prophet.

Tahirid emirate – often considered the first Iranian independent Sunni dynasty (821–873) in Khorasan, only nominally dependent on the Abbasid caliphate.

Taklamakan – desert in southwest Xinjiang in the Tarim basin.

Taliban – translated as “students” (from *Pashto*: *ṭālebān*), and created from the anti-Soviet resistance during Afghan-Soviet War (1979–1989), this ultraconservative, militant, political and religious faction emerged around 1994 in the south-eastern Kandahar province of Afghanistan, initially drafting followers among students educated in the madrassas in Pakistani refugee camps. After dominating local warlords and gaining increasing support from Pashtun and conservative elites in other Afghan provinces and abroad, the movement was able to conquer the capital, Kabul, in 1996 and ruled the (largely unrecognized) ‘Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan’ in totalitarian fashion until their ousting after the 2002 US invasion.

Taranchi – Originally a name for Turkic peasants in what is now Xinjiang. Later, and until the early 20th century, it came into use to designate the Uyghurs from Ili river basin with their distinct identity from the Uyghurs of the southern Tarim basin. By the 1940s, they were absorbed into the modern Uyghur nationality.

Teip – ‘Taypa’ in Nakh languages, transliterated as ‘Tayp’ or ‘Teip’ from Russian, is a clan-identity based on common ancestry and geographic location among the Chechen and Ingush in the North Caucasus. The teip-system adheres to an elaborate set of rules and norms regarding (communal) land tenure, honour, hospitality, exogamy (marrying somebody outside the teip).

Tenge – Kazakh currency.

tiānmíng (*Chinese*) – see ‘Mandate of heaven.’

törü (*Turkic*) – a belief system similar to (*dharma*) or sacred law, regulating the world order at various levels, ranging from political order to

the social and the religious sphere, including postulates on the interaction with land, water, and animals. *Törü* thus governs as a divine, normative and moral code, and everybody, including khans, must adhere to it (or lose the mandate of heaven and their right to rule).

Transdnistria – also spelled Transnistria, a separatist enclave and unrecognized de facto state in Moldova since 1990.

Transoxiana – *lit.* ‘behind the Oxus’ (the Greek name for the Amu Darya river), also called ‘Mā warā’ al-Nahr’ in Arabic. Ancient Western-centric exonym for the region located northeast of (indeed, ‘behind’) the Amu Darya.

tümen – demographic or military numeral unit in Turko-Mongol cultures, counting 10,000 households or soldiers, respectively.

Turkization – pre- and early-modern acculturation into *Turkic* (in the first instance Central Asian *Turkic*, though it can also apply to Anatolian *Turkic*) cultures and societies. Not to be confused with Turkification, which refers to policies and processes of assimilation into the *Turkish* majority culture in modern Turkey.

Twelver Shia – largest of the three largest Shia branches existing today. The Twelvers believe that spiritual guidance over the Muslim community was ordained to pass down the line of Ali up until the 12th imam, Muhammad ibd Al-Hasan, who – as the ‘hidden’ Imam – was concealed by God but is still alive, and will return as the ‘Rightly Guided One’ or ‘Mahdi’ (*Arab.*) inaugurating the process leading up to the Day of Judgement.

ulus (*Turkic*) – ‘tribe’ in the nomadic Turko-Mongol tradition. A unit of the political order, usually divided into three subunits: *ghol* – ‘centre,’ *barungar* – ‘right wing,’ *djungar* – ‘left wing.’

Umayyad caliphate – second caliphate, and first great dynasty to succeed the original Islamic empire of the Prophet (661–750). Also spelled Omayyad.

Ummah (*Arab.*) – Islamic community of believers, also a transnational political entity.

United Russia (*in Russian*: 'Yedinaya Rossiya') – ruling party in Russia.

United Tajik Opposition (UTO) – a loose Tajik political coalition of Islamists, democratic and environmental activists, Tajik nationalists, and advocates for greater self-determination for the Gorno-Badakhshan region. Its largest and best-organised component was the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. They officially joined forces in 1993 after the first and most violent phase of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997), and disbanded after the 1997 peace agreement. Its members later participated in coalition governments, but then the different parts of the UTO got increasingly marginalized.

uruu (*Turkic*) – Kyrgyz clan networks, *uruk* (*urug* or *urugh*) are used to denote sub-divisions. Urugh is also used in Uzbekistan.

waqf (*Arab.*) – Islamic inalienable charitable (property) endowment, often managed as a trust.

wuzarā' (*Arab.*) – viziers or high-ranking political advisors in Islamic polities.

Yasaviyya – Central Asian Sufi order, *see* Box 7.1.

yayla – summer pasture in Turkic.

Zhenotdel (*Rus.*) – Russian abbreviation for "women's section." Founded in 1919. Section of the Bolshevik and then Soviet communist party devoted to women's affairs. Its task was to instil revolutionary class consciousness among women through literacy campaigns, political agitation and education about the new socialist marriage and family laws. Shut down in 1930 when the Soviet legal-institutional reform process was considered completed – *see also* Box 13.1.

zhensovet (*Rus.*) – women council, a special-purpose committee to defend and promote women's rights and equality within an institution or organization, originally to promote Soviet values and ideology – *see also* Box 13.1.

Zhungaria *see* Dzhungaria.

Zhuz – equivalent of 'horde,' the largest territorial tribal division of the Kazakhs on the Eurasian Steppe. The term 'horde' itself is derived from the Slavic 'orda' and originates from the Turko-Mongol 'ordu,' meaning 'royal seat,' 'court,' or 'military camp.'

Zikr (*Arab.*) – Sufi practice of silent devotion, meditation and trance.

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The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Map No. 3771 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
January 2020

<https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/kazakhst.pdf>

Source: Kazakhstan, Map No. 3771 Rev. 7, January 2020, UNITED NATIONS (reproduced with permission)

Map B – Kyrgyzstan

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Map No. 3770 Rev. 8 UNITED NATIONS
June 2011

<https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/kyrgysta.pdf>

Note that this map does not show Batken Province separately, but includes it in Osh province (*Oshkaya Oblast'*).

Source: Kyrgyzstan, Map No. 3770 Rev. 8, June 2011, UNITED NATIONS (reproduced with permission)

Map D – Turkmenistan

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section
Map No. 3772 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Map E – Uzbekistan

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

Map No. 3777 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

<https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/uzbekist.pdf>

Source: Uzbekistan, Map No. 3777 Rev. 6, January 2004, UNITED NATIONS (reproduced with permission)

Map F – Afghanistan

Department of Field Support
Cartographic SectionMap No. 3958 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
June 2011

<https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/afghanis.pdf>

Source: Afghanistan, Map No. 3958 Rev. 7, June 2011, UNITED NATIONS (reproduced with permission)

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ТАШКЕНТЪ.
TASCHKENT.

Театръ. „Moulin rouge“ г. Макса
Le théâtre „Moulin rouge“ de Max.

Max's Moulin Rouge Theatre.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

Central Asian Studies: A Maturing Field?

Adrien Fauve

IFEAC & Paris-Saclay University

Keywords:

- Central Asian Studies • Academia • Area Studies • Academic Discipline
- Reflexivity • Inclusion • Globalization

CHAPTER 1

Central Asian Studies: A Maturing Field?

ADRIEN FAUVE

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THIS VOLUME is the result of more than three years of hard work, between 11 partner institutions, with the involvement of 22 authors coming from a dozen of countries. Obviously, all our efforts were deeply affected and challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic. One can assume that the editorial trio, like the author of these lines, wishes to make a contribution to the academic literature in Area Studies and Social Sciences in general, provide future specialists with solid knowledge, with useful guidelines and with stimulating incentives to engage in new research. But looking back at the whole process, thinking about the title of the volume, the global dynamics of the Erasmus+ EISCAS Eurasian Insights project, taking a step aside and trying to contemplate the wider picture, it appears clearly that this handbook must first of all position itself in the field of Central Asian studies.

Why study Central Asia, after all? A first answer to that question would point to the position of the region at the crossroads of many cultural worlds. Central Asia bears traces of many influences accumulated during centuries: Iranian, Turkic, Mongolian, Chinese, Russian etc. In this respect, as a historian of the Tibetan empire once wrote:

“Central Asia is of fundamental importance for understanding Eurasian History (...) It is the missing link in World History.”*

*Beckwith 1993: 241

Also, it is a place where nomadic and sedentary populations were in intense, both peaceful and violent contact. All these aspects are covered by several contributions in Part II (chapters 4 to 8). Hence, it is an excellent occasion to take stock of the true complexities of social reality, as the influences mentioned above created a mosaic of languages, identities and religions, which experienced 70 years of Sovietization. These legacies now interact with globalization trends, the formation of national identities, struggles between numerous economic and social interest groups who claim financial resources or legal recognition, while specialists observe the consolidation of authoritarian regimes. These specific aspects are addressed in Part III (chapters 9 to 14). Moreover, the current geo-

politics of Central Asia remind of the strategic importance of the region for anyone who is interest in world politics.

Five countries, with the common legacies mentioned above and with their local specificities, got independent, meaning they needed to manage sovereign borders which became international after 1991, meanwhile, they had to cope with competing and pressing incursions from regional or global powers, assess their own foreign policies, establish diplomatic ties among them and participate to multilateral dynamics on the world arena, while the world itself was subject to deep change, with the rise of emergent powers, notably neighbouring China. Last but not least, with the Taliban forcefully coming back into play in Afghanistan, the necessity to understand what is happening becomes even more crucial. These issues are analysed in Part IV (chapters 15 to 18).

In addition, the fact that several countries of the region very much rely on non-renewable sources of energy, experience major environmental challenges, linked to water management or pollution, increases the issues at stake. The considerable societal changes generated by the rise of capitalism, massive urban modernization projects, significant migration trends to Russia, causing high economic dependence on remittances, all coping with Soviet developmental legacies articulated to external aid, produce a complex picture of what still needs to be investigated further, based on material presented in Part V (chapters 19 to 22).

Finally, among the many good reasons why people might be interested in studying the region is the very fact that hundreds of academics dedicate their professional and intellectual life to the complexities and strategic importance of Central Asia.

As a matter of fact, this handbook is published almost simultaneously with two other similar projects prepared by teams of colleagues.* Is it by coincidence? The three projects are similar, considering the editors' academic intentions, but naturally different, if one examines and compares their content: consult also Chapter 2 by Bruno De Cordier and Jeroen Van den Bosch on the multiple definitions of the region, and Chapter 3 by Justyna Hadaś and Jeroen Van den Bosch about our distinctive didactic approach. Beyond the rich differences between the edited works by Rico Isaacs and Erica Marat, by David Montgomery, and this handbook, the very existence of such parallel editorial projects must be understood as a sign of Central Asian studies now reaching a point of maturity.

Intellectual maturity of a field or a discipline usually comes with reflexivity, meaning the efforts to understand how knowledge is produced, to accept the limits of academic activity, to assess the

*Isaacs and Marat 2021;
Montgomery 2021/22

unintentional effects of what scholars do when they work in the field, in class, at work, or engage in public debates, to critically analyse their positionality, and make peace with the reception of written material in face of possible controversies.*

*Ruby 1982

Though this can be discussed, one can trace the origins of region-specific scholarship on Central Asia back to 1982, with the creation of a dedicated international journal, *Central Asian Survey*, under the influence of several prominent specialists such as Alexander Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejey, whose intellectual guidance marked both European and American university campuses.

The next generation of specialists, trained by the pioneers of the field, tried and succeeded in institutionalizing research on Central Asia with the informal emergence of the *European Society for Central Asian Studies* (ESCAS) in 1985, followed by its upgrade into a fully-fledged registered organization in 1995. ESCAS has hosted up to 16 international conferences, almost every two years.* There is hope that after the Covid-19 pandemic, things will resume as before.

*ESCAS 2021

One must also pay tribute to the many scholars who laid down the foundations of what we are now looking at, notably because they supervised doctoral dissertations of those people who, today, expand the scope of the field, train a new generation of scholars, and who come from many different countries, disciplines and social backgrounds. Indeed, for several decades, scholars publishing in English about Central Asia rarely originated from the region. Today, in the 2020s, things are much more balanced, as a result of the brilliant collaborative work done by colleagues in a broad array of academic structures.

On the European continent, many institutions are training specialists of the region or host research groups and centres that are instrumental to the ongoing international dynamics of Central Asian studies, some of which are part of the EISCAS consortium. But a quick mapping exercise shows that the network goes far beyond the team we have put together: INALCO, the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS) and *Sciences Po* in France; Exeter, Saint Andrews and Cambridge Universities in the UK; the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB); *L'Orientale* in Naples; the *Max Planck Institut*, *Humboldt-Universität* and the *Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde* (IfL) in Germany; the *University of Warsaw* and the *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies* in Poland; *Lund University* in Sweden; the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* (UvA) as well as the *International Institute of Social History* (IISG) in the Nether-

lands; and the *European University* at Saint Petersburg, the *Higher School of Economics* and the *Institute of Oriental Studies* in Russia, to name just a few.

To the west, across the Atlantic, there are also major places where scholarship on Central Asia is very well established, like *Columbia University* which regularly hosts the congress of the *Association for the Study of Nationalities*, the *Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies* at Harvard, George Washington University's *Elliott School of International Affairs* with its dynamic Central Asia Program,* and Indiana University's *Central Eurasian Studies Program*, where numerous specialists, originating from the region or with a North American background, defended their PhDs. The *Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs* is also a brilliant initiative valorising scholarship done by colleagues, young or experienced, especially those coming from the region.*

In Central Asia itself, IFEAC has played a major role since the mid-1990's, first from its original premises in Tashkent (1993-2010), then thanks to its headquarters in Bishkek (since 2012), particularly with its journal entitled *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*.* Despite officially being a French research centre, IFEAC actually welcomed and supported a vibrant community of European, Central Asian and North American scholars, some of which contributed to our handbook. Among the many dynamic institutions located in the region, one must mention notably UCA, AUCA, OSCE Academy in Kyrgyzstan; as well as KIMEP, AlmaU, NU or DKU in Kazakhstan; plus regional portals such as the *Central Asian Analytical Network*.*

Moreover, now that Central Asian studies has become a more mature field, one can witness a very interesting and long-awaited phenomenon: the increased symmetry between Central Asian and European or American scholars, which is manifested in today's composition of boards governing major academic associations like the *European Society for Central Asian Studies* and the *Central Eurasian Studies Society*.*

In conclusion to this short piece opening a sturdy handbook, the author wishes to introduce a conceptual distinction that may help analysis of the state of the field. In the 1990s and 2000s, foreign scholars were somehow separated from their Central Asian counterparts by academic culture, daily working environment, publication practices, intellectual attitudes, access to data or academic reputation on the world stage. Paradoxically, European or American academics significantly relied on the generous help provided by their Central Asian colleagues, but the latter were not very present

at international conferences nor in the English-speaking literature.

Sometimes, there were clashes arising from misunderstandings, or even enmity, when Central Asian researchers saw foreigners arrive, obsessed by specific objects of study like 'nationalism,' 'authoritarianism,' 'corruption,' 'clientelism,' 'Islamic revivalism,' and so on, often with limited understanding and access to information. Whereas Central Asian scholars had an intimate knowledge of all these phenomena, published their results mostly in Russian, and considered foreigners not capable of making total sense of it.

For their own part, foreign scholars could have the tendency to portray Central Asian academics as stuck in these social realities, lacking the conceptual tools and methodological distance to objectify them, and not overcoming the linguistic barrier of Russian, viewed as a limiting expression tool in global Academia. Moreover, foreign scholars would make themselves a career in Western Europe or the US, while Central Asians would mostly live and work in the region.

Now, in the 2020s, things are radically different. New generations of scholars blur these lines. There are Central Asians who work in academic institutions in Western and Central Europe or the US (and sometimes also in Australia, Japan, Korea and China), and the other way around, with Europeans and Northern Americans working in academic institutions in Central Asia, in addition to foreigners who found other jobs in the region. Also, one can encounter Central Asians who were trained abroad and came back to Central Asia in order to work as prominent academics with international outreach. This makes the picture quite complex. Consequently, one must now make a distinction between three profiles of scholars:

- *Local scholars* – people who work in Central Asia, who are either originating from the region, of course, or foreigners with a large experience of living in the region, benefiting from immediate access to knowledge on the ground, good command of local languages and who train students there.
- *Native scholars* – people who were born and raised in Central Asia, but have sometimes been trained abroad and might also be affiliated nowadays with institutions in Europe, the US, the Gulf or Asia-Pacific.
- *Foreign scholars* – people who were born and trained outside of Central Asia, went there for fieldwork or visits, and are not based in the region.

No doubt such a conceptual distinction is disputable and can be criticized as another ‘pigeonholing project,’ but the author and his fellow co-editors would be thrilled if debates can be launched on this topic. Of course, foreign scholars can become local scholars if their own professional path and the circumstances of life conducts them to settle in Central Asia for several years – like the author of this introduction – or to become personally intertwined with the region. And Central Asian scholars can almost turn into ‘foreign scholars’ if their career and their life cycle puts them away from the region for numerous decades. Whatever their trajectories, people who specialize in Central Asian studies are very diverse, and the whole profession should acknowledge it. Let’s hope this handbook will help all of them, whatever their origins, background, disciplines, or generation. Central Asian studies is definitely a maturing field. May it continue to be relevant, attractive to new specialists, and productive in terms of academic knowledge and expertise.

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View on the Salar river.

CHAPTER 2

Defining and Delineating Central Asia from a European Perspective

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Keywords:

- Terminology • Definition • Delineation • Region • Central Asia • Central Eurasia
- Central Asia Proper • Caspian Sea • Maritime Dimension • Orient • Regionalism

CHAPTER 2

Defining and Delineating Central Asia from a European Perspective

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*"The end of our exploring will be to arrive where we
started, and know the place for the first time."*

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

AT FIRST GLANCE, an innocent-sounding title like *The European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies* should raise few eyebrows, but as our more scholarly synapses connect, several critical questions tend to bubble up in the observant mind. Why, exactly, a *European* handbook? What kind of *Central Asia*, precisely? Why not Central Eurasia? Or even, what do they mean by a *handbook*?

As editors, we know we would not get away with this without proffering at least some sensible answers to these questions, but this chapter aims to go beyond merely explaining 'the European connection' or explaining the choice behind our interpretation of 'Central Asia.' In this introductory text we also relate how all chapters puzzle into the larger whole of this book project, and we hope to offer some original perspectives on the region and our notions of it that shape our interaction with it. What kind of 'Orient' was Central Asia really for Europe? How did the so-called 'seas' (the Caspian and Aral) affect this centrally located, landlocked Eurasian region? To this purpose, in the style of this handbook, we have included several Info Boxes to shed some new light on these under-studied dimensions of Central Asia.

And for those still pondering what kind of handbook this is, we kindly invite you to discover our didactic vision and study guidelines, presented in Chapter 3, and to find there also what other hidden tools this book has to offer. But first, this.

1. '*La Liaison européenne*'

This book is an explicitly *European* handbook on Central Asia. Why is this? For a start, indeed, most contributors are Europeans who have often spent considerable time in the region in various capacities, or are scholars affiliated with European academic institutions. It is the outcome of one of the core purposes of this work: to offer a primarily European collection of chapters and perspectives on a region the scholarship about which is dominated by scholars from, or at least affiliated with institutions in, the US. Merely identifying, listing and approaching possible contributors to this book was already a good opportunity to have a view on who in Europe is working on what aspect of the Central Asian region.

The peculiar 'European aspect' of the book is going beyond that though. It is first of all a matter of how to approach this peculiar region that is Central Asia. Seen from Western Europe, and certainly for the generations for whom the accessible parts of Europe were limited to Western Europe, some parts of Yugoslavia and this odd exclave of West Berlin until 1988-1991, Central Asia was for a long time some sort of backwater of a wider Eastern Europe. The final decline and eventual demise of the Iron Curtain and of the Soviet Union in 1988-1991 put a series of new, often accidentally independent polities on the map. The region's five southern successor states of the Soviet Union (Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, forming 'Central Asia' in its most conventional sense) are polities with predominantly Turkic and Tajik titular majority populations.

They were shaped by Soviet socialist societal experiments and social engineering which had a major yet often overlooked component of modern nation-building, and they are marked by their rapid (re-)integration in the economic world system and their harsh confrontation with the current phase of (hyper-)globalization since 1991. Probably few regions are as cliché-ridden in the way they are being perceived and approached as Central Asia is. Long approached since 1991 as a mere passive object of abstract geopolitics, and hostage to stereotypes of being mere producers oil resources, pipeline transit areas and a hotbed of unrest, Central Asia has indeed many other aspects, not in the least, grassroots and living societies in full process of defining its self.

The 1990s international developmentalist assumption that the Central Asian countries would become blossoming market economies and functioning liberal democracies after a period of 'transition' proved erroneous. Also, this new constellation of relative-

ly-recently independent polities is still a young region in absolute terms. It will be interesting to see what will happen in the longer term instead. What kind of a region is this? Is it the Turkic world beyond Turkey and the former Ottoman space? Is it a specific space within, or outskirt of, the Islamic sphere? Is it 'Eastern Europe's Orient'? Is it postcolonial? For Europe and us Europeans this is all the more relevant to wonder and understand at times when economic over-entanglement with China becomes nefarious for Europe, and when, in one way or another, we are destined to find a *modus vivendi* with Russia.

2. How to Define Central Asia?

Central Asia is a modern construct to denote a civilization that no longer exists. This leads to trouble of all kind. Time-travelling historians and archaeologists struggle with the boundaries of this recent (modern) notion, while political and social scientists are scrambling to track down the transformative continuity that gets lost somewhere in the murky waters of the early 19th century. So, while the former try to establish the connections and distinctiveness of the cultural heartland of Central Eurasia and quarrel over the answers they get, depending on the where its borders are drawn, the latter are required to have an intricate knowledge of the seemingly endless cultural transmutations in order to distil from them their inherent, unique, civilizational genetic code, needed to understand these processes.

The debates that accompany these research traditions, firmly locked within the confines of their respective academic disciplines and spanning decades, have resulted in a sort of 'delineation-fatigue,' an effect of endless efforts to tune that proverbial academic radio with a broken button for a large impatient audience, using a pair of pincers, while not even agreeing on the required bandwidth (AM or FM), nor on the taste in music. One can only understand and sympathize with the consternation of the spectators sitting several rows away from this uncomfortable display. In response the academic community has developed two attitudes: "Get me my pair of pincers, and I'll show you how it's done!" or the Latin saying "De gustibus non est disputandum (In matters of taste, there can be no disputes)".

Out of respect for both approaches, each academic mindset deserves a fair evaluation. Those scholars who have rigorously continued the pursuit of delineating and defining Central Asia, have often improved the 'sound quality' of their specific, like-minded

Box 2.1 The 'Eastern X-factor'? Some Premodern Imaginaries and Experiences that Shaped European Notions of Central Asia

In medieval Europe, centuries before any notion of Central Asia-as-a-region came into being, what we now call Central Asia did somehow exist on the mental map as 'a realm beyond everything,' from where movements and dynamics came that often had far-reaching effects on Europe. Much was shaped by European interactions and confrontations with the Mongols, as well as by narratives or legends, and Christian-eschatological interpretations of world events that triggered European interest in what is now called 'Central Asia.'

Take the medieval legend of 'presbyter John', about a mythical and supposedly ideal Christian kingdom ruled by a priest-king called Ioannis (Johannes, in medieval Latin), which supposedly existed in the distant Orient. The legend is believed to have originated somewhere around the year 1145. Various, often garbled, versions circulated over the years, as did many speculations on who presbyter John might be or which existing ruler could fit his role. And although other places – Ethiopia, in particular – were suggested as the eventual setting of the kingdom, the legend became closely associated with Central Asia. It did not entirely come out of the blue though, for it was likely inspired by tales about existing Oriental Christian churches – Nestorians in particular – and of (partly) Christianized Central Asian peoples like the Kerait, Naiman and Kara-Kitai.

The legend's popularity was reinvigorated in both Western Europe and in the Crusader kingdoms that had come into being in the Holy Land (what is now Israel-Palestine) in the wake of the First Crusade (1096-1099) with, first, a number of setbacks suffered by the Crusaders; second, political tensions between the papacy and the worldly rulers within the Latin Christian world itself; and, third, the arrival in Europe of reports about the rise of Mongol power in the east. In these circumstances, the legend raised hopes that new Christian allies

could be found in the Orient not only to fight the Islamic powers, but also to set an example of 'proper' Christian rule over Christendom itself.

Such an alliance eventually never materialized, yet the idea had brought Christian Europe's rulers and pontiffs to send various envoys east to help to 'grasp' the region. One of them was William of Rubrouck, a Flemish Franciscan friar who happened to be in Cyprus during unsuccessful Seventh Crusade (1248-1254) of king Louis IX of France's (the later Saint Louis), and met with the king there. Between 1253 and 1255, he travelled from Acre (in what is now Israel-Palestine) to Karakorum (the capital of the Mongol empire in what is now Mongolia), crossing the Caucasus and what is now Kazakhstan and Xinjiang in the process.

Rubrouck (known as *Guillaume de Rubrouck* in French and *Gulielmus de Rubruquis* in Latin) carried a letter of recommendation from Louis IX. But rather than being his diplomatic envoy, his mission was to find and bring support to Central Asian Christians and to Christian captives of the Mongols. His travel notes are one of the most extensive premodern Western European accounts on Tartary (as Central Asia was long called in Europe) and its populations, societies, customs and economies. Rubrouck was also one of the first to mention peoples and polities like the Tanguts and Tibetans in a medieval Latin European account. He also believed that the last khan of the Kara-Kitai, who was killed by the Mongols in 1218, had been the famous presbyter John. Through his travel accounts, William of Rubrouck was one of the initiators of a demythologizing process about a 'Central Asia' that was previously often described as a mysterious land of half-monsters and fabulous beings.

Note that the perception of 'Central Asia' as a source of threats was not merely a matter of prejudice, for it was from there that the Mongols moved westward. And while Western

Europe experienced little of the Mongol invasions first-hand, Eastern and Central Europe certainly did. 'Central Asia' as a wider notion also preoccupied in another capacity there, and in the kingdom of Hungary in particular: that of the ancient homeland of its own people. In Hungary's case, the Magyar forebears of the Hungarians had been steppe nomads before they settled in Central Europe. Hungary had become aware of the impact of the Mongol advance through the Russian and Cuman refugees, who had been granted asylum in Hungary by king András II (1205-1235) and his successor, king Béla IV (1235-1270).

It was the latter, encouraged by reports of previous expeditions, who entrusted the Dominican friar Julian to travel to the ancient homelands of the Magyars in the Pontic-Caspian steppe and along the Volga. The purpose was to look for the descendants of the Magyar tribes who had stayed behind during the great westward migration some three centuries earlier and who were now threatened by the Mongols, and bring them to the kingdom of Hungary and to the Latin Christian faith. During his travels in 1235 and 1237, friar Julian (known as *Julianus barát* in Hungarian) and his companions reportedly did find populations and communities speaking languages akin to Hungarian in the Volga region.

Friar Julian also visited Mongol army encampments there. Two decades before William of Rubrouck, he reported extensively in Latin – Europe's lingua franca at the time – on the Mongol presence, their customs and warfare techniques. He returned to Hungary with a warning of an imminent Mongol invasion of Central Europe. A few years later, in autumn 1240, this materialized, starting with the siege of Kiev, and with Hungary and neighbouring Poland invaded and sacked for the first time in the next months.

The Polish city of Krakow still maintains a daily ritual to commemorate the Mongol onslaught. A trumpeter climbs the steps of the Saint Mary's basilica on the central square every hour, to play the so-called *hejnal* melody

in the four directions of the wind. It is a short reveille or call to arms – *hajnal* meaning 'dawn' in Hungarian – that is abruptly halted, allegedly to imitate the effect of a 'Tartar' arrow, piercing the original guardsman-trumpeter's throat, before the Mongols broke through the gates and the sacking and pillaging began. The threat was real, and the terror as well, with the Polish duke Henryk II Pobożny (Henry II the Pious) decapitated in the mud after losing battle of Legnica (Liegnitz) in Silesia in 1241, and the Mongols parading his head on a spear in front of his stronghold, after having first cut off and filled 'nine bags' of (right) ears to count the dead Polish troops, according to the late-medieval chronicler Jan Długosz.

King Béla's Hungarian army would be obliterated two days later at the battle of Mohi at the Sajó and Tisza rivers. Several other invasions would follow in 1259 and 1287. In Central Europe, the experience with the Mongols shaped a very different notion of 'Central Asia' than in Western Europe. Even well after the demise of the Mongol empires, large tracts of Central and Eastern Europe would remain affected by incursions coming from its successor polities, not in the least as targets of slave raids by the Crimean Tatar khanate and the Nogai horde.

Further Reading:

Denise Aigle, "De la 'non négociation' à l'alliance inaboutie. Réflexions sur la diplomatie entre les Mongols et l'Occident latin," *Oriente Moderno*, LXXXVIII, (1998): 395-434. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00415883/document>

Roman Hautala, "Early Hungarian information on the beginning of the western campaign of Batu (1235-1242)," *Acta Orientalia*, 69, no. 2 (2016): 183-199. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42947493.pdf>

audience. It takes courage to challenge well-established norms and back up new insights with hard-earned empirical evidence, and thus contribute to their respective field by recalibrating or designing better measuring instruments (like concepts, typologies) or even paradigms, even while too few of these insights migrate to other disciplines of Central Asian studies.

The other approach of ‘everything goes’ foremost runs the danger of falling into the relativist trap of (radical) post-modernism, but can be useful in certain disciplines that have their own solid analytical toolboxes (e.g. political or social theories) that do not require an exact spatial delimitation for their operationalization. Nonetheless, ‘selection-by-outcome-bias’ and ‘historical contingency problems’¹ remain real pitfalls when comparing socio-political systems based on a partial coverage of Central Eurasia without contemplating (and calibrating for) its consequences. Still, adhering to a delimitation of Central Asia that is a ‘familiar tune’ in one’s academic household, frees up time and energy for data-collection or fieldwork, and may still yield the occasional ‘under the shower’ improvisation that triggers innovation.

Leaving the radio analogy above, the field of Central Asian studies is blessed by both approaches that exist in a symbiotic, albeit it tense, relation to one another – not unlike the nomadic pastoralist and sedentary agriculturalists of the region themselves, actually. Each approach should be the personal choice of the Central Asian scholar, and as long as both ‘camps’ exchange ideas and insights, the field will be better because of it. Anyhow, the boundaries between both groups are unclear, and scholars usually switch between approaches several times throughout their career.

This observation is meant to illustrate the importance of defining Central Asia as research object, and – since this is a student-centred handbook – we have decided to group the main existing approaches into three main frames: ‘Central Eurasia,’ ‘Central Asia+ (proper),’ and ‘former Russian or former Soviet Central Asia,’ and systematize the logic behind each of them, as well as their

¹ Any set of real-world cases is biased because of ‘self-selection’ or the fact that their original diversity has been reduced as a result of historical and political contingencies, in other words: our data only represent those socio-political organizations that have survived. For instance, while the Europe of 1500 included some 500 more or less independent political units, the Europe of 1900 had about 25, implying that today’s observable ‘national states’ in that region are thus a highly contingent set of (surviving and constructed) cases. Yet all observable cases represent only a ‘limited diversity,’ meaning one can only observe less diversity than is logically possible for the variables under investigation. (Ebbinghaus 2005: 138)

advantages and some blind spots. All three approaches, of course, share the wish to place our region of interest at the centre of attention, but all have a unique agenda in what they hope to achieve by doing this. This introduction is not meant to be exhaustive (let alone, the final word) in this regard, but represents a basic analytical inventory for readers ('a radio program booklet, if you please'), especially for young scholars or newcomers to the field.

This handbook adheres predominantly to one definition of Central Asia, comprising the five majority-Muslim former Soviet Union ('the FSU') republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. For this reason we also will note below how each of the book chapters connects with this or that conceptual frame. The respective authors themselves motivate their choices where they deviate from this standard definition used in this book.

2.1 Central Eurasia – in Search for 'Connectivity'

To start with the biggest frame, Central Eurasia is a concept we almost do not apply in this book. The only chapters that somewhat touch upon it are Bruno De Cordier's chapter (4) and Slavomír Horák's (15), when describing exogenous geopolitical attempts to classify Central Asia from the perspective great powers with conquest on their mind; or arguably the widest frame in Sébastien Peyrouse's chapter (16) on the Chinese *Belt and Road Initiative*. Both cases are thus examples that aim to connect Eurasia's inner core with its surrounding territory (here, by annexation in case of the first two, and by transport infrastructure in Peyrouse's chapter). And this 'connectivity' is the main logic for using such a wide frame.

LIMITS – The delimitation of this larger region, as shown on Map 2.1, stretches from the Pontic steppe, the Caucasus, Siberia, all the way to greater Mongolia (including 'inner Mongolia' in China) and China's north-eastern provinces, and including Tibet and a belt running from northern Afghanistan all the way to eastern-central Anatolia.

LOGIC – The connectivity-drive of the Central Eurasian frame is the attempt to identify unity at the heartland of the Eurasian continent, like an academic E.T. pointing a long, luminous finger toward a shared characteristic relevant for its discipline. Such quests can encompass a cultural dimension (Iranian and Turkic heritage), a

genetic one (the Turko-Mongol migrations), a socio-economic (the Central Asian Culture Complex), a religious (its unique trajectories of Islam, Buddhism and eastern Christianity), or a political frame (the study of its empires).

This frame was adopted by scholars like Denis Sinor² to overcome older, contested frames like High, Inner or Middle Asia. Each of these aimed to define a distinct cultural zone, either defined by its mountainous geography, like Louis Hambis' concept of High Asia (*Haute-Asie*), or the historical region characterized by Chinese civilizations (Inner Asia). Both are shown on Map 2.1 for contrast, but to understand the quirky evolution of "murky" 'Middle Asia' or other Soviet labels, we gladly refer to this book's second Case Study: *Toponymy of Central Asia: Proper Names or Forged Concepts?* written by Svetlana Gorshenina that offers a comprehensive, diachronic overview of these concepts, and many more.

BIASES – The search for unity means, of course, the calibration of the analytical lens, making common characteristics more visible and, at the same time, blurring differences. The biases that sneak in with this approach are thus exactly related to either overexposure of shared traits, or underlit nuances. It is worth to mention two here:

The first bias being the 'Imperial Paradigm,' when narratives focus too much on the large empires that have emerged in the wider region. Many of these were kickstarted on the fringes or the fertile Eurasian belt (see also Chapter 11), but turned outwards for their conquests. A good deal of others were annexations from the surrounding civilizations that (temporarily) incorporated a chunk of the Eurasian core. This approach is focused too much on 'big' polities and ignores the (often longer) periods of 'local order' that also defined the region – as argued by Vincent Fourniau in Chapter 5.

The second bias is the unruly 'false dilemma' when scholars either focus too much on the nomadic character (as a defining element of the wider region) or dilute it completely in favour of its ancient sedentary civilizations, to connect the latter with the Middle East and Hindu Kush civilizations. This is an unnecessary black-or-white approach for the sake of stressing either connection at the cost of severing the other.

In addition, what also matters is the location of the light source, as becomes obvious in the different Western European, Anglo-Amer-

² Denis Sinor, originally Dénes Zsinór (1916-2011) was a leading historian of Central Asian history affiliated with Indiana University and Cambridge.

ican, Russian or Chinese projections that shine foremost on their own connections with Central Eurasia, obscuring others. Even the term 'Eurasia' itself, cannot escape its Russian-centred origins.* In this regard, our choice for FSU 'Central Asia' itself, as the main focus of this book, is actually not particularly European-centred, despite what one might think of the title.

*Gleason 2010; Ismailov and Papava 2010

BLIND SPOTS – Beside biases, each of these three frames also has blind spots. In this case, all frames studying the connectivity along the network of silk roads (both ancient and modern) have arisen mostly from Western or Chinese viewpoints along the east-west axis, to the effect that the north-south axis has remained under-explored. This is especially the case regarding the transregional trade of its core and its linkages to India and Russia. Once the sea route around Africa (and later through the Suez canal) had been established, overland trade patterns shifted, but did not disappear. This north-south realignment has been partly covered by including the Hindu Kush, Tien Shan and Tibetan plateau into the scope of historical studies, but this has not extended yet to the northern steppes* and the role of their nomadic inhabitants as intermediaries in trading (and slaving). Also, the region's maritime aspects deserve more attention, as shown in Box 2.2.

*Williams 2014: 8, 12

2.2 'Central Asia+' – in Search for 'Distinctiveness'

This frame is used predominantly in historical context to establish how Central Asia differs from its surrounding cultures. With a sharp pencil, wielded menacingly, the cultural region defined by nomadic-sedentary symbiosis is marked to identify borders of friction with its adjacent polities and civilizations. This handbook's Part II, titled *Identities and Historical Roots*, containing chapters 4 to 8, does exactly this.

LIMITS – This delimitation of Central Asia encompasses an area that was never united as an autonomous, single entity. At times it was absorbed by larger polities (e.g. the Turkic or Mongol khanates), but its territory was never 'ruled' as a polity, by a group originating from Central Asia 'proper.' Central Asia 'proper' thus is bigger than 'the FSU Central Asia', and spans the Eurasian Steppe and its northern fringes, encompasses today's Xinjiang (with its two historical regions of Dzhungaria and *Altı Shahr*), northern Afghanistan and north-eastern Iran, safely cuddling its core located between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya (Transoxiana) and including the region

Box 2.2 A Maritime Dimension for a Landlocked Region?

Unlike Europe, with its extensive history of large maritime empires, Central Asia is hardly, if at all, associated with the sea and with maritime issues. The region, however, has, or abuts to, two large water bodies, which are called seas in Russian, in the regional Turkic languages and in Tajik, in many Western and Central European languages, as well as in Farsi and Arabic. The largest of these, the Caspian Sea, has a surface area of 371,000 km². The other, the Aral Sea, had a surface area of some 68,000 km², including its numerous islands, up to 1960, the year after which its surface started to shrink dramatically. By comparison, the surface area of the Baltic Sea is some 377,000, that of the North Sea some 570,000 and that of the Sea of Azov 39,000 km².

Both the Caspian and Aral seas possess several physical characteristics of a sea, such as varying salinity levels and a specific maritime fauna. Yet they differ from 'regular' seas in the sense that they have no natural salt-water connections or outlets to larger oceanic systems. This could, perhaps, qualify them as *quasi-seas*. Rather than refuting its existence, it emphasizes Central Asia's landlocked and thoroughly continental character. Do they matter for a proper understanding of the region? They do, for they add an often-overlooked maritime dimension to the region's overall functioning, accessibility and social-economic fabric throughout history.

Although Central Asia was never an 'overseas' in the European understanding of the term, and although the importance of its maritime aspects gradually waned in the twentieth century, the region's social history and identities, the more so in the western portions of Central Asia, have definitely been co-shaped by maritime factors. Seas played a role in the region's accessibility from the west and northwest, like the trade routes that long functioned between the Volga and the centres south of the Aral Sea. Central Asia was long approached through the northern Caspian seashores and from the Caucasus (the Cis-Caspian or *Прикаспи́й (Prikaspiy)* as it was called in Russian from the 18th century onwards), often by using boat routes over the Caspian Sea (to the Trans-Caspian or *Закаспи́й – Zakaspiy*). Likewise, boat transport over the Aral Sea and connecting river transport over the Amu Darya was used to travel from the northwest to Khiva, the adjacent Turkmen territories and to places as far inland as Charjui.

Maritime routes thus formed a sort of supplement on overland mobility to and within the western parts of Central Asia, and as such ensured, along with overland transport, some sort of connectivity between the latter and the rest of the region until the construction of railways through the region between 1879 and 1906 – (see also Case Study 5 by Slavomír Horák). Moreover, the proximity of both water bodies and the economic agency supported by them (especially fisheries, but also peculiar activities like at one time sea and coast piracy in the southern Caspian) historically shaped specific local and sub-re-

gional cultures and livelihoods among a number of western Kazakh and Turkmen groups, among the Karakalpak and among some Uzbek groups living near the southern Aral seashore. And it was also in the seashore parts and by sea – more especially on the island of Cheleken situated near what is now the coast of Turkmenistan – that in the late 19th century was first put into practice in Central Asia what is nowadays commonly associated with the region: petroleum extraction.

The relevance of Central Asia's littoral, already affected by the construction of railways, further decreased with the shift of the gravity centre of the Soviet Union's oil industry away from the Caspian after 1955 and the drying-up and obliteration of the Aral Sea from 1960 onwards. In the late 20th century, it then returned on the mental and economic map in the capacity of a raw material periphery connected to the global economy through oil, gas, and their spin-offs. Historically though, the littoral of Central Asia was instrumental in the social transformation and actual becoming of the Central Asian region. The histories of the Aral and Caspian basin show that there was also proper, living social history there, before they became popularly almost-exclusively associated, as it is the case now, with environmental disaster and with being a rather passive subject in oil extraction and energy geopolitics. How the remaining Central Asian littoral and its societies will fare within the fledgling post-oil given, and what role historical patterns, legacies and individualities will play in the process, is therefore a relevant and fascinating issue within the study of the region.

Further Reading:

Bruno De Cordier, "Central Asia's maritime dimension? The historical position and role of the Aral-Caspian basin in the modern shaping of the region," *Region*, 8, no. 2, (2019): 149-172.

west of the Caspian Sea. Map 2.1 shows such a projection of what we can call 'Central Asia+' but Map 5.1 gives a better close-up illustrating its natural environment.

LOGIC – The motivation behind such a delineation is well attested to in our handbook chapters. To track down the region's distinct identity by following its curvy historical roots one ends up with a collection of interrelated sub-regions. Bruno De Cordier (Chapter 4) stresses its original Islamization dynamics. Vincent Fourniau (Chapter 5) explores its sub-regions in greater depth and explains their similarities and contrasts. The next chapter (6) by Svetlana Gorshenina studies the region's unique coloniality through various perspectives. Sébastien Peyrouse continues on Bruno De Cordier's story, by looking at later religious transformations, up until

Map 2.1 Capturing 'Central Asia' – Different Approaches

This map with current state borders shows the three main approaches discussed in this chapter: Former Soviet Central Asia, Central Asia+ and Central Eurasia. For contrast it also shows the delineations of High Asia (*Haute-Asie*) and Inner Asia (*Asie intérieure*), which used to be common in the previous decades.

Sources:
Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5161&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv

contemporary times, and thus Chapter 7 connects both with this frame as with the next one. Chapter 8, by Gian Marco Moisé and Abel Polese investigates the linguistic laboratory that this specific region was and continues to be. Most chapters thus dig through the last 150 years (or so) of history that has been deposited by the whirlwinds of the late 19th and 20th century. It even goes beyond that. Bruno De Cordier, for example, time-travels back more than ten centuries, but concludes with how this earlier Islamic ideological imprint would greatly determine the region's future trajectories and identities.

BIASES – To establish the origins of the region's distinctiveness, scholars have to spit in their hands and grab a shovel to dig down to the original layers of its proto-identities. The all too turbulent history of the last 150 years does not allow us to draw straight lines. And while layer after layer can be exposed, it is wrong to treat this space as a unified region. Despite its many common characteristics, Central Asia was a set of overlapping spectrums (of nomadism-sedentarism, of Turkization, Islamization, Russification, etc.), with its sub-regions acting as inter-communicating vessels slowly adapting to changes from outside.

The Bolshevik coup d'état and its aftermath were the proverbial firecracker in the pond that with one bang would mix up and disturb this normal pace of adaptation, and resulted in rapid changes (decossackisation, dekulakization, Sovietization, collectivization, national delineation, nativization, and forced fast-track modernization) at great human cost. Still, in search of that 'Central Asia proper' – that no longer exists – one should not forget it was never *one* region, but a set of interrelated subregions.

BLIND SPOTS – A common blind spot is that scholars have forgotten its fringes, now that contemporary Central Asia has shrunk to its FSU borders. The 'firecracker' was felt hardest in the middle of the pond, but the tidal wave did not erase all layers further away. Think about the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmen that fled into Dzhungaria or Khorasan (north-eastern Iran) after a military defeat with Tsarist Russia or to escape the murderous Soviet collectivization campaigns. What about all those Basmachi in northern Afghanistan and the Pamir that did not return home?

At least in Soviet cinematography these wild imaginations of 'untamed Central Asia' shifted south- and eastwards – as depicted in the so-called 'Red Westerns' or 'Easterns'³ portraying the Cen-

³ In Russian, *исстern* (*istern*) from 'East' or *остern* (*ostern*, the latter borrowing the German term *Osten* which means 'the East') to replace the

tral Asian (or, alternatively, Siberian or, even, southern Ukrainian) 'Badlands' during the Russian Civil War at the outer fringes of Central Asia proper. All such movies share the realization that Soviet civilization was only brought so far, but not beyond these borders.

Actually, these earlier 'fringes' of Central Asia+ that used to be the frontiers of friction with surrounding civilizations, would over time become more tranquil outskirts of the new nation-building powers of Iran, Afghanistan, China and Mongolia during and after the Cold War. Modernization would come, but at a slower pace, directed from capitals from another direction, often located much further away and in different civilizational cores. Here the study of the continuity and mutations of the 'Eurasian culture complex' is still underexplored. Few have appreciated the value of such fringes enough to track down intact strings of Central Asian identity.

2.3 'The FSU Central Asia' – the Setting of (Aspired) 'Transformativity'

This third frame is the one that was particularly chosen for this handbook. Parts III to V (containing chapters 9 to 22) deal with this definition of Central Asia. While the term 'Central Asia' here can be criticized for its (neo- or post-) colonial undertones, borders are borders and live both on maps and in minds. The 'reduction' of Central Asia to its five FSU titular nations does give a stable reference point, and is hence increasingly used by scholars.

LIMITS – As shown on Map 2.1, this definition of Central Asia thus encompasses the five contemporary republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. They inherited the exact boundaries of their predecessor Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics which emerged during the process of national delimitation shown also on Maps 8.1 to 8.4. Central Asia's inherited Soviet-era borders remain unchanged to this day. Unlike in the Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya, Ossetia, etc.), Moldova (Transnistria), and in the Crimea, Lugansk and Donetsk in Ukraine, no areas here have either de facto or officially seceded or merged with neighbouring states since 1991 (nor are there or have there been any credible attempts to do so).

'West' in 'Western.' The 1960s and 1970s, in particular, were prolific times for the production of Red Westerns. One of the best-known films in the genre is Vladimir Motyl's 1970 *Белое солнце пустыни* (The white sun of the desert), set at the Turkmen shores of the Caspian during the Russian Civil War and Basmachi insurrections. More recent, some 1990s Eastern-like productions lean towards the post-apocalyptic genre.

LOGIC – This handbook connects with this definition of Central Asia in four distinct contexts (coloniality, multiple modernities, statehood, and authoritarianism), each case embarking on the mission to capture the region's unique transformation in the last 150 years. Not unimportantly, this definition approaches Central Asia through entities and polities that are still best recognizable and the easiest to 'get' both by the region's populations and by outsiders: modern sovereign nation-states. Although for a while already, nation-states have been dismissed as a 19th-20th-century relic made increasingly irrelevant by the ongoing hyper-globalization, they remain, in Central Asia as elsewhere, the cornerstone of the international relations system as well as one of the sources of primordial self-identification among their citizens, especially *vis-à-vis* outsiders.

The Central Asian countries as they exist now form the spaces and contours in which not only a major redefinition of self is taking place, but where external actors try to influence and 'steer' this process.

We see this in several fields: the position and connection of the region in and with the economic world system; the interpretation and practice of 'development'; the dynamics of religion and de-secularization; the building of both official and unofficial national narratives and the role that history, and the rewriting, interpretation if not outright skewing thereof, plays in the process.

The 'FSU approach' also fits into another, very topical logic: was the Soviet Union, in the way it was structured and functioned, inherently 'colonial,' and is present-day Central Asia in a 'post-colonial' paradigm? If so, how to approach this with a maturity and serenity often lacking in the current, often activist-hijacked, debates about 'decolonization'?

Chapter 6 (Svetlana Gorshenina) studies Central Asia's relation to the Tsarist and Soviet 'empires' regarding **coloniality** and self-image. Chapter 7 (Sébastien Peyrouse) on religion; Chapter 8 (Moisé and Polese) on languages; and Chapter 9 (Jeremy Smith) on clans, tribes and ethnicity, study that same historical bond from their respective angles.

The Soviet developmental legacy and its impact on newly acquired **statehood** with uneven development and **multiple modernities**, are tackled by: Chapter 12 (Baktybek Kainazarov) on civil society, traditional institutions and media; Chapter 13 (Rano Turaeva) on women and gender; Chapter 19 (Luca Anceschi and Julia Schwab) on political economy; Chapter 20 (Natalie Koch) on environmental geopolitics; Chapter 21 (Bhavna Davé) on migra-

Box 2.3 Central Asia – “To Be, or Not to Be ... a Region?”

Regions are constructs, but they have been used differently by external actors and by the Central Asian states themselves. The collapse of the USSR and the withdrawal of Russia under Yeltsin, made FSU Central Asia by default ‘a new region.’ But in almost all spheres, the region’s ‘region-ness’ was nothing more than a broken puzzle, the sum of five, with four of them – ‘neutral’ Turkmenistan being the exception, dreaming of a southern pipeline to Pakistan and India – keeping warring Afghanistan and its theocratic Taliban regime (after 1996) at arm’s length with a stick.

The early 1990s collaboration “success stories” like the *Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone* (CANWFZ) or the *International Fund for saving the Aral Sea* (IFAS) yielded credibility to the region’s promising path to maturity in the international arena, but like the other former Soviet newly independent states (NIS), their eagerness to join the IMF and World Bank, or the triumphal launch of its ‘native’ integration schemes like the *Central Asian Union* (CAU, later *Central Asian Economic Union* – CAEU) were foremost aimed at regime consolidation (external legitimacy through membership), club diplomacy (for gatekeeping international relations – cf. Chapter 11 and 17), and donor shopping. Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev was most adept at this, after having leveraged the nuclear arsenal on his territory (with the US, not Russia!) in order to get much-needed foreign investment.

However, if one applies the definition of a region, as “a group of countries with a more or less explicitly shared political project,” (Hettne 1999: 2) Central Asia, actually, had much more ‘region-ness’ than Western and other external observers could see, but *their own* shared political project (getting legitimacy and donor money) was probably not in line with what Western credit-lenders had in mind, and was also not particularly coordinated by the Central Asian states themselves. In any case, this highlights the contrast between Western normativity and real-life functionality – or: ‘for what and for whom should Central Asia be a region?’

After the post-1945 ‘old’ regionalism, limited by Cold War constraints, the late 1980s saw the start of a second wave of (new) regionalism, with high hopes in the 1990s. However, scholarly appreciation for the phenomenon by the early 2000s came to realize several things: first, that the bright new (liberal-democratic) world where regions would take over from states would not materialize any time soon; second, that this was actually not even a precondition for successful integration (the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) was such an outlier); third, that current theories were too Western-centric (benchmarked on Western, mostly European examples) and completely ignored what had been going on in Latin America and Africa. (Bach 2016: 3)

Still, a long list of scholarly publications was written between 2000 to 2013 about Central Asia’s ‘un-regional’ behaviour. Karimov and Niya-

zov were the main culprits that did not know how to play together. With Uzbekistan lambasted for its stubbornly introverted fickleness, refusing to take up any membership beyond the talking-shop. Turkmenistan was more on the autistic spectrum, with its 'permanent neutrality.' In the end, Astana decided to find new international organizations to play with, but kept checking in from time to time if one of its neighbours changed their mind.

Still, this did not remove the need for great powers that Central Asia *had to be* a region, and not just any region, a strategic region! How better to convince a US congress to allocate huge sums for military operations in Afghanistan after 9/11? How else to underscore Russia's new military base in Kyrgyzstan or uphold the cohesiveness of its 'near abroad'-policy under Putin? Central Asia had to be a region, one that stood together in their concern with Islamic terrorism coming from Afghanistan, and would collaborate with great powers to deal with this global threat. Needless to say, regime consolidation in Central Asia got quite a boost after this tidal wave of great power interest, and funding.

Between 2013 and 2019 three things had changed. First, Russia and China had both kick-started their own organizations, at first getting along well together with the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO) in 2001, but soon behaving more competitively with Moscow's push for 'Eurasian' integration (the *Eurasian Economic Union* – EAEU – cf. Chapter 17) and Beijing's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI – cf. Chapter 16). Second, the US had already embarked on retreating from Afghanistan (symbolically planned to be finalized on '9/11' of the year 2021) and had been downsizing its military build-up and influence. Third, new leadership in Turkmenistan (however hesitantly), but more importantly, in Uzbekistan (since 2016) is putting the puzzle back together again. Tashkent under Mirziyoyev has been repairing bilateral relations with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, slowly allowing to bring the region's most densely populated core, the Uzbek portion of the Ferghana valley with over eight million people, in wider integration schemes.

How to interpret this trend? Is Central Asia becoming a region (again)? As always, the chosen theoretical frame constrains the answers one can find.

If one embraces theories of regionalism and regionalization, Central Asia can be subjected to a 'region-ness'-meter: a hierarchical typology of five evolutionary (teleological?) phases that benchmark a region's process of achieving the highest form of integration, a region-state (level 5) – with a sort of voluntary empire as its ultimate (ideal) end point. On this scale, Central Asia would currently (at least by 2019 standards) hover between a 'regional complex' rating (level 2) and the dawn of a 'regional society' (3) with a dominant discourse of 'cooperation, integration and mutual benefits,' endorsed by all states, that finally goes beyond the declarative posing at the typical leader summit 'class reunion' photo ops.

However, *New Regionalism Theory* focuses foremost on the rising level of institutionalization that transforms regions, and does not account for any stark power inequalities of the region's sudden integrative 'progress' with the Russian EAEU and Chinese-led BRI. Nor are critical neo-colonial frames or alternative agendas by member states considered.

An alternative approach, would be to use the so-called English School of International Relations as a theory for investigating if the region has become a 'society of states' (an international society, as defined by the works of Hedley Bull et al.). This time not measured by formal institutions, but how they are bound by a shared set of rules on how to deal with one another. This frame does not require the yardsticks of common institutions or the pooling of sovereignty, but looks at other norms, also informal ones. In such a study, Filippo Costa Buranelli finds that this regional 'Central Asian' state system has become stable and ordered, with actors sharing a common understanding regarding their own:

- (Regional) interpretation of sovereignty (stressing non-intervention)
- International law (treaties)
- Diplomacy (conflict-management, bilateral talks, and off-the-record informal meetings of diplomats)
- Authoritarianism (their 'typical' constitutions – cf. Chapter 14, or their use of referenda and ruling parties – cf. Chapter 10)
- Great power privileges with special roles for Russia and China and for the US and the EU in designated, well-patrolled spheres. (cf. Costa Buranelli 2019: 240-250)

A third approach is to drop the state-centric view, and look at the political regimes, at how they congregate in specific authoritarian (personalist) clusters in certain world regions. Such cluster formation is not random, but regimes become part of clusters through coercive means, socialization, and/or develop regime type similarities over time because of regional structures. Often a 'critical mass' of regimes (or one powerful regime) is required around which other regimes can cluster. In other cases, regime clusters are foremost shaped by their regional structures, which conform regimes to one-another, as a result of common legacy like a former empire (e.g. the USSR).

In this regard, Central Asia started off as a (lawless) 'bad neighbourhood' with ethnic clashes and the Tajik Civil War, exacerbated by Uzbek interference (i.e. attempted efforts at installing its own regime there in 1992 and 1998). But since 1999, the region has been steadily absorbed into the similar overlapping hegemonic structures of Russia and China. These 'hegemonic regime' clusters will uphold the prevailing status quo and promote autocratic stability to Central Asia

(Van den Bosch 2020). While the Russian 'gravity centre' is in a rather defensive mode (due to EU encroachment and norm contagion in its outer rim – Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus), a future potential clash with China's expanding cluster, could result in real friction, along a frontline running right through Central Asia, with real consequences.

'Region-ness' is thus in the eye of the beholder, but by cleaning out our theoretical toolkit and adjusting frames to account for the Western genesis of our IR theories (e.g. in line with Western normative thought and (strong) state-centredness) without stumbling in the pitfall at the other extreme (e.g. orientalist thinking that stresses the inherent informal, neo-patrimonial natures of such quasi-states), it continues to pay to think about Central Asia's international relations in comparative perspective.

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tion; and Chapter 22 (Suzanne Harris-Brandts and Polese) on urbanization.

Delving deeper into the **authoritarian contexts** are: Chapter 10 (Adrien Fauve) on ruling parties, referenda and elections; Chapter 11 (Jeroen Van den Bosch) on personalist rule, patronalism and Weber's notions of rulership; Chapter 14 (Scott Newton) on constitutions and legal systems; Chapter 17 (Catherine Poujol) on foreign policies and external relations; and Chapter 18 (Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro and Maria Raquel Freire) on securitization discourses, threat framing and terrorism.

BIASES – Even if some advocate and indeed try to move beyond the 'FSU paradigm,' for now, and likely for the near future, the region remains infused with legacies of a Soviet system in which these modern polities and their institutions themselves came into being. This brings up at once an interesting question though: at what point can one state that the FSU approach no longer applies? Is an alternation of generations enough, or does it depend on other, more structural, factors?

Other than that, a major bias (risk) is the approach of 'FSU Central Asia' though 'fad issues' which most often come into fashion because of current affairs or because of funding priorities: 'water wars,' 'terrorism,' 'ethnic conflict,' 'drug trafficking,' 'energy politics,' or whatever issue is trending in the international community.

BLIND SPOTS – There are several. Since it is often believed, in various international spheres, that nation-states are passé or that the 'failed state' paradigm (always popular when examining other world regions) applies to Central Asia as well, the region's countries and their political systems are too often seen as passive, agency-less objects in dynamics that surpass the region – which they are not. Rather, at various echelons, the states can take advantage, in one way or another, of external actors – not only 'classical powers' but also transnational corporations, aid organisations, intergovernmental bodies and international financial institutions.

Furthermore, in terms of historiography, a number of formative episodes that are too often subject to misjudgement and clichés need to be revalorized and re-emphasized as both teaching and research subjects. Examples include the true nature and functioning of nomadic societies (addressed by Vincent Fourniau in Chapter 5), the historical presence and evolution of Islam and Central Asia's place in the Islamic realm (addressed by Bruno De Cordier in Chapter 4), and the nature and impact of Tsarist rule under which

the region experienced its first modern transformation. For all may be past history, yet somehow they still reverberate in the fabric of these countries and societies up to his day.

Finally, there is the attention for the dynamics at the deep-societal level, at the grassroots as they say. These countries have populations and living societies, after all. In terms of working in this field, there are enormous differences between what is possible in the different Central Asia countries, because of varying official attitudes, restrictions, and the overall societal climate towards researchers and what they exactly want to research. While Kyrgyzstan is generally well – if not over- – researched because it is much easier to work there (in practical terms), little has been done in and on Turkmenistan, in contrast.

3. So, now what?

We now had several interpretations and embodiments of 'Central Asia.' What to do with them, which is the 'true' one? Does it feel, as T.S. Eliot suggested in the opening quote, like we know the place for the first time? For authors and readership alike, it will probably depend of what your familiar interpretations of the region are, which aspects of the region you have been working on, and what aspects of the region you are specifically interested in. The latter brings us to the fact that the post-structuralist and hyper-relativist approach where 'anything goes and fits' is useless, for it ignores the fact that things occur in specific, and often lasting, spaces that are shaped by both historical developments and current experiences.

It is not a matter of having to make a final choice regarding the definition of the region. The relevance of one frame over another works itself out once one determines which historical phases, polities and societal developments one wishes to examine, who the core actors are or were, and what spaces they lived and acted in.

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Bruno J. De Cordier is a professor at the Department of Conflict and Development Studies under the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of Ghent University (Flanders, Belgium). He teaches, amongst others, a course in the history of Central Asia, a region where he has also lived for several years. De Cordier is particularly interested in the extents and ways in which past histories continue to be reflected in present realities and identities, and ways in which history can inspire ways to deal with the likely turbulent future.

Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch (PhD) studied Area Studies (Slavonic Studies) and Political Science (International Relations) at the Catholic University in Leuven (Belgium) before obtaining his PhD at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (AMU) on the topic of personalist rule in Sub-Saharan Africa, recently revised and turned into a book (Routledge, 2021). He continues to study authoritarian ecosystems as an independent scholar and works at AMU as a project coordinator, often doubling as editor. His research fields encompass theories of dictatorships, the classification of political regimes, autocratic cooperation, democratization, linking domestic elites with foreign policy and IR. With a background in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, he is currently branching out to make new comparisons with other world regions.

Chariot with clover.

CHAPTER 3

How to Use this Handbook: Didactic Vision and Study Guide

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Keywords:

- Learning Outcomes • Student-centred Education • Reading Comprehension
- Didactic Design • Teaching in Higher Education

CHAPTER 3

How to Use this Handbook: Didactic Vision and Study Guide

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1. The Purpose of this Handbook

Since its inception, this handbook has been designed as a didactic material for various target groups of readers. Its development has been the main objective of the EISCAS project, and is imbedded in its larger mission to strengthen Central Asian studies (CAS) and their educational dimension. In various consultation phases – involving specialists in educational studies and cognitive psychology, together with the chapter authors – the book's scope and methodology were worked out to be refined over time. In this introductory chapter, we expose how the handbook's different didactic elements can serve various types of readers in different roles like: students, educators and scholars. This does not exclude the usefulness of the volume to a wide range of professional experts (journalists, policy-makers, etc.) and other Central Asia *aficionados/as*.

At the earliest stage, the project team carried out a need-analysis to define the scope and target audience of this book. Surveys and interviews made it possible to assess which academic approaches dominate the multi-disciplinary Area Study of CAS and to analogically identify several fields that – by grace of the sheer size of their target reader groups – were expected to benefit most from EU-funding. History, Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science (including International Relations) turned out to be currently the most prominent disciplinary lenses to study Central Asia. Notwithstanding, it is important to reiterate at this point that this choice, disadvantaging other disciplines like Archaeology, Art and Cultural Studies, Geography, Linguistics, Literature Studies, and others, solely reflects the logic of EU-funding allocation (based on the need analysis), not the intrinsic value or quality of these study fields.

In the next phase (preparing the EISCAS grant proposal), a general working methodology was conceived and presented as a pil-

lar of this book project. Once funding was secured, several project teams (editorial, didactic and curriculum design, with the support of other experts) worked closely together to survey existing curricula of CAS courses, distil from them the most current Learning Outcomes and subsequently coordinate our own formulation of parsimonious Learning Outcomes for each chapter, as well as classroom activities and other extra-textual elements. The project's didactic experts bundled all guidelines into a written 'didactic vision' and presented them to all involved handbook authors. Later, additional instructions were created for questions, classroom activities, assignments and other elements. Based on these recommendations, the editors made decisions on how best to present handbook content to readers (chapter structure, questions for readers, the use of Info Boxes, recommended reading, etc.) in order to foster reading comprehension and learning processes;¹ the same goes for the choice of maps, figures, and additional case studies.

The rather exceptional² focus on learning does not cloud the scholarly aspirations of this handbook. For each topic, editors have strived to debunk stubborn myths, to guard against the pitfalls of resorting to clichés (where scope did not allow greater complexity), and de-orientalize Central Asians and the region. Since all contributing authors, all experts in their respective fields, integrated cutting-edge research to reflect the current state of the discipline (for the selected topics), this handbook broadens its readership by doubling as a reference work for a scholarly audience as well.

2. Why Do We Use Handbooks ?

Defining handbooks as a genre is a complex issue. There is no commonly accepted definition of a handbook in Academia, which is rather striking bearing in mind that a great number of researchers, teachers and students have been using handbooks for decades (with many of these same researchers contributing to their writing and editing). Moreover, the terminological distinctions between a handbook, a textbook and a manual turn out to be vague, culturally pronged and discipline-dependent.³

¹ The EISCAS project is grateful for the input and training on reading comprehension provided by Paul van den Broek (Leiden University) during the project's Prague Staff Training (November 2018).

² To this day, almost no publications on Central Asia have been designed explicitly with a student-centred approach – see also Box 3.1.

³ Cultural differences are observable for example between the British, Dutch, French, German and Italian contexts of the academic use of these

A fundamental issue would be then not ‘what a handbook is,’ but the question of who uses handbooks and what for? Such is an approach proposed by text and discourse studies, where genres are seen as social action and texts are studied through the lens of their purposes, uses and audiences.* This leads us to a more specific question of who is to use this particular handbook and what for. Thus, handbooks in Academia have traditionally held a pedagogical-instructional purpose.* They were, on the one hand, written by researchers for other researchers, but on the other, were extensively used at universities and other institutions with the aim of teaching new generations of students. Handbooks therefore have been commonly used *both* for teaching and regular self-study and not uniquely, as a narrow view would suggest, solely as a reference book for scholars.*

*Bazerman, 2014; Miller 2015

*Connors 1983; Augello and Guidi 2012: 15-16

*Augello and Guidi 2012: 17

Similarly, nowadays, handbooks in Academia are used as a teaching material. They can often be found in the literature list of a course syllabus as main resources for autonomous learning and are recommended by teachers to be read as a means of preparing classes, to study for exams or for course-related research projects, a place this handbook aspires to take.

A survey of contemporary handbooks in Social and Political Sciences indicates that the main function of a handbook is to present the state-of-the-art academic knowledge on a particular subject or in a specialized (sub-)field, both in order to: (a) serve as a reference tool; (b) and support instruction. From a formal point of view, they tend to have a clear structure divided according to general sub-topics (e.g. economy, politics – like in the case of this handbook). Many of these works are also products of collective efforts, as the contribution of a number of specialists enhances the scope and overall quality. Since they can be treated as a sort of a compendium, they are particularly useful for students, young researchers and other adepts of a particular field. These observations and our practical experience led us to conclude that handbooks were and still are often used in a similar way to a textbook or coursebook.^{4*}

*Hagemann and Rosch 2012: 98, 112-113; Erreygers and Van Dijk 2012: 223-231

terms (Augello and Guidi 2012: 15-16). Other contexts, like e.g. the Polish language, reflects a lack of clear distinction between a handbook and textbook. Additionally, each discipline has its own subgenres and its own ways of using handbooks. In some spheres (e.g. the case of composition studies) the functions of a handbook are narrowed to quick checking, getting specific factual information (Segal 1995; Connors, 1983), while social scientists and historians will use handbooks differently, with much more emphasis on intensive reading, skimming or scanning.

⁴ Undoubtedly a handbook is not a textbook. For instance, the structure of a handbook is more flexible and less sequential than that of a textbook.

Box 3.1 Handbooks in English on Central Asia after 2000

The first works in the 1990s (or before) aimed to capture the transformation of the region under or after Soviet rule. Most works stayed firmly within their discipline (History, Political Economy, Cultural Anthropology, etc.) and rarely ventured beyond the borders and debates of their academic home turf. Some are truly impressive, like the *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, (Paris: UNESCO, vol. 1-6, 1992-2005), and are still excellent reference works today. Most disciplines adopted a larger definition of Central Asia (see also Chapter 2).

Factual Reference Works

- Giampaolo R. Capisani, *The Handbook of Central Asia: A Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics*, (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000).
- Reuel R. Hanks, *Central Asia A Global Studies Handbook*, (Santa Barbara CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

'Classic' Handbooks

- Rico Isaacs; Erica Marat (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Central Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2021).
- David W. Montgomery (ed.), *Central Asia: Contexts for Understanding*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021/2022).

The works by G.R. Capisani (2000) and R.R. Hanks (2005) are monographs that were published at a time when factual information on the new Central Asian republics was sparse, incomplete or non-existent in some spheres, while simultaneously the region had been gaining prominence for policy-makers and investors anxious about the rising security threat of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996. Capisani covered all five countries and aimed at describing their socio-economic transitions and transformations since the fall of the USSR. Hanks applied a more security-oriented lens, prominently aimed at an American readership, but limited his purview to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. (A new, updated edition has been announced.) Both works are now outdated, but fulfilled an important encyclopaedic function in the field two decades ago for scholars that did not specialize in Central Asia.

As the years progressed, research on the region boomed. Initially, this was kickstarted by funding from governments desperate for a better understanding of the political and security dimensions of the larger region as the Afghan war progressed and power politics became increasingly complex with the rise of China. Later the focus shifted and was broadened with many sub-fields boosted by innovative contributions (many from native scholarship), while at the same time Central Asia became more popular in the mainstream literature by the 'Silk Roads' phenomenon. After 2015, there was a growing need in the field to capture these sprawling new insights into comprehensive and accessible reference works, one of which you are reading now.

The newest works in the list above, edited by Rico Isaacs and Erica Marat (Routledge 2021) and David Montgomery (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), are planned for publication around the same time as this handbook. Both are excellent reference works for scholars and experts working in this field of Area Studies. Both books tackle the region in a cross-disciplinary fashion, but with different purposes. The book by Isaacs and Marat captures the state-of-the-

discipline, presenting major findings in the academic field and identifying long-term trends, recent observations and future developments. The one by Montgomery is by far the most comprehensive in scope to date, offering short introductions and cases on a humbling range of topics (including on family structures, cinema and Art), serving a readership operating beyond Academia, e.g. including policy-makers or other readers, who need to get up to speed on specific topics related to Central Asia for professional reasons. Both endeavours have brought together an impressive set of authors.

This European Handbook differs from the above two handbooks in that it was especially designed as a didactic material. It goes beyond basic introductory chapters and offers longer pieces (covering course modules) that in style and format present a selected range of the most-important topics in an accessible manner, supported by info-boxes, new maps, recommended literature, and with several case studies integrating chapters.

Accompanied by a series of recorded lectures (YouTube), a comprehensive glossary and smart index, this work is fine-tuned for self-study or as a reference work. And by abandoning the typical (inflexible, stacked) textbook structure, this handbook is meant to aid (not restrict) educators in selecting chapters as teaching materials (grounded in Learning Outcomes), and borrowing from each chapter's didactic section when preparing classroom activities or assignments. Finally, its Open Access format, rendered possible by the *Erasmus Plus programme of the European Union* and the support of *ibidem Verlag*, makes this European Handbook available without financial restrictions.

Handbooks take such a position, especially when comprehensive textbooks simply do not exist (which is a case for CAS and some CAS-related domains).

In this sense, a handbook is a hybrid genre, aimed at both doing research and teaching about research.⁵ As explained in the beginning of this chapter, during the creation of this particular handbook we have sought to expand and strengthen the instructional dimension. We have foremost taken into consideration the students themselves that will be using it for self-study, as well as, in the second place, the teachers who would like to use it (even partially) as an important didactic material for their courses on Central Asia.

While a textbook is purely didactical and presents a systematic approach to the learning process in a specific subject or course, a handbook can be used in several courses/programmes and the content can be treated selectively, depending on the needs of a group of students, their teacher(s) and the institution in which learning takes place. This does not change the fact that handbooks can and are widely used with a similar, instructional purpose to textbooks.

⁵ Such a distinction between doing and teaching a particular academic domain has been explored by David Colander, among others (Colander 2006).

3. A Student-oriented Handbook

In the previous section, we have alluded to two target audiences of our book: first, students (mainly Master and PhD level) and, second, academic teachers or instructors. We came to the conclusion that a good handbook has to take into account what educational and cognitive research says about reading and learning, and also propose some tools for both these target users (Learning Outcomes, questions, classroom activities and case studies). Each chapter starts with a *Student Section* (Learning Outcomes and Questions) and is followed by a *Teacher Section* (Topics for Assignments and Classroom Activities). Additionally, six case studies have been created (and assigned to their respective chapters) and most chapters contain a link to a recorded lecture on the topic. The use of these didactic/pedagogical elements is designed to be optional so the handbook leaves space for flexibility and adaptation both for teachers⁶ and students.

3.1 What Are the Learning Outcomes For?

We designed the Student Section to support student interaction with the text and their learning. The first part of each section is dedicated to the *Learning Outcomes*. The ‘Intended Learning Outcomes’ (here used in an abbreviated form ‘Learning Outcomes’ or LOs) are a basic element of the ‘Outcomes-Based Teaching and Learning’ (OBTL).^{*} They are statements that identify what the learner will know and be able to do by the end of a course, of a program or as a result of any other learning experience, which can be a lecture, workshop or – what particularly interests us – reading a book chapter.

^{*}Biggs and Tang 2011: 10–14

There are two main reasons for including the Intended Learning Outcomes in the chapters of the handbook: a purely instructional and a practical one. From the instructional point of view, Learning Outcomes are linked to the concept of student autonomy. Although some academic teachers see the need to formulate Learning Outcomes for their course as an external and over-bureaucratic requirement, their existence is in fact beneficial for students as regulators of their own learning process. In the words of Phil Race and Ruth Pickford, clearly stating the intended LOs helps learners to “take ownership of their need to learn,” because this way the students are informed about what they have to learn but also how to show afterwards what they have learned.^{*} In this sense,

^{*}Race and Pickford 2007: 11

⁶ Whenever we refer to a teacher, we have in mind an academic teacher, instructor, educator or any kind of person carrying out Central Asia studies instruction.

the LOs also enhance transparency in the learning and assessment processes.*

*Race 2005: 24-27, 77-78

Even though they are sometimes reduced to be indicators of assessment criteria, LOs should be a basic point of reference alongside the entire learning period (e.g. the whole semester).⁷ As such they can help students in their metacognitive activities: planning, self-monitoring and self-evaluating. Placing the LOs at the beginning of each handbook chapter enhances their visibility and invites to metacognitively think about the goals already *before* consulting the chapter and to have them in mind during reading.

In turn, the practical (organizational) advantages of assigning Learning Outcomes to each chapter is that the teachers may check if the chapter content coincides with the LOs of their own course. This aspect can also be approached reversely: the proposed LOs can be used as an inspiration for teachers and curriculum designers, for example in case of creating a new course on Central Asia in their institution. To this purpose, all chapters are listed with their LOs at the end of this book, before the Index.

The chapters usually include a list of five to eight main Learning Outcomes, which in no way exhaust the didactic content of the chapter, but have been chosen by the authors and editors as the most important ones. Teachers should take into account the subjective dimension of such a choice and manage the LOs in a way most suitable for them and their students. It is important to stress that we decided to exclude the generic skills from the LOs and focus solely on the discipline-specific ones. In other words, the LOs that you will find here are specific, such as “student is able to *classify Central Asia’s political regimes*” and not general ones, like “student is able to *think critically*.”

While formulating the Intended Learning Outcomes the authors in this handbook have attempted to dedicate ample space for skills. This way chapters aim to go beyond the goals of merely declarative and factual knowledge. By *skills*, we mean intellectual academic skills understood mostly as *higher order thinking skills* (often referred to as HOTS) such as: explaining, analysing, evaluating, comparing, giving arguments, applying, hypothesizing and others.⁸ Such academic skills bring students closer to a deeper

⁷ Consult the work of John Biggs and Catherine Tang, who see the intended learning outcomes as a central element for their model of constructive alignment in higher education. (Biggs and Tang 2011)

⁸ We are not using the term *skills* in the sense of “professional skills,” “real-life skills” or “practical skills,” as they tend to be understood in the context of vocational training or in the business world. Indeed, the view of skills in higher education could be (and has been often) linked to these types of skills and to neoliberal discourses. As Christine Veloso Barbosa Araújo

understanding of the studied matter and to the competences of a future researcher or a Central Asia specialist beyond Academia. Students, rather than just to *know* things, are expected to be able to *do* something with this knowledge. Certainly *doing* is not treated as the opposite of *knowing*, but they rather constitute two sides of the same coin. Clearly, one needs to possess quality and well-structured knowledge to be able to operate on it in a complex way. What has to be remembered is that some students use these higher order mental operations spontaneously, while some do not.* All the students at some point are required to perform them in Academia, but are often expected to learn them *on the go*. What is worse, they often do not know about this and in their learning thus concentrate on factual information. Having these skills represented among the LOs and being able to practice them while reading can contribute to HOTS development.

*Biggs and Tang 2011: 7

3.2 What Are the Questions For?

In the second part of the Student Section, students and teachers will find three types of questions. Their purpose is threefold: activating a student's prior knowledge, guiding the reading and learning process, and stimulating further reflection.

Pre-reading questions respond to a constructionist principle of building new knowledge on the existing cognitive structures. This means that effective learning from written texts depends, among other factors, on background knowledge – the problems arise when the reader does not have it, but also when they do not activate it.* This is why, before initiating learning from the chapter, the reader is invited to reflect on what they already know (and, potentially of equal cognitive value, on what they *do not* know). In case the student does not know the answer, they can try to guess (formulate hypotheses about the possible answer). Such an activation should

*Ambrose et al. 2010: 10–39; Kendeou et al. 2003

et al. argue – in their critique of the Bologna reform – the focus on skills in the Bologna process was oriented towards an adaptation of university curricula to market requirements. (Velooso Barbosa Araújo et al. 2018) According to Antônio Bolívar, *“the term skills has its origin in the business world and that makes it questionable as a model of training for basic and higher education, by linking it to neoliberal policies which subordinate education to labour market and human resources management demands.”* (Bolívar 2011: 110) Therefore, we think that an important distinction has to be made, between professional, practical (often mechanical) skills and academic or higher order thinking skills, necessary both in Academia as beyond it (e.g. in expert jobs in Central Asia). As Maria del Carmen López states, focusing on teaching skills in Academia does not necessarily go hand in hand with adopting a neo-capitalist approach. (López 2011: 163)

also enhance the so-called *far transfer* – in other words: the knowledge acquired in a different context (another course or discipline) will be more easily applied to understand new topics, as this does not always happen automatically.*

*Ambrose et al. 2010: 108–110

Main Questions are mostly compatible with a chapter's Learning Outcomes. These questions orientate the student towards the most important content of the chapter and their basic function is to guide the reader's attention. In the first reading it is advisable to read these questions beforehand. In the subsequent interactions with the chapter (study episodes), they can be used by the student to practice retrieval (in other words, to check how much content they have been able to retrieve).

Post-reading questions or 'beyond the chapter questions' invite the students to a further reflection and/or further reading. These are more advanced questions, which allude to extended and abstract knowledge and higher order thinking skills that may go beyond the ones articulated in the chapter LOs. They may be used for group/classroom discussions (with the teacher moderating and providing feedback) as well as for individual written or oral assignments.

All three types of questions can also be used as ideas for both formative and final evaluation. Because of the complexity of issues addressed we do not include answers in the handbook, thus feedback will have to be regulated by the teacher. Finally, all the questions (as well as subsequent tasks) are helpful to establish reading and learning goals and thus aid the subsequent self-monitoring and self-evaluating processes. If the student is able to answer the questions, this is a sign that these goals are at least partially completed.

3.3 What Are the Classroom Activities For?

At the end of each chapter, we have included a Teacher Section. This Section first lists topics for written assignments and then presents a description of one or two classroom activities, proposed by the author(s) in consultation with the project's Didactic Team. The purpose of the classroom activities is twofold:

- Firstly and mainly, classroom activities are oriented towards engaging students in actions that will make the content more meaningful to them, for example by linking theory with practice. This is based on the conviction that *doing* is a powerful vehicle for learning (the *learning by doing* principle), derived

from constructivist (and socio-constructivist) approaches: such as learning by doing, experiential learning, as well as student-centred and practice-to-theory approaches (as opposed to the traditional transmissive approaches). Knowledge is constructed, re-constructed, tested and consolidated in action.

- Secondly, some activities have been conceptualized as pair or group work and as such can be useful contributions in the spirit of *collaborative learning* (also known as *cooperative learning*), which is considered as one of the most popular, desired (and according to research, effective) approaches to learning.⁹

In this handbook – without singling out any of the above mentioned approaches and leaving the decision to each teacher and/or institution in this regard – we understand that the common denominator for these activities is to engage the student with the material by making them *do* things. We want to see students interacting with texts by using different strategies, and hope teachers try out the varied range of activities that we provided, which hopefully will make the learning process more meaningful.¹⁰ For example, in the classroom, instead of explaining a phenomenon, topic or concept to students in a lecture, teachers may invite students to participate in an activity aimed at discovering the nature of a problem or at understanding the issue better. The ‘explaining’ part can be covered by the handbook (in an individual study before or after the class). This way, a unique classroom opportunity for interacting and working with others would not be bypassed.

The activities proposed at the end of each chapter can be seen, not only as a complete set of steps and tips, but also as their authors’ proposals and inspiration for teachers to design their own activities. We believe that many teachers using this handbook, already – either intentionally or intuitively – implement the constructivist approaches in creative and diverse ways. In this sense, and obviously, this handbook is a modest practical implementation of the *doing* paradigm (by giving the teachers some options and ideas to make their students more active as readers and learners).

Some steps of the group activities can take place in the classroom and parts of them serve as group or individual homework. A teacher will know best which parts of a task can be prepared

⁹ For a review/ overview of research on cooperative learning, consult the article of Robyn M. Gillies. (Gillies 2016)

¹⁰ As Arno J.C. Reints indicates: “*Pupils have to do something with [that] content in order to learn successfully. Therefore, developers of learning materials choose certain learner activities: exercises, assignments, questions, etc. These activities are meant to foster specific learning goals.*” (Reints 2013: 25)

by *their* students outside of the classroom and which tasks require more support or feedback to complete. The teacher also sets an approximate time limit for particular elements of the task. All the activities can be easily modified by the teacher, based on the needs of the group. Indeed, we encourage teachers to adjust the level of difficulty of the tasks, to add or eliminate some of their elements, experiment with them and refine them based on their own experience.

3.4 Videos and Cases

At the end of most Student Sections, users of this handbook will find references to a video and/or a case study. **Videos with recorded lectures** by the chapter authors are available at the *EISCAS Eurasian Insights* YouTube channel.¹¹

QR code and link to the EISCAS channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsjT4dEDkMpBR_XUIIvVz7Q

This integration of a set of videos with the handbook responds to two pedagogical principles: multimodality and variation. The former, **multimodality**, understood as the use of materials in different modalities (visual, audio and audio-visual aids) has rightly become common in university teaching practice. There are two strong reasons for that, mentioned by Reints.* The first reason corresponds to the diversity of cognitive preferences of individual students as well as their needs related to the use of different sensory channels.¹² The second reason is the ‘modality principle,’ which encourages a change of modality of the teaching/learning material (e.g. from visual text processing to auditive or audio-visual information) in

*Reints 2016: 25

¹¹ The content of the online lectures and their respective chapters do not coincide with a 1:1 proportion. A video often covers an important element or a set of elements of a chapter, thus deepening or widening its substance.

¹² The topic of cognitive styles or cognitive preferences is still worth discussing and is still being researched, beyond its controversial *matching hypothesis*, regarding the modality-specific learning styles. (Aslaksen and Lorås 2018; Cuevas 2015)

*Reints 2016: 25; Mayer and Moreno 2003; Sadoski and Paivio 2004

order to reduce the cognitive load of a specific channel and thus to facilitate processing.*

All this responds to the second and a more general principle of **variation**. When the content is delivered in different ways, learners stay more engaged. The same or a similar content, presented both in a written and audio-visual form, can build stronger cognitive connections and consequently enhance retrieval. The lectures are not only an alternative to the written texts, but also a way to practice spaced learning.¹³ On different occasions (spaced in time), the student can be acquiring the same or similar content, but presented in a different modality. A great part of our lectures can be also listened to.

One of the ways for the teachers to use the videos is to ask the students to watch them before class, so that they can be ready for discussion or other engaging activities. This way, the teacher's contribution does not have to be a lecture covering the whole topic, but they can instead complement what the students have already read, with comments and classroom activities. What we do advise is that the teachers manage – in their own, creative way – the use of the videos as didactic tools, by preparing their own questions (to be presented for example before watching). Another idea would be jigsaw activities in which some students would be responsible for preparing a part of the content based on a different part of the same video (or video vs. chapter) and then collaboratively share what they know. This will help avoid a passive reception of the audio-visual material.

Furthermore, **six case studies** have been integrated into the handbook, available in a separate section (at the end of the book). Each covers one or more chapters and, to fulfil their pedagogical purpose, contains an assignment. In order to complete the task, the student needs to understand the case study itself, link it to its corresponding chapter or chapters, and perform an additional reflection, based on the author's instructions. The assignment often refers to further reading or contains further insights from the author. We hope the teachers will find their own ways of integrating the cases into their courses.

3.5 A Comment on Online Learning: The 2019 Pandemic and Beyond

We originally intended the videos – as well as the whole handbook – to function as additional didactic resources in support of campus-based learning, in other words: as an integral part of traditional (offline) learning programs. After the Covid-19 pandemic

¹³ The spacing-effect will be addressed in the Part 4 of this chapter (study guide).

experience, we generally sustain this original vision, in which the handbook was primarily designed to be used in offline environments (especially if one considers the way in which we framed classroom activities). Nevertheless, writing this chapter in the fall of the year 2020, we feel the need to address the issue of online learning, having in mind the pandemic-induced, dramatic change of circumstances affecting the work of academic teachers worldwide. We can, indeed, imagine the use of our handbook in distance education.

- First of all, in either case (online or offline), the handbook would be used by students for self-study (independently of the teaching mode).
- Second of all, teachers will be able to adapt proposed activities (questions and activities) to online environments, as they have done in their recent practices all over the world. The fact that an electronic free version of the handbook is available will only facilitate such a use. At the same time, we want to stress the importance of a teacher figure who will be administrating the process and creating opportunities for interaction (collaboration) between the students.¹⁴

In the era of fascination with new technologies in education, reasonable appeals have been made to moderate and manage the overwhelming hype on digitalization and to base the design of digital materials on what we know about learning and not only on what looks good, sells good and seems to be technologically functional. Online learning resources should be first of all pedagogically, not technologically driven.*

*Watson 2001

This idea underlies the inclusion of video materials into the handbook: they are not there to enhance the perceived attractiveness of the handbook (through the use of modern technologies), but to be meaningfully integrated into the learning process by teachers and students, to cater to students who have a preference for the spoken word, and to make possible a revision of the written material through the use of a different medium (as explained in Part 3.4).

¹⁴ We do believe that online learning can be effective, but also agree with Phil Race and Ruth Pickford's claim that it *cannot* and *should not* replace or exclude human communication, collaboration and support (among peers as well as between learners and their teachers). (Race and Pickford 2007: 101; Reupert et al. 2009)

4. Study guide: How to Use This Handbook?

This part contains some tips for the main users of this handbook: the students, although teachers are also invited to acquaint themselves with this study guide. We all learn in our own preferred ways and you have probably already developed some of your favourite routines and strategies. Independently from the level of your studies (Bachelor, Master or PhD) and from your previous background, we assume that your goal is to learn about Central Asia and thus make this learning effective and long-lasting. Our goal, in turn, is to support you in this process and invite you to use an active approach, opposed to the idea of passive reading with the mere intent to remember the content and to later reproduce it in a (later) evaluation context. Actually, the results of your study will largely depend on the quality of your interaction with the texts you will be reading. To encourage such interaction, we have equipped each chapter with a Student Section that contains Learning Outcomes and questions. Many chapters are also accompanied with a link to a YouTube lecture and a case study.

4.1 Use the Pre-reading Questions to Activate Your Prior Knowledge

In the Student Section you will find three types of questions: questions for a pre-reading reflection, main questions and post-reading questions. The pre-reading questions are designed to activate the knowledge that you already possess on the topic (and its related skills). This way, the new (and possibly more advanced) knowledge will be better integrated and linked with what you already know (i.e. what you have previously learned). For this reason, always read the pre-reading questions and try to answer them before reading the chapter. Do not become discouraged in cases where you do not seem to know the answer (or can only answer the question partially) – instead try to formulate a hypothesis about the possible answer or answers. Remember, discovering that you *do not know* something is equally valuable and it is an important part of the process of monitoring your own learning. On the other hand, the pre-reading questions may seem very basic to you. However, questions that seem basic and simple, like *what is democracy?* or *what is a resource?* can lead to profound and complex answers. This is why you should try to go as deep and specific as possible. If you are studying with a classmate, this might be a great opportunity for a brainstorming session. In any case, you should remember that the purpose of this section is not to check or evaluate your knowledge as much as to set it in motion and get you ready for learning. Also,

in most cases, the answer to these questions will be implicitly or explicitly presented in the chapter.

4.2 Use the Main Questions to Guide Your Attention – Read them Beforehand

The main questions were created to help guide your reading and, subsequently, your learning. They lead to the information in the chapter (concepts, issues, phenomena, etc.) that the authors themselves established as important. They also give you a notion about what to expect to find in the text and correspond with the Learning Outcomes for that chapter. For these reasons, you should read the questions before starting to read the chapter (e.g. immediately after dealing with the pre-reading questions).

Of course, what may happen is that what is important to you in the chapter – or to your teacher, for your course or a research project you are working on – is not the most important for the authors of this handbook (and was not represented in the questions). This is why we advise you to use the questions critically and selectively, in line with the purposes of the course you are enrolled in, of a particular class you are attending or any other learning event. Take into account the specific instructions given by your teacher. Write down, mark and/or annotate whatever is important to you (for your research, your project, your interests) or use a mental map to relate hierarchically different topics and/or concepts within the text.

4.3 Inspire Yourself with the Post-reading Section

The post-reading questions solicit answers that go beyond the chapter and are often a creative outlet and open proposal for reflection. Some post-reading questions invite you to explore other works. You might want to discuss this part with a classmate, your teacher or a tutor after reading the chapter. Remind yourself of your own, individual and specific learning goals: what other issues are interesting to you? Propose your own ideas for discussion with your classmates or teacher, or as topics for essays.

4.4 Benchmark Your Learning with Learning Outcomes

Being an autonomous (and therefore, a more effective) learner consists of being able to plan, monitor and evaluate your own learning process. Learning Outcomes are so important, because they give you both a general sense of direction for your study and where you are heading at in a certain course or with a certain chapter. Often students do not put enough attention to familiarize themselves

with the LOs, even though their main purpose is to support their learning. Check to what extent the Learning Outcomes of a hand-book chapter are in line with your course LOs and try to monitor how well you are achieving them. A good way of evaluating your own progress is to go back to the LOs and check if you are able to perform the intended outcomes. Finally, try to focus on the so-called HOTS (higher order thinking skills), such as analysing, assessing, explaining, comparing, giving arguments or hypothesizing, as expressed in particular outcomes. While reading, try to spot insights and understand the links between concepts, events and phenomena, instead of retaining separate facts or trivia. Do your best to understand information, not to memorize it.

4.5 Practice spaced study

You have probably heard this a million times, but for a good reason. It is extremely important to stretch the study process in time. For example, 20 hours of study just before an exam (a so-called *massed study*) does not equal another 20 hours spread out in time (*spaced study*, e.g. one hour a day for 20 days). Indeed, the superiority of spaced study (also called *distributed study*) over massed study is paramount.¹⁵

Spaced learning is not only more effective but also long-lasting. This can be applied to reading a chapter. If you are supposed to read it before class, take your time and divide the preparations in two or three parts. Use this time not only for different kinds of reading (see Part 4.7, below), but also to reflect on the questions and the possible answers. This way you will not be just starting to read the chapter the day before the class, but will have time to try to retrieve what you remember, answer the questions again and think of topics for discussion.

Reading is an active process – these are the ways in which you can take charge of it. If you study this way during the whole semester, you will be able to save a lot of time in the exam period, because your knowledge will have deepened and consolidated during the semester. Also, the acquired information and insights will stay with you longer and will serve you in other courses.

4.6 Practice Retrieval

Retrieval or *retrieval practice* is one of the most useful and at the same time underappreciated learning strategies. It happens after you have made your first attempts to learn something and it consists of setting the material aside (e.g. the chapter, your notes, or

¹⁵ For the topic of spaced study, consult: Kornell et al. 2010; Zulkiply et al. 2012; Krug et al. 1990; Greene 2008.

any other material you are using to learn) and trying to actively remember as much as possible. This may sound obvious and it is possible that you have been using this learning strategy intuitively. However, studies show that students very rarely use retrieval and instead they rather re-read the material again and again (which is less effective).^{*} Converting retrieval into an intentional and systematic learning strategy will bring significant benefits^{*} for long term retention (memorization) of study material.

*Karpicke et al. 2009

*Roediger and Karpicke 2006

Trying to remember something (to retrieve the information from your memory) has been traditionally associated with evaluation and not with the learning itself (it has also been called *the testing effect*). However, retrieval should be used during the whole learning process as a strategy and it is you, the student, who plans and monitors these *testing* activities.¹⁶ In the process of retrieval, you might be failing and feel frustrated (with a huge amount of complex study material this will naturally occur), but even these failed attempts will be beneficial for your memory and further performance.

In order to practice retrieval, you can come back to the questions you have already reflected on some days or weeks earlier and try to retrieve the correct answers. You can also create your own questions and go back to them, create flashcards with concepts to define, names, events or anything else that you consider important. A more global approach (and a more difficult one) is to try to retrieve *everything that you know* about a certain chapter topic (e.g. 'migration in and from Central Asia,' to give just one example of chapter) without looking at the text. If you feel that you are not remembering a lot, have a look at the chapter's structure (re-read the headings and sub-headings) or go through the chapter again. You can practice retrieval several times: just after reading a chapter, then a day and a week later and finally, the number of additional times that you need to, before the final evaluation. Also here spacing is essential – studies show that retrieval systematically spread over time brings better results than massed retrieval.^{*} This means that the more systematically you practice retrieval, the better for your final results.

*Karpicke and Bauernschmidt 2011

4.7 Read the Chapter More Than Once and in Diverse Ways

There is no one way of reading academic texts (or any other text), although you might have already become used to a certain way of doing it. What people probably most associate with reading is the so-called *intensive reading*, which consists of going through the

¹⁶ To give an example, answering questions (like the ones proposed in the handbook) and taking quizzes are effective ways to practice retrieval.

whole text from the first word to the last one. Intensive reading allows you to familiarize yourself with the whole text, both general ideas and details, as well as the relationships between them. Two other basic strategies can be useful in your academic learning:

- The first one, **skimming**, is aimed at building an overview of the content in a relatively short time. It is highly advisable to use skimming at the beginning of the process – i.e. when you see the chapter for the first time. Before you start with the first paragraph, take time to leaf slowly through the whole chapter and try to identify the structure. Read the headings and sub-headings and the first sentences of each section. Have a look at illustrations, boxes, lists, tables or maps and the bibliography. Do you see anything familiar, strange and/or interesting? In the process, try to guess what the author's main ideas might be. After this you will have a better idea of what the chapter is about and your expectations will guide your next reading: a more thorough and intensive one. Skimming is very useful also when you want to revise what you have already learned: try to retrieve the main ideas (summarize the chapter content in just one or two minutes) and then skim the chapter to check, how well you did.
- **Scanning**, on the other hand, will be useful when you are looking for a specific piece of information – possibly you have been using it intuitively. This way of approaching reading will be helpful to find or confirm the answers to the proposed questions.

The secret is to adjust your reading strategy to your current goals. The goals are different when you are trying to have a general view of the chapter before digging into it (skimming), when you're trying to find or confirm a specific piece of information (scanning), when you want to understand deeply and exactly the chapter content (intensive reading), when you are revising for an exam or practicing retrieval (a combination of skimming, scanning and, if needed, intensive reading). In addition, when reading, have the bigger picture in mind. Ask yourself these questions: *Have you ever read something else on the same topic? Where was it published, who was the author? Was it different/similar and how? How does it relate to what you have learned in your courses (on Central Asia or other)? What is unclear? Are there any passages that do not convince you?*

*Barnett and Seefeldt 1989;
Krug et al. 1990

In any case, read the text more than once and in a spaced way.* Reading is interacting with texts and with each time you will be able to bring something new to this interaction.

4.8 Introduce Variation into Your Learning and Simply Experiment

Learners who use diverse materials get better results.¹⁷ Try to experiment with new tools and strategies: watch and listen to the online lectures, find alternative sources of information and compare them, check out the case studies attached to the handbook and collaborate with your classmates on tasks and questions (you can learn from your peers more than you may sometimes expect). Create your own study aids, based on what works on you: flashcards,¹⁸ mental maps, diagrams, drawings, videos or voice recordings (summaries of chapters or topics recorded by you to be watched or listened to later).

Find what ways of organizing your learning work best on you. What kind of learner you are: do you prefer a clear structure for your actions (discipline, timetable, instructions), do you prefer to work in a more spontaneous way, or do you need a combination of both? Do you like to learn with others? If yes, when, how and why? In any case, plan your activities and monitor and evaluate yourself to see what works and what does not. Experimentation is the key. In short, find your own preferred ways of learning, be open to experiment with new strategies and learn to adapt them to your current needs and the material.

5. Didactic Design: What Other Tools Does This Handbook Offer?

This handbook is foremost directed at students of CAS – its primary target audience – that will benefit from the specially designed Student Section. Its second target audience are the teachers of these students. As described above, the handbook encompasses different tools to aid this particular group with constructing lesson plans, formulating homework, selecting relevant handbook chapters for their courses, setting up study programs, completing/enriching courses by selecting e-learning materials, assignments, etc. Its third target readership are of course (young) scholars, aca-

¹⁷ See Part 3.4 of this chapter for the notion of *variation*.

¹⁸ We tend to associate flashcards with vocabulary learning, but you can adapt them to the content pertinent to your discipline. One can use two-sided cards to represent pairs such as: concept-definition; phenomenon-description; event-causes; event-consequences; event-description; thesis-arguments in favour or against; policy name-policy description; problem-possible solutions. You can write any kind of specific question on one side and the answer on the other (if the answer is complex, indicate the place where it can be found, e.g. the handbook page). It will work for any concept/event/historical figure and your own associations and thoughts. Remember, the index is neatly split between Names, Places, Concepts and Events for optimal retrieval. Also, who says that a flashcard has to be small?

Box 3.2 About the Maps in This Handbook

The maps in this book were not designed to provide a full chronological overview, but together with the atlas in the beginning of the book, they can provide an interesting (if incomplete) chronology of the many transformations of Central Asia.

The table below shows a systematic overview of all the maps in this handbook that serve as visual aids for individual chapters. Each map is listed by its number (the first one referring to the chapter where it can be found) and also contains either its approximate time frame or its specific theme.

TIME PERIOD	TOPIC		
	Polities	Economy & Environment	Geopolitical Projections
<i>Ancient Times</i>	4.1 (600)	5.1 (environment) 11.1 (environment)	15.4 (622-750)
<i>Medieval Times</i>	4.2 (765)		15.5 (800-900)
	4.3 (975)		
<i>(Early-)Modern Times</i>	15.7 (1206-1405)		15.6 (1400-1800)
	5.2 (1600)		
	8.1 (1700)		
<i>Tsarist Period</i>	15.8 (1711-1907)	19.1 (oil and gas) 22.1 (urbanization)	15.1 (1904-1943)*
<i>Soviet Period</i>	8.2 (1920)		15.2 (1920-1930)*
	8.3 (1926)		15.3 (1963)*
	8.4 (1936)		
<i>After Independence</i>	7.1 (religions)	16.1 (BRI)*	15.9 (1991-2020)
		16.2 (infrastructure)	
		20.1 (pollution)	
		20.2 (resources)	

**Denotes that a map is a world map or macro-region projection.*

For readers who want to access comprehensive works with authoritative maps and detailed description on the (wider) region and its historical developments, the editors recommend:

Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1993).

Malis Ruthven; Azim Nanji, *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of Russian History*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2002).

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003).

demics from related disciplines that aim to migrate into the field of CAS, but without excluding the general public or other experts. All these are likely to consult the handbook to increase their understanding of the region or in search for references, concise summaries and insights. Most probably, those in the third group will read the handbook individually, on their own terms, and will do so selectively without the guidance of a mentor, promotor or teacher. Nonetheless, besides the Student and Teacher Sections, or the Case Studies, the handbook contains some elements that all groups can use.

Glossary and List of Abbreviations – The editors have compiled an exhaustive list of all relevant Central Asia-specific and general concepts described in the chapter, and present them alphabetically with their explanation or translation. While authors and editors habitually introduce names and concepts in various relevant languages (with transliteration) in the chapters, the glossary only contains translations and English transliterations. The same goes for the list of abbreviations. (Do not confuse the glossary with the Concepts Index, which guides the reader to all relevant passages in the text about these concepts, but does not explain them.)

Concise Atlas – While many chapters contain specially designed maps to illustrate their narrative, the editors have provided several basic maps in the beginning of the book. In this Concise Atlas, we reproduce five official UN maps (one for each country according to this handbook's scope – and one for Afghanistan, in addition to a map with Central Asia's ethnic minorities, from the CIA. We are grateful for these organizations' granted permissions and open-usage policy that has made it possible to include them.

Boxes – Editors and authors have collaborated to create a series of Info Boxes, each marked with the number of the chapter to which it relates most and where it can be found. Boxes are different from other extra-textual elements like figures or tables, because they are 'of the text' but not 'in the text' in the sense that they provide information that is contained in a separate space (visually separated from the text with a frame) in order not to disturb the narrative flow of the main text. The main text refers to these Boxes, but under no circumstances is the reader forced to read them at a particular moment, and can thus focus on the chapter's main line of argumentation without interruption or distraction.

Boxes either ‘zoom in’ to provide depth and detail to an argument, statement, or concept in a chapter, or ‘zoom out’ to further elaborate on a larger debate or methodological issue, or organize and systematize pertinent information, and thus add context and clarity to certain aspects of a chapter.

Unique Reference System – In addition to the general attention to design and page layout, the editors have worked out a rather unusual referencing system that present bibliographic notes in the margins, so the natural flow of reading is not interrupted by in-text references. In theory, footnotes and endnotes could have the same effect regarding readability, but in practice, the former would bloat the bottom section of the page, reducing the amount of text, and also interfere with the clarity of the informative footnotes, which become hidden among the references; endnotes then are not handy to consult, especially in digital format.

Hence our chosen system of short references in the margins is optimized for reading both on screen (when scrolling to read) and paper, allowing readers to quickly identify where a reference relates to a word, sentence or paragraph (depending on the location of the *). The minimalist approach of listing only authors’ last names and a publication year (or alternatively an organization’s name or abbreviation) is meant to make note-taking easier and to reduce the textual information next to the main text to its bare essentials. However, all references can be looked up easily at the end of each chapter, where all short references are listed alphabetically, first in the Latin alphabet, then in Cyrillic.

Page Design and Background Information – In collaboration with our book design company, Typeface nv (Belgium), the editors have followed age-old style rules that should make the act of reading not only a pleasant experience, but also one optimized for learning. Beside the referencing system, pages have been given the right margins so readers do not stumble by the end of a line and lose track. Annotations can be easily added in the sides since there is space for them.

Editors and authors have made extra effort to explain mentioned, indirectly relevant names, objects, concepts and events by adding informative footnotes. These sometimes overzealous additions aim to trigger or provide background knowledge for students and scholars not yet that familiar with the wider region’s history or culture, but can in some cases be helpful for Central Asian specialists as well (when reading about a less familiar sub-field).

Recommended Literature Sections – Because all contributing authors are experts in their respective fields, the editors have asked each of them to come up with a list of works they recommend for future reading. These sections can be found right after the bibliography and are accompanied by introductory text by the authors, disclosing precise recommendations or singling out titles.

Overview of Learning Outcomes – For teachers and students that need a systematic overview of all (main) Intended Learning Outcomes, they can find such an outline before the index. We hope this can facilitate the preparation of lesson plans or guide autonomous learners in choosing the sequence in which they plan to study selected chapters.

Smart Index – The index takes on a special function in this handbook. Like the proverbial ‘nervous system’ the index secretly connects all chapters and – upon demand – can yield new insights and connections for inquiring readers. To optimize retrieval the editors have decided to split the index into four non-overlapping parts:

- *Names* – names of individuals, groups, peoples or (their) organizations. (The latter are listed under their abbreviation, and political regimes can be found under the name of their ruler; not by country.)
- *Places* – names of cities, (sub-)regions or other zones of interest (like e.g. steppe)
- *Concepts* – theoretical and analytical conceptions applied by the authors, but also notions specific to the region
- *Events* – specific historic or political events or transformations that are important and relevant for readers

For obvious reasons, we only include index references for entries that actually say something about the latter. If a name, place, concept or event is just mentioned in passing, without containing any additional information, we have not referenced it. The editors have provided subentries from complex or recurrent topics.

We hope that with such ‘tools’ all readers can easily find their way along this handbook and adapt it to their needs, no matter how diverse these may be. By focusing *first* on students, *then* their teachers, and *thirdly* on advanced readers, this book project actually increases the variety of end-users, and does not narrow them down to one segment at the cost of discriminating against others.

Since experienced scholars looking up information can easily skim over the Learning Outcomes, skip exercises entirely and focus solely on the text, these elements will not hamper their reading process. Still we hope that many of them will also enjoy watching an online lecture (related to the chapter topics of their interest), and connecting with the author and the text in a different modality.

Box 3.3 'Wikistan' – A Digital Silk Road Community

Scholars of Central Asian studies are fragmented globally and within the EU as well. Researchers and teachers are mostly left to their own devices and expertise in order to build out curricula and train their next generation of students at their home institution. Such decade-long fragmentation has of course left its mark on education. Although, with globalization and digitalization, these disparities are now lessening at different speeds. Nevertheless, it is still not uncommon that in higher education institutions students are trained foremost in a dominant discipline (instead of a multi-disciplinary fashion) and that doctoral students are mentored in the tradition of their supervisors or research institute.

Although access to this Area Study has become more open and accessible, it is still a niche, and (PhD) students often find themselves isolated at their institutions, unable to share their passion and academic interests with many of their peers. International conferences exist, but often remain expensive for young scholars, and they are not aimed at undergraduates.

This intercontinental dispersion of Central Asia aficionados/os across (mostly) Eurasia and North America also has its advantages, with much potential for interesting friendships and innovative ways of collaboration. Making online connections and finding out who is located where and works on what, can be a first step.

Therefore, we would like to bring our readers' attention to the 'Wikistan' platform, an online community of scholars, focusing on Central Eurasia. It is free, open and in English. Its (extensive) registration process allows members to provide detailed information about their topics, covered time periods and interests, while anonymity can be regulated (according to personal preference). For instance, scholars living or working in an authoritarian context can hide their private data and even name, if they choose so. The platform is organic, because it is not centrally managed or steered, and evolves over time according to its members' needs and preferences.

To connect on Wikistan follow this link: <https://wikistan.ehess.fr/>

6. Conclusion

This handbook is not intended to imitate a textbook. Its purpose is the same as for other handbooks in the Humanities and Social Sciences: to educate its students (and other newcomers to the field) about state-of-the-art knowledge. Our authors, researchers and academic teachers in Central Asia studies, have put their best instructional practices into this Handbook, trying to bridge complex area content with primary student audience. We believe that if we want to raise students' engagement and interest, three factors are important:

- 1) A reader-friendly handbook
- 2) An active role of the teacher as *facilitator*
- 3) Self-aware, active and autonomous students

In the learning process, 'autonomy' does not mean total independence, this is why we see the need to support students in their learning (Student Section), no matter how advanced their initial knowledge and skills may be. Whenever needed, we encourage the teachers and the students to deepen the level of discussion, going beyond the questions proposed by the authors. What is most important, however, is to keep in mind the individual character of each student and the profile of your group and the institution. For example, it is worth trying collaborative learning and experimenting with the classroom activities, but only if the teacher feels up to and comfortable doing this. And, finally, only if it is compatible with your course goals, Intended Learning Outcomes, and the needs of your students.

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Old city with mosque (Friday mosque Hajji Akhrar, seen from the market).

PART II

IDENTITIES AND HISTORICAL ROOTS

CHAPTER 4

The Original Islamization of Central Asia: From the Arab Frontier Colonies to the 'Governorate Dynasties' (650-1000)

Bruno J. De Cordier

Ghent University

Keywords:

- Islamization • Religious Geography • Socio-cultural Transformation
- Umayyad Caliphate • Abbasid Caliphate • Tahirids • Samanids

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the process of original Islamization of Central Asia and its relevance to the present confessional-cultural geography and identity of the region.
- Assess the processes and dynamics of social-cultural transformation at work during the different phases of Central Asia's original Islamization, and recognize these when they appear in other regions and episodes.
- Recognize the characteristics as well as formal and informal institutions of empires and other political greater spaces.
- Explain a number of basic concepts of Islamic political theology as well as (historical) Islamic political institutions.
- Describe the dynamics and patterns of religious conversion.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What were the religions and confessional systems in Central Asia before Islam?
- When and how did Islam arrive and spread over the region?
- Why did Islam – and no other confessional system – eventually become, or remain, the majority religion in the region?

Main questions

- Was the spread of Islam throughout Central Asia merely a matter of military conquest and forced conversions? Why (not)?
- What determines and enhances religious conversion? How and why?
- What do we understand by an 'ideological empire' and what was the role of the institution of the caliphate in this case?
- Which Islamic concepts refer to territoriality and polity? How?
- Which factors contributed to the Muslim Arab conquest of Central Asia?
- How did Islam become intertwined with the Central Asian societies and identities? Which social actors and social groups were crucial for this process?

Post-reading questions

- Given its historical presence, is Islam an inseparable component of (the) Central Asian identity (identities) and of nation-building in the region?
- When abstracted, do the examined factors and dynamics of Islamization have current relevance in other parts of the world where – in various ways and to various extents – the influence of Islam is growing?
- Are religions ideologies?

CHAPTER 4

The Original Islamization of Central Asia from the Arab Frontier Colonies to the 'Governorate Dynasties' (650-1000)

BRUNO J. DE CORDIER
Ghent University

"The history of religions reaches down and makes contact with that which is essentially human: the relation of man to the sacred. The history of religions can play an extremely important role in the crisis we are living through. The crises of modern man are to a large extent religious ones, insofar as they are an awakening of his awareness to an absence of meaning."

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986)

THIS CHAPTER tells the story of Central Asia's integration and transformation in a political-ideological space stretching at one point for some seven thousand kilometres from Córdoba in southern Spain all the way to what is now Pakistan in the east. It examines how a faith and ideology that originated in Arabia and began as basically a Bedouin movement, was implanted and spread in Central Asia – which here comprises the joint present-day territory of the five Central Asian successor states of the USSR plus that of Xinjiang – in a time span roughly from 630 to the year 1000.¹ And eventually it remained a central element of social and cultural self-identification among the majorities of the region's populations and societies for many centuries after the departure of its original bearers and champions.

Here, the author identifies the actors and key dynamics that made the imprints of an ideological empire. These social-religious etchings outlasted their original creators by over a millennium: specific Islamic notions of polity and territoriality simmered in the worldviews of later generations, who – with their own interpretations, emulations and militancy – anchored these cultural components into independent Muslim dynasties, thus creating the

¹ Islam is simultaneously referred to as a faith and an ideology because – besides being a belief system that informs an individual's and community's relationship vis-à-vis the transcendental, and a set of normative beliefs and values rooted therein – it encompasses a political theology with prescriptions and regulations how to organize earthly society and polity.

Figure 4.1 Politics in Central Asia and the Four Islamization Phases. Source: Author's own work.

I (ca. 650–700): Muslim Arab conquest of Iran and impact on Central Asia.

II (ca. 700–820): Establishment and consolidation of Umayyad and then Abbasid caliphal rule in the region.

III (ca. 820–1000): Coming into being of a distinct Muslim Central Asian culture under the 'governorate dynasties' of the Tahirids (821–873) and the Samanids (875–999).

IV (ca. 960–1350): Gradual conversion of Central Asia's steppe Turkic component and of present-day Xinjiang, and rise of Central Asia's Sufi schools and -traditions.

foundations of contemporary Central Asia. Understanding these dynamics is the key to studying the region's cultural DNA and its continued affinity with Islam, despite the social disruptions of the last 150 years.

1. Central Asia's Politics and Cultural-Societal Space around the Year 630

Generally speaking, the historical Islamization of Central Asia can be divided into four phases, the first three of which are the ones examined in detail in this chapter.

- The **first** of these phases took place roughly between 650 and 700, when Central Asia was more an appendage in the Muslim Arab conquest of Iran.
- The **second** is the establishment and consolidation of Umayyad and then Abbasid caliphal rule in the region between 700 and 820.
- The **third** and actually crucial phase is that of the 'governorate dynasties' of the Tahirids (821-873) and especially the Samanids (875-999), under the rule of which a proper and distinguishable Muslim Central Asian culture came into being, at least in the region's sedentary and culturally-Iranian areas and societies.
- And **fourth**, there is the gradual conversion of the Turkic dynastic and tribal elites and pastoral tribal populations in Central Asia, in present-day Xinjiang and in the steppe between 960 and 1350, and the rise of Central Asia Sufi schools and traditions during the period.*

*Favreau 2018: 13-26

To have a clear idea of the space in which it happened, a first question that arises is, what did the Central Asian space look like around the year 630, right after the formative years of the Islamic movement in the western Arabian Hijaz region and on the eve of the first Muslim Arab expansions? Let us first look at its general demography. The Central Asian population at that time was estimated to number, perhaps, 2.6 million. By comparison, the estimated population of the western and interior parts of Arabia – the region where Islam originated – was some 2.5 million, and that of Iraq and Iran in their present contours about 1 and 5 million respectively. By the year 1000, when the era covered by this chapter more or less ends, Central Asia's population was believed to number about 3.2 to 3.5 million, that of western and interior Arabia 2 million, and that of Iraq and Iran 2 and 4.5 million respectively.*

*McEvedy and Jones 1978: 147, 151-153, 163, 168

Map 4.1 Eurasia and Central Asia on the Eve of Islam around the Year 600

Sources: Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'Orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993), 20. Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=119801&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

In terms of politics and political geography, the region was not a unified entity under one cultural-ideological framework although its sedentary-agricultural areas culturally-linguistically belonged to the wider middle and eastern Iranian realm. The area roughly corresponding to that of what is now Turkmenistan belonged to Dihistan and Margiana, both north-eastern satrapies or provinces-viceroyalties of the Iranian empire. As such, they were integrated into the greater Iranian economic and administrative system. The sedentary-agricultural areas in the Central Asian heartland and immediately south of the Aral Sea, which are now part of Uzbekistan and northern Tajikistan, were a patchwork of oasis-based city-states and principalities, the most important of which were Samarkand, Penjikent, Kish, Khujand, Bukhara, Aksiqat and Qat. Culturally and linguistically eastern and middle Iranian, and politically independent though at times tributary to the Iranian empire, the principalities in the Central Asian heartland were pivotal in the land network of trans- and intercontinental trade routes of the time. Parts were economically and politically more oriented east towards the Chinese sphere than westward.*

Bactria, the cultural-historical region stretching roughly from Herat to the Hissar range in present-day Tajikistan, then consisted of a number of late-Hephthalite principalities. Remnants of a larger empire with a dynasty of Hunnic origin that emerged around 440 and stretched into Xinjiang at its zenith, they were now tributaries and frontier vassals to the Iranian empire. Further east, in the Tarim basin enveloping much of present-day Xinjiang, were a series of oasis-based city-states, the most important of which were Kucha and Khotan. Culturally-linguistically also predominantly eastern Iranian, the region and its oasis polities gradually fell under the suzerainty of the Chinese Tang dynasty and its 'Anxi protectorate' from 640 onwards.² Finally, the steppe regions between the Aral basin and Balkhash lake, and parts of northern Xinjiang, belonged to the territory of nomadic-tribal confederations, largely consisting of southwestern Turkic tribes. Once part of a larger Turkic-nomadic confederation that stretched from the Caspian to Mongolia, but disintegrated into an eastern and western part around 580, they were in interaction with the oasis states of the southern Aral basin, the Central Asian heartland, and the Tarim basin.*

*Frye 2011: 712-713; Bosworth and Bolshakov 1996: 28; Golden 2011: 50-55

*Golden 2011: 50-55; Roux, 1997: 163-166

² The Protectorate-General to Pacify the West (安西大都护府), as the 'Anxi protectorate' was called in full, was a imperial-Chinese military protectorate over the kingdoms of Kucha, Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan (now in Xinjiang) as well as portions of present-day Kazakhstan. It lasted until 790.

As it was before this episode and would, albeit differently, remain so after it, the Central Asian region was a patchwork of sociologies and micro-regional identities under the Iranian or Iranian-influenced lead cultures of the time. Sociologically predominantly rural, its economies were based on the complementarity of pastoral nomadism and settled oasis-based agriculture, a wide range of artisanal crafts and, in some areas, mining. This everyday economy would largely continue to function even at times of invasion and occupation. Despite a high degree of autarchy in terms of everyday production, the region was not isolated or cut off from the world economy of the time. Trade along the transcontinental, overland transport axes that crossed the Central Asian space was crucial to both the region's economy and social organization, and connected it to China, Iran and the eastern Mediterranean, as well as to the Turkic and Slavic areas beyond the Caspian.

In terms of confessional systems, pre-Islamic Central Asia was much more diverse if not fragmented. The majority of the population professed either the official form of Zoroastrianism, which was the state religion and part of the ideology of the Iranian empire, or one of the many non-official folk variants of Zoroastrianism, which existed at the popular and sub-regional level. In the principalities of the Central Asian heartland and south of the Aral Sea, which usually had no state religion, these local unorthodox forms predominated alongside local folk religions. More to the north, in the steppe, the Turkic nomads predominantly professed steppe faiths and animism.

In eastern Central Asia and the Tarim oases, the confessional geography was dominated by local forms of Zoroastrianism, Manicheism (a gnostic cult that had originated in Iran), and Buddhism (which was the state religion in the kingdom of Khotan). Finally, Abrahamic traditions were present in the region by that time too. Oriental-Christian churches like the Nestorians, Melkites and Jacobites, for example, had a following and an institutionalized presence in Merv, in Herat and other cities in the Hephtalite territories, in Samarkand, and among the Turkic peoples in the Balkhash and Ili basin and in northern Xinjiang, while groups of Iranian Jews had long-established themselves in a number of cities.*

*Roux 1997: 217-220

Box 4.1 Central Asia's Pre-Islamic Religions

Jacobites – Oriental-Orthodox church which, along with the Nestorians and Melkites, was among the main three Christian churches to be present in pre- and early-Islamic Central Asia. It originated in the Byzantine-Roman empire and is named after Saint Jacob of Edessa (534-578), the bishop who established it. It had a large presence in Syria, on the Sinai peninsula, among the northern Arab tribes and among Armenians, before it gradually moved into Central Asia. There were reportedly Jacobite communities in Kashgar and Yarkand (eastern Central Asia) as late as the 13th century. Not to be confused with the namesake Catholic insurgents in 17th-century Britain. There are still Jacobite Christians, especially in (pre-war) Syria and in the Syrian diasporas.

Manicheism – A gnostic movement (a movement believing in good and evil and offering salvation through *gnosis* or knowledge of spiritual truth) that combined elements of Christianity, Judaism and animism. It came into being in Ctesiphon, in the Iranian empire, in the third century, and is named after its founder and prophet, Mani (216-274/277). In Central Asia, the Manicheist movement, which was long considered a Christian heresy, was especially active from Samarkand and in eastern Central Asia (present-day Xinjiang), where pockets survived until the 13th century. In its early days, Manicheism was also successful in the late Western Roman empire. In the medieval period, teachings influenced by Manicheism inspired certain heretic Christian sects, like Catharism in southern France.

Melkites – Adepts of various Byzantine-rite Christian churches (Copts, Greeks, Georgians, etc.) who were present in Central Asia in the pre-Islamic period. Many were Byzantine captives who were resettled in the Central Asian marches of the Iranian empire in the fifth century. Around the year 760, certain groups were resettled north by the Abbasids to the region of what is now Tashkent. Melkite communities could be found as far abroad as present-day Kyrgyzstan.

Nestorianism – Oriental-Christian current that had a substantial presence in the Central Asian region in the pre- and early-Islamic period. It originated in the Byzantine-Roman empire, around the year 420, following a split caused by disputes over the united human and divine nature and person of Jesus Christ – which Nestorian doctrine rejects. Considered heretical, the Nestorian movement – named after its founder, the Byzantine-Syrian archbishop Nestorius – and its followers, many of whom were Syrians or members of northern Arab tribes, moved to Iran. From there they established themselves in Central Asia around 490, and then in Central Asia. By 800, there were Nestorian dioceses in Merv, Herat, Samarkand, Navekat, Kashgar and Khotan. Nestorianism also had adherents among the elites and rank-and-file of some nomadic peoples like the Kara-Kitai and the Keraites, and among the medieval Uyghurs.

Shamanism and steppe animism – The dominant pagan belief system among Turkic pastoralist nomads who inhabited the steppe belt from the northern Black Sea basin to Mongolia. It was also prevalent among the Magyars (Hungarians) before they migrated to Central Europe and were Christianized. Steppe animism was no unified system and came in many forms, often varying per tribe. In general, it comprised belief in a chief god of the sky or in several gods, in the sacrality of landscape elements and natural phenomena, in animal and human sacrifices, and in a world of souls and spirits with which mortals communicated through a shaman or soothsayer. Many animist elements were ‘absorbed’ during Islamization and continued to exist in the folk practices of Islam. Steppe animism and shamanism are nowadays often called Tengrism. This, however, is a fairly recent, neo-pagan concept that emerged in the late 19th and 20th century among Turkish and Pan-Turkic nationalist movements, some of whom want to separate genuine Turkic-ness from the ‘alien-Semitic’ religion that is Islam.

Zoroastrianism – Main pre-Islamic confessional system in Iran, and in the sedentary areas of Central Asia. It is believed to have come into being somewhere between 1500 and 1000 BC in the area of Herat. It is one of the oldest monotheistic religious traditions, and may have had some influence on the development of early-Judaism. Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the various Iranian empires between 500 BC and 642 AD, and influenced – in various forms and to various extents – many local and sub-regional beliefs and cultures in the Central Asian region, as far abroad as the oasis states of what is now Xinjiang. Its teachings are codified in the Avesta scriptures. Typical Zoroastrian institutions include the fire temples (although Zoroastrians do not worship the fire as such, as often thought, but the central divinity, the purity and life-bringing of which is symbolized by fire), a hereditary priesthood, and, historically, a peculiar caste system. There are still Zoroastrian communities in Iran (more specifically in Yazd and Kerman), among Iranian diasporas, in pockets in Pakistan and India, and among some Kurdish subgroups.

2. A Core-Periphery Tale?

Such was, in a nutshell, the political, societal and confessional space in which the implantation of Islam was to happen at first in the wake of the Muslim Arab invasion. Somewhat similar to the Greek kingdoms of Central Asia, the Muslim Arabs and the polities and dynasties founded, dominated or legitimized by them integrated the region into a civilizational sphere – the core of which was situated far outside the region – and implanted ideological-civilizational notions that lasted long after their more or less direct rule and physical presence ended. In this, they differ at once from

later conquerors like the Kipchak and Mongols – or the Vikings and Magyars in Western and Central Europe for that matter – who eventually partially assimilated into the faiths and cultures of the societies they had subjugated, often also adding their own racial and cultural elements to the latter in the process.

2.1 Positions in the Early Medieval World-system

Did the Hijaz region, as the cradle of Islam and the centre of the first Islamic polity, serve as a clear geographic-political core for Central Asia once it became integrated into the Islamic realm itself? The position of Central Asia in the Islamic order can be best interpreted by looking at its position *vis-à-vis* the historical 'central civilization' identified by David Wilkinson.* This central civilization took several shifts and shapes throughout premodern and modern history. In 737, it encompassed an area from the Adriatic-eastern Mediterranean over Iraq to eastern Iran, and, with it, some southwestern confines of Central Asia. Some portions of the Hijaz were also part of this central civilization's core, albeit as an exclave separated from the rest by the northern Arabian desert. The bulk of sedentary Central Asia formed a semi-periphery in this system, while the pastoral-nomadic steppe regions belonged to the periphery and were only connected to the economic world systems of the time by an intermediate of the sedentary areas.

*Wilkinson 1991: 144-148

The Hijaz and Medina, however, remained the political centre of the caliphate for only five more years after the Arabs had conquered Iran and the southern confines of Central Asia by 651. Then, in the year 656, it moved to Kufa in Iraq. The Hijaz certainly remained an important link in the Red Sea economic space, but it was not the economic core of the fledgling Islamic empire. Its main importance was symbolic and ideological as both the birthplace of Islam and the setting of the central Islamic pilgrimage centres, Mecca and Medina. So in terms of core-periphery relations, it can be said that the core areas towards which Central Asia became oriented once it was annexed and integrated into the Muslim *oecumene*, were Iran and Iraq rather than Arabia.

2.2 Relevant Notions of Territoriality and Polity

In principle, the confines of Islam are defined by the limits of the community or nation of believers, the *Ummah* (*Umma* - أمة). It is an ideological community that basically extends to everywhere where its physical representatives are present. This contains a number of territorial components and concepts:*

*Albrecht 2018: 48-57; Filipec 2017: 189-201

- Of the three most fundamental and relevant here comes, first, the *dār al-islām* (دار الإسلام) or 'realm of Islam.' Its premodern meaning referred not so much and not exclusively to areas where Muslims are in the majority or politically sovereign, for – in the seventh to tenth centuries – they were not majorities for many years in the territories that they had conquered. Rather, it referred to areas where Muslims can live in safety and are free to practice Islam. In reality, however, it was often felt that this was only achievable through political domination and territorial expansion. The contours of the *dār al-islām* are also considered temporary, since the universal character of the Islamic message ideally extend the limits of the Ummah to the whole of mankind.*

*Miquel 1988: 24-25

- The *dār al-hārb* (دار الحرب) or 'realm of war', also referred to as *dār al-kufr* (دار الكفر) or realm of unbelief, refers to areas where non-Islamic laws are enforced, whose territory is not or is no longer adjacent to any Muslim territory, and where Muslims and *ahl al-dhimmā* (اهل الذمة), the non-Muslims under Islamic protection, do not or no longer enjoy the protection by an Islamic authority.
- Finally, the *dār al-'ahd* (دار العهد) or 'realm of truce (or covenant)' were non-Muslim entities recognized by an Islamic authority after a treaty. Between roughly 650 and 850, Central Asia was primarily *dār al-hārb* and *dār al-'ahd*.

Another crucial component is the institution of the caliph and the caliphate (خلافة), the line of successors of the prophet Muhammad as the leader of the Ummah. The main caliphates that existed throughout Islamic history were those of the Rightly-Guided caliphs of Medina and then Kufa (four caliphs, 632-661), the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus (14 caliphs, 661-750), the Abbasid caliphate of Kufa and then Baghdad (37 caliphs, 750-1258), the so-called Abbasid-Mamluk 'shadow caliphate' in Cairo (18 caliphs, 1258/61-1517), and finally the Ottoman caliphate (29 caliphs, 1517-1924).^{3*} Besides being a fundamental component of Islam and the Ummah, the seat of the caliphate, along with the main Islamic pil-

*Lapidus 2002: 45-65; Бoльщaков
1989, 1993, 1998, 2010

³ Although the Ummah is theoretically supposed to have only one caliph(ate), a number of 'counter-caliphates' did simultaneously exist throughout history. For example, in 929, almost two centuries after the demise of the Umayyad caliphate, descendants of the Umayyad line proclaimed their own independent caliphate in Córdoba, which existed until 1031. Other examples were the Fatimid caliphate of Cairo (909-1171), and the Almohad caliphate in northwestern Africa and southern Spain (1147-1269).

grimage sites, provided a sense of political-ideological centre to an ideological realm.

Recognition by the caliph would also become an important source of legitimacy for Muslim rulers or tributaries, just as recognition by the Roman pontiff was for medieval Latin Christian rulers in Europe. Early on, however, these Islamic institutions and concepts of nation and territoriality became intertwined with the notion and practice of premodern empire. This basically came forward when the line of the Rightly-Guided caliphs of Medina, who were appointed by a sort of conclave of notability and tribal leaders, ended. And the caliphate, from the Umayyads on, became a hereditary-imperial line cribbed from the Byzantine caesaropapist system⁴ that preceded Umayyad rule in Syria.

What are the key characteristics of empires? First, they are by nature multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and culturally and sociologically very diverse. Second, they are based on a complementarity of this *de facto* diversity and unity, which is to be realized through personal-dynastic unions, the imposition of a political superstructure over a plethora of polities and the imposition of representatives of the central level at the regional and local level. Third, they are kept together by a political idea, a military, a transport system, a taxation system, a *lingua franca*, and a notion among the subject populations that unity and incorporation bring advantages. Of crucial importance here are a permanent garrison system and a bureaucracy whose tasks are confined to tax and tribute collection, ensure the proper functioning of the judiciary, control local authorities, and maintain a minimum of public order.*

*Duverger 1980: 10-16

Local beliefs, customs and institutions are respected and allowed to organize and inform governance and judiciary at the local level. This results from the consequences of expansion itself. For example, once the Muslim Arabs penetrated into areas that belonged to the Byzantine, Iranian and Hispano Roman-Visigothic realms, they faced the major challenge of having to administer areas with complex societies and cultures that were very different from theirs. This naturally led, as often happened, to the co-opting of institutions, administrative systems, civil servants and lesser rulers inherited from the previous polities.*

*Miquel 1980: 220-222

The same happened in Central Asia in the eighth century, where much of the local and regional elites, administrative-juridical insti-

⁴ Caesaropapism, a term most often associated with the Roman-Byzantine empire, is the doctrine and practice in which the state and a lay ruler exercises supreme authority over ecclesiastical matters.

tutions, economic infrastructure and monetary and tax systems inherited from the Iranian empire, the Central Asian principalities and the Hephtalites continued to function within the new caliphal order well after the Muslim Arab conquest.*

*Litvinsky et al. 1996: 471–472;
Lapidus 2002: 37; Gibb 1923: 56;
Gyselen 1984: 692–699

*Duverger 1980: 10–16

Fourth, empires maintain a set of symbols and myths that legitimize the central rulers as well as the lesser rulers appointed or co-opted by them.* Finally, empires reflect Carl Schmitt's concept of a *Großraum* or 'greater space', which is grounded upon a mutually constitutive relationship between a particular space and a specific political idea. To be realized, it requires a clearly-defined space and a self-assertive power representing and championing that political and societal idea, guaranteeing internal order, and organizing relations with other 'greater spaces'.* It is here then, that the Islamic notions of territoriality and the concept of empire converge.

*Minca and Rowan 2014: 276

3. Dynamics and Actors of Islamization in Central Asia

3.1 Timeline and Patterns of the Muslim Arab Military Campaigns

Around the year 630, the area under the Muslim Arab caliphate consisted of western and inland Arabia, Yemen, and present-day Oman. The Arabs and – as such – Islam, arrived in Central Asia through Iran and during the collapse of the Iranian empire between 636 and 652, a time span of sixteen years during the reign of the first three Rightly-Guided caliphs of Medina. Before Islam and before the Muslim Arab conquests, Central Asia itself had limited contact and experience with the Arab sphere, but the Iranian empire had a lot. Both overland and maritime trade between Iran and the kingdoms of southern Arabia had been ongoing since the early fourth century.* The Lakhmid kingdom on the Euphrates had been an Iranian vassal since the fourth century and was eventually annexed in 602.⁵ Around 530, Iran established its suzerainty over Oman and the south coast of the Persian-Arab Gulf. It also assisted northern Arab tribes to rise up against its Byzantine archenemy.

*Кункова 2011: 58

So the conquest of Iran certainly happened in a psychological space established before. Some narrative to denote this timeline is needed: Muslim Arab incursions into Iran started around 633, yet the battle between the caliphal and imperial-Iranian armies and their respective allies and auxiliaries was decisive, as was the Iranian defeat at al-Qadisiyya on the Euphrates in autumn 636. Shortly afterwards, in 637, the caliphal armies seized the Iranian

⁵ The Lakhmids were a partially-Christian Arab kingdom southwest of the Euphrates, in what is now Iraq. It existed between roughly the years 300 and 600, and was an Iranian buffer state against the Byzantine empire and its allied northern Arab tribes.

capital of Ctesiphon and crossed the Tigris. What followed was an eastward advance by different Muslim Arab armies into the Iranian heartland along two major inroads. Kerman and south-eastern Iran were conquered between 644 and 649, almost simultaneously with Rey (present-day Teheran) and the southern Caspian coast which were between 643 and 651. Merv, Nishapur and Herat, then part of the eastern Iranian realm and situated on the confines of Central Asia, fell between 650 and 652. Finally, another army moved into the Caucasian-Caspian region, taking Derbent in present-day Dagestan in 654.

By that time, the advance toward Central Asia came to a temporary halt. Partly, it was to consolidate the north-eastern frontier around strongholds and garrison cities like Merv and Nishapur, but especially it did because of a crisis, turmoil and civil war in the core of the caliphal polity itself. This resulted, first, in the move of its political centre to Kufa in Iraq, and then, in 661, in the takeover by a new dynastic line of caliphs, the Umayyad. Regular military incursions and raids into the Central Asian heartland and towards the Aral Sea – called *Baḥr al-Kḥwārizm* in Arabic – occurred again between 674 and 694, but did not result in a permanent military occupation and colonization. The actual conquest of the Central Asian heartland and the Aral Sea basin rather happened under the Umayyad caliphate between 706 and 714.* Samarkand was seized in 712, soon after the Umayyad invasion of the Visigothic kingdom in Hispania.

*Litvinsky et al. 1996: 451-465

In terms of military raids and territorial annexation, neither the Umayyad and their successors, the Abbasids, made it into the central and northern steppe in what is now Kazakhstan, nor to Xinjiang, except for a half-baked Umayyad incursion into the southern Tarim basin in the year 715.* Despite setting up sizeable military garrisons in the Central Asian heartland, Umayyad authority there would never be really consolidated or institutionalized though. Resistance in both the oasis states and by Turkic nomads remained strong, and the drought, crop failures and famine of 733-734 further undermined what there was of Umayyad presence and authority. Until well after 750, Central Asia proper remained at the fringe of the 'Eastern Lands', as Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia came to be called collectively.^{6*}

*Gibb 1922

The number of casualties and displaced during the Arab military advance and conquests is not clear, difficult to assess and

*Litvinsky et al. 1996: 451-465

⁶ Later, the concept of the Eastern Lands came to designate only the areas east of the Dasht-i-Lut desert in Iran, thus still including Central Asia. (le Strange 1966: 382) These came to be better known as al-Khurāsān, the Arabized version of the Iranian name for 'Eastern Lands.'

*McEvedy and Jones 1978: 153, 163

varies widely by source. Likely they differed starkly depending on the locality and on the conditions in which conquest took place. Some sources mention a sharp drop in population by some 15 to 20 percent between the years 600 and 700 in the area of the Iranian empire, which does not seem to have happened in Central Asia proper.* The Muslim Arab conquests and the displacements and dislocations that they caused certainly contributed to this. As important, however, was the protracted Iranian-Byzantine war of 604-628 followed by the civil war of 628-632, and the radical changes in political geography after the collapse of the empire.⁷

So what factors determined the pace and impact of the Muslim Arab advance into Iran and then toward Central Asia? Was it about being outnumbered? No. Invaders seldom form a majority or even a sizeable portion of the invaded territory's population, even at the time they take over power there.⁸ A set of other factors were instrumental. To start with, as with every premodern military campaign, seasons and weather determined whether and when physical geographic barriers – such as rivers, deserts and mountain ranges – could be crossed. The caliphal armies established a stronghold in Iraq, which would become their base of operations for the east. And just like several decades later, the Muslim invaders in Visigothic Hispania could take advantage of the Roman road system, and benefited from the imperial Iranian road system that had been expanded and greatly improved in the sixth century. Then, there is the motivation and determination of the invaders. It is tempting to see Muslim Arab invasions – and other invasions for that matter – as merely driven by material gain, either through looting or through tribute payments.

Although these definitely played an important role, they are not sufficient to understand and explain what motivated the invaders.

⁷ Regardless of the episode, an important distinction must be made between the direct deadly casualties of military or irregular violence and executions, and the (usually much larger) number of casualties of the humanitarian crisis directly or indirectly caused by the conflict (collapse of supply lines, crop failures, epidemics, etc.).

⁸ When we look at Europe, for example, the Salic Franks in the Roman province of Belgic Gaul did not consist of more than 7 to 12 percent of the population when they took over the province between 440 and 460. The Vandals who crossed the strait of Gibraltar into Roman Africa in the year 429 and eventually established a kingdom there, were estimated to have numbered 80,000, a quarter of them combatants. (Latouche 1947: 688) The population of Roman Africa at that time was estimated at some 3 million. And the Umayyad and Berber army which invaded the Visigothic kingdom in Hispania in early 711 probably numbered not more than some 12,000 men (Collins 1994: 97), while the invaded territory's population numbered about 4.25 million (McEvedy and Jones 1978: 101, 103).

So what other motivations were at play among the invaders? First, the impossibility of returning to the areas of origin because of the risk of being physically eliminated, or at least socially marginalized there. Second, there was certainly something that this author calls 'the complex of the periphery' – an urge to take revenge on more developed cultures felt to have been traditionally arrogant and condescending towards the self-group. Third, the desire to eliminate real and perceived outside threats. And fourth, the championing of a new, universalist ideological project and faith on the interface of the earthly-political and the transcendent, that offers rewards in the afterlife for those fighting for it and propagating it.

From their side, the invaded misperceived the capacity of the invaders, in the sense that the Arab advances were looked upon as an umpteenth raid by nomads from the periphery like the Iranian empire experienced many times before with Turks, Bedouins, Baluch and others. So it was assumed that they could easily be defeated, fragmented or assimilated. Bedouins were traditionally considered an inferior culture in Iran, and the missionary-ideological zeal of the new Islamic polity was underestimated. 'Empire fatigue' also played a role. At the time of the Muslim Arab invasions, the Iranian empire, though highly developed and sophisticated, was already past its zenith. The dynastic legitimacy and the societal and economic resilience of Iran were heavily weakened and undermined by the protracted Iranian-Byzantine war of 604-628 and the civil war of 628-632, and the loyalty of the Lakhmid and Hephtalite vassals started to falter.⁹

Although they did not necessarily welcome or sympathize with the invaders, a number of factions, rebel groups and pretenders to the throne were willing to collaborate or solicit temporary military help from externals or invaders.* This was not only crucial in Iran, but also during the conquest of the Central Asian heartland, with its different rival principalities* and during the Muslim invasion and occupation of Visigothic Hispania in 711, where one could take advantage of an internal succession crisis.* Finally, traders, spies (often doubling as traders), emissaries and turncoats brought in intelligence about the invaded areas, their societies and defence structures, that was necessary to organize the military campaigns.

*Litvinsky et al. 1996: 468

*Litvinsky et al. 1996: 460

*Fanjul 2017: 31

⁹ The Hephtalites were a dynasty and tribal confederacy of alleged Hunnic origin that rose around 440. It ruled over a territory in southern Central Asia and parts of what is now Pakistan, before it became, like the Lakhamids in the west, a vassal and buffer state of the Iranian empire by 600.

3.2 The Establishment of Frontier Colonies

In the seventh and eighth centuries, at the time of the expansionist movements under the Rightly-Guided caliphs and their Umayyad successors, the population of western and inner Arabia decreased by one-fifth and that of Yemen by about one-tenth.* This reflects the effect of the population transfers, first into greater Syria and the Euphrates basin and then to other newly-conquered territories, to consolidate the territorial gains by 'implanting' physical representatives of the new ideological order there and, at the same time, relieve demographic pressure on resources in the Arab heartland. This also happened in the confines of Central Asia.

From 672, 20 years after the conquest of the area, reportedly 47,000 to 50,000 Arab colonists were resettled in Merv and the surrounding Murgab oasis, in Nishapur and in a number of other places where the infrastructure and the availability of fertile land were considered adequate. The settlers came mainly from Basra, Kufa and Yemen, and were partly individual fighters or *muqātilūn*, and partly fighters accompanied by their families.* A bit less than a century later, by the late Umayyad period, the number of (descendants of the) ethnically-Arab settler population in eastern Iran and Central Asia was believed to be between 115,000 and 175,000.*

As was the case in Arabia, oasis cities became the stronghold and operating bases of the Muslim Arabs and the fledgling Islamic order in the confines of Central Asia. Unlike Alexander the Great some ten centuries earlier though, they did not found or substantially re-establish many cities and towns throughout the region. They rather settled within, or on the outskirts of, existing localities, altering these with specific customs and goods, landmark structures like mosques, and a different way to organize the markets.* Although locally and regionally their presence varied considerably, Arabs remained a minority of the population in Iran and Central Asia.

Garrisons and colonists settled and lived their lives in and around a number of cities and major transport axes. So for a long time, Central Asia's more remote countryside, mountainous areas, and plateaus were less or not affected at all by the cultural and ideological impact of their presence. In the areas where they were concentrated, however, the colonists, as physical representatives of the Islamic order, did considerably alter the racial-ethnic and organizational character of society. Besides keeping their tribal and Kufan, Basran and Yemeni regional loyalties for several generations, they brought specific governance and religious institutions and the Arabic language to the region and formed self-governing

*McEvedy and Jones 1978: 147

*Pourshariati 1998: 45; Agha 1999: 215

*Agha 1999: 224

*Беленицкий et al. 1973: 212-213

enclave colonies of which the inhabitants would only accept governance by one of their own.^{10*}

*Miquel 1975: 516–520

3.3 The 'Indigenization' of Islam

Arab colonists and native Iranians and Central Asians long formed parallel societies. The frontier colonies were an 'embryo' of an Islamic society and as such instrumental for the realization of *dār al-islām*. It was not their expansion in size, however, nor their demographic weight, which explain the spread of Islam throughout the region, but rather the indigenization of a faith and ideology both at the Central Asia grassroots and elite levels.¹¹ The latter is a basic condition for an externally implanted faith and ideology to have any lasting presence beyond its original Arab following. Islamization did not happen at once in the wake of defeat against the Muslim Arab forces either, but was rather a lengthy process that extended well beyond direct Arab rule and presence. Richard Bulliet's 'conversion curve' for Iran is illustrative in this regard.

It states that by the end of Umayyad rule in 750, one hundred years after the capture of Merv and Nishapur, reportedly some 15 percent of the Iranian population professed Islam. The steepest slope in the curve – what its author calls 'the bandwagon period' – was between 791 and 864. The 50 percent mark was reportedly reached around 820, almost two centuries after the initial Arab conquest of the region and at a time when Abbasid power clearly had started to wane. Only a minority of the Muslims then were Arabs or of Arab lineage. A clear acceleration occurred under the emirates that succeeded it. At the end of the Tahirid emirate around 870, for example, over two-thirds of Iran's population was believed to have converted to Islam, while the near-totality, about 90 percent, was around the year 910, when Central Asia and north-eastern Iran were under the independent Samanid emirate.*

*Bulliet 1994: 38–39

Although the figures in the curve are territorial averages and do not give a regional and local breakdown, they are indicative of the duration and the patterns of the Islamization process. Muslims remained a minority in the eastern territories well after the initial invasion and conquest. Nor was conversion a linear process. In not a few instances, throughout the seventh and eighth centuries,

¹⁰ Similar frontier colonies appeared on the other side of the Caspian, for example Derbent in present-day Dagestan. (Ахундова 2010: 121–131)

¹¹ Indigenization is a process in which something initially extraneous (for instance, a certain idea, an institution, technology, etc.) gets integrated and transformed into a local society and culture in such a way, that it suits the society and its culture and becomes something 'own.'

Box 4.2 The Sunni-Shia Schism

This was a major split in Islam following a succession struggle after the prophet Muhammad's death in spring 632. Initially, the divisive issue was whether the Ummah (the Islamic community) should be led by anyone with sufficient merit and who is sufficiently inspired by the example of the prophet, or only by someone from the lineages of Muhammad and of Ali, the last of the Rightly-Guided caliphs. According to Ali's supporters, he was the one appointed as the successor by the prophet himself shortly before his death. The decisive split occurred in the autumn of 680, after the battle of Karbala (in present-day Iraq) between the new Umayyad caliph and the partisans of Ali led by the latter's sons. The latter lost, but their followers, the *shī'at 'Alī* (شِيعَةُ عَلِيٍّ) or 'adherents of Ali' were to become the Shia.

Sunnism and Shiism have a lot of communalities in terms of the central position of the Quran, the prophet Muhammad and of the holy sites in Arabia, and confessional practices. But they also have specific institutions, political theologies and pilgrimage sites. While the *sunna* (سنة) – or the whole body of scriptures and traditions on the life and teachings of the prophet Muhammad – are central in Sunnism, Shiism also attaches a central importance to Ali and other members of the *ahl al-bayt* (أَهْلُ الْبَيْتِ) or House of Muhammad, messianism, martyrdom and sacrifice, and the defence of the downtrodden. Although Central Asia was not the epicentre of the schism, Shia were well-represented among the Arab colonists and deportees and Iranian converts who settled in the region in the early-Islamic period.

Shia were also actively participating in the Abbasid uprising against the Umayyad (744-750), which had a lot of support in southern Central Asia. Over time, Shiism became strongly intertwined with Iranian identities and entities, as was the case under the Buyid emirate (934-1062) and, especially, the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), under which it became the state religion. Nowadays, an estimated 87 to 90 percent of the followers of Islam worldwide belong to Sunni and 10 to 13 percent to Shia traditions and -currents. The vast majority of Central Asian Muslims nowadays are Sunni. Central Asia's Shia minority includes population groups of alleged Iranian origin in and around Samarkand, the Ismaili of Tajikistan and in Xinjiang's Tashkurgan.*

*See also: Map 7.1

indigenous individuals and groups who had formally converted to Islam reverted to their old faiths, or continued to practice them in parallel despite formal conversion. There is no similar, detailed curve for the sedentary Central Asian heartland. But since Iran, moreover north-eastern Iran, was the 'conduit' for the Muslim Arabs and Islam into Central Asia, and since it contains some of the region's southern confines, the pattern sort of reflects and impacts what happened in Central Asia as well.

Generally speaking, five relevant patterns of change in religious affiliation can be observed:

- **Transition of tradition** – for example, from Christianity or steppe animism to Islam.
- **Institutional transition** – between different schools or persuasions within a faith, for example from Sunnism to Shiism or from Latin to Orthodox Christianity.
- **Affiliation** – adhesion to a new religious movement by individuals hitherto not or hardly involved in a religious movement.
- **Intensification** – centring religious involvement and activity in life due to a common experience.
- **Apostasy** – abandonment of a religious tradition and transition to another one, or to a value and norms system not informed by religion.*

*Brandt 2009: 4-5

Now, who were the actors who enhanced the indigenization process of Islam?

3.3.1 *The Alleged and Actual Role of Heterodox and Mystical Movements*

Sufism, the mystical practice of Islam, which originated in Iraq during the eighth century and spread into Central Asia throughout the tenth, is often believed to have been the driving force for the spread of Islam in the region. However, this was more the case during the late-third and especially during the fourth phase of the Islamization of Central Asia, and during and after the Mongol period.* Rather, during the first phase, the frontier that was Central Asia was a refuge for different schismatic and heterodox movements that contributed to the implantation and propagation of Islam in the region and its societies.¹² The Kharijites, for example, were a militant anti-caliphal and egalitarian sect that came into being during the reign of Ali (the last Rightly-Guided caliph, 656-661). Well-represented around Merv and in Sistan, they advocated a strict literalist adherence to the Quran.

*Paul 2008: 306-311

The Kaysanites, a Shia movement that emerged during the anti-Umayyad uprising in Kufa in 685-687, considered Ali to be the sole legitimate caliph and his son Muhammad al-Hanafiyya the Mahdi or end-times saviour and redeemer. It also gradually adopted many elements of pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs. Some Kharijite and Kaysanite followers came to Central Asia on the run from persecution,

¹² In a similar way, dissenting Oriental Christian groups found refuge in the Byzantine-Arab borderland desert and in Central Asia.

others moved to the frontier to sit out imminent eschatological end times there, while yet others were resettled in the borderland colonies there in a policy of 'exporting' potentially troublesome minorities away from the centre and co-opting them in frontier securitization.*

*Daftary 1996: 48–51

The militancy, the notions of social justice, and the millenarianism of these movements brought them to often take the lead in rebellions against seemingly unjust Umayyad policies in the region and to support peasant revolts against the landowners. In that capacity, and because they could incorporate regional and local particularisms in their interpretation of Islam, they managed to gain a certain following for Islam among the grassroots, and later – under the Abbasids – among the equally heterodox Mubayyida ('white shirts') movement of al-Muqanna, which started in Merv around 760 and also combined old Iranian beliefs and some tenets of Islam. For several years, it had a semi-independent stronghold in what is now southern Uzbekistan. After the Abbasid re-conquest of that part of Central Asia in 779, some Mubayyida groups settled around Otrar in the southern steppe.*

*Deom 2009: 102–103; Bosworth and Bolshakov 1996: 33

3.3.2 Militarized Proselytizing?

Islam largely came to Central Asia in circumstances of military conquest. Conversions-by-the-sword and executions of those who refused to convert did occur in the process, just like destructions of Zoroastrian fire temples and of Nestorian and Chaldean churches. But, as was the case in the Christianization process of Europe, they are not sufficient to explain the rooting and spread of Islam in the region. For one, because once the coercive order ends or retreats, so usually does the influence of the ideology societies were coerced into. What happened instead was that the faith and ideology itself survived its initial champions by many centuries. So, 'militarized proselytizing' in fact means that the military and military institutions were vectors and brought frameworks for Islam and for the early Islamic order in Central Asia.

To start with, early Muslim rule in Central Asia was dominated by military figures. Upon defeat or rendition, the truce and occupation treaty usually included the imposition on non-Muslims of the status of *ahl al-dhimma* (a legal guarantee). This granted protection by the Islamic authorities and a number of conditional religious and property rights, and imposed duties like the annual payment of the *djizya* tax to fund this protection. Furthermore, among the early representatives of Islam were Muslim Arab soldiers quar-

tered among the population in the Central Asian cities and towns, or who were based in garrisons the size of which, by 731, numbered some 12,000 soldiers in Samarkand and some 10,000 in the Qala-i-Dabus cantonment south of Bukhara, for example.*

*Беленицкий et al. 1973: 152

Finally, in the Abbasid period in particular, the *ribāṭ* or fortification system also played a crucially important role in anchoring an Islamic presence on the Central Asian frontier. The system, which was continued and even expanded under the Tahirids and Samanids, was based on multi-functional border fortifications, which also comprised stage stations, hospices, hostels, market places and mosques. They were a tangible emanation of *dār al-ḥarb*. Many were manned by *ghāzī*, orders of volunteer Islamic warriors engaged in a holy war for the protection and propagation of the faith.¹³* Hence the *ribāṭ* were outposts of a political-civilizational order interacting with the everyday life of local societies. In that capacity, they were comparable to the Roman *limes* along the Rhine, the Danube and in Roman Africa.

*de la Vaissière 2008: 71–91; Tor 2009: 284–286

3.3.3 The Role of Receptive Rulers and Social Categories

Like it did in western Arabia in its formative days, Islam in Central Asia gradually took root first in urban areas. The region's peasant population held on the longest to their traditional folk faiths, and to the culture of fire temples – until around the year 1000, and even well beyond. In cities, Islam initially found an indigenous Central Asian adherent base among two broad categories: indigenous elites, and specific social categories among sub-elites and the lower strata of society. In Central Asia, like elsewhere, upon conquest the Muslim Arab invaders set up a more or less permanent administration in which the power of the caliphs and of the central level of the empire was represented by an *amīr* or emir, who was in charge of political-military matters, and an *ʿāmil*, who ran fiscal-financial affairs.

In the early decades after conquest (the more so in turbulent frontier area), Muslim Arab rule was highly militarized, enclaved, and often only headed by an emir. But as power consolidated and governance structures became more elaborate, they came to include a number of provincial *dawāwīn* or administrative departments in charge of specific fields such as the judiciary, taxation or irrigation, and *wuzarāʾ* or viziers, counsellor-ministers.* Initially, most emirs were of Arab origin, although in some cases – like south of the Aral Sea in what was to become the province of al-Qwārizm – members

*Miquel 1980: 215

¹³ They were somewhat equivalent to the Christian military orders such as the Hospitaller and Livonian knights to name but these examples.

of indigenous dynasties could be appointed in a similar governor position.

The Muslim Arab rulers were well aware of the usefulness of the often sophisticated Iranian and local-regional administrative structures. Hence these and their dignitaries were engaged early on in the administration of conquered territories with sociologies very different from those in the Arab core. Certainly during the first few decades, these co-opted and tributary native rulers were not necessarily born Muslims or converts. In al-Qwārizm, for example, it was not until 810, almost a century after the Arab conquest of this region, that a ruler of the local Afrigid dynasty converted to Islam. Yet gradually, indigenous Muslim convert elites started to emerge as indigenous nobility and landowner classes. They increasingly relied on the new order to maintain their positions, and – as members of the invaders' elites – intermarried with the native elites.

Among the sub-elites or grassroots echelons of society, a number of merchants (a social category to which the founders of Islam also belonged), city-based artisans and members of artisan corporations, and some native Central Asian groups who found support among the Muslims during social uprisings, were also found to be receptive to Islam. Another category well-represented among the early converts from the region were soldiers, who either fought alongside the Muslim invaders for some reason, or were Iranian, Caspian and Turkic warriors who were taken prisoner and enslaved during military raids.*

*de la Vaissière 2007: 143–151

Why did individuals convert? Alan Strathern distinguishes three sets of motivations.* First, *secular attraction*: conversion offers trading opportunities, military alliances, diplomatic capital and access to networks. At once, however, Strathern underlines that this does not exclude a sincere, more structural affinity with the faith, well beyond conscious calculations and cynical opportunism. Such affinity can be caused by transformations of modes of living through trade patterns, office-holding, urbanization, literacy and so on. In the process, Islam often added a layer to existing spiritual patterns and repertoires, thus being already 'regionalized' and 'indigenized'.

*Strathern 2017: 22–24

A second set of motivations for conversion comes as *demonstration of immanent power*, often after having witnessed the power of the new faith during moments of radical rupture – such as military defeat, institutional crisis, or state and empire collapse. In these circumstances, the faith in question can address the worldly concerns of certain groups, such as a better social status for one's own class and walk of life in the new faith than under the old faith and

social order. In Central Asia, this played out for merchants, notably. It also played out for social-professional groups frustrated by the Iranian caste system which – even though it was modified over time and probably varied locally in terms of rigidity – was generally less permeable and open to social mobility than the Islamic system.*

*Kristó-Nagy 2016: 76-77

This author would also add the nature and quality of the personal contacts between the local populations and both Arab and native convert Muslims. One's individual receptiveness or antipathy towards Islam and its message largely depended on personal experiences with its representatives. Strathern's third set of motivations for conversion has to do with *state-building and disciplining society*, which includes: institutional frameworks to organize society; rewriting the rules of legitimacy; alternatives to kinship as the organizing mechanism of political life; and a vector of literacy and a literacy culture and practice.¹⁴

This applies all the more when an old faith that informs and legitimates a political order enters into deep crisis – as happened with Zoroastrianism between highly formalized state Zoroastrianism and dissenting and schismatic groups – and general disarray during and following the Iranian war of succession of 628-632, during which not less than 11 emperors succeeded one another in the short span of four years.* Although in Central Asia proper, official Iranian Zoroastrianism was not the pillar of the state it was in the (eastern) Iranian empire, its crisis did negatively affect the belief systems and social institutions inspired by it.

*Pourshariati 2008: 340

3.3.4 Non-Arab Convert Native 'Intergenerational Muslims' – the Formation of a New Base

Already in the earlier phases of the Arab conquest, so-called *mawālī* or non-Arab converts to Islam played a not unimportant role as auxiliaries in the Arab armies. Around 650, for example, Iranian and Caspian *mawālī* formed about one-fifth of the 5,000-strong caliphal army that occupied north-eastern Iran.*¹⁵ And of the 54,000 caliphal troops stationed in north-eastern Iran around the year 705, reportedly some 7,000 were *mawālī*.* Arab soldiers and settlers also intermarried with Iranian, Caspian and Turkic women in the territories that they conquered and occupied. This contributed to the emergence of Central Asian *ashrāf*, aristo-

*Litvinsky et al. 1996: 470

*Stark 2018: 368

¹⁴ This also applied in the gradual conversion to Christianity of the Frankish Merovingian dynasty in Western Europe from the sixth century and the Varangian Russian princes from the tenth century onwards.

¹⁵ For more detailed examinations of the recruitment and the role of the *mawālī*, see Amikam Elad. (Elad 2005; 2010)

cratic lineages tracing their descent to early Arab conquerors, or to the prophet Muhammad and members of his entourage. But on the whole, gradually, a new generation of Muslims emerged who were either born in the region from emigrated Arab or mixed Arab-indigenous parents, or who 'inherited' their Islamic affiliation from first-generation *mawālī* fathers.

This genealogical 'indigenization' of Islam would have dramatic political consequences, for the urge for recognition and a greater role in the Islamic order. The *mawālī* Muslims were instrumental in the Abbasid uprising and the overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty between 744 and 750. The uprising – the centres of which were Kufa and Merv – started as a power struggle between the southern Arab tribes and the Yemeni, and the northern Arab tribes who were (perceived as) privileged in the Umayyad system. The intertribal rivalries soon affected the Arab settlers in Merv, Nishapur and other eastern places. The rebellion was joined by dissenting religious groups like the Kharijites who saw the caliphs as usurpers, and wanted to re-establish the original equality of the members of the Ummah, and the Shia who before had revolted several times against the Umayyad.*

*Bosworth and Bolshakov 1996: 30–35

The substantial social-popular base of the Abbasid uprising, however, was provided by north-eastern Iran's and Central Asia's *mawālī* populations, who had come to understand that conversion had not automatically brought ethnic and social equality with the Arab Muslims.¹⁶ There was also widespread discontent with the Umayyad taxation policies in which *mawālī* had to pay a number of poll and protection taxes, which Muslims were normally exempt from. Due to a growing need for revenue and the lack of a uniform and streamlined taxation system, peasants were taxed both by the Umayyad imperial administration and by the *dahaqīn* or landowners.*

*Marín-Guzmán 1990: 3–5, 54–58; de la Vaissière 2018: 110–146

In Kufa, the Abbasid organization was led by descendants of the prophet Muhammad's uncle Abbas – hence its name. Its representative in the Eastern Lands from 745 onwards was Abū Muslim al-Khurāsāni, a charismatic native from Central Asia who would soon organize the Abbasid uprising, overthrow the Umayyad governorate, and take over power there. In the summer of 751, under Abū Muslim's eastern governorate, an Abbasid army defeated a Chinese expeditionary force in Talas, which had come to take advantage of the internecine strife between the Umayyad and Abbasids and of

¹⁶ Contrary to conventional wisdom in certain circles, despite the universalist and egalitarian message of early-Islam, ethnic-based hierarchies and racism did exist in Muslim Arab(-dominated) societies. For an examination of Omayyad- Moorish Andalusia in this regard, see Serafín Fanjul. (Fanjul 2017)

the post-uprising disorder to support a regional secession attempt in the Samarkand area. The crucial outcome of the battle put a halt on Chinese military advances into the Central Asian heartland and even present Xinjiang for centuries, and resolutely turned Central Asia south-westward to the Islamic realm.^{*17}

*Roux 1997: 91-92

3.3.5 Central Asia in the Abbasid Economic Space

Central Asian history basically consists of overlapping waves each of which show strong associations between trade and diplomatic networks, transcendentalism and state-building. This makes it what Victor Lieberman calls a vast 'exposed zone,' where life always meant dealing with evanescent imperial systems, recurrent incursions as well as with competing transcendentalisms.* It brought Central Asia into different *œcumene*, like the Greek-Oriental, the imperial-Iranian, the Arab-Iranian Muslim and, as a variant, the different steppe civilizations. The Abbasid revolution and the establishment of a new caliphal dynasty brought a political system in which Iranian, Caspian and Central Asian *mawālī* and their descendants were much better represented at both the central and regional governance level.

*Strathern 2017: 35

By the late eighth century, Central Asia administratively belonged to the Abbasid provinces of *al-Khurāsān* (الخراسان) with Merv and Nishapur as its main political-military centres, *Ma wāra' al-Nahr* (ما وراء النهر) with Samarkand as its capital, and, just south of the Aral Sea, *al-Khwārizm* (الخوارزم), with Kat as its capital. The ideologically and militarily defined order also framed a vast economic space in which much older patterns of traffic and exchange would be revitalized. Maurice Lombard identifies four characteristics and impacts:*

*Lombard 1972: 42-43

First, the Mediterranean and the Orient were moulded into one civilizational space basically for the first time since the empire of Alexander the Great and his successors.¹⁸ The westward-oriented economic space incorporated Central Asia's old economic fibre and

¹⁷ Abū Muslim eventually fell from grace with the new Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur. He was tricked into traveling to Kufa, arrested, and reportedly executed on a spot along the Tigris in early 755.

¹⁸ 'Civilization' and 'civilizational space' are understood here as Marcel Mauss defined them: a sufficiently large and ample whole of qualitatively as well as numerically important and characteristic social phenomena, and the different societies in which they occur(red) and which are characterized by them, so that one can speak of families of societies. By definition, civilizations possess more or less common characteristic forms which consist of all its specific aspects in terms of ideas, practices, and products; a territorial and non-territorial area; as well as layers which are a civilization's form within a given timeframe. (Mauss, 1969-2002: 10-12)

Map 4.2 Eurasia and Central Asia at the Zenith of the Abbasid caliphate around the Year 765

Sources:
Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'Orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993), 23.
Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=119801&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

transport systems. Its connectedness was enhanced by the installation of a monetary system under the gold *dinar*, and by the consolidation and spread of Arabic as the first imperial lingua franca. Besides being the language of government, it was a liturgical language and the vector of a faith and ideology.¹⁹ As such, Arabic transcended its original Arab geographic core. The position of Arabic also influenced the formation and codification, in a modified Arabic script, of Farsi, which became the second lingua franca in the eastern parts of the empire.*

*Sourdel 2007: 58–59; Fleury 2004: 133–135

Second, through Central Asia and the Caspian Sea – called *Baḥr al-Ḳazwīn* or ‘sea of Qazvin’ in Arabic – a connection came into being with the northern Caspian Khazar kingdom, the middle and upper Volga basin, and the northern forests, with the trade in furs, wood, slaves, flax, honey, fish, sheep and cattle.* The main centres and commercial turning plates in Central Asia became al-Ḳhwārizm and Samarkand. Third, a world trade emerged on the bases of the complementarity of continental and maritime trade, since overland trade route systems came into the same greater space as the Mediterranean, Red Sea and Pontic-Caspian maritime systems. And finally, after losing its southern and African provinces to the Islamic polity, the Byzantine empire economically and politically re-oriented itself towards south-eastern Europe and the Adriatic, and to the Pontic-Black Sea region.²⁰

*Golden 2011: 50

3.3.6 *The Role of the Central Asian ‘Governorate Dynasties’ and of Turkic and Caspian Praetorians in the Late-Abbasid Period*

But what turned out to be perhaps the most powerful engine of the conversion of the Central Asian heartland to what is its majority faith up to this day, was the takeover of the championing of the Islamic cause by the indigenous polities that emerged when the Abbasid empire did what all empires sooner or later do, and started to stagnate and disintegrate. When we look again at Richard Bulliet’s conversion curve, we notice that a clear majority of the region’s population had undergone various degrees of conversion in one way or another in that the near-complete conversion of the sedentary zones (at least of al-Khurāsān) occurred when the Abbasid empire was already on the wane.* Its decline started in the early ninth century and clearly manifested itself in the open by 861 with the outbreak of civil war in Iraq and the appearance, in a number

*Bulliet 1994: 38–39; 2017: 72

¹⁹ In that respect, its position was similar to that of Latin in the Carolinian empire in Western Europe.

²⁰ Eventually, the interaction between the Pontic-Black Sea space and the Varangian Russian principalities would bring the latter into the Oriental-Christian realm.

*Sourdel 2007: 50–52

of Arab and non-Arab provinces, of de facto independent emirates with hereditary rulers.*

The area under direct Abbasid control gradually shrank to present-day Iraq and some parts of the Persian Gulf basin.²¹ It remained a rump state, at times under the suzerainty of neighbouring emirates and at times independent, until the siege and sacking of Baghdad – which became the capital of the empire in 762 – by the Mongols at the beginning of 1258. Elsewhere, the power shifted to non-Arab groups who built up their social ascent and political influence within the Abbasid system. The first of these were the so-called *mamālik*, a sort of caliphal praetorian guard, whose members were often recruited from among Turkic and Caspian slaves and war prisoners.²² Some of their commanders were given emir positions and eventually established their own dynasties.²³ In 836, Caliph al-Mustaʿṣim eventemporarily relocated the Abbasid capital to the *mamālik* headquarters at Samarra.

The second group of interest were regular regional governors who, as the central level of power weakened, increasingly acted autonomously to the extent that they were no longer appointed by the centre as was the custom, but their office became a hereditary position. Two of these ‘governorate dynasties,’ the Tahirid (which existed from 821 until 873) and especially the Samanid emirate (which lasted from 875 to 999), were instrumental for the formation of proper Central Asian Muslim polities and cultures.²⁴ The Tahirid emirate – the capital of which first was Merv and later Nishapur – was founded by Tahir ibn Husain, the Abbasid governor of al-Khurāsān. He was of Iranian origin but culturally quite Arabized as well as a convinced Sunni.

²¹ With the decline of the Abbasid empire, and the shift of the demographic and economic centre of the Islamic sphere to the east, the seat of the caliphate in Baghdad, and Mecca and Medina, the holy places of Islam in western Arabia, gained more of a symbolic rather than actual political significance.

²² In English and other European languages, the *mamālik* are better known as Mamluks.

²³ One example was the al-Ikshid emirate based in present-day Cairo, which lasted from 935 until 969.

²⁴ A third Iranian governorate dynasty, which partly existed at the time of the Tahirid and Samanid emirates, was the Saffarid emirate. Based in Zaranj in Sistan, it existed from 861 to around the year 1000. At its zenith, its territory only encompassed a small southern portion of Central Asia though. In Tabaristan south of the Caspian Sea, the Alavid emirate *de facto* seceded in 864 and lasted until 928. In the west of the Abbasid empire, there was a similar process with the emergence of the Shia Hamdanid emirates of Aleppo and Mosul which existed from 895 until 1002.

He and his family claimed to descend both from Iranian imperial lineages and from the Quraish tribe to which the prophet Muhammad belonged. His *mawālī* ancestors also reportedly supported the anti-Umayyad rebellion of Abū Muslim.* So elite legitimacy was clearly anchored in a mixture of Iranianism and Arab Muslim-ness. Although the Tahirid emirs – some relatives of whom held posts in Baghdad and Samarra – did continue to send tax revenue from al-Khurāsān to the centre, they became *de facto* independent rulers with their own armies, and economic, monetary and fiscal policies. Was the emirate an attempt then to re-establish Iranian independence for the first time since the Arab conquest, as some historians believe?* Not at this stage yet. Rather, it was a re-arrangement and devolution of territorial control.*²⁵

*Azad 2012: 154-155

It was different with the Samanid emirate, which was first based at Samarkand and then Bukhara. At the time it was formed, the empire was already fatally weakened by the so-called ‘Samarra turmoil,’ a period from 861 to 870 during which four caliphs, pretenders and their factions, and different *mamālik* units were entangled in a civil war. The ruling dynasty of what would become the Samanid emirate were originally a family of *dahaqīn* or landowners from the Herat region. Family members were assigned the governance of four shires in the old Abbasid Central Asian provinces of al-Khurāsān and Ma wāra’ al-Nahr, which soon would form a separate confederation. In the year 892, they were united under a common ruler, emir Abū Ibrāhīm Ismail. Although he nominally remained a regional delegate of the caliph, his rule, which lasted until 907, would become characterized by the formation of a proper Central Asian Muslim polity.*

*Pignon 2013

*Azad 2012: 166-168; Cahen 1973: 155;
Bianquis 1996: 22

In the process of building statehood, emir Ismail, his followers and his successors were led by the Sunni legitimization principle of being *ghāzī*, warriors for the faith. The frontier between the sedentary and the steppe, threatened as it was (or perceived to be) by Turkic incursions and by apostasy and secessionism was *dār al-ḥarb*.* A crucial component of jihadism was the takeover and expansion of the Abbasid and Tahirid *ribāṭ* system (see section 3.3.2.). At the same time, the championing of the Islamic cause in Central Asia was de-Arabized and closely intertwined with a strong sense of Iranianism, which made there a common idea of own-group with the majority population of the region. Eventually,

*Negmatov 1996: 84-87

*Tör 2009: 218-284

²⁵ Comparable somehow to the devolution of the Roman empire into four *de facto* independent regions with ‘deputy emperors’ (the so-called tetrarchy) between 286 and 309.

Map 4.3 Eurasia and Central Asia after the Disintegration of the Abbasid Caliph Empire around the Year 975

Sources: Jean and André Sallier, *Atlas des peuples d'Orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993): 25. Map created by editors, adapted from: https://fr-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=119801&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

it was under the Tahirids and especially the Samanids that Central Asia gained ‘civilizational autonomy,’ in the sense that the region was not a mere component, dependency or (semi-)periphery of a civilization, the core of which was situated outside the region, but itself a core of a specific Central Asian Muslim civilization.^{*26}

*Wilkinson 1991: 138-139; Tor 2009: 284-287)

4. Conclusion

The first three phases of Islamization of Central Asia’s sedentary areas, and some adjacent parts of the steppe, jointly lasted over 350 years. It started with a movement – or Arab military invasion and conquest – that reached Central Asia through Iran. But unlike the Vikings, Magyars and Mongols –to name but a few who eventually took over the faiths of the lands and societies they subjugated – the invaders left a faith and ideology that lasted well beyond their direct rule and physical presence. Was the Islamization of Central Asia achieved after the three and a half centuries? No. It was not. But the periods under examination in this chapter were crucial in the transformation of the region, the anchoring of an important component of its traditional cultural fibre, and – with the emergence of independent Central Asian Muslim dynasties – even the achievement of a period of civilizational autonomy.

For Central Asia, the political and practical centre of the Islamic sphere to which it came to belong, was much less the original Islamic core in western Arabia – though it had great symbolic significance in the new tradition and was connected to the region by the pilgrimage traffic – compared to Iran and Iraq. What was essential in the process of religious transformation? More than military invasion and armed conquest in the strict sense, it was, first, a fatigue and crisis of the old societal orders and belief systems. Second, there was the idea of an embattled frontier. This was crucial for the presence of militant sects, military orders and, of course, for the establishment of frontier colonies in which transferred Arab populations were governed by Islam. As such, they were social incubators for the new political and societal order.

At the end of the day, it was the result of a convergence of classical empire-building, and specific Islamic notions of polity and territoriality. The presence of Islam would never have lasted beyond

²⁶ Another example of an episode when (parts of) Central Asia had civilizational autonomy is that of the Greek-Central Asian kingdom (250-125 BC) that came into being when it seceded from the Seleucid empire (itself a successor state to the empire of Alexander the Great) and supported a hybrid invader-native culture.

enclaves, however, if a sufficiently large and influential indigenous convert base had not come into being, and – especially – if the championing of the Islamic cause would not have been taken over by the indigenous or indigenous-based emirates that emerged from the decline of the Abbasid empire. So paradoxically, it was the decline and disintegration of the latter that accelerated and sealed the religious transformation of the region.

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6. Recommended Literature

One of the few historical works on the Central Asian region in the Dutch language, De Cordier's book from 2012, treats the central question of how Central Asia obtained its present sociocultural and political map through an examination of four crucial formation periods: the region's original Islamization, the Mongol period, Central Asia's integration into the Tsarist empire, and finally its transformation into the USSR. It has numerous thematic maps and graphics. For those who read French and look for a comparative and cross-cultural examination of the anatomies, institutions and political cultures of empires (a topic treated in this chapter), the volumes edited by Duverger in 1980 and by Gougenheim, in 2019, respectively contain 21 and 16 case studies of premodern and modern empires, several of which encompassed or exerted influence over the Central Asian region.

For its part, Lombard's book from 1972, a collection of nine articles by this renowned medievalist, offers a thorough insight into the medieval economic space and patterns of economic interaction in and between the caliphal Islamic sphere (including Central Asia) and greater Europe between the seventh and the eleventh century. It is also illustrated by a number of maps. Lapidus' book from 2002 is respectively recommended for insight on the social-cultural history of the premodern and modern Islamic worlds. Finally, for those who need to look up concrete medieval Islamic concepts or personalities, Meri's two-volume work is a comprehensive encyclopedia containing not only many biographies, but also entries on customs, institutions and events. Most entries have their own concise 'Further Reading' sections.

- Bruno De Cordier, *Het onbeloofde land: een geschiedenis van Centraal-Azië*, (Leuven: Acco, 2012).
- Maurice Duverger (ed.), *Le concept d'empire*, (Paris: Centre d'Analyse Comparative des Systèmes Politiques – Presses Universitaires de France, 1980)
- Sylvain Gouguenheim, *Les empires médiévaux*, (Paris: Perrin, 2019)
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Cite as: Bruno J. De Cordier, 'The Original Islamization of Central Asia: From the Arab Frontier Colonies to the 'Governate Dynasties' (650-1000), *in:* Jeroen Van den Bosch; Adrien Fauve; Bruno De Cordier (eds.), *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2021): 75-113.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Some present-day opinion discourses have it, that a process of Islamization is currently ongoing in the EU, and in Western Europe in particular. In this chapter, you have been given a thorough examination of a historical Islamization process and the different actors, factors and dynamics at play in it. When you make abstraction of these, are there indeed similarities and parallels?

TOPIC 2

Given the ways and historical patterns of its spread outside of its original core, how 'Arabic' is Islam, actually?

TOPIC 3

Given a historical presence that lasts from the early-medieval period up to this day, is Islam an unalienable part of the identities and societal texture of Central Asia's Turkic and Tajik populations?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

A classroom debate can be organized around each of the topics proposed above for written assignments. This works well with matters that cause controversies and/or can be seen from opposite perspectives. This classroom activity can be treated also as an alternative to the written assignment. However, depending on the needs of the course, of the group and the teacher, it can also be held (with proper modifications in the procedure) after each student has already worked on their individual written assignment.

For instance, for the first topic proposed above – present-day opinion discourses (and alleged analogies) on Islamization in (Western) Europe – the procedure can be the following:

- First, the question-topic is shared with the whole group of students, so that it can be reflected on beforehand. Each student is asked to come up with at least three arguments for and against the topic statement. Then, in class, students are divided in groups (e.g. four members each) to share their arguments and prepare a common list of similarities and differences between the two cases being compared. Ideally, they write on a large sheet of paper with two columns (an editable online document per group is another option).
- After this, each group decides on which of the two positions they will defend in the final debate (focusing on similarities versus focusing on differences) and begins to prepare one of their members for the role of the spokes(wo)man in the final debate. If the teacher prefers, (s)he can assign a particular position to each group in a top-down manner, in order to make sure that both positions will be represented on the classroom level in a balanced way. The groups work on arguments and possible counterarguments.

- In the final stage two bodies (i.e. groups of representatives) are formed out of the appointed spokes(women) (3-5 people each side). The number can be modified, according to the needs of the group, as well as the time and space available. These two groups are settled in front of the class so that they can debate with each other. The rules of the debate are presented by the teacher (such as: who speaks when, if/when the floor is given to the rest of the class to ask additional questions and/or add arguments; time limit per speaker, if needed).
- The teacher moderates the discussion giving floor to representatives of each side and controlling the time limit. This role can be also attributed to one of the students. The teacher can also contribute, e.g. by stating controversial questions connected to relevant current affairs. Finally, (s) he streamlines conclusions. The frequency and quality of participation can be marked.

In cases where the debate is combined with individual written assignments, students would be sharing the main findings and conclusions of their written assignments, first in groups. Then each group would adopt a posture (in favour or against the main statement) and present their common conclusions to the whole class. The lecturer/teacher prepares two or three controversial questions, possibly connected to relevant current affairs, which are asked right after each presentation. Then the floor is opened to the students for a plenary discussion.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUJqRGlxGDE&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsightsEISCASEurasianInsights

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to CASE STUDY NO. 1 by Bruno J. De Cordier

Ташкентъ.—Taschkent. № 16.
Часть города „Махкама“.

Makhkama neighbourhood (lane where the Sibzar, Kuchin and Beshagach streets cross).

CHAPTER 5

Early Modern Interactions between Pastoral Nomadic and Sedentary Societies in the Central Asian Culture Complex

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Keywords:

- Acculturation • Central Asia Proper • Circulation • Cultural Anthropology
- Culture of Self • Nomadism • Periodization • Sedentariness • Typologies

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Discuss historical cycles in Central Asian history.
- Argue that the notion of Central Asia applies both to a cultural area and to a historical one.
- Understand the difficulties in the process of defining Central Asia as a historical space.
- Relate the geographic distribution of the irrigated agriculture in Central Asia with the political limits of its dynastic-political entities.
- Explain why the Chinggisid legitimacy is an integrating force in Central Asian history.
- Relate some major moments of the nomadic-sedentary interactions with political events of Central Asian history.
- Name the main components of the nomadic-sedentary interactions in Central Asian history in political, cultural or religious, and linguistic terms.
- Relate the process of Turkization among the Central Asian populations with the notions of interaction, acculturation and circulation.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- How would you define Central Asia? And Central Eurasia?
- Name the main ethnic groups of the region and some of their internal sub-groups, or tribal divisions.
- Why Central Asia is often viewed as the birth place of the big 'Empires of the Steppe'?
- What explains that Central Asia had large sedentary areas (with agriculture and big city centers), despite the fact that it is overall a very arid region?

Main questions

- What difficulties arise when one tries to define Central Asia and related cultural and historical issues?
- What are the main characteristics of Central Asia's natural environment?
- Is our classic mental mapping of Central Asia opposing a nomadic North to an agricultural South a reflection of the natural environments? If not, what does it reflect?
- Why series of associations such as 'Nomadic-Turkic-Tribal and non-Muslim' do not apply to most of historical moments in Central Asian history?
- What is the tension between concentration and dispersion for the nomads in general, and the nomadic conquerors in particular?
- What were the major markers of Central Asian cultures?
- What did Turkization and Islamization consist of?
- What is the 'Tamerlane exception'?

Post-reading questions

- Why is mobility a debated notion in the history of both Central Eurasia and Central Asia?
- Why is it not sufficient to mobilize the imperial paradigm and macro-characteristics to treat the history of Central Asia proper?
- Typologies are extremely necessary, but typologies of nomadism, and of the nomadic-sedentary contacts, cannot address all the local variations. Please argue.

CHAPTER 5

Early Modern Interactions between Pastoral Nomadic and Sedentary Societies in the Central Asian Culture Complex

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THE INTERACTIONS between pastoral nomadic and sedentary societies form the foundation of the Central Asian culture complex. Until the end of the traditional ways of life in the Region¹ during the first decades of the twentieth century, these interactions structured not only its economy, but also its cultural life, as well as the various native representations of identity, also called ‘the representations of self’ in this text.²

This chapter starts by elaborating on Central Asian’s spatial scope in Section 1 in order to identify and present its unique cultural characteristics. Section 2 introduces several key aspects of the Region’s environment in relations to its inhabitants’ lifestyles, economies and cultures. Section 3 studies the concept of mobility and pastoral nomadism in juxtaposition to sedentariness. The next section (in 4.1), first builds on this by analysing its aftermath, the results of those interactions and ‘circulations’, and then illustrates the insights from previous sections by presenting several ‘mirrors’ (Part 4.2) based on historical cases, which are summarized in Part 4.3, before the final conclusion of the chapter.

1. The Central Asian Culture Complex

1.1 What is ‘Properly’ Called ‘Central Asia’?

With a topic like this, it is essential for this chapter to clearly define what is to be understood under ‘Central Asia.’ The arguments involved in the discussion of the interactions between the two

¹ The term ‘region’ unavoidably indicates a variety of areas in this text, therefore the author decided, for the sake of convenience, to use the term with an ‘uppercase R’ when it refers to the entire Central Asian region. The use of the term with a ‘lowercase r’ (as region or sub-region) is then reserved to either designate one of the sub-regions of Central Asia, or any other region in the world.

² For pictures of these traditional societies, see: Hugues Krafft, Pierre Centlivres and Paul Nadar. (Krafft 1902; Centlivres 2002; Nadar 2007)

major kinds of economies and populations (i.e. nomadic and sedentary) will not be the same whether or not the discussed notion of Central Asia includes regions as far east as Mongolia and the famous Chinese-Steppe³ frontier north of the Great Wall and Gobi desert.

For two centuries now, the term 'Central Asia' is commonly applied to many different areas. Since 1991, in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the definition of Central Asia applied throughout this handbook has become predominant. For this chapter, the author uses a slightly different definition of Central Asia that encompasses Xinjiang, the five former Soviet republics and northern Afghanistan, yet Mongolia and the Chinese Steppe frontier are not considered in this study. When scholars include the latter then that regional delineation is often called 'Inner Asia' (*Asie intérieure*) or 'High Asia' (*Haute-Asie*).

In addition to this terminological fluctuation, there is another issue regarding the existing typologies on the nomadic-sedentary interactions. These classifications can be traced back to a brilliant and quite old literature partly drawing on the model of the Chinese-Steppe frontier and High Asia.* The nomadic-sedentary interactions that took place in this chapter's Region of interest, for example in the surroundings of the Syr Darya river, or of the lush Zeravshan valley, have been omitted when creating these existing typologies. Also there is much less literature on these sub-regions of 'Central Asia proper' than on cases related to High Asia (i.e. the Chinese Empire and its direct historical experience with nomadic invasions from the Steppe). Already in the 17th to 18th centuries, the main European orientalists put their focus on either High Asia or the Middle East, but not on Central Asia proper.⁴

*Barfield 1995; Bergholz 1993;
Fletcher 1995; Rossabi 1975

³ The term 'Steppe' with 'uppercase S' was and still is widely used to indicate anything related to the political or cultural history of its nomadic inhabitants. Please note that most often one focuses on the impact that these nomads made on the peoples and the states of the rest of Eurasia. Therefore, 'the Steppe' became a historical object, and also a symbol of political vigour (see below for the expression 'Empire of the Steppe'), as opposed to 'steppe,' with a 'lowercase s,' which points to a form of vegetation and landscape dominant in the steppe belt of Eurasia.

⁴ The command of Chinese language was central to the expertise of Joseph Deguignes (or de Guignes, 1721-1800) the famous French orientalist, and for his predecessors. The command of Ottoman sources was also central to the expertise of the orientalists specialized in the Islamic sources, at a time when Europeans visited, and reported on, 'the Orient' by traveling in the Ottoman Empire, or Persia, or Moghul India, but not in Central Asia. Nevertheless, some major works of exceptional quality were published

In other words, Central Asia as defined above, is less studied than many other parts of Asia, including the Middle East, particularly regarding issues of the interactions between nomadic and sedentary communities, which are the two poles of the Central Asian culture complex. Therefore, this chapter will focus on these lesser-known and under-studied cases of interaction between the two. For example, the Kazakh societies (see Box 5.3) are almost never taken into account in discussions of the nomadic-sedentary interaction's history. This is why what is understood under 'Central Asia' matters that much, and why there are still so many new arguments to further discover and develop in this field of study, despite the existence of a rich and 'classical' canon. After all, up to this day, historians and archaeologists still make many discoveries in the ongoing excavations in Pompei, for instance!

As shown on Map 5.1, Central Asia can basically be divided into five ecological-cultural sub-regions:

- A. Dasht-e Qibchaq (or *Dasht-i-Kipchak*), which refers to the central parts of the 'Eurasian Steppe' (often also called 'the Kazakh Steppe' since the 15th century)
- B. The Caspian Sea littoral and the Kara Kum ('Black Sand') desert
- C. The left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan
- D. Transoxiana
- E. Alty Shahr⁵ in the Tarim basin and Dzhungaria (jointly often called also 'Eastern Turkestan') – this region mostly coincides with the territory of contemporary Xinjiang.

Many of these terms are commonly used in the literature, but they refer to different historical traditions and periods, and some of them are highly disputed. Indeed, every country among which contemporary Central Asia is divided has its own agenda in the field of terminology – see Box 5.1. Today China is probably the most demanding and the most restrictive in this regard. Of course, this academic approach aims to study the facts and the native dis-

with a lot of materials on Central Asia, like the *Librairie orientale* of Barthélémy d'Herbelot in 1697. Except for a handful of people before the 19th century, Central Asia remained almost unvisited by Europeans before the time of the Tsarist colonization.

⁵ 'Alty Shahr' means 'six cities' in the Uyghur language. The list of these cities vary by source, yet German archaeologist and explorer Albert von Le Coq mentioned Kashgar, Maralbexi, Aksu (not to be confounded with several namesake localities in Central Asia, e.g. Aqsu in present-day Uzbekistan), Yengisar, Yarkand and Khotan." (Bellér-Hann 2008: 39)

Map 5.1. *Central Asia's Ecological Environment and Natural Sub-regions*

This map with the contours of contemporary Central Asia shows most or the area of 'Central Asia proper' as described in this chapter and its corresponding geographical and climatic features that have affected the development of its pastoral nomadic and sedentary cultures, and their hybrids. Its main sub-regions are indicated with the following letters:

- A** Dasht-e Qibchaq or the 'Eurasian Steppe'
- B** The Caspian Sea littoral and the *Kara Kum* desert
- C** The left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan
- D** Transoxiana
- E** Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria

Note: The editors brought together cartographic elements from various maps, but adapted them to the standard projection used in this handbook, for this reason the positioning of map elements is indicative, not authoritative.

Sources:
Rafis Akhazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 1.
Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 2-3.
Jean and André Sallier, *Atlas des régions d'orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993): 149.
Map created by editors, designed by Typeface IN.

courses surrounding such facts, and their various interpretations, but not to support any of them – particularly when it comes to ongoing disputes of interests managed by existing states, or super-powers.

The expression ‘Central Asia’ defines a cultural area, and not a political unit. A single, united political space encompassing the entire region never really came into being in this area, nor in the past, neither today. However, the idea of a specific area, different from the other large cultural areas surrounding it always existed in the history of the Region, particularly in the views of its non-Central Asian neighbouring states and cultures like China, India or Persia. These cultures forged their own views of the different spatial divisions of Asia, and such well-known terms like Turan (see also Map 15.6) or Turkestan, arose in this regional context, mostly to define the space north of the Amu Darya river.

For obvious geographical reasons, the above-mentioned Asian neighbours of Central Asia had more interaction with the latter throughout history than Western Europeans. However, the 19th century was a time of European domination not only through conquests but also through sciences and knowledge. In this context, European and Russian orientalists and geographers forged the expression Central Asia at the beginning of the 19th century. It took them a few decades to really specify which space they actually wanted to define as such, and this is why one can see quite some variations of the definition. Ever since Julius von Klaproth (1783–1835) wrote his works in French in 1826 using this new term ‘*Asie centrale*,’ the expression ‘Central Asia’ became gradually adopted by others and translated into many languages.*

*Klaproth 1826

In other words, even if the contemporary dominant expression to define this Region draws from European and Russian knowledge, the need to define this specific cultural area is certainly not an invention by Europeans. Local visions of space were always created by the different cultures of Asia. Take note that none of the many terms that accumulated over the course of history are completely interchangeable, like Turan,⁶ Turkestan, Central Asia, etc.

1.2 Defining Central Asia through Historical Cycles

Let’s divide Central Asian history into major cycles. Each such cycle is composed of two periods: a first period of invasion by a major empire, which brings in what we call a ‘world order,’ but crumbles

⁶ On the term and idea of ‘Turan,’ consult: Caiozzo et al. 2018; for a visual representation, see Map 15.6.

apart after a relatively short time, usually a century or so. After this period of world order under world empires, their dismantling paves the way to the rise of much smaller, local and sub-regional political units. This period of 'local order' in politics and culture is often very long and may last a few centuries, and it is marked by the local cultures absorbing many of the legacies left by the previous world empire. Due to the historical significance of these processes of re-composition of local cultures with new components and influences, the processes of acculturation were repeatedly at work throughout Central Asian history. Therefore, it makes sense to use such expressions as 'post-Mongol period,' or 'post-Soviet period.'

Speaking of a 'post-Mongol period,' this chronological division is useful for three reasons. Firstly, because the Chinggisid Mongol invasions incorporated the whole of Central Asia in only *one* decade after 1218, a feat that subsequent empires such as the Russian or Chinese could not repeat.⁷ Secondly, the legacy of the Chinggisid Mongols marked the politics and the culture of the five above-mentioned sub-regions of Central Asia for centuries, giving to the entire Region a great deal of internal coherence. Its many subsequent dynasties were all of Chinggisid descent (cf. the 'Shaybanid Mirror' in Part 4.2.1 below). And thirdly, this post-Mongol period's expression refers to the historical cycles that have characterized the history of the Region.

1.3 Acculturation and Continuity

The Central Asian culture complex comes from mutual and multifaceted processes of acculturation between groups whose status and cultural identity evolved over time. The pastoral nomads of one period would become village and even town dwellers several generations later, just as some non-Muslim nomadic, Turkic-speaking tribal groups gave birth to ruling dynasties settled in cities, a few generations later acting as pious defenders of a strict observance of Islam (cf. Part 4.1.5 'Sedentarization as Acculturation' below). Likewise, in places once only inhabited by Iranian language-speakers, one can find a distinctive shift to a local⁸ Turkic language-speaking majority sometime later.

⁷ The name 'Chinggisid' comes from the name of the founder of the Mongol Empire, Chinggis Khan or Genghis Khan (ca. 1160-1227) – see also Map 15.7.

⁸ In the post-Mongol period, the main Turkic languages in the Region were Karakalpak, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uyghur (as it has been called since the early 20th century), Uzbek and Turkmen languages, spoken by a large majority of the population of the Region, where Iranian idioms are mostly represented by the Tajik language and its many local varieties, and by the Pamir languages.

Indeed, acculturations and changes took place in different periods. However, it is important to stress the continuities as well: for example, Turkic languages of the area have more than 50 to 60 percent of loan words from Iranian languages and from Arabic. In general, the multi-faceted changes and partial continuity they carry within them are fully intermingled in such a way that makes them unique to the Region. Changes and continuities affected all aspects of life during the making of the Central Asian culture complex: culture, religion, language, economy, and landscapes. From the sixth century onwards, it has mostly been a Turko-Persian culture complex, with a strong and unique Chinggisid component.*

*Amitai-Preiss and Morgan 2000;
Amitai and Biran 2005

These processes of acculturation, for instance, have affected the languages spoken and the religions observed, but have not altered the geographical distribution of the pastoral nomadic and sedentary societies, nor their long-lasting interactions.⁹ Picturing these long-lasting processes is a major intellectual challenge offered by Central Asian studies, and this work does not solely concern historians, with political studies or cultural anthropology also deeply involved to tackle this challenge because of the strong political undertones of interpretations rendered, and in the usage of this past in each of the territories of Central Asia today.

This is not only the case in the five, now independent former Soviet republics, where each government is engaged in constructing a national idea for which the past is tremendously important. This is also true in China, where the government and the communist party aim to be the only institutions to dominate the discourse on and about Xinjiang and its different native populations – mostly Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.

1.4 Debating Objects of Social Sciences

Pastoral nomadic and sedentary societies created their own ways of food and goods production, and their own ways of life, by inventing and developing techniques that would enhance some of the potentialities of their natural environments. Pastoral nomadic and sed-

⁹ A striking example of continuities alongside the changes is given by the history of the distribution of nomadic and sedentary groups. 'Ethnic' communities of the post-Mongol period, known under umbrella terms such as Karakalpak, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmen, formed the largest pastoral nomadic groups. (Jacquesson 2002) Population groups and cultures inhabiting the same territories before them or their direct ancestors, were already pastoral nomads before becoming Turkic language-speakers or Sunni Muslims. Therefore, the processes of Turkization and Islamization occurred among populations which had already been pastoral nomads for centuries, and would remain so after these changes; for more info on these parallel processes, see Part 4.2.

entary societies developed as a result of invention, and adaptation. In this long historical process, each of these two major types of societies, our two 'poles,' developed their own value systems and representations of the 'Other.' Despite their continuous contacts and cultural proximity, the Other is often portrayed as a stranger.

Nomadic and sedentary societies constitute categories by themselves, and there exists a large literature on them. But still many questions are left open, or are controversial. It would go far beyond the scope of this chapter to even list them in detail. The most important ones may probably stand as follows: Why and how could not numerous nomads expand so far, and even impose their rule on many of their older, more numerous, and more 'advanced' sedentary neighbours? Was the main reason for such nomadic migration the search for pastures for their livestock, and did this pastoralism contribute to their outstanding mobility during times of war, and for the large-scale nomadic expansions throughout Eurasia? There is an extensive literature on these topics, and many new points of view have been proposed, but they have not always been able to erase the old depictions and myths about nomadic strength and being a perennial threat to the sedentary areas and populations.

By concentrating on the Central Asian culture complex, this chapter 'absorbs' and reflects on many of these discussions.¹⁰ These discussions extend to the terminology, and terms like 'nomadism,' 'tribe,' 'migration,' 'the Steppe,' and many others are called into question in recent scholarly works. Discussions also extend to the methodologies used to study these objects, or concern the existing typologies: for example, many nomadic groups regularly or occasionally practice some sort of agriculture. For each of the discussed terms, a semantic variability can be found in the academic literature as well as in the native categories of the local populations, which complicates attempts to define and classify these concepts.

Indeed, local languages also reflected changes and fluctuations in the perception of who was a nomad, and what such terms were supposed to mean.* Yet, these rich and sometimes confusing terminological debates did not, in most publications, eliminate a kind of 'common' and generic meaning and use of these terms, nor even highly criticized concepts like 'tribe.' This is the reason why they are still used in this chapter.

*Paul 2006

The Central Asia cultural complex is definitely made of these contacts and interactions, considering that this area is the cradle of their two major tools: the cultivation of cereals and their use of horses. Indeed, around 5500 BC, the horse was first domesticated

¹⁰ See also the bibliography and recommended literature at the end of this chapter for more works on these debates.

in the present-day Kazakh steppes, while agriculture in the Region started near the Kopet Dagħ mountain area (now located on the border between Iran and Turkmenistan), which is located on this belt of foothills and mountains that stretches east to the Tien Shan, and which is a source of human-grown, domestic cereal cultures (like barley and tender wheat).

It took hundreds of years of adaptation for stock breeders and sedentary farmers to acquire their technical maturity, and hone their ability to enhance the potentialities of each of their own environments. This chapter scrutinizes pastoral nomads and agricultural dwellers in much later times, and most of the examples refer to the post-Mongol period, but it takes into account the paradigm of permanency, particularly in similar environmental conditions, even if the political situations regularly changed from one period to another.

1.5 Putting Central Asia at the Centre

The topic of the interaction between nomads and sedentary populations helps to place Central Asia and its fascinating history back again in the centre of attention. Although fascinating, this history has unfortunately been neglected in the studies of Asia, and somewhat overshadowed by new terms such as ‘Central Eurasia.’ (This quite recent expression encompassed a huge territory composed of Central Asia, High Asia, parts of Siberia, and so on. – cf. Map 2.1) In the traditional European knowledge of Asia, these spaces were gathered under the expression of Tartary, which was widely in use in Europe from the 13th to the 19th centuries, in the aftermath of the Mongol or ‘Tartar’ invasions. Accordingly, this chapter will redress this issue and really put Central Asia proper at the centre, instead of giving the priority to the imperial paradigm, which is almost always the case when one talks about the Region’s history.

From the time of the construction of European knowledge on ‘(Greater) Tartary’ until today, the historical discourses that sought ways to connect this part of Asia to more powerful external dynamics and especially to imperial ones (‘the imperial paradigm’ as it is called here) have been dominant.¹¹ Consequently, the most explored fields of study are revolving around this imperial paradigm, and the periods of world order in the Region. The imperial

¹¹ ‘(Greater) Tartary’ was the common name in Western Europe and on Western European maps before ca. 1850 for the area roughly stretching from the Sea of Azov to Mongolia – see also Map 15.6. Usually, there were sub-divisions like ‘Independent Tartary’ (southern Central Asia), ‘Lesser Tartary’ (the steppe region between the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea) and ‘Chinese Tartary’ (present-day Xinjiang).

paradigm was also extended to nomads by focusing on the various nomadic conquerors. Therefore, we clearly have to distinguish pastoral nomadism as a constant factor of the economic life of the Region, from certain groups of people with nomadic ascendancy that, at some periods of time, had a major impact in its political and dynastic history through warfare and expansion.

Local history remains the least known and least explored, although the largest part of the nomadic-sedentary interactions took place under the umbrella of this local order, and at the level of the local histories of Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria, Dasht-e Qibchaq, Transoxiana, the Caspian Sea and Kara Kum, and the left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan.* Academic works usually take into account the existing literature and canon. This chapter makes no exception in that regard, but differs in focus from most of the academic production about Central Asia's history, which revolves around the imperial paradigm, and still – as far as nomads are concerned – overemphasises their military history throughout Eurasia, from the Chinese Steppe frontier to Europe.*

*Bregel 2003

*Grousset 2015; Franz and Holzwarth 2015; Paul 2004; 2013

In this chapter, the author chooses not to put the focus on this nomadic military history for two reasons: first, this part of their role in world history is among the best highlighted by the academic traditions, while it still feeds many awkward representations; and second, this history refers to spaces that are much larger than just Central Asia. Their military history was written against a background of spatial and scalar confusion between Eurasia, Central Eurasia, and Central Asia proper. If one continues to apply this expression of Central Asia to its past (for historical purposes), it becomes necessary to stress its historical personality, and this implies discipline. Most importantly, this requires one to really place Central Asia at the centre, and thus avoid the very common confusion between Central Eurasia and Central Asia proper. And to pursue this goal of enriching this study area by reducing the imbalances between these two different research topics, because until now far too many aspects of Central Asia proper have suffered from being understudied.¹² Since the author has chosen not to put the focus on nomadic military history, he instead aims to bring to the attention of the reader two major issues that unfortunately are very undermined by their 'classical' historical treatment.

¹² Researchers on, say, Poland or Great Britain would not say to each other that their specialization is 'European history,' but rather the country's specific history that they work on. The same goes for Central Asia: the histories of High Asia, the Mongol sphere and the Middle East have many aspects and moments in common with Central Asian history, but this does not prevent the latter from being specific, within the larger Asian or Eurasian history.

Box 5.1 Place Names: Endonyms, Exonyms and Terminological Standpoints

All area studies present a terminological maelstrom which seems all the more blurry when one knows little about the reality to which it refers. For the better known area studies this onomastic diversity is common and accepted, and one does not pay attention to it, although it is the same like any other cultural area: Paris (French), *Париж* – *Parizh* (Russian), *Parigi* (Italian), *Москва* – *Moskva* (Russian), Moscow (English), *Moscou* (French), and so on. In the case of Central Asia, the onomastic diversity is also the legacy of the many cultural traditions that directly played a role in the Region: ancient Iranian, Greek, Arabic, Turkic, and the many local variations of these global heritages.

This onomastic diversity can also be viewed through the prism of the notions of exonyms and endonyms. Very common exonyms met in the academic literature are the ancient Greek names of the rivers, like Oxus for the Amu Darya, or Yaxartes for the Syr Darya. Their equivalent in classical Arabic are Sayhun and Jayhun for respectively the Syr Darya, and the Amu Darya. The archaeological and medievalist literature uses them quite widely, as well as ancient names like Bactriana, Sogdiana, and so on.

In relation to the Chagatayid dynastic branches, the region called Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria was often called 'Mogolistan' (or 'Moghulistan') in the medieval local sources, a term that is also used by the Western European and Russian academic publications. Therefore, for the same space, one reads in the academic literature: 'Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria,' 'Kashgaria,' 'Xinjiang,' 'Eastern Turkestan' or 'Mogolistan.' The use of these terms to designate the same region illustrates its intertwined layers of history. Each of these terms carries not only an onomastic heritage, but refers to various political situations, in relation to the power which used this term and to the context into which it was given.

Therefore, we see that the limits between endonyms and exonyms is not only a question of heritage, but also of political legitimation and legitimacy, according to which what is considered an exonym for some, is an endonym for others. The term 'Xinjiang' (meaning 'new frontier' in Chinese) is a perfect example of this tension. Xinjiang means 'the new frontier' in Chinese, and it was given to this region after its conquest by the Qing dynasty against the Dzhungar Khanate by the end of the 1750s, under emperor Qianlong (1736-1795). Not only is the term Chinese, but the very notion of 'new frontier' refers to a Chinese expansion movement. This Chinese name (and translation), which is obviously an exonym in the eyes of the region's inhabitants at this period, is viewed as an endonym by the Chinese political power because it refers to their own perceived territorial legitimacy in that region.

The other terms that we mentioned are more endonyms (Alty Shahr, or Mogolistan), because they were given throughout the course of local history. However, they are either rarely used in Chinese academic works, or are not tolerated, like 'Eastern Turkestan,' for the reason that they refer

to periods or political movements, where Chinese power was contested in 1934 and 1944. It is interesting to note that the Russian imperial power had a different relation to the terminology after its conquest of Central Asia, since it widely used many old local terms to label the new colonial territorial units it created, among which the most famous is the region of Turkestan (officially called the Governorate-General of Turkestan) – see also Map 8.2.

In particular, the tension between concentration and dispersion merits more exploration in the traditional approach through military history (cf. Part 3.5 ‘Concentration versus Dispersion’ below). Also, the chapter will raise some new questions in relation with the Kazakh Khanate (in Box 5.3). Obviously, in a single chapter, one can only formulate propositions.

Central Asian countries also have a productive academic system and they published extensively during the Soviet era on their own archaeology, history and ethnography, in what one might call their ‘culture of self.’* Doing so, they managed to pave the way for creating their own identity discourse before and after the implosion of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, the academic production is still vivid, mostly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which results in a variety of discourses on the Central Asian culture complex. Beyond this diversity, they all have in common that they put Central Asia at the centre.

*Fourmiau 2019

2. Environmental Diversity and Strategies of Adaptation

Nature in Central Asia is to be thought of in terms of the inter-dependent relationships established by human communities with their environment, which have profoundly transformed over time. This applies both to the nomadic and to the sedentary-agricultural areas. Central Asia as a whole is an arid region, from the northern fringes of the Kazakh Steppe down to northern Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush mountains, from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Tarim basin and the Taklamakan desert in the east in contemporary Xinjiang. Consequently, both nomadic and sedentary communities lived in an arid environment, and their different ways of life did mostly reflect their strategies to enhance these dry environments.

There are several types of pastoral nomadism, based on various pastoral techniques – as many as there are forms of agriculture.

All these various adaptations to the available natural resources also have their own chronologies.¹³

For example, in the vicinity of such large rivers such as Syr Darya, one could have maintained some kind of agriculture on the river banks flooded during spring even in the middle of the desert, but yields would have been very limited compared to the food production derived from grazing herds on the endless pastures in the steppes around the Syr Darya. By the same token, the many inland deltas could also have been grazed, but it appeared that developing intensive irrigated agriculture there offered much more than any other type of economy.

The practice of creating large typologies to classify both the environments and the societies living in them often faces the need to update these typologies by accounting for numerous sub-types observed in the studied field. The same goes for the human techniques developed in these different natural environments of the Region: mountains, steppes, and deserts. Pastoral nomadism particularly is overwhelmingly referred to as one category, or one reality, and its internal diversity is rarely exposed in detail outside the specialized literature. Since it was adapted to various environments, and locations, pastoral nomadism is more diverse than one may expect. And this diversity matters when it comes to scrutinizing the plethora of local processes of contact and interaction with sedentary communities.

2.1 The Natural Environment of Central Asia

Central Asia has high mountains, plains, and plateau highlands and they all are inhabited, or enhanced by either nomadic pastoralism, or agriculture, except for the highest places, over 5,000 meters above sea level. The dominant characteristics of these very different environments are continentality, aridity, and endorheism (when almost none of the surface drainage reaches the sea). Below the chapter discusses these regional characteristics in more details and connects them with the role of mountains regarding the availability of water.

2.1.1 Continentality

Continentality affects the climate, the hydrography and the vegetation. The geographic centre of Asia is in Central Asia: Dzhungaria is the most distant region on earth from any open sea system, equidistant from both the Gulf of Bengal (2,650 kilometres), and from

¹³ Contrary to what was thought until the 20th century, pastoral nomadism is not a stage of human development that precedes agriculture.

the Arctic (2,800 kilometres). Due to the fact that air masses in the northern hemisphere circulate from west to east, this continentality entails arid conditions.

2.1.2 *Aridity*

All the regions of Central Asia are situated too far from the circulation of the air masses in the northern hemisphere and some regions like Dzhungaria are even dryer due to mountainous barriers. The entire Region features this extreme continental climate with mostly arid to semi-arid conditions. Drought is one of the dominant characteristics for all of the places where sedentary and nomadic societies can be found. Traditional agriculture concentrates in the warmest areas, which are also, surprisingly enough, the driest ones (cf. Part 2.3 'The Agricultural Foothills'). Two-thirds of the Region receives less than 200 millimetres of precipitation a year (by comparison, Amsterdam has an average of 766, and Paris 637 millimetres). In addition to that, there are only 25 to 35 non-sunny days in most of the Region, except for a few places, while London averages 106 rainy days each year, and 1,500 hours of sunshine a year (by comparison, there are 2,850 hours per year in Marseille, 3,700 in Cairo, and even more in Tashkent or Kashgar).

2.1.3 *Endorheism*

Except for one river (the Irtysh in eastern Kazakhstan and western Siberia), Central Asia's rivers do not reach oceans and instead, they are lost in deserts or semi-deserts. This phenomenon is called endorheism (sometimes spelled 'endoreism'), interior drainage. Paradoxically, water is not that scarce in some areas, thanks to the presence of mountains. And thus its geography explains where rivers are located in this arid space.

2.1.4 *Mountains and Water*

Water, as a resource, is generally presented in the literature as a limiting factor for contemporary socio-economic development. Nevertheless, the traditional societies of early-modern Central Asia were more limited in their use of water resources by technical reasons than by its scarcity per se. Many of Asia's highest mountain ranges are located in its central part, and Central Asia has many of the largest mountainous systems of the continent. In the southwest there is the Hindu Kush, in the southeast the Kunlun and Karakoram, and in the middle the Pamir (with peaks as high as 7,494 meters

in Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan and 7,649 meters in Xinjiang). Then further to the north, there is the Tien Shan range (with its highest peak at 7,439 meters on the Sino-Kyrgyz border).

All the rivers of Central Asia have their sources in these mountain ranges, which form the 'water-tower,' so to speak, for the entire Region.¹⁴ After having left the mountains, rivers flow down into the deserts and semi-deserts, which cover much of the lowlands and where precipitation is very scarce. This is why rivers have mostly snow-fed, ice-fed or – in the cases of the Amu Darya, Syr Darya and others – they retain a mixed flood regime. This plays a major role for agriculture and oasis life in the sense that the highest level of flood water in rivers occurs during the hot season, when the crop irrigation is most needed (see also Part 2.3 'The Agricultural Foot-hills' below).

2.1.5 Deserts and Semi-deserts

As mentioned, two-thirds of the Region receives less than 200 millimetres of rainfall per year. However, due to continentality and cold winters, the deserts and semi-deserts (like the Kara Kum and the Kyzyl Kum) have a better vegetation cover than the 'classical' tropical deserts (like the Sahara-Sahel) because they have much less annual water evaporation, and therefore they offer much better prospects for pastoralism. This allowed Central Asia, as well as the colder High Asia, to become some of the best spaces for pastoral nomadism on the planet. The Taklamakan desert in Xinjiang (with less than 50 millimetres of rainfall per year) is the only hyper-arid zone, and one of the biggest sand deserts on earth.

2.2 Conditions for Pastoralism

Except for numerous but relatively small-sized pockets able to sustain agriculture, the vast majority of Central Asia's area has sustained communities thanks to pastoral nomadism. The nomads have mastered all types of environments, from wooded steppes, proper steppes and semi-deserts to mountains. Their population density varied on average from 0.5 to 1.2 inhabitants per square kilometre. Pastoral nomadism is based on six animal species: horses, camels (mostly two-humped camels but also single-humped dromedaries), bovine cattle, sheep, and goats. In the high mountains, one also finds yaks (a seventh species), which are the only domestic

¹⁴ Further north at the borders of High Asia, one finds the Altay mountains, but no major rivers of Central Asia proper originate there or pass through there, except for the Irtysh, whose source lies in the Altay. This tributary of the Ob river crosses the eastern part Kazakhstan yet it is mostly a Siberian river.

animals able to face environments above altitude levels of 4,000 meters. Not all nomadic groups kept all six or seven species all-together or simultaneously, and the composition of the herds varied from one nomadic group to another according to the grazing resources (see some numbers on seasonal migrations and the composition of herds below in Part 3.2.2). This versatility reflects the capacity of pastoral nomads to adapt to their environment.

Among many variables, the density of the vegetation cover and the snow factor, in particular, explain the diversity of pastoral nomadic techniques and the seasonal migrations routes. They each reflect the complex interactions between climate and geography. From the slopes of the Kopet Dagh mountains on the Iranian frontier to the Altay mountains at the border with Mongolia, the vegetation cover varies a lot, from covering less than a quarter of the desert area to the entirely-covered and 'closed' grasslands in the northern fringes of the Kazakh plains or on the slopes of the Altay. All the Region is affected by snow and frost factors in winter, from around 30 days a year in the south to 160 days a year in the north. The slightly higher precipitations in the central and northern parts of Kazakhstan (200 to 350 millimetres per year) usually coincide with a snow cover between 80 centimetres to one metre thick. The vegetation cover and the snow factor are central to the daily life of nomadic groups as well as to the typology of nomadism.

The 42 parallel (which runs roughly along the modern Uzbek-Kazakh and Kyrgyz-Kazakh borders and the northern parts of the Taklamakan desert, with the city of Urumqi being on the 43 parallel) separates the Region's southern deserts from the northern ones. In the southern deserts (mostly the Kara Kum and Kyzyl Kum),¹⁵ the vegetation cover encompasses about one-quarter of the area, and this is where most single-humped camels live along with sheep and goats. Although summers are long, dry and very hot, the winter frost lasts from 50 to 120 days per year. In the northern deserts, the vegetation cover encompasses 25 to 40 percent of the area, but the winter is much colder and longer – frost can last from the end of September to April. In the Kazakh part of the Aral Sea in the southwest of Kazakhstan (on the 45 parallel) the snow cover lasts about 70 days with 20 centimetres or so of snow.*

*Cariou 2016: 142-144

All these factors are decisive for the organization of the winter grazing: horses are able to scrape through the snow with a depth of 30 to 40 centimetres to reach the vegetation, while sheep for example are able to scrape the snow at a maximum depth of ten to twelve centimetres.* Because the dominant representations and percep-

*Макаров 1995: 89

¹⁵ The Taklamakan desert is not considered here because it is even dryer and does not sustain year-round pastoral populations.

tions of pastoral nomadic life in the Western European cultures are based on African and Arab nomadism, one does not associate the nomadic way of life with animals grazing snow-covered steppes battered by freezing winds, and struggling to find some vegetation under the snow for weeks or even months. One of the major risks for such pastoral nomads is the *zhut*, as Kazakhs call it. For them, *zhut* refers to snow that has transformed into a layer of ice by very strong frosts. This prevents animals from grazing, and they die rapidly in great numbers. Therefore, a *zhut* can have consequences for years.

2.3 The Agricultural Foothills

Sedentary life basically made possible the glory and cultural influence of Central Asia and its lasting images of the architectural beauty of Kashgar's and Mazar-e Sharif's shrines, the wealth of the Samarkand gardens, the jade industry of Khotan, and the irrigated fields and green landscapes of Khorasan. Villages and cities also contain the bulk of the Region's population, although they occupy less than one-tenth of the total area, and entire areas like Dasht-e Qibchaq never had a real network of cities prior to contemporary times, except for some of their southern fringes.

Villages and cities are all oasis-based, and they are mostly located in a very typical ecological niche: the convenient foothills scattered all around the mountainous systems. Many are also located in deltas of relatively small rivers. There are also some oases in the lowlands, like the Khorezm region on the left bank of the lower Amu Darya, south of the Aral Sea. Here, the irrigation systems of Khorezm derive the water directly from the large Amu Darya. Yet, more typical is irrigation from smaller tributaries or smaller rivers, particularly on alluvial plains and at foothills, where groundwater from higher mountain slopes gathers.

The many traditional fertile agricultural landscapes of the Region are thus not watered by rainfall, but by human techniques of water supply and irrigation: all oasis agriculture is sustained by irrigation. This is why such expressions as 'hydraulic civilization' were created. It is enough not to irrigate for one season, and nothing will grow. Beyond the irrigated fields, the green colour of the vegetation vanishes from the landscape and the natural dry environment takes over.

2.4 Mental Mapping and Geographic Reality

Therefore, the classic mental mapping of Central Asia which opposes a 'nomadic North' (Dasht-e Qibchaq and Dzhungaria) to an 'agricultural South' (Alty Shahr, Transoxiana, the left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan) is a reflection of the distribution of the material cultures, but not of the natural environments into which these cultures have developed. Bukhara's climate is even dryer than that of the Dasht-e Qibchaq, known for being a pastoral nomadic space *par excellence*. To recap, nomadic life can be found everywhere in the Region where there are no irrigation systems and cultures, and thus one finds it also a few kilometres beyond the gates of the main cities, the most representative symbols of sedentary life, like Bukhara, Kashgar, Tashkent or Turfan.

Accordingly, the interaction between nomads and sedentary people developed at different scales: Kazakh nomads living hundreds of kilometres from the nearest oasis are part of this history, but likewise groups of Turkmen nomads putting up their tents only twenty or thirty kilometres away from Bukhara. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that only three areas in Central Asia are suitable for both pastoral nomadism and sedentary dwelling (including rural and urban settlement): Alty Shahr, Transoxiana, and left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan. The other areas like Dzhungaria, Dasht-e Qibchaq or the Caspian plain and the Kara Kum desert, support solely pastoral nomadism, except for some locations at their fringes, like the few cities on the margins of the Kazakhs' space (Otrar, Taraz and Turkestan), and of the Turkmen space like Merv and Charjui.

3. The Paradigms of Migrations and Mobility

The interactions between pastoral nomadic and sedentary societies have been a constant process at work through Central Asian history, but have never remained identical. They existed under very different forms and scales, engaging many different actors at times. Therefore, even though pastoral nomadism is a permanent component of the Central Asian culture complex, it is both possible and necessary to approach this process from different angles: in economic, cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic terms, as well as in chronological terms. Because, as stated earlier, until now, this phenomenon has been mostly approached through the lenses of nomad warfare or nomadic expansion.

3.1 Representations and Terminological Debates on Migration and Mobility

There exist many ‘collisions’ and ‘conflicts’ between traditional and common representations of Central Eurasia, and the new contributions of ongoing research on Central Asia proper. In this ‘common knowledge’ or ‘conventional wisdom,’ there is a paradigm of migration and mobility attached to Eurasia, and particularly its nomadic component, but there is some confusion about their different possible historical and anthropological meanings. Indeed, in the case of Eurasia and Central Asia, one thinks foremost of the long-distance migrations of nomadic warriors, or of the impressive population migrations that profoundly transformed the linguistic and cultural composition of both sedentary and nomadic communities (like the migrations of the Indo-European peoples, or much later, the westward migrations of the Turkic-speaking peoples). This is probably why this paradigm of migration is often associated with conquest. Yet again the question comes up of rightfully scaling the space, and the research objects to be studied, as well as the surrounding debates on terminology that define these objects. By placing Central Asia at the centre (and not covering the whole of Central Eurasia) this chapter invites readers to pay attention to the ongoing debates on objects and how they are framed.

3.2 Nomadic Migration as Part of the Larger Notion of Mobility

The terminological question about ‘migration’ or ‘mobility’ arose from anthropological works on nomadism as a type of economy and a way of life. The term ‘migration’ is widely used to qualify the movement over space of the nomads in the cycle of their pastoral production, as well as territorial expansions realized by dominant so-called ‘nomadic groups.’¹⁶ In both cases, it applies to many different scales, sometimes encompassing dozens of kilometres, other times thousands: Many nomadic groups only had to travel about 30 to 100 kilometres between summer and winter pastures, and not all military conquests came from very far away (cf. Part 4.1.3 below on the value of ‘local order’ periods).

This multiple meanings embedded in the term ‘migration’ (i.e. strictly pastoral-seasonal or large-scale population movements) might cause interpretation problems. In any case, ‘migration’ here implies the movement over space of the majority or the totality of a community, as opposed to, for example, the individual travel of

¹⁶ There are ongoing discussions between historians and anthropologists about how to best call the different kinds of movement over space relevant to Central Asian history, and how to do so in each of the major academic languages. For such expressions like ‘so called nomadic groups’, please see authors’ explanations just prior the Box 5.2 about the ‘Domino Effect’.

merchants from sedentary settlements even to remote destinations, or the driving of herds to summer pastures in the Alps, for instance, which involves only a very limited number of members of the local peasant communities. Both types of migration (inside the economic cycle of pastoral production, or those of political significance) are old components of the processes of contacts and interactions between communities.¹⁷

3.2.1 *Nomadic Migration: The Contribution of Anthropology*

Despite the fact that mobility is a major component of the pastoral nomadic life, historians have neglected its study, as they have favoured the study of those territorial expansions of political significance coming from 'the Steppe' into sedentary areas and communities. Anthropologists have defined several types of pastoral migration, among which are included the horizontal, the vertical and the radial or circular ones.* The latter three are the most common in Central Asia to define the seasonal rotation, mostly between the summer and winter pastures.¹⁸ The horizontal one dominates in the Dasht-e Qibchaq and in some parts of Transoxiana (Kazakhs, nomadic Uzbek tribes).¹⁹ Vertical pastoralism dominates in the mountains from the western Tien Shan to Dzhungaria (Kyrgyz and Kazakhs), while the radial type dominates in the Kyzyl Kum desert (Karakalpaks) and in and around the Kara Kum desert as well as in northwest Afghanistan (Turkmens).

*Ferret 2014: 95

¹⁷ Some specialists also point out that nomadism cannot be reduced to mobility. (Ferret 2014: 968-970)

¹⁸ The summer pastures are called *zhaylau* in Kazakh, *jayloo* in Kyrgyz, *yaylov* in Uzbek, *aylag* in Turkmen, and the winter pastures are named *kstau* in Kazakh, *kyshtoo* in Kyrgyz, *qishloq* in Uzbek, and *gyslag* in Turkmen. It is not rare to find these terms in the specialized literature, more than the names of the spring and fall pastures. The Uzbek and Turkmen terms are written with the spelling used in these countries. (For Kazakh and Kyrgyz terms, the author used an approximative transliteration from their Cyrillic spelling.) Nurbulat Masanov published a detailed description of the main seasonal pasture for each of the three Kazakh hordes or *zhuz*. (Масанов 1995: 56-63) See also the very detailed table of the dominant forms of pastoralism proposed by Carole Ferret. (Ferret 2014: 974-979)

¹⁹ Until now typologies tended to be linked solely to the natural environment and have not been linked to any ethnic groups or national categorizations of belonging. Their mention is merely supplementary information. Please note that only for periods after the end of the 15th century, one may use such terms like Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens and Karakalpaks, because by then each of them had a local usage reflected in the sources.

In the horizontal type, the migration covers between 100 and a 1,000 kilometres per year (the Shumeke tribe of the Lesser Kazakh Horde or *Zhuz* was known to be record-breaking in that respect.) In the Dasht-e Qibchaq, winter pastures tended to be closer to the south, where the snow cover is less, and summer pastures were further north, where the vegetation cover is better. In the mountains, the rotation is based on a vertical migration between lower winter and higher summer pastures.* The radial type of the desert is quite short in distance, but it enhances all the variations of the vegetation cover according to seasons and altitude, the salinity of the wells' water, and so on.

*Stepanoff 2013: 40–41; Ferret 2014: 982; see also Map 5.1

Talking about wells, major anthropological works propose to enrich the typologies of Central Asia's nomadism by also distinguishing between the use of either surface water, or water from wells.* Surface water includes rivers, river flows, lakes and ponds formed after rainfalls, and implies a natural usage of it, versus the 'artificial' water from the wells. The latter is called artificial in the sense that it is obtained by human labour (to dig and manage the wells). This 'natural' or 'artificial' usage of water is central to the type of mobility and the range of activities that dominate the life of the groups concerned.

*Масанов 1995: 80–81

The natural usage of water allows for the practice of some sorts of agriculture and the sustenance of an artisanal sector, and makes possible a larger variety of species in the herds because the issue of their adaptability to be constantly on the move is not such a high stake as for the second type, since herds can dwell longer in the same locations. The artificial usage of water based on wells dominates in the driest places. The constant search for well water entails longer yearly migration routes, due to low vegetation cover, and less variety of species: herds are mostly composed of sheep and goats, well-adapted to this mobility. All these factors impact the contacts with sedentary communities. The wells-based nomadic groups were more mobile, and many of them had more contact with the sedentary communities, located in the most arid zones of Central Asia (see also Part 3.5 'Concentration versus Dispersion').

3.2.2 *Seasonal Migrations and the Composition of the Herds*

Despite some noticeable differences between their life conditions (climate or hydrography, for example), the nomadic groups of Central Asia are all traditionally concerned with many common issues. The capacity of sheep to adapt better to the widest range of vegetation made them very popular in all groups and communities, so

that these, by the late 19th century, made up 60 percent of the herds on average in the whole Dasht-e Qibchaq, with lower shares for the northern herds (about 33 percent in the Omsk²⁰ region) and higher proportions in the Caspian plains where sheep make up to 84 percent of the herds.

For other species, their shares in the herds are much more contrasted. Indeed, horses composed on average 13 percent of the Kazakh nomads' herds, with 36 percent in the Omsk region, and less than 4 percent in the Syr Darya region. Bovine cattle had an average of 12 percent, with a maximum of 29 percent in the north-western regions and four to seven percent in the south. Finally, camels form on average about four percent of the herds, with a maximum in the Caspian and Syr Darya regions (13 percent), versus less than one percent in the northern regions like Omsk.*

*Ferret 2014: 991; see also Map 5.1

It is estimated that at the end of the 19th century, sheep counted in total 18 million heads, goats three million, horses four million, bovine cattle 3.5 to 4 million, and camels one million on the territory corresponding to contemporary Kazakhstan.* According to the census of 1897, the ethnic Kazakh population in the area of what is now Kazakhstan was 3.4 million, of which over 90 percent were still nomads or semi-nomads at that time.

*Масанов 1995: 68-71

3.3 The Economic Cycle of Interactions between Nomadic and Sedentary Communities

Economically speaking, the interactions between pastoral nomadic and sedentary agricultural societies are based on the fact that both communities need to interact not just to acquire goods that they do not produce themselves, but also to sell their own produce and artisanal products.* The nomadic-sedentary economic interaction was very active, and involved a large inventory of goods. Sedentary settlers would not only sell grain, flour, fabrics, fruits and crafted goods that they produced to nomads, but also goods that they acquired through inter-regional and inter-continental trade, like

*de La Vaissière 2016; Burton 1997

²⁰ The city of Omsk (called Omby, in Kazakh) in southwestern Siberia is situated in the Russian Federation today but is less than one hundred kilometres from Kazakhstan's northern border. Kazakhs lived for centuries in this area, and under the Tsarist empire (the period from which these data are derived), the administrative region of Omsk overlapped with contemporary Kazakhstan's territory, and included a large Kazakh population, especially from the Middle Horde. The proportions and numbers of this paragraph refer to the end of the 19th century. (Масанов 1995: 70; Ferret 2014) Note that in censuses and in Russian administrative sources of the time, Kazakhs were called 'Kirgiz' or 'Siberian Kirgiz,' and Kyrgyz were called 'Kara-Kirgiz.'

tea, mirrors, and so on. Indeed, Chinese mirrors have been found in the graves of Steppe notables since ancient times. At the other end, nomads would sell horses, weapons, ironwork, furs, skins, what we would now call 'logistics services' (i.e. guides, the renting of pack animals, caravan escorts, protection, etc.), and slaves to villages and towns.

One of the most interesting aspects of the extremely intensive exchanges between sedentary centres is the fact that traders and emissaries could not avoid crossing nomadic areas on the hundreds and often thousands of kilometres that, for instance, separated Bukhara from Kashgar, Mazar-e Sharif from Tashkent or Samarkand from Kazan and western Siberia.²¹ The caravan routes involved countless opportunities to interact, to sell and buy.* Caravans were the dominant way of transporting goods until the end of the coming of the railroads²² in the late 19th century, and they would often be composed of 500 to 800 camels or more, as the medieval Arab traveller ibn Fadlan, for one, testified.

*Meyendorff 1826

The inter-nomadic economic interaction was also very dense when it concerned goods imported from outside their region, and nomads living closer to the sedentary areas commonly served as intermediaries for 'sedentary goods' for more remote nomadic communities. But this inter-nomadic exchange was lower as far as their own goods were concerned, because most groups would have quite similar products to offer, despite the differences in their herds' composition, or their differences in terms of a natural versus artificial usage of water, as discussed above.

In general, it should be noted that the history of inter-nomadic exchanges is still badly known, and remains understudied even in contemporary research. The best data available dates back to the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century in the regions of Central Asia under Russian rule. As was the case with many European colonial empires, for fiscal, economic, political, and cultural

²¹ Coined by the Prussian geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1873, the famous expression 'Silk Road' (or 'Silk Roads' as it has become common to say today) tried to synthesize the commerce between the eastern and western parts of Eurasia. But over time an important commerce also developed along a north-south axis. For example, the Arab diplomat and traveller Ahmad ibn Fadlan (877-960) ventured from Khorezm south of the Aral Sea to the lands of Volga Bulgars in 922 and testifies about impressive caravans: "The next morning we encountered a solitary Turk- a despicable figure, unkempt and really quite repulsive-a man of no worth at all. It had started to rain heavily. 'Halt!,' the man said. The entire caravan ground to a halt: it numbered about three thousand mounts and five thousand men. 'Not one of you will pass.'" (ibn Fadlan 2014: 207)

²² More specifically, until the Russian imperial military administration built the Trans-Caspian Railway, in the 1880s.

reasons Tsarist Russia measured, counted, and officially organized the search for information and data about those territories recently incorporated into the empire. Some major studies propose to interpret this interaction cycle in the light of the absolute necessity for nomads to trade with sedentary communities, a mechanism which determines the nomads' relationships with the 'outside world.'*

*Khazanov 1994; Khazanov and Wink 2001; Weissleder 1978

3.4 Saturation Processes and Demographic Temporalities

Due to the limitations and burdens imposed by the natural environment, the limitations of the livestock density affected the human population density. As discussed earlier, most of the largest nomadic areas of Central Asia have low vegetation covers (about 20 to 25 percent in the southern semi-deserts; more than that further north). This limited the average density of pastoral nomadic populations from 0.5 to 1.5 inhabitants per square kilometre.* The risk of overgrazing, or of the so-called saturation of pastures, is a constant marker in nomadic life. Saturation is a key notion, and one of the main problems to be managed by nomads. Yet, the demographic temporality of nomadic groups did not match with the yearly cycle of the herds, which could be, often suddenly, affected by numerous seasonal risks. Such risks and crises (like *zhut*, or diseases) could decimate herds and abruptly upset the fragile balances on which pastoral nomadism rests, and have lasting social consequences. Therefore it is believed that small groups or individuals were regularly marginalized and quit nomadic life to eventually settle or settle part-time in or closer to sedentary zones.

*Макаров 1995: 64, 122

'Pauperization' of nomads might also entail that they resettled closer to sedentary dwellings. When nomads settle and get more involved with agriculture, one says that they 'settle down' or 'sedentarize.' The topic of sedentarization is a major marker of nomadic-sedentary interactions. One often thinks of its human and political causes – see also in Part 4.1.5 'Sedentarization as Acculturation' – but the phenomenon also has natural causes, such as overgrazing and saturation, and the fact that the demographic temporality of humans does not neatly match with the yearly cycles of a natural economy. Considering the permanent risk of overgrazing, it is easier to understand why sudden concentrations of nomads were actually undesirable if they all were to stay in a pastoral environment. Regrettably, the classic historical focus on the military history of the nomads has not incorporated such data.

Box 5.2 The 'Domino Effect' of Historic Events?

The 'domino effect' analogy has been widely used to portray some aspects of Central Eurasian history, including Central Asia. The history of the migrations – of the expansions, of the population movements, and of the tremendous conquests by nomadic conquerors (with smaller populations) – still raises questions today. They have nurtured many fantasies among historians, travellers, writers and chroniclers alike, and the peoples of Central Eurasia have been compared to ocean waves: systemic and unpredictable at the same time.

In this context, the domino effect image assumes that an event that takes place somewhere far away in the core of Asia might directly affect the opposite side of the Eurasian continent. It was mostly applied to early-medieval and medieval history. Due to the repartition of the main powers of Asia, it assumes that events taking place at the Chinese-Steppe frontier north to the Great Wall, would affect the Caspian Sea region or the late-Roman or European space and history a few decades later, or even more. Some events may indeed be explained by some domino effect dynamics, but the analogy has been used far too often and became popular at a time when historians knew too little about the regions and 'nomadic empires' they sought to explain. About 'Imagining the protonation', one can read:

*"This generated a sort of "billiard ball" model of history, in which prenational, tribal peoples moved as discrete integral units across Eurasia to collide with and displace each other."**

*Sneath 2007: 159

While it is very evocative, the domino effect image remains very imprecise, and therefore, highly debatable. To use it fruitfully, one needs a strict attention to chronology and periodization, to the geopolitics of each period of history, and to the environment's constraints discussed in this chapter. But it often concerns actors and periods about which we actually know little. However, in the past decades, archaeology has unearthed some new knowledge about the famous 'empires of the Steppes.'

Nonetheless, without a strict command of chronology and many cross-sources, the domino effect's image portrays nomads moving in all directions on supposedly endless spaces, and leads us to think in frames to identify links between events which are separated in time by decades, or even more. If used in such a manner, the analogy actually does more damage for historical analysis than it furthers our understanding. Can one really assert a causal link between events shrouded in time that took place in distant countries, when one knows even less of the 'connecting history' taking place in the supposedly 'endless spaces' between them, for the sole desire to know and explain?

3.5 Concentration Versus Dispersion

The dynamics of concentration and dispersion is a major issue in the yearly economic cycle of pastoral nomadism as well as in the political life of Central Asia. Both concepts are meant literally – denoting the physical concentration or dispersion of nomads and livestock in space. Due to the above-mentioned limitations of their natural environment, concentration in a pastoral environment can only be temporary unless there was either a dispersion to happen, or a rapprochement with sedentary agricultural areas, providing opportunities to acquire food and wealth. Whatever ‘state’ a nomadic grouping was in, there was always a direct effect for nearby sedentary settlements, and this is true for the seasonal concentration (as part of the yearly cycle of food production) as for the political momentum (when leading nomadic groups engaged in expansions and conquests).

Inside the yearly cycle of pastoral nomadic food production, the moment of concentration is winter, and the moment of dispersion is the rest of the year, with a culmination in summer.* As mentioned higher, winter in most of the regions was spent either closer south for the horizontal type of nomadism, or in the valleys for the vertical type practiced in mountains.²³ This means that winter concentrations of nomadic groups gave them multiple opportunities to interact more actively with nearby sedentary dwellers, and such engagement affected the life of both societies in economic cultural, but also in political terms.

*Ferret 2014: 961, 975, 979

The winter concentrations indeed might expose nomadic groups to military and fiscal logics set by sedentary powers, when the nomads crossed the borders of territories sedentary rulers claimed to control (see also Part 4.1.1 ‘States and Dynastic Spaces versus the Natural Limits between Nomadism and Sedentarity’ below, as well as Chapter 11 of this book). The expansions and migrations by leading groups of nomadic origin happened to be important moments of nomadic concentration as well. These concentrations of nomads necessarily entailed intense contacts with sedentary settlements, from commerce to conquest or resulting in marriage alliances.

After the conquest of entire sedentary areas or kingdoms – by, for example, the Turks of the first Turkic khaganate (6th century), the Chinggisid Mongols (13th century), or the Dzhungars (17th century) – the question faced by these so-called ‘nomadic conquerors’ remained how to manage these new acquisitions. After a first phase when plunder might have yielded enough food and wealth to conquerors, the now displaced but concentrated nomadic

²³ See also Carole Ferret for marginal or reverse cases that usefully challenge established typologies of pastoral-nomadism. (Ferret 2014)

*Fourniau 2000

groups located in territories far away from their own pastoral environments that were new and often unknown to them, had to be relocated.* In addition, we know that military forces during these migrations and expansions also enrolled many non-nomadic warriors, like during the Chinggisid conquests, a living expression of interactions with sedentary societies also in war times. This is why this author previously used expressions like ‘of nomadic ascendancy,’ ‘of nomadic origin’ or ‘so-called nomadic conquerors’ rather than simply ‘nomad(s)’ and ‘nomadic’ – see also Part 2.1.1 in Chapter 11 ‘Understanding Turko-Mongol Politics’.

4. Acculturation Processes as the Foundation of a Culture of Self

Closely related to the notion of interaction one finds the notion of ‘acculturation’. The concept of interaction would indicate a process, as it is ongoing, but it does not inform on its aftermaths. Acculturation, on the contrary, makes it clear that intense contacts transformed all the groups involved in the process of interaction. One can also frame interaction as that process of ‘intense circulation’ of such exchanged cultural elements.

The multi-faceted processes of acculturation took place in all types of communities, both nomadic and sedentary. Interaction and circulation create a unique Central Asian area, even if their scale and pace varies from region to region. From this point of view, Transoxiana and the left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan are of particular interest.

There is not a single period of Central Asian history until the 19th century which is not in one way or another linked to or marked by pastoral nomads, and by their interaction with the powers and populations of the sedentary territories. Central Asia is therefore the cradle of numerous intertwined political, social, cultural and linguistic processes of assimilation or dispersion, of consolidation, and acculturation. This section aims to highlight some of the most significant ones. Until now, the author stressed issues that had a lot to do with the natural conditions and dynamics. In this final section, these interactions are studied from the point of view of acculturation, manifested in many societal and political dimensions.

4.1 Politics and Dynasties as Part of Nomadic-Sedentary Interactions

Before the sedentary (Chinese and Russian) empires’ new imperial cycle started again in the mid-18th century, the notions (and their recollections) of warfare and expansion throughout most of Eurasia

is foremost linked to the actions and vitality of the Steppe nomads. In the 1930s, the French historian and sinologist René Grousset aimed to deliver a global political history of the nomads of Eurasia and their expansion processes, under the expression of 'The Empire of the Steppes'.^{*} However, the Chinese and Russian new expansion cycle crushed any Steppe nomads' political vitality forever.

*Grousset 2015

4.1.1 *States and Dynastic Spaces Versus the Natural Limits Between Nomadism and Sedentarity*

It is tremendously important to stress that the very rich political history of the Region did not reflect, nor depended on, the natural limits between nomadism and sedentarity. All state formations of Central Asia controlled both sedentary and nomadic areas, which is enough to suggest how important and permanent the contacts were between these two 'poles' of the Central Asian culture complex. There were no city-states in the Region, unlike in ancient Greece for example: all the sedentary polities controlled vast nomadic areas and therefore, quite large pastoral nomadic groups. This control waxed and waned in various time periods, but it always entailed countless institutional or societal interactions, mostly concentrated on military services, fiscality and commerce. Sedentary rule over nomads often triggered crises, because it was often challenged by the nomads.^{24*}

*Digard 1988

4.1.2. *Time and Space According to Dominant Historical Traditions*

Any discourse on the history of nomad's or nomadic sedentary interactions strongly involves the notions of time and space, but the benchmark for time and space has mostly been conceived and expressed along the lines of sedentary actors and mentalities.^{*} This is why the history of such interactions is strongly biased, and even double-biased: by sedentary powers and documented with their sources from Central Asia or adjacent areas, and later by European, and Western academics. Nomadic societies remain the least studied aspect of the Region's history, in part because they left fewer sources than sedentary cultures, especially during times when there were no conflicts between them. Fortunately enough, the last few decades have seen many archaeological works that have improved our knowledge about nomads.^{*}

*Sela and Levi 2009

*Cahiers d'Asie centrale 2001b; 2013

Finally, these recent archaeological and anthropological works have led to a revaluation of the pastoral nomadic cultures, with their techniques and contribution to history now being recognized

²⁴ Richard Tapper published a lot on the relations between tribes and state in Iran and Afghanistan. (Tapper 1983)

as valid on a par with the sedentary ones. This shift in framing is now being fully integrated into the Region's complex history as a legitimate dimension. Prior to it, the pastoral nomadic factors in political and cultural history were mostly portrayed through the notions of assault, plundering, domination, and imitation.

4.1.3 *Re-evaluating Periods of Local Order: Periodization is Key*

Even reduced to their military history, the course of nomadic-sedentary contacts is to be divided between two main types of expansions: external (from outside the Region) and internal conquests and expansions (from inside the Region). Periodization is key for organizing the understanding of influences, and avoiding confusion of space and scale between Central Eurasia and Central Asia proper.

The expansions coming from outside are linked with the surrounding world empires, and are by far the best studied. Between the sixth (first Turkic khaganate) and the 18th century (the Qing-Manchu conquest) many new actors arrived into Central Asia mainly from the northeast and the east, and also from the southwest or the south (e.g. the Islamic conquest in the eighth century). As a result, the northern and western interactions and geopolitical influences are under-represented for this time period, but became prominent later during the Russian colonial conquest and annexation.

Among these expansions coming from outside, some brought about or were followed by significant population migrations (the Turkic migrations of the 6th-8th centuries, or the Chinggisid Mongol conquests of the 13th century, which also came from the northeast), while some did not (e.g. the Islamic conquest). Please note that some expansions belong to the more global history of the Steppes (e.g. the Turkic khaganates or the Chinggisid Mongols) and some not (the Islamic conquest). While all of them put their mark on the whole of Central Asia and triggered long-lasting consequences, they were still not frequent if not rare phenomena in the Region's overall history.

In the introduction of this chapter, the author proposed to divide long-term Central Asian history in cycles, each of which is made of two periods. We call the second one a period of 'local order,' denoting a time after the political collapse of the world empires, and of the integration of their legacies into the local societies, and cultures. In between those rare periods of world empire expansion, the longest periods of local order also saw episodes of migration and expansion 'from inside.'

Population migrations or military conquests took place from inside the Region, i.e. from one of its sub-regions into another. This means that not all events of importance for local history came from the outside or from far away, like the Islamic conquest, which originated in the distant Middle East for instance. Many important events came also 'from inside'. Unfortunately, they remain under-studied, despite the fact that they have been very important in shaping the Region's personality.

The Uzbek conquest of Transoxiana, Khorezm and northern Afghanistan (in one decade straddling the 15th and the 16th centuries), is one prominent example; the Dzhungar expansions from contemporary Xinjiang into the Kazakh steppes and Transoxiana (from the 1630s to the 1750s) is another. The former was swift, did not leave a trail of devastation, and so had a low instantaneous impact, but turned out to have a very high legacy rate, including the 'Uzbekization' process of Transoxiana. The latter lasted a long time (episodically over the span of 150 years), had a strong impact at its moment, but left a low legacy rate. Both have in common the fact that they are less studied than the impact of world empires (Islamic, Chinggisid Mongol, or Russian), and this results from over-stressing the imperial paradigm, and from the confusion regarding the delimitation of Central Eurasia and Central Asia. These pitfalls apply to almost all aspects related to the history of Central Asian proper.

4.1.4 *The Making of Individualized Regions: The Canvas of Central Asia*

It is crucial to introduce the notion of 'regional historical spaces' to define Central Asia as an autonomous historical object, made up by these sub-regions. This matters a lot in regard to the autochthony of the Central Asian culture complex, and – beyond that – its political history. Up until recently, Central Asia has been mostly depicted through external influences, and since we know that it was never integrated into a single political unit, the question of how to treat this concept from a historical perspective?

The five major sub-regions defined earlier (Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria, Dasht-e Qibchaq, etc. – see also Map 5.1) of which Central Asia is composed, form the canvas of the Region as a historical and political space. Each of them had an autochthonous political and dynastic history and gave shape to historical entities. They themselves are the result of individualized combinations of the acculturation forces at work throughout the entire Central Asian area. The pace and the dynamics of Turkization or Islamiza-

tion, for example, differ in time and scale in each of these sub-regions. Yet these historical and dynastic spaces were strongly linked by interdependent dynamics which are unique to the Region.

Indeed, Central Asia, as a specific historical space, was united from within by its internal dynamics. Its historical specificity was realized at the level of its sub-regions through their unique links among one another. In other words, Central Asia is not only a cultural area, but also a specific historical space in se. This is why it is very unfortunate that most of the questions related to the local order's history or to the making of the individualized sub-regions are still the least worked upon. This would also help to better understand many of the contemporary issues taking place in the different countries of the post-Soviet period.

4.1.5 *Sedentarization as Acculturation*

The history of the sedentarization processes is a very important aspect of the nomadic-sedentary interactions, as already stated earlier, when the chapter presented the 'saturation' processes (cf. Part. 3.3 'The Economic Cycle of Interactions between Nomadic and Sedentary Communities'). Sedentarizations occurred in many ways, but they obviously occurred more intensively in the contact zones. Outlying oases like Charjui or Merv for Turkmen groups, or like Taraz and Turkestan for southern Kazakhs, played a major role as contact zones. The most numerous contact zones were closer to the main sedentary-agricultural centres, like Tashkent, Bukhara or Kashgar. These contact zones proved to be areas of active acculturation for all communities involved, but for nomads, this acculturation has taken on the form of sedentarization.

These margins between 'two poles' are of particular interest, but they were neglected not only in Western and Soviet but also in modern-day Central Asian historical studies, as if it was derogatory for the national identity they seek to develop. The very notion of sedentarization is also neglected in the countries of the Region, where a normative, static portrait with sedentary cultures on one side, and nomadic ones on the other, dominates the way history is imagined. Nor do present-day identity strategies of these countries value the notion of acculturation, despite the fact that so many communities throughout history experienced changes in their way of life, and or in their identities. This is very unfortunate because this concepts is central to understand the Central Asian culture complex: sedentarizations occurred at all times, and particularly in the post-Mongol period. What social scientists would call semi-no-

madism or semi-sedentarity is an aspect of this larger sedentarization process.

The sedentarization processes were diverse, including not only mobility but also negotiations. The communities established at the fringe of the irrigation water distribution systems in the khanate of Khiva, for example, were often semi-nomadic Karakalpak and Turkmen. Their location at the end of the water distribution networks obliged them to negotiate for better water supply, and formed the frame for their integration into the Khivan social and political system, even if they were subalterns in this system. The native political powers have practiced the settlement of nomadic or semi-nomadic groups at all times. This greatly differs from the forced sedentarizations of the 20th century, which occurred for political or ideological reasons in Turkey, Iran and in the Soviet Union (collectivization), because contemporary water management and agriculture technology allows for the settling of pastoral nomads in the areas where they lived before as nomads.

4.2 The Light of the Mirrors

To illustrate some of the major markers of this history the author presents a few ‘mirrors,’ following a well-established literary tradition. Here, a ‘mirror’ refers to an ancient, then medieval (both Islamic and European) tradition of educating a young sovereign by compiling advice on political and governmental ethics. Hence, such mirrors are often called the ‘mirrors of princes’. These ‘mirrors’ below have been chosen to depict and present the climax of acculturation as well as to identify where the interaction and circulation between nomadic and sedentary factors changed the Region and every one of its sub-regions in a ‘unique Central Asian way.’²⁵

4.2.1 *The Shaybanid Mirror*

The term Shaybanid here refers to a dynasty ruling over Bukhara and most of Transoxiana and the left bank of the Amu Darya (but without Khorasan) from 1500 to 1599. ‘Shaybanid’ is a name the origins of which are connected to the name of one grandson of Chinggis Khan, Shayban (or Shibani, who died in 1266), one of the sons of Jochi (ca. 1182-1227), who was the Chinggis Khan’s eldest

²⁵ Some nomadic elites for instance were well acquainted with the sedentary cultures: at the end of the 15th century, the young Shaybani Khan, before he became the conqueror of Bukhara, was educated in the city’s madrassas. By the same token, the famous 18th century Turkmen poet Mahtumquli, was educated in the Khiva madrassas, before he went back to live in the ‘Turkmen desert.’

Map 5.2 Early-modern Eurasia and Central Asia (early 17th century)

Sources: Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'Orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993): 33. Map created by editors, adapted from: https://it-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=119801&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

son.²⁶ Even centuries later, it was prestigious to bear the names of the forefathers.

At the junction of the 15th and 16th centuries, the Shaybanid realm of Transoxiana was founded by Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1451-1510). This realm was established after the last migration-conquest of Transoxiana had been conducted by Mohammad Shaybani – from the present-day Kazakh space, into present-day Uzbekistan. This expansion was an ‘internal’ migration-conquest in the Region. Mohammad Shaybani’s life was spent in a period of transition. Born in what is today Kazakhstan, into a ruling family over a tribal confederation calling itself the Uzbeks, and ruled by his grandfather the Khan Abul Khair (1428-1468), or Abulkhair as in the citation below.

They confronted a switch of allegiance on the behalf of many of their previous supporters:

*“When Abulkhair had made himself master of the whole of the Dasht-i-Kipchák, he desired to remove several of the Sultáns of the race of Juji, in whom he detected symptoms, of seditious designs. Karai Khán and Jáni Beg Khán, perceiving the intentions of Abulkhair Khán, fled, together with a few other Juji Sultáns, to Moghulistán. This country was at the time under the Khánship of Isán Bughá Khán, who received them favourably and assigned a corner of Moghulistán for them to live in. Here they dwelt in peace.”**

*Haidar 1972: 272

This shift of allegiance occurred around 1450-1460, and entailed the remnant of the tribes faithful to the branch of Abul Khair of the young Shaybani to quit their original area, and finally conquer Transoxiana and Bactria over the last Timurid princes.^{* 27}

*Babur 1922; 1985

Transoxiana and ‘left bank Amu Darya’ also had the peculiarity, unique to the region, that they housed some Shiite populations (in an overwhelmingly Sunni Central Asia) as well as some Oriental Jewish communities – see also Map 7.1. Contrary to what happened in Khorezm (see the next ‘mirror’ below), Transoxiana under the Uzbek Shaybanid rule and afterwards, continued to widely use written Persian as a court and literary language. This *habitus*, or cultural capital, makes Uzbek rulers belong to what is often called the ‘Turko-Persian crossroads,’ the ‘Persianate world’ or ‘Persianate culture.’* These expressions aim to capture the merging maelstrom

*Green 2019

²⁶ One finds also ‘Juchi,’ ‘Djöchi,’ or ‘Juji,’ as in the citation by M.M. Haidar. One sees many transcriptions for names and terms in the literature: in Central Asian studies, one has to get used to the many alternative spellings for terms according to time, countries, and authors – see also Box 5.1.

²⁷ The ‘Memoirs of Babur’ (*Babur Name*) are a major source of this time. Babur calls his enemies the ‘Uzbeks.’ (Babur 1922; 1985)

of traits that coexist in one singular cultural reality, into which ethnic origin, written and spoken languages, religion, and political culture, are connected in an original way that is unique to Central Asia.

The culture and society of 16th century Transoxiana is one of the richest of the Central Asian area in the sense that it is composed of most, if not all, of the elements that are separately dispersed in the other parts of the Region. At that time, only in Transoxiana they interacted all together: the last Turkic migrations from the Steppe, many sedentarizations, which also entail a higher pace of Turkization (cf. Part 4.2.2. 'The Arabshahid and Qungrat Mirror: the Yurt inside the Palace', below), and the ideology of Chinggisid legitimacy.

The Chinggisid heritage is another spectacular originality of Central Asia.²⁸ The latter was indeed the only space of the former empire where the Chinggisid ascendancy remained a condition to rule in all the political units of the Region – see also Chapter 11. It proved to be fully integrated into the native conception of legitimacy to obtain supreme political power, not only in the Shaybanid realm.*

*McChesney 2000

Therefore, the Chinggisid legacy is probably one of the most long-lasting political factors of the Region's history. It lasted until the 17th century in what is Xinjiang today, until the first half of the 19th century in the Kazakh space, and until the beginning of the 20th century in Transoxiana, where the Shaybanids ruled before. The Chinggisid heritage and culture transcended economic environments, dynastic spaces and ethnic groups. For example, Kazakh khans from nomadic descent happened to rule the settled Uzbek oasis of Khiva or Tashkent in the 18th and 19th centuries: their Chinggisid lineage made them legitimate rulers in the eyes of the sedentary elite groups, and this ascendancy overpassed differences between groups, in this example between Kazakhs and Uzbeks.*

*Boukhary 1976

4.2.2 *The Arabshahid and Qungrat Mirror: the Yurt inside the Palace*

Arabshahid and Qungrat are the names of two dynasties that rule over Khorezm and its surroundings.²⁹ They ruled the region and the khanate of Khorezm from the beginning of the 16th to the first decades of the 18th century for the Arabshahid, and from the mid-18th century to 1920 for the Qungrats.* Nothing better illustrates

*Abul-Ghâzi 1970

²⁸ Initially, when they arrived in the 1220s, the Chinggisid Mongols were not Muslim.

²⁹ From its core sedentary area of Khorezm, the Khanate of Khiva used to expand through the vast nomadic Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts, all the way south to Khorasan.

the results of countless interactions and circulations that went on in many spheres of life and their overall material and symbolic impact than that of the custom of the 18 to 19th century Khivan khans who received external envoys in a yurt placed in a yard inside the royal palace walls in the city of Khiva.* The merging of different traditions was here demonstrated in the clearest manner, the palace being the symbol of the sedentary administration and rule, and the yurt being the felt tent and true seat of power of the nomads for centuries.³⁰

*Mouraviev 1823

Another main dimension intensely reflected in this mirror is the issue of Turkization, one of the major layers of the Central Asian culture complex. The phenomenon of Turkization occurred also in Anatolia and in Iran, but everywhere it had its local context and its own aftermath. The expansion of Turkic-speaking populations through conquest or migration enhanced the entrenchment of new languages in many new places, and led to their hybridization with other or local languages.³¹ This resulted in the formation of many different Turkic languages and dialects. Above, the chapter has drawn attention to the changes and partial continuities they carry within them. The topic of the Turkization processes is a perfect illustration of this.

By the 11th century, (in stark contrast to their situation some 500 years earlier) some large areas, like Alty Shahr, Dzhungaria and Dasht-e Qibchaq, already had populations speaking only Turkic languages, as they still do today. In some other areas, mostly in Transoxiana and the left bank of the Amu Darya and Khorasan, the process of Turkization yielded more complex situations. Many groups there remained speakers of Iranian languages, mostly Tajik and Pamir languages. However, everywhere the linguistic transformation entailed intertwined influences, which is the reason why Turkic languages of Central Asia have a very high percentage of loan words from Persian (as well as from Arabic). Before, Iranian languages dominated the whole of Central Asia. This high level of hybridization and multi-layered linguistic canvas are markers of Central Asian culture.

Some minor variations might be observed, and the level of hybridization is a bit stronger in some languages – like Uzbek and

³⁰ We know that Chinggis Khan was very suspicious towards the sedentary way of life, and he probably would not have approved of this merging of symbols.

³¹ These migrations westward started with the first expansion of Turkic kingdoms from present-day Mongolia to the Caspian Sea during the sixth century. Let's note that the term 'Türk' is an endonym found in the inscriptions dating back from the first Turkic Khaganate. But exonyms are numerous also in the writing of Central Asia's history (see Box 5.1).

Uyghur – than in others, like Kazakh or Kyrgyz. This was not the case everywhere. In Anatolia, for instance, one of the other main zones where Turkization processes occurred, Anatolian Turkish was not all that much nurtured by previously dominant Kurdish, Armenian and Greek languages.

Last but not least, the Qungrat mirror is also a significant reflection of the development in prestige of Turkic written languages for court and poetry purposes. Historically, Central Asia remained an area where Persian remained widely used in court and administrative contexts, besides literature, even when the ruling dynasties were Turkic. In contrast, many Turkic cultural markers overall remained despised. However, lesser-known developments happened during the post-Mongol period, in particular a sort of ‘alliance’ between sedentary high culture and literary eastern Turkic languages, also called Chagatai³² or Türki.

This alliance, as it is called here, was greatly enhanced by the prominent figure of Alisher Navai (1441-1501, spelled *Navoiy* in modern Uzbek) from the city of Herat in Khorasan. Navai is one of the best known literary scholars and philosophers to give the eastern Turkic language its highest possible place as a means of expression for sedentary ruling groups, and high culture (cf. Part 4.3 ‘Nomadic-Tribal-Turkic,’ below). After Navai, elite groups and high culture continued the widespread use of Persian, like in the Shaybanid realm. But the use of the Central Asian Turkic language, or Eastern Turkic, tended to get stronger over time, and it is a major marker of this time period, reflected in this mirror, as well as in the

Toutant 2019 Hojas’ mirror.

4.2.3 The Hojas’ Mirror

The term ‘Hoja’ has different meanings, but as a name it refers here to a dynastic political organization that ruled over Alty Shahr between 1678 and 1759. This name comes from their *Naqshbandiyya** Sufi ancestor, from whom they derived their religious legitimacy that they transformed into a political one.* Although many khans elsewhere were pious, and also had connections to Sufi orders, they derived their legitimacy from their secular dynastic Chinggisid roots after the 13th century. Therefore, the Hojas’ mirror

*See also Box 7.1

*Papas 2005; 2008, where the term is spelled ‘Kwaja’

³² This Eastern Turkic language is thus called ‘Chagatai language’ in the academic literature. Chagatai is originally the name of the second son of Chinggis Khan, and the younger brother of Jochi, whom we mentioned earlier. Chinggis Khan had four sons, but Central Asia was initially divided among his first two sons’ realms, or *ulus*. Their subsequent heirs were frequently at war and changed the original borders of their *ulus*, and later sprouted many dynastic branches of Jochid or Chagatayid origin – see also Map 15.7.

sheds a light on the unique space in the post-Mongol period where political power draws its roots directly from a Muslim religious affiliation only: the Hojas' theocracy.

Politically, they ruled over the oases with puppet Chinggisid princes of the Chagatayid branch as their nominal rulers, which had become the vassals of their Dzhungar overlords that took over Alty Shahr by conquest around 1680. The Dzhungars remained north and were based in Dzhungaria proper, and the Hojas ruled in Alty Shahr (see also Maps 5.1 and 5.2).

Alty Shahr was a place where eastern Turkic was linguistically dominant in the *belles lettres*, and where many translations from Persian to Tūrki were commissioned by the elite and ruling groups (like in Khiva).

This mirror reflects also the paradigm of 'frontier' in the history of the Region. Central Asia was by then indeed entirely a Muslim region. However, its northern and eastern flanks formed a religious frontier with the non-Muslim world, while in the south and west it was only surrounded by Muslim countries.

This frontier moved north and east as the populations of Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria, and of Dasht-e Qibchaq over time gradually converted to (mostly Sunni) Islam. This occurred a few centuries after Transoxiana and Khorasan had become entirely Muslim in the eighth and ninth centuries (cf. Part 4.3 'Nomadic-Tribal-Turkic?' below).

If Central Asia, unlike the Middle East, had no significant non-Muslim populations in the early-modern era, it comprised, again unlike the Middle East, the Muslim world's northern and eastern frontier with the non-Muslim world in this part of Asia. The theocratic Hoja's regime under the non-Muslim (Buddhist) Dzhungar overlords is a striking illustration of this.

The Hoja's mirror also illustrates the role of religion as a social and political identity marker, which indeed continued to strongly influence society in 19th century Xinjiang, as it also does today. One has to address the current situation in Chinese Xinjiang in light of this strong religious tradition acting as an age-old, local identity marker.

4.2.4 *The Tamerlane Exception*

Despite the fact that the famous Amir Beg Timur or Tamerlane (1336-1405) ruled long before Shaybani Khan or the Arabshahid dynasty, his reign, and his immediate descendants' reigns are much better studied than the three 'mirrors' presented above.*

*Gonzales de Clavijo 2006; Manz 1999

This once again highlights the domination of the imperial paradigm of Chinese, Russian and Western historiographic traditions. Indeed, Tamerlane, who ruled from Samarkand, is the founder of a vast empire stretching at one time from Damascus to Delhi. With a territory at one time largely surpassing its Central Asian core, one can easily label it a 'world empire'. But Tamerlane is foremost a conqueror and founder of the only world empire created from Central Asia proper that extended outside the Region in westward and southward directions (to the Mediterranean and northern India), which by itself is highly unconventional for late medieval geopolitics and later successors. This is the 'Tamerlane exception.'

*Fourniau 1996

Tamerlane's historiographical fame started in Europe as early as the 15th century, and never ceased to shine.* While there are many European biographies of him, there is not a single one of Shaybani Khan, let alone of the other rulers of Central Asia. After Timur's death in 1405, his empire became fragmented and rapidly shrivelled down in size, but under his successors an astonishing 'Timurid Renaissance' bloomed in all spheres of culture, art, and architecture throughout the 15th century in the realms ruled by his successors – like Babur (1483-1530), who eventually founded the Mughal dynasty in India. A densification of the acculturation processes went on, and led to the consolidation of the specific Central Asian cultures, as they were encountered by the time of the new imperial (i.e. Chinese and Russian) conquests.

4.3 Nomadic-Tribal-Turkic?

It is interesting to note that all earlier-mentioned terms defining winter and summer pastures derive from Turkic words, and not from Persian loan words, which are so common in Turkic languages. This illustrates that besides and beyond the Turkization and the sedentarization processes which took place, Central Asia's main nomadic communities up until the 20th century were Turkic-speaking ones. As we all know, human communities create their own representations of their history and the social configurations they experience. Both local sedentary cultures and – later on – Western ones, created interpretative tools to portray and oppose the two 'poles' of Central Asian history: the nomadic and the sedentary communities. And so they brought to life categories like 'nomadic-tribal-Turkic' in juxtaposition to 'sedentary-nontribal-Iranic.'

Such categorizations are interesting since they testify to existing representations that one encounters in naive thinking, and in

native popular preconceived ideas and clichés, and in outdated Western publications. However, they are wrong from an academic standpoint and constitute one of the main biases through which the Region's history is too often examined. They are erroneous because they mechanically oppose many traits that shifted and evolved over time, and never retained a fixed place, contrary to what is suggested in this exclusive disposition of three associated terms versus three other counterparts. Many of these characteristics merged over time, as already stated in the chapter introduction. For example, the sedentary population of Transoxiana in 1800 was often Uzbek-speaking, while this Uzbek endonym had been brought into this region around 1500 (cf. Shaybani Khan) by a large tribal confederation based on a pastoral nomadic economy. In the meantime, sedentarization and 'Uzbekization' transformed both the conquered and the conquerors.

The way such categories aim to fix events is not only simplifying, but also ideological. Ideology is a category that one might always want to question for societal and political issues. For example the author noted the very derogatory adjectives used by the earlier-quoted ibn Fadlan, the Arab diplomat and tenth-century traveller when depicting 'the Turk,' the merchant he met with the large caravan (see the quote in footnote 21). This disdain is part of the overall negative bias attached to the nomadic-tribal-Turkic series. These series are also artificial if expressed outside of any specific chronological indication. The reason they exist and continue to be used, however, is that at some periods of history, these three 'defining' elements were indeed conglomerated in exiting social and historical situations.

Prior to the massive Turkization of sedentary populations of Alty Shahr and Transoxiana before the tenth century, most of the Turkic populations of Central Asia were predominantly nomadic and socially organized along genealogical-political structures called tribes, in juxtaposition to the (predominantly) Iranian-speakers of the oases, which they flanked from the north. However, the constant movement of acculturations in the history of the Region led to much more hybridization than suggested by such clear-cut situations: When the de-tribalized Uzbek-speaking peasants of the Tashkent oases in the 19th century 'faced' the tribal nomadic Kazakhs of the nearby steppe, both groups were Turkic-speaking and Sunni Muslim.

Last but not least, a religious dimension is also implicitly suggested by such stereotyping. During the short-lived periods during which these labels actually corresponded to existing situations,

the nomadic-tribal-Turkic element tended also to be non-Muslim, when they encountered Islamized, linguistically Iranian, sedentary Central Asia.

Beside brief moments of congruence regarding these labels, the frontier of Islam moved north as Turkic and tribal nomadic populations converted over time. The Islamization of Central Asia gradually went from south to north and northeast from the eighth century (Transoxiana and Khorasan) to the post-Mongol period (Dasht-e Qibchaq). This 'threshold game' between the Steppe and the oases has been at work since ancient times and it was periodically renewed by and involving new actors. History is periodization, while ideology is often fixity. This 'frontier' shifted and, in the 17th to 18th centuries, it was located in the Alty Shahr-Dzhungaria zone with the theocratic Muslim Hojas under Buddhist Dzhungar overlords.

5. Conclusion

The 'problem' of Central Asia is twofold. First, it has no natural boundaries, nor was it ever a single state unit like the Roman or the Ottoman Empires were. In addition to that, at the core of the biggest continent it was subject to many population movements and conquests. Nevertheless, this Region is by far not just the mere continuation or extension of its adjacent areas, as many have pretended too often. Its geographic centrality in Asia so far has been seldomly connected to the discussions on what we call the imperial paradigm. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries of the Region have tried to assert this central position, and it is not coincidence that present-day Kazakhstan decided to call itself 'the bridge of Eurasia.'

This chapter tried to reflect the major aspects of the very rich Central Asian culture complex and present them for each chosen topic. The aim was to shed some light on the strong historical and cultural specificity of the Region, and on its internal dynamics. Central Asia was never united as a unique political entity, but its sub-regions were linked by interdependent dynamics, that moulded it together like autonomous political and cultural area in the past, a unity in diversity, so to speak. For this reason Central Asia is a perfect subject for researches of the so-called 'area studies.'

Despite the fact that the term 'Central Asia' itself is colonial, what it refers to is a territorial body that arose as such in pre-colonial history, and was previously labelled with specific terms by the peoples and the powers of Asia (e.g. Turan, Turkestan, etc.).

Box 5.3 The Kazakh Khanate

One of the primary objectives of science is to identify general laws. One may note that in many major publications on nomadism therefore it is common to see examples indiscriminately taken from many different areas of Eurasia (from Manchuria to Iran), at many different historical eras, from Ancient times to Modern periods.* The second characteristic such studies consider vital for the nomadic formations is their duality with sedentary spaces.* In addition to that, it is often posited that the exchanges were more advantageous for nomads than for sedentary peoples. The Steppe-Chinese frontier's rich and complex interaction in the long term is one of the most-studied examples in Asia.

Science and research are also devoted to identifying and shedding light on particular cases as much as possible, and to trying to adapt existing typologies to any new facts or discoveries. However, this tension between the general laws and particular cases, for the moment, tends to lean towards general laws when scholars scrutinize nomadic sedentary relations in Central Asia. This is why it would be necessary that new thoughts on the history of the Kazakh khanate be poured into general knowledge on the nomadic sedentary relations, and about the so-called 'nomadic states'.*

*Paul 2004

*Khazanov 1994

*Sneath 2007

Figure 5.1 Seal of Abul Khair Khan (1710-1748)

Abul Khair was the khan of the Lesser Zhuz of the Kazakhs (1710-1748), but his military successes against the Dzhungars allowed him to gain great influence over the other Hordes. Therefore, it is said that he is among the rare khans of the 18th century to rule over all of the Kazakh Hordes. He used this seal for his diplomatic contacts during his entire reign. This illustration also pays tribute to Irina Viktorovna Erofeeva (1953-2020), the best specialist in 18th and 19th century Kazakh history.

Source: Erofeeva 2001: 38-39.

This chapter shows that all five sub-regions mentioned above in this chapter (Alty Shahr with Dzhungaria, Dasht-e Qibchaq, Transoxiana, etc.) have their own political history. But most important is to stress two other characteristics that are seldom taken into account: first, none of the political units of our sub-regions in the modern period was a political tributary of any of another sub-region (e.g. paying tribute for protection); they indeed did not depend on any kind of political subordination to the other regional political units. And second, neither were these polities tributaries of the nearby larger states, or adjacent imperial powers, existing at that time around Central Asia. This was the situation at various (easily memorized) dates like in the year 1600 or 1700, but even before.

Canada or Cyprus are certainly independent countries, but still they are members of the Commonwealth, which recalls a previous link with (and subordination to) the British Empire. Greenland today has a parliament, and a government, yet it is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, and so on. For Central Asian polities, their situation changed gradually during the 18th century, since after the 1730s, Russia started exploring different ways to be more influential in the Kazakh steppes, and made alliances with different Kazakh khans, while the Qing Chinese conquest of Alty Shahr and Dzhungaria was underway by the 1750s.* This imperial cycle's history, as it is called here, is quite well known, in contrast to the periods before it. Unfortunately, the imperial paradigm has distorted the way we perceive Central Asia, and reduced the attention that could have been paid to periods of local order. Yet, such rule lasted a few centuries, as exemplified by the lifespan of the Kazakh khanate, or khanates.

The Kazakh khanate, and khanates of the Dasht-e Qibchaq (1460s-18th century) are tremendously interesting by themselves. Indeed, the discussions about large Eurasian 'nomadic states' conducted by historical research seems to assert that as soon as such 'states' were created they had to force strong linkages with sedentary areas. These linkages are mostly economic, and can be established through conquest, or demanding tribute, thanks to which the 'nomadic states' actually ended up controlling large sedentary areas and regulated their nomadic-sedentary interactions.

Many 'nomadic' rulers or emperors were indeed the overlords of sedentary communities and cities. This was not only the case with many famous Chinggisid khans but also with the Dzhungar khans over the Hojas of Alty Shahr as shown earlier in this chapter (cf. Part 4.2.3 'The Hojas' Mirror'). In the case of the 'nomadic conquests,' after a first phase of war and plunder, sedentary life and economy continues under new suzerains. However, the Kazakh khanates do not correspond to this typology, and did not regulate nomadic and sedentary economies within their own realm.

Some marginal network of cities and oases like Taraz or Turkestan certainly existed in the south of the Kazakh space – see also Map 5.1 –

*Noda 2016

yet the Kazakh Khanate had lost the battle for control over the larger southern sedentary centres like Tashkent by the 1550s. Compared to Tashkent, the few cities, like Taraz, were small. Yet, still, the Kazakh political realm existed and thrived for centuries, first as a more or less united khanate, then as a conglomerate of khanates corresponding to the three *Zhuz*, or hordes. This further complexifies the question raised here because the khanates were almost totally deprived of any sedentary areas, particularly on the territory of the Middle *Zhuz*.

To sum up, the Kazakh Khanate, or rather the Kazakh khanates, while not being the political vassals of any of the adjacent polities, did not benefit from intense nomadic-sedentary interactions through their realm. Actually, during the modern period, the transcontinental trade crossing their space was mostly between Russia and Central Asia, and we still know too little about its repercussions for the economy of the Kazakh Khanate and its sub-entities. This propels us to ask new questions, and enrich the existing typologies, because the Kazakh khanates do not match with the dominant typologies of 'nomadic states' even though they existed for over three centuries!

This is also the right place and opportunity to note that historical research needs to improve our knowledge in many domains, and particularly regarding the economic history when it comes to nomadic-sedentary interactions, in order to re-evaluate typologies. What was the share of the trade between the Kazakh Khanate (or khanates) in 1600, then in 1700, with Bukhara, Khiva, or the main sedentary centres of the Region? We simply do not know. We know very little as well about what were the respective shares of trade between Alty Shahr and Transoxiana (the Bukharan and, later, also Kokand khanates), for both economies in 1700. And one has to admit that large empires, like the Russian and Chinese ones, left more sources of economic nature, as far as our current knowledge is concerned, than the various local spaces of early modern Central Asia themselves.

For the post-Mongol period, one can say that Central Asia covers the regions of the realms of the Jochid and Chagatayid dynastic branches: From the Caspian Sea to the Taklamakan, from the contemporary Russian city of Omsk down to Khorasan and 'Afghan Turkestan'.³³

The periods of local order are made up by many productive processes of social, political, cultural, religious and linguistic integration. This is also due to the fact that they are by far the longest ones, which allowed for a better adaptation to the world factors for each of the sub-regions. For this reason, one does not – or should not –

³³ The north of Afghanistan is sometimes called 'Afghan Turkestan' due to the dominant Turkmen- and Uzbek-speaking populations, concentrated in the Maymanah, Balkh, Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz regions.

solely talk about the juxtaposition of different layers of history, but also of their merging into a singular culture. Acculturation processes created new cultures and values. They strongly contributed to the making of a specific Central Asian culture complex, distinct from the other cultural areas around.

The cultural complex of Central Asia is based on a strong interaction between the hydraulic civilization of the irrigated foothills and the pastoral civilization of the steppes. This interaction was already in place in ancient history, and extended over the entire period studied here. Central Asia is known for being the place of the Steppe Empires, from the Huns to the Dzhungars. But, this old classification does not even begin to cover all aspects of this vast thematic that still requires many readjustments. Concepts as crucial as those dimensions like concentration versus dispersion presented above, are still not fully introduced into discussions on the history of the 'Empire of the Steppes.'

By the same token, not all pastoral nomads marked the political history of the Region; in fact only a few did. However, all periods of Central Asia's history until the 19th century were marked by the interaction between pastoral nomads and the powers and populations of the sedentary territories. The Region is indeed the cradle of many intertwined cultural and societal processes of acculturation, and consolidation, with both natural and human causes. This chapter could only try to identify the most salient aspects of some of the topics attached to these above-mentioned notions. The author was obliged to make choices, and of course, it was difficult not to stress, or even mention, so many other questions, particularly about the integrating forces within Central Asia.

As stated earlier, the Chinggisid heritage sustained in the mind and memory of the ruling groups a geographic and geopolitical knowledge that was much larger than their own dynastic space. This profoundly nurtured the unique linkage between our five sub-regions into a single, and unique, historical space: Central Asia. The Kazakh slave trade can give a good idea of the mental mapping and knowledge of a 'global' Central Asia, even for its simple inhabitants. The Kazakhs who occupied themselves with capturing Russian soldiers or peasants at the margins of the expansion zones of the Russian empire north of the Kazakh space during the 17th or 18th centuries, went all the way down to the Bukharan markets to sell their captives, travelling about 2,000 kilometres.

Obviously, so many other issues could not even be approached in this chapter. But please recall that in general, whatever the topic under scrutiny, our knowledge is better as far as sedentary pop-

ulations are concerned. Fortunately enough, this imbalance has been reduced during the last decades, with more studies published and better data available. This work's bibliography is concise, but each title itself has been based on solid bibliographies. The author encourages readers to discover their references, and to pursue with passion this chapter's crucial topic which mission could be summarized as follows: How could Central Asia become what it is?

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7. Recommended Literature

As mentioned in the conclusion, the author 'recommends' all works listed in this chapter's bibliography, so please take all other titles listed as recommendations for 'future reading.'

The bibliographical field of Central Asian studies is a reflection of material and geopolitical conditions which together form a triangle: Which topics were and are considered sufficiently interesting for concerned authors, but also for their states and their academic systems? On which topics was it or is it possible to publish in a context of censorship, or during international tension? And finally, what topics can be reasonably addressed considering the availability and accessibility of the source material? This, of course, requires a diverse knowledge of the languages used in the sources.

Reflecting this triangle, this bibliographical field is extremely asymmetrical, from the point of view of topics, regions, or periods covered, and regarding the languages of relevant publications. For ethnography and statistics, materials in Russian are by far the richest and the most detailed. Considering history, the Region has been mostly approached through macro-characteristics, and through what, in this chapter, is called the 'Imperial paradigm.' These two global dimensions helped to identify some very important factors of change in the course of its history, but they also helped to favour common confusions between Eurasian, Central Eurasian, Middle Eastern and Central Asian history proper. As a result, the long period between 1450 and 1800 is probably one of the less studied.

It has become time to amend this and for research to finally focus on Central Asia proper. Since 1991, much new archival and field research allowed new material to be published, but they mostly concern contemporary issues. Therefore, the history of Central Asia is still in need of new sources, and new issues and topics need to be examined.

The few titles below are intended to propose some further readings in elaborate working tools, like encyclopaedias, which cover all periods and offer an inspiring variety of topics. They provide, for instance, biographical material that is hard to find in periodicals or monographies. Extensive Pan-Soviet, individual Soviet republic or post-Soviet encyclopaedias can also yield much valuable information on Central Asia, and can be located in most European research libraries. I also recommend the reader to consult annotated bibliographies, like Thomas Hoppe's book below.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Nomadic-sedentary interactions are a timeless and long-lasting factor in the Central Asian history. Please argue.

TOPIC 2

When studying the issue of water and the Region's environmental constraints from a historical perspective, how would you compare historical 'water problems' (often called today 'water conflicts') to modern ones? (Compare with Chapter 20 for a critical analysis of the contemporary problems.)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

This activity is focused on the notion of 'historical cycles' in Central Asian history. Due to the fact that the proposed historical scheme opposes periods of world empires versus periods of local political order, this might be a pair activity.

The teacher provides a detailed timeline for Central Asia since Ancient times, and each pair will have to identify which periods should be classified as 'world empires,' and which ones as 'local order' in Central Asian history. Remember that both periods constitute two halves of the same cycle, so each 'local order' period should be followed by a new cycle of 'world empire.'

Students discuss and present their arguments. Then it might be interesting to compare the ideas between different pairs and check if they identified the periods in a similar way. Much will depend on the students' own interpretation of these terms (which also should be brought to discussion). Then, in small groups (e.g. two former pairs together), students should try to identify which related processes of circulation and acculturation took place in which period and answer the question: in what cycle is Central Asia now?

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGWhzl1pvQ&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to CASE STUDY NO. 1 by Bruno J. De Cordier.

Acrobats in the old city.

CHAPTER 6

Orientalism, Postcolonial and Decolonial Frames on Central Asia: Theoretical Relevance and Applicability

Svetlana Gorshenina

Eur'Orbem, CNRS-Sorbonne University

Keywords:

- Orientalism • Postcolonial Studies • Decolonial Theory
- Postcolonial Discourse • Russia • Central Asia

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Recognize the characteristics of orientalist discourse.
- Understand a number of basic concepts of Orientalism.
- Present the main ideas of postcolonial theory in the context of the post-Soviet space (both in Russia and Central Asia).
- Understand the dynamics of postcolonial discourse between anti-colonial arguments, nationalism and self-orientalization.
- Describe a variety of historiographic interpretations of Tsarist and Soviet colonialism among Russian and Central Asian scholars, before and after 1991.
- Compare Tsarist and Soviet situations as colonial or non-colonial.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- How might we define 'Orientalism'?
- Is the concept of Orientalism intended solely to describe 'Eastern' countries?
- Can the categories 'East' and 'West' be used in scholarly analysis?

Main questions

- What are the main concepts of classical postcolonial theory? How can we apply it to the post-Soviet space?
- To what extent were the Tsarist and Soviet period colonial? What interpretations have been produced to answer this question?
- How is postcolonial theory perceived in the post-Soviet space?
- What trends in historiography have emerged (or continued) after 1991 with regard to Central Asia?
- How is the history of Tsarist and Soviet Central Asia conceived by contemporary Central Asian, Russian and Western scholars?
- How are the concepts of Orientalism, postcolonialism, post-socialism, post-coloniality, decolonization, self-orientalization and nationalism interrelated?
- How do decolonial ideas differ from postcolonial or anti-colonial ideas? How can they be applied to the Russian and Central Asian history and historiography?

Post-reading questions

- Do researchers working on postcolonial theory (who use anticolonial rhetoric in order to demonstrate the need for decolonization in their countries) produce a specifically nationalistic discourse that represents a kind of postcolonial nationalism (a nationalistic interpretation of a postcolonial theory in a post-colonial context)? If yes, explain how?
- To what extent can (neo-)imperialist and (or) nationalist discourse be viewed as an 'anticolonial' defence of (an) 'oppressed people' (e.g. Kyrgyz *Velikoderzhavie*)?
- Can the demonstration of hostility towards the West and postcolonial thinking (which is characterized by globalization) be considered a form of postcolonial nationalism?

Orientalism, Postcolonial and Decolonial Frames on Central Asia: Theoretical Relevance and Applicability

SVETLANA GORSHENINA
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THE HISTORY OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORIES and their (non-) acceptance is extremely controversial. This is not only due to the nature of their central premise, which calls into question the very process of knowledge production and the political biases of their producers. The complex dynamics that surround their promotion or rejection also contribute to their wide-ranging application (from the socio-political sphere to the areas of science, art and literature), which in turn is reflected in the complex corpus of scholarly works. Their plasticity and direct dependence on the researcher's personal view play a role, allowing diametrically opposing interpretations of ideas that (self-)originate in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).

The complex structure of postcolonial research has become a further obstacle in the application of these theories. In order to better institutionalize their perspectives, researchers try to combine all anti-colonial discourses under the term 'postcolonial studies,' from the descriptive postcolonial history of the 'global North' to the postcolonial critique of the former metropolises and South Asian subalterns, through to the radical movements that seek to distance themselves from them.* Among the latter are decolonial ideas that problematize (from the standpoint of political activism and ethics) the connection between the knowledge production process and the positioning of scholars in the context of global coloniality. In addition, Leftist-Marxist theories maintain an anti-capitalist stance, progressivism, and emphasize the economic motivations and material and social conditions of all actors of colonization.

The differences in the use of postcolonial theory by its 'conservative,' 'liberal,' and 'radical' proponents often reflect the different personal backgrounds or life experiences of the researchers. Among them are those from the 'global North,' people from what is often still colloquially called 'the Third World countries' who have received recognition in Western (primarily English-speaking) academic spheres and those from 'the global South' who continue

*Tlostanova 2020

Box 6.1 Defining Colonialism, Decolonization, and Other Prefixes

Colonialism – Originally from the Latin word *colonia*, meaning an agricultural settlement of a population outside of that population's original territory. In the context of this analysis, the term refers to a historically specific period, linked to particular conquests in the early modern and modern eras, which were presented as 'civilizing missions' aimed at modernizing 'backward' populations and cultures. The 'progressiveness' of modern colonial empires purportedly gave their forerunners and advocates the right to annex regions beyond the European continent and create a hierarchal structure of government. Within this framework, the local populations had limited rights in comparison to the inhabitants of the metropolises (the centres of the colonial empires) under the pretext of their alleged 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment' and of cultural or racial particularities, while the metropolises reaped the colonies' resources and sought to maximise profits from them.

Decolonization – The process of liberation from colonialism and of gaining independence, as well as the process of overcoming (post)coloniality.

Global coloniality – The long-term results of colonialism, which manifest themselves in "certain local forms and conditions that remain a connecting thread for understanding the seemingly disparate manifestations of modernity."^{*}

Orientalism – A multi-faceted term that can refer to an academic tradition involving the study of 'oriental' languages and cultures, or to an artistic style imitating 'oriental art,' as well as to relations of dependence that allow an object to be subordinated by devaluing it. See Part 1.1 for a detailed discussion.

Orientalization – To evaluate any culture/identity (e.g. non-European, pre-modern) from a Eurocentric point of view in a snide and mocking way in order to underline its own superiority and the inferiority of the Other.

Neo-colonialism – Refers to any and all forms of control by ex-colonies or new great powers over former colonies that are politically (nominally) independent.

Postcolonial – Affected by the lingering effects and impact of colonialism, and also the transhistorical comparative framework focusing on local resistance to colonial rule.

Post-colonial – Linked to a period chronologically taking place *after* a colonialism, in contrast to 'pre-colonial.'

Postcoloniality – The intellectual, ideological and cultural consequences of colonialism that remain after the formal end of a colonial order.

*Tlostanova 2020

to work beyond their own geographical and linguistic borders. The relative subjectivism that is encouraged in postcolonial studies allows for a broad interpretation of postcolonial ideas across the entire spectrum of anti-colonial and nationalist discourses.

The handbook's purpose has determined the structure of this paper: mapping out the (*quasi*-)full spectrum of current viewpoints on the issue. First, the author outlines the main ideas of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the context of their emergence and their critique in the Western academic realm. Second, the chapter presents a history of colonial and anti-colonial discourses in the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union. The third section analyses the acceptance or rejection of Orientalist ideas in the post-Soviet context, from the former Soviet centre and colonial periphery, to Europe's so-called 'overseas' of 'far abroad' (*дальнее зарубежье*), America and Japan. Fourth, arguments *pro* and *contra* on the most debated issues in postcolonial theory in relation to the post-Soviet space will be presented, such as the possibility of *not* analysing imperial Tsarist Russia through the lens of Orientalism, the definition of 'Soviet' as imperial, neo-imperialist, colonial, anti-colonial, post-colonial or postcolonial,¹ and the decolonization of post-Soviet, post-socialist and (or) postcolonial Central Asia.

The attention is focused on the Central Asian 'post-Soviet' space. The Caucasus and Siberia, as well as the Russian Federation, which are also important for understanding the particularities of Russian Orientalism, are not included in this text. For some detailed bibliographic references, the author recommends that the reader consult her earlier publications.* Also, note that to indicate when this is text citing sources by referring to a relevant publication's own listed works, the author uses the label 'bib. ref.' *after* the short reference itself.

*Горшенина 2007; Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b

1. Orientalism: The Basic Concepts

1.1 Defining Orientalism

The term 'Orientalism,' which probably first entered the English language in Joseph Spence's *An Essay on Pope's Odyssey*, published in 1726,* is key to postcolonial thought. It nonetheless invites different readings, which – depending on the position of the researcher – may be regarded as outdated, relevant or politicized hyperbole. The problematic nature of the term stems from the fact that it combines

*Kalmar 2016

¹ Regarding the nuances between 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial,' see Box 6.1.

lay interpretations with scholarly definitions. Among the possible definitions, the author outlines the notions that were formed in the 18th to the 21st centuries:

- An *academic tradition* involving the study of 'Eastern' languages and cultures and encompassing historical, philological and archaeological understandings, whose roots go back to the Renaissance. This definition does not involve the politicization of knowledge.
- An *artistic style* that appeared in Western and Central Europe and Russia from the 18th century and articulated itself through a particular range of 'Eastern' themes and motifs in music, architecture, painting and literature. The analysis of this style was often carried out without any linking to the colonial or imperial context. It was originally created by writers and artists who travelled to 'Eastern countries' and was based on the 'Eastern' collections of imagery, art objects, paraphernalia, etc. that came into being and gained popularity in Europe. It was subsequently replicated, forming a visual image of an imaginary 'classical East' with geographical variation.
- A *pseudo-science*, as found in the Western politicized knowledge of 'the East' that contributed to the creation of a biased view toward the 'East.' The goal of this 'system of ideological fictions' was to legitimize Western cultural and political superiority and create relationships of dependence, dominance and subordination. This interpretation sees 'Orientalism' as a *discourse of power* constructed in 'the Occident' that is directly linked to imperialism and colonialism, as well as a *corporate institution* designed to preserve the ideological and political hegemony of Europe throughout Asia.
- Any *relations of dependency* that allow the subordination of an object by belittling it. Despite the collapse of the colonial system, 'Orientalism' has taken on new forms and expressions in the modern world, largely remaining the same, preserving all Western prejudice against the non-West. From a euro-centric vantage point, it evaluates non-European or (and) pre-modern identities and cultures in a sneering, mocking manner. In this new discourse, dependencies preserve specific emphasis on the colonial and postcolonial contexts and global coloniality for which postcolonial theories are no longer sufficient and instead decolonial ideas are needed to dismantle these dynamics.

These different interpretations of 'Orientalism' can be organized chronologically. In the period from the late 18th century to the mid-20th century, Orientalism was perceived as a neutral definition for the study of non-European cultures and the creation of artistic works on the theme of 'the Orient.' The same framework applies to the special late 18th-century policy of the *East India Company* regarding Indian languages, laws and customs. Since the 1960s, the understanding of Orientalism has become increasingly critical: its ideological bias and the biased scholarly and literary-artistic representations formed in its wake have been highlighted. The publication of Said's '*Orientalism*' in 1978 gave it a definitively negative meaning. The conclusions of researchers from previous generations, that idealized the role played by European scholar-administrators and deemed the European intervention to be beneficial to Asian societies, were called into question.

This critique provoked a wave of renaming in the Western academic spheres, in which the monolithic 'Oriental Studies' was replaced with the Departments of Middle Eastern Studies or East Asian Studies, while 'Orient' (and its adjective 'Oriental') became almost taboo and were replaced by 'Asian.' The subsequent spread of Said's ideas, somewhat resembling a hype, took the term out of its specific historical and geographical context, making it synonymous with a contemptuous attitude towards 'the Other.' Having become 'traditional,' Orientalism is gradually giving way to more radical left-wing theories of decolonization and anti-colonialism.* At the same time, the relentless criticism of Said's ideas constantly revives the previous definitions of 'Orientalism,' transforming these four definitions from a chronological sequence into competing yet concurrent theories.

*Tlostanova and Mingolo 2012;
Tlostanova 2020

1.2 Context of Edward Said's 'Orientalism'

Starting with his research for a dissertation on the 19th century novelist Joseph Conrad, Said developed his concept in specific political, social and academic contexts. The general background to the work was the political-epistemological crisis of the post-war period, defined by "a series of events – the Holocaust, the post-war disintegration of the European empires, the 'Third World' revolutionary and minority movements in the West – that cumulatively undermined confidence in European modernity and its narrative of progress."** These changes were reflected in the academic worlds, which experienced successive 'turns:' the structuralist and post-structuralist, the linguistic, the discursive and the postcoloni-

*Shohat 2010: 44

*Shohat 2010: 44

al-cultural. During the 'post-war seismic shift,' the decolonization of the academies occurred: "ethnic studies, women's studies, and Third World studies were already challenging the epistemological foundations of what constituted a legitimate object of knowledge."*

Even if the first elements of anti-colonial criticism may tentatively be recorded as early as the end of the 19th century, Said relied, on the one hand, on later ones, such as the anti-colonialist writings of such figures as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Theodor Adorno, Roberto Fernández Retamar and C.L.R. James. On the other hand, he built his concept from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, French philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of knowledge and power and how they interact, along with the ideas of French Marxist scholar Maxime Rodinson. In the field of Middle Eastern Studies, his immediate precursors were Anouar Abdel-Malek, who was well acquainted with the Soviet excesses of Marxism, and Abdul-Latif Tibawi, who determined that academic knowledge about the Middle East grew out of deep-rooted medieval Christian hostility to Islam and was by definition Eurocentric and tainted by its association with European colonial rule and racism.

1.3 Edward Said's ideas

Said built his concept from an analysis of scholarly, artistic, and political discourses related to mainly French and British Orientalists who came from the most implicated imperial nations in the Islamic Orient. Geographically speaking, his cases were limited to Pakistan, the Middle East and North Africa. The main tenets of his ideas can be summarized as follows:

*Said 1978: 2-3

- Orientalism is based on essentialist discourse of ontological and epistemological fundamental differences between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident' that are presented as real-world givens and fundamentally unequal in essence. It is also associated with the notion of the Orient's or an Oriental's "Otherness."* This discourse is not politically innocent but became a vehicle of control: according to the Gramscian idea, hegemony is not limited to political forces, and moral and intellectual leadership is the true foundation of political power.
- The Foucauldian ideas of knowledge and power have been extended by Said to the colonial world and were transposed to his notions of 'colonial power' and 'oriental knowledge.' After Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 in the context of the

assertion of capitalism, 'Orientalism' crystalized as an official discourse about the East, responding to the imperatives of imperialist power and reflecting the Westerner's fantasies and desires towards the East. Imperialism, colonialism and Orientalism become interdependent, influencing one another. This 'colonizing knowledge' institutionalized or formed itself into a system that went beyond the limits of the Academy: intellectual corporate institutions, scholarship, theories, concepts, terminology, imagery, colonial bureaucracies, colonial styles, etc.* (Said 1978: 1-2)

- The result of this politicized, eurocentric, reductionist knowledge, constructed as such by Western observers, are 'ideological fictions' about the East. Its 'imaginative geography' has no clear boundaries, except for the understanding that this space, associated primarily with Islam, then with Hinduism and Buddhism, lies outside of the Christian world. Far removed from the reality of the 'East,' 'imagined' or 'constructed' rather than 'analysed' or 'studied,' this image generates stereotypical dichotomies between *positive* qualities of a civilized and superior European West and *negative* ones of a barbaric and inferior Asiatic East that are rooted in the opposition of the 'masculine West' and 'feminine East' (rational *vs.* aberrant; developed *vs.* undeveloped; modern *vs.* retarded). Thus, this discursive construct legitimizes Western cultural and political superiority. In fact, it was necessary to dominate the East on an ideological basis: it is a specific 'technology of power' intended to control colonial lands and peoples.

1.4 Criticism of the Ideas of Edward Said

If the pre-Saidian writings on Orientalism were already objectionable, the publication of Said's book provoked a flurry of criticism from 'Western' and 'Eastern' researchers. Bernard Lewis, a British-born, American historian of Islam and the Ottoman empire working at Princeton University became a symbol of the most severe criticism of Said, which was echoed by many influential Orientalists* (these include in particular Ahmad, Bayart, Clifford, Irwin, Kopf, Kramer, Mackenzie, Varisco, Warraq and Hamdi).*

*Lewis 1982

*MacFie 2000

The main tenets of Said's critics go as follows:

- Said uses a specific, convenient set of examples, an 'arbitrary rearrangement' in his treatment of the historical evidence, reflecting a preformulated idea and a preordained conclusion.

- Said reveals a deep-seated, postcolonial resentment towards the West and only discusses its negative attributes. *Orientalism's* central thesis is essentially anti-Western, which hides an identity crisis associated with internal problems within the Middle East, down to elements of anti-Zionism (in some interpretations of this criticism, Said is practically an accomplice of Palestinian terrorists).*
- Said does not know any Eastern languages apart from Arabic and allowed a large amount of inaccuracies into his text. As a literary scholar rather than a historian, he does not consider the history of Orientalism in the longer term. He therefore omits examples of the study of the East from earlier periods, for example, the Renaissance (although, it could be counter-argued that a narrow chronological frame allows him to preserve the integrity of a specific period that was marked by the development of modern European capitalism). He also does not distinguish between pre-colonial and colonial periods.* At the same time, Said does not offer robust literary interpretations of Eastern images, motives, and plots. Literary texts for him are simply material that demonstrates some of the thought patterns of orientalist discourse. He does not consider texts as part of a system of literary hierarchies and reputations, multilevel intertextual references or the tradition of national literary processes that also have an internal logic of development.
- By presenting the localized experiences of the British and French empires as universal, Said leaves all other models of imperial-colonial relations out of his analysis. In particular, he does not address countries that did not have significant Eastern colonies or at least close relations with and presence in a number of Eastern polities, such as Germany (first and foremost) but also Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, that all made a great contribution to the study of Eastern cultures (within this, critics do not acknowledge the fact that by the end of the 1830s, the institutionalization of Orientalism had already been instigated within the English and French scholarly circles and that this produced very influential research and trained scholars and colonial administrators from countries that had a 'second wave' of Orientalism).
- Said reduced history to certain bipolar interpretations, describing the relationship between the authorities and researchers in an unclear manner. Without taking into account the specifics of individual disciplines, Said places researchers under the

*Малахов 2003; Штейнер 2008;
Глик 2020

*Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib.
ref. 37 п61

umbrella term ‘Orientalists,’ although this term became obsolete in the early 1970s with the advent of more specific terms, such as ‘Indologists,’ ‘Sinologists,’ ‘Iranists’ and ‘Arabists.’ As a result, Said himself creates a homogenizing, essentializing and totalizing vision of the East. His analysis, that focuses exclusively on canonical Western literature created by white European scholars, ignores other categories of texts associated with peripheral actors (women, *métis* minorities and local elites), thus denying them critical thought and their own agency. Similarly, he does not see a difference between the Victorian national chauvinists and the researchers working in ‘pure research’ that were sympathetic to the local population, and does not discuss the multifaceted nature of the interaction between the colonizers and colonized.

These criticisms were not left unanswered. In his next book, *Culture and Imperialism*,* Said developed several nuanced ideas about Orientalism and responded to his critics. He extended the chronological and geographical limits (with the addition of the American case study) and clarified the difference between capitalism and imperialism. He pointed out that ideological constructions, memory and cultural practices (mostly hybrid) survived the disappearance of colonial empires and reinforced the superiority of ‘the West’ over ‘the Third World.’

*Said 1993

The debate on Orientalism, which started in Anglo-American academic circles and has been raging for over forty years now, has given rise to a new type of research on the particularities of conducting this critical dialogue and a specific mode of critiquing the critiques.* In addition, the life and work of the proponents of classical postcolonial theory have also been the subject of study in recent years. Along with Said, ‘classical’ and ‘traditional’ Postcolonial Studies include also Indian scholars Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak who are the founders of Subaltern Studies.* These ‘postcolonial Others’ have nonetheless managed to occupy an important place in the Western Academy.

*Hsu-Ming Teo 2013

*Abdalkafor 2015

1.5 Orientalism in the Present Day

Despite the criticisms it provoked, Said’s book remains probably one of the most influential scholarly books in the humanities to be published in the English language. *Orientalism* triggered a radical epistemological break within the Western academy. Said created both general ideas and concepts that set out the logic of the postcolonial perspective. He also developed more specific approaches

to the analysis of ‘colonial discourse,’ and the ‘decolonial turn’ that emerged from these approaches cannot be ignored, regardless of one’s stance towards it.

*Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b:
bib. ref. 29n35

Researchers from different countries have taken the concept ‘Orientalism’ in many different directions.*

First, the geographical scope was expanded. On the one hand, studies of the Ottoman and Russian empires and Latin America (which are not frequent sources of enquiry in postcolonial and decolonization analysis) along with the classic cases of Middle Eastern Studies have been produced. On the other hand, researchers went beyond the limits of a set of related representations of the non-Western world, transferring the analysis to the functioning of Orientalism in European history and culture. This tendency has been called into question since it reverses Orientalism, generating another monolithic geo-fantasy of ‘the West.’

*Lowe 1990; Shohat 1992;
Chioni Moore 2001

From this perspective, concepts of Europeans’ “internal Others,” “the West colonising itself” and “Occidentalism” were developed.* These allow a critical analysis of discriminatory and orientalisising discourse both in relation to Western European history (including the analysis of Shakespeare’s plays*), the ‘secondary’ Western States (in particular, Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand) and the ‘peripheral’ countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Within the framework of the so-called ‘social Orientalism’, the working class, women and the ‘little colonialists’ of the ‘great powers’ (white people from the bottom of the social hierarchy whose living conditions in the colonies were harsh) also became the objects of analysis.

*Singh 2019

Second, the disciplinary field expanded beyond the boundaries of textual analysis, branching out from literary theory and cultural criticism to the broader research fields of Anthropology, History, Art, Philosophy, Linguistics, Geography, Economics and International Relations. This led to the emergence of new areas such as the critical theory of cultural heritage and human geography. The typology of sources expanded accordingly: archival documents, iconographic and cartographic material, oral history, and new digital media were added to published texts of various descriptions.

The methodological framework has also been nuanced. Among the heuristic concepts found in the seminal works of second-generation postcolonial researchers, it is necessary to mention the concepts of ‘the contact zone’ between imperialists and colonial peoples, in which a preconceived idea of ‘Others’ was formed. In addition, the concept of ‘transculturality’ determines the hybrid result of this colonial encounter. This concept of ‘hybridity’ (along

with its related notions of 'in-between-ness,' mimicry and derivativeness) allows us to understand the formation of new identities during the course of interactions in the context of the colonial situation, while 'subaltern agency' describes local populations that are oppressed, but are far from being passive informants and in fact participated in the production of colonial knowledge.*

A productive critique of Said's *Orientalism* and its proponents emerged between 1990 and 2000.** These new interpretations highlighted the need to reject generalizations as well as the need for a detailed and dynamic reconstruction of the historical context literally over decades. They emphasize diversity, historical and geographical discontinuities, irregularities, and the discursive heterogeneity of Orientalism that is not exclusively limited to imperialist propaganda (in particular, in the colonial literature created by women). These new approaches allow the construction of counter-discourses that run parallel to the process of "provincializing Europe."* They mean not only debunking myths about the universalism of European values and desacralizing official discursive structures, but also shifting the emphasis from the centre to the periphery.

There is an entrenched understanding that the interactions between 'the East' and 'the West,' different groups of colonizers, the colonized elite and colonized masses do not occur according to the logic of binary oppositions, but are multi-vector, non-linear and marked by subjectivity.* They represent a specific situation in-between, implying mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, heterogeneity, the reversibility of roles of colonizers and colonized, and the subversion of the relation between centre and periphery. Accordingly, precedence is now given to the vision of an ambiguous, changing, much more complex reality, which can only be comprehended through the discourse analysis of individual characters located in different times, spaces and bodies. The emphasis on actors dictates the relativity of evaluations depending on the selected points of view that are sometimes incompatible and thus subjectivity is prioritized. Event-based narratives are replaced by an analysis of the background to these events, the hidden and articulated motivations of actions and deeds, while finally, the initial colonization projects and their often unsuccessful or unexpected implementations are compared.

Today's postcolonial researchers methodically turn to Derrida's theories on 'deconstruction.' Rather than emphasising the power of colonial discourse (which Said wrote about after Foucault), instead they underscore the weaknesses that undermine it from within,

*Spivak 1987; 1988; 1999; Pratt 1992; Bhabha 1990; 1994; Ashcroft et al. 1995; Matar 2000; Raj 2007; Schaffer et al. 2009; Loomba 2015; Gorshenina et al. 2019; Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 31 sqq notes 40-43, 66, 67, 68, 69, 74, 79, 81

**Behdad 1994; Lawrence 1994; AHR 2000; McEwan 2000

*Chakrabarty 2000

*Allen 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013

*Bhabha 1994; Escobar 2007

thus opening up possibilities for decolonization.* Alongside post-colonial theories, there are interesting ideas of: cultural transfer (Michel Espagne, Michael Werner); cross-over history (*histoire croisée*); history-in-equal-parts (*histoire à parts égales*); connected histories (Serge Gruzinski, Romain Bertrand, Sanjay Subrahman-yam); transnational history or microhistory (Carlo Ginzburg, Jacques Revel); the phenomenon of hybridization (Homi Bhabha); mixing (Alexis Nouss); and shared or entangled history (Sidney Mintz, Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann 2003).

*Wiredu 1996

At the same time, many researchers started to discuss the fact that Orientalism has metamorphosed into a neo-Orientalism that reflects the new globality of the world that is marked by global coloniality and Islamophobia. The opposition of West-versus-East has given way to an unequal relationship between ‘the global North’ and ‘the global South’ in which hegemonic discourses reproduce hierarchical relations between (former) colonizers and the colonized in the form of a binary opposition of the developed versus the undeveloped. The need for “conceptual decolonization”* led to the emergence of more radical methods and approaches. Along with representatives of radical (neo-)Leftist anti-colonial discourse, decolonial researchers criticize postcolonial scholars for using theories and language developed by Western academia.*

*Mbembe 2021

2. Russian and Soviet Orientalism

Russian Orientalism was often cited by Said’s critics as an example of the ‘pure research of the East’ that was developed independently of empire and colonialism. Nonetheless, in the Tsarist and Soviet experience, Orientalism, empire and colonialism form a single block, outside of which it is impossible to analyse the common history of Russia and Central Asia over the last few centuries.

However, the adoption of the theoretical framework of Said’s *Orientalism* for Central Asian historical study both in the Western world and, to a greater extent, in the post-Soviet space is delayed, uneven, often with a bias towards important stances and subjective interpretations. There is an evident – but not huge – body of work that rigorously develops postcolonial approaches based on examples of Russian/Soviet/post-Soviet cases. Unsurprisingly, works by ‘Western’ researchers or ‘local’ (i.e. Russian and Central Asian) scholars associated with Western Academia and academic institutions undoubtedly feature prominently in this corpus.

2.1 Reception of Postcolonial Theories in the USSR and post-Soviet Countries

Nathaniel Knight initiated a broad discussion about the applicability of Said's framework to the contexts of imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet space.* Citing the example of Vasily Grigoriev in Orenburg who did not find political use for his own knowledge of 'the East,' Knight demonstrated the 'specificity' of the interactions between Russian imperial power and knowledge. He suggested that it was impossible to fully apply the theory of Orientalism to the history of Russia. Knight, in this instance, followed the approach favoured by David Kopf* who was writing in relation to some British Orientalists who were in opposition to the British colonial administration.

*Knight 2000

*Kopf 1980

Despite the fact that this issue had already been clearly covered in the 1990s,* it was Knight's statement that provoked a lively discussion in the journals *Kritika* and *Ab Imperio** and these polemical works remain the most frequently cited in the post-Soviet space.* However, over the past twenty years, the body of publications on Russian-Soviet Orientalism has been supplemented by a number of serious works (*infra*) and analysis of these trends.* Despite this, the question of the applicability of these theories to the former Soviet space is still relevant for a number of reasons:

*Brower and Lazzerini 1997; Evans 1999

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 218n5-16

*David-Fox et al. 2006

*Forum Al 2010; Sunderland 2011; Morrison 2009, 2012; Borner and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 30n36; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2014; Алаев 2016

(1) Said's *Orientalism* was published in Russian as recently as 2006 and Govorunov's translation was a poor one.² Furthermore, it was accompanied by an epilogue written by Konstantin Krylov, an ideologue of 'moderate' Russian nationalism, and founder and editor-in-chief of the journal *Questions of Nationalism*.* By linking Said to Russian nationalism, Krylov presented his own imperialist discourse as an anti-colonial defence of the "oppressed Russian people," which overarchingly sent readers in a misleading direction.* A more faithful re-translation, as well as the publication in Russian of Said's second key book *Culture and Imperialism**, did not change the situation.

*Крылов 2006

*Бобровников 2008; 2016

*Сайд 2012

(2) The majority of post-Soviet researchers are not entirely familiar with the genesis of postcolonial discourse, an issue exacerbated by the lack of postcolonial readings on university programs and an insufficient amount of translations of the key texts on postcolonial theory into Russian. Thus, one of Franz Fanon's key works was published in Russian for the first time in 2020, while the works of Georges Balandier, who proposed the concept of "the colonial

² The KGB's internal translation and fragments published in *Kino* magazine in 1995-2003 remain unknown to the general public.

*Balandier 2001

*Рейтблат 2020

*Tolz 2011

situation” back in 1951 are still relatively unknown.* A consequence of such lack of specific knowledge of the political, cultural, historical and other contexts to the emergence and existence of post-colonial discourse was, for example, the oversimplified argument that Said’s ideas were formed under the direct influence of Soviet Orientalists,* which stems from a much more nuanced study by Vera Tolz.* However, it would be more accurate to say that Said was familiar with anti-imperialist Soviet criticism indirectly through the works of Abdel-Malek as well as Marxism (particularly its French and German interpretations), which were just several of many important theories for him.

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 212–213n3–4; Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 28n29, 59, 128
**Oskanian 2018

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 250–251n86–87; Bassin 2008; Laruelle 2008

(3) There are widely disseminated statements from researchers and the public about imperial Russia’s and the Soviet Union’s ‘special path,’ which purportedly encompasses ‘European’ as well as a ‘Oriental’ patterns and elements.* What reinforces this position, which is actively supported by Vladimir Putin,** is ‘self-Orientalization,’ a stance which represents Russia either as a specific part of the East, or as ‘Eurasia’ (an intermediate space between West and East).* This perception implies some sort of special relationship with Asia rather than a Western type of colonialism. Accordingly, Russia is removed from the vortex of postcolonial issues and is thus transformed from an empire that is ‘catching up’ (*nedo-Evropa* – *недоЕвропа*) into a key player on the world stage.

*Горшенина 2007: 246–248
*Morrison 2008; Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 222n25, 246n74; Bornet and Gorshenina 2014a; 2014b: bib. ref. 52–53n110–116; Sabol 2017; Gorshenina et al. 2019

(4) There is an entrenched view that Russian and Soviet history is essentially non-colonial, which makes the model that Said outlines not applicable to the Russian/Soviet context, since this model is allegedly only relevant to the ‘traditional’ Western empires and their colonies in the Middle East and South Asia. This close-mindedness is facilitated by the widespread notion of the existence of certain ‘classical colonies’* and only a small number of comparative works in which the Russian-Soviet experience is compared to other (post)colonial situations.* These viewpoints are often abstracted from existing historical interpretations regarding the (non-)colonial past of both the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union.

2.2 Evolving Perspectives on Russian and Soviet (Non-)colonialism

Whether Orientalism is accepted or rejected in relation to Tsarist and Soviet dynamics depends on whether Tsarist or Soviet history is interpreted as being colonial. The interpretation of Tsarist and Soviet history has changed on numerous occasions over the past three centuries.

2.2.1 *Tsarist and Soviet Perspectives*

The **Tsarist generals and administrators** described the Russian presence in Turkestan, Trans-Caspia and other parts of Central Asia almost-exclusively in terms of conquest and colonization. Referencing the European experience (which was repeatedly mentioned in Russian projects), theorists and practitioners of the colonial settlement of Turkestan argued exclusively about whether the Russian conquest and colonization was ‘better,’ ‘less destructive’ and ‘more humane’ than the Western ones. These arguments centred around the specifics of Russia’s geographical position (the continental nature of the empire and the absence of natural geographical barriers between the mother country and the colony), its proclaimed Messianic role as ‘a unifier of East and West,’ and the ‘Russian character’ which allegedly was more capable of adaptation and assimilation.* This was necessary in order to connect the perception of Central Asia as ‘ours’ or as an ‘internal Orient,’ which later developed into a rather controversial concept, given that the Western powers also perceived their colonies as ‘their’ territories, despite being separated from the mother country by seas.

*Gorshenina 2012: 37–94; 2016

In the **early Soviet period** and more specifically the **1920s**, in the works of a number of Soviet functionaries and historians (Mikhail Pokrovsky, George Safarov, Turar Ryskulov and Peter Galuzo,* the Tsarist empire was presented as a “reactionary state” that imposed “obscurantism” within its borders, by leading colonial conquests and transforming Turkestan into “a prison of peoples” – in other words, “absolute evil” (*абсолютное зло*). This was reflected in the Bolshevik policy of the early years, which proclaimed that an anti-colonial agenda was central to its domestic and foreign policy. This agenda was expressed through the expropriation of foreign property (which was presented as decolonization) to their attempts to lead an anti-colonial movement around the world. Having created the language of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, historians analysed the Tsarist colonization of Turkestan and the rest of Central Asia through the lens of Marxism, from the perspective of class struggle and shifts in socio-economic structures (*социально-экономические формации*). So, the imperial and capitalist dichotomy of ‘East-and-West’ was replaced by the concept of class struggle. Anti-colonial Bolshevik discourse was theorized but not always implemented in practice since it proposed the Orient’s liberation from several positions all at once:

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 227п36–37

- Liberation from Tsarist imperialism, which led to an official break with colonial discourse, politics, and symbols of the Rus-

sian Empire; while at the same time hiding the clear signs of continuity. These included, in particular, the rapid reconquest of land extending to the former imperial borders during the civil war, which suggests a very specific, under-the-radar hybridization of colonial and class discourses.*

*Sahni 1997

- Liberation from ‘Islamic obscurantism’ and the ‘backwardness of feudalism,’ which meant the implementation of a number of projects with a certain liberating potential that envisaged the social progress and transformation of the physical and cultural landscape of Turkestan. These projects required the broad mobilization of Muslims to support the Bolsheviks against anti-Soviet national elites (that were primarily religious), in particular, the active participation of ‘progressive’ local elites, who had been operating within the framework of the reformist Muslim movement (*Jadids*)* and had already been proposing the modernization of Central Asian society since the 19th century.
- The liberation of all oppressed countries of the ‘East’ from the encroachments of the ‘West,’ which meant spreading the revolution beyond the Soviet borders, utilizing the example of Central Asia. The emphasis shifted from the vision of proletarian revolution in highly developed industrial nation-states to the anti-imperialist struggle in colonial and semi-colonial countries around the world.*

*See also: Box 7.2

*Wallerstein 1997: 7

Considering these particularities, scholars are cautious to define this period as colonial. Instead, they suggest describing it as post-colonial, especially in the early Soviet years. Adeeb Khaled’s idea of the “nationalization of the revolution in Uzbekistan by the *Jadids*” points in the same direction.*

*Khaled 2015: 90–116

In the **Soviet Union** of the **1930s**, the theory of ‘absolute evil’ was criticized, and its supporters were repressed. The search for the ‘positive’ in the Russian conquest of Turkestan began in tandem with the strengthening of the idea of Empire and the rise of Rusophile and Pan-Russian sentiment. Inspired by a quote from Karl Marx about the modernizing role of England in India, a new narrative was launched in 1929, which stated that the region’s Tsarist conquest provided the ‘positive attributes of Russian enlightenment’ and ‘social and economic progress for the backward peoples of Asia.’ The Stalinist government justified this as being a continuation of the ‘progressive activities of the Russian intelligentsia,’ rather than a direct heir of Tsarist policy. This revisionist theory proposed the notion of ‘the lesser evil’ (*меньшее зло*), which assumed that out of the many evils – localist feudalism, endless feuds between

local khanates and emirates, the capture of Turkestan by the Western imperialist powers and (or) the Ottoman Caliphate, subjugation under China, invasion and conquest of the Russian empire itself – Tsarist-Russian rule was the least problematic since, on the one hand, the Russian empire possessed more advanced social formations and links with the revolutionary movement, and on the other, ‘the Asians’ eventually preferred the Russian presence to the encroachments of other colonial powers.* Nonetheless, Soviet historians did not deny the revolutionary potential of the Central Asian proletariat and peasantry (*дежханство*),³ but at the same time did not assume that the subsequent ‘progress’ was possible without the Russian leadership. The right to introduce modernity was assigned to the ‘progressive’ Russians alongside the rejection of the policy of ethnic particularism and radical emancipation of populations at the edge of the empire (the discourse of nationalist progress began to fade into the background, since by 1934, the policy of ‘nativization’ (*коренизация* – *korenizatsiya*) was curtailed, and the right of nations to self-determination had not been discussed since 1925).

*Hauner 1992: 40; Горшенина 2007: 229

The promotion and ‘export’ of world revolution was removed from the Soviet agenda under the new Stalinist course. Radical expansionist internationalism gave way to the construction of ‘Socialism in one country’ under the leadership of an ‘older brother’ that, even in relation to the historical past, could not be held to any kind of account, let alone for colonial misdeeds. The USSR became increasingly like a new socialist empire with a colonial flavour, organized around a centre-periphery model. The anti-colonial discourse was gradually replaced by a discourse of co-optation.

Within this framework, the rehabilitation of the Russian nation and culture (1932-1938) occurred in conjunction with the propagation of the concept of the ‘friendship of peoples’ (*дружба народов*), which promoted the idea that “those who had suffered from oppression in the past no longer held grudges against their former exploiters (the Tsarist regime) nor the corresponding cultural paradigm (Russian culture).”^{*} In 1938, the paternalism of this policy became evident with the adoption of the law on the compulsory study of Russian for all the republics’ (non-Russian) schools.^{*} The large-scale program of Russification was intended to support the position of the Communist Party (which was dominated by Russian-speaking members), as well as to facilitate the management of the state.

*Skakov 2020

*Blitstein 2001

³ This specific term ‘*dekkhanstvo*’, whose roots go back to the Samanid period, defines the peasants of Central Asia.

World War Two strengthened the importance of the Russian people in the 1940s, since they constituted the first among equals, and the war also solidified the official political narrative of a single Soviet community through the unification of all republics. At the same time, the republics saw a rapid growth of local, native but Russian-speaking Soviet intelligentsia, who were associated with and owed much to 'the centre.' This process began with the temporary de-centralization of the Soviet polity during the period of military evacuation to the Central Asian hinterlands necessitated by Word War Two.

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 229n41

*Нечкина 1951

*Объединенная научная сессия
1959: 7–9, 39–41, 50–51

*Caffee 2020

*Халфин 1965

In the 1950s, the 'theory of the lesser evil' was transformed into the narrative of 'absolute good'.* In particular, in an open letter written in 1951, the historian Melitsa Nechkina criticized the 'lesser evil' theory, claiming that the (Tsarist) empire had lots of positive achievements.* This was an important ideological shift in the interpretation of the Russian presence in Turkestan, which was now regarded as a 'progressive process' which was deemed objectively beneficial to the local native population. The post-Stalinist United Sessions of Central Asian historians, which met in Tashkent in 1954, 1955, and 1959, officially declared that the annexation of non-Russian peoples to Russia had objectively progressive significance, despite the colonizing role of Tsarism. The alleged positive role of the Russian proletariat, together with the Bolshevik party, and the significance of the fraternal union with the oppressed and the poor of the peripheral republics were particularly emphasized, the role of which was not to be confused with the negative role of Tsarism, which "deliberately cultivated a patriarchal-feudal oppression."* Thus, at the moment of de-Stalinization, the conceptualization of the empire as a positive force came to the fore. Anti-colonial language faded from official Soviet rhetoric but nonetheless continued to be perpetuated in scholarly works, art, as well as in propaganda that was aimed outside of the Soviet space, influencing the formation of the global anti-colonial movement.*

The 1960s saw a complete rejection of terms such as 'colonization' as well as 'colonial,' 'military capture,' 'conquest' and 'colony.' They were replaced by 'entry,' 'inclusion,' 'accession' and 'national question,' reflecting the essence of the new approaches and the attempt to reinforce a positive image of the USSR, which was presented as a symbol of the "free and non-colonial Union of fraternal peoples" and the "solidarity of diverse workers in their class struggle against Tsarism."* From this point forwards, Soviet historiography, which had been preoccupied with the struggle against 'bourgeois falsifiers of history,' constructed certain binary oppositions

in its narrative of Soviet rule. It shunned the concepts of military conquest and annexation and instead emphasized the voluntarism and objective progressivity of the Soviet project, contrasting the 'progressive activity' of the Russian revolutionaries, democrats and proletarians against 'reactionary' Tsarism. This artificial binary juxtaposition, which was fundamentally dishonest in its understanding of the colonial order and in fact was no more than a derivative of the theory of 'friendship of peoples,' became the main point of discussion, creating a series of false logical associations. Such black-to-white shifts and *vice versa* (i.e. hopping from one position to another) were frequent but by then had lost the propagandist fervour from the previous decades.

The late-Soviet discourse of the 1970s and 1980s was marked by the Cold War and not characterized by integrity or consistency. The overall constant was the regular reference to the 'backwardness' of the Central Asian populations. According to the Soviet *doxa*,⁴ this derived in particular from the lack of important intellectual and cultural centres, and the absence of a viable economy and social-economic infrastructure prior to Soviet development efforts and social engineering, such as industrialization, electrification and the mass literacy campaigns. Like in Tsarist times the Soviet discourse emphasized that their regime was the best for the Central Asian peoples in the current stage of history, characterized by a clash and final struggle between two ideological systems. This ideological viewpoint dictated certain debates* about 'accession,' its economic, political and cultural progressive consequences, the 'reactionary' nature of certain events or characters of the Tsarist colonial administration, the value of the social-democratic and revolutionary workers' movements, as well as the international situation of Turkestan, which was 'rescued' by its unification with Russia. At the same time, the range of opinions remained very wide and sometimes there were works that produced sharply critical assessments of 'Tsarist colonialism' in the line and spirit of those of the 1920s.*

*Ахмеджанов 1995

*Кастельская 1980

Finally, the climate of the *perestroika* years (1986-1991) revealed the fragility of these ideological structures. Many members of the local⁵ intelligentsia, who were disillusioned with the Soviet system,

⁴ From the Greek δόξα, meaning popular belief.

⁵ The author uses 'local' here to refer to the titular Turkic and Tajik ethnicities (or 'nationalities' in Soviet parlance) of Central Asia. A titular nationality (*титульная национальность*) or nation (*нация*) corresponds to the dominant ethnic group in a given republic. This ethnic group's language and culture determine the state language policy and education system, and its name determines the name of the state (for example, in Uzbekistan, the titular nation is Uzbek, in Turkmenistan it is Turkmen, and so on).

turned to the opposition. At the same time, they reproduced, in accordance with Soviet attitudes and constructed Soviet identities, various versions of the self-Orientalization and self-Westernization theses that were deemed acceptable in a pan-Soviet culture.* The criticism of the Soviet reality that swept across the Central Asian republics was both anti-colonial and nationalistic. Despite it being the same rhetoric that was employed in the 1960s to criticize US and (or) Western European imperialism, the raising of the status of local languages was at the forefront of demands.* Anxiety about the appearance of so-called *mankurts* (people who had forgotten their cultural origins), famously described by Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov in his novel *The Day Lasts More Than One Hundred Years* (1980), permeated the political discussion against foreign domination, showing that all aspects of the so-called modernization programme were being called into question.* The local intelligentsia, who drew direct parallels with the plight of 'Third World' countries (mainly India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran) and for whom the national Soviet republic served as a reference point, expressed doubts about the possibility of equality within the Soviet Union itself, based on the dependency relationships between the centre and the periphery. However, since the Soviet authorities accepted and even encouraged such criticism, some scholars are inclined to determine the start of the postcolonial period with the opportunities of *perestroika*.

*Igmen 2012

*Kalinovsky 2018: 19–42

*Karagulova and Megoran 2011

2.2.2 "Western" Historiographical Perspectives in the Twentieth Century

In the US and Western Europe, research on Turkestan and Central Asia in general suffered altogether a less dramatic fate. During the Stalinist era and the Cold War, access to Soviet archives and libraries was simply denied to Western researchers, depriving them of direct contact with Central Asian source material, which affected both the number of specialists on the region and contributed to the simplification and schematization of the Western analysis of Turkestan.*

*Mackenzie 1967: 265n.3;
DeWeese 2002: 317–318

While the concept of '(voluntary) accession' was strengthened in the Soviet Union after World War Two, a 'national narrative' that was grounded in the 'national liberation' resistance of non-Russian peoples to the oppression of Tsarist administrators and Soviets flourished among Western historians, Sovietologists and emigrant specialists who worked primarily in the US, France and the UK.* They tended to view the Soviet Union as a colonial empire, not

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 233n51

unlike the other modern high-imperialist European empires, and considered the closest parallel to Central Asia to be the situations in India, Algeria, and Indonesia. This contention was supported by a series of factors, such as the relative religiosity of the population, the 'alien-ness' of the Bolshevik ideology to the non-Russian peoples, the commitment of local intelligentsia to their own 'traditional' languages, and the relatively superficial – despite all the efforts of the Soviets – spread of the Russian language among the population, etc.*

*Myer 2002

The few works that sympathetically described the results and impacts of Soviet modernization in the more 'backward' areas of the country were most frequently written by journalists or geographers and had little impact on Western historiography.* In general, disparate publications were not able to reverse the general scholarly disinterest in the history of the Central Asian region, which was marginal for Western research centres until the first specialized department (the Centre for Inner Asia Studies) opened at Indiana University in the early 1980s. In the first post-Soviet years, Western scholars, mainly Sovietologists and specialists in literature and oral traditions, published fairly politicized works on Central Asia.*

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 234n52

*DeWeese 2002

3. Central Asian Historiographic Trends after Independence

Today, the scholarly community that is writing the history of (post-)colonial Central Asia concur that it is fragmented and polarized – an assessment which is, by the way, also applied to work on the Caucasus and Siberia. Internal, personal and (or) ideological tensions among its members did not simply vanish at the end of the Cold War. The opposition of the Western and (post-)Soviet worlds and the notions of 'bourgeois' and 'progressive' scholarship did not evaporate at once. On the contrary, this inertial and deeply ideological confrontation has intensified, creating new conflicts, which are nonetheless no longer reducible to the opposition of the so-called different schools of scholarship.* The post-Soviet period, which is marked by a postcolonial polycentricity, possesses an even wider range of views on Said that are both favourable and more critical, denoting not merely differences of interpretation but a rift between postcolonial theories and decolonial ideas.

*Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 39n65

In other words, the boundaries between pro- and anti-Said, and between post-colonialists and de-colonialists, have become much more complex. Positions across the spectrum of this epistemological framework can be taken by all types of scholars: 'local' post-Soviet Russian and Central Asian experts (let us not forget an exist-

ing distinction between researchers from *korennye* (native) and (or) *titul'nye* (titular) nations, and *russkie* and (or) *russskogovoryashchie* (Russophone) scholars), post-Soviet specialists who emigrated to the West and were integrated into Western Academia, Western researchers who moved to Central Asia (usually for a very short time, for example, to work at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan's capital Nur-Sultan), Western scholars from Western universities, as well as Central-Eastern European scholars from universities in formerly socialist Central-Eastern European countries. The character of the knowledge produced is no longer directly linked to its place of production and to the origins of researchers, even if we can still see predominant intellectual orientations in different countries and environments. Now the belonging to a current of thought is mainly due to a scholar's personal history and intellectual choices.

3.1 Conservative Russian Assessments of Orientalism and the (Non-)colonial Russian/Soviet Past

The demise of the Soviet Union did not lead to the disappearance of the idea of Russian superiority in a specific 'civilizational' sphere involving the former 'Soviet East.' In 2008, Russia's 'near abroad' (*ближнее зарубежье* – *blizhneye zarubezh'ye*) was proclaimed a sphere of privileged interest. Simultaneously, several political projects intended to unify and re-integrate the post-Soviet space around Russia were formulated.* Being the third incarnation of its kind (after the Tsarist and Soviet projects), the post-Soviet 'civilizing mission' has not caused Orientalism to fade from some kinds of research in Russia.⁶ On the contrary, this project supports the negative stereotypes in the scholarly interpretation of postcolonial ideas* and permits statements like those made by Mikhail Piotrovsky, the director of Saint-Petersburg's Hermitage museum, in which he called for an "end to this postcolonial ideology and culture with its stance of contrition and repentance."* Moreover, while rejecting the heuristic potential of postcolonial and decolonial studies, some Russian scholars have reacted negatively to the decolonial ideas of their Central Asian colleagues (e.g. the com-

*Шелекпаев and Чокобаева 2020: 75

*Штейнер 2008; Serebriany 2012;
Панарин 2015

*Пиотровский 2020

⁶ For example, the Russian Foundation for Fundamental Research and the Russian Historical Society launched a call for a research project related to the centenary of the creation of the USSR. The call listed priority research strands like the "civilizing mission" of the Soviet project, the concept of the Soviet Union as a "special civilization," the concept of the "Soviet people" in theory and in practice, the experience of language policies, the role of the Russian language, and the Russians and representatives of other nations in Soviet history. For the text of the call (in Russian), see: РФФИ 2021.

memoration of the centenary of the 1916 Steppe Uprising in Central Asia and especially Kyrgyzstan.*

*Morrison et al. 2019

There is a wider social and political context that fuels this attitude. The growth of imperialist nostalgic moods about faded glory, propelled by official propaganda,* occurs in the context of sporadic attempts at territorial expansion, increased labour migration from the peripheral southern territories of the former Soviet Union to Russia, the stagnation and unravelling of economic complexes once connected to a centralized Soviet structure, the subordination of culture to 'neoliberal politics,' and so on. In the public sphere, imperial-nationalist rhetoric is being revived, along with an ethnonational hostility that verges on imperial chauvinism, xenophobia, nativism and racism.

*Dadabaev 2021a

In the current context, ideas of Russian nativism are becoming more and more present despite the fact that, politically speaking, Russia remains a federation in which the attitudes of its various regional and federal actors towards the past – and the instrumentalization of that past – is very complex. In the process of this nationalist revisionism – the most visible in the political and academic panorama of today's Russia – the history of the Russian-Soviet empire is construed predominantly as the history of the Russian nation and Russian culture. Historians are still predominantly influenced by the research of those who were trained in the late Soviet years and who remain oriented towards Soviet academic doctrines and beliefs. As a consequence, they find it difficult to acknowledge and face the colonial past. These researchers favour the late-Stalinist thesis of 'voluntary accession' and describe the 'increment' (expansion) of the imperial space without using terms like 'colony' or 'metropole'.

The 'increment' of the imperial space is referred to as a consequence of the abstract law of cultural and geographical determinism and the peculiarities of the international situation. The notion of the 'positive role of colonialism' regularly surfaces in official Russian discourses, without shocking or provoking a negative reaction either from historians or among the general public. Economic speculations that certain fringes of the Russian empire were in a better position than, say, central Russia, and that the 'huge costs' of this 'modernization' far exceeded the 'insignificant benefits' of co-existence form the main link in a series of arguments supporting the view of the 'progressive' nature of Russian expansion in Asia.* Russia's 'unique civilizational role,' which goes back to the traditions of both the Orthodox and Soviet search for a 'special path' also remains an argument in the historians' stockpile, in addition to the

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 240п66

notion that Russia had an important role in organizing a dialogue between different civilizations within a single state that had traces of universalism.

*Рейтблат 2020

Researchers refuse to accept the term 'colonialism' and downplay the specific features of the colonial conquest in modern times. Instead, they seek out a tactful narrative in which it is possible to combine 'conquest' or 'accession,' the 'progressive role of the Russians,' the 'objective benefit' from these events and the cult of 'pure research.' The argument that there is a regional disciplinary approach to 'the Orient' represented by the Caucasus, Central Asia, China, Japan, etc.* is presented as proof of the non-Orientalist nature of Russian and Soviet research and state administration, and repeats the aforementioned criticism of Said's ideas (cf. Part 1.4). At the same time, the term 'postcolonial research' has become in vogue among certain circles of scholars, but this often constitutes superficial rhetoric that adorns the opening paragraphs of publications, rather than a robust, sustained engagement with the question of postcolonialism in the Russian and Soviet context. A similar superficial understanding of postcolonial ideas can be also observed in the work of some researchers from Central Asia.

*Ремнев 2011: 190–191

This (neo-)Orientalist discourse also developed in the context of the disappearance of Central Asia from the collective nationalizing memory of Russia and is also facilitated by the dropping number of Russian specialists on the region (e.g. on Kazakhstan, see A. Remnev*). Everything that cannot be included in the new official notion of 'the Russian world' becomes 'foreign' and 'superfluous.' The most significant and dramatic episodes in the joint history of Central Asia and Russia (such as the battle of Geok-Tepe in 1881)⁷ are minimized in the process of the reconstruction of Russia's official history and historiography. The 'forgetting' or denial of the colonial past comes forward in the fact that in today's Russia there is no official anniversary commemoration date and virtually no commemorative monuments related to the Russian presence in Turkestan, and also in the fact that this topic receives minimal attention in the school curriculum. This reluctance to recall one's own colonial history or active denial of the very existence of colonies or colony-like polities in the Tsarist and Soviet context creates "new, neo-colonial, forms of co-dependence with the countries situated at the periphery of the empire."^{*}

*Abashin 2020

⁷ The disastrous defeat of the Turkmen forces at the fortress of Geok-Tepe (Blue Hill) in 1881 by Tsarist troops signified the last major battle before the annexation of the Turkmen lands. An earlier siege of the same fort in 1879 had resulted in Russian defeat and retreat.

3.2 The Contrasting and Shifting Positions of Central Asian Researchers

Orientalism, when understood as the reproduction of relations of dependency, retains its position in Central Asia. Due to the “transculturality of the contact zones,”* the voice of the formerly colonized, along with elements of anti-colonial discourse and nationalism, pierces through the Soviet model of history, albeit with varying success. In Central Asia, as in Russia, several ways of conceiving history coexist. The character of these approaches depends on the countries of Central Asia, as each republic now has its own trajectory defined by the specifics of the political administration, internal and external conjunctures and forces, and particular ideologies.* At the same time, in the neo-liberal context, the ways in which history is written also depend on the individual author, their personality, their ethnicity, their educational and training background and their inclusion (or aspiration to be included) in different academic networks that may require (self-)censorship. As a result, many historical narratives, constructed in the region over the last three decades, are ambivalent, easily alterable and contradictory in relation to each other.*

On the one hand, some scholars write history from a Soviet perspective, using Soviet rhetoric and truisms, while trying to adjust Russian and Soviet clichés to a specific political momentum. This is largely due to the region’s political and economic dependence on Russia, as well as Russia’s influence on the everyday life of the Central Asian states, which leads to fear, censorship and self-censorship in the interpretation of the past. A certain lack of intellectual and material resources (in particular, limited access to new scientific publications) should perhaps not be underestimated either. On the other hand, another group of Central Asian historians rewrite national history in a radical and problematic way, downplaying Russo-Soviet agency in the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time, they regularly review their attitude to Russo-Soviet ‘colonialism.’ In their works, one can observe the containment of the colonial era to the parameters of the Tsarist period then its subsequent extension to 1991.

The degree to which the Tsarist and Soviet regimes are deemed to have colonized (in particular, the representation of the Soviet era as a ‘national tragedy’ and (or) ‘occupation’ or as part of national history) is dependent on the current relations with Russia and on the strength of political pressure from the authorities, who impose a discourse of legitimization of their national and international narratives on historians. Regardless of these internal oppositions

*Pratt 1992

*Cooley and Heathershaw 2017; Rico and Frigerio 2019

*Dudoignon and Komatsu 2003-2006; Amsler 2007; Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 236-238n56-60; Adams 2010; Laruelle 2017; Шелекпаев and Чокобаева 2020

among the intellectual currents of the republics, there are several common features that characterize the present historiography of the region. The chronological breakdown that was created in Soviet times, the adherence to Russian-language sources, and the specific, often purely factual manner of presenting material that is focused 'objectivism' are retained.

Frequently, they do not focus on local actors, but on the actions of Russian agents, presenting themselves not as subjects of history, but rather as objects, or even victims (see R.M. Masov about Tajikistan; and other analyses).^{*} Even the appearance of new facts does not change the Moscow-centric vision of history or the doctrines of the Soviet academy, due to its relative isolation from world trends.^{*} The problem persists in the way in which arguments are constructed, their quality and interests, their political implications, self-censorship in some cases, etc.

These narratives are not static and are directly influenced by the political discourse of the country's leadership and opinion-makers aligned with them. For example, in Uzbek historiography, ideological attitudes have changed several times, from sharply negative in the wake of independence to almost positive following the 'new course' under the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. After the demise of the Soviet Union, Uzbek historians almost unanimously spoke of 'Russo-Soviet colonialism' (see also the narrative line in the *Museum of the Memory of the Victims of Repression in Tashkent*), focusing on the most painful subjects and denying or concealing the existence of any positive contributions from the Soviet government, including the creation of modern state institutions in Central Asia between 1924 and 1936. At the same time, 'traditional culture' has been presented as superior to 'Soviet culture.'^{*} This criticism was accompanied by a collection of facts no less biased than those presented in Soviet times, and an amnesia towards the fact that colonization was not possible without the assistance of the local population or at least certain categories thereof.^{*} The increase in the number of publications in Uzbek has also been a response to assert the value of Uzbekistan's own national Academy and the desire to escape Russian framing and the Russian 'lens' (many Russian researchers do not read Central Asian languages easily).

In the context of the fight against Islamists and during the thaw in Uzbek-Russian relations, the tone of Uzbek historians' writing softened. They re-evaluated the character of the Andijan uprising⁸

^{*}Масов 1991; Bregel 1996; Abashin 2015: 360–364; Масанов et al. 2007; Шнирельман 2015; Шелекпаев and Чокобаева 2020: 81–85

^{*}Никитенко and Шагалина 2016

^{*}Adams 2005

^{*}Bregel 1996; Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 238n 62; Cameron 2018

⁸ A short-lived rebellion against Tsarist rule in the region of the abolished Kokand khanate on 29 May (17 May *old style*) 1898.

of 1898 and the Basmachi movement⁹ (*басмачество* – *bas-machestvo*) that had previously been described as national liberation movements exclusively. Even certain positive consequences from Central Asia's incorporation in Russia were recognized. With the thawing of political relations between Russia and Uzbekistan initiated by Mirziyoyev, any discussion of the colonial past, as well as the use of the term 'conquest,' became undesirable, so as not to offend the new-old partner. This shift in tone and the critical publications written during the first years of independence that were put down to 'growing pains'* did not greatly advance the analysis of 'colonial problems.' Uzbek historiography is mostly unaltered by postmodern and poststructuralist criticism, and draws its intellectual ideas both from the legacy of Muslim progressives of the early-20th century (can this be seen as 'de-Westernization?') and from Soviet methodologies.* It thus remains true to the Soviet tradition of selecting past events that can be regarded as a precursor to or justification for the present.

*Алимова 2004

*DeWeese 2016

These fluctuations and this dependence on political circumstances are also valid for the intellectual elites of the other republics. The pre-electoral speech of the new head of state of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev about the history of Kazakhstan, for example, was riddled with anti-Russian attacks, victimhood discourse, scare-mongering about an external enemy and references to and glorifications of the country's ancient history.* These attitudes will undoubtedly lead to a new upsurge in research with strong anti-colonial rhetoric. Despite the use of elements of anti-colonial discourse in the construction of new collective and individual identities in the former Soviet republics, the process of decolonization is proving to be inconsistent. 'Empire' is viewed increasingly clearly as an 'absolute good,' even if it is projected to the very distant past (for example, the Timurid empire) or to the near future, which of course has not yet come to pass.

*Токаев 2021

The Tsarist and Soviet periods are now often off the radar and off the mental map of researchers in the region itself. It is difficult for postcolonial theories to fit into this particular context, because their criticism is aimed not only at colonialism of the past, but also at national projects in the post-colonial space of the present. This makes them inconvenient for some Central Asian researchers, mostly advocates of strong nation-states with strong rulers (so-called *государственники* – *gosudarstvenniki*), who are not

⁹ A set of complex anti-Soviet insurrections (1917-1926), see also footnote 6 in chapter 14.

willing to question and criticize the national canon and the current stage of de-colonization connected with the formation of independent states by former Soviet elites once virtually at the behest of 'the centre.' The understanding that colonial history continues into the present has not found its way into scholarly and political discourse. At the same time, the problem of choosing the official languages to be used in the Central Asian countries – a clearly postcolonial issue – became more acute between 2019 and 2020.*

*Ulko 2020

3.3 The 'New Wave' in the Context of Old and New Divisions

The opening up (albeit momentary and incomplete) of the Russian and Central Asian archival repositories contributed to the formation of a cohort of researchers from all horizons by the early 2000s who came to associate their work with these 'archival revolutions.' These researchers, who are mainly American, European and Japanese but often know or understand the various Central Asian languages, have made local actors more visible, thanks to a new corpus of primary sources originating both from the archives of the colonial administration and from texts by local authors.* Cautious attempts to apply postcolonial theories have partly influenced Russian and Central Asian approaches.* Postcolonial ideas or their elements were adopted as a theoretical framework mainly by researchers who are in close contact with the Western Academy, despite the fact that the early post-Soviet years were characterized by a total rejection of the socialist legacy and a reverence for the newly-discovered Western, liberal school of thought.

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 253n89;
Котюкова 2016

*Morrison 2011; Adams 2011;
Kudaibergenova 2016

The ensuing brain drain to the US, Western-Central Europe and some other countries also helped to contrast and transform the understanding and methodology of the Soviet and post-Soviet worlds. In other words, this new generation of post-Soviet scholars is constituted of those who have been trained in pro-Western universities in Russia (e.g. *European University in St. Petersburg*) or Western-inspired universities in Central Asia (e.g. *Nazarbayev University*,* *American University in Central Asia* in Bishkek), have studied in Europe, Japan or the United States, or have joined Western academia as professors, researchers or lecturers. This process weakened the universalist claims of Russian Oriental studies, since Central Asian researchers' direct contact with Western academia and the ability to directly search for answers in Western sources made the tradition of the Russian and Soviet mediation between the 'backward peripheries' and modernity redundant.*

*Laruelle 2019

*Tlostanova 2020

Their publications have contributed to shifts in thematic focus

and, more importantly, intellectual initiatives. The analysis of the histories of Central Asia and Russia in the context of postcolonial world history as well as the application of methods that are used to analyse European empires and colonialism seem in their view to be an appropriate and logical approach.*

These studies stem from different cases, with varying degrees of attention to theoretical aspects, history of dissemination of these ideas, and comparisons with other colonial practices. They have addressed different disciplinary fields, from archaeology and ecology* to gender activism (*ShTAB/Femshtab* – ШТАБ/Фемштаб, the *Feminist School for Theory and Activism* in Bishkek, or the LGBT Organization Labrys Kyrgyzstan*). One of the most important features of these new publications is the use of oral history and non-Russian archives.*

Scholars have also analysed terminological aspects: for example, the meaning of the toponym 'Central Asia'* or the validity of the definition 'post-Soviet' among the generations born after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.* Starting from the idea of colonial mimicry,* they have questioned the agency of local elites, mechanisms of knowledge production, the manipulation of memories, or gender issues.¹⁰ They have attempted to identify connections among modernity, postcoloniality, decoloniality and (both 'bad' and 'good') nationalism.* There are also examples of new approaches from transnational-global history and comparisons between the Tsarist and Soviet experiences and other colonial and postcolonial countries.* In this cosmopolitan context, as of 2020, there is a strong self-reflection on the role of post-colonial or decolonial 'local' experts in the system of knowledge production.* At the same time postcolonial theory is sometimes used to explain complex situations with simplistic linear patterns.*

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 251n88

*Gorshenina et al. 2019; Sharipova 2019

*FB ШТАБ/Фемштаб; FB Labrys

*Sartori 2016; Ab Imperio 2018; Сартори and Шаблей 2019

*Gorshenina 2012; 2014

*Ibañez-Tirado 2014

*Bhabha 1994: 122

*Adams 2005; Tlostanova 2020

*Beissinger and Young 2002 ; Kandiotti 2002; Khalid 2006; Levi 2015; 2017; 2020; Mark et al. 2020; FB PoC

*Кудайбергенова 2019

*Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen 2016

4. Sensitive Issues and the Diametrically Opposed Propositions for their Resolution

4.1 Orientalism and the 'Distinctiveness' of the Russian Empire

In addition to the varying discourses about the (non-)coloniality of the Russian presence in Turkestan (cf. Part 2.2), researchers from

¹⁰ For the agency of 'local' elites, see: Heathershaw et al. 2018; Uyama 2020; Бисенова and Мукашева 2020; for mechanisms of knowledge production, see: Rottier 2004; Ремнев 2011; Бисенова and Медеуова 2016; for the manipulation of memories: Dadabaev 2021b; Bekus 2021; Забыть и вспомнить 2021; and for gender issues, consult: Northrop 2004; Edgar 2006; Kandiotti 2007; Kamp 2009; Kane and Gorbenko 2016; Шелекпаев 2020; Шерстюков 2020.

different horizons often argue that the theoretical framework of Orientalism cannot be used to understand the Russian-Turkestan dynamics due to the 'distinctiveness' of the Tsarist empire. Adherents to this **non-coloniality thesis** give the following reasons as to why:

- The 'Asian' nature and character of Russia, its history and religion, sharply distinguishes it from the Catholic, Protestant and Enlightened West, a distinction which is reinforced by its technical and political 'backwardness' in comparison with Western-Central Europe and its own late transition from pre-modern to European modernity. Accordingly, it is doubtful that the Romanov empire could truly count as an 'Orientalizer.'
- The primarily continental nature of the Russian empire and the geographical indivisibility of the colony and the metropole.
- The specific features of the conquest of Central Asia, such as the 'accidental move eastward,' submission to 'fate,' and the existence of petitions from the local population that requested 'voluntary' inclusion into the empire.
- A more 'humane,' 'fraternal' and 'educational' attitude to the local population (in particular, the absence of racial discrimination and Christian proselytism, the prohibition of the slave trade), that permitted the creation of 'their own Orient' and the improvement of the living conditions of the indigenous inhabitants of the region.
- The assimilation and acculturation of the Asian elites into the Russian aristocracy, which eventually transformed into a cosmopolitan supra-ethnic elite.
- The significant numerical presence of a Russian(-speaking) population in Central Asia.
- Turkestan's eventual 'unprofitability' for Russia.

These arguments, which are used by many scholars as a refusal to recognize the heuristic contribution of the concept of Orientalism, are refuted through a very different understanding of Russia's role. The main idea behind this opposing position is that Russian history is comparable to other colonial powers, both European and Asian (e.g. Japan or China) and, accordingly, can be fully analysed through a framework of postcolonial ideas.*

Those who consider the **Russian coloniality thesis** formulate their arguments as follows:

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 213п6-8; Collier et al. 2003; Cronin 2015; Levi 2017; Keller 2019; Morrison 2020

- The Western European Enlightenment influenced the formation of modern, secular features of Russia through the selective adoption of elements of Western modernity within its imperial power-knowledge nexus, while at the same time maintaining a distance from the West.
- The imitative nature of the imperial Russia's pursuits which constantly reproduced existing Western-Central European models, and Russia's participation on equal terms with Great Britain and the Chinese empire in the colonial division of Central Asia.
- Russia's desire to conquer Central Asia in order to change its purportedly lowly position in the world political system, imposing the role of the 'backward East' on it and defining its own place as a strong imperialist power comparable to and equal to the modern European empires.
- The military nature of the capture of the khanates and emirates, which provoked resistance of the local populations that led to military rule and several major uprisings.
- Large distances (be it steppes, rather than seas) separate the major centres of the empire – Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, Kiev, etc. – from the southern periphery. There were also strongly marked differences between the Central Asian world and Russia at the levels of demography, geography, politics, religion and social structures.
- The spread of imperialism through railways which were a successful equivalent of the steamships in the European maritime empires.
- A sense of superiority over the 'Orient' because of Russia's Orthodox Christianity and its partially European identity. This despite Russia's so-called 'special affinity' with 'its own East', its 'hybridity' and the proximity of Russian Orientalists to their subject matter.
- The assimilation of local elites and the Russification of the population, which acquired a totalizing nature in the Soviet period (the various relocation and resettlement programs of Slavic populations into the region were indeed meant to Russianize non-Russian areas and territories). While no Christian proselytizing took place, there were policies of transforming or limiting the systems of *Sharia* Islamic law and *Adat* customary law.*

*Сартори and Шаблей 2019; Sartori and Abdurasulov 2020

- The establishment of new forms of political and economic dependence and hierarchical management structures in the conquered regions, designed and developed by representatives of another culture, using the application of modern sciences and administrative methods. After assuming a leadership function, Russian administrators introduced structural inequalities: the native Turkic and Tajik populations had limited rights compared to the inhabitants of the metropole (which was explained away by the 'superiority' of Russians over people from the 'Orient' or their 'underdevelopment' or 'unfavourable' cultural or racial characteristics in contrast to Russians). In other words, local candidates were only allowed to occupy lower-level positions, all reforms were initiated and granted from Saint Petersburg only, and in any election native candidates (*инородцы* – *inorodtsy*) were proportionally given fewer seats than Russian candidates, so that their vote primarily counted for less. Nonetheless, the inhabitants of Central Asia had some agency, which forced the Russian administration to adapt to local conditions, in particular, they had to allow the Russian border and territorial management to be organized with the input of local nomads and traditional authorities.
- The emerging scholarly approach to the study of Oriental peoples in the fields of Ethnography, Linguistics, and Archaeology was interlinked in Russia's imperial rule. Just like Western researchers, Russian researchers worked (studied, catalogued and classified) in order to facilitate the process of integration into an autocratic empire.

In spite of the oppositions between these two stances, a number of researchers have developed an understanding that it is possible to speak about a specific Russian Orientalism in a way that takes account of the Russian specifics and as well as any nuances or shades. Of course, it should be recalled that debates about Russian colonialism, which gave rise to a specific Russian Orientalism, derived from the opposition between a 'greater' or 'lesser' evil as well as from the perspective that heralds the alleged 'uniqueness' of the Russian case. Most of the works, following in the wake of global trends, analyse postcolonial issues through the prism of empire (cf. concepts 'New Imperial History,' 'Imperial Turn' and 'Imperiology'), while highlighting the differing colonial situations of the Russian/Soviet East.* Among them, in particular, are several books that analyse Russian Orientalism in a similar way to Said i.e. in terms of the production of knowledge and representations.** They

*Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 29–30n35, 37–39, 41, 52n109; Clem 1992; Campbell 2017; Keller 2019

**Meaux 2010; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010; Рахимова 2013; Алексеев 2015; Чач 2016; Gutmeyr 2017; Volkov 2018; Issiyeva 2021

do not always ally in their conclusions or in the manner in which they employ postcolonial theories, but they reveal a complex picture of Orientalism as an academic tradition, political practices, or various interpretations on the theme of the 'East': literary, theatrical, musical, and artistic.*

The most significant of these works is Vera Tolz's *Russia's Own Orient*,* which draws a link between the Orientalists of the Russian school (headed by Baron Viktor Rosen) and Said's theories. Connecting the first stages of anti-colonial criticism with the Russian Orientalists, Tolz describes the paradoxical and evasive nature of Russian Orientalism, which was formed under the strong influence of the West but was also led by Orientalists who were themselves of Eastern origin. This Orientalism, which at the same time reaped the benefits of Russian expansionism and criticized it, created its 'own-own-East' in which objects and subjects operated in extremely close proximity to each other. This did not prevent it from being involved in the reorganization of the Eastern peripheries, where it was constantly torn between asserting Russian superiority and favouring positive discrimination towards minorities.

Alexander Etkind's book, *Internal Colonisation*,* and subsequent studies of the internal vector of Russian capitalism* attempt to demonstrate that the empire did not only exploit ethnic 'others,' but also 'their own people' (cf. the nature of the relationships between the Russian elites and the Russian popular masses). However, these attempts to apply existent Western theories of social Orientalism to Russian material have provoked sharp criticism.* According to these critiques, the intellectual approaches exclude the initial stages of military capture ('external colonization') from their analyses, replacing them with an internal counterpart ('internal colonization') which is based on the very controversial idea of 'no man's land.' Bringing this theory to its logical conclusion allows not only the colonization of the Russian masses by the elites, but also the colonization of the latter by 'the West.' The proponents of these ideas refer to the "strategy of 'border indeterminacy' that Russia historically used for expansion (...) and the colonialist tendency towards the 'non-differentiation of the external and internal.'" They argue that their work was not limited to just one internal aspect, calling for the need to study both vectors of colonial expansion.* However, even if fully thought through, this theory has limited application in relation to Central Asia, which was the most 'colonial' edge of the Tsarist and Soviet empires.*

*Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 32n43

*Tolz 2011

*Etkind 2011

*Эткинд et al. 2012

*Morrison 2013; 2015; Uffelmann 2019; Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 213n5

*Эткинд et al. 2012: 9, 24-25

*Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 249n85

4.2 The Most-heated Debate: 'Soviet' as Neo-imperialist, Colonial, Anti-colonial, Post-colonial or Postcolonial?

The Soviet period remains one of the blind spots in modern post-colonialism, provoking controversies at the academic and political levels. Attempts to apply postcolonial theories to the Soviet period produced conflicting results and added to the existent possible readings (Marxist or nationalist) of this era. For researchers of all persuasions, the important question is whether one can talk about the Tsarist and Soviet periods in Central Asia in terms of continuity or difference and this itself depends on how one defines 'Soviet.' The problem of periodization is particularly evident in relation to the periods at the beginning and at the end of the Soviet era, often defined as anti-colonial and post-colonial rather than colonial.*

One position that insists on a **Soviet 'rupture'** by emphasizing the specific features of Soviet society proposing a more specific definition that would take into account the following factors:

- The use of anti-colonial rhetoric in Soviet ideology and post-colonial transition within the early Soviet polity itself.
- The rejection of the Tsarist empire's hybrid and exceptionalist 'civilizing' project, which was branded as tainted by 'Great Russian chauvinism.'
- The lack of institutionalized superiority, according to racial criteria, of Russians over other Soviet ethnic groups.
- The spread of the same 'colonial' technologies of subordination and modernization on both the Russian and the Central Asian peasants and workers.
- The equal powerlessness of Russians and non-Russians *vis-à-vis* the repressive apparatus of the state.
- The co-optation of the post-colonial discourse during *pere-stroika*.
- The demise of the Soviet Union which occurred not as a result of anti-colonial struggles for independence (with the exception of the Baltics) but following top-down decisions taken at 'the centre' itself.

By staying on these positions one of the most significant differences between the Soviet regime and the Tsarist regime was the policy of nurturing a national consciousness among non-Russians. From these deliberate and calculated efforts from Moscow – the core of the empire – modern nations were created with all the lit-

*Akiner 1998; Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 215n10; Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 33n47, 34n49; Khalid 2007; Pianciola and Sartori 2007; Teichman 2007

eral and symbolic attributes of national statehood.* The existence of ‘the modern mobilizational state’ and the specific policies of the ‘affirmative action empire’ bringing **modernization** and **modernity*** is particularly evidenced in economic indicators that show: the growth of industry; general electrification; an increase in the number of hospitals, schools and kindergartens per capita; the training of native personnel in various fields; the development of national culture and language in the republics; the involvement of indigenous people in party institutions, state and administrative power not only at the local level, but to some extent also in the centre; the universal right to participate in elections; and finally, access to all social services like pensions, free secondary education and medical care. However, the question of the modernity of the Soviet Union, and indeed of imperial Russia, remains debatable.*

This position is also supported by the **self-identification of many (ethnic) Central Asians**, who – with the exception of nationalistic and religious intellectuals¹¹ – are not ready to accept the definition of the Soviet period as colonial, nor recognize themselves as ‘formerly colonized.’ This also applies to members of the younger generation who were born after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but who do not define themselves “in opposition to the Soviet legacy.”* The anti-colonial discourse that was created in the 1920s and cultivated with periodic intensity by the Soviet government (increasing significantly during *perestroika*), particularly for the formation of military-political alliances in foreign policy, exerted a great influence here (cf. Part. 2.2.1).

This discourse was also facilitated by the influential trope of Western Slavistics about **Russia’s not-entirely-European nature**, which enabled Russia to be removed from the sphere of fully-fledged European colonial powers (later to become the ‘First World’) that were in undisputed opposition to the ‘East’ (as part of the postcolonial ‘Third World’). This position was reinforced by the perception of the Soviet Union (and the Soviet-aligned socialist countries in Central-Eastern Europe) as the ‘Second World,’ whose geopolitical status as a country of emerging communism was recognized as an official counterbalance to imperialism due to their sharp ideological opposition. It also led to a number of researchers

*Roy 2000; Haugen 2003; Hirsch 2005; Bergne 2006; Edgar 2006; Gorshenina 2012

*Martin 2001; Khalid 2006, 2015

*AHR 2011; Споря о модерности 2016

*Laruelle 2009; 2019: 15

¹¹ In 1989–1991, the nationalist movements of *Rastokhez* (*Ҳаракату мардумии / Растохез* – ‘Revival’) and the *Islamic Renaissance Party* in Tajikistan (*Ҳизби наҳзати исломии Тоҷикистон/Партия исламского возрождения Таджикистана*), and *Birlik* (*Берлик/Единство* – ‘Unity People’s Movement’) in Uzbekistan carried out anti-colonial strategies and discourses.

seeking to describe Soviet society as postcolonial in contrast to the colonial Tsarist regime, because according to the official ideology, the Soviet polity implemented the decolonization of the Central Asian peoples, freeing them simultaneously from the local feudal system and from the Tsarist colonial empire (cf. Part 2.2.1).

Arguments about the (non-)coloniality of the Soviet regime depend on whether it is viewed as a modernist social state or an empire. Of course, this contrast is overstated, because the fact that the Soviet Union as a social state pursued a policy of economic and social modernization and used anti-imperialism as the main component of its ideology does not preclude it from being an empire. As John Heathershaw* observes, this ambiguity of the union, defined both as an empire and a modernizing state, is reflected in the definitions given by scholars, such as “affirmative action empire,”* “empire of nations”* and “empire-state.”**

*Heathershaw 2010

*Martin 2001

*Hirsch 2005

**Beissinger 1996, 2006

So, much depends here on how one understands the **concept of ‘empire,’** which at one end of the spectrum, can be defined as the “direct administration of different communities from an imperial centre.”* This of course does not correspond to the Soviet principle of sovereign equality. At the other end of the spectrum, however, the Soviet Union can be understood as empire due to the existence of *de facto* structures, mechanisms and practices that legitimized relations of dependence within a centralized structure and the constant tendency towards territorial expansion and interventionism throughout the Soviet period (for example, the ‘Soviet-Polish War’ of 1919-1921, the secret protocols to the ‘Molotov-von Ribbentrop Pact’ of 1939 and subsequent first Soviet annexation of the Baltics, the ‘Soviet-Finnish Winter War’ of 1939-1940, the formation of the ‘socialist bloc’ or ‘Eastern bloc’ in 1947-1955, the more covert intervention in the Ethiopian-Somali ‘Ogaden War’ in 1978-1979, and the intervention and war in Afghanistan in 1979-1989).

*Watson 1992: 16

That is why the purportedly non-colonial policy of ‘affirmative action’ can also be regarded as a **manifestation of colonialism** in the context of a social state, which was implemented through national (social) policy versus anti-colonial resistance.* Under the Soviet regime, a civilizing mission with several differences and a change in official rhetoric was repackaged in the Marxist-Leninist formulation of the progressive role of the Russian working class and revolutionary intelligentsia guiding ‘the backward East’ along the path towards socialism and communism. The interaction with the Western periphery, in particular with the Baltic republics, in which Moscow saw itself as ‘the East,’ was built on a different equation, and the variation in the relationship of the mother country

*Northrop 2004; Pianciola 2008; 2009; Borbet and Gorshenina 2014b; bib. ref. 33n 47; Kassymbekova 2016; Бисенова and Медеуова 2020; Шерстюков 2020

with different colonies also undermines the concept of affirmative actions.

The very rhetoric of the **'enlightenment of the backward'** (which was one of the key points in the construction of socialism and social policy) reproduced classic examples of Orientalist discourse that justified the annexation of regions to Russia and its integration into the Soviet polity after the 1917 revolution and the civil war. Within the framework of this discourse, the Bolsheviks had to play the role of mediator between the 'unenlightened' indigenous population of the peripheries and the universal values of 'global' civilization. "Socialist construction (the physical transformation of space) and complex cultural initiatives (the development of mental space)" were the specific practices that were supposed to help "'backward' peoples 'catch up' with the flows of history and become independent builders of a communal socialist building."^{*} This dual discourse – the propagation of an idea of emancipation under a structure of domination – was adopted by local researchers and politicians, who used it to try to push the centre towards more proactive policies for the development of the national peripheries. They recognized themselves as dependent on 'the big or elder brother' and, where necessary, they were prepared to self-orientalize as a means to attain their goals.¹² The construction of a national culture could only be realized through the use of the institutions of socialism, Soviet rhetoric and the acknowledgement of inequality.

*Skakov 2020

In the same vein, the Soviet Union's foreign paternalistic policy towards the countries of the 'Socialist East' (e.g. Mongolia from 1924 to 1991, Tuva from 1926 to 1944, China from 1949 to 1962, Afghanistan from 1978 to 1989, South Yemen between 1967 and 1990, etc.) sought to guide them, as an elder brother is supposed to do, along the path of progress.^{*} The Soviet government provided an important role to Central Asia in the international information-propaganda efforts. From the 1950s, the Soviet Foreign Ministry increasingly appointed specialists from Central Asia to important diplomatic posts who were, in the words of Artemy Kalinovsky, a kind of Soviet poster boys for modernity and anti-imperialism.^{*} In the 1960s and 1970s, Central Asia, whose once so 'backward'

*Applebaum 2019

*Kalinovsky 2020

¹² A very illustrative example was given to the author by Pavel Aleekseyev (recording, 01 August 2020): "On the occasion of the arrival of party functionaries in Gorny Altai, the local Altai poet (who graduated from the Communist University of the Toilers of the East) was routinely disguised as a shaman and staged a *kamlanie* performance. After the departure of the Moscow bosses, this poet reverted to his cultivated status in respect to the local population. The metropolitan and regional press also promoted and affirmed the role of the Siberian peripheries as exotic open-air museums of savagery."

*Kirasirova 2011; Tasar 2011

peoples had already purportedly made an accelerated transition to modernity while preserving their cultural heritage, was increasingly presented as a model and springboard for the spread of Soviet influence into the South and East.* The pursuits of the local Orientalists, even those that were working on the most 'classical' forms of historical-philological analysis became a symbol of the favourable social, cultural, economic and political conditions created by the Soviet government for the Central Asian intelligentsia. That is why, even without touching on "issues of economic development, political conditions or international politics," these pursuits were used as a tool in the USSR's anti-imperialist struggle, becoming a kind of continuation of the Soviet nationalities policy.*

*Kalinovsky 2020

*Suny and Martin 2001

At the same time, the government, with the help of researchers, established a system of grading 'national development,' **constructing a hierarchy** of tribe-people-nationality-nation that had implied differences in the level of autonomy.* Since the 'nativization' programme (*korenizatsiya*, that had been an important element of negative discrimination) of the 1920s had ensured the creation of new Soviet national elites, the Soviet government cultivated a kind of national consciousness compatible with the Soviet socialist modernity project and official multiculturalism, which implied creolization rather than racial and ethnic segregation. Nevertheless, the presence of the so-called 'fifth line' in every Soviet passport, which indicated ethnicity ('nationality' or *национальность*) within the framework of Soviet citizenship, could have negative consequences in the lives of Soviet people in certain situations.

The inevitable, voluntary melting (*слияние* – *slivanie*) of all the Soviet peoples into one single socialist nation with a clear dominant Russian language and culture was declared as the ultimate goal. Reforms and repressions under the banner of the fight against 'backwardness' did not lead to the equalization of social space, but strengthened the structural inequality between the elites and ordinary people both in the centre and in the peripheries, creating a quasi-classist social system. Russian nationalism, total Russification, Islamophobia, racism and progressivism, which led to the violent destruction of the former way of life, as well as anti-nomadic policies for sedentism and the introduction of 'European' (or at least the Russian interpretation of European) norms and rules of everyday life contributed to this new social system.*

*Pianciola 2009; Kudaibergenova 2013; Абашинов 2015; Мамедов and Шаталова 2016; Dadabaev and Komatsu 2017; Teichmann 2017: 35-40; Kindler 2018; Thomas 2018; Аманжолова 2019; Tlostanova 2020

Meanwhile, in the early years, the Bolsheviks reproduced the main features of the classical colonial empire. From 1918 until the 1920s, they presided over the military conquest of the territories of the Kokand (Turkestan) autonomy, the Bukhara emirate and the

Khiva khanate, as well as the destruction of the popular Basmachi insurgent movement and their adjoining peasant army of Russian settlers, initiating reprisals against the political elites of the region in the 1920s and 1930s. Later, the Soviet government recreated several attributes of colonial rule, but with the notable difference that instead of adopting a dead-end agrarian colonization, which had provoked popular unrest against the Tsarist administration, it favoured industrial colonization. This could more effectively ensure the mass migration of the population from European Russia and Ukraine as well as the more speedy and thorough integration of the indigenous population (although most of the local workers were still employed in the agricultural sector, which intensified the colonial nature of industry). This framework set out a planned economy and an inter-republican division of labour through the development in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan of cotton monocultures, which were perceived as “adjuncts of agriculture and raw materials.”*

*Obertreis 2017

Thus, efforts to transform ‘underdeveloped’ peoples in each nation took place in the context of the colonial economy of the state with a centralized administrative structure. These efforts involved numerous organs of external control that operated in parallel with the national authorities¹³ as well as through the political inequality between the ‘centre’ and the regions (all decisions were made in Moscow; as a rule, the second Secretary of the Central Committee in local Communist parties was appointed by ‘the centre’). In this sense, the Soviet Union was not quite typical, but nonetheless represented a continuation of the Russian empire, and did constitute a colonial system. Moreover, the main lines of the regime’s policy resembled the European countries’ ‘civilizing mission,’ with all the flaws of modernity and modern colonialism, but in the form of state socialism. From this point of view, the USSR is perceived as “another recolonization of a society that had previously been captured and subordinated to a different modernity/colonialism, but at the same time was taught to think that socialist modernity was a form of decolonization.”*

*Tlostanova 2020

However, according to Kalinovsky,* this thesis of a Soviet-style decolonization, along with the Soviet nationalities policy, was called into question at the time of the tentative de-Stalinization that Nikita Khrushchev started in the 1950s, which nonetheless did not result in any anti-colonial uprisings. The result of comparing the arguments of these two positions leads to an understanding of

*Kalinovsky 2020

¹³ For example, the Turkestan and Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b), the Central Asian Economic Council, the KGB and troops from the Central Asian military district.

*Heathershaw 2010

the Soviet version of colonialism as extremely complex and ambivalent. This modernizing and multinational state with a Euro-centric imperial aspect was, in the words of John Heathershaw, “more or less foreign or domestic over different spaces, times and media,”* and one which still requires a robust and detailed assessment.

4.3 The Decolonization of the Post-Soviet, Post-socialist and Post-colonial Space

*Almaty 2011

*Müller 2018

It is even more difficult to explain the simultaneously post-Soviet and postcolonial experience through classical postcolonial theory, which does not take into account the problems of post-socialism and post-Sovietism, and Central Asia’s belonging (or not) to ‘the global South,’* see also the singular proposal to include the region in the “global East.”* Its analysis requires special critical optics that must “take into account the broader relations of dependence and post-dependence that are associated with the critical analysis of modernity as a set of epistemological attitudes and patterns created for its self-legitimization and reproduction.”*

*Mignolo 2007; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2007; Tlostanova 2018; 2020

*Breed et al. 2020

*Müller 2019; RSR 2020

Even if we dismiss the terms ‘post-post-colonial’ as historically inadequate, ‘post-Soviet’ as irrelevant for generations born after 1988-1991, and ‘post-socialist’ (which continues to be used*) probably as a non-viable concept that is only valid in relation to regional studies,* the modern inhabitants of Central Asia are simultaneously post-colonial, post-Soviet and post-socialist ‘Others.’ They are associated with the peripheries not only in relation to the former metropole, but also on the scale of **global coloniality**.* As Madina Tlostanova writes, these “individuals and groups are often products of a specific Soviet creolization, lack monoethnic cultural roots, were born and raised in the Russian (imperial) language continuum and within the framework of the late Soviet intellectual culture that was oriented towards the West.”*

*Spivak et al. 2006; Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib. ref. 34n49, 45n89; Djagalov 2020; Mbembe 2021

*Tlostanova 2020

The roots of the creation of these specific societies go back to the 1920s policy of ‘nativization’ (*korenizatsiya*) but its main attributes were formed between the 1950s and 1970s, including for the intellectual elites. From the mid-1940s, when Soviet scholarly traditions were strengthened in Central Asia (through the creation of academies of science and the opening of universities and institutes), the focus of regional study gradually shifted to the republics. The centre, represented by the ideological party leadership and leading institutions, reserved the right to make final decisions over theoretical articles, reviews, commentaries, the awarding of degrees, etc., but lost full control over regional scholarly debates. Central Asia’s elites were able to reflect on the past and traditions of their ethnic

groups, often even within the framework of Marxism-Leninism, going beyond the ill-defined limits of what is permissible or forbidden. In this sense, the **local intelligentsia cannot be defined as a subaltern** in the same way that the proponents of Subaltern Studies had envisioned it.* Despite the persistently watchful eye of the centre, they always had access to the printed word, the university department, and politically important posts. In this situation, a new, inconspicuous conflict began to form within the historiographical groups in the republics.

*Spivak 1988

This conflict was between Central Asian scholars from the titular nationalities, who usually received the necessary training in the academic centres of the Soviet Union, and the ethnic Russian and other Slavic researchers who lived in the same peripheries and had received the same education. For the Central Asian scholars, an open (as far as the situation allowed) or veiled reference to the colonial character of the Russian Empire became an important element of the **emerging national identity** and an indication of their equal status with their 'older brother' (*старший брат*) in Soviet society.* For the region's ethnically Russian or Russianized scholars, the emergence of anti-colonial rhetoric threatened their special status as 'enlighteners.' Over time, the 'little Soviet colonizers' were relegated to supporting roles and the highest positions became inaccessible to them. This was despite their knowledge of the Russian language, which still provided them with access to the local intellectual elite and made their secondary roles crucial to the functioning of the overall system. The position of scholars from the centre was even more privileged: while retaining control over postgraduate and doctoral research, they continued to be 'teachers,' tutors and gatekeepers.

*Kemper and Connerman 2011;
Kemper and Kalinovsky 2015;
Kalinovsky 2020

'Sovietness' was a common trait shared by all of these researchers, which, according to the observations of Artemy Kalinovsky,* was not exclusively due to censorship or self-censorship, or the 'wearing of masks' (to borrow Bhaba's term), but was in fact due to their personhood. Born mainly after the 1917 revolution, they grew up under Stalin or during the Khrushchev 'Thaw.' Some of their teachers had survived the repressions of the 1930s.* Not knowing any other reality than the Soviet one, they trained new generations of local elites by the same Soviet standards.* The first post-Soviet generations of Central Asia's researchers ought to have undertaken their research in the context of decolonization, but they were not be ready to do so. Indeed, it was necessary to wait another twenty years to be able to openly address these problems.

*Kalinovsky 2020

*Bornet and Gorshenina 2014b: bib.
ref. 33n46; Bustanov 2014

*Kudaibergenova 2013; Бисенова and
Медведева 2016

Nonetheless, the process of 'decolonization' is not limited

exclusively to intellectual elites, nor to research on Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia, nor to the postcolonialism of Central Asians exclusively. Global coloniality, which affects all areas of life, concerns both ex-dominant territories and ex-metropolises, which should also be regarded as 'post-colonial' and 'post-colonialist' societies because of the profound, interdependent transformations they have experienced in their recent shared past. Within the imperial borders of Russian society – both in the centre and the periphery – profound changes have occurred that were due to the domination of 'the Other.' The colonial structure of the Tsarist empire and the Soviet polity was formed by the assimilation of physical space, the reformation of the mentality of 'the natives,' the recruiting and co-optation of local elites, the creolization of the population and the integration of local economies into an overarching Russian and Russo-Soviet economic framework.

This **dialectic of interdependence** does not reduce the colonial situation in Central Asia to a conflict between Central Asian societies and Russian imperialism within the conundrum of colonial history and (or) anti-colonialism. It reveals all of the ambiguous dynamics found in the relationships between the colonized, colonizers and hybrid groups, which, representing heterogeneous communities, had to adapt Soviet-era practices and networks to new situations and new relationships of inequality.* Colonial and orientalist issues and the problem of decolonization have become unavoidable in the contemporary context. The recognition that post-Soviet/post-socialist existence can be viewed not only as post-colonial and postcolonial, but also as neo-imperialist, makes us think about a new coloniality/subalternity that has been arising during the decolonization of the post-Soviet space.

Decolonization, understood more widely in the context of global colonization/coloniality, is a term that covers increasingly diverse areas (see for example the *#dekolonizirueto* (*#деколонизируйэто*) podcast series). This contributes to the blurring of the historical context to Said's *Orientalism* as well as the emergence of conspiracy theories at one extreme and de-colonialist ideas that diverge from postmodernist and progressive thinking at the other. Proponents of decolonial theory believe that it is necessary to abandon the prefix 'post-' and apply any Western theories, whether colonial and anti-colonial, to postcolonial material dating back to the European Enlightenment.* As an alternative, they suggest going beyond the vector of time (trans-modernity, decoloniality, separation, etc.) and legitimacy of forms of knowledge previously discredited as inferior and subordinate (such as religion or folklore).* From

*Davé 2007: 2, 12

*Chakrabarty 2000: 5-6

*Тлостанова 2009: 70

their point of view, it is presently necessary to focus not on the historical definitions of the strategies of (neo-)colonialism, but “on the long-term ontological, epistemological and axiological traces that remain after colonialism seems to have been consigned to the past.”* These ubiquitous, entrenched stigmata from the colonial past inflect the current ‘post-dependence’ situation.

*Tlostanova 2020

In the same vein, the ideas of the early 2000s (although not always presented as de-colonialist theories) proposed that the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union represented both the object and subject of Orientalism and that the analysis of their history should be conducted within the entire matrix of the diverse and contradictory colonial and postcolonial practices of ‘Orientalism’ and ‘Occidentalism.’ A number of researchers have introduced the concept of an imperial distinction between ‘inferior’ and ‘minor’ empires and Western European or ‘major’ empires, which implies the presence of an **imperial hierarchy** built from “several imperial leagues.”* This concept is based on the same principle of the non-European, ‘Asian,’ ‘Euro-Asian’ or ‘Eurasian’ essence of the Russian empire and draws parallels with other societies of a ‘Euro-Oriental’ nature (e.g. the Balkans).*

*Boatca 2010; Tlostanova 2014

*Todorova 1997; Горшенина 2007: bib. ref. 221n19

At the top of the pyramid of this hierarchical structure are the champions of European and American modernity (the US, the UK, France, etc.), which are followed by the Mediterranean and Central and Eastern European countries, thus forming some sort of an ‘internal imperial distinction.’ This second level is followed by a third level of external imperial distinction, in which Russia – a ‘second rate, forever-catching-up-to-the-West empire’ – is placed next to the Ottoman empire by virtue of its religious, ethnic, linguistic, and economic characteristics. Following this, the researchers state that these minor empires were integrated into the capitalist world-system on unequal terms. The next step in this chain of reasoning is to classify the Tsarist and Soviet empires as targets and victims of the West’s colonial policy and define it as an ‘oppressed’ or a **subaltern empire**.* According to Tlostanova, “Russia, as a secondary empire that pivots between semi-peripheral and peripheral statuses in the world system, follows the law of regressive transition from the imperial distinction into a colonial one. This dual-faceted empire, in respect of its victorious rivals, is in fact viewed as a colony.”* Accordingly, the entire literary, scholarly and political discourse that originates in ‘the West’ is perceived to orientalize Russia/the USSR. The same model is found in discussions about the term ‘post-socialism,’ which is also proclaimed to be a supporting structure for the orientalist concept by which Western research-

*Morozov 2015; Koplatadze 2019

*Tlostanova 2020

*Müller 2019; RSR 2020

ers describe post-Communist Europe and therefore orientalize it.* To complete these lines of reasoning, it can be argued that these discourses also convert postcolonialism into a self-victimizing nationalism in the spirit of Krylov's epilogue to the Russian translation of Said's *Orientalism* (cf. Part 2.1).

*Ремнев 2011: 182-183

However, this idea of 'subaltern empires' has its own heuristic value. It allows us to provincialize Russia's imperial experience as an interpretative matrix and, accordingly, to look at other forms of imperial experience in the region of the post-Soviet period, which is marked by various forms of **imperial fantasies** and quests for 'great power status' (e.g. the Kyrgyz *Velikoderzhavie*, which also applies to Kazakhstan*). By using the concept of empire, it is possible to analyse the relations between the dominant nationality and other nationalities, and by way of colonial terminology towards ethnic minorities in post-Soviet quasi-federal states.*

*Ремнев 2011: 177-178

*Rapin 2019

Another significant rupture in the current period of postcolonial and decolonial thinking is the debate about academic language. The **existing linguistic hierarchies** reflect the geography of the centres of knowledge production, in relation to which Central Asia remains a peripheral region.* Currently, only works published in the English-speaking American and post-imperial British contexts are recognized as 'proper scholarship.' De-colonialists believe that the use of these specific terminological and conceptual apparatuses, and of a language subtly created to describe their own history, implies the recognition of a Western intellectual hegemony and their own inferiority and 'secondariness' in relation to Western academia. This, in turn, signifies self-colonization and post-dependence, and, consequently, their unproductivity as a research object and/or supplier of raw materials.*

*Кудайбергенова 2019

Having called out this Orientalization, de-colonialists appeal for a revolt against the Anglo-American dominance within postcolonial theory. They argue for the de-Westernization and de-globalization of scholarship whose central premise rejects the binary opposition of the 'backward' ethnic culture and 'progressivism' (which is purportedly only ever Western or, even more so, *global* in character). However, there are those that oppose this view, who argue that such a negative attitude to "intercultural openness and globalization as part of post-colonial thinking indicates a dislike for the West, which, in turn, is a kind of post-colonial nationalism."* Since the scholarly languages that have been formed to date are Western languages, a radical rejection of them means a transition to some other, but no longer scholarly, field. Thus, the epistemological problems raised by Said remain insoluble in the context of the global criticism of Western modernity and coloniality.

*Uffelman 2019

5. Conclusion

It is not necessary to define all the innovative studies of the last decades as postcolonial. However, the majority of recent publications are based on the idea that the history of Central Asia during Tsarist and Soviet periods was directly linked to imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. This union was not equal, but it fundamentally changed the situation in both Central Asia and Russia. Even after the collapse of the Soviet system, Russia did not lose its central character, and continued to use Central Asia as a resource base and object of study. In response to this evidence, many scholars have cyclically returned to the same question: can Said's ideas be used to analyse the history of the post-Soviet space? Indeed, more than twenty years have passed since the question about the relevance of postcolonial ideas to Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet history was formulated for the first time.

By constantly raising this question (with varying degrees of innovation), scholars were able, by the beginning of 2020, to form a block of publications that can be fully included in the overall category of postcolonial studies. Although all periods of modern history have been covered, the majority of these publications are devoted to the post-colonial period and remain related to the problems of nationalism and national, religious and ethnolinguistic identity.* However, a surge in interest in these theories among the general public occurred precisely in 2020-2021. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the scientific communities have moved to online communication. These virtual interactions have made the boundaries among researchers with different backgrounds even more arbitrary, and have opened up scientific discussions to a wider public.

The debate on the applicability of Said's ideas has shifted from scientific publications and academic audiences to the broader online context, displaying a polycentric structure. Public conferences have been organized by the *Tbilisi-Tashkent Project* (Amsterdam),¹⁴ *The Oxford Seminar for the Caucasus and Central Asia*,* the London Central Asia Research Network,* the University of

*Moor 2001; Горшенина 2007; Khalid 2007; Adams 2008; Abashin 2014; Tlostanova 2014; Шафранская 2015; Мамедов and Шаталова 2016

*Abashin 2014; Kudaibergenova 2017

*TOSCCA

*LCARN

¹⁴ This project was implemented as part of the *Tashkent-Tbilisi Telegram* blog in cooperation with Neon University and the media outlet *Sigma*. Since autumn 2020, it has popularized post-colonial theories, combining publishing translations of classics of post-colonial thought (Mbembe) and organizing lectures with the participation of researchers, artists and activists, like: Sergey Abashin, Georgy Mamedov, Alima Bisenova, Vyacheslav Morozov, Madina Tlostanova, Rosen Djagolov, Anton Iskhanov, Anna Temkina, Artem Sleta, Alexander Etkind, Saodat Ismailova, Marianne Kamp, Cloé Drieu.

New Hampshire (USA), *Nazarbayev University* (Kazakhstan),¹⁵ the *European University of Saint Petersburg*, the *Eurasian, East and Central European Studies Women Academics Forum* and *Columbia University*¹⁶ and the *School of Literary Practices* (*Школа литературных практик* – www.literatice.ru). The cosmopolitan composition of the participants, many of whom took part in all these activities, echoed the wholly globalized composition of the public.

Two special thematic issues of the journal *Новое литературное обозрение* (*New Literary Review*), published in 2020 (no. 161 and 166), supported this interest at an academic level. The belief that well-known theorists of postcolonial studies were uninterested in the former Soviet Union, which represented a long-standing complex, has lost its *raison d'être*. These new developments, while still in an initial phase, have nevertheless given some respectability to the ideas of postcolonialism and de-colonialism, outlined the spectrum of issues that can be discussed in light of these theories, and brought to the forefront researchers working in this field. Among them is a small group of young academics of Central Asian origin (mainly from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) but trained at Western institutions.

They have begun to play the role of Central Asian subalterns, openly expressing their desire to work within the framework of post- and decolonial theories and become full-fledged interlocutors in the debates. They have also showed the limitations of these ideas in post-Soviet societies: the discussions, which were held in English and Russian, reminded of the double dependence of Central Asian academics on Russian and Western scholarship. They have outlined what should be done to find a different (and personal) voice and subjectivity. In fact, their work has been the first to show that new ideas can come from a local academic community that resists the diktat of Russian and Western institutions and protests against the appropriation and objectification of the experience of local researchers. Behind these reflections there is a hope of entering “global science” as a full member rather than as a peripheral provincial.*

This renewed interest in postcolonial theories (or, more accurately, their rediscovery) has not abolished a deeply rooted tradition in Central Asia of denying the heuristic potential of such theories, including the key concepts of hybridity, subalternity and orientalism. The reluctance to work with post-colonial frameworks

*Соколов and Титаев 2014; Форум 2014

¹⁵ For Alima Bisenova's lectures see the recommended literature at the end of this chapter.

¹⁶ For instance, their online seminars like “Decolonizing Post-Communist Studies” promoted on social media (Twitter).

may be explained by the success of the Soviet project and by the “resistance to new global hegemonic theories of post-coloniality that are not ‘forged’ in local experience and are not rooted in the local intellectual tradition.” This may be the reason why scholars sometimes dismiss this strand of the literature, even if they do not possess sufficient knowledge of it. However, this dismissal is increasingly difficult, because most state institutions and practices are of a hybrid nature and many people in the region see themselves as subordinates.

Hence, a line of demarcation remains between two groups: Western specialists (and their post-Soviet colleagues trained in the West) and Central Asian scholars. The former group perceives the ideas of Said and his followers as ‘traditional,’ whereas the latter, with few exceptions, still adhere to the isolationism of Soviet scholarship. This coexistence of opposing ways of writing history can be seen in several historical topics, such as the evaluation of the 1916 revolt,^{*17} and the discussion of the so-called Basmachi movement of the 1920s and 1930s.** We should not forget a broader problem: in the growing body of research on Central Asia, scholars often do not read publications beyond their narrow interests and the usual bibliographic circle of “sacralised” authors.*

Despite all these facts, we can say that postcolonial theory has gained a foothold in Central Asia, occupying an already significant niche in the fast-growing scholarship on the region. The situation in Central Asia has become comparable to that of other regions of the world. It seems likely that reflections on the history of Central Asia will continue to unfold at different rates. The balance between Orientalism, Sovietism, nationalism and decolonization will continue to be struck, on the one hand, by regularly changing historical interpretations; on the other hand, through attempts at depoliticizing and humanizing our knowledge of Central Asian history and society.

*Бисенова and Медеуова 2016: 234-235

*Nurtazina and Uyama 2012; Айтпаева et al. 2017; Morrison et al. 2019; Шелекпаев and Чокобаева 2020: 81-83

**Абашинов 2020

*Kamp 2009: 2

¹⁷ The Central Asian revolt of 1916, also known as the ‘Semirechye Revolt’ was an anti-Russian uprising in the context of forced military subscription and general hardship under Tsarist rule during World War One.

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7. Recommended Literature

First, the author suggests that reading should start with Said's own works, which will give an understanding of his main ideas. Then, it is useful to read other classical texts as well as the critique of post-colonial theories (A. L. MacFie) and some analyses of the difficulties of applying Said's theories to the Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet cases (В. Бобровников, V. Morozov).

An analysis of the complex nature of Russian Orientalism in the imperial period is presented in V. Toltz's book. The author recommends also to see some critical analysis of the Soviet period in terms of postcolonial theories by A.K. Bustanov, A. Kalinovsky, and Г. Мамедов and Ш. Шаталова. For an understanding of the de-colonial approach, the works of M. Tlostanova are important. The links between Orientalism, nationalism and decolonialization are presented in J. Heathershaw's paper, A. Bisenova's online lecture (1) in Russian, as well as Timur Dadabaev's lecture in English (2).

The forum related to the М. Соколов and К. Титаев's paper and С. Рапин's paper outline the panorama of knowledge production in a polarized context between the 'Global North' and the 'Global South.' The appearance of local voices in the decolonization process are analysed in papers by А. Бисенова and К. Медеуова, Д. Кудайбергенова, Н. Шелекпаев and А. Чокобаева. Finally, Ph. Bornet and S. Gorshenina's article provides numerous bibliographic references for further reading.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

How could the choice of language and location of academic publications be linked to Orientalism, nationalism and decolonization?

TOPIC 2

Is it possible to put decolonial or nationalist theories into practice in urban spaces? Can we talk about orientalization or self-orientalization in relation to urban space? Is it possible to rewrite history through urban structures?

TOPIC 3

*Etkind 2011; Etkind et al. 2012

To what extent is the concept of 'internal colonization'* applicable to the analysis of colonial situations in Tsarist or Soviet Central Asia?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

All the topics suggested for written assignments could be the subject of a classroom activity. This work could take the form of: 1) role-plays in which the group of students are divided into two or more opposing parties; 2) debates between several protagonists, at the end of which a decision has to be reached. Below two examples are given.

ACTIVITY 1

(See TOPIC 1)

Postcolonial criticism of the (neo)colonial pursuits of Western powers (both past and present) claim to draw on delocalized and universal knowledge. However, postcolonial criticism is formulated almost exclusively by researchers operating in the 'global North' who write in the English language and function within the parameters of Western 'critical theory'; whose roots can be traced back to the European Enlightenment.* Works that are published in other languages and that do not use Western terminological and conceptual frameworks remain excluded from the category of 'proper' research. As a result, there remains a Western, and especially Anglo-American, monopoly over the production, control and dissemination of knowledge.* Essentially, the Western disciplinary frameworks reproduce a coloniality of knowledge, since "postcolonial discourse is mainly concerned with interpreting the (post)colonial Other for the occidental Self in a language that it understands."* Given this, how might we attempt to decolonise knowledge?

The following role-play situation is proposed for this activity: students play the role of members of the board of the rectorate of a certain Central Asian university, where they (in small groups) have to develop guidelines for the academic staff on where and in which language academic papers should be published. In doing so, they have to take into account the demands of developing a "national" language and local scientific publications (journals, book series, textbooks), global trends and requirements (SCOPUS, index Hirsch, ORCIDID, Academic Ranking of World Universities or Shanghai Ranking, Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings), and ideas of decolonization.

*Spivak 1999; Bhabha 1994; Said 1978; Ahmed 2014; Chakrabarty 2000; Горшенина 2007: 224n27; Rapin 2019

*Соколов and Титаев 2014

*Tlostanova 2020

ACTIVITY 2

(See TOPIC 2)

For this activity, the teacher divides the class into two groups. The first group – the “top city officials” – wants to make the city modern and nationally recognisable (“exotic”) in order to attract tourists and generate income by signing building contracts. The second group – the “activists” and “architects” – fights for the preservation of the city’s “cultural heritage”. Each group has to develop an argument on how, from their point of view, cities should be redeveloped. At the end of the discussion, students should analyse how the arguments used can be classified as orientalist, nationalist or decolonialist; how “cultural heritage” is defined; whether the Soviet past could be part of “cultural heritage”; what the “national” aspect of cities is, and how urban planning could be used to write a new national history.

Examples could include Tashkent, Samarkand, Dushanbe and Nur-Sultan. Classroom discussions should be preceded by independent research on the internet (in particular the debates in specialized *Facebook* groups and reading some studies on Central Asian cities, such as this handbook chapter by Abel Polese and Suzanne Harris Brandts, as well as:

- Adrien Fauve, *Bienvenue à Astana: la capitale des steppes... et du monde*, (Paris: Éditions B2, 2014).
- Svetlana Gorshenina, ‘Iran ou Tūrān? Une guerre de la mémoire autour du Shāhnāme en Asie centrale contemporaine et ses racines russo-soviétiques,’ in: Anna Caiozzo; Laurent Dedryvère; Stéphanie Prévost (eds), *Le Touran entre mythes, orientalisme et construction identitaire*, (Valenciennes: Presses de l’université de Valenciennes, 2018): 95-124.
- FB group: “Slom:” <https://www.facebook.com/groups/328799110874813/about>
- Ferghana.ru: <https://fergana.ru>
- AsiaTerra: <http://www.asiaterra.info/news/>
- The Red and Black Book of Uzbek Architecture: <https://archalert.net/>

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftWkfZNiG6o>

Prayer at the Jami Hoja Anwar-Veli mosque.

CHAPTER 7

Central Asia's Contemporary (Post-Soviet) Religious Landscape: A 'De-Secularization' in the Making?

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Keywords:

- Sunni-Shia • Orthodox Church • Islamization • Judaism • Bukharan Jews
- State-Church relations • Soviet religious policy • Minorities

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Introduce the diversity of religions, as well as the multitude of internal trends and denominations in each religion present in Central Asia.
- Demonstrate the impact of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes on the current religious situation in Central Asia.
- Describe the phenomenon of increasing religiosity in Central Asia.
- Understand the true causes of the so-called religious revival in today's Central Asia.
- Argue that the post-Soviet Central Asian authoritarian regimes have instrumentalized the alleged religious renewal to gain political legitimacy.
- Highlight the impact of globalization on religions in Central Asia.
- Give examples of politicization of Islam in Central Asia.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**Pre-reading questions**

- What is the dominant trend in today's world: secularization or increasing religiosity?
- What are the background and limits of the globalization of religions?
- What was the policy of the Soviet Union towards religion? Was it really atheist?
- How would you define political Islam?
- Is Central Asia more or less exposed to globalization than other regions?

Main questions

- What is the impact of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes on the current religious situation in Central Asia?
- Thirty years since the fall of the Soviet Union, what remains of the historical religious diversity in Central Asia?
- What are the symptoms of increased religiosity in the post-independence era?
- How is religion managed in post-Soviet Central Asia, and what is the impact of political authoritarianism on religious freedom and practice?
- How do local forms of religious beliefs and practices fit or resist globalizing trends?
- What are the forms of politicization of Islam in Central Asia?

Post-reading questions

- What are the scope and limits of the so-called religious revival in Central Asia?
- What other world regions have witnessed similar developments?
- Is there a risk of radicalization and of increasing violent religious extremism in Central Asia?

Central Asia's Contemporary (Post-Soviet) Religious Landscape: A 'De-Secularization' in the Making?

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CENTRAL ASIA TODAY numbers some 60 million people, the majority of whom consider themselves Muslim: 70% in Kazakhstan, 83% in Kyrgyzstan, 93% in Turkmenistan, and more than 95% in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Besides, important Christian minorities (25% in Kazakhstan, 17% in Kyrgyzstan, and less than 10% in the other three countries), as well as a few Jewish communities live in the region. On the other hand, only 4.2% of Kazakhstani population, 1.5% of Tajikistani, and less than 1% of the Kyrgyzstani, Turkmenistani and Uzbekistani populations consider itself to be non-religious.* These figures are particularly striking almost 30 years after Central Asian states independence, which ended 70 years of the state atheism and anti-religious policy of the Soviet regime and its goal of "the end of religion." Does what has been viewed as a religious renaissance or an Islamic awakening,* and often extolled by the political authorities as allegedly demonstrating the recovery of freedom of religion after 70 years of Soviet anti-religious policy, mean that a process of de-secularization has begun in the region?

*Pew Research Center: 2012

*Critchlow 1996: 1

This chapter will demonstrate that the situation is more subtle; the homogeneity these figures seem to show hides the complexity and diversity of religious practice in Central Asia. First, for long periods of time, Central Asia has been a land of religious tolerance, where a wide variety of religious beliefs and movements have coexisted. Although religious pluralism in Central Asia has repeatedly been challenged and even threatened in the course of its history, there has continued to be a diversity of religious beliefs, movements and practices.

The apparent sudden religious effervescence in independent Central Asia that these figures seem to demonstrate conceals both the persistence of religious beliefs and practices under the Soviet regime, as well as current political authorities' control of religion, which has led in some cases to a reduction of religious freedom more drastic than during the post-Stalinist Soviet regime and which some believers have interpreted as an assault against reli-

gion and especially against Islam. Religious beliefs and practices in Central Asia also highlight a contrasted cultural and historical heritage, between nomadic and sedentary areas, among states, and sometimes among regions in the same state. Finally, religious diversity is further increased by globalizing flows which include Central Asia, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, through debates over and exchanges of religious knowledge, through movements of individuals within the region or from beyond Central Asian borders, be they labour migrants or young people pursuing religious or non-religious studies abroad, or through virtual movements through the use of new technologies such as the Internet and social media.

This chapter will introduce the diversity and complexity of the religious phenomenon in contemporary Central Asia by highlighting the impact of the historical Tsarist and Soviet legacies on local political authorities' management of religion, on religious practices and their evolution from one generation to another, especially from that born under the Soviet regime to that born after independence. It argues that the so-called religious revival is not a plain resurgence of religions supposedly almost completely suppressed by the atheistic Soviet regime and restored by "democratic" post-independence governments, but rather a diversification of approaches and practices of religions, materialized by Central Asian populations' increasing religiosity, at the crossroads of domestic cultural and historical legacies, of current politically, economically and socially troubled contexts, and of transnational human and technological flows. It will highlight the impact of globalization on the religious phenomenon in Central Asia, where traditional and sometimes forcibly localized beliefs and practices co-exist with increasingly globalized beliefs and – although in a limited way – with processes of politization of religion and, in the case of Central Asia, especially of Islam. This chapter will address all religions but will mainly focus on Islam, which accounts for about 90% of the believing population in the region.

The first part will highlight the religious diversity and practices in Central Asia for more than two millennia. It will be followed by an introduction to the handling of religion under the Soviet regime. We will show the overlapping of a quasi-permanent repression – albeit fluctuating in intensity – with the survival of religions, both through official and unofficial practices. The Soviet period is essential to understanding contemporary Central Asian populations' approach to religion, the evolution, progress and sometime dissipation of religious currents, as well as interreligious relations,

which is addressed in the third part. A fourth part will focus on the management of religion by Central Asian governments, and will highlight the impact of political authoritarianism on the contraction but also the emergence of autonomous spaces of religious practice. A fifth and final part will address the extent and limits on the politicization of Islam in Central Asia, where a so-called violent extremist threat has been used by the political authorities to strictly regulate and repress manifestations of most forms of alternative approaches to religion deemed not to conform to the framework authorized by political authorities.

1. Central Asia: A Historical Confessional Frontier?

Situated between several large empires, Central Asia has enjoyed religious diversity from earliest antiquity. Along with animist beliefs and practices (shamanism), which developed in the region from prehistorical times,* Zoroastrianism entered the Central Asian region via Khorezm and spread later to Khorasan, Bactria and Sogdiana and further along the Silk Road, such as in Xinjiang,* while Manicheism and Buddhism all co-existed from the very beginning of our era. The first Christians established themselves between the end of the second and the fourth centuries,* with Melkites, Armenians, Jacobites, and Nestorians¹ fleeing persecution in the Byzantine and Persian empires.* The first Jewish communities settled in Central Asia in the fifth century.

From the eighth century, Islam, as the *Hanafi* school of Sunnism,² settled in Transoxiana – the land between the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers, which includes actual or parts of modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Several cities in the region such as Bukhara, Samarkand and Urgench emerged as centres of Islamic culture and education, with personalities such as Abu Rayhan Biruni, al-Farabi, and Avicenna significantly contributing to the region's fame. From the 11th century onwards,

*Rozwadowski 2012: 278

*Abazov 2008

*Koshelenko et al. 1995: 55-70

*Richard 1982: 103

¹ For more information on pre-Islamic religions in Central Asia see also Box 4.1.

² The *Hanafi* school is one of the four main Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence. It is named after Abu Hanifah (699-767), an Iraqi of Persian heritage who taught at Kufah (Iraq). The Hanafi school is considered the most liberal in the use of legal techniques. It gives preponderance to the use of informed opinion, and also permits the use of preferential judgment and reasoning by analogy. The Hanafi school is considered the most widespread with followers in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, South and Central Asia, and in Xinjiang in China.

Box 7.1 Contemporary Sufi Orders in Central Asia

Kubraviyya – Founded by Najm al-Din Kubra (1145/46–1221) in the Khorezm region, Kubraviyya followed the acetic tradition of Junayd al-Bagdadi. It was the most prominent of the three Sufi orders in the Central Asian region from the Mongol period until the 17th century, when it was overtaken by Naqshbandiyya. Kubraviyya claims a link that goes back to the Prophet Muhammad through Ali ibn Abu Talib, his cousin and son-in-law. The spiritual centre of this Sufi order is located in Kunia-Urgench in modern-day Turkmenistan, where the tomb of its founder is located. The last groups of this Sufi order are now active in China, and derivative branches are active in India and Iran.

Naqshbandiyya – This is the most prominent Sufi order in Central Asia today, and has spread throughout the Muslim world. Founded in the 12th century in Bukhara by Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf al-Hamadânî and 'Abd al-Khâliq al-Ghujdawânî, the Naqshbandiyya takes its name from Khwaja Shâh Bahâ'uddîn Naqshband, who is considered to be its most prominent master. While most other Sufi orders trace their spiritual lineage to the prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abu Talib, Naqshbandiyya traces it through Abu Bakr, the first caliph. It entered the Middle Volga region in the 15th and 16th centuries, overshadowing the earlier *Qadiri* and *Yasawi* orders. It also spread to the Xinjiang region in the 16th century. It distinguishes itself from many other Sufi orders by its capacity to adapt to changing social and political conditions and by its decentralized nature. Naqshbandis practice silent devotion, or *zikr*. They traditionally have been politically engaged, including opposing the Soviet regime, and in particular emphasize adherence to Sharia law.

Qadriyya – This Sufi order is today, after Naqshbandiyya, the most popular order in Tajikistan. Unlike the three other orders founded in Central Asia, Qadriyya was founded in Baghdad by Abdul-Qadir Gilani (d. 1166), and was introduced into the region by Arab merchants. It has been largely absorbed by Nashbandiyya, but remains a separate order in the Fergana Valley and in Tajikistan in particular. Unlike Naqshbandiyya, Qadriyya, which was forced to practice a silent *zikr* during the Soviet period to avoid persecution, today practices a vocal *zikr*.

Yassaviyya – Created by the Turkish poet Ahmad Yasavi (1093–1166), Yassaviyya began as an order of wanderers. The order stressed retreat (*khalwa*) as a practice, and exerted a profound influence on the development of mystical orders across the Turkish speaking space. It contributed significantly to the spread of Islam in Central Asia by adapting it to nomadic environments, and spread throughout Turkestan and Transoxiana, among the Kyrgyz, the region of the Volga, southwards into Khurasan, and westwards into Azerbaijan and Anatolia. The centre of this order is the city of Turkestan, where the mausoleum of its founder was built under the ruler Tamerlane.

Shiite Ismaili minorities also settled in the Badakhshan region, i.e. the Pamir mountains in Tajikistan, which still today holds about 200,000 followers. Nomad populations in Turkmenistan were converted from the 10th century,* while those in the steppes of what is now Kazakhstan were converted from the 14th century.* In the 18th century, Catherine II, who considered Islam a higher form of religion than Shamanism, pushed for a stronger Islamization of the Kazakh steppes* which resulted in the development of *inter alia* Islamic education, book publishing and administrative institutions of Islam.*

*Clement 2018: 5; Tor 2009: 287

*Frank 2003: 264

*Martin 2016: 203

*Frank 2003: 261

Islam also developed in its Sufi form – Central Asia having been the birthplace of some of the major Sufi orders, including the regionally prominent *Yasaviyya*, *Kubraviyya*, and *Naqshbandiyya*, which developed a set of shrines, notably in the valleys of Zeravshan and Kashka-Daria in what is now Uzbekistan, built around the tombs of its founding saints and spiritual leaders (Baha al-Din Naqchband, Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduvânî, Khodja Ahrâr, Seyyid Bereke, and Chaykh Chamseddin Koulal). The *Qadriyya*, founded in Bagdad, as well as other less prominent groups such as the *Chishtîs* or the *Shattârîs*, were also present in the region.*

*Deweese 2007: 2

Many earlier religions disappeared rapidly with the Islamization of Central Asia from the eighth century. The remains of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism are now rare in the region. However, shamanism has persisted on the margins of Muslim traditions, especially among Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkmen nomads.* Under the Mongol empire, the religious situation remained favourable to multi-confessional coexistence as the empire's leaders manifested great tolerance with respect to the religions of the Book, and did not conceal their interest in Christian theology.* The religious landscape was changed however significantly by Tamerlane and his Timurid successors, who eradicated almost all non-Muslim movements, except Judaism.

*Басилов 1992

*Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1970: 51

The Jewish community, referred to as Bukharan Jews to differentiate them from Jews in other parts of the Tsarist Empire and the later Soviet Union,* persisted after the Russian conquest of Central Asia from the 18th and 19th centuries. Well integrated into the region's urban centres, and concentrated mainly in the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, as well as in several towns in the Ferghana Valley and Tajikistan, the Bukharan Jews managed to preserve their faith and their own communities.* The Russian conquest of the region also brought Russian peasants and Cossacks, who brought with them the Russian Orthodox Church and other Russian Churches, especially that of the *Old Believers*, while other minorities in the Tsarist

*Levin 2014: 321

*Zand 1989

Box 7.2 Jadids and Jadidism: Reforming Islam and the Society

Although the *Jadids* were comprised of both radicals and moderates and were not a unified movement, they shared a will to look for and implement deep change in their society, and brought about debates not only on religion but all social themes related to culture, identity, and politics. The Jadids interpreted departure from the true path of Islam as one of the essential causes of decline. Accordingly, they claimed the necessity to distance oneself from a chain of local and conservative masters and study the textual sources of Islam, while at the same time taking lessons from the knowledge, discipline, and power of the European countries they admired.

Sources:

K. Hitchens, "Jadidism," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, XIV(4): 339-346.

Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Empire – such as Ukrainians, Poles and Germans – brought other Christian denominations, from the Catholic Church to Protestant Churches including Lutheran, Mennonite, Baptist, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Pentecostalist.

While Islam has continued its development in Central Asia since the eighth century, the Russian conquest gave rise to debates within the *ulema*, ranging from opposition in the 1890s to conservatives (*Qadim* – 'Precursors') averse to change, to a new generation of reformers called *Jadids*, critical of a society they judged backward and corrupt. Despite their enthusiasm for the Bolshevik revolution, the Jadids would later be repressed by the Soviet regime, which would bring about deep changes in the Central Asian religious landscape.

2. Repression and Persistence of Religions under the Soviet Regime

2.1 The Bolshevik Anti-Religious Offensive

In January 1918, inspired by the concept of French laicity, the Soviet authorities passed a decree separating the Church from the State and school. Besides state secularism, religious freedom was, at the official level, guaranteed by article 124 of the 1936 constitution, which stipulated the separation of the church from the state and from the school, the freedom of religious worship as well as the freedom for citizens to conduct anti-religious propaganda, and by article 52 of the 1977 constitution, which guaranteed in the Soviet

Union freedom of conscience, the right to profess or not to profess any religion, the right for authorized religions to conduct worship as well as the right of citizens to conduct atheistic propaganda.

In the Soviet logic, religion touched upon two distinct questions – that of atheism and that of nationalities – and thus raised a double issue. First of all, it contradicted the philosophical choices of the regime, those of a society supposedly liberated from the burden of religion as the “opium of the people.” On the other hand, it reminded the Soviet authorities of the importance of the national question, especially in the Central Asian region where Slavic populations are a minority, and since the religions that resist it are rooted in their role of catalyst of national traditions. In Soviet practice, the Marxist subordination of the ‘nation’ to the ‘class’ applied in an ambiguous way: only the Party decides, according to its general policy, to implement the nationalist – and therefore sometimes religious – components or those of classes, or to combine them temporarily.* Soviet religious policy therefore fluctuated according to the ideological evolutions of power and the regime’s will to solve the problems that lay ahead.

Although Moscow was reluctant to come into direct confrontation with Islam soon after the revolution, the Soviet regime gradually undertook anti-religious campaigns in Central Asia as elsewhere in the rest of the empire in the 1920s. Although some relative tolerance persisted with regard to the Muslim ulema,* Soviet anti-religious policy resulted in the closure of most mosques: out of 26,000 in 1912, only a thousand were left in 1941.* The regime requisitioned *waqfs* (Islamic property endowments), Quranic and customary courts were abolished, and 15,000 primary and secondary religious schools were closed. The policy of the mandatory unveiling of women (*hujum*),³ which reached its peak in 1926-1927,* as well as the prohibition of polygamy and of bride price (*kalym*),⁴ were construed as violations of Central Asian traditions that were

*Besançon 1986: 435-448

*Malashenko 1993: 164

*Абдусамедов and Артыков
1978: 96

*Kamp 2006: 150-185

³ In 1927, the Soviet state launched a wide-ranging campaign in Central Asia, called *hujum*, against various practices in daily life considered backwards. The centrepiece of this campaign was the fight against women veiling their faces. The goal was not just to liberate women, but to transform society through the liberation of women. Mass meetings were organized in several cities of Central Asia where thousands of women burned their veils and urged others to follow their example. The campaign however provoked retaliatory violence, including rape and murder against unveiled women, and was abandoned when the Soviet state began its campaign for collectivization in the region.

⁴ The *kalym* is an ancient custom in Central Asia which consists of paying the parents of the bride as a “refund” for bringing up their daughter.

Box 7.3 Soviets, Atheism, and the Anti-religious Policy

The anti-religious policy promulgated by the Bolsheviks has emerged as one of the materializations of the radical change promised by the revolutionaries. Lived or understood as an absolute, religious belief contravened the Soviet regime that claimed to govern the life and intellect of each individual. To believe in a religious ideal, whether it is embodied by an ethic of life or a transcendent figure, meant questioning the Communist unique and exclusive *Weltanschauung*. Moreover, religion is also the embodiment of a bygone regime and society. Its development during the so-called pre-capitalist and capitalist phases would have maintained a tradition considered anachronistic and deemed incompatible with the needs of the new man, *homo sovieticus*. Hence, the mere existence of the religious institution constitutes not only a regression but a threat to the regime in its willingness to abolish the old order. Religion must therefore be supplanted by materialist philosophy; this includes replacing religious rites and festivals with Communist festivals, and rewriting history by downplaying the role that religion played in the culture of the republics of the new Soviet Union.

Regarding Marxist writings, the Bolsheviks nonetheless extrapolated a philosophy, which is certainly critical of the faith but which has never developed a political program to exclude religion and its practitioners, much less a counter-ideology. By willing to eliminate religion and its practice in the short term, the Bolsheviks went beyond the stages that the original Marxism had largely addressed: if the withering away of religion was for K. Marx and F. Engels inevitable, its disappearance was not supposed to result from a strict political planning but from the end of the social and psychological exploitation of individuals; it was thus more of an expectation than a scientifically calculated sociological perspective.

Throughout the Soviet regime, atheism would have to guard itself against external attacks and, above all, against internal erosion caused by the discouragement of the militants facing the magnitude of the task. The regime feared the development of “a-atheism” or agnosticism. Despite the assertion of this absolute, which consisted in eradicating religion from the new society, the Soviet authorities’ policy would in fact be nuanced throughout the regime. The few concessions made, however, should not be interpreted as the government’s acceptance of the religious factor but as a simple temporization of the exclusion of religion. It was only under Gorbachev that a possible coexistence between religion and power would be really taken into consideration, within the framework of a now dying socialist regime. Until then, atheism remained a long monologue – immune, at least in appearance, to any scepticism or criticism, but over the decades it would interfere increasingly strengthless in books, newspapers, classrooms, Soviet factories and kolkhozes.

Sources:

Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty. A History of Soviet Atheism*, (Princeton University Press, 2018).

William Van den Bercken, “Ideology and atheism in the Soviet Union,” *Religion in Communist Lands*, 13, no. 3, (1985): 269–281.

well-established and considered as “national” as much as religious.* All other religious institutions, as well as places of worship of minority religions (synagogues and churches), suffered the same fate.

*Keller 1993: 25–50; 2001

A period of relative religious tolerance throughout the Soviet Union began with the Second World War. After the entry of Nazi troops into Soviet territory on 21 June 1941, Stalin promoted national reconciliation and union, and atheist propaganda experienced a general relaxation. Several Central Spiritual Administrations of Muslims (SADUM)⁵ were created, with the one founded in Tashkent in October 1943 responsible for regulating the spiritual affairs of the Muslims of all five Central Asian Republics. The Soviet authorities authorized the opening of the Mir-i Arab madrassa in Bukhara in 1945, as well as a number of mosques elsewhere in Central Asia.*

*Tasar 2017: 78–140

In the last years of his regime, Stalin returned to the fundamental atheist principles of Marxism, an approach confirmed by his successor Khrushchev who launched a new antireligious campaign in 1959, setting a goal of eliminating religion from Soviet society within five years. It resulted in new waves of repression against all religions, and Islamic and Christian movements. It was not until the Brezhnev regime (1964–1982) that the situation of religions stabilized: official policy against religion was maintained at the discursive level by the reaffirmation of the principle of state atheism, but the regime no longer responded to the affirmation of faith by mass terror, instead relying on measures of professional discrimination, police and administrative harassment.

2.2 The End of Religion in Soviet Central Asia?

The official atheism* and the control and repression of the Soviet regime did not mean the end of religious belief and practices in Central Asia and the rest of the Soviet space. First, clandestine mosques multiplied while warehouses in kolkhozes or other communal spaces such as *chaikhana* (“tea houses”) were used as worship spaces.* Despite the reduction in the number of prayer houses, the Orthodox Church, as well as other Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant (Lutheran, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostalist, and even Jehovah's Witnesses) continued to carry out their religious activities discreetly, although some movements were even able to carry out proselytizing activities.*

*Smolkin 2018

*Bennigsen 1988: 78

*Peyrouse 2002: 191

⁵ Духовное управление мусульман Средней Азии и Казахстана (САДУМ).

Soviet Central Asia also saw the arrival of the second largest group of Jews, *Ashkenazi*, in two main waves: a first group, in the early 1920s, fled the Russian civil war and pogroms, as well as famines in Russia and Ukraine, while a second wave came after the Nazis' invasion of Russia in 1941. Less integrated with local populations than the Bukharan Jews, who had been in the area for a long time, Ashkenazi Jews settled mainly in the capitals, particularly in Tashkent, as well as in the major industrial cities of Central Asia, and were largely Russified, although they nonetheless preserved their religious practices. Shia Islam, which had modestly entered the region from the 15th century in the area of Samarkand, also developed during this period through the arrival of Azeri minorities in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Religious beliefs in Central Asia have consisted of a multitude of practices that escaped official institutions, and the atheistic ideal of the Soviet regime has continuously clashed with these manifestations of faith. Whereas the official atheism of the Soviet period succeeded in suppressing the jurisconsults at the same time as it closed the Islamic courts and proscribed the Sharia, it faced significant difficulties in abolishing religious customs. Over the generations, religion was maintained through practices whose theological significance might have weakened, but which remained signs of community belonging and identity markers. Moreover, leaders of Soviet Islam played an ambiguous game by taking advantage of the flaws in the Soviet system to secure the faith's autonomy, discreetly supported by some party officials. By decreeing the end of religions, the Soviet authorities ignored a fundamental aspect – that is, the multiple and interweaving links between the professional and private lives of individuals in charge of administrative affairs in the region.

Many Central Asian Communist leaders were atheists at their working place during the day, but believers in the evenings or weekends, and so turned a blind eye to the maintenance of officially forbidden religious practices. Some of them even diverted public funds to support places of worship. This phenomenon of religious practice by the so-called cadre or local members of the Communist Party is all the more important with the indigenization (*korenizatsiya*) under Brezhnev, through which a large number of the majority ethnic groups in each republic were hired in local administrations. Many celebrated the great Muslim holidays and the different rites of passage (circumcision, marriage, burial) along with the Soviet festivities.* The Spring Festival or Navruz (Iranian New Year), the beginning of Ramadan, the fast-breaking (*Iftar*) or the

*Thibault 2015: 17

feast of the Sacrifice (*kurban bayrami*) were celebrated by Muslim Soviet citizens who continued, at the same time, to drink alcohol and even to eat pork. Moreover, from the 1970s, the region experienced an increase in pilgrimages to the shrines of local saints. While the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) was mostly prohibited, these tombs were seen as a place where believers could spend time with “friends of God” (*awliy*), i.e. the saints buried there. These pilgrimages constituted a means of expression of piety and, more widely, of religion apart from that authorized and formatted by the Soviet regime and the Muslim administration of the SADUM, and were even condemned by some administrators of the SADUM.*

*Sartori 2019: 290

In Central Asian, local versions of Islam were also developed by Sufi groups, who practiced a depoliticized religious mystique, rooted in local traditions (worship of saints, regional pilgrimages) and whose brotherhoods intersected with older solidarity, family and professional networks.* Finally, the contacts between official Islam and parallel Islam remained frequent and the link with the *Ummah* (أمة - Islamic community), although significantly reduced, had not been broken. The new madrassa Al-Bukhari, opened in 1971, allowed the formation of theologians, some of whom were allowed to go to Arabic Muslim countries like Egypt and Yemen to complete their studies. At the same time, other religions, especially Christianity, were maintained. Local Muslim leaders, insensitive to the atheist ideology, have proved more tolerant of other religions, including Christianity.

*Bennigsen and Wimbush, 1985

Gorbachev's coming to power and the ensuing reforms of the Soviet system gave religious expression a freedom that Soviet believers had hardly ever known. In Central Asia, this “resurgence” of religious practice affected the majority Muslims, the Jewish community, and the various Christian denominations: *Perestroika* gave rise to the construction or reopening of many Muslim and Christian places of worship and allowed the establishment of new religious and proselytizing movements. In a short period of time, the growing number of places of worship and the diversity of religious movements contrasted significantly with the religious landscape to which local populations had hitherto been accustomed.*

*Atkin 1992: 59; Malashenko 1994: 111

Secularizing and anti-religious policies conducted by the political authorities throughout the Soviet Union, as well as the de-Islamization of public life in Muslim regions, constitute a fundamental Soviet legacy in the five contemporary states of Central Asia. Atheist propaganda, the abolition of all laws with religious connotations or linked to Sharia as it had existed in the Central Asian Khanates before the Bolshevik revolution, the destruction

of the infrastructure that transmitted Islam such as the closure of buildings of worship and of Islamic teaching, repression of various intensities of believing populations, as well as, with rare exceptions, their isolation from the rest of the Ummah, did not lead to the destruction of Islam as Soviet authorities expected, but rather displaced Islamic values from the public arena* and significantly contributed to a differentiation of Islam as thought and practiced in Central Asia from that in other Muslim regions and countries.

*Khalid 2007: 133

With a limited knowledge of Islamic dogma, the believing populations in Central Asia practiced a form of localized Islam which became synonymous with tradition and a marker of national identity that differentiated the local (*mestnye*) Muslim Central Asian populations from exogenous Slavs or Europeans recently arrived (*prishlye*) in the region.* In addition, patterns of Islamic religious life differed among regions within the Soviet Union,* regions whose diversity— after independence – combined with the openness of Central Asian governments to increasing – if still controlled – religious practice, and of contacts between Central Asian believers and the Ummah, has led to an increasingly diverse approach to and practice of Islam.

*Khalid 2007: 134, 138

*Deweese 2002: 327

3. Religion after Independence

3.1 The Proliferation of Places of Worship and the Diversification of Religious Movements

The rapid development of places of worship brought in with perestroika continued after independence in 1991,* stimulated by the official repeal of political control over religion and by the religious hierarchy's narrative on an alleged intrinsic link between ethnicity and religion, in particular between titular nationalities – Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tajiks – and Muslimness.* This linkage, which had been

*Khalid 2007: 119

*Hilgers 2009: 11–30

Map 7.1 Religious Composition of Central Asia

This map presents a tentative overview of the religious composition of Central Asia and the approximate locations of clusters of religious minorities. Note that since no current statistics are available, religious affiliation is deduced from cultural group characteristics and thus projected according to the latter's approximate prevalence. Also, note the probable bias in favour of Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic groups (especially in northern Kazakhstan) and Jews (especially in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), from which many community members have already steadily emigrated.

Sources:

Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of Russian History*, (London-New York, Routledge, 2002): 131.

Michael Izady, *Atlas of the Islamic World and Vicinity*, (New York: Columbia University & Gulf 2000 Project, 2006–present).

<https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml>

Map created by editors and designed by Typeface nv.

maintained under the Soviet regime in the family context, moved beyond family circles following the political liberalization initiated under Gorbachev and gained increasing momentum after independence. Muslims restored or constructed networks of religious buildings for prayer and Islamic education. Many were financed by local political authorities, while more modest mosques in remote areas were generally supported by donations from the community. Religious exchanges with other Muslim countries, which had been restricted under the Soviet regime, developed in the 1990s. Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Turkey and Arab countries financed several large mosques* and made donations of religious literature to the region, while Central Asian students were sent to universities or madrassas in Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan to study religion.

*Saivetz 1993: 311-326;
Balci 2018: 103-129

Minority religions also took advantage of this new political context. The Russian Orthodox Church reopened, restored or built new churches or prayer houses. Catholic and numerous Protestant movements present in the region, either long established or recently arrived, also gained from the religious tolerance which increased after independence. The development of Christianity in the region nonetheless was slowed by the massive emigration of Slavic and European national minorities; in less than two decades, nearly four million Russians, several hundred thousand ethnic Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Poles, as well as nearly 800,000 Germans, left Central Asia for their "ethnic homelands." Judaism experienced a relatively similar fate; after the fall of the Soviet regime, the Jewish population in Central Asia declined rapidly, with most migrating to Israel or Western countries.

To compensate for the emigration of what was sometimes a significant number of their parishioners, some Protestant denominations engaged in proselytizing activities, including among orthodox Russians, national minorities such as Koreans, and among the traditionally Muslim populations of ethnic Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tajiks, etc.* In addition, taking advantage of the new openness to religious practice, missionary movements from the United States, Germany and South Korea assisted these efforts or undertook their own by financing local churches or by bringing new Christian denominations to the region, such as Methodism, Presbyterianism, and Charismatic churches. Moreover, new cults, such as Baha'i, the church of Scientology or Hare Krishna, invested in the region and undertook proselytism campaigns.

*Peyrouse 2003: 266-274

3.2 Interreligious Dialogue – and Discord – in Central Asia

One aspect of the new political context born with independence – namely political power, now increasingly managed by elites of Muslim tradition due to the gradual ethnicization of administrations and to the exclusion and emigration of Slavic minorities, especially the Russian minority – raised questions about the legitimacy of some religious movements in a space where they were a minority religion for minority ethnicities. Some elaborated a particular narrative to justify to local political authorities, as well as to other religions and denominations, their presence or even the desirability or proven development in Central Asia.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), as well as many Christian denominations, has strived to demonstrate its autochthonism, i.e. its historical presence since the 18th to 19th centuries in supposedly respectful and peaceful coexistence with Islam and Muslims. For the ROC, this has meant rewriting its history during the Russian conquest of Central Asia. Throughout the 19th century, the ROC had consistently attempted to convince the Tsarist authorities to launch missions among the Muslims by portraying Islam as a political movement that threatened the Russian Empire, and initiated “anti-Muslim missions” (*protivomusul'manskaia missiia* or *antimusul'manskaia missiia*) in the Kazakh steppes beginning in the 1880s, and in the rest of Turkestan from 1912.*

*Peyrouse 2004: 109-135

After independence, the ROC endeavoured to avoid these sensitive episodes of its history by focusing on the positive relations that it claims Russian Orthodox believers have had with the local Muslim populations since the 18th century. Other Christian movements, including the Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist and Adventist Churches, also played on autochthonism, claiming that they followed the flow of Slavic, German and Polish populations in the process of colonizing the Kazakh steppes and Turkestan from the 18th and 19th centuries, accordingly asserting a presence in the region as old as that of the Orthodox Church.

The diversification and rise of new religious groups – their increasingly visible public activities, and the proselytizing activities of several denominations which attracted converts either from one Christian movement or another, especially from the ROC, or from Islam, or individuals of Islamic background – raised controversies. These sometimes even resulted in physical attacks on proselytizing movements or believers, although such incidents have been relatively few in the thirty years of Central Asian countries independence. A main reaction has been the development of interreligious

relations and dialogue involving local Muslim representatives and Orthodox Church clergy, and to a much lesser extent the Catholic Church and some Protestant denominations, in particular the Lutheran church. Such interreligious meetings have elaborated a narrative that protects them by delegitimizing and excluding the so-called non-traditional movements and challenged the wisdom of allowing too much religious freedom, which they have portrayed as opening the door to the worst evils of westernization, in which “the rights and freedoms of the good and honest majority are dominated by the ‘rights and freedoms’ of an abnormal and criminal minority.”* Accordingly, Muslim representatives and the ROC have sought to prevent clashes by avoiding proselytism among persons belonging to nationalities traditionally associated with the other religion.

*ИКИМ 2002: 12

3.3 From Belonging to Believing? The Multiple Faces of Increasing Religiosity in Central Asia

Beyond the diversification of religious groups and the proliferation of places of worship in the region, religious development in Central Asia has been marked by unprecedented growth and diversification of approach to religiosity, defined here as the way people reflect in their daily life their religion, system of beliefs, rites, forms of organization, ethical norms, and feelings about the divine, shaped by new internal and global debates and exchanges.

*LOUW 2007: 23

Studies show that interest in religion and religiosity, especially among Muslims, has increased considerably,* even in areas of traditionally nomadic culture. In Kyrgyzstan, the number of persons attending weekly religious services more than doubled between 2007 and 2012. Increased religiosity and religious practice has been particularly marked among the younger generation, who differ significantly from their parents, who were educated under the Soviet system and had a relatively flexible practice of Islam, praying irregularly and drinking alcohol. Studies in the region since the 2000s show that a growing percentage of the younger generation is more respectful of the five pillars of Islam, demands increased religious education, refuses to drink alcohol, and follows a *halal* diet as evidenced by the rapid growth of this type of food in the region.

*McBrien 2017

This increased religious interest and practice also reflects a shift from the feeling of belonging that prevailed under the older generation, i.e. being Muslim due to one’s belonging to an ethnic group of Muslim culture, to a belonging paired with an increasing feeling of believing.* Although in most cases, going to the mosque and following the five pillars of Islam remain an identity marker as

under the Soviet regime, this demonstration of ethnic and cultural belonging has been increasingly combined with, and sometimes exceeded by, a feeling of belief, leading to a quest for true Islam and to a process of personal transformation, both through an individual approach as well as through a group or mosque.

This development has given rise to intergenerational conflict, with young people criticizing their parents and family for not complying with what they believe is “true” Islam. Conversely, parents educated in the Soviet tradition may worry about the increasing practice of Islam by their children,* with some viewing what they consider as excessive or non-traditional religious practices of the new generation as a potential risk to their own way of life and to their legitimacy in society. Consequently, many young people try to balance their religious life between Islamic rules they have acquired outside the family circle, and the so-called local traditions mixing culture and religion as postulated by their parents as intrinsic to their identity.* The new generation have carved out space for their own discussions, such as at wedding celebrations where they can talk and learn about Islam outside of parental and family control.* Many also increasingly are turning to the Internet for information on Islam.

*Junisbai et al. 2017

*Louw 2013: 228

*McBrien 2017: 75-78

Moreover, despite the willingness of religious hierarchies to relate religion to an ethnic sense of belonging, the relation between the two identities has been increasingly debated among local populations. The ‘national’ singularities of the Muslim faith are, for instance, questioned by all those who see in the universality of Islam a possibility for the Muslims of the region to come back onto the international scene. Consequently, the post-Soviet space has been torn between two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, the falling apart of the ancient conceptions of religion as a social and cultural foundation, a phenomenon that the religious hierarchies attempt to slow down; and on the other hand, the insertion of religion into reconstructions of identity that manifest themselves as the “rebirth” of ancient identities supposedly destroyed by the Russian and Soviet regimes, which actually individualize the way people relate to religion.

Moreover, Islam can find itself symbolically competing with a rehabilitation of pre-Islamic religions, like the Tengrism of Turkic peoples, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, or Zoroastrianism in Tajikistan. These efforts at rehabilitation are very often the products of intellectual, political, or nationalistic circles, but they nevertheless show how religion is frequently at the centre of concern about identity, particularly under the influence of ‘civi-

zationist' models (for instance Samuel Huntington's *Clash of civilizations*) which represent religion as the original bedrock of contemporary cultures. Yet both Tengrism and Zoroastrianism never gained any significant backing among the grassroots of society.

From these evolutions and intersections results a multitude of possible individual beliefs and daily practices across communities. Post-Soviet Central Asia is therefore not simply the re-emergence of beliefs and practices that were pushed underground or confined to the family circle under Soviet rule, but rather, "their alteration in form, nature, and appearance, as individuals and communities gain direct access to ideas and information concerning religion via a variety of new sources (e.g. social media, missionaries, and activists as well as opportunities to travel and study abroad)."

*Jones 2017: xiii

Consequently, "Islamic beliefs and practices throughout the region should be viewed on a continuum from scriptural/textual to mystical/traditional with most people not located firmly at either end."

*Jones 2017: xiii

It is to all these questions of increasing religious belief, of dialogue and potential conflicts between religions, and – by extension – to the multiple questions of identity related to the religious belief and practice, that the governments have had to answer since independence.

4. Central Asian States Policies on Religion: Showcasing Secular Policy and Religious Freedom

While there are national variations, all Central Asian governments responded to the new context of independence with systems affirming the principle of separation between religion and state, while promoting but controlling and even shaping the so-called religious renewal viewed as a potential ideological competitor. To do so, they emphasized the intrinsic link between religion and ethnicity and framed a so-called traditional Islam, supposedly tolerant, apolitical, and compliant with local history and culture.* This approach, which has made local Islam the only officially acceptable form of practice, has nevertheless been increasingly challenged by the diversification of Central Asian populations' religious expectations and practices.

*Rasanayagam 2010: 96

4.1 Secularism and Religious Freedom

All Central Asian legislative texts, as well as specific laws on religion passed after independence, were drawn up according to the principle of secularism, or the separation of religion and state. Each

country's constitution, in its preamble or its first articles, asserts the separation of state and religion. Only the Uzbek constitution does not include any explicit article concerning secularism, but the separation of state and religion is specified in article 61. All states guarantee freedom of worship or belief; individuals are free to practice their own religion or no religion. State atheism is forbidden, and all individuals are equal before the law whatever their religious belonging. No constitution in Central Asia has made Islam the official religion of the country, nor do they mention words such as 'Islam,' 'Muslim' or 'Quran.'

4.2 Defining Traditional Religions to Exclude "Alien" Ones

In a region with dozens of ethnic groups, Central Asian governments have promoted a principle according to which each religion or denomination should reflect the identity of an ethnic group. Subsequently, Islam for titular nationalities (Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmens and Uzbeks) as well as for minorities such as Azeris or Uyghurs, Judaism for Jews, the Russian Christian Orthodoxy for Russians, Catholicism for Germans and Poles, and Lutheranism for Germans are granted recognition and registration. Other movements, especially so-called new religious movements, i.e. those established in the region after independence, such as the Muslim Tablighi Jamaat or some Protestant movements, have faced increasing pressure.

The main criteria which determine whether a particular religious movement will be defined as non-traditional or even as a 'sect' are whether it is a newcomer in the country, whether its representatives are of foreign origin, and whether it is attempting to spread itself by means of proselytizing. Consequently, some proselytizing denominations such as Baptism and Seventh Day Adventists, despite having been present in the region since the 19th century, have been regularly harassed by local administrations. This approach has also resulted in legislation restricting proselytizing, also responding to the expectations of many Muslim and Orthodox Christians hierarchies in the region.

A second essential element of Central Asian governments' religious policies has consisted of controlling the local development of Islam which, by its potential capacity to innervate political and social spaces, has been perceived as a potential threat to state authority and legitimacy. The governments thus continue the Soviet paradox of separation of religion and the state, which prevented religions or religious movements from being involved in

politics while at the same time the state maintained strict control of all religious movements and activities. All Central Asian governments have hoped to dissociate a “good” and “tolerant” Islam from fundamentalist or politicized trends.

In the 1990s, governments in the region gave an important role to Sufism, which they deemed a local, traditional and peaceful form of Islam. However, first and foremost they framed a so-called traditional Islam by encouraging local practices such as the worship of local saints and pilgrimages to their tombs, deemed apolitical and anchoring believers in their ethnicity and their national culture.* Traditional Islam is viewed as a religious practice with exclusively spiritual concerns, which rejects politicization and even social commitment, and promotes 'national' and local religious and cultural traditions. In so doing, political authorities have in some ways resumed the Soviet model of control and management of religion which insisted on treating as 'folklore' a certain number of socio-cultural phenomena like religion* with the aim of warding off the risk of politicization of religious movements.

*Kehl-Bodrogi 2008: 153-186

*Hann and Pelkmans 2009: 1524

To do so, the authorities have relied on local Muslim clergy, anticipating that the latter will take on such re-traditionalization, and opt for government support of conservatism in social mores in exchange for depoliticization and an expectation that they will be allowed to practice with minimal state interference. Most of the post-Soviet Central Asian ulema recognizes the existence of a secular state as long as its religious freedom is generally respected. Moreover, the mullahs of small neighbourhood mosques, thanks to whom Islam was able to survive as an element of social and cultural life during the Soviet period, are usually local notables faithful to the political choices made by their clan or their mahalla. They strongly approve the incorporation of local traditions into the practice of Islam, and they favour a conservative and apolitical re-Islamisation. Finally, the combination of religion and ethnicity with the promotion of a so-called traditional Islam has been all the more easy to promote as wherever it is indigenous in the former Soviet Union, Islam has taken firm root in the local social structure. Marginalized from the great centres of influence of Islamic civilization, cut off from the rest of the Middle East as a result of the adoption of Shiism in Iran, the Islam of Tsarist Russian and Soviet Central Asia developed some distinctive features which do not exactly fit, on both the dogmatic and ritual level, with the classical Islam of the Arabic-speaking world.

Yet, in so doing the Muslim clergy have played an ambiguous part in their own exploitation and very often let the authorities

make instrumental use of them. The agreement on the part of Muslim clergy to being under state control turns out to be paradoxical: while some clergy hope that this will turn out to be a means of entering the official structures discreetly Islamizing the state, it seems that, on the contrary, it is the state which would succeed in secularizing the representatives of Islam once they have in effect become civil servants. However, a key factor for the power has been to manage influence and its relationships with increasingly diverse religious leaders at the local and national levels. In Central Asia, as anywhere else, there has been increasing competition between sources of authority, helping to significantly diversify the affiliations and practices of Islam.* The authorities have been increasingly concerned about the emergence of a new generation of theologians, many of them trained abroad while migrant workers or in new Islamic schools, and who consider that a radical Islamization of post-Soviet societies would represent, in the medium term, one of the best guarantees of enhancing their own professional prospects.

*Borbieva 2017: 151-172

To meet their stated ambitions to preserve a moderate Islam and secure peaceful coexistence of all religions, Central Asian political authorities have regulated religion through increasingly strict legislation and administrative control of religious institutions and practices, leading to a significant restriction of religious freedom from the late 1990s.

4.3 Legislative Efforts Increasingly Restricting Religious Rights

All Central Asian states, to varying extents, have kept or only slightly altered the Soviet control structures and procedures relating to religion, despite the principle of separation of state and religion stated in their constitutions. Councils for Religious Affairs have been maintained in all five countries. Despite their official function of advising and promoting dialogue between state and religious groups, these Councils enable the authorities to keep all religious movements under strict scrutiny. The *Soviet Central Spiritual Administrations of Muslims* (SADUM) for Central Asia was replaced by spiritual directions of Muslims for each state in the region, which keep constant control over Muslim life,* going as far in Uzbekistan under late President Karimov or in Turkmenistan still today as to provide pre-written sermons. They also provide the government with information on any unauthorized groups or communities that might try to practice an alternative Islam outside state control. After independence, several key Muslim figures who

*Бабаджанов 2000: 65

*Olcott 2012: 107-134

attempted to secure the independence of these boards from the state, for instance the Uzbekistani theologian Mukhammad-Sadik Mukhammad Yusuf, were forced to give up their office.*

Despite constitutions and relatively liberal religious laws passed in the first half of the 1990s guaranteeing religious freedom, legislation on religion has since then become increasingly restrictive, and laws have largely undermined fundamental principles of freedom of conscience, religion, or belief, although there are notable differences among the countries. Mandatory registration of religious groups was kept in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, and restored in Kazakhstan. Any religious community that fails to register under what are often stringent requirements is illegal and subject to fines, while its leaders, even its followers, can be arrested for practicing their religion. Political authorities have used registration requirements to exert pressure on “non-traditional” movements such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Protestant charismatic movements and the Baha’i.

*Muminov 2007: 29

*Muminov et al. 2010: 256;
Peyrouse 2017: 175

Although the restrictions promoted in the legislative framework apply to all religions, they are particularly aimed at some forms of Islam, including under the guise of preventing “extremism.” Shiite worship in the region is under strict scrutiny as Central Asian states fear possible religious interference from Iran, and no Shia mosque has been allowed to be built in Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, despite the fact that a significant ethnic Azeri Shia minority resides in the latter. The Sufi brotherhoods, initially encouraged as they were perceived as promoting a moderate and non-politicized Islam, have also been restricted.* Religious education remains a very sensitive issue in Central Asia and is also under very close control. The teaching of Islam is limited to a few madrassas and higher Islamic institutions attended by a small number of cautiously selected students. Outside of these institutions, any theological teaching of Islam has been banned and regularly, severely repressed.* Other religious movements such as proselytizing Christian churches come under special control and struggle to obtain the necessary authorizations for teaching religion, or are regularly repressed when such teachings or simple Bible readings are given in a private setting, for example in believer’s private apartment. Greater tolerance is, however, awarded to the large “traditional” churches, first and foremost the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as to the Catholic and Lutheran churches, which more easily obtain authorization to organize classes on religions, or are less likely to be repressed when they provide religious lessons in non-official settings.

In general, controls and restrictions have affected Islam more than the other so-called traditional religions. With the exception of Turkmenistan, and to a lesser extent Uzbekistan under late President Karimov, where – since the 1990s – many Christian places of worship had been closed, mosques and Muslim places of worship have been particularly targeted. In Uzbekistan, whereas 6,000 mosques were registered in 1993, by 1998, the figure had fallen to 1,967* and continued to decrease in the following years. In 2017, Tajikistan converted 2,000 mosques into facilities for general public use. Particular restrictions have also been placed on certain segments of the population; in Tajikistan, women are prohibited from attending services in mosques, and there are restrictions on children attending mosques and receiving religious education, particularly Islamic education. In Tajikistan, no minor may attend a mosque or participate in a Muslim service, except funerals. The pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) is also subject to very close state control, particularly over the number and individuals who can participate, such as in Turkmenistan where since independence fewer than 200 people per year have been allowed to visit Arabia although officially the Saudi authorities allow 5,000. Those who do go are generally selected for their political loyalty and supervised by the security services throughout their journey. Finally, authorities in all five countries have exercised strict censorship over the publication of religious materials, as well as over their import, partly in response to religious literature from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Jordan, which flooded into the region in the 1990s. While the publication, dissemination and importation of Christian literature is also tightly controlled, Christian works are generally less subject to pressure than books related to Islam.

*Abdullaev 2002: 256

Local authorities have on a regular basis used administrative harassment and other pressures, such as arbitrary arrest, and some cases of torture of believers engaged in unauthorized religious activities has been reported. Although believers from the so-called non-traditional Christian communities were affected – particularly Jehovah's Witnesses – such pressures were particularly exerted against the Muslim community. In Karimov's Uzbekistan, 17,000 thousand Muslims were put on a list of suspected extremists because they were regularly attending mosque, wearing beards (for men), or *hijab* (for women).

All the countries in the region are therefore experiencing significant restrictions and fundamental violations of religious rights. However, there are significant differences among them. Despite restrictions, Kyrgyzstan has since independence enjoyed greater

freedom of religion than any other state in the region. Kazakhstan and, to an even greater extent, Tajikistan, have curtailed the relative freedom and religious diversity they had established in the 1990s. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have since the early 1990s significantly restricted religious freedom, and human rights in general. The situation has improved under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who removed 16,000 of the 17,000 names on the list of suspected extremists and allowed people to attend the mosques regularly without fearing administrative retaliation, although controls and restrictions on religious activities are still pervasive.

Central Asian authorities have used the spectre of religious extremism to justify their control of religion. International events including the seizure of power in Afghanistan by the Taliban in the 1990s, the 11 September 2001 attacks, and the rise of the Islamic State in the 2010s, as well as events in Central Asia itself such as the bombings in Tashkent in February 1999, Islamist incursions in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan in the summers of 1999 and 2000, and bombings in Uzbekistan in 2004, have been widely instrumentalized by the ruling powers to justify the toughening stance on religious practice, especially on Islam.* They have built on a paternalistic narrative to set themselves up as protectors of their citizens who, suddenly deprived of any reference frame, would have “spontaneously” turned towards religion and, consequently, could potentially be victims of fundamentalist and even violent movements. Yet, in so doing, they have deliberately ignored the gap between the official Communist political ideal and the Soviet reality that had its roots in the history of the regime long before Gorbachev’s liberalizations; faith never ceased to exist and the end of the Soviet Union only accelerated a much older process. Perestroika and independence were not the ‘rediscovery’ of religion but the officialization of a phenomenon that has never been extinguished.

*Horsman 2005: 199–213

Moreover, this rigid approach by the state – unfairly likening moderate supporters of the separation of state and religion to fundamentalist supporters of Islamic political models – inevitably provokes reactions from the Muslim community and theologians. In the more repressive republics, the authorities have unwittingly fed the feeling that the religious hierarchy is corrupt and disconnected from the real needs of the believing population. Moreover, limiting the autonomy of the religious phenomenon transforms it, in the eyes of part of the population, into a counterweight to the government. As a result of their overcautious attitude towards the autonomy of ‘civil society’ and their fear of losing control of the religious phenomenon in its totality, the authorities thus themselves

contribute to the birth of a reaction against them and speed up the social anchoring of an alternative Islam which may or may not be destined to become more radical.

5. Alternative and Politicized Islam in Central Asia

After independence, Central Asia indisputably experienced a diversification of movements proposing alternative and sometimes politicized approaches of Islam, with the development of the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan, the emergence of the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan, the arrival of foreign proselytizing movements such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (حزب التحرير – Liberation Party) or *Tablighi Jamaat* (The Outreach Society), or the recruitment of Central Asians into transnational movements active beyond the Central Asian borders such as the Taliban movement in the 1990s, Al-Qaeda in the 2000s, the Islamic State or the Al-Nusra front in the 2010s. Facing an alleged growing threat of violent Islamism in Central Asia, local governments have presented non-*Hanafi* Islam as a new phenomenon that emerged after independence and took advantage of an alleged ideological void provoked by the collapse of the Soviet Union,* assimilated them with a set of very different movements under disparaging and overgeneralizing terms such as 'violent extremists', and presented them almost systematically as exogenous or supported by foreign forces. These three approaches, however, raise many questions and are discussed below.

*Khalid 2007: 117

5.1 The Impact of the Soviet Legacy on Islamism and Salafism in Central Asia

Despite the strict control of religion by Soviet structures, the doctrines of political Islam developed on their own in Central Asia, within the very heart of the Soviet system. For many decades, Central Asia has experienced considerable internal theological debate among reformers, conservatives, and fundamentalists. These debates, however, did not derive from outside influences, but rather developed as a function of local criteria – regional traditions, references to influential intellectual figures, the relation of the region to the Soviet state, and specific social and economic conditions. The rise of fundamentalist Islam in the region was further facilitated by the Soviet repression of reformist Islam.

Even in the 1920s and 1930s, the worst years of Stalinist repression, the local ulama opposed each other in their readings of Islam and continued to train their own disciples. The SADUM, despite its apparent subservience to official Communist discourse, enabled

*Babadzhanov 2001: 195–220;
Peyrouse 2007: 40–54

the discreet intercourse of theological discussion and the pursuit of debates among reformers, conservatives, and fundamentalists.* From the 1970s onward, the Ferghana Valley became the main region in which fundamentalist conceptions of Islam crystallized, and a leading battleground between Hanafite conservatives and fundamentalists inspired by *Hanbalism* and *Shafi'ism*.⁶

*Abramson 2010: 36–24

*Balci 2018: 108

*Borbieva 2017: 172

The political liberalization initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika enabled the proliferation of contacts between Central Asians and other Muslim countries. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, an array of Islamic groups from Middle Eastern and Gulf countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey came to Central Asia to support the development of Islamic institutions and fund the construction of mosques, apparently to exert religious and political influence. Yet, political Islam did not come to the region simply via the external influence of foreign Islamic missionaries, but rather initially began to develop within the Central Asian Soviet milieu itself. Contacts among various Islamic communities took place through literature imported by the SADUM during the Soviet period, and later, after independence, through other channels. For example, Gorbachev's liberalization enabled a proliferation of contacts between Central Asians and other Muslim countries. Many students went to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan to study Islam.* Their return contributed, to some extent, to a flow into Central Asia of a political approach to Islam, although most of those who returned did not bring back radical Islamic ideas.* Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Borbieva, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, where top Muftiate officials have degrees from Saudi Arabia or Egypt, many Muslims found "unique local understandings of Islam less compelling than discourses defined in a limited, accessible corpus of texts and shared with Muslims all across the world."*

5.2 The Polycentric Nature of Alternative Islam and Islamist Movements in Central Asia

From independence, Central Asian political authorities deliberately ignored the very polycentric nature of movements proposing alternative approaches to Islam, by their objectives (promotion of a national Islam in reaction to the censorship of the state policy, or of an Islam called pure and transnational, or sometimes both), by the

⁶ *Hanabali* and *Shafi'i* are two other major (but conservative) schools (*madhāhib* – مذاهب) of Sunni jurisprudence (*fiqh* – فقه); the fourth one is *Maliki*, who is more moderate, but not as liberal as the *Hanafi* school.

nature of their activism (political or apolitical, violent or non-violent engagement), by the geographical place of their activities (in Central Asia or beyond the borders of the region, Afghanistan or the Middle East), and their evolutionary character (some movements advocating against the separation of religion and state eventually accepted it). It is therefore necessary to disaggregate these movements to present their complexity and diversity, as much in their ends as in their means.

First, several movements emerged in response to local governments' repressive policies and their refusal to sufficiently integrate the Muslim component of the local culture into the methods of governance of justice, and also called into question the separation of religion and state. This is the case with the *Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan* (IRPT – *Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston*). The IRPT originates from the Revival of Islamic Youth of Tajikistan, founded in 1972 as an underground organization in the Tajik SSR. It took inspiration from the Jadid (Reformer) movement (see Box 7.2), seeing it as an indigenous liberalizing tradition interrupted by the Soviet experiment. The IRPT became more prominent after the collapse of the Soviet regime, aiming to revive Islam after decades of anti-religious policies, supporting the overlapping of Islam and collective identity, and following the evolution of Islamist movements such as existed in the Middle East – that is, evolution in a nationalist direction such as in Iran or Palestine. The movement has significantly revised its political approach, at least officially. After military engagement during the Tajik civil war between 1992 and 1996, the IRTP agreed to participate in a coalition government, committed to respect the secular constitution framework, no longer advocated the Islamization of the state but accepted the Islamization of society in a traditionalist mode, and even championed Tajik nationalism versus Uzbekistan. As ethnic solidarity has prevailed over ideology, the IRPT has never formed an effective alliance with Uzbek or other Central Asian Islamists. The IRPT was the only Islamist political party recognized in Central Asia until it was banned in Tajikistan in 2015. Other small parties have benefited from short periods of legal recognition, but they are very often more 'nationalist' than strictly 'Islamist' and call only for an officialization of Islam by the state with the aim of a 'national rebirth.' An example is the *Alash* party in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, before it was banned.*

*Möhämmätshin1997

A second movement, created in 1996, the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU – *O'zbekiston islomiy harakati*), like the IRPT,

reacted to the authoritarian and anti-religious policy of the government, as well as to social injustice, but quickly engaged in violent activism in Uzbekistan and beyond, including in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. Its tactics in the 1990s, while Tajikistan was engulfed in civil war and Afghanistan was under the rule of the Taliban, involved underground and guerrilla activity, but these ceased to be effective once the territories were controlled by regular armies serving the current governments. The fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 deprived the IMU of its training grounds. Its most radical members reassembled in the tribal regions of Pakistan, far away from Uzbekistan.* The movement has since significantly weakened and disintegrated. In 2002, major internal dissensions, triggered by a rhetoric founded on a globalized Jihad as opposed to combat against Central Asian political powers, brought about a schism: militants who aspired to redirect their combat against the Central Asian governments, in particular the Uzbek government, left the IMU and created the *Islamic Jihad Union* (IJU).^{*} In 2015, although supported by and supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan, the IMU pledged allegiance to ISIS, again provoking an outflow of activists who refused this reorientation. Although considerably weakened, the movement may nevertheless remain active to a limited extent on a regional scale, and its future will probably depend on developments concerning the Islamic State of Khorasan.*

*Peyrouse 2018: 141-143

*Balci and Chaudet 2014: 5

*Giustozzi 2018: 214-217

Foreign Islamist groups have also penetrated the region, beginning in the 1990s. One of the most popular, Hizb ut-Tahrir, was created in Jordan in the 1950s and advocates the Islamization of power and supports a pan-Islamist philosophy through the establishment of a Caliphate, officially through non-violent means. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international movement, local chapters' activities in Central Asia have been adapted to the local context by developing a national argument combined with a strongly anti-western and anti-Semitic narrative.* Despite some surface unity that the activists themselves aim to display, many people joining movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir appear motivated by local social conditions. Mobilization around the idea of a worldwide Caliphate and a unified Islamic nation is very often a long-term ideal consciously or unconsciously postponed. In spite of numerous alliances and contacts amongst participants, it is quite unlikely that they could unite since local interests are so important. Many Islamist activists in Central Asia have joined parties in order to fight simultaneously against the current regimes, judiciary injustices against persons considered to be too 'religious,' or the deterioration of the economic situation. In most authoritarian states, such as in Karimov's

*Karagiannis and McCauley 2009: 323

Uzbekistan or in Tajikistan, this membership is understood as a mode of political opposition – the only one possible – and the theological goal of a Caliphate is quite irrelevant to the daily concerns of the activists.

Another movement, the Tablighi Jamaat, originating from the Indian subcontinent, developed in the region after independence, but has since been banned in all states except Kyrgyzstan. Although denounced by Central Asian governments as extremist, the Tablighi are different from groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir in their intentional apoliticization, refusing to take part in elections or any other political activity. Although transnational and foreign, this movement also experienced a process of localization in Central Asia, with its leaders adapting their discourses and practices to the local context. Subsequently, the movement has succeeded in adapting and making locally acceptable a religious approach previously associated with foreign beliefs and practices.*

*Toktogulova 2017: 226

The states of the former Soviet Union have been, along with those of Western Europe and the Middle East, main targets for recruiters of foreign fighters for ISIS. However, the scale of the phenomenon, although very real, has been largely overestimated in Central Asia. While governments have advanced numbers of between 5,000 and 10,000 recruited until 2017, most sources report a maximum of 5,000 Central Asians who had joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq.* Central Asians have mainly been recruited abroad during their migration to Russia, where their status as marginalized migrant workers may have increased their vulnerability as targets. Moreover, while violent Islamist militants in the 1990s were mainly engaged in Afghanistan through – among others – the IMU and IJU, many have gradually turned their attention to the conflict in Syria, seduced by propaganda promoted by the Islamic State on social networks, which asserted that they are mistreated or disadvantaged specifically because of their Muslim identity and combined this with a narrative about the “just war” against the Syrian al-Assad government and on the jihad to stop the slaughter of innocents.* For Central Asians facing harsh conditions and unemployment in their home country, on top of pressures from local governments restricting the practice of Islam, the Islamic State offered a utopian ideal where every Muslim has a place and a status; many were also promised financial benefits, free housing and education for their children, regardless of their social origin. Moreover, as migrants, they were no longer under the control of their family, community or even religious circle, which had constituted an important preventive mechanism against recruitment of young

*Barrett 2017

*Tucker 2015: 22

people into violent militancy. In addition, for migrants recruited in Russia, Syria is a more attractive destination as it is far cheaper and easier to fly to Turkey and go from there to Syria than to travel to Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Finally, alternative approaches of Islam – including ‘Salafism,’ which involves a literal reading of the scriptures and a desire to circumvent history by a return to the Islam of earlier time – have been propagated through the transnational circulation of people and ideas. The development of Islamic financing and Sharia-compliant businesses developed particularly after the 2000s, highlighting the increasing number of entrepreneurs driven by the desire to align their business practices with their religious beliefs.* Although Islamic financing has been increasingly encouraged by political authorities, small entrepreneurs’ motivations significantly differ from those of local political authorities, which are driven primarily by political and economic benefits.*

*Botoeva 2017: 245-262

*Botoeva 2017: 250

Moreover, growing religiosity among migrant populations, particularly in Russia, where about four million Central Asians annually travel for seasonal work, may foster a possible emergence of new leaders outside the control of government, and a religious practice both freer and potentially more distant from the standards imposed by Central Asian authorities.* In addition to labour migrants, the growing number of young people studying in foreign universities has contributed to the spread of alternative Islam, sometimes in radical forms – although the role of extremist madrassas in radicalizing Central Asians has been exaggerated by local governments.* Students completing religious studies in universities in Egypt or Pakistan have attracted the concern of Central Asian governments, leading, for example, the Tajik authorities to call students back home and to threaten the families of those who refused to obey. However, with this approach, the governments are ignoring three problems: first, the lack of opportunities for Islamic education in the region has led an increasing number of young people seeking alternatives abroad; second, while some were actually recruited by fundamentalist madrassas, many students were at universities whose training was recognized but were faced – once they returned to their own countries – with government refusal to accept their degrees or integrate them. They could thus become more vulnerable to extremist trends of religion. Finally, the attractiveness to students of foreign universities is very diverse and goes beyond religious motives. For many, going to a foreign university is less a quest for piety than a means to ensure better marriage conditions or access to a higher social status.*

*Eraliev 2018: 146

*Abramson 2010: 6

*Stefan-Emmrich 2017: 288

5.3 The Impact of Government Policy on Radicalization

Central Asian political authorities' aggregation of most alternative forms of religion, especially those which are Islamic, under the label of non-traditional and therefore a threat to local societies, has ignored the great diversity among them, some of which advocate moderate approaches, respectful of secular constitutions, while others support more radical trends, both in their narratives and in their means to achieve their goals. Most contemporary Central Asian states are using similar tactics as other authoritarian Muslim countries: a crackdown on radical Islam, state control of the religious institutions, and curbs on rule of law and democratization. As a consequence, "the obstacle to democratization does not come so much from the Islamist centrists as from the conservative secular elites who are first and foremost anxious to lock up their power and to exclude the Islamists."* The development of the Islamist movements in the region is fed by authoritarianism. In many of these countries, the ban on secular opposition opens the scope of the social claim to Islamist movements, which are the only ones to 'talk politics' and to voice their opinion on the current management of the country. This is not enough yet to allow one to assume that they are actually representative of an important part of the population; the majority of the Muslim population of the former Soviet Union remains favourable to the idea of a secular state respecting the religious rights of everyone. For example, more than 2/3 of the Tajik and Kyrgyz populations and 9/10 of the Kazakh population oppose making Sharia the law of the land, and more than 90% of the population in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan support religious freedom for other faiths.*

*Roy 2004: 46

*Pew Research Center 2013: 15, 63

Some of these movements are, therefore, tied to the diversification of the political landscape. Indeed, this very landscape is today either completely non-existent (as in Turkmenistan), or still largely restricted (as in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan), while in Kyrgyzstan, the weakness of the state and the criminalization of politics projects a weak image of "democracy." As Oliver Roy explains, "Islamization does not necessarily imply the setting up of another model of society, but rather the reappropriation of change,"* the possibility of which has yet to be granted to Central Asian societies. Secondly, the poor state of the economic and social systems in Central Asia feeds at the same time the resentment of a part of the population, unable to challenge authority under penalty of repression; this also generates migration flows which nourish precisely the diffusion of alternative, sometimes fundamentalist or even extremist currents.

*Roy 2004: 136

6. Conclusion

Since ancient times, Central Asia has been a land of religious diversity, which has, however, significantly varied along with changes in its political systems, particularly under the Timurids, and more recently in the 20th century under the Soviet regime. Looking at the history of the region over a long temporal scale, several remarks are to be taken into account before understanding the contemporary religious situation.

Central Asian history – and more generally, that of the Soviet Union – is traditionally divided into three temporal units: the Tsarist regime, the Soviet period, and the time following the proclamations of independence. The first would have contributed to the development of religion and of Christianity, as the Tsarist regime authorized the opening of many Orthodox churches and also of Protestant and Catholic prayer houses in order to allow the Slavic and German populations who settled in the region during the 18th and 19th centuries to practice their faith. The second would have instituted a long period of religious prohibition and systematic pressure on believers. The new states would allow, according to some observers, the revival of religious rights formerly granted by Tsarism. Yet, the Tsarist regime was not as liberal as the governments now claim; in addition, the Soviet period combined phases of repression and cohabitation throughout its existence and sought different modes of compromise with a religious phenomenon it could not master.

As for the new states of Central Asia, they are far from recognizing the right of individuals to practice any religion, without government regulation. The idea of a religious ‘renewal’ permitted by the collapse of the atheist Soviet regime is thus not devoid of some ambiguity, for it partly conceals the political realities of contemporary Central Asia. The concept of ‘renewal’ has enabled the states that appeared in 1991 to boast that they have given birth to democracy and allowed their countries to recover their religious freedom, while what they have hindered is the development of an open dialogue between religion and society. The ‘enemies of the people’ of Soviet times and the ‘enemies of stability’ of today comprise any elements which do not unambiguously align themselves with the authorities: political parties, non-governmental organizations, intellectually disobedient individuals. The state’s management of religion in Central Asia thus appears to be one of the main indicators of a political inability to think out the relation between state and religion inside an innovative conceptual framework.

One can, however, question the appropriateness of the tactics chosen by the local authorities to keep religion in general, and official Islam in particular, in their ideological clutches. The Islamic clergy are increasingly perceived as instruments in the authorities' hands, ill-equipped theologically to resist, and the official discourse, which associates any zealous observance or mystical approach (Sufism for instance) with terrorist Islamism, probably contributes to the radicalization of certain sections of the population. Apart from Kazakhstan, where the living standards of the population are rising, the four other republics of Central Asia are in difficult economic and social situations in which the argument of a political Islam capable of solving everything can appeal to many. Muslim charitable activity and solidarity, discreetly implemented by the Islamist movements, help to recruit families on the edge of poverty. A call for a seizure of the public property misappropriated by the elites in power and for a redistribution of the national income to the poor is likely to appeal to populations that are shocked by their experience of the 'market economy' in the 1990s. Besides, the social justice slogans of the Islamists are heard sympathetically by those who are nostalgic for the Soviet Union and its egalitarianism, and there are many such persons in Central Asia.

Even if the social environment in several parts of Central Asia represents an ideal breeding-ground for Islamism, we should nevertheless stress the fact that most citizens are secular in their outlook. The idea that religion should be separated from political life and remain a private matter is supported by most believers. There is, indeed, in Central Asia a local form of Islam which, despite its traditionalism and its conservatism, is characterized by its ability to survive and exist within a secular state, thanks to its renunciation of violence and its recognition of the separation between the secular and religious institutions as long as religious freedom is respected. Local Islam can prove to be very adaptable to the circumstances of the time, as it demonstrated in Soviet times. It is this adaptability that has always been, and still is, challenged by political Islam, which – unlike the 'traditionalists' – refutes the idea of an accepted existence of an Islamic community within a secular state. It is thus important to take into account this opposition between the Islamists and the majority of local Muslims, who consider these representatives of political Islam to be 'intruders' serving as the vehicle of an imported ideology. However, the pursuit of authoritarianism and the failure of the social contract risks fueling a politicized Islamic alternative discourse, as evidenced, for example, by the popularity of the IRPT in Tajikistan, a popularity

that led the political power, threatened in its legitimacy, to ban the party. Central Asian political authorities will not be able to avoid an essential aspect which is the diversification of the religious practice and the vectors of transmission of religion, and consequently of the increasing competing sources of religious authority, regardless of the degree of control, desired or proven, on the religious phenomenon.

By addressing the diversity of religions and their multiple denominations and internal trends in Central Asia throughout its history, this chapter has several goals. It first highlights the often overlooked important impact that the Tsarist and Soviet legacies had on post-Soviet management and the practice of religion in Central Asia. Second, it stresses that the so-called religious revival after the fall of the Soviet Union is materialized in the increasing religiosity of Central Asian populations and by a diversification in religious movements, but not as a resurgence of religious practice supposedly almost suppressed after the Bolshevik Revolution by the atheistic Soviet regime. Third, it aims to challenge some of the clichés circulated by post-Soviet Central Asian governments according to which they initiated and enabled religious renewal whereas the exercise of the right to freedom of religion has been regularly flouted since the collapse of the USSR. Finally, it highlights the impact of globalization on the religious phenomenon in Central Asia, where traditional and sometimes forcibly localized beliefs and practices co-exist with increasingly globalized beliefs and, although in a limited way, with processes of politization of religion and, in Central Asia, especially of Islam.

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8. Recommended Literature

First, the author suggests studies on the history of religion in the region, which are fundamental to understanding the current situation. This includes S. Keller's book, and chapters 3 and 4 of A. Khalid's book, which provides an excellent synthesis of Islam under the Soviet regime. Importantly, the recommendations given here aim to illustrate the diversity of religions in Central Asia, both in their management by the political authorities, and in their practices, through political, sociological, anthropological approaches. P. Jones' edited volume proposes one of the best multidisciplinary studies on a range of questions related to Islam in the region. Some specific case studies – for example for Uzbekistan (I. Hilgers and J. Rasanayagam) or for Kyrgyzstan (J. McBrien) – provide an in-depth anthropological approach. Political Islam, its extremist movements, and the limits of their development, are investigated in Jones' book. Finally, some recommendations are intended to propose the reader to study some more specific aspects not addressed in this chapter, such as gender and religion (S. Peshkova).

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Sébastien Peyrouse (PhD), is a research professor at the Central Asia Program in the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (George Washington University). His main areas of expertise are political systems in Central Asia, economic and social issues, Islam and religious minorities, and Central Asia's geopolitical positioning toward China, India and South Asia. He has authored or co-authored several books on Central Asia such as *Turkmenistan. Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe), *The "Chinese Question" in Central Asia. Domestic Order, Social Changes, and the Chinese Factor* (London, New York: Hurst, Columbia University Press) and *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe), and published many articles, including in *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *China Perspectives*, *Religion, State & Society*, and *Journal of Church and State*.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

As they move away from the Soviet legacy of management of religion, how can political authorities guarantee religious freedom while preventing extremism and radicalization?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Students will be working in groups to arrive at ideas on how to improve freedom of religions and guarantee secularism in the Central Asian authoritarian context. The purpose of the first two steps is to prepare the students for a final plenary discussion.

First, the teacher creates three groups. Each will be discussing a different set of issues. This interaction can start with a form of in-group brainstorming (in this case, the teacher reminds the students that brainstorming consists of writing down all possible ideas, without selecting only the ones that seem “correct” and rejecting the “wrong” ones). Students are asked to write down the main ideas of their group (and being provided with a sheet of paper and markers or an editable online document to work on). They are also informed that each of them will be representing their group at a later stage.

- **Group 1:** How to frame and improve freedom of religion in Central Asia after 70 years of atheism and in a context where religious rights remain widely flouted? Should the demands of certain believers or clergy members to limit religious freedom be met? For example, should Christian movements be allowed to carry out proselytizing activities which lead some Muslims to join these movements, at the risk, according to some, of causing interfaith unrest in Central Asian Muslim countries?
- **Group 2:** Is it legitimate to allow Islam to play a political role? A part of the population calls for Islam to play an increased role not only in society but also within state bodies and in state policy. Should the French/Western inspired concept of secularism be revised and adapted to the local Central Asian historical and cultural context? If yes, how?
- **Group 3:** How to address radicalization? How should the government regulate religion and build a framework that prevents extremist drifts and guarantees religious freedom? What would be the role of security services in addressing radicalization, and how should the political authorities ensure that they do not violate religious freedom?

A second step will bring the three groups together to compare their results and discuss the possible contradictions between the three of them, i.e. between the need to ensure religious freedom, and the need to prevent radicalizations. How to resolve contradictions? This part of the activity can be organized by mixing the members of the previous three groups. New groups – of three people – will be formed in such a way that there is always one member representing former Groups 1, 2 and 3. In this way, each person will report to the new group on their previous group ideas, in order to carry out a more detailed discussion. Another solution would be groups of six people (two representatives of Groups 1, 2 and 3). In this part, first contradictions are identified, and then possible solutions are discussed within the groups. The teacher provides feedback when needed and writes down key ideas (regarding contradictions and solutions) on the blackboard. A final, summary discussion is carried out in plenary, moderated by the teacher.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_a0xPtgosY&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

Съ казіевъ (народныхъ судей).

Kazi court.

CHAPTER 8

The Historical Conditioning of Languages and Ethnicities in Central Asia

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Keywords:

• Language • Ethnicity • Nativization • Deportation • Social Engineering • Language Policy

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand why the linguistic landscape of Central Asia is so complex.
- Present the linguistic landscape of Central Asia under the Tsarist Empire.
- Argue how the Soviet influence altered and shaped those cultures.
- Relate the languages with the nation-building processes after 1991.
- Relate the languages with the political agendas of the leaders of the countries.
- Give examples to illustrate that language policies are instruments of identity-building.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- Which are the languages of Central Asia?
- Which are the ethnicities and minorities of Central Asia?
- How do you think foreign powers affect or have affected their development in the past?

Main questions

- Why is the linguistic landscape of Central Asia so complex?
- Which ethnic groups and languages existed in Central Asia during the Tsarist period?
- How did the Soviet Union's policies alter the Central Asian linguistic landscape?
- How did Central Asian states approach the language issue after the fall of the Soviet Union?
- How did their choices impact the minorities and their language use?
- Which scripts have been used for each language and where?

Post-reading questions

- What are ethnicities and nations?
- Why is identity a source of political contention?
- Why do languages become a source of political contention?
- Are there any other contentious social constructs that have affected the people of the region?
- Beyond Central Asia, which regions have lived complex sociolinguistic changes? Which other languages have been used as tools for nation-building and how? How did political choices affect those languages? Think about other languages whose status varies depending on the different states where they are spoken. In the European context you might want to consider the examples of Romanian in the Republic of Moldova and Romania, or Albanian in Albania and Kosovo. Could they be compared with Kazakh in Kazakhstan and Xinjiang?

CHAPTER 8

The Historical Conditioning of Languages and Ethnicities in Central Asia

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AT A QUICK LOOK, the Central Asian linguistic landscape seems simple to decode: there are five republics, an autonomous region, and six corresponding languages. After a deeper look, however, things turn out to be more complex than that. Each of these entities has its own national language, but with two major nuances. First, the use of language does not overlap the administrative territory of that state. Second, foreign languages still play a major role in the everyday geopolitics and geo-linguistics of the region. Third, it is not uncommon for an individual to speak several languages (Uzbek and Kyrgyz, for instance). This stems from the fact that the Central Asian languages are not that separated but share a common origin and history.

This chapter has a chronological structure: firstly, the authors illustrate the modern history of ethnicities and languages in Central Asia, from the invasion of Turkestan by the Russian Empire to the linguistic policies adopted under the Soviet Union; second section analyses how the national policies adopted since 1991 have affected the complex linguistic panorama of the region; finally, this chapter surveys the languages of contemporary Central Asia while denoting their features and paradoxes. The geographical notion of Central Asia is in line with the rest of this handbook, and therefore, this survey of languages will be mainly limited to the five post-Soviet countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, but in addition also extends to the autonomous region of Xinjiang, in China.

The unfolding of the chapter proves to readers how the history of dominance over the Central Asian populations has conditioned and shaped languages and ethnicities through migrations, resettlements, as well as statal and national policies. The authors will show that, besides an official 'national' language, a myriad of nuances exist and contribute to shaping the relationship with local culture, memory, and society.

1. From Turkestan to the Soviet Republics: Social Engineering and Nation-building in Central Asia

The Russian Empire conquered Turkestan in various moments over the 1800s. (In contrast, Map 8.1 provides an illustration how the region looked before the Tsarist conquest.) By the end of the 19th century, Tashkent, Khujand, Diyak, and Samarkand had been conquered by the Russian Empire, which also managed to defeat the Khanate of Kokand, and the Emirate of Bukhara leading in 1867 to the establishment of the Governor-Generalship of Russian Turkestan. Subsequent expansions led to the annexation of Ashkhabad, Merv, and Pendjeh (now in Turkmenistan). While Bukhara, and Khiva remained largely independent, economic relations were boosted by the desire to access cotton markets in the region. This meant that Russian influence came also in the form of infrastructural and technological development, with the Transcaspian and Trans-Aral Railways respectively from Krasnovodsk and Orenburg to Samarkand and Tashkent. The table below shows the languages spoken in the provinces of Central Asia in 1897.

Table 8.1 Population and Demographic Composition of the Russian General Governorates and Steppe Provinces in Central Asia in 1897

TERRITORY OR PROVINCE		POPULATION	COMPOSITION		
			Indigenous populations		Russian settlers and cadres
General Turkestan Governorate	"Nuclear provinces" from 1876	3,910,633	<i>Sart, Uzbeks, Kazakhs (Kirgiz-Kaysak) and Tajiks.</i>		3,810,364
Trans-Caspian Province		382,487	<i>Turkmen and Kazakhs</i>		322,876
Total for the General Turkestan Governorate		4,293,120			4,133,240
General Governorate of the Steppe	Province of Semipalatinsk	684,590	<i>Kazakhs</i>		604,564
	Province of Akmolinsk	682,608	<i>Kazakhs</i>		427,389
	Province of Semirechye	987,863	<i>Kazakhs, Kyrgyz (Kara-Kirgiz), Uyghurs (Taranchi), and Sart</i>		865,907
Total for the General Governorate of the Steppe		2,355,061			1,897,860
Steppe provinces	Province of Ural'sk	645,121	<i>Kazakhs</i>		460,173
	Province of Turgay	453,416	<i>Kazakhs</i>		410,904
Total for the Steppe provinces		1,098,537			871,077
Total		7,746,718			6,902,177

Source: The table has been translated from the original Dutch version of Bruno J. De Cordier, *Het onbeloofde land. Een geschiedenis van Centraal-Azië*, (Leuven: Acco, 2012): 137.

1.1 Nativization and Administrative Borders

A double process of adaptation of the Central Asian tribes of Turkestan and social engineering on part of the state started only in the 1920s with the Bolsheviks – cf. Map 8.2. Allegedly, the decision to divide Turkestan in five Soviet republics was taken following ethnical and linguistical divides. For the Bolshevik leaders, the only way to empower the people of Central Asia was through political mobilization. Nevertheless, no political mobilization could have been achieved without literacy. At the time, the literacy of the nomadic tribes of the region was less than 5%.^{*} Therefore, the first move of the Soviet government was to make them literate in their own mother tongues. This policy, known under the name of *korenizatsiya* (“rooting” or “nativization”), was promoted throughout the 1920s and 1930s along with the creation of careers in local administrations in native languages.^{*}

*Schlyter 2003: 164

During the Russian revolution of 1917, a provisional government of Jadid (Muslim modernist) reformers tried to declare Turkestan’s autonomy but faced short life against the Tashkent Soviet, eventually opening the way for the invasion of Bukhara and Khiva and the establishment of the *Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic*. In a mixed attempt to respect local traditions to minimize chances of rebellion and divide populations that could find lots of common points (language, religion) and eventually reduce the risks by Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism, the Soviets set out to divide the region.^{*}

*Haugen 2003

In 1920, the Kirgiz(-Kaysak) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established and soon after, in 1925, renamed as the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, from which the Kyrgyz (Kara-Kirgiz) Autonomous Oblast’ was then decoupled and upgraded to the status of USSR constituent republic in 1936. In 1924, the Uzbek and Turkmen SSR were established (as shown on Map 8.3) and, in 1929, a small territory of the Uzbek SSR was separated and renamed the Tajik SSR.^{*} Together Map 8.2 until 8.4 show different phases of the evolution from the simplified Socialist Republics of Kyrgyz and Turkestan at the end of the 1920s until the quasi-definite creation of the five Central Asian republics by the end of 1936.

*Fierman 2009

Borders were only partly mirroring ethnic divisions, often leading to co-existence of different ethnic groups in the same territory or city (i.e. Osh, Shymkent). The creation of Autonomous Oblasts (Khorezm, Karakalpak) was then used to acknowledge this kind of difference without granting full autonomy to a territory. To high-

*Haugen 2003

light differences, local languages and cultures were codified, the Cyrillic alphabet was later introduced as the script for all Central Asian languages (replacing earlier Persian and Latin alphabets), in order to eventually make Soviet citizens unable to read Turkish or Farsi and feel somehow detached from countries with a similar language.

1.2 Deportations and Evacuations

Soviet population policies significantly affected Central Asian languages and cultures. While forced collectivization led to the death of at least a million individuals, with the establishment of strategic factories and military facilities came the need to import specialized workers mostly from other SSR republics. In addition, agricultural campaigns led to the resettlement of more than 300,000 agricultural workers, mostly to Kazakhstan. Deportation and evacuation policies also largely affected the ethnic and linguistic composition of Central Asia, with potentially dangerous individuals being moved to remote Central Asian areas. For instance, after the German invasion, Soviet citizens of German origins were considered dangerous and deported to Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan and employed to develop infrastructure for war efforts. Deportation of Karachays, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingushetians, Kabardians, and Crimean Tatars to Central Asia followed the logic to neutralize groups that had allegedly befriended German troops during their invasion.^{1*}

*Manley 2009; Polian 2004

Evacuation followed a different logic and was intended to move important industry and *intelligentsia* to Central Asia, where they would mostly be inaccessible to the Nazi advance. As a result, in 1941 alone, 12 million Soviet citizens were evacuated to the region, significantly reshaping its composition.*

*Manley 2009; Soucek 2000

By force of these events, linguistic and administrative borders were set in highly arbitrary forms. Nevertheless, distinguishing ethnicities is often impossible, particularly because the main trait, language, is shared, changed, and exchanged in consideration of the needs of communities and their spirit of adaptation.

Soviet national policies had been largely based on co-opted and recycled ethnic categorization efforts aimed at clipping the wings

¹ The Crimean Tatars and Kalmyks are from Mongolian descent and had migrated to the Crimea and just north of the Caucasus respectively. The other are ethnic groups with homelands in the northern part of the Caucasus; in the northwest: Karachays and Kabardians are respectively from Kipchak-Turkic and Circassian descent; in the northeast Chechens and Ingushetians have been native to the region for centuries.

Map 8.1 Central Asia in the Early 18th Century

This map with the region's modern outermost boundaries presents the main titular ethnic groups as well as the khanate of Khiva (1511-1920) and emirate of Bukhara (1785-1920). In the early 18th century Central Asia was engulfed in a series of territorial realignments between Kazakhs, Dzhungars, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Turkomans. The Muscovite Russian advance into Kazan and Astrakhan in the 16th century, had brought Tsarist forces to the region's fringes with their city-fortresses of Yait'sk / Ural'sk (1620) and Guriev (1645), and Semipalatinsk (1718), and these would close in from the north under Tsar Peter the Great and his successors in the 19th century (as shown on Map 15.8) targeting the Kazakhs, who were weakened by Dzhungar raids. From this unstable period of inter-tribal feuding and economic and political turmoil the Kokand khanate would swiftly emerge as a new polity in the Ferghana valley (from 1709), first as a vassal of the Qing dynasty, later conquering large tracts of the eastern Bukhara emirate along the Syr Darya, expanding northwards into what today is south Kazakhstan, and southwards into the Khujand and Badakhshan regions (now Tajikistan), reaching its greatest extent under Muhammad Ali (Madali) Khan (1822-1844), until it was conquered and abolished by the Russians in 1876.

Sources:

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 29, 32.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 56-59.

Scott C. Levi, *The Rise and Fall of Khoqand, 1709-1876*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): 134.

Map created by editors, designed by Typeface NV.

Map 8.2 Central Asian Territorial Divisions in 1920

By 1920 the Bolshevik nationality policy (to identify and grant titular 'nations' their homelands) had not been implemented yet and Central Asia was still mostly divided based on Tsarist oblast' delineations. The Turkestan ASSR (thus part of the RSFSR) was created in April 1918 on the territory of the (earlier) Turkestan Governorate-General (1775-1917), including the Syr Darya, Semirechye, Samarkand and Ferghana oblast' (former Kokand Khanate).

In August 1920 the former Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, Turgay and Ural' Oblast' and the northern part of the Zakaspiian oblast' were united in the new Kirgiz ASSR (also part of the RSFSR). The term Kirgiz had been erroneously applied to Kazakhs since the 18th century while the Kyrgyz were called Kara-Kirgiz.

In the former khanate of Khiva the khan abdicated in February 1920 transforming the polity in the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic. The emirate of Bukhara followed the same fate in August 1920. However, these last two (Turkic-Iranian multilingual) polities were the main obstacles for implementing the nationality policy in the region, and both would be dismantled after 1924 in the upcoming delineations, after Moscow had dismissed alternative solutions out of fear for enabling Pan-Islamist and Pan-Turkic counterrevolutionary forces (e.g. the Basmachi insurrections).

Sources:

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 32, 33, 35.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 90-93.

Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1993): 154-155.

Map created by editors, designed by Typeface NV.

Map 8.3 Central Asian Territorial Divisions in 1926

In 1926 the effects of the experimental national territorial delimitation (*национально-территориальное размежевание*) policy were clearly visible. With the Kirgiz ASSR serving as a precedent, Moscow proceeded by creating an additional two nation-states and three autonomous entities in Central Asia.

By 1923 Moscow had increased control over the two People's Republics, changing them into the Khorezm Soviet Socialist Republic (October 1923) and Bukharan Soviet Socialist Republic (September 1924), only to abolish both in October 1924 to make way for two new SSRs (Uzbek and Turkmen), the new Tajik ASSR (part of the Uzbek SSR), and two new Autonomous Oblasts (AOs): Karakalpak and Kara-Kirgiz. The Karakalpaks speak a (Kipchak-)Turkic language closer to Kazakh and the Kara-Kirgiz were fully nomadic and difficult to control by the Soviets, and thus better separated from their Kirgiz/Kazakh kin. The choice for a new 'Uzbek' language from local dialects instead of relying on the universal, literary Chagatai Turkic was to counter pan-Turkic ideas.

In May 1925 name changes were introduced, with the Kirgiz ASSR now becoming the Kazakh ASSR, including the Karakalpak AO and the renamed and (in 1926) upgraded Kyrgyz ASSR (formerly the Kara-Kirgiz AO). The Gorno-Badakhshan AO had been created in July 1923, but was officially added to the Tajik ASSR in January 1925.

Sources:

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 37.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 94-95.

Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1993): 154-155.

Map created by editors, designed by Typeface NV.

Map 8.4 Central Asian Territorial Divisions in 1936

By late 1936 the final changes had been made to the Central Asian territorial divisions. In 1929 the Tajik ASSR was given 'independence' and saw its upgrade to an SSR. Under the 1924 USSR constitution, this sparsely populated ASSR did not have the requisite population of one million, so Moscow ceded the Leninabad/ Khujand province from the Uzbek SSR to complete the Tajik SSR. In reality this was a barter, trading a non-Tajik, populous province from the rich Ferghana valley in exchange for the Tajik-dominated cities of Samarkand and Bukhara that would remain within the Uzbek SSR.

The Kazakhs and Kirgyzs would not become fully-fledged titular nations until after the brutal mass collectivization had been completed (1934) and became the Kazakh SSR and KirgYZ SSR only in 1936, validated by the new USSR constitution.

In the same year the Karakalpak AO was upgraded to an ASSR and transferred to the Uzbek SSR, after having belonged to the Kazakh ASSR since 1925 and briefly to the RSFSR since 1930. From 1932 Turtkul (before Petroaleksandrovsk) until 1939 was its capital, but after repeated floodings from the Amu Darya river Nukus was chosen as its new capital. It is this territorial constellation that would enter the independence era in 1991, with Karakalpak retaining its status within Uzbekistan, and Gorno-Badakhshan AO playing a pivotal role in the Tajik civil war.

Sources:

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 32, 35.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 90-95.

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Dillip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*, (London-New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009): 47-48.

Jean and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'orient: Moyen-Orient, Caucase, Asie centrale*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1993): 155.

Map created by editors, designed by Typeface NV.

of emerging Turkic national consciousness, as well as ethnographical research from the Tsarist era. The result was the creation of different republics distinguishing ethnicities based on language.

1.3 Russo-Soviet Assimilation

In the first phase, even if Russian did not become the state language of every Soviet republic, it nevertheless gained the status of inter-ethnic communication language.* From 1938, a decree issued the compulsory teaching of Russian in all schools throughout the Union. This was shortly followed by the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet for native languages in 1940. It had been the third change of code in a few years. In fact, after an initial phase of adapting Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, and Kyrgyz to the Persian alphabet, from 1928 they had been switched to the Latin script to set them apart from their linguistic neighbours. Under Khrushchev, Russian became a symbol of socialist unity, and with the laws of 1958-1959, the teaching of native languages in the first years of school was no longer obligatory.*

*Fierman 2012

*Ferrando 2012

These policies inevitably produced social consequences in the Soviet republics of Central Asia. In the literature, there is a tendency to portray them as either a form of colonization or modernization. The picture however was more nuanced: natives learning the Russian language, absorbing the Soviet culture, and ascending the state hierarchy were perceived as different from those who did not manage or refused to achieve such results. These individuals were referred to by other natives as “Russi.”* A similar assimilation of natives into Soviet culture has been observed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as well as in Belarus and Ukraine. On the other hand, parents often aimed for their children to learn Russian – perceived as an indicator of superior culture, and therefore means to progress in life. Hence, another result of these policies was to associate the ideas of modernity and backwardness to Russian and native republican languages, respectively.

*Dadabaev 2013

While Kazakh and Kyrgyz could be mutually intelligible, the presence of Russian, Ingushetian or Tatar speakers reinforced Russian as the language of communication. The melting pot was reinforced through inter-ethnic marriages that produced new generations of multilingual Central Asians.* Spoken by the members of the cultural and political elite, Russian was soon associated with the notion of a higher culture, pushing families in desiring a Russian education for their children.* Russian has remained an important language even after the end of the USSR, with some major

*Kosmarskaya 2014

*Dadabaev 2013

*Kosmarskaya 2014

cities using it more than the national language, and education still offered in Russian in several institutions. Initially, the Russification of the colonized peripheries did not aim to assimilate but rather to “foster identification among the minority communities.”* Even though Soviet authorities revolutionized the political institutions of the once Tsarist Russia, linguistic education in the peripheries of the empire maintained many elements of continuity. Partially justified by the fact that Central Asian languages were not fully developed, Russian was expected to stimulate the political awareness and self-consciousness of the Central Asian populations.

2. Language Policies since 1991

*Ferrando 2012

The proposed laws elevating native languages to official languages are believed to be one of the key elements that accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union. These laws were adopted in all five Central Asian states and as a result the first decade of independence coincided with a decline of Russian-speaking schools. Still, Russian did not lose its social status as it continues to be largely spoken and taught in all these five former republics.* The newly independent states approved constitutions that recognized Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, and Kyrgyz as their official languages.

*Brubaker 1996

Already in 1996 R. Brubaker warned about the “nationalization” of the state, referring to the possibility that national policies could be used to prompt a nationalist interpretation of state management and policy-making.* It is no secret that policies in Central Asian republics were often ethnically tainted. Since the 1990s, with some exceptions, Russian has undergone a continuous phasing out from the official life of Central Asian states. This does not mean it has left the sphere of everyday communication, but life for Russian speakers has become more complicated in a number of other spheres.

First, national languages have gradually replaced Russian in public communication. The process has not been easy, smooth or devoid of criticisms. But three decades after the collapse of the USSR, the status of Russian has strongly deteriorated to the benefit of national languages in several spheres of life, as shown in this Section. Apart from state policies, this process has also been shaped by demographic shifts and migration from the countryside to cities.

2.1 Kazakh

Kazakh is the Turkic language of a traditionally nomadic people. As such, in the beginning the language was not really codified, but

in its first years as a literary language, Kazakh (as Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek) saw a period of Arabic codification, shortly followed by a Latinization in the 1920s.* In the Soviet period, this path was abandoned in favour of the Cyrillic alphabet.

*Schlyter 2003; Sadykova and Saifulmalikova 2019

Since independence, the attitude of the Kazakh government towards the Russian ethnic group has aimed to be as inclusive as possible. Nursultan Nazarbayev's presidency (1991-2019) tried to maintain good relations with the Russian Federation and to prevent the secession of the Russian minority in the northern part of the country. Indeed, one of the alleged reasons behind the change of the capital city from Almaty to Astana (now renamed Nur-Sultan) in 1997 was to avoid neglecting other ethnic groups. Despite these attentions, the Kazakh language progressively increased its importance. Since 1993 the Kazakh constitution recognized Russian as the language of interethnic communication and nowadays is used along Kazakh in documents of the public administration.*

*Fierman 2012

In 2010, 50% of the population could speak Kazakh while 88% could speak Russian. Another important factor that contributed to the increasing importance of the Kazakh language is the arrival of *oralmandar* (ethnic Kazakh returnees – *оралмандар* in Kazakh) from Uzbekistan, Karakalpakstan, Xinjiang and Bayan-Ölgii (in Mongolia). In fact, from 1991, Kazakhstan financed a program of resettlement for 944,000 ethnic Kazakhs from these territories.* In 2018, the Kazakh language returned to the Latin script. Kazakh remains more diffused in the western and southern regions of the country, with younger generations more proficient than older ones.* In contrast to most post-Soviet states, Kazakhstan celebrates the languages of the peoples of Kazakhstan, on 22 September, and has done so every year since 1998. Moreover, 2020 has seen the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the birth of Abay Kunanbayev (Абай Құнанбайұлы – 1845-1904), renowned poet and writer, father – along with Mukhtar Auezov (Мұхтар Әуезов – 1897-1961) – of the modern Kazakh language. All major cities in Kazakhstan host statues of Abay Kunanbayev and the capital, Nur-Sultan, has a museum dedicated to the life and works of the poet.

*Werner et al. 2017

*Aminov et al. 2010; Laruelle et al. 2019

2.2 Kyrgyz

The *Kyrgyz Language Day* has been celebrated on 23 September every year since 1989, the year of the adoption of the law on languages. The first Kyrgyz alphabet was developed by the poet and politician Kasym Tynystanov (Касым Тыныстанов – 1901-1938) between 1921 and 1926, while he was studying at Kazinpros.² Exe-

² The Kazakh-Kyrgyz Enlightenment Institute was a pedagogical institution established in Tashkent (*Казахский институт просвещения – Казинпрос*)

Box 8.1 Moving a Capital: From Almaty to Nur-Sultan

Moving a capital city is not as infrequent as one would be led to think. From 1950 to 2000, twelve countries other than Kazakhstan moved their capital city. But when, in 1997, President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced that the capital would be moved from the rich Almaty to the small Akmola (Tselinograd in Soviet times, and lost in the Northern steppes of Kazakhstan), many questioned his reasons. The official explanations were geographic: Almaty rests on a dangerous seismic land, meaning the city's potential for expansion had been long exhausted by Soviet planners, and the surrounding mountains trap pollution over the city, particularly in winter. These reasons are of course valid, but they tell only part of the story.

As noted by Richard Wolfel and Edward Schatz, nation-building was one of the main reasons for moving the capital. On the one hand, the choice of having a capital closer to Russia allowed President Nazarbayev to avoid the creation of irredentist movements led by the Russian-speaking population residing in the north of the country. On the other hand, Nazarbayev had the chance to create a capital city in his image, reinforcing the sacralization of presidential power (cf. Adrien Fauve). This objective has reached its maturity with the re-naming of the city from 'Astana,' that from Kazakh simply translates as 'capital,' to the more evident 'Nur-Sultan' (Nazarbayev's first name). Far from the borders, the new Astana seemed like a safe choice to assert the identity of the multi-ethnic independent Republic of Kazakhstan through the provision of a new centre of balance.

Sources:

Adrien Fauve, 'Beyond 'Personality Cults': Sacralization of Power in Kazakhstan and the Concept of Monarchy,' in: Rico Isaacs; Alessandro Frigerio (eds.), *Theorizing Central Asian Politics: The State, Ideology and Power*, (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 167-188.

Edward Schatz, "When Capital Cities Move: The Political Geography of Nation and State-Building," *Working Paper*, no. 303, (The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 2003).

Richard L. Wolfel, "North to Astana: Nationalistic Motives for the Movement of the Kazakh(stani) Capital," *Nationalities Papers*, 30, no. 3, (2002): 485-506.

cuted in 1938, he was a victim of Stalin's Great Terror. Between 1994 and 1997, the bills of 10 Kyrgyzstani Som, the national currency, bore his portrait. Nowadays, his most relevant monument is in Bishkek in the courtyard of the *Kyrgyz National University*.

In the first years after independence, Kyrgyzstan did not have the financial nor logistical capability to deal with the education of minorities in their own language. For this reason, the government

allowed the Russian embassy to provide school education for its ethnic minority. Textbooks were imported from the respective kin-states of Uzbeks and Tajiks, and the lack of funds of minority schools was solved by the contribution of parents to the expenses.*

*Ferrando 2012

Nowadays, the primary language of Kyrgyz and Uzbek is the one of their respective ethnic group. Despite the large minority, Uzbek is still not considered an official language of the state, while Russian, spoken by 43.5% of the population, is formally recognized.* Nowadays, the public administration uses both Kyrgyz and Russian, but while the former remains the most common language in secondary education, the latter is the most used in tertiary education. Kyrgyz maintained an adapted form of Cyrillic script.

*Aminov et al. 2010

2.3 Tajik

The *State Language Day* is celebrated every year on 5 October. The festivity was moved in 2009, having previously been observed on 22 July, the day on which in 1989 the country adopted its new language law. Before the advent of the Soviet Union, the Tajik language was considered a dialect of Persian. To maintain a Soviet republic with a larger territory, the Uzbek government tried to cast doubts on the autonomy of this language. Nevertheless, the literary contributions of Sadриддин Айни (СадрИДДИН АЙНИ – 1878-1954), poet and writer, author of the first full-length novel in Tajik (*Dokhunda* – ‘the Mountain Villager’ – 1927), convinced the Soviet government to recognize the autonomy of Tajiki culture.

Aini managed to unify a language stemming from a variety of dialects sparsely dispersed through river valleys and mountains.* Moreover, he had to exclude several common terms originating from religious practice and replace Russian terms introduced after the first few decades of school education in the capital. Nowadays, the *Tajiki State Pedagogical University* is named after him and the capital Dushanbe hosts his most important monument (and also his mausoleum). Aini was so important for the culture of Central Asia that Samarkand, now in modern-day Uzbekistan, accommodates a house-museum dedicated to the poet, who lived there for 35 years.

*Rowe 2011: 261

While at the beginning of the 20th century only 1% of the population of Tajikistan could read and write, nowadays national literacy is above 99.5%. In 1989, the last Soviet census found most of the population to be either bilingual or trilingual, knowing Tajik, Uzbek and Russian.* Nowadays, 85% of the population has at least an intermediate knowledge of Russian. After its independence,

*Aminov et al. 2010

Tajikistan maintained the Cyrillic script, adding a few modifications functional to its language.

2.4 Turkmen

Turkmen is the Central Asian language closest to Turkish. The 18th century spiritual leader and philosophical poet Magtymguly Pyragy (1724/33-1807) is widely recognized as the father of modern Turkmen, and even nowadays is celebrated as a saint. On 18 May, Turkmen celebrate his birthday followed by the Day of Rebirth, Unity, and Poetry of Magtymguly on the 19 May. Apart from Ashgabat, it is also possible to find statues dedicated to Magtymguly Pyragy outside of Turkmenistan: in Kyiv, Astrakhan, Tashkent, and Khiva. While the Constitution of 1992 addressed the issue of language sparsely, Turkmenistan was the first Central Asian country to reintroduce the use of the Latin script for its alphabet in 1993.* The language policies have been always driven by political intent, but since 1996 the motive evolved from nation-building to the leader cult of the authoritarian president Saparmurat A. Niyazov.* Turkmen is the only official language of the state, but Russian remains the second language for a large part of the population. The teaching of two foreign languages in secondary education has become the norm. Usually, these languages are English and Russian. Nowadays, the state administration works only with Turkmen, but official websites are available in Turkmen, English and Russian.*

*Fierman 2012

*Clement 2018: 138; Ahn and Jensen
2016

*Aminov et al. 2010

2.5 Uzbek

Along with Sadriddin Aini, Uzbekistan celebrates, as father of its national language, the 15th century Chagatai-Turkic poet from Herat in current Afghanistan, Alisher Navai (Alisher Navoiy – 1441-1501).* While the poet was significantly relevant for the culture of most of the major ethnicities of Central Asia, he was Uzbekified and Sovietized by Uzbek writers and scholars from the 1920s to the 1940s.* Uzbekistan named one of the biggest urban parks of Tashkent after him, as well as the National Library. The *National Day of Language* is celebrated every year on 21 October.

*Hiro 2009: 127

*Shin 2017

After obtaining its independence, Uzbekistan adopted a stricter policy than its neighbours regarding the official language. On the one hand, Uzbek was recognized as the primary language of the state, while on the other, the regime issued a strict ban on the illegal importation of books from neighbouring countries. The government believed that their presence would have hindered the pro-

cess of nation-building. Only after a few years, authorities started to translate the official Uzbek textbooks in the six minority languages. In 1995, Uzbekistan was the second country of Central Asia to change the official language back to the Latin script.* Nowadays, as much as 90% of the population can speak Uzbek, but only 57% can speak Russian.*

*Ferrando 2012

*Aminov et al. 2010

2.6 Russian

The number of Russian speakers exceeds the total ethnic Russian minority in Central Asia. In fact, several ethnic Central Asians speak Russian as a first language, while smaller minorities such as Jews, Chuvash,³ Belarusians, and Ukrainians, among others, are merged in with the group of Russian speakers while actually having a language of their own. Their status has even been proposed as a new identity category in the post-Soviet world that resulted not from migration but rather from the receding of borders.* Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the only countries that recognize Russian as an official language of their state, but Tajikistan has acknowledged it as a language of inter-ethnic communication at constitutional level. With roughly 70% of the population pertaining to the titular ethnicity, neither Turkmenistan nor Uzbekistan had serious risks in phasing out Russian. On the other hand, the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev was concerned with the risk of secession by the large Russian (Slavic) minority in the north of the country, and thus the transition to the Latin script was postponed until 2018. Tajikistan did not transition to the Latin script, not so much for ethnic as for economic reasons. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan decided to maintain its Cyrillic alphabet.

*Laitin 1998

³ As descendants of the Volga-Bulghars (or Bulgars), the Chuvash have their homeland spread over the Volga-region, where they have their own republic in the Russian Federation (and before that an ASSR in the USSR), but this ethnic group has significant minorities in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan (Bashkiria), and in the Ulyanov, Samara, and Saratov areas. Several enclaves can also be found in Siberia and Central Asia. They speak their own language (Chuvash – *чăваш*), which is the only living language of the Bulgaro-Turkic branch.

Table 8.2 The Use of Russian in Different Media Outlets

COUNTRY	OFFICIAL STATUS	EDUCATION	NEWSPAPERS	TV & RADIO	GOVERNMENT WEBSITES
Kazakhstan	Recognized at constitutional level	Schools are required to teach in Kazakh, Russian and English while university education is available in several languages.	Widely circulated	79% of people watch TV in Russian	Yes
Kyrgyzstan	Recognized at constitutional level	20% of schools teach in Russian, as do most institutions of higher education, including the Russian-Kyrgyz Slavonic University.	Widely circulated	78% of people watch TV in Russian	Yes
Tajikistan	No official status	Higher education is offered in Russian at the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University in Dushanbe.	Widely circulated	91% of people watch TV in Russian; 80% of people access Russian internet	Yes
Turkmenistan	No official status	Drastically reduced and extremely limited.	Only one newspaper: "Neutral Turkmenistan"	Broadcast in Russian, and Turkish is only available through satellite TV	Yes
Uzbekistan	No official status	Russian is still relevant, but the number of schools offering education in Russian has decreased. The language is taught at a maximum of 2 hours per week.	Widely circulated	70% of shows must be in Uzbek	Yes

Sources: Aminov et al. 2010; Bekmurzaev 2019.

Although Russian remains largely used informally in everyday spheres of life, and in some more formal environments (some universities and schools), several aggressive policies have strongly reduced its use. With that said, the increasing migration to urban from rural areas has had an impact on, for instance, Bishkek – where Kyrgyz has progressively been more in use.

2.7 Uyghur

Recognition of the linguistic rights of minorities in Xinjiang started only in the 1980s. In 1984, China passed two important laws on language: the *Law of Autonomous Governing of Minority Regions*, and the *Compulsory Education Law* to teach Mandarin or Putonghua in all primary and secondary schools. This allowed the flourishing of Uyghur and other minority schools in the region, and a growing bilingualism.* Minorities were progressively included among cadres as well as in regional and central bureaucracies, with Uyghurs at the forefront.

*Reny 2009

3. The Linguistic Panorama in Nowadays Central Asia

The history of conquests and political unrest that characterized Central Asia over the centuries, in combination with nomadism as a cultural trait of several of its societies, are some of the features that led to the creation of a unique primordial broth from which such a diverse set of languages emerged. In fact, the region hosts Turkic languages, Indo-European ones in the form of Slavic and Iranian languages, Semitic languages as well as Chinese languages.* This overlap of different codes of communication led to multilingualism and lexical interference.

*Schlyter 2003: 159

Multilingualism is a state-of-affairs in which more languages coexist in a society, within ethnic groups, and thus individuals are able to speak more than one language. The most obvious example of multilingualism in Central Asia is shown in the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, where Russian is still nowadays commonly spoken along with the national languages of the titular states. Similarly, Uyghurs, in the autonomous province of Xinjiang in China, learn Mandarin in schools along with their native language.

Lexical interference frequently took the form of relexification, a situation in which a lexical element of a language enters the lexicon of another one.* This type of interference can be either bidirectional or unidirectional. In the former case, the languages influence each other, as in the case of Uzbek and Tajik. In the latter, one language, socially perceived as superior, produces modifications on the other one, as in the case of Russian on Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and Tajik.

*Schlyter 2003: 159

Geopolitics played a relevant role in determining the capability of Central Asian languages to survive or disappear. For two decades the Soviet Union cultivated and elevated Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, and Turkmen languages to achieve nation-building, only before imposing Russian as the real indicator of Soviet culture. Moreover, deportation policies during the Stalin era ended up bringing more ethnicities and more languages into the already complex (reformed, still partly nomadic) societies of Central Asia. Similarly, China imposed Mandarin on minorities in Xinjiang, but recognized their right to an education in their language from the 1980s. The contemporary linguistic culture of Central Asia is the result of centuries of interaction between different social groups and states. For an initial survey of the languages spoken in Central Asia see Table 8.3 below.

Table 8.3 *The Languages of Central Asia*

LANGUAGE	TITULAR ENTITY	TITULAR ETHNICITY IN CENTRAL ASIA	COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF SPEAKERS IN CENTRAL ASIA
<i>Official titular Central Asian majority languages</i>			
Kazakh	Kazakhstan	Kazakh	Kazakhstan
Kyrgyz	Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz	Kyrgyzstan
Uzbek	Uzbekistan	Uzbek	Uzbekistan
Tajik	Tajikistan	Tajik	Tajikistan
Turkmen	Turkmenistan	Turkmen	Turkmenistan
<i>Indigenous Central Asian minority languages</i>			
Yaghnobi	-	Yaghnobi	Tajikistan
Gorno-Badakhshan Pamir languages (Shugni, Rushani, Bartangi, Wakhani, ...)	-	Valley populations of the western Pamir in Gorno-Badakhshan	Tajikistan
Karakalpak	Karakalpak autonomous republic in Uzbekistan	Karakalpak	Uzbekistan
Balochi	Balochistan province in Pakistan	Baloch	Turkmenistan
Dungan-Hui Sinic	-	Dungan	Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan
Uyghur	Xinjiang-Uyghur autonomous province of China	Uyghur	Xinjiang and Kazakhstan
Abdal (Enyu or Äynu)	-	Abdal	Xinjiang
<i>Mixed languages resulting from infra-border communication</i>			
Kyakhta	-	Pidgin contact language in Russian-Chinese trade	Now extinct. Spoken along the borders between the Chinese and Russian empires from the 18 th to the 20 th century
Hezhou	-	Mix of Uyghur and Salar (both Turkic) with Chinese languages	Xinjiang

Karakalpak and *Uyghur* are Turkic languages from the Kipchak and Karluk branches respectively. *Yaghnobi* and the *Pamir languages* are from the Sogdian (eastern Iranian) branch of the Indo-European language family. *Dungan* (Дүңгендер/Дунгандар in Kazakh/Kyrgyz) and *Hui* (回族 – *Huizú* or *Хуэйзү*) refer to the same Sinitic-speaking Turkic Muslims in Central Asia and China respectively. The *Abdal/Enyu/Äynu* people are a small, unrecognized ethnic group in the Tarim Basin (now Xinjiang) that have their own cryptolect (secretive dialect), mixing Turkic (Uyghur) grammar with a mostly Iranian vocabulary.

LANGUAGE	TITULAR ENTITY	TITULAR ETHNICITY IN CENTRAL ASIA	COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF SPEAKERS IN CENTRAL ASIA
<i>Languages which appeared in Central Asia as a result of population movements in the 19th and early-20th century, and of Soviet social engineering and deportation policies</i>			
Russian	Russian Federation	Russians	Kazakhstan
Volga and Crimean Tatar	Russian Federation (autonomous republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and of Crimea)	Volga and Crimean Tatars	Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
Chuvash	Russian Federation (autonomous republic of Chuvashia)	Chuvash	Kazakhstan
Chechen and Ingush	Russian Federation (autonomous republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia)	Chechens and Ingushetians	Kazakhstan
Yiddish, Hebrew and Judeo-Tat	Israel	Jews	Kazakhstan
Ukrainian	Ukraine	Ukrainians	Kazakhstan
Armenian	Armenia	Armenians	Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan
Azerbaijani	Azerbaijan	Azeri	Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
Polish	Poland	Polish	Kazakhstan
German	Federal Republic of Germany	Volga Germans	Kazakhstan
Koryo-mar Korean	The Koreans (for standard Korean)	Koreans	Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan
Kurdish	The Kurdish movement and the non-recognized Kurdish entities in the Near East and in the diaspora	Kurds	Kazakhstan

Crimean Tatar (къырымтатар тили) is a (Kipchak) Turkic language, while *Chuvash* (чăваш) is the only living language of the Bulgaro-Turkic branch. *Chechen* and *Ingush* are native (north) Caucasian languages. *Judeo-Tat* (or *Juhuri*) has Persian roots (Iranian) and was spoken by the “mountain Jews” in the eastern Caucasus. It is now endangered but still spoken in Israel.

<i>Appeared after 1991</i>			
English	United Kingdom	-	Large(r) urban areas with a concentration of international organizations, foreign companies and expatriates from beyond the former Soviet Union.
Turkish	Turkey	-	Large(r) urban areas with a concentration of Turkish companies and expatriates.
Chinese (standard Mandarin)	China	-	Areas with a concentration of Chinese companies and expatriates.

Source: Authors' own work.

Box 8.2 Alphabets, Scripts and Their Evolution in Central Asia

Due to the different policies of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China towards nationalities and ethnic groups, over the span of the 20th century Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, Uyghur, and Uzbek were taught and written using different scripts. While the main purpose of the Bolsheviks after 1917 was to increase the literacy rates of the populations of Central Asia, Stalin imposed the Cyrillic alphabet to avoid the Turkic populations of the Soviet Bloc feeling closer to Turkey than to the Soviet Union. On a similar note, China had introduced the Cyrillic script for Uyghurs for a few decades, only to revert back to the Arabic script when the Sino-Soviet relationship worsened. The full historical evolution of the scripts of these is shown below.

LANGUAGE	ARABIC SCRIPT	LATIN SCRIPT	CYRILLIC SCRIPT
Kazakh	Until 1929 in the provinces conquered by the Tsarist Russian Empire.	In the territory that would become the Kazakh SSR, 1929-1940. 1964-1984 in Xinjiang.	1940-2018 in the territory of Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakhstan.
	A modified version is still in use in Xinjiang.	Reintroduced in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2018, but still in transition.	Still in use in Mongolia.
Kyrgyz	Until 1928 in the provinces conquered by the Tsarist Russian Empire.	In the territory that would become the Kyrgyz SSR, 1928-1938.	In use since 1940 in the territory of Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.
	A modified version is still in use in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Xinjiang.		
Tajik	Perso-Arabic alphabet until 1927.	In the territory that would become the Tajik SSR, 1927-1938.	Still in use since 1938.
Turkmen	Until 1928.	In the territory that would become the Turkmen SSR, 1928-1940.	
	Still in use in Iran and Afghanistan.	Reintroduced in the Republic of Turkmenistan in 1993 with slight variations.	1940-1993.
Uyghur	Uyghur Arabic script in use since 1982.	The Uyghur Latin Alphabet is an auxiliary script developed since the early 2000s.	In use in the former Soviet countries since 1940.
	Used before 1949.	A version of a Latin Script has been used in the Soviet Union in 1927-1928.	Used in China in the period 1949-1982.
Uzbek	Until 1928.	In the territory that would become the Uzbek SSR, 1928-1940.	1940-1995.
	In Xinjiang some still use the Uyghur Arabic script.	Reintroduced in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 1993 with slight variations.	Still in use in Xinjiang.

Source: Authors’ own work

Central Asia is therefore under the umbrella of Turkic languages, but the ethnic mobility associated with nomadism and social engineering make things more complex. Map G shown in the Concise Atlas portrays the ethnic situation of Central Asia in 1992, but over the 1990s, the nation-building policies of the independent former Soviet republics utterly reduced complexity. This section focuses on how the contemporary ethnic composition of the different entities of Central Asia affects an ideal map of languages.

3.1 Kazakhstan

According to the census of 1989, Kazakhs comprised 39.7% of the overall population of the republic, shortly followed by 37.8% of Russians, with Ukrainian and German minorities accounting for 5.4% and 5.8% respectively.* With the declaration of independence, large groups of ethnic Russians emigrated towards the Russian Federation while the Kazakh ethnic group slowly increased its numbers. As of 2020, out of the 18,695,880 citizens of Kazakhstan 63.1% are Kazakhs, 23.7% Russians, 2.9% Uzbeks, 2.1% Ukrainians, 1.4% Uyghurs, 1.3% Tatars, 1.1% Germans.* Nevertheless, when breaking down the presence of Russians by age group, ethnic Russians do not surpass 13% of total ethnicities in the age group from 0 to 4 years.* Still, not all ethnic Kazakhs know Kazakh, and the language is mostly spoken in western and southern Kazakhstan with the relevant exception of Almaty, a veritable Russian-speaking bastion. The languages of minorities are often spoken in areas with their highest concentration, including: Shymkent, home to a large Uzbek minority,* eastern Kazakhstan hosting the Uyghur minority, and northern Kazakhstan, inhabited by a wide variety of ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking minorities.

*Spehr and Kassenova 2012

*WPR 2020a

*Laruelle et al. 2019: 9

*Refworld.org 2008

3.2 Kyrgyzstan

The census of 1989 confirmed that only 22% of the citizens of Bishkek were ethnic Kyrgyz, because most of them were still living in rural areas. As of 2020, the ethnic composition of the 6,486,527 citizens of Kyrgyzstan has been as follows: 72% Kyrgyz, 14.5% Uzbek, 9% Russian, 1.9% Dungan, 1.1% Uyghur, 1.1% Tajik, 0.7% Kazakh, 0.5% Ukrainian. Most of the 101,000 Germans living in Kyrgyzstan in 1989 have emigrated.* Although more than 70% of people can speak Kyrgyz, the country recognizes Russian as an official language of the state, and Bishkek is largely a Russian-speaking city. Finally, one of the biggest cities of Kyrgyzstan, Osh, is home to a large Uzbek minority.*

*WPR 2020b

*Refworld.org 2004a

Box 8.3 Same Language but Different Alphabets: Kazakhs in Xinjiang and Kazakhstan

Kazakh is one of the most relevant ethnic minority languages spoken in China due to the substantial presence of Kazakhs in the Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, the Mori Kazakh Autonomous County, and the Barkol Kazakh Autonomous County in Xinjiang. Before 1935 Kazakh was not officially taught to the minority. This function was supplied by religious Islamic institutions, present in the region from as long ago as 1870. (Ruoyo Fang 2009: 228) After 1935, they were often converted to public schools, and – with the foundation of the People's Republic of China – the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region allowed education in minority languages. Somehow anchored to a religious tradition, the Kazakh in Xinjiang follows an evolved Arabic script after the introduction of five new signs by Akhmet Baitursynov to better suit the language. On the other hand, as illustrated so far, in Kazakhstan this idiom underwent the Latin and the Cyrillic script only to re-transition recently to the Latin one. Along with frequent relexifications from Russian to Kazakh and the different use of words and expressions, this was a source of difficulty in the process of integrating the *oralmandar* (repatriated Kazakh speakers), who spoke versions from Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Karakalpak. On a similar note, Uyghurs share the same destiny. (Diener 2005; Werner et al. 2017) While in Xinjiang, Uyghurs continue to employ the Arabic script, those living in Central Asia employ the Cyrillic script to speak the same language. (Duval and Abdukerim 2006) This is a side effect of the Sino-Soviet tensions over nationality policies between 1962 and 1975.

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3.3 Tajikistan

When Tajiks were recognized as the titular nation of their own Soviet republic, approximately 800,000 of them were living beyond its borders.* In 2020, Tajikistan is inhabited by 9,463,985 people: 79.9% Tajiks, 15.3% Uzbeks and 1% Russians.* The number of Russians dramatically decreased because of the Tajik civil war that devastated the country from 1992 to 1997. Tajiks and Uzbeks often speak their respective language, but there is a high proportion of citizens who are either bilingual or trilingual. Minority languages include Russian, Kyrgyz, and Farsi. The country hosts an ethnic minority on the verge of disappearance, the Yaghnobi people, who are descendants of the Sogdians, and speaking an Eastern Iranian language close to Pashto.

*Rowe 2011

*WPR 2020c

3.4 Turkmenistan

Even after independence, Turkmenistan remained one of the most closed countries in the world. As a result, in only one decade the proportion of ethnic Turkmen doubled. In 2020, Turkmenistan is home to 6,000,593 citizens, 85% of whom are Turkmen, 5% Uzbek and 4% Russian.* The languages of Turkmenistan include Turkmen, Russian and Uzbek, with Russian being also the primary language of smaller minorities such as ethnic Azeri and Armenians. As in Azerbaijan, the consumption of Turkish media is becoming increasingly common – hence the diffusion of the Turkish language. Southern Turkmenistan also hosts Balochs, a small diaspora minority mostly concentrated in a region between Pakistan (Balochistan province), Afghanistan, and Iran. These people speak Balochi, a specific form of Northern Iranian language. Other minorities include Kazakhs, Tatars, Ukrainians, Kurds, Armenians, Azeris and Pashtuns.

*WPR 2020d

3.5 Uzbekistan

Initially, Socialist Uzbekistan was bigger, but after the recognition of Tajiks as an autonomous ethnic group the Soviet authorities decided to grant them an independent republic in 1929. As a result of this choice, nowadays Uzbeks remain the biggest minority in Tajikistan. According to the latest census, in 2020 Uzbekistan is home to 85% Uzbeks, 5.5% Russians, 3% Tajiks, 2.5% Karakalpaks, 1.5% Tatars and a remaining 2.5% including Kyrgyz and Turkmen, among others.* Samarkand and Bukhara have historical significance for Tajiks, believed to be their most common ethnicity dur-

*WPR 2020e

*Refworld.org 2004b

*See also Map 7.1

ing the late Russian Empire. Karakalpak is an autonomous province in Uzbekistan, home to a native ethnic group sharing most of the common features of Kyrgyz and Kazakhs.* The country is inhabited also by around 20,000 descendants of the Koreans deported in Central Asia by Stalin.* Although not a big minority, to this day the ethnic group maintains its own language derived by Korean, which is known as Koryo-mar (also Koryo-mal or Koremar).

3.6 Xinjiang

*Kozhirova et al. 2016: 79

*Kozhirova et al. 2016: 75

The Xinjiang region is one sixth of the entire Chinese territory and home to 56 different ethnic groups.* According to the 2010 census, 21.82 million people lived in the region. Nowadays, Uyghurs constitute 46% of its inhabitants against 39% of Han Chinese and 7% of Kazakhs. The remaining 8% share includes Hui (Dungan), Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Russians, Tibetans, and Mongols among tens of others.* While Uyghurs remain the majority in the region, they constitute only 12.3% of the inhabitants of the capital Urumqi, against 73% of Han Chinese. Hence, the geography of languages of Xinjiang is diverse but still driven by a strong urban-rural divide.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an historical overview of the evolution of languages in Central Asia. The first section intended to provide a summary of the main factors contributing to the shaping of languages in the region before and throughout the Soviet era. The second one addressed state and regional language policies drawing the attention of readers to the most spoken languages in the area. Finally, readers were presented with a survey of languages of the region largely based on the demographic composition of its different entities.

Learning the languages of Central Asia is an anthropological endeavour that forces a confrontation with the complex history of these populations. For example, considering the recent transition of Kazakh to the Latin script, linguists have not yet deliberated the official set of rules necessary to teach it. On the other hand, a student of Kyrgyz or Tajik is expected to learn the Cyrillic alphabet to master a Turkic or Persian language, respectively. In other words, history is unavoidable, and while facts and myths have mixed, languages have always coexisted and influenced each other.

In Central Asia, languages certainly have had a complex life because the inter-ethnic mixing created room for multilingual-

ism. Soviet authorities never erased ethnic languages, but rather contributed to the codification of some of them, thus guaranteeing their survival. While Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek were elevated to the rank of national languages, those of minorities often became endangered. At the same time, the imposition of Russian utterly affected the self-contradictory essence of a state that aspired to unity and diversity, simplicity and complexity, tapping into the potential for multilingualism that seems almost an innate feature of Central Asian populations. The attitude of Chinese authorities in Xinjiang since the 1980s has followed a similar logic.

On the other hand, driven by political intent, since 1991 the national policies of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia flattened the complexities of this linguistic panorama, promoting the diffusion of national languages destined to strengthen the collective identity of these independent states. Nevertheless, while multilingualism has been endangered, the effects of globalization have contributed to its survival, isolating it to the more educated fringes of these societies. Where previously these fringes were “Russi,” they may yet become “English” or “Turki”.

Moreover, it is not unlikely that in the future new languages will blossom. As the Kyakhta Sino-Russian border language developed over the 19th century, perhaps similar pidgins may appear in the Jarkent area in Kazakhstan to link Kazakh, Uyghur, and Chinese, or even in Iskashim at the Tajik-Afghan border, functioning as a bridge between Tajik and Dari.

Paradoxically, while the ancestors of the Central Asian ethnicities never really bothered to figure out what language to speak or what was their history, their heirs heavily relied on them as a means for nation-building and of legitimizing regimes. The more multilingualism and mobility disappear from Central Asia, the more these populations will tell tales of nomadism, manliness, and pride.

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6. Recommended Literature

The works suggested here aim to help the reader to reflect on the concept of ethnicity and nation to aid understanding why identity markers of specific ethnic groups may become sources of political contention. Authors such as M. Weber (1996), C. Geertz (1996), B. Anderson (1994), E. Hobsbawm (1994), and E. Gellner (1994) illustrate different positions on how to interpret social identity markers, including but not limiting to language. Nevertheless, these scholars are/were social scientists, while the policies themselves were realized by policy-makers; this is the reason why reading Stalin's (1994) thoughts on nations is crucial to understand how language policies unfolded in Central Asia. The remaining readings focus on the rights of minorities as understood by the UN (Capotorti 1991), and how politics can handle the cohabitation of different ethnic groups (Lijphart 2008; McGarry and O'Leary 2012; Barth 1996).

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

In this chapter you were given some examples of how different language policies shaped the social balance of Central Asian societies. How was your language used to shape the identity of your and other countries? (e.g. was your country a colonial power?)

TOPIC 2

Given the diverging paths of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, how do you believe this has affected their mutual perception?

TOPIC 3

If you participated in ACTIVITY 1 (below), how do you think politics should engage in matters of social identity?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

For this role-play activity the teacher chooses one among the five different Central Asian states. Students are then divided into four or five groups, depending on the size of the class. One group will act as the president of the country (together with the ruling elite or the main political advisors) and the other ones will represent a different ethnicity living in its territory.

For example, if Kazakhstan is chosen, the division could be the following:

- Group 1: The president and the ruling elite
- Group 2: Kazakhs
- Group 3: Russians
- Group 4: Ukrainians
- Group 5: Uzbeks

While the elite group will be constituted by three or four students, the remaining groups will have to roughly represent the proportions of the ethnic groups in the country at the time of independence (refer to Section 3 of the Chapter). The objective of the activity is to identify the language(s) of the state, to acknowledge their official or unofficial status and to see how language policies, linguistic rights and interests become a source of polarization.

The teacher can propose different scenarios. For example, the discussion is taking place around the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 and the state constitution is just being drafted. Another option is to consider a more recent period (or the near future), imagining that a major constitutional reform is being prepared. In such case, each group wants to use the opportunity to present their interests, to renegotiate the rights concerning their language and culture (and their official status) or to defend the status quo. In this second case the students have to take into account the current post-independence state-of-affairs and formulate hypotheses about best future scenarios for their group. In both scenarios students can learn lessons from the present developments (either as hindsight or to identify current grievances).

In the first phase, groups will discuss among themselves the current state-of-affairs and then decide which strategy to adopt and what objectives they want to achieve in consideration of the weapons of negotiation at their disposal (e.g. how numerous is my group? in which part of the class/country are we located and who do we border with?). The prime objective of the political group will be always to maintain peace among its citizens and the integrity of the state. Ethnic groups will write their claims on a piece of paper that they will hand over to the political group. This phase of the activity will terminate with a brief discussion among the members of the political elite (the first group) based on the claims received from the others.

The second phase of the activity will consist of a general assembly coordinated by the political elite group. In this phase, each group will negotiate its position in consideration of its relative strength and objectives. If more than 30% of the members of all ethnic groups do not agree with the decision of the political group, a civil war erupts or a serious political gridlock happens. Then, the teacher helps the students summarize the assembly and assess why an agreement was or was not reached.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

<https://youtu.be/R8Gkf6MqSy4>

(View of) Moscow Street, near the prison.

PART III

SOCIETAL-POLITICAL DYNAMICS

CHAPTER 9

Clans, Class and Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Central Asia

Jeremy Smith

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Keywords:

• Clans • Class • Ethnicity • Identity • Mobilization • Myths

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Describe the organization of clans and assess their role in Central Asia.
- Explain the limited presence of the class category in political rhetoric in post-Soviet Central Asia.
- Appreciate the role ethnicity plays in Central Asian politics.
- Distinguish between mythological or rhetorical uses of these terms, and reality.
- Recognize stereotypical characterizations of Central Asian societies.
- Compare Central Asian societies with each other and with other countries, based on the categories of clans, class and ethnicity.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**Pre-reading questions**

- What is your own understanding of the terms: clan, class and ethnicity?
- Do these terms have different meanings in different contexts?
- How important is each for societal organization and individual identification in your own country (or other places you are familiar with)?

Main questions

- How clearly are the concepts of clan, class and ethnicity understood in general?
- How different are the understandings of clan, class and ethnicity in Central Asian countries from the dominant understandings in the West or Russia?
- How important are clans to understanding Central Asian countries?
- How important is class to understanding Central Asian countries?
- How important is ethnicity to understanding Central Asian countries?

Post-reading questions

- Choose a Central Asian country and map out the structure, distribution and role of clans there. How significant are they to political and social life?
- What scenarios can you envisage where 'Class Struggle' begins to play a bigger role in understandings of developments in Central Asia?
- Do you consider clan, class, or ethnic loyalties to have played a significant role in leadership change or renewal in each of the Central Asian countries?
- How different in reality are Central Asian countries from others in terms of social organization?

CHAPTER 9

Clans, Class and Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Central Asia

JEREMY SMITH

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THIS CHAPTER DEALS with three of the concepts which are used to differentiate various sections of society in the five Central Asian states – clans, class and ethnicity – which also play an important role in politics. The fact that political organizations often reflect societal identities is perhaps not altogether unusual, but in Central Asia, political affiliation is especially closely associated with these identities, and social and political roles tend to be intertwined to a peculiar extent. In the post-Soviet world, this seems more normal than in longer established democracies, and politicians frequently double up in a societal or business role. Thus the long-time Prime Minister of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, served regularly as a member of the board of the giant gas company Gazprom and was its chairman for a time before becoming President, while businessmen are often brought into politics. This pattern is repeated in Central Asia, where the lines between politics, ethnic organization, and even sports or organized crime are frequently blurred.* One scholar has gone so far as to observe ‘indications of [a] merger between crime and state’ in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.* In part, this is a product of the Soviet party-state system, where the Communist Party essentially controlled all societal interests as well as career paths. In part, it is connected to the difficult conditions in which democracy and democratic representation operate in Central Asian countries. Finally, the lack of tradition of civil society, i.e. of independent social organization outside of the direct sphere of politics, further leads to a kind of default situation where group interests are seen as directly connected to the political sphere. A separate political sphere, staffed by career politicians, is hard to identify.

In addressing these three key concepts, much of this chapter is also devoted to dealing with the myths that surround them. It can be simple and convenient to explain developments in terms of clear-cut divisions within society, but the extent to which clans and ethnicity, in particular, are seen as underpinning political organization is often exaggerated. While it is less common in the 21st

*Satybaldieva 2015

*Marat 2006

*Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983

*Hosking and Schöpflin 1997

*Suny 2000

*Collins 2003

*Кадыржанов 2014: 52

than in the 20th century to explain everything in class terms (as Marxists frequently used to do), clans or ethnicity are frequently put at the centre of interpretation by both local and foreign commentators. To some extent this is encouraged by official narratives which allow myths about the national past and traditions to develop. Since the late 18th century, European and other states have exploited or invented national myths to reinforce a sense of national community.* After the fall of communism in Europe at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s political authorities, both in newly independent states (NIS), and in older states which had transitioned from communist to democratic rule, embarked on crude exercises in making or developing myths that gave legitimacy in a new national form, in place of the failed legitimacy of communism.*

In spite of Ronald Suny's warnings to scholars not to reduce understandings of the population of Central Asia to simple categories of ethnicity or religion,* the essentialization of notions of clan and ethnicity has continued to lead to confusion, mystification, or the counterposing of one to another. Thus a western scholar of Central Asian clans juxtaposes clan to ethnic identity, according much greater power to the former while suggesting this also explains (bearing in mind this claim was made before the 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan) the relative lack of ethnic conflict.* Others more or less conflate notions of clan and ethnic identity.

A Kazakh scholar has written:

*"In contemporary Kazakhstan, the factor of the ethnic affiliation of the head of state and of clan ties remains critical in the recruitment of the political and administrative elite, in the political Kazakhization of society. This factor allows Kazakhs to numerically dominate in the political system and state apparatus (...) even in those regions where the Kazakh ethnos does not constitute the majority of the population."**

*Satybaldieva 2015

Thus clan is depicted as a part of the system of ethnic dominance. But another scholar familiar with the politics of the Kyrgyz countryside points out that neither clan nor ethnicity are sufficient, and indeed are largely redundant, in explaining the complex ties of loyalty and patronage.* The motivation of local elites in philanthropically promoting the wellbeing of the population is more or less excluded by the emphasis on essential characteristics of clan or ethnicity. Meanwhile, the scholarly discussion of class as a factor in either identity or political motivation is virtually absent in the analysis of Central Asia.

This chapter engages with the question of which personal or group affiliations are important when it comes to explaining political or societal behaviour? It seeks to provide an introduction to categories which, in Central Asia and elsewhere, are complex, fluid, and overlapping. Clans, classes, and ethnicity are real; membership of each is either officially recorded or can be roughly determined according to certain criteria, although differing definitions will often create room for disagreement. Membership of a group does not in itself, however, explain behaviour. Objective classification as a group member does not necessarily mean that any individual considers his or her membership of that group to be important. More significantly than subjects of objective classification, clans, class and ethnicity are objects of *identity*, and the extent to which each individual identifies with each category can vary enormously. At best, conclusions can be drawn about average citizens. Even this loses meaning, however, given the enormous geographic, occupational, age and gender diversity of the region.

In recent years, researchers have developed the analytical framework of *intersectionality* in examining the way in which individuals can hold multiple overlapping identities such as gender, class and race at the same time. A more detailed study would benefit from deploying such a framework, but it is beyond the scope of this introduction. The chapter treats each of the categories separately, starting with an overview of the concept in terms which might be familiar to European readers, and deals with some of the myths surrounding each concept before summarising some of its main features. The readings listed at the end of the chapter will help those who wish to explore each or all of the categories further.

1. Clans

Clans have been regarded in many quarters as playing an essential social and political role in Central Asia. The significance of clans is supported by major academic studies* as well as featuring widely in journalistic and other popular accounts of the region.

*Collins 2006; Schatz 2004

In much of Europe, popular understandings of the nature of clans are driven by romantic visions of highly organized structures led by a chieftain, inhabiting a distinct geographical region, and possibly distinguished from each other by unique clothing or other features. Often they are associated with a military purpose. Among the most obvious examples are the Scottish clans with their distinctive tartans, popularized by the novelist Walter Scott and other romantic nationalists in the early 19th century.* The popular online

*Trevor-Roper 1983

video game ‘Clash of Clans’ draws on such traditions to replicate in popular imagination similar warlike stereotypes of clans. The visual side of clan identification is often emphasized, not just by tartans in Celtic and Gallic societies, but by head-dresses and other clothing which are frequently organized according to clan in museum exhibitions. Other popular uses of the notion of clan are more metaphorical, referring to a family group which is closely organized and plays a political role. Criminal gangs or mafias in various parts of the world from the US to Ireland, Italy and Albania are referred to as clans, and often share family or ethnic ties. Families who play a political role are also termed as clans, such as the ‘Aliyev Clan’ which has dominated politics in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, or the ‘Trump Clan’ – the family of US President from 2017-2021, Donald Trump.

The reality in Central Asia, as well as elsewhere, is that clans are much less formal and structured than such images suggest. As Kathleen Collins, a Western scholar of Central Asian clans, puts it, “The clan is an informal identity network based on kinship ties and is common in semi-modern societies.”^{*} In academic discourse, going back to the founder of modern sociology Max Weber, kinship is usually emphasized. All members of a clan are related to each other, which is what distinguishes them from a ‘tribe’ (which, in some societies, may be composed of several clans).^{*} Such closely knit clans based on kinship have continued to play a role in Soviet and post-Soviet societies, such as in Chechnya in the North Caucasus, where the clan or *teip* system¹ has been credited with contributing to both the strength of identity and the effective military organization which helped Chechens to defy Soviet and Russian power throughout the 20th century.^{*}

Such highly structured clan systems do continue to play a role in Central Asia. In **Kazakhstan** the population is divided into three main hordes: *zhuz* (Kazakh: жүз – *jüz*) the Senior Horde (Ұлы Жүз – *Uly Zhuz*), Middle Horde (Орта Жүз – *Orta Zhuz*) and Junior Horde (Кіші Жүз – *Kishi Zhuz*). These are themselves subdivided into eleven, seven and three tribes or *ru* (Kazakh: ру) respectively,

¹ *Teip* (*Taïna* – *Taypa* in Nakh languages; *Taïn* or *Teïn* in Russian) is a clan-identity based on common ancestry and geographic location among the Chechen and Ingush in the North Caucasus. The *teip*-system adheres to an elaborate set of rules and norms regarding (communal) land tenure, honour, hospitality, exogamy (marrying somebody outside the *teip*), etc. In the 1920s and 1930s Soviet rulers superimposed a ‘tribal’ classification to organize and control teips: *Tukkhum* (Тукхум in Russian, *Токхе* in Chechen) was designed as some kind of (leaderless) alliance run by a deliberative body (council of elders). This controversial system did not take root and is still considered foreign in the region.

^{*}Collins 2003

^{*}Hille 2020

^{*}Garb 1998

which are themselves further subdivided into clans – see also Box 9.1. Most Kazakhs are aware of their affinity and this pyramidal system allows them to determine the closeness of their connection in clan terms to any other Kazakh. The structure is presumed to be based on genealogy and therefore also provides information on family ties. The *zhuz* system is presumed to have many functions, from the preservation of history and memory of ancestors, mutual recognition between connected clan members, the preservation of cultural and social capital and, finally, insuring against in-breeding through strict rules regarding marriage between clan members.* Similarly, Kyrgyz are spread among three ‘wings’ or *kanat* (канат²), which are divided into *uruu* (*uruk*) which are further subdivided into *uruk*, while Turkmen ‘tribes’ (*halq* or *il*) are divided into a number of *taypalar*, below which are a number of subdivisions down to the historic *oba*, a collection of nomadic households.

*Haypзбаева n.d.

But the relevance of clans in the sense in which anthropologists and sociologists understand it has to be qualified. Historians and political scientists have used the term ‘clans’ in another metaphorical way to describe informal political groups operating within the sphere of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This has been a useful way of describing the ‘patron-client networks’ which underpinned the Soviet Union’s economic and political functioning. Typically centred on a leading communist official, these ‘clans’ may have included some family members but were not really based on kinship at all.* The second qualification is that, if clans are mostly associated with semi-modern societies then, as a system for allocating privileges, they clash with modernity. Weber himself predicted, in the early 20th century, that clans would die out with the progress of modernization. Both qualifications should be born in mind in thinking about Central Asia. As the author will show, the term ‘clans’ has been stretched to explain geographical affiliations and other loyalty and reward systems.

*Mitrokhin 2011

The clash with modernity is borne out by research which shows, for example, that in Kazakhstan preference in hiring people according to their clan is common in state-owned companies, moderate in the private sector, and rare in local subsidiaries of foreign-owned companies.* Thus, in this case, the more exposed the company is to market forces and to international influence, the less important is clan affiliation. This already suggests that the influence of clans is on the wane and is more important in less developed rural areas than in more metropolitan centres.

*Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron 2013

² Like in most nomadic Turko-Mongol societies, the Kyrgyz encompassed a supra-tribal grouping that in various times was subdivided in two or three wings: *Ong kanat* (Right wing), *Sol kanat* (Left wing), and sometimes *Ichkilik* (Internal or Middle wing).

Box 9.1 Lineage-based Social Systems in Central Asia

This tentative hierarchy of lineage-based labels present the five main Central Asian titular nations, ordered from those with the longest history of statehood (left) to those that were more divided in local subunits (right). At the highest level (I), one finds the Kazakh hordes (Senior, Middle and Junior), Kyrgyz ‘wings’ (Right and Left) and the Turkmen main tribal divisions (Teke, Yomut, Ersari, Chowdur, Goklan and Saryk). While the Kazakh hordes did possess significant levels of statehood (see also Box 5.3) the Kyrgyz and Turkmen did not, rendering group-identities at clan/tribal level (II) more salient. Kyrgyz for instance rely much more on *uruu* (clan/tribe) and *sanjyra* (patrilineage). Group identities at clan and sub-levels were mostly headed by a Bey (Kyrgyz: *Biy*, Uzbek, Kazakh: *Bek*, Turkmen: *Beg*, Tajik: *Be*), denoting origin from a hereditary, aristocratic title that devalued over time from ‘lord’ to ‘governor,’ and now ‘sir.’ In contrast, the more sedentary Tajiks and Uzbeks either adhered to the (nominal) sovereignty of their shahs, khans or emirs, or remained outside state-structures in the most remote (mountainous) areas. The fragmentation of the nomadic Turkmen at sub-clan level (III) is most pronounced, but for all titular nations these divisions at level III are far from exhaustive, and have been most subject to change throughout the last centuries (colonization, delineation, collectivization, etc.).

	TAJIK	UZBEK	KAZAKH	KYRGYZ	TURKMEN
I	<i>Emirate</i>	<i>Khanate / Emirate</i>	Zhuz (horde)	Kanat (wing)	Halq / II (people)
II	Avlod	Urugh	Ru / Taypa	Uruu (uruk) / Sanjyra	Taypa / Urug / (...)
III	<i>Mahalla (settled)*</i>	<i>Qishloq (settled) Mahalla (settled)*</i>	Aul (nomadic) <i>Kishtau (settled)</i>	Aul (nomadic) <i>Kishtak (settled)</i>	Aul (nomadic) <i>Gyşlag (settled) Oba (household) Bir ata (household)</i>
	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)

Cursive indicates that this group label is rather based on location than on common ancestor-de-scent (although this division is still blurry in the case of sedentary and semi-nomadic communities)

* On mahalla, see also Box 13.2.

Sources: Collins 2006; Edgar 2006, Olcott 2002; Light 2018.

In fact, it can be surprising that clans continue to play any role, given the advance of modernity and the inherent opposition of the Soviet system to allowing governance based on tradition. However, as is now well established, ‘clientelism’ based on a web of informal personal networks maintained by reciprocal favour giving were an essential part of how the Soviet system operated.* In Central Asia and elsewhere (such as the North Caucasus) clans simply fed into, replicated, and reinforced this system. Clan ties could be used by employees and communist party members as a means of advancement, while for bosses in both the economy and politics, clans provided a reserve of personnel who could be expected to show

*Hosking 2000

a higher than normal degree of loyalty to their patron. Following the Soviet collapse, the same clan networks provided the basis for mutual assistance in more difficult times:

*"The clan was covertly a means of advancement and protection during the Soviet period, in relatively good economic conditions, now the clan has proven a resilient identity and mechanism of survival in harsh exterior conditions."**

*Collins 2003

There is substantial evidence that clans have undergone a post-Soviet revival, with interest in genealogy and the nature and understanding of clans continuing to evolve and change in the 21st century.*

*Jacquesson 2012

The fluid and ambiguous meaning of clans is reflected in local uncertainty. Although surveys in Central Asia have shown that most people, especially in rural areas, identify with a clan, many different terms are used. The Russian terms *klan* or *rod* (with its stronger emphasis on kinship) are both used throughout the region, as well as the local terms *avlod* (Tajiks and Uzbek) and *uruu* (*uruk*)³ – Kyrgyz and some Uzbek).* In Kazakhstan, the terms *taypa* and *ru* are usually translated as tribe and clan respectively, but are often used interchangeably, and are themselves subdivisions of the hordes or zhuzes.*

*Collins 2003

*Olcott 2002

Appreciations of the role of clans also varies, with many Uzbeks associating clans with criminal groups (mafia), and the interference of clans in politics having been officially condemned in Tajikistan. There may be some basis for the association of clans with criminal activity. A great deal of the world's heroin is produced in Afghanistan and smuggled across the border into Tajikistan, and from there through other Central Asian countries on its way to Russia and the West. Networks of trust greatly facilitate these smuggling and trading activities, as does making deals with states. The social functions of the clans, providing economic support to its members at times of crisis, require resources which can be extracted, if not from the drugs trade, then from the state. Thus even the beneficial role of clans can be seen as encouraging corruption and other forms of extortion.*

*Ceccarelli 2007

It is in the context of this supporting role, all the same, that most Central Asians identify themselves as members of a clan. The post-Soviet collapse of both the rural and industrial economies led many Central Asians to migrate or work temporarily abroad, sending back remittance payments to their families at home, as

³ *Uruu* (уруу) stands for clan, and *uruk* (урук) is used to denote subdivisions in Kyrgyzstan.

described in Chapter 21. But with little or no support from the state, individuals who could not or would not migrate fell back on, first, their families, then on local magnates, but often on clans. Clan leaders or wealthy notables could choose to provide such support in return for loyalty and future favours, or as reward for past behaviours. Clans were also seen as responsible, informally, for the administration of justice locally as well as playing an important role in the job market.*

*Collins 2003

The criminal and social roles of clans are deduced from locally taken surveys as well as inferred from common – though frequently mythologized – discourses. The role of clans in politics is even harder to quantify, since it is the nature of such political influences to remain hidden, and neither the clans themselves nor the structures over which they hold influence are willing to admit a strong presence of clans in political systems. Hidden clan networks have been accorded a paramount political role in Kazakhstan,* but it has also been noted that clans are just one of many fulcrums of a complex web of patron-client networks inherited from the Soviet period.* In Tajikistan, as already noted, clans face official disapproval. In Uzbekistan the long-serving President Islam Karimov (1989-2016) took care not to associate himself with any one clan and put himself above clan politics, while the highly centralized and personalized regime instituted in Turkmenistan by President Niyazov kept the influence of clans in check.*

*Schatz 2004

*Olcott 2002

*Ceccarelli 2007

Although it is among the historically nomadic Kyrgyz and Turkmen that clans are considered most deeply rooted, it is in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that the most has been made of the role of clans in politics. Both cases, however, blur the distinction between literal and metaphorical applications of the concept of clans. Political rivalries in Kyrgyzstan were, for a long time, viewed through the prism of a strong geographic divide between the north and south of the country, accentuated by poor communications and weak central power which allowed local magnates to flourish. Since clans are mostly geographically located, however, it has been common for observers to substitute clan rivalries for this single geographic divide. There is some evidence for this: as S. Frederick Starr has pointed out, in the 1980s former President of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, allied his southern clan with Uzbeks of Kokand in Uzbekistan, thus alienating other southern clans.* However, in 2010 the north-south divide in the country overlapped with, and was then overtaken by, the ethnic divide between Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and others, which tore apart the city of Osh as described later in this chapter.

*Starr 2006

Outside of the realm of day-to-day politics, the most powerful role ascribed to clans in Central Asia is in the context of the Civil War in Tajikistan in the early 1990s. In much of the literature, the forces that made up the various sides in this war have been composed of adherents of the Leninobod (Khujand), Kulobi, Gharmi, Kurgan-Tyube, and Badakhshoni clans.* Not only is this an oversimplification of the ideological, social, and religious differences as well as the foreign interventions that underlay the conflict, but these alignments would more accurately be categorized as regional than clan. Here one can see the merging of metaphorical and literal meanings of clan, but on a much larger scale.

*Akbarzadeh 1996

To sum up, discussions about the present day role of clans in Central Asia should be approached with some caution. Genuine clans, similar in many essential features to those found in many pre-modern societies, and playing crucial social roles, have been around for a long time, especially among the Turkmen and Kyrgyz, while they continue to play an important role and regulate many aspects of social life in Kazakhstan. But in many cases where clans are referred to, the term is more metaphorical. There may or may not be a group of relatives involved, but 'clans' tend to be much looser than this, subject to overlapping and changing membership.

Thus, there are many notions and understandings of clans. What they generally have in common is a connection to kinship or bloodline, an emphasis on history and tradition, and the necessity of loyalty as well – in return – as preferential treatment. Originally clans were also connected to geographical locations. While this continues to be the case to some extent (and is indeed the main component of clan membership in Tajikistan), decades of mobility and dispersal of clan members mean they can now operate as the basis for national or even cross-border networks.

Official discourses are ambiguous and often contradictory about clans. On the one hand, the leaders of newly independent states have been anxious to establish the ancient lineage of the nation-state in order to promote coherence among the population and add legitimacy to their own rule. Promoting or inventing traditions of the national past, including traditions of clans, help to achieve this end. On the other hand, actual clans (real or metaphorical) create distortions in the system of government and a potential challenge to the President's power. For forward-looking leaders like Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, the association of clans with backwardness was a further deterrent to fully embracing their existence or revival. For Uzbekistan's Karimov, this was less of a concern and he was able to promote clans as a concept while limiting their power by carefully

playing them off against each other. In fact, popularising mythologized notions of clan may have helped to empty them of content.

2. Class

In pre-Soviet and early Soviet times, the primary social differentiation within the local population of Central Asia was between the urban and rural dwellers. Administrative positions were held by Russians and others such as Ukrainians and Armenians, and the military was totally dominated by these groups. Much of the new skilled industrial workforce was also brought in from other parts of the Empire, so that when revolutions broke out in 1905 and 1917, in places like Tashkent the usurpation of power by the predominantly-Russian workers' movement was accompanied by a struggle based on nationality.* But in many cities merchants, traders, craftsmen and workers in some trades like construction came, to a degree that varied across the region, from the local population. They had very different ways of life, levels of education and political outlooks from the European population, but also diverged rapidly from their rural brethren. Inasmuch as the locals did not feel much affinity based on national or clan identities, there was little to unite the urban and rural groups. This is not to say that there was no class differentiation within the local population of either the towns or villages. Wealthy merchants had very different allegiances from artisans or servants. A kind of aristocracy also existed and was influential in the countryside, known by a variety of titles but most commonly lumped together in Russian sources under the term *bey*. Clerics also held a privileged and influential position in both towns and country. But the relative lack of differentiation within local communities inspired and reflected an egalitarian outlook and the strength of political movements which were premised on the common interests of a population united by religion and, according to the intellectual leaders of these movements, nationality. These features influenced the early Soviet regime, which tolerated ideas of 'proletarian nations' and the precedence of the struggle against remnants of colonialism over class struggle.* Thousands of Russians who had settled as farmers under the tsars had their land confiscated and were forced out, so that the countryside returned to a state of the overwhelming preponderance of locals in the population.

The forced collectivization of agriculture in the early 1930s which, among other impacts, led to the death or emigration of millions of Kazakh herders and their families,* opened up oppor-

*Sahadeo 2007

*Bennigsen and Wimbush 1979

*Pianciola 2004

tunities for more Russian settlement in the countryside. Millions of more Russians and other Slavs followed to the countryside in northern Kazakhstan as part of Nikita Khrushchev's 'Virgin Lands' campaign of the 1950s. While the urban-rural divide has never disappeared, the gap reduced significantly during the post-War years. But class never emerged as a major mobilizing force even in the years of *perestroika* (1986-1991) when industrial centres and coalfields in other parts of the Soviet Union were riven by labour unrest. Thus available data suggests that, in Central Asia, there were much lower levels of strike activity as well as political demonstrations during these years.*

*Beissinger 2002

By the time of the Soviet break-up, class had more or less ceased to be a category that carried true subjective meaning for most Soviet citizens. The abolition of private property by the Soviet state took much of the sting out of class positions,* while the Soviet regime had appropriated the language of class as part of the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism. With the disappearance of any faith in that ideology and the collapse of the system that it was supposed to underpin, the discredited notion of class as a carrier of group or personal identity has rarely been heard in post-Soviet Central Asia or the rest of the former Soviet Union.* Official discourses of the new regimes also discouraged identifying with class, promoting instead a vision of a united population, all of whose members could be represented by the elected or self-appointed leader. Faced with a social identity denuded of any positive meaning and encouraged by the authorities, people turned overwhelmingly to national, clan or religious identities instead.

*Smith 1997

*Siegelbaum and Suny 1994

As a result, political parties in Central Asia since 1991 have rarely been organized along class lines – the main exception being what was left of the Communist Parties. But this does not, of course, mean that social differences, whether described in class terms or not, did not exist. Wealth differentials in Central Asian society are enormous. The syphoning off of private and public funds to offshore accounts or investment in western countries by business leaders, often connected to the ruling families, is well known and has resulted in several scandals.* The social composition of the populations of the Central Asian countries has changed drastically since the end of the USSR. As described in Chapters 8, 19 and 22, the collapse of the collective farm system and of traditional Soviet manufacturing industries led to employment on a massive scale in both rural and urban areas. While some people were able to take advantage of opportunities to acquire new skills or take their own business initiatives, for many more the main alternatives were tem-

*Cooley and Heathershaw 2017

porary migration abroad to earn money, or engagement in unofficial economic activity (see also Chapter 21). This has been the case especially for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. On the other hand, the huge increase in profitability and discovery of new reserves of oil and gas in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan has led to a massive rise in the numbers of both skilled and unskilled workers in the oil and gas industries.

Even in the areas of concentrated worker population that the energy industry has created, however, class-consciousness remains weak, for the reasons already outlined. Trade Unions are dominated by official confederations, which are partly or fully directed by the government. Independent trade unionists, like Erlan Baltabay, a leader of the *Independent Oil and Energy Workers' Union* in Kazakhstan, face regular harassment and imprisonment.* To most observers, class loyalties have been supplanted by national or personal loyalty, and the absence of any regular discourse about class has made it relatively easy for elites to take control of and direct popular movements.*

*ILO 2019

All the same, class conflict, mostly in the form of strikes, is a not uncommon feature of society, especially in the gas and oil fields. Months-long strikes and protests by oil workers in the Kazakh town of Zhanaozen, near the Caspian Sea, in 2011 culminated in clashes with police and the death of at least 15 people.* Towards the end of

*BBC 2012

*Reuters 2017

2017, miners working for the steel company *ArcelorMittal* occupied mines not far from the Kazakh capital Astana (Nur-Sultan). Although courts and police were used against the strikers, management ceded a 30% pay rise and other concessions.* What is revealing about this case is that, while the company was pursuing legal action against the strikers, senior political figures were intervening to diffuse tension. These included Dariga Nazarbayeva, daughter of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose father had made much of his political career in the town of Temirtau, where *ArcelorMittal* is based. Referring to this, Dariga was quoted as saying: "This region is not foreign to him. Its problems are of great concern to him. I am very sorry that ArcelorMittal management has allowed matters to reach this conflict situation;"* This and other interventions illustrate one of the characteristics of the Kazakh regime, especially since the Zhanaozen events – positioning the President and other leading figures as friends to the working people, while at the same time permitting ruthless repression against organized labour when needed. While it is difficult to get information on labour relations in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, this paternalistic relationship seems quite typical for Kazakhstan and for the region more broadly.

*Kumenov 2017

3. Ethnicity

In the absence of any serious discourse of class, invented traditions about clans reinforce regional identities, but there is little doubt that ethnicity has been the most important basis for mobilization across the region. Presidents and prime ministers have put ethnicity, language, culture, history and symbols at the heart of their 'nation-building' projects. But at the same time, regional politicians, businessmen and others have mobilized minority ethnicities in their support, fuelled in part by perceptions of discrimination by central government. In the worst cases, different ethnic identities have been at the basis of violent conflict, especially in the ethnically complex Ferghana valley, and nowhere more so than the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, close to the border with Uzbekistan.

Terms like 'ethnicity,' 'nationality' and 'race' are used inconsistently, with overlapping meanings, which can lead to a great deal of unclarity. In the West (Europe and North America) popular usage tends to associate 'nationality' with citizenship, or the country that is shown in your passport. In most European countries, a majority of the population bear a citizenship and nationality that coincide with their ethnic identities – French, Hungarian, Swedish, etc. – and the language they mostly use. Important exceptions are Belgium, where the population is divided between Dutch speakers (Flemish) and French speakers (Walloons), and Switzerland, which is divided into German, French, and Italian speakers. Everywhere, however, there are significant numbers of inhabitants of each country who may be citizens of that country but who identify themselves differently, in terms of either language, descent, culture, or a combination. These are referred to as ethnic minorities, and so in these cases there is a distinction between nationality – essentially citizenship – and ethnicity, which is a reflection of ancestry and culture.

The way academic researchers use the terms is, if anything, even less clear. Anthony D. Smith, makes a distinction but insists that nationalities are rooted in, or grow out of much longer established 'ethnies'.^{*} They are therefore wrapped up in each other. In general, scholars tend to use nationality to describe more institutionalized forms of identity, whether as specified in passports or citizenship policy, or more broadly through the educational and language policies associated with a particular territory and its state. Nations and nationality therefore tend to be viewed as more 'modern,' recent, and constructed than ethnicities.^{*} But it is already clear that there is space for ambiguity and overlap here. Further confusion is sown

^{*}Smith 1986

^{*}Suny 1993

by a common insistence that ‘nations’ must be associated with a particular territory, in definitions shared by authorities as far apart as the late *London School of Economics* professor Anthony D. Smith, and former leader of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin.*

*Smith 1986; Сталин 1946

A third category – race – also overlaps with or is closely associated with ideas about ethnicity and nationalism. In popular usage, race tends to be understood as much broader than ethnicity, and to be defined mostly by physical features such as skin colour and facial characteristics. This comes close to academic usage. Rogers Brubaker, summarizing definitions of Race and Ethnicity, found that “Race is said to be involuntary, ethnicity voluntary; race to be a matter of external categorization, ethnicity of internal self-identification (...).”* In other words, Race is more focussed on things that are given to us and we cannot alter, like appearance and genealogy, while ethnicity includes elements like language and culture which we are generally brought up with, but which are more flexible and can ultimately be rejected. A simple distinction between ‘race’ – ‘ethnicity’ – ‘nation’ might, therefore, involve a progression from factors that are given by nature, factors that are culturally determined, and factors that are constructed in the modern era, by nationalist movements or, in particular, by a state (giving rise to the nation-state). But in both vernacular and academic usage these distinctions are rarely clear-cut and would in any case still overlap. As Max Weber noted a century ago, the concepts are at the same time too complex and too vague to serve as useful analytical tools.*

*Brubaker 2009

*Weber 1978

The reason for digressing into definitions is, that the picture changes when it comes to usage in the Soviet Union and its successors. It becomes, subsequently, not just a question of usage but of different understandings, which affect the dynamics of group relations as well as state policies.

Firstly, the Russian term *natsional'nost'* (национальность) is ubiquitous and used in a range of contexts, like *nationality* in English, but the alternative *etnichnost'* (этничность) is even less used than *ethnicity*, and is mostly confined to academic contexts.

Secondly, since 1932 passports in the Soviet Union included a compulsory entry on nationality (*natsional'nost'*) for anyone aged 16 or over. This had to be based on the nationality of one of your parents and was very difficult to change later. Hence a distinction was made between citizenship (Soviet) and nationality. It also meant that nationality was, in effect, determined by the state with very little room for individual choice. As Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch* put it: “A central feature of the Soviet Union, it is now widely recognized, was the assignment of nationality to every

*Siegelbaum and Page Moch
2016: 975

part of the country and each individual, as inscribed on line five of the internal passport.” Thus the distinction given above between natural, cultural, and institutional characteristics is broken and no longer holds.

Thirdly, the institutionalization of ethnicity (in the Western sense) went further than almost anywhere else: the USSR was created as a federation of (eventually) fifteen republics and, within them, a series of autonomous republics and regions, each named after a nationality (Kazakh, Turkmen, Georgian, Estonian, etc.). Ethnic minorities in each republic were (with the exception of Russians and other Slavs – see below), given lower recognition and status than members of the titular nationality. Thus entitlement to a range of benefits, access to jobs, university places etc. depended (in practise if not in law) on your ethnicity. Finally, while philosophical systems of ethnicity like the ‘ethnogenesis’ component of some Eurasianist⁴ thought were officially frowned upon, the assumptions behind them were widely accepted in public and academic discourse. Nationality and ethnicity were seen not only as ancient, fixed and unchangeable, but as based on genetic make-ups which also determined the balance of human characteristics and personality traits. Such ‘primordialist’ understandings also play a large part in popular discourse in the West but – unlike in the Soviet Union – are challenged by modernist or ‘constructivist’ understandings. Overwhelmingly, therefore, in the Soviet successor states nationality or ethnicity is seen as essential to human beings, more important than categories like class, and defining not only the solidarity between members of a nation, but also group and individual characteristics. A number of corollaries flow from these conceptions including, for many, the impossibility of the peaceful coexistence of different ethnicities, and the argument that territorial claims and national borders should be determined by ancient historical patterns of dwelling and migration.* Primordial understandings of ethnicity and nationhood continued to dominate and to inform policy and attitudes.*

*Bassin et al. 2015; Shnirelman 2001

*Tishkov 1997

⁴ Eurasianism (*евразийство*) was a political (geo-)ideology and movement created in the 1920s among Russian émigrés that had fled the Russian revolutions. Adherents presented Russia as a unique (leading) civilization spanning two continents, its culture being a ‘mix’ born of the fusion of Slavic and Turko-Muslim peoples, and as an alternative to Western modernity, building on and reinterpreting many elements from Orientalist and Westerners-Slavophile debates (*западнику-славофилы*). According to the leading Eurasianist Lev Gumilev’s writings on ethnogenesis, each ethnic group had a specific character linked to its geographic environment.

By contrast, Western academic literature on the Nation has followed an almost exclusively 'constructivist' interpretation, meaning that nations are modern and constructed rather than natural, timeless and organic. While there is consensus around modernism, analyses differ as to by whom, how, and why nations were created. For Marxists, nations are a deliberately fake construct of the ruling classes designed to mislead workers into believing their interests are identical with those of their rulers. Ernest Gellner also identifies the origin of nations with the emergence of capitalism, but in his account the needs of modern communication and a skilled and flexible workforce necessitated spreading a common language and shared sense of values and purpose if capitalism was to function effectively.* For Benedict Anderson, nations emerge earlier with the arrival of print capitalism, which allowed intellectuals and politicians to spread the ideas that encouraged people to 'imagine' themselves as belonging to a particular community – the nation.* Antony D. Smith, as already noted, traced nations back to pre-existing 'ethnies' and accorded a greater role to intellectuals than to politicians in developing nations and nationalism.* There is some irony in the fact that Central Asian leaders have been among the most enthusiastic nation-builders' of all time, and yet reject constructivist in favour of primordial understandings of nations. The final parts of this section look, first, at some of these policies, second, at the question of the Russian population, and finally at ethnicity as a source of conflict, all of which are linked to particular understandings of, and discourses about, nationality or ethnicity.

Before that it is necessary to look at the demographic situation of Central Asia since the Soviet collapse. In line with the modernist interpretation, there was little appreciation of national identity in the region before the 1917 Russian Revolution. Only relatively small numbers of intellectuals saw national identity as a serious alternative to regional, religious, or clan identities. But in the 1920s they were able to make common cause with the Bolsheviks, who regarded national identity as advantageous to their efforts to establish and develop Soviet power.* The collection of data for the 1926 Soviet census, at the same time as Turkestan and southern Russia were being demarcated into five national territories, encouraged self-identification with the five main ethnic groups of Central Asia – Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek – see also Maps 8.1 to 8.4. Although these ethnicities and nations were to some extent 'invented' they took hold quickly and were taken for granted by the end of the Soviet era.* But there were substantial numbers of other ethnicities – Uyghurs, Karakalpaks, and other Turkic or Iranian

*Gellner 1983

*Anderson 1983

*Smith 1986

*Edgar 2006

*Hirsch 2005

peoples, Russians (by a long way the largest non-Muslim population), as well as Ukrainians, Germans, Chechens, Meskhetians and others who were relative newcomers to the region, either as a result of imperial or Soviet colonization, or as a legacy of the deportation of whole ethnic groups from the Caucasus and European Russia in the build-up to and during World War Two. (See also Map G on the 'Major Ethnic Groups in Central Asia in 1992' in the Concise Atlas beginning of this book.)

Equally or more importantly, the 'big five' Central Asian nationalities were never neatly divided from each other by state borders. It is a myth that Joseph Stalin [Stalin, Joseph: nationalities policy] or any other Soviet leader set out to draw deliberately complicated borders which would leave significant numbers of people on the 'wrong' side of the border of the state identified with each nationality.* But when the borders were drawn in the 1920s, the complex ethnic mosaics meant it was inevitable that the new territories were multi-ethnic, and Soviet priorities such as establishing urban centres as hubs for economic development frequently overrode ethnic considerations.* Later border changes in the 1960s and 1970s, enacted by the authorities of the Central Asian republics themselves, increased the number of ethnic enclaves and exclaves – small territories which were cut off from the main territory of the republic to which they were assigned.* All of these factors applied especially in the Ferghana Valley region, meaning the ethnic map remained particularly complex in the border regions of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Without exception, the leaders of the new post-Soviet states saw 'nation-building' as a primary task – that is to say, fostering a sense of belonging to a nation which was at the core of the territory and the government. In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and later Tajikistan, this process was linked closely to the personality of the President. The process was in itself not without problems,* and was especially problematic given the difficulty of trying to promote a single national identity in a multi-ethnic region. In the 1990s, these projects mainly involved "the iconography of the new regimes, the privileged status accorded to the local languages, newly revised histories and the exclusion of members of non-eponymous groups [member of ethnic groups other than the titular one] from the echelons of power."*

Symbols such as national flags, national animals and birds etc. were quickly established. Examples of what researchers term 'banal nationalism'* included competition over flying the world's largest flag (a record held by Tajikistan between 2011 and 2013), a prolif-

*Morrison 2017

*Hirsch 2005

*Reeves 2014

*Cummings 2007

*Smith et al. 1998

*Billig 1995

*RFE/RL 2013

eration of national holidays, and extravagant celebrations of independence and other anniversaries.* While regime leaders sought to dictate the nature of the new national messages and continue to regulate them, the role of other national actors should not be underestimated. Local authorities were responsible for erecting national monuments, while sculptors and others decided their ultimate form. Films and other artistic media, which are among the most effective carriers of national messages today, have also frequently departed from the script, especially in Kyrgyzstan. The idea of the nation in contemporary Central Asia, as in other contexts, is therefore fluid and contested. *

*Isaacs and Polese 2015

Language laws went beyond pure symbolic significance – discrimination in employment, which was particularly notable in the public sector and included firing officials who had held their posts for a long time, could be justified by reference to an individual's language abilities. All five Central Asian republics gave primacy to their titular languages by laws passed between 1989 and 1990, although the lack of resources like textbooks as well as the impracticality of implementing change in offices where there were so many Russian speakers involved hampered their full implementation. Nevertheless, by 1995 only Kazakhstan gave Russian or any other language the status of full official language outside of specific regions, and there its status has been subject to frequent change.* While Russian is useful for practical reasons in international relations as well as a common language of multi-ethnic societies, opponents of official recognition of Russian have seen it as a legacy of imperial rule. This aspect was also reflected in changes of the official alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin letters, which was introduced in theory (though rarely in practise) in Uzbekistan as early as 1993, but in Kazakhstan only in 2018, reflecting a growing anti-colonial discourse there.

*Smith et al. 1998

At the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union, fears were expressed in Moscow and beyond concerning the many millions of Russians living in the Soviet Union but outside the Russian Federation. On the one hand Russia regularly expressed concern about the rights of these Russians, while on the other hand, international observers and politicians within the other post-Soviet states saw them as a potential source of instability. Throughout the 1990s Russia sought to build guarantees for the rights of ethnic Russians into a series of treaties, and to make dual citizenship agreements with the Central Asian states, but with limited success.* Meanwhile, fears of destabilization based in part on ethnic Russian communities were realized in Moldova in the early 1990s and Ukraine

*Teague 2005

in 2014. Smaller incidents involving tensions between Russians and the titular communities have been seen regularly in Estonia and Latvia.

The first response of Russians left in Central Asia was to leave for Russia. The Russian population of all five republics fell from almost ten million in 1991 to 4.7-4.8 million in 2016. Almost three quarters of these are in Kazakhstan, and are highly concentrated in the north of the country.* While Russia used the continued presence of Russians in Tajikistan as a justification for its intervention in the Tajik civil war in the 1990s, in practise it is mostly in Kazakhstan that Russians retain influence and potential threat. This threat appears to have come closest to realization in 1999, when a group called *Rus'* led by Victor Vladimirovich Kazimirchuk, adopting the name of the 18th century peasant rebel leader Emilian I. Pugachev,⁵ appeared to conspire to take parts of northern Kazakhstan out of the country and join it to the Russian Federation. 22 people were arrested in Ust'-Kamenogorsk and the conspiracy, which remains shrouded in a certain amount of mystery, was foiled.* Through its crackdown on this movement, the Kazakh government signalled it would not tolerate any talk of secession, and when fears arose again in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 there were no signs of any serious unrest. In between times the Kazakh government has pursued inconsistent policies towards the still substantial Russian minority. Language laws in 1989 and 1995 downgraded the status of the Russian language, but in practise it has functioned as an official language in the parts of the country where large Russian communities remain. The move of the capital from Almaty to Akmola (renamed Astana and in 2019 Nur-Sultan) further north has been seen as a move to both appease and bring the central power closer to the Russian minority.*

*Goble 2016

*Commercio 2004

*Glenn 1999

But by and large, Russians have not been involved in the most serious cases of ethnic conflict in Central Asia. While the break-up of the Soviet Union did not engender the levels of conflict that many feared, and did not come close in scale to the traumatic events that accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia at the same time, ethnic tensions did erupt all around the Soviet peripheries before, dur-

⁵ Emilian I. Pugachev (Емельян Иванович Пугачёв, ca. 1742-1775) was the Ataman (chief) of the Yaik Cossacks (located near the Yaik river, in the Ural') that headed the mass uprising against Catherine the Great between 1773-1775 known as 'Pugachevshchina' (Пугачёвщина) the bloodiest rebellion against central state authority and serfdom in Russia between 1618 and the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, it disrupted an immense territory and momentarily threatened the Muscovite heartland. Defeated in 1774 at Tsaritsyn (Volgograd) Pugachev was captured soon after and executed in Moscow in 1775.

*Fearon 1998

ing and after the break-up. 'Commitment problems'* meant that minorities who had enjoyed some protection under Soviet power could not feel secure in the new political formations that succeeded the USSR. The nation-building policies and nationalist rhetoric of the new regimes sharpened fear and mistrust. The rapid emergence of hard international borders where previously republic borders had been fully open led to tensions across the borders, and between different ethnicities on either side of the border, as families and communities were effectively cut off from each other; natural resources, especially water, became sources of tension; and even established transport networks were disrupted so that, for example, there were cases of families unable to return bodies of deceased relatives to a final resting place in traditional family plots.*

*Reeves 2014

The Ferghana Valley, with its exclaves and enclaves and cross-border communities, has been a particular flashpoint. Most conflicts have been relatively small, involving two or more individual villages, and were solved either by police action or by negotiations. Disputes over water or land usage, exacerbated by disagreements as to the exact location of international borders, have been especially common between Kyrgyz and Tajik communities. In some cases relatively small disputes become politicised and escalate, prompting political and military interventions for a short time. But the most serious conflicts, both before and after the Soviet collapse, have occurred in the town of Osh and the surrounding region. Osh is the largest city of the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, located at the eastern end of the Ferghana valley. Its importance as a political centre stems from the geographical and cultural division of the country, with the north centred on Bishkek and the south on Osh. It stands close to the border with Uzbekistan and, at least up until 2010, most of its inhabitants were Uzbek. Violence erupted in the city on 4 June 1990, and spread to the surrounding countryside, where most of the deaths occurred. Tensions over jobs, housing, land and natural resources were exacerbated by economic crisis leading to a collapse of the industries on which the town depended, and increasingly assertive nationalist language on the part of Kyrgyz leaders especially. Estimates vary, but it seems that at least 120 Uzbeks, 50 Kyrgyz and one Russian died in the clashes that continued until 10 June.*

*Tishkov 1997

Osh and the nearby city of Jalalabad were the scene of further clashes in 2010. The memory of the earlier conflict undoubtedly played a role in stoking passions 20 years later, and underlying factors such as a housing shortage and unemployment remained similar. The demographic mix – predominantly Uzbek cities sur-

rounded by Kyrgyz countryside – was much the same. But otherwise circumstances were very different. Kyrgyzstan was a long-established independent state, while neighbouring Uzbekistan had by now made it clear that it had little interest in the Uzbek minorities living beyond its borders. A political crisis in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek actually set the ball rolling for conflict in the south. The unpopular President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was forced out of office in April 2010, and fled to his former power base in the south before leaving the country. In something of a power vacuum and with Bakiyev supporters looking for scapegoats, some injudicious remarks by local Uzbek leaders revived suspicions that Uzbeks would seek to take the town away from Kyrgyzstan. In such a combustible situation, even a small spark could set off the flames of conflict. Rumours (apparently unfounded) that Kyrgyz women had been raped by Uzbeks led to street fights in Osh on 10 June 2010, which then spread to Jalalabad. There followed four days of unrestrained violence, with Kyrgyz reinforcements arriving from the countryside and joining in the complete destruction of Uzbek housing areas (*mahallas*) and the killing of random Uzbeks.* At least 470 people, most of them Uzbek, lost their lives, but some estimates put the number of victims at several thousand.

*Melvin 2011

The Uzbek government closed its eastern border on 14 June 2010, denying an easy escape to thousands of refugees, but also sparing the region the internationalization of conflict which had beset the post-Soviet regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. Subsequent investigations pinned much of the blame on the mayor of Osh Melis Myrzakmatov and on the lack of response from Kyrgyz security forces, as well as highlighting factors like unemployment and housing.* Far more than the 1990 events, the 2010 killings transformed the city and the region, with hundreds of thousands of Uzbeks leaving and mistrust between the two ethnic communities barely healing.

*KIC 2011

The Osh conflicts were the most violent outcomes of ethnic differences which had become politicized in the Soviet era, and became even more competitive with independence. Nation-building policies were accompanied by occasional direct acts of oppression, such as the Kazakh government's repression of Uyghur national activists. One response has been large-scale outmigration by Russians and other minorities. But where minorities remain, violence is the exception rather than the rule. Constitutions and laws offer protection to minorities and this is institutionalized in some cases, such as for the Karakalpaks of Uzbekistan, who enjoy considerable autonomy in their region in the west of the country.

4. Conclusion

*Brubaker and Cooper 2000

The question of identity is a complex one – one which has been widely discussed, debated, and extended in academic literature in recent decades. So much so that some scholars have challenged whether there is any meaning left in the concept at all.* It is, of course, possible for individuals to have multiple identities – owing to region, ethnicity, nationality, class, clan, or other group – which will come to the fore according to particular circumstances. It is important to remember that however much academics agonize over identity, for the most part ordinary people do not. While it is possible to draw on socio-economic data and reams of theory to debate whether a low-paid salaried farm labourer is a worker or a peasant, it may be that the labourer herself or himself never thinks about the question. We are more likely to actively think of ourselves in national terms while following international sports events, and with a special intensity at times of war. Class comes to the fore when we are on strike or demonstrating, or just thinking about social inequalities. Clan or other forms of heritage may inform our choices when choosing what to wear on formal occasions.

*Costache et al. 2018

Even complex identities are not necessarily problematic. People with parents from different ethnic backgrounds are often proud of a mixed heritage, or will feel affinity to one or other ethnicity depending on the occasion. But sometimes external pressures do force individuals to select an ethnic identity – Soviet or post-Soviet passport laws, or outbreaks of ethnic conflict. Other forms of identity also feature in day-to-day life. While the notion that there may be some choice over sexual or gender identity has not made many inroads in Central Asia, there has been an increase in LGBT activism, especially in Kyrgyzstan. It has, however, faced many obstacles both from legislators and officials, and from street violence.* On the other hand, in Uzbek society another institution arguably plays more of a social role than nationality: the *mahalla*, a neighbourhood or community of housing, often walled off from the surrounding settlements, and with its own committee that regulates the affairs of inhabitants – see also Box 13.2. So strong are these traditional communities that the government of Uzbekistan has recognized them as organs of local self-government, while in 2010 they emerged as the focal point for organization and physical defence among the Uzbeks of Osh. While the individual *mahalla* may serve as an important focus of affiliation and identity for both urban and rural Uzbeks, they overlap with other identities, and by their nature are exclusionary: non-Uzbeks are for the most part

excluded, although they do include Uzbeks of all professions and levels of wealth.*

*Liu 2012; Urinboyev 2011

Leaving aside these other forms of identity, and with all the necessary caveats about making generalizations across a hugely variegated geographical area, this chapter summarizes as follows the very different roles of clan, class and ethnicity in Central Asian society: clans play an important role in many regions, but their significance tends to be exaggerated. Metaphorical uses of the term 'clan' to describe various forms of informal network can create confusion when it comes to understanding traditional clans, whose status has been to some extent reinvented in modern times.

Class is rarely used as a category in Central Asia, either in academic analysis, official discourse or popular understanding. Political parties are more likely to be organized along national or regional than along class lines. This is the result of Soviet usages and official disapproval, as well as the total restructuring of the economies after the collapse of the USSR. Attempts to mobilize along class lines, for example by building independent trade unions, are met with repression. Paternalistic regimes do, however, often position themselves as the defenders of the poor against privileged elites. While this implies the presence of severe social divisions, it successfully undermines them as a basis for mobilization.

Ethnicity is then, and partly by default given the absence of a discourse of class, the most important form of identity and the basis for much official and unofficial activity. Soviet and post-Soviet passport laws inscribe ethnic identity, which is the basis for individual experiences of educational and career opportunities, as well as for state policies that – legally or informally – discriminate based on ethnicity. In some cases, ethnicity becomes the basis for violent conflict, but it must be emphasized that most of the time ethnic difference does not lead to violence. Russians, the former colonizers and largest non-local minority, are in a special position. Their status is in flux and their numbers and influence declining, and it is here that changes might be expected in years to come.

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6. Recommended Literature

The chapter covers three distinct topics which – while linked conceptually – are rarely treated together. Individual country studies are the best way to read about the relationship between the three, but for more detailed studies separate works are needed. Kathleen Collins’ book is the most comprehensive study of Central Asian clans in English to date, and can be supplemented by Schatz (on Kazakhstan), Jacquesson and Gulette (mostly on Kyrgyzstan), and Ceccarelli, who focusses on the way clan ties overlap with criminal organizations.

On ethnicity and nationality, for an exposition of how national identities were part invented, part based on existing traditions and social structures, and part promoted by an alliance of nationalist intellectuals and Bolsheviks, Adrienne Edgar’s study of Turkmenistan in the 1920s is outstanding. For contemporary Central Asia, the 2015 special issue of the journal *Nationalities Papers* edited by Rico Isaacs and Abel Polese provides excellent insights on post-Soviet nation-building.

There has been very little work directly on the issue of class in post-Soviet Central Asia. Scott Radnitz’ book deals with how social groups have been mobilized by political elites, so addresses the issue tangentially. Individual country studies are again the most useful source, while there are also some excellent news websites, which provide accounts and analysis of individual events and current issues. Among the best for Central Asia are eurasianet.org and rferl.org.

- Alessandra Ceccarelli, “Clans, politics and organized crime in Central Asia,” *Trends in Organized Crime*, 10, no. 3, (2007): 19-36.
- Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

David Gulette, *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and Tribalism*, (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2010).

Rico Isaacs; Abel Polese (eds), 'Between "imagined" and "real" nation-building: identities and nationhood in post-Soviet Central Asia,' Special Issue of *Nationalities Papers*, 43, no. 3, (2015).

Svetlana Jacquesson, "From clan narratives to clan politics," *Central Asian Survey*, 31, no. 3, (September 2012): 277-292.

Scott B. Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics and Beyond: The Power of Blood in Kazakhstan*, (Washington DC: University of Washington Press, 2004).

Cite as: Jeremy Smith, 'Clans, Class and Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Central Asia,' in: Jeroen Van den Bosch; Adrien Fauve; Bruno De Cordier (eds.), *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2021): 329-357.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Assess the significance of clans, class, and ethnicity in the social and political development of the Central Asian countries. (Depending on the length of assignment, the teacher can choose whether to focus on just one of these factors, and/or invite students to examine just one Central Asian country).

TOPIC 2

How different are Central Asian societies from those of the West/Europe/Russia/North America (or other region/country depending on where the course is being taught or where students come from)?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

The teacher divides the class into pairs or small groups, and assigns each group to one of the Central Asian countries. Each group should be given a large (blank) map of a Central Asian country where they can use different coloured pencils/pens to shade in roughly the geographical concentration of clans, classes (perhaps with 3 categories of industrial, agricultural, and professional workers) and ethnicity. Course materials can be supplemented by use of data and maps found on the Internet. The students should also mark on the maps the capital cities and regional power centres, and think about how the shadings might influence central and regional politics.

In a more advanced version of this activity, the students take into account the economic development and population density of the previously marked areas and discuss the following question: which identity groups are most likely to be in charge in certain areas? Are these groups in power now at regional or national level?

To successfully complete this task and to enrich the discussion, the students can consult:

- Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Map 20.2 from this handbook will be useful for determining the available resources in different areas.

The groups present their findings to each other. There can then follow a general discussion comparing the significance of these factors, backed up by the maps as visual aids.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

PART 1: <https://youtu.be/Uel3fePb9nQ>

PART 2: <https://youtu.be/z1Lfhl-S67o>

Inauguration on 4 May 1913 of the memorial of K.P. von Kaufman and his soldiers "who won Middle Asia."

CHAPTER 10

Presidential Elections and Ruling Parties in Central Asia

Adrien Fauve

IFEAC & Paris-Saclay University

Keywords:

- Elections • Political Parties • Authoritarian Regimes • Referendum
- Presidents • Legitimation • Elite Groups

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Conceptualize party politics in authoritarian context.
- Apply the '4+1 pattern' to discuss parties and elections in Central Asia.
- Relate elections and referendums with the legitimization of power.
- Address continuity and change in Central Asian politics.
- Question the availability, nature and quality of election data in the region.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**Pre-reading questions**

- Can you name at least one political party per country in CA?
- What is the usual voters' turnout in Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan?
- Has the communist party disappeared in all five countries?

Main questions

- What are the three basic notions needed to discuss party politics in Central Asia?
- What are the main instruments used against the opposition?
- Why are elections and referenda organized in authoritarian regimes?
- How are referenda instrumentalized in the Central Asian countries?
- What does the '4+1 pattern' refer to?
- What are the common trends between Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan?
- Why is the situation different in Kyrgyzstan?
- Can you identify youth movements directly connected to ruling parties?

Post-reading questions

- Is there a dominant ideology among ruling parties?
- Beyond obvious links with presidential elections, what are the many functions of a ruling party?

Presidential Elections and Ruling Parties in Central Asia

ADRIEN FAUVE

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ON 19 MARCH 2019, the president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, who had been in power since the late 1980s, even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, announced on television that he was resigning from office. In a matter of days, following the principles of the Constitution, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, president of the Senate, became the interim head of state, and elections were called for June. As witnessed in the field by the author of these lines, everyone was struck by the news,* regardless of the signs of a potentially smooth transition.*

*Vlast.kz 2019

*Rfi.fr 2019

Rapidly, the transitory government decided that candidates had to register in late April, which gave them very little time to prepare for campaigning and favoured the main incumbent, obviously affiliated to *Nur Otan*, the presidential party. The elections – despite criticism from OSCE observers and repressed mobilization of newly formed protest groups – ended with the anticipated outcome of Tokayev becoming the second president of post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Thus, one may wonder why elections needed to be organized in the first place.

This brief anecdotal example somehow epitomizes the problems addressed in this chapter. As a matter of fact, in Central Asian countries, presidential elections are organized frequently, but calendars are subject to change and everything happens as if the outcome was predictable. Also, the same candidates keep running and running, even when the number of mandates was initially limited. How is this possible? What do presidential elections mean for authoritarian regimes? Even if they are state-controlled, are they really “elections without choice?”* What roles do the main political parties play in such situations? This chapter will shed light on those problems by addressing the situation in the five post-Soviet countries of Central Asia since the 1990s.

*Hermet et al. 1978

Because of the significant power in the hands of heads of state and their longevity, this chapter will focus on presidential elections and referenda calling for extending presidential terms. The author will leave aside parliamentary or local elections, despite their

importance for a complete understanding of how politics is being done at all institutional levels of governances. The empirical thickness of presidential elections and referenda is already enough and significant: overall our data collection contains about 28 elections and 20 referenda in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan altogether since 1991!

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 1 gives clear definitions of key concepts used throughout this study, then Section 2 addresses a 4+1 pattern linked to presidential elections. Finally, Section 3 analyses a critical phenomenon in Central Asia, known as ruling parties.

1. Three Core Definitions: Elections, Parties, Authoritarianism

Let us start by defining some key notions that will be used throughout this chapter. First, one must understand that elections are a way of designating leaders that is fundamentally based on voting procedures.

1.1 Elections

For the purpose of this chapter, the author will only focus on elections with a simple majority (candidates who gather >50% simply win the ballot). Elections introduce a hierarchy between elected rulers and ordinary citizens: in theory, the former are supposed to exercise political power while the latter delegate this power to those representatives of the people. Therefore, it appears logical that elections induce non-permanent mandates – otherwise there would not be any other election afterwards.

Finally, one must acknowledge the fact that elections are not intrinsically linked to democracy as a regime. For instance, in Athens, during ancient Greek times, “sortition” was very much used in order to select those who would exercise power. It was another way to select leaders, but randomly and based on anonymity. Also, elections are still organized, even if totally controlled by political leaders, with predictable results due to fraud and tremendous pressure on voters, even in contemporary North Korea. This demonstrates that elections are a specific political tool consubstantially linked to a process of legitimation of the people who govern society. Even when they are neither free nor fair, they exist and mobilize numerous social agents (candidates, organizers, voters, observers).

1.2 Political Parties

Political parties have been the subject of scholarly attention since the beginning of Social Sciences. Following Max Weber, who started investigating parties in the early 20th century, one can start by considering political parties as organizations directly involved in the struggle for public duties and positions of power in society. Weber's own words already illustrate the perceived significance of this collective phenomenon hundred years ago!

*"Their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power (...) Their means of attaining power may be quite varied, ranging from naked violence of any sort to canvassing for votes with coarse or subtle means (...) they aim to influence the existing polity."**

*Weber 1979: 938-940

Later on, parties were additionally conceptualized in contrast to other collective organizations (trade unions, associations, clubs, etc.) thanks to several defining criteria:* they remain even when their leader dies (e.g. the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after Lenin or Stalin), they possess local offices directly linked to national headquarters (e.g. *Nur Otan* in remote Mangystau region, 2000 km from the capital city Nur-Sultan), they explicitly show a deliberate will to access power based on collective action (campaigning or coup d'état) and they strive for popular support (in polls or public space). This need for being backed by citizens, as the author will show below, also applies to authoritarian rulers.

*La Palombara and Weiner 1966: 6

1.3 Authoritarian Rule

Consequently, one should properly define authoritarianism as a specific kind of political regime. Let us articulate two major definitions: Juan Linz's pathbreaking analysis complemented by seminal arguments from Guy Hermet and recent updates from the literature. As matter of fact, one must first take stock of the following criteria, which are common to every authoritarian regime. First of all, competition among political actors is low, but there still can be several minority parties or groups trying to oppose the power elite: it differs from totalitarian regimes where there is a unique party (e.g. Communist Party in China under Mao's rule). Hence, the system is of limited pluralism,* a point well illustrated by the hegemonic domination of *United Russia* (*Единая Россия – Yediniyaya Rossiya*) at the State Duma after the 2016 parliamentary elections* with 341 seats among the 450, despite the existence of other parties such as LDPR¹ (40 seats) or *Just Russia* (23 seats). Limited

*Linz 1964: 255

*ДУМА РФ 2019

¹ LDPR stand for *Liberal Democratic Party of Russia*, in Russian: ЛДПР – Либерально-демократическая партия России.

pluralism can cover many aspects of political life, ranging from party representation in a parliament to academic freedom in universities or the expression of contrasting opinions in the media.* In the following pages, for the sake of coherence, the author will mostly concentrate on election results for presidential ballots.

Second of all, authoritarian rule relies more on force or coercion to generate obedience rather than persuasion and legitimation.* This kind of political regime tends to grasp and control political institutions which then demonstrate pro-regime bias: heads of state benefit from broad nomination powers, they can easily revoke officials, and few elite positions are subject to a competitive process of elite selection. Co-optation is thus a key feature,* even in times of contentious movements.* And even when elections are organized, as shown below, the ruling elite manipulates electoral law and instrumentalizes the judiciary in order to discredit opponents, therefore they do not solely bet on ballot-box stuffing, as shown by the case of Jordan in the 2000s.*

*Heinrich and Pleines 2018

*Hermet 1985

*Gandhi and Przeworski 2006;
Svolik 2012

*Sika 2019; Fanxu Zeng et al. 2018

*Lust-Oskar 2006

2. Presidential Continuity and Longevity: The Initial Matrix of a 4+1 Pattern

The literature on elections in Central Asia gives useful orientations in order to understand what is at stake: some works insist on the struggle among elite groups, especially between state-affiliated candidates and market actors coming from the private sector,* other publications enquire the difference between elections in strong and weak states, in relation with nation-building processes,* while there is also scholarship questioning the effects of regime type on political attitudes of citizens.* However, there is an aspect that is not investigated in this literature: a distinctive feature of Central Asian politics which lies in common characteristics shared by four countries. Those, by contrast, always delineate a singular case. Therefore the author will call this a 4+1 pattern. The latter is easily applicable when it comes to presidential continuity before and after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union in 1991.

*Sjoberg 2011

*O Beachain and Kevilhan 2015

*Junisbai and Junisbai 2019

2.1 Continuity

From that particular standpoint, 1991 should not be considered as a major turn: men who were leading the Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remained in office. The main difference here, the “+1” case is Tajikistan, because of the civil war. Indeed, Saparmurat Niyazov (since 1985), Nur-Sultan Nazarbayev (since 1989) and Islam Karimov (since 1989) were all

holding the crucial position of first secretary within their respective republican Communist Party. Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan had become president of the Supreme Soviet of Kyrgyzstan in 1990. However, contrary to his counterparts, he was not a career party leader prior to his advent to power but a prominent scientist.

Nevertheless, all four men were elected presidents of their independent country in 1991. E. Rahmon differs a little in this group of post-Soviet presidents as he was not the first to rule over the country and was “just” an elected member of the Supreme Soviet in Tajikistan since 1990 before he eventually became head of the government in 1992 and finally president in 1994. But from the moment when he reached the position of chief of state, he remained in power. So the idea of continuity between the Soviet era and independence is robust: 4+1 presidents who have ruled in the 1990s and 2000s already had significant experience of republican politics. Moreover, two of those who are currently in office also occupied major positions in their respective national system: Shavkat Mirziyoyev had been prime minister of Uzbekistan for 13 years and Tokayev had served as Speaker of the Senate for 6 years before they both got elected as presidents. Continuity here can be understood not only as the fact of remaining in power as it happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the ascent as well of deeply experienced *apparatchiks* who stood quite a long time in the direct shadow of their predecessors. This is for instance very different from the rapid emergence of Vladimir Putin as successor to Boris Yeltsin in Russia: he was neither a public figure nor an elected official (he actually served several short-term mandates in a row as director of the FSB² intelligence service (July 1998-March 1999), secretary of the security council (March 1999-August 1999) and first-deputy prime minister (roughly seven days in August 1999!).

A decade later, these rulers again shared another similarity: they were all re-elected once or twice, always with a score higher than 70% of the cast votes. The 4+1 pattern also applies here as the only contrasting case is Niyazov in Turkmenistan who was confirmed – or rather, prolonged – in 1994, through a plebiscite with supposedly 99.9% of the voters in favour of extending his term until 2002. Then in 1999 he simply became president-for-life thanks to a constitutional reform, inscribing his title of ‘Turkmenbashi’³ in the most official documents.

² FSB stands for *Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation* (in Russian: *Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации* – ФСБ), the successor to the notorious Soviet KGB.

³ Which means ‘leader of the Turkmen,’ a title he had publicly chosen for himself back in 1993.

Somehow, the 4+1 pattern, gathering a majority of similar cases and introducing a nuance (although not applying to the same country) demonstrates the coherence of post-Soviet Central Asia as a region and a relevant object of study. It is of course not the author's intellectual project to essentialize Central Asia, but despite the true need to criticize the imaginaries of the region and the narratives constructed from an external and frequently Western viewpoint, there are some common trends, at least when it comes to politics, which are interesting to understand, observe and investigate.

2.2 Longevity

After having discussed presidential continuity rooted in late Soviet times, one must now turn to a connected dimension: presidential longevity. Again, there is a 4+1 pattern if one looks at a couple of additional characteristics, which need to be identified. Firstly, in four countries there have only been two heads of state since 1991, meaning for thirty years. Secondly, two of them died while in office (Niyazov in 2006; Karimov in 2016) and the person who handled their funerals eventually became the new country leader: G. Berdimukhamedov was vice-president and S. Mirziyoyev was prime minister, both were leading the ceremonials and had to struggle against other highly positioned individuals in their respective regime, notably the speaker of the senate in Ashgabat (who had a constitutional claim to the interim presidency) and the director of SNB security services in Tashkent (who led the country hand in hand with Karimov). Beyond this anecdotal evidence, all these elements are easier to grasp in a comparative overview presented in Table 10.1.

In three of the cases considered above, the first president remained in power between 15 and 28 years. Only in Tajikistan did the second president stay longest in office (25 years from 1994 until now). Either way, in all four cases, presidents stay in office for a long period. There is also a slight nuance concerning presidential succession in Kazakhstan as Nazarbayev indeed resigned, but still holds significant and influential positions in the state apparatus as chairman of the national security council and head of the *Nur Otan* hegemonic party.

The sole, blatantly contrasting case here is Kyrgyzstan, where six presidents have served since 1991, in chronological order: A. Akayev, B. Bakiyev, R. Otunbayeva, A. Atambayev, S. Jeenbekov, and now S. Japarov. Again, this is a crude demonstration of the extent to which 4+1 pattern genuinely applies to the longevity issue. The chronological developments of instable presidential office in

Table 10.1 Presidential Longevity in Central Asia: A Common Trait in Four Countries

	KAZAKHSTAN		UZBEKISTAN		TURKMENISTAN		TAJIKISTAN	
2 post-Soviet presidents	Nazarbayev	Tokayev	Karimov	Mirziyoyev	Niyazov	Berdy-mukhame-dov	Nabiyev	Rahmon
Advent to power	1991	2019	1991	2016	1991	2006	1991	1994 (after the civil war)
Longevity	28 years	In office	25 years	In office	15 years	In office	1 year	22 years
Position before being elected president	1 st secretary CP Kazakh SSR (since 1989)	Speaker of the Senate (since 2013)	1 st secretary CP Uzbek SSR (since 1989)	Prime minister (since 2003)	1 st secretary CP Turkmen SSR (since 1985)	Vice-President (since 2001)	President of the Supreme Soviet of Tajik SSR (sept. 1991)	President of the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan (since 1992)
End of mandate	Resigned	N/A	Died in office	N/A	Died in office	N/A	Forced to resign after a coup	N/A

Source: Author's own work.

Table 10.2 The Many Presidents of Kyrgyzstan: A Country Specific Feature

	Akayev	Bakiyev	Otunbayeva	Atambayev	Jeenbekov	Japarov
Advent to presidential power	12 October 1991 (reelected 1995, 2000)	10 July 2005 (reelected 23 July 2009)	3 July 2010	1 December 2011	24 November 2017	28 January 2021
Expected end of mandate	October 2005	2015	Late 2011	Late 2017	Late 2023	(ongoing) depending on a new constitution
Actual end of mandate	3 April 2005	15 April 2010	1 December 2011	24 November 2017	15 October 2020	N/A
Reason of resignation	Contested parliamentary elections (March 2005)	Protests against corruption and repression of opposition figures	End of constitutional reform in accordance with the 27 June 2010 referendum	Expected end of mandate	Contested parliamentary elections (October 2020)	N/A
Total longevity	13.5 years	5 years	1.5 year	6 years	Almost 2 years	N/A

Source: Author's own work.

Kyrgyzstan can be explained by the iterative popular protests and constitutional changes (cf. Chapter 14).

2.3 Kyrgyzstan as a Contrasting Case

Several heads of state in Kyrgyzstan did not reach the final term of their mandates. As a matter of fact, they were forced to resign from office by popular unrest, because of fraud allegations, discredit etc. This is very much different from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan,

where the first presidents after independence died in office (Niyazov in 2006, Karimov in 2016), and also different from Kazakhstan, where the first post-Soviet president openly and unexpectedly decided to leave his duties after a 23-year rule (Nazarbayev in 2019). Factionalism – the political phenomenon based on a tactical alliance between a small group of agents aiming at accessing power despite ideological differences – might be the most heuristic⁴ concept to mobilize in order to understand these frequent changes in Kyrgyzstan, which do not lead to a deep systemic evolution. Let us get back at this specific feature of our +1 case here, which shows that only two presidents, out of six, did finish their expected terms in accordance with their initial mandate (Otunbayeva and Atambayev). Besides, only Atambayev experienced a smooth transit of power, when Otunbayeva left her seat (2011) and when he himself, after six years, let his successor Jeenbekov take over. All remaining three were indeed forced to resign.

3. Fostering a Ruling party

In four of the five Central Asian countries under scrutiny, there is a ruling party (*правлящая партия* – *pravyashchaya partiya* in Russian). Generally speaking, to make the situation possible, this all means that heads of state, with the active help of a loyal or affiliated power elite, instrumentalize the electoral codex, calendar and other election related tools, such as thresholds or “tribunitian opposition,”* in order to exert their grip on supreme power. This specific concept, initially rooted in French politics of the 1950s and concerning the role of the communist party, means that a party can offer a pedestal to social groups who lack influence or a voice in the system. Consequently, such a party allows those who feel marginalized to express themselves, but it also serves as a security outlet to avoid conflict and channel discontent. In order to update this concept and apply it to Central Asian regimes, one must add that the ‘tribunitian opposition’ is also convenient for the ruling elite because it shows a certain – albeit limited – commitment to international standards of pluralism, referring back here to Linz’s definition of authoritarianism. The 2019 presidential elections in Kazakhstan give a good example of these dynamics.

*Lavau 1969

⁴ This term is admittedly slightly pedantic, but it is quite current in the Social Sciences (Moustakas 1990). In choosing to mention it here anyway, the author intends to train readers to know it, and to understand its meaning and uses: it simply means ‘efficient for making discoveries or findings.’

Table 10.3 *Ruling parties in Four Countries of the Region*

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
Name of the party	<i>Nur Otan</i> (People's Democratic Party)	<i>O'zlidep</i> (Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party)	TDP (Democratic Party of Turkmenistan)	NDPT (People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan)
Year of creation	2006	2003	1991	1994
Number of affiliates	900,000 (1)	161,758 (2)	148,500 (3)	250,000 (4)
Number of seats in parliament	84/107 (since 2016)	53/150 (since 2020)	55/125 (since 2013)	51/63 (since 2015)
Chairman	Nazarbayev (former president)	Aktam Khaytov	Ata Serdarov	Rahmon (current president)
Founder	Nazarbayev	Karimov	Niyazov	Abdumazhid Dostiev
Youth organization	<i>Zhas Otan</i>	N/A	<i>Makhtumkuli</i>	<i>Sozandagoni Vatan</i>
Regional cooperation with similar parties	Official agreement with <i>United Russia</i> + Chinese CP + NDPT	Official agreement with <i>United Russia</i> + discussions with <i>Nur Otan</i>	N/A	Official agreement with <i>Nur Otan</i> + <i>United Russia</i> + <i>Eni Azerbaijan</i>

Source: Author's own work, based on: (1) Astana Times 2013; (2) Wikipedia 2020; (3) Turkmenistan.ru 2007; (4) Sputnik News 2015.

One of the key features allowing longstanding presidents to hold onto power is their reliance on a main political party to which a great number of people in governmental and regional administration, health services, education and other public sectors are affiliated. This phenomenon is known, on Central Asian ground, as *pravyashchaya partiya* or 'ruling party.' It enjoys a critical position in power institutions and retains quite a lot of affiliates. A decade ago, these parties were treated as "proto-hegemonic" in the literature,* but their scope has expanded and one can consider them "dominant."* These parties indeed exist, once again, in four of the five Central Asian republics under scrutiny: *Nur Otan*, *O'zlidep*, TDP⁵ and NDPT⁶ demonstrate that the 4+1 pattern also works here, as shown in Table 10.3.

*Isaacs 2011

*Duverger 1963; Cox 1997

3.1 The Kazakhstani Example of a Ruling Party

It even reaches a peak in similarity that parties tend to cooperate in official ways.* For instance, on the occasion of the 2019 presidential elections in Kazakhstan, *O'zlidep* sent its deputy-head to observe the ballot and a meeting with the national secretary of *Nur Otan*

*Asia-Plus 2014

⁵ TDP stands for the Turkmen abbreviation of *Türkmenistanyň Demokratik Partijasy*, 'Democratic Party of Turkmenistan.'

⁶ NDPT stand for the Russian abbreviation for *Народная демократическая партия Таджикистана* (in Tajik: *Ҳизби халқии демократии Тоҷикистон* – *Hizbi xalqii demokrati Tojikiston*), meaning People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan.

*Uzidep.uz 2019

took place, where both agreed that, “as leading political forces of their countries, [parties] have the capacity to become one of the main channels of *popular diplomacy*.”*

In order to get a better understanding of how these dynamics work, let us focus on the Kazakhstani case, which epitomizes, in a way, this trend of a leading organization, reaching a position of partisan hegemony, fuelling presidential longevity in authoritarian regimes by reducing competitiveness and controlling the electoral process.

*Gandhi and Heller 2017

In this country, as in many other authoritarian regimes,* changing the electoral system or introducing restrictions in the legislation on party activities, does indeed appear as to be a way to ensure political dominance. As shown in a recent empirical account of this trend in Kazakhstan, “adapting the electoral rules (...) can directly limit the access of political opponents in parliament. It also helps to significantly reduce political competition, keep the opposition in a weak state and influence the outcome of the elections.”*

*Alzhanov 2019

The law on political parties dates back to 2002 and was adopted after a political crisis which had led to the eviction of former system insiders, who became opposition leaders with the creation of *Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan* (DCK⁷), and were put under pressure by the government to either leave politics or show loyalty. At the time, by the way, the prime minister was Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who eventually became president seventeen years later, thus succeeding Nazarbayev. In concrete terms, the law limited the emergence and official registration of parties. Hence in 2004 the parliamentary elections led to the consolidation of a ruling party (*Otan* – ‘Fatherland’) which absorbed other pro-presidential groups such as *Asar* (‘All Together’ – led by Dariga Nazarbayeva, the first president’s elder daughter), the *Civic Party*, and *Agrarian Party*, to finally become *Nur Otan* (‘Light of the Fatherland’) in 2006, right after the presidential elections. Rapidly, a proportional system was implemented, based on a set of restricting parameters: party lists, a single national constituency, the impossibility of forming electoral blocks through coalitions, a crucial threshold of seven percent, under which no group can enter the institution,⁸ and official registration requiring that a party has 40,000 proven affiliates with at least 600 members in each of the 14 administrative regions (*oblys* in Kazakh). As a consequence, spontaneous, self-nominated and

⁷ It is called the *Қазақстанның демократиялық таңдауы* in Kazakh, *Демократический выбор Казахстана* – ДБК (DVK) in Russian

⁸ The exact same 7% barrier also exists in the Russian Federation.

outsider candidates did not have any means to get into the lower chamber of the Parliament: in 2007 *Nur Otan* gained 98 of 98 seats, then 83 in 2012 and 84 in 2016. By restricting the emergence of pluralism in legislative elections, the ruling elite actually masters the grounds of political space, preventing any protesting force from benefitting from a national rooting, and casting legitimate candidates for the most important election: the presidential one. By doing so, the ruling party perpetuates its domination,* as seen in other countries of the region. But there is another major instrument in the toolkit of Central Asian political leaders: referenda.

*Del Sordi 2016

3.2 Referenda

From December 1991 up to February 2021, one can count the organization of no less than 20 nationwide consultations about constitutional change, presidential terms, or other political parameters. How can a social scientist make sense of this? Legitimation of authoritarian rulers does rely on apparently objectified numbers or statistics produced by the participation of citizens. This is the reason why voter turnout is so important, even when elections are neither free nor fair: the simulacrum of people actually going to polling stations even if what they chose is required under pressure, or gained by clientelistic motives, is symbolically operational. This is exactly what scholars who analyse elections, following a path opened by Pierre Bourdieu with his notion of “symbolic coup,”* have demonstrated in order to explain how election engineering operates: popular participation is transformed, through regime propaganda, by affiliated media and members of the political elite (ministers, members of the parliament, governors of regions) as acknowledgement of the system and consent to domination: election results are taken as the mirror reflection of public opinion, whereas thorough investigations tend to show that numbers are an outcome of “electoral fabrication.”*

*Bourdieu 1992

*Catusse 2002

A referendum is a simple voting procedure allowing for consultation directly with citizens on a specific governmental project. It is usually organized nationwide, often used for constitutional changes but sometimes can be applied at local level. Most frequently, questions are simple and answers as well. Table 10.4, below, clearly shows that this political tool has been used much more in Kyrgyzstan, a country where authoritarian regimes have been less consolidated (cf. Chapter 11) and are less affected by the continuity of the ruling elite.

Table 10.4 Overview of Referendums in Central Asia after 1991

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
Number of referenda	2	9	2	1	4
Dates of referenda	April 1995 Aug.1995	Jan. 1994 Oct. 1994 Feb. 1996 Oct.1998 Feb. 2003 Oct. 2007 June 2010 Dec. 2016 Jan. 2021	March 1995 Jan. 2002	Oct. 1994	Nov. 1994 Sept. 1999 June 2003 May 2016

Source: Author’s own work based on: ElectionGuide 2021.

Referenda are very much transversal in all five Central Asian countries. Even in Kyrgyzstan – where presidential longevity does not apply to the extent of the other four cases – a referendum is mobilized as a political tool by the power elite in order to legitimize their rule. The 10 January 2021 double ballot is a clear example of this trend. Indeed, interim president Japarov had declared he would run for office right after the October 2020 crisis (due to contested parliamentary elections, which led to the resignation of Jeenbekov) and he set the agenda toward a more presidential regime, thus framing political debates,⁹ as suggested by supporters of the “soft-authoritarian” framework,^{*} by scheduling popular consultation on the same day as the election. This way, voters would participate in both the presidential election and referendum at the same time. The question asked was expressed in very simple terms: “do you support a presidential or parliamentary republic?” with three possible answers (presidential, parliamentary, against both).¹⁰ Citizens were consulted about a possible deep constitutional change. However, the project remained at drafting stage, even a couple of months afterwards.¹¹ As a matter of fact, no version of the new fundamental law was made available to the public, for voters to make up their mind, before they went to polling stations. By winning the

*Schatz 2009

⁹ Even if he personally did not participate to any of the six contradictory debates between other presidential candidates (author’s observation from direct fieldwork in Bishkek, Winter 2020-2021).

¹⁰ Official results show 39.12% voters turnout, with 81.3% opting for a presidential form of government, 10.9% for a parliamentary system and 4.45% against both. (Shailoo.gov.kg 2021)

¹¹ A stabilized draft version started officially circulating on 9 February 2021 for public consideration during one month. It was initially published on the website of the Parliament. Then various associations of lawyers or elders (*aksakal*) and local NGOs commented it with a critical eye, such as *Adilet* or Media Policy Institute. (Kenesh KYR 2021)

presidential election, and getting approval for his inflexion of the regime towards more power in the hands of the head of state, Japarov displayed an extended form of popular legitimacy.

As recently argued in the literature, such political systems can be understood altogether under the broad category – originating in comparative politics – of ‘electoral authoritarianism’:^{*} in order to cope with the uncertainty of neither free or fair elections, those in power rely on a set of manipulative strategies (clientelism, calendar change, constitutional reforms, *kompromat*¹² scandals, influence on the media, constructing appearances etc.) to produce election results favourable to them. But when it comes to Central Asia, some specific nuances need to be added to the picture,^{*} which help refine the approach and make sense of the empirical findings. If applied to this chapter’s analytical grid, there are two categories: *dominant party regimes* (four main cases) and *competitive authoritarianism*^{*} (+1).

^{*}Schedler 2006; 2013

^{*}Orange 2019

^{*}Levitsky and Way 2010

4. Conclusions

Overall, this chapter establishes a set of indispensable concepts required for anyone who might envisage analysing Central Asian politics: ruling parties, presidential elections and referenda under authoritarian rule. After having introduced a theoretical innovation, coined as the ‘4+1 pattern’ built upon a critical assessment of presidential longevity in comparative perspective, a final feature is considered, namely partisan hegemony. Indeed, one must consider political parties as a key phenomenon in human history since the 19th century, existing under any kind of regime (ranging from democracy, to authoritarian rule and totalitarianism) and playing a crucial role in the functioning of political life.

In Central Asia, ruling parties play a key role in consolidating presidential regimes as they embrace public administration and serve institutional control. This is mostly valid in the four main examples tackled here (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) but does not really apply in the +1 case (Kyrgyzstan), where party organizations are extremely fluid and versatile, easily recomposed, shrinking or getting bigger on the eve and after elections, and thus weakly institutionalized.

¹² A term associated with the dirty work of the secret services, it is short for ‘compromising material’ (*компрометирующий материал*) and refers to obtaining damaging information about a political group, politician, businessperson, or other public figure, either by leaking it to the public (to destroy reputations) or to threaten a person or group to do so, in order to blackmail them.

Factionalism seems to operate as a more systematic phenomenon in this particular national context. This coincides with the notion of “competing pyramid systems” in which some factions – or elite groups – compete for the dominant position in a patrimonial regime* by including or excluding people (cf. Chapter 11).

*Hale 2015; Junisbai and Junisbai 2019

Nevertheless, elections in Central Asia – be they organized to legitimize presidential rule or to consult citizens about constitutional change by way of referendum – are mostly a façade generating a stabilizing effect,* apart from Kyrgyzstan, where protests over election results can regularly lead to unexpected change among the elite groups in power. Moreover, despite the stark difference, in terms of presidential longevity, between the four similar cases, where only two individuals have been holding power, and the contrasting case where six people have been in office, a common feature needs to be underlined: elections are subject to a fabrication engineering which is meant to symbolically legitimize the domination of elite groups and stabilize the political regime.*

*Seeberg 2012

*Polese et al. 2017

Beyond the core conclusions of this chapter, there is also an important methodological and reflexive feature that the author wishes readers to pay careful attention to. Because every researcher, junior or senior, needs to be conscious of how she/he conducts investigations and has a professional obligation of being transparent about it, in the eyes of the scientific community judging the validity of her/his assertions.

As a matter of fact, it is difficult to obtain reliable information, especially figures related to the number of affiliates to parties and election results in the region. Available data published on collaborative websites such as *Wikipedia* are not always sustained by hard evidence; they are often quoting media coverage of elections or public events. This is obviously one of the methodological challenges when enquiring about ruling parties and presidential elections in Central Asia. Statistics most likely do exist but are kept for internal purposes by the management structures of these organizations. After several attempts to dig into their official websites, and in light of the lack of systematic fieldwork concerning party members from the five countries, gaps still need to be filled. One very useful alternative source of information and data in this regard is the *Global Party Survey* led by Pippa Norris, covering numerous parties, their ideologies, policy positions and rhetoric, in a total of 163 countries around the world.* But readers of this chapter might want to develop their own research methods on that very matter and thus contribute to the field. The academic debate welcomes such studies with open arms. Notably also, research on the agency

*Global Party Survey 2021

of registered or banned parties, populist strategies, local elections and politicians' careers still needs progress. The author would be thrilled to discover future investigations and publications related to these and other issues related to domestic politics in Central Asia. If the way is paved – even partially – our didactic task here is fulfilled.

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6. Recommended Literature

Many stimulating works on politics in Central Asia have not been cited in this chapter, notably because the whole point was to avoid an encyclopaedical approach and instead rely on a mix of fieldwork observations and content analysis. Nevertheless, some additional references can be of help to those who plan further research, especially when one needs to clarify her/his contribution to the literature – in other words, express the originality of findings and conclusions. This is also the reason why the author is happy to recommend the methodological instruments of the works below.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

What is the role of elections in authoritarian regimes? To elaborate on this issue, keep in mind both domestic and international politics.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Students will be working in small groups (2-3 people) on a series of tasks, that serve to (1) put in practice the chapter's content (2) deepen the understanding of the discussed matters or (3) gather relevant data for further analysis. Each of these tasks could also be treated as a separate idea for a task, depending on the course objectives, the group needs and the time at your disposal.

In case of each task, the students should be encouraged to divide the work within the group (especially if gathering data is required).

- **Task 1.** Compose a table with ballot results for opposition candidates at latest presidential elections in the 4 states examined in Table 10.1 (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan). Are you observing any trends? Once this part of the exercise is done, go back to a couple of previous elections and create a graph, in order to monitor possible evolutions.
- **Task 2.** Try to draw a political compass of the main parties in Kyrgyzstan since 2010, based on their main ideological stances (to that aim you will need to search for their websites or browse profiles on social media). What difficulties are you facing? Elaborate on that, based on the conceptual tools taken from the chapter, notably, the lack of a ruling party in Kyrgyzstan, the many changes in the names of political parties and shifting alliances.
- **Task 3.** Search for the issues tackled during all referenda in the five countries of the region, compare their frequency (or lack thereof) and voters' turnout. What interpretation can you make of this?
- **Task 4.** Compare the names and the meaning of the hegemonic parties in their native language, Russian and English. What remarks can you draw from there?
- **Task 5.** Search for recent, credible and traceable information about the quantity of party members in each country (give a critical assessment of journalistic, academic and official sources in various languages).
- **Task 6.** What are the administrative obligations and the electoral thresholds for parties in order to be registered in each country? Here also, draw a comparative table. What does it show concerning the possible emergence of opposition forces?
- **Task 7.** Use a blank map of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (with administrative delimitations). First, try to map 2021 presidential elections' results by region (*oblast'*) in Kyrgyzstan. Then do the same for the 2019 ballot in Kazakhstan. What does the political geography reveal?

For each of the seven completed tasks, students provide a brief written answer, stating their main observations and conclusions, as well as including the required table, graph or map (where applicable). Before the final version is delivered to the teacher and discussed in plenary, they could compare and share their outputs between groups (by merging each two groups together).

Another way of distributing work in the whole activity is to assign each of the seven tasks to different groups (both in class and/or as homework) and then have the groups mutually share the results of their work.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf2jDuDfAhM>

Grossfürstlicher Palast (Grand Duke palace).

CHAPTER 11

Political Regimes in Central Asia: Tracing Personalist Rule from the Khanates to the Present

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Keywords:

- Political Regimes • Personalist Rule • Patronalism • Authoritarianism
- Dictatorships • Classifications • Weber • Legitimacy

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the impact of personalization and the behaviour of such a regime.
- Classify Central Asia's political regimes.
- Trace different forms of rulership in Central Asia over time.
- Identify general historical junctures in the history of Central Asian state formation.
- Compare Central Asian regimes to their (post-colonial) counterparts from different regions.
- Explain how contemporary personalist regimes in Central Asia survive and thrive.
- Understand how these regimes came into existence (personalization of power).

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What is democracy? Where does it end and when does autocracy start?
- What is the difference between a state, a political regime and a government?
- How do you understand charisma, as a source of power?
- How did the transformation from monarchy to republic happen in (Western and Eastern) Europe and in the rest of Eurasia? (e.g. in Turkey, in India, in China?)

Main questions

- How can we classify Central Asian regimes? (Which defining factor is the most meaningful in their classification to differentiate the five countries?)
- In what spheres of analysis do the concepts of personalist rule (B. Geddes et al.) and patronalism (H. Hale) overlap? Where do they differ?
- How are Steppe empires created?
- Which factors could lead to a collapse of pre-modern Steppe empires?
- Personalist regimes are driven by survival. What strategies do such rulers use to stay in power?
- Personalist regimes today are very exclusive, less so in the past. How did they seek legitimacy in pre-modern times? How do contemporary regimes try to (self-)legitimize themselves?
- Are all Central Asian dictators the same? (On what dimensions do they differ?)

Post-reading questions

- How likely is a coup d'état in Central Asia? (In which country is this most probable?)
- How does our understanding of Central Asian dictatorships change, if we use individual-focused theories (like leadership styles or president-types) instead of an analysis of political regimes? How do our insights shift when we only look at state-level – treating domestic politics as a 'black box,' ignoring regime type?
- Considering the Turko-Mongol and Soviet legacies, which one is most meaningful for understanding the internal dynamics of contemporary regimes, and why?

Political Regimes in Central Asia: Tracing Personalist Rule from the Khanates to the Present

JEROEN J.J. VAN DEN BOSCH
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"Bad is the shepherd, under which wolves fatten"

- Tajik proverb

"God help the sheep if the wolf is judge"

- Danish proverb

CENTRAL ASIA IS NOTORIOUS for its poor democratic record. According to *Freedomhouse* measures, an independent watchdog organization that monitors political rights and civil liberties around the world, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are cyclical culprits in its annual report, sharing the dubious title of "most unfree countries in the world" along with North Korea, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and Equatorial Guinea and several other war-torn dictatorships.* On the other hand the region has never known a Western liberal democratic model, and its autocratic roots run deep, beyond the Soviet period, past the premodern khanates and Emirates, stretching back to the Mongol period and before.

*Freedomhouse 2019: 16

This chapter will navigate between applying Western frameworks of democracy to Central Asia and cultural relativism: Western theories of democratization have few insights that apply directly to a region so culturally different. On the other hand, treating the region as culturally predestined for autocratic rule dismisses the aspirations for freedom of its people living under these regimes and would obscure the diverging trajectories of the five states under observation in this chapter. Therefore the author applies various insights from political regime theories within the Central Asian context.

Why is the study of authoritarianism in Central Asia important? Understanding the internal workings of Central Asian regimes will highlight both the parallels in behaviour with similar regime types in the wider region and in other continents, while at the same time expose the regional particularities which can be traced back to Central Asia's political-cultural heritage and shared legacies. Moreover, this approach will expose both similarities and

differences among the regimes of the five Central Asian states.

First, this chapter will categorize Central Asian politics and present some definitions and typologies of authoritarian regimes, before classifying the regimes of the region. The next section will focus on some of the historical roots and unearth the region's particular authoritarian characteristics. The third section will look at repression, resource curses, gatekeeping, etc. to clarify regime behaviour and explain their longevity and regime stability.

The theoretical part is necessary to link this chapter with the existing frameworks of governance frequently applied to Central Asia, and to assess them with a critical lens. A closer look at the historical legacies brings out the parallel trajectories of Central Asian states, while illustrating differences with other post-Soviet polities or other forms of personalism in different parts of the world. The final section will look at the contemporary behaviour of the newly Central Asian states and disclose their different dynamics in amassing, consolidating and maintaining power.

1. Conceptualizing Regimes and Rulership in Central Asia

Both democracies and autocracies are political regimes. These operate at the level between state and government. Regimes function within states, through which institutions they rule, but regimes themselves can have their own institutions (e.g. political parties, military council, etc.). In this chapter's approach, the state is considered to be "a set of organizations invested with the authority to make binding decisions for people and organizations juridically located in a particular territory and to implement the decisions using, if necessary, force."^{*} Regimes then are a group of people, a network regulated by a set of formal and informal rules that identify who holds political power; how members get selected and appointed; the hierarchy, relations and power division among them; and how this group interacts with society at large.^{*}

Regimes thus have institutions (legislatures, political parties, decision-making bodies, etc.) that operate according to these formal and informal rules. The number and complexity of these institutions vary according to the regime's level of institutionalization. Regimes exert certain behaviours in domestic and international arenas according to the strengths and limitations of their regime type, the level of their state-capacity,¹ and their position within the

^{*}Evans et al. 1985: 46-47; Hanson 2016: 2

^{*}Skaaning 2006

¹ Defined as the ability of state institutions to effectively implement official goals. (Sikkink 1991)

global political landscape (alliances, membership in international organizations), geopolitical linkages to other states, etc.

None of the regimes in Central Asia can be classified as democracies, but contrasting autocracy with such a dichotomic, black-and-white classification leaves scholars with little comparative margin, since this puts all the region's regimes in one category. Approaches that include a third category of autocracies with elections² overstate the importance of elections, at least for dealing with this region, thus in this chapter the author will introduce polychotomous (multiple category) classifications, differentiating between various authoritarian regimes.

Nonetheless, a clear definition of where autocracy ends and democracy starts needs to be established before moving to more nuanced subdivisions or presenting alternative approaches. In this regard it is useful to mention Milan Svolik's paraphrasing of Lev Tolstoy: "democracies are all alike; each dictatorship may be undemocratic in its own way."³ This phrase denotes that dictatorship is a residual category that does not meet one or several required criteria to be classified as a democracy. These can be minimum criteria like: free, fair and competitive elections to the legislature and (often indirectly) the executive, in addition to more demanding criteria like respect for political and civil freedoms.* As a result, autocracies are a heterogenous group that can differ as much from one another as they do from democracy. Keep in mind that scholars use different definitions of democracy, and their choice for either a minimalist or maximalist approach alters their reference frame and thus any derived interpretations thereof.

This author uses the terms 'dictatorship', 'authoritarian regime' and 'autocracy' interchangeably. When dealing with literature on Central Asia or on dictatorships in general, this author recommends the reader to avoid theoretical works that do not draw a clear conceptual boundary between democracy and autocracy. 'Semi-democracies, hybrid regimes, anocracy' all blur divisions between established regime types. 'Weak, unfinished, frozen, stalled, halted, or transitional democracies' all imply that liberal democracy is the inevitable teleological end goal of any political regime's pathway, *a priori* dismissing other trajectories.*

Having established our basic definitions of states and regimes,

*Svolik 2012: 20

*Hegre et al. 2001: 33, 35; Levitsky and Way 2010: 4-5; Regan and Bell 2010: 748

² Some examples of these trichotomous approaches are 'competitive authoritarian regimes' (Levitsky and Way 2010) and 'electoral authoritarianism' (Schedler 2009), see also Box 11.5.

³ "Happy families are all alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," from *Anna Karenina* by Lev Tolstoy. (Svolik 2012: 20)

Box 11.1 Weber's Original Typology of Rulership

As one of the fathers of sociology, the German sociologist Max Weber sought to understand the nature of power and the relations between the ruler (king, queen, leader, president, prime minister etc.), his or her staff (advisers, followers, ministers) and those ruled (subjects, citizens, masses) throughout history. These relations and the rationalization of these power relations (legitimacy) are a corner stone in sociology and one of the foundations of political science, especially the field of comparative politics. His theories still guide our thinking about power, domination and legitimacy, even decades after his death.

Weber made a clear distinction between 'Power' (*Macht*) and 'Rulership' (also translated as 'Authority' or 'Domination' – *Herrschaft*). 'Power' is the probability that one actor within the social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance.* 'Rulership' is the power to command and the duty to obey.

A good example of the difference between power and rulership is this: an army commander may impose his will upon the enemy, but can do so only if they yield to his superior arms or manpower. He does not have rulership over enemy soldiers, only over his own. His own troops obey his commands because they adhere to his authority and are duty-bound to do so.*

Of course in every genuine relationship of rule there is a specific minimum of willingness to obey. On the one hand, the ruled must have an interest in obedience. This can be due to affection for the ruler, custom and practice, or material rewards for loyalty. On the other hand the only reliable basis for any rule is the belief that this power relationship is just. This rationalization of the asymmetric social relationship between ruler and ruled is called legitimacy.*

Macht (power) + legitimacy = *Herrschaft* (rulership)

Weber classified three main types of legitimacy and divided them into subtypes. These are "genetic ideal types" that do not merely describe but rather suggest a dynamics of change, the typical patterns of emergence, operation, persistence and decline of types of legitimate rulership.* Nonetheless, these ideal-types can never exist in their pure form, and so each manifestation of rulership is characterized by a different mix of the three types listed below:

- Legal-rational rule or the belief in the legality of statutory orders and the right of those appointed to exercise rule to give directions. In other words, adherence to the authority of the law or a legal system, widely accepted by the ruled, which are members of this political organization (citizens) and accept its bureaucratic hierarchy (*Amsthierarchie*) with formal positions, acquired on the basis of merit, demanding specialization.

Examples: presidents, prime ministers, foreign secretaries, UN secretaries-general, etc.

*Szelenyi 2016: 3

*Blau 1963: 306-307

*Blau 1963: 306-307; Szelenyi 2016: 3;
Weber 2019: 338-339

*Breuilly 2011: 479

- Traditional rule, or everyday belief in the sanctity of long-established traditions and the legitimacy of those whose authority derives from these traditions. The acceptance of a ruler's authority within a belief system based on tradition, religion or other ideology shared by the ruled.

Examples: monarchs (kings, queens, shah, pharaohs), tribal or clan leaders, chieftains, leaders of established religions (popes, muftis, caliphs), etc.

- Charismatic rule is the belief in the exceptional sanctity or heroic qualities or exemplary character of a person, and of the orders that this person proclaims or creates; the wilful submission to the authority of a charismatic leader.*

*Weber 2019: 341-342

Examples: messiahs, prophets, cult leaders, fascist leaders (Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler), conquerors (Chinggis Khan, Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, "Saladin" – Al-Nasir Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub), independence leaders (Mahatma Gandhi, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Sukarno, Lech Wałęsa), freedom fighters (Che Guevara, Jeanne d'Arc, "Mahdi" – Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, Nelson Mandela, Simón Bolívar), etc.

this chapter identifies three major dilemmas that have been inherent in Central Asian polities since their first imperial stirrings. These dilemmas can be found in the spheres of rulership (1.1), regime type (1.2), and socio-political level (1.3); or respectively: the belief system of the ruled, which accepts a certain form of rule as 'just' (legitimacy); the internal organization of politics at the highest level (personalist rule); and the dynamic processes of collective action that create and maintain ruling networks (patronal politics).

Of course, these spheres interconnect and overlap, but since each one is attached to its own theoretical framework, this chapter presents them one-by-one below. The selected concepts of rulership, personalist rule and patronal politics are not the only frames for studying politics in Central Asia. However, to avoid losing sight of the forest, the author has opted for only these three complementary forest paths, while other trees remain neatly fenced off. So, other important concepts like neo-patrimonialism or (neo-) sultanism can be found in a separate Box (11.2). Section 2 of this chapter then explores the authoritarian legacies of Central Asia's premodern politics, colonization and Soviet occupation; while Section 3 covers the dynamics of contemporary states. The same three spheres are used to denote, describe and explain changes in Central Asia's political systems over time.

1.1 Charismatic Rulership and the Dilemma of State-building

To understand the foundations of Central Asian polities it is necessary to dig a bit deeper into Max Weber’s classification of systems of rulership. His original classification is presented in Box 11.1 but this chapter expands upon it. Alas, the nature of Weber’s typology, identifying three ideal-types (legal-rational, traditional and charismatic rule) does not allow for clear distinctions of modern regime types within this fluid spectrum, since all real-world manifestations encompass in essence a mix of his three types. Also, contemporary adaptations of Weber’s type that aim to deal with modern systems of rule still fall short of precise identification and operationalization as shown in Box 11.2.

A different approach is to stretch out Weber’s ideal types along two axes, allowing us to generally place regimes on a fluid two-dimensional spectrum as shown in Table 11.1. On one axis we have legitimacy embedded in routine and customs, identifying a person, which has a claim to power according to royal descent, sacral traditions, mythical origins or religious beliefs (*traditional*); and also a political office, position or mandate, whose powers and competences are derived from law, legal prescriptions or bureaucratic procedures (*legal-rational*). On the other axis, the right to rule is bestowed to an extraordinary person that by grace of personal magnetism can change existing norms and conventions in his/her exercise power (*charismatic*). This spectrum also identifies a fourth type of rulership;⁴ by adding the ‘charisma of office’ or *institutional-charismatic* legitimacy. Here, a person, occupying a specific political position, can divert the belief in an existing impersonal order to his/her benefit, to become the ultimate arbiter and interpreter of such order. Power is thus less restrained than in pure traditional or legal-rational orders, but is still dependent on holding the office, to which the powerholder is bounded.

Table 11.1 Dimensions of Rulership – Based on Max Weber

	Routine	Extraordinary
Personal	Traditional legitimacy	Charismatic legitimacy
Impersonal	Legal-rational legitimacy	Institutional-charismatic legitimacy

Sources: Weber 2019; Breuilly 2011; Dow 1969.

⁴ To this author’s knowledge, this fourth type was first identified and worked out by Helen Constan as ‘charismatic bureaucracy’ in 1957-1958, before being picked up by others. (Constas 1961; Dow 1969; Jowitt 1992; Breuilly 2011)

Examples are, for instance, wartime leaders like Charles de Gaulle or Winston Churchill that could not overturn their existing order without losing their own source of legitimacy. This fourth type of rulership also solves the problem of operationalizing charisma to modern polities.* More examples are provided in Box 11.2 and when surveying past and contemporary cases in the next sections.

*Breuilly 2011

Since charismatic rulership is a recurrent feature of Central Asian polities, some more detail is needed. It is the least durable of all three types, because followers actually ‘create’ charismatic leaders in times of great transformation and crises, especially when there is a great need for salvation and a leader who can deliver miracles and resolve problems that look almost unresolvable. Charismatic leaders offer hope for the hopeless, promise paradise on Earth, but (repeated) proof of charisma is necessary to uphold this belief and, when leaders cannot deliver, they lose their authority.* Therefore, charismatic rule has to blend into other types in order to make stable rule and successions possible.

*Weber 2019: 407–408;
Szelenyi 2016: 8

Some scholars have found that charismatic rule is not necessarily disruptive to the established order but can serve as a device used by a fraction of the ruling class seeking supremacy over the rest, without the aim of upending the established system.* So, charismatic authority is most potent as a creative force to enable unconventional rulers to dominate a political order. Once the battle is won, the oppressors are overthrown, or the reform is carried through, followers (especially staff) seek to legitimate their position. “They want to be recognized as having a right to the powers that they hold. Demands for an orderly system of status relationships, a fixed power structure and a predictable pattern of social exchange begin to make themselves felt. This process of routinization accelerates with the passing of the original leader.”*

*McCulloch 2014: 3

*Jones 2001: 758–759

From this point there are two pathways. Either followers ‘elect’ or ‘confirm’ a successor, a protégé or descendent of the leader that shares the same values and mission, and bestow legitimacy to them – this is called “hereditary charisma” (*Erbscharisma*), and it is a form of traditional rulership. Alternatively, laws and procedures are set in place to convey loyalty and authority to the future holders of this same political position. When norms and procedures dominate and constrain future leadership, charisma has abated, and thus transformed into impersonal legal-rational rulership. However, when political successors retain sufficient leeway to alter and shape this new order, one ends up with the “charisma of office” (*Amtscharisma*) or institutional-charismatic rulership.*

*Dow 1969: 318

Readers should keep in mind that such forms of rulership are theoretically imprecise, and even almost impossible to measure, since most polities derive legitimacy from various sources at the same time. Nonetheless, Weber's insights are useful to contemplate and reconstruct (our) narratives how political orders are created and maintained in different time periods. In this chapter, Weber's concepts will be applied to study Central Asian state-building; e.g. how pre-modern polities struggled to institutionalize and were dependent on charismatic leadership to transform into empires; and how modern polities have been radically severed from their traditional roots by Soviet modernization (like other colonies).

1.2 Personalist Rule and the Dilemma of Legitimacy

Central Asian regimes are often labelled sultanist, neo-patrimonial, superpresidential or personalist regimes when their leadership style is compared with that of other rulers in other regions. Based on their internal organization only, they can also be categorized as party-regimes. The presence and nature of elections (cf. Chapter 10) creates even more distinctions depending on the classification criteria used by scholars and experts.

'Personalist rule' is a well-delineated regime type from a larger typology of autocracies – conceived by Barbara Geddes – that focuses on the constellation and regime dynamics at the top of a political system. To understand personalist regimes, it is necessary to take a closer look at the whole typology developed by Geddes and her colleagues in the early 2000s and supplement this with some insights from other approaches. Her idea was to separate all known democracies from a large sample of political regimes (for all independent states from 1946 to 2010) and provide a useful polychotomous classification solely for the remaining autocracies. With fellow scholars, Geddes et al. differentiate between types only by looking at the power holders and the various kinds of incentives regime elites face, using game-theory.

This way they sorted autocracies into four main categories: monarchy, military regimes, single-party rule and personalist rule, and several amalgams or hybrids.

- In **monarchies**, a royal family are the powerholders, with a king, queen, sultan, shah or equivalent at the head of the regime.⁵
- In **military regimes**, a group of officers decides who will rule and exercises some influence on policy.

⁵ Monarchy as a regime type was added later by Geddes et al. and the exact coding criteria are unclear. (Wilson 2014: 5)

Box 11.2 From Weber to Neo-Patrimonialism and (Neo-)sultanism

For scholars of Central Asian regimes it is paramount to understand the origins and evolution of some of Weber's concepts because contemporary frameworks are either derived from Weber's theory or invented to overcome some of its analytical shortcomings. As shown in Box 11.1, Weber thus looks at the belief systems of the ruled or the legitimacy of various rulerships. In his classification he expands on the relationship between ruler, ruled and staff, focusing on the status of each actor and how the ruler shares the rewards of office. Below are two subtypes of traditional rulership that Weber identified: 'patrimonialism' and its extreme form, 'sultanism':

Patrimonialism – A system of rule where the state is the personal property of the ruler (*Patrimonium*). Staff, however, acquire the rights to govern parts of the state, the material means of administration needed to serve the ruler. This exchange limits the ruler's discretion in selecting his staff from among the appropriate classes. They are traditional associates (*Genossen*).

Weber's primary example was the feudal system in Western Europe where vassals received fiefs, which became heritable over time. Another example would be the original Boyars in pre-Tsarist Russia.

Sultanism is an extreme form of patrimonialism, where the ruler still personally owns the state, but is able to retain full ownership of his *Patrimonium vis-à-vis* his administrative staff. These receive benefices from serving, but have no security or property rights to this patronage whatsoever. The ruler has full discretion in selecting his staff and is unrestrained by tradition. The position of the staff is reduced to subjects.

Sultanism is a bit of misnomer: Weber based the concept on his contemporary understanding of the Ottoman empire, but in reality the legitimacy of Ottoman sultans was supported by tradition and bound by law.*

One of the few historic examples would be the expropriation of nobility property rights into a new system of Russian service nobility (the *Pomest'e system* or *Местничество*), whose subjugation by the princes (later the tsars) started under Ivan III (reign: 1462-1505) and was abolished in 1682 and finally replaced by Peter the Great with the meritocratic 'Table of Ranks' (*Табель о рангах*).*

These two important subtypes of traditional rulership have been updated by later generations of scholars to analyse political systems today. The first conceptual hurdle was to apply Weber's timeless typology to so-called modern states. The trend emerged in other Area Studies: Latin American, South Asian and finally African Studies. Aristide Zolberg was the first to add the prefix 'neo-' to distinguish

*Chehabi and Linz 1998: 6

*Hale 2015: 24; Szelenyi 2016: 13-15;
Weber 2019: 361-369; Hoskin 2001:
87, 94, 204

*Bach 2011: 275-277

between traditional and neo-traditional regimes in 1966. In the end, it was Shmuel Eisenstadt who coined neo-patrimonialism in 1973. The concept, however, thrived within African politics since the late 1970s but due to the absence of cross-fertilization, it would develop differently within the realms of various area studies in subsequent decades.*

Neo-patrimonialism – The ‘neo-’ prefix served to indicate a clear boundary between Weber’s pre-modern states and the new modern states in Latin America and those that had emerged with decolonization (1945-1962) in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Neo-patrimonial states are a blend of modern bureaucratic-legal (Western model) state systems with some pre-modern, traditionalist forms or rulership.

The concept is characterized by its conflicting norms and defined primarily by the hybridity between two logics of rulership. It is based on the close interaction between patrimonialism (all power relationships are personal relationships) and legal-rational bureaucratic domination. The distinction between the public and the private formally exists and is accepted, even if it is not respected.*

Regrettably, in the last decades the concept has been stretched to fit various research purposes and cover different phenomena, and has become of catch-all concept that is often treated self-explanatory and obscures more than it explains. The main problems with neo-patrimonialism can be listed as follows:

- Where do pre-modern states end and modern states begin? (delineation)
- In this hybrid, where can one draw the clear border between the bureaucratic-legal and the traditional? (delineation)
- Is the concept a separate regime type or a conflicted mode of legitimacy? (operationalization)
- Does the concept apply only to regime and state structures, or to a wider set of social relations in society? (vertical scope)
- Does the concept overlap solely with authoritarian regimes, or can democracies likewise be neo-patrimonial? (horizontal scope)*

When it comes to the problems of **delineation**, there are no clear answers and this lack of clarity has haunted the concept since its inception. So far, proposed subtypes of neo-patrimonialism could not overcome this obstacle.* Regarding **operationalization**, Anne Pitcher et al. have pointed out that Weber’s ideal types explain legitimacy and do not correspond with regime types.* As a consequence, neo-patrimonial rulership can be present in various autocratic types and even in some democratic regimes, e.g. Botswana (**horizontal scope**). In Weber’s original work, legal-rational rulership does not coincide with democracy, but encompasses institutionalized autocracies as well.

*Bach 2011; Bratton and van de Walle 1994; Erdmann and Engel 2007; Laruelle 2012: 303

*Erdmann and Engel 2007; Pitcher et al. 2009; Hale 2015; Isaacs 2014; Laruelle 2012; Cheeseman et al. 2013

*Cheeseman et al. 2013: 66; Fisun 2012: 93-94; Franke et al. 2009; Bratton and van de Walle 1994
*Pitcher et al. 2009: 126-127

Finally, the **vertical scope** is open for interpretation, and scholars have studied neo-patrimonialism from top-down as well as bottom-up approaches, gaining new insights. Neo-patrimonialism is thus rather a set of social relations mediated by loyalty and governed by bonds of dependence, than a separate regime type.*

*Hale 2015: 25

(Neo-)sultanism was created by Juan Linz in 1970 and later expanded in 1998 in collaboration with H.E. Chehabi. The 'neo-' prefix is routinely omitted, but this subtype of authoritarian regime is similarly different from its original Weberian interpretation, and created to capture 'modern' political systems:

*"(A regime) based on personal rulership (...) with loyalty to the ruler based not on tradition, or on him embodying an ideology, or on a unique personal mission, or on charismatic qualities, but on a mixture of fear and rewards to his collaborators. The ruler exercises his power without restraint at his own discretion and above all unencumbered by rules or by any commitment to an ideology or value system. (...) binding norms and relations (...) are constantly subverted by personal arbitrary decisions of the ruler, which he does not feel constrained to justify in ideological terms. (...) lack of constraint derived from tradition and from continuing traditional legitimacy distinguishes it from the historical types of patrimonial rule."**

*Linz 2000: 151

Unlike neo-patrimonialism (a form of rulership), Linz' sultanism was devised as a regime (ideal-)type, focusing on the strong dependency relation between ruler and staff, a lack of institutionalism, and its merging of public and private spheres. Sultanism is less widespread than neo-patrimonialism and has become synonymous with the latter's most predatory manifestations (narrow horizontal scope), but suffers from similar shortcomings regarding delineation and operationalization, although it has been used exclusively to analyse political systems top-down (vertical scope) and not society at large.

Conceptually birthed from Linz' analysis of Trujillo's Dominican Republic, sultanism's narrow classification made it idiosyncratic, and just few historic cases fit the mould: Mobutu in Zaire; Bokassa in the CAR; Idi Amin in Uganda; Batista in Cuba; the Somoza regime in Nicaragua; the Duvaliers in Haiti; Pahlavi in Iran; and the Marcos regime in the Philippines.* Still, readers may encounter the concept in the literature on Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.* For instance, N. Kunysz contrasts Niyazov's sultanist rule with the more regulated neo-patrimonial rule of Berdymukhamedov's Turkmenistan.*

*Chehabi and Linz 1998;

Bach 2011: 279

*Cumings 2002

*Kunysz 2012

When studying Central Asia, readers should be aware of the conceptual limits of neo-patrimonialism and sultanism, but this should not disbar some of the excellent comparative research done on Central Asian states and societies using these frameworks, nor would it be

unfair to dismiss their theoretical contributions.

Rico Isaacs finds that neo-patrimonialism has given theoretical impetus to study the informal-formal spheres in Central Asian political systems, at top and societal levels. While at first, scholars focused too much on informal elements, the formal continues to remain important in respect to authority and legitimation. Future research should explore this hybridity. Neo-patrimonialism could also rekindle the study of legitimacy in the region by focusing on domestic discourses of power. Finally, after dropping Weber's teleological path from traditional to legal-rational legitimacy, coinciding with the advent of 'modernity,' the concept could drive research on 'multiple modernities' or on how Central Asian elites and societies possess their own agency and rationalism *vis-à-vis* modernity and state development.*

*Isaacs 2014

- In **single-party regimes**, access to political office and control over policy are dominated by one party, though other parties may legally exist and compete in elections.
- **Personalist regimes** differ from both military and single-party in that access to office and the fruits of office depend much more on the discretion of an individual leader. The leader may be an officer and may have created a party to support himself, but neither the military nor the party exercises independent decision-making power insulated from the whims of the ruler.*

*Geddes 1999: 7; Geddes et al. 2012

For the study of contemporary Central Asian regimes, only the last two types are relevant, but before going deeper into these regime types, this author must share three important observations: Firstly, Geddes et al. are not the only ones who devised useful polychotomous classifications of autocracies, as shown in also Box 11.3 and Box 11.4.

Secondly, to understand internal regime dynamics and behaviour, it is necessary to frame regime networks as being composed of three groups. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al. have given universal labels to these groups across all polities.* With a slight adaptation, these groups are called:

*Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003: 37–54

- **Leadership** (incumbent): the paramount power holder(s) in the regime. They maintain their coalition of supporters through the allocation of public and private goods.
- **Ruling coalition**: a subset of the selectorate of sufficient size such that this group's support endows the leadership with political power over the remainder of the selectorate as well as over the disenfranchised members of the society (residents).

- **Selectorate:** the set of people whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics⁶ institutionally required to choose the government's leadership and necessary for gaining access to private benefits doled out by the government's leadership.
- (Residents: This large group is not part of the regime, but encompasses the rest of the population that is excluded from the selectorate by the leadership and ruling coalition.)

In other words, in dictatorships the selectorate is the 'in-group' that benefits most from the current regime. Political recruitment is drafted from this group and they profit more than residents for their support of the ruling coalition and the leadership. The ruling coalition – backed by the selectorate – are the key regime actors who enable the leadership to exercise power. They work with the leadership and share the spoils of office. The leadership can act as *primus inter pares* in collegial regimes (monarchies, military or single party regimes), or can 'dominate' a ruling coalition, like in personalist regimes and their hybrids. Box 11.3 identifies these three groups for various regime types.

Thirdly, personalism is not considered a separate regime type by all scholars. Some treat it as a characteristic that can be present in (almost) all regime types.* Personalism is a trait that can emerge when the leadership, usually one man,⁷ breaks the collective action power of the ruling coalition so this group loses its ability to control, replace and oust him. This transition from a power equilibrium to such imbalance can take place slowly over time, or swiftly, depending on the regime's unique circumstances and historic legacy. Once it is altered and consolidated, the regime embarks on a specific trajectory and exhibits a particular behaviour that stands out from non-personalist regimes.

Consider personalism as a threshold, a trait that can emerge both in military, civilian or totalitarian regimes. Once personalist power is concentrated in the hands of one man, such regimes do not regain that equilibrium and cannot depersonalize (during the lifetime of that dictator) without collapsing.* This threshold approach still allows researchers to group personalized regimes together when studying their behaviour as if they were a separate type. Nonetheless, institutional differences matter and degrees of personalism still vary.

*Van den Bosch 2015; 2021; Gandhi et al. 2014; Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Svoblik 2009, 2012

*Svoblik 2009

⁶ Virtually all societies in human history have used four criteria to sort people into or out of the selectorate: (1) personal origin: birthplace and lineage; (2) special proficiency: skills, beliefs, and/or knowledge; (3) wealth; and (4) gender and/or age. (Bueno de Mesquita et al 2003: 43)

⁷ In personalist regimes such dictators have been invariably male.

This chapter's working definition of personal rule goes as follows: A personalist regime is governed by a small ruling coalition, tied to the leader through personal ties. Its selectorate is made up by an extension of this network through patronage ties and clientelism. Followers are drafted from kin, co-ethnic groups, interest groups and other loyalists. Depending on the need for support and its original mode of internal organization (rebel group, party, military) the selectorate can be either small or large (and can be changed by the dictator over time). The whole network is regulated predominantly by an informal set of rules, while a façade of formal norms is upheld at the same time. Power is concentrated in the executive, but can be supported by other subjugated branches of the government. There exist no or few checks and balances to the leader's power. The powerholder is identified by his control over the tools of repression and as being the main provider of patronage on which the loyalty of the network depends.

Some of these regimes hold elections, which are not free or fair, as political power is not derived from an electorate but relies on a mix of repression and co-optation. The regime network is very exclusive and closed to the majority of the population and other elites. Its key dynamics are the constant reshuffling of the ruling coalition, preventing individual members to build up their own independent support bases. For this reason, state institutions are hollowed out and deprived of their autonomy and effectiveness. Tyrants often use them as crude instruments of patronage (and sometimes for repression) instead of providing services. For instance, recurrent power blackouts in Kyrgyzstan during winters (2009, 2014, 2018) were direct results of mismanagement and corruption. Needless to say, exclusive personalist rule over time alienates both elites and its population, and the rightful claim to power does not outlast a ruler's fleeting charisma.

1.3 Patronalism and the Dilemma of Good Governance

When Henry Hale launched his concept of 'patronal politics' he had several goals: Firstly, he wanted to shed the Western cognitive bias on how politics work, by dropping the West's ideal of how democracy *ought* to work as a theoretical reference point; instead focusing on the dynamics of real political systems in his region under study (Eurasia). Secondly, methodologically he wanted a framework that would not be static, but one that could account for changes within these regimes. Thirdly, he decided to launch the new concept 'patronalism' to avoid confusion with or further stretching of

Box 11.3 Overview of Political Regime Classifications

POLITICAL REGIMES						
REGIME TYPE	DEMOCRACY	AUTOCRACY / DICTATORSHIP				
		AUTHORITARIAN REGIME TYPES				TOTALITARIAN REGIME
		CIVILIAN	MILITARY	MONARCHY	(THEOCRACY)	
IDEOCRACY						
Leadership	President/ PM	Ruling party leader	Head of armed forces	Monarch	Religious leader	Ruling party leader
Ruling Coalition	Ruling party coalition	Politburo	General military staff	Advisors and closest royal family	Religious council	Politburo
Selectorate	Electorate	Members of ruling party	Loyal officers and troops	Extended royal family, nobility	Loyal religious followers	Loyal party members
Examples:	Canada Japan New Zealand Sweden Uruguay	Mexico (PRI) Vietnam Zimbabwe	Myanmar South Korea (Lee) Guatemala (García)	Saudi Arabia Morocco Brunei	Afghanistan (Taliban) Iran (post-Khomeini) Vatican City	USSR (Khrushchhev)
Personalist	Not compatible	Cuba (Castro) Ghana (Nkrumah) Romania (Ceaușescu)	Chile (Pinochet) Ethiopia (Mengistu) Rwanda (Hab-yarimana)	Not compatible	Iran (Khomeini)	Nazi Germany North Korea PRC (Mao Zedong) USSR (Stalin)
Examples: Congo/Zaire (Mobutu) Iraq (Saddam) Russia (Putin)						
Charisma Repression	Elections Legal-bureaucratic	Repression		Sacred	Ideological	
				Traditional (belief)		
Primary sources of legitimacy and power (Weber)						

Source: Author's own work based on: Geddes et al. 2012; Kailitz 2013; Linz 2000; Van den Bosch 2015.

This Box illustrates the basic subdivisions of political regimes, merging classifications by J.J. Linz, B. Geddes et al. and S. Kailitz. The basic division is between democracy and dictatorship. The latter can be subdivided into authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Authoritarian regimes then are mostly subdivided into civilian, military or monarchic rule. Theocracies are a rare breed somewhere in-between the latter two, but can be analytically separated when labelling them as ideocracies.

Personalist rule is depicted as a characteristic of autocratic regimes, and both pure types and hybrids are shown, with some well-known examples. Note that personalism and monarchy are not compatible. Theoretically, if a monarchy were to turn personalist and disable its traditional ruling structures, it would undo the internal cohesion of its ruling coalition and thus cease to be a monarchy.

At the bottom, each regime type's corresponding sources of power and legitimacy are indicated. Of course, these are fluid and overlap, and all regimes (even democracies) are kept in power by their state's monopoly on violence (ranging from coercion to repression to terror). Note how fascist and communist ideologies are also guiding belief systems or worldviews, and thus technically fall under traditional rulership.

existing analytical frameworks like clientelism, neo-patrimonialism, etc.*

So, patronal politics are not a corrupt, deviant mode of social interaction, but actually the default mode of doing business and politics throughout most of humankind. The West is a recent exception, where some – but not all – of these practices have been declared illegal (e.g. lobbying). Globally speaking, corrupt behav-

our is not the exception to the rule; it is the rule.* People in patronalistic societies are caught in a vicious cycle, as other studies of systemic corruption have indicated: “Everyone expects everyone else to behave this way, it makes no sense for an individual to behave differently since she would only wind up hurting herself and possibly those who depend on her, possibly severely.”*

*Hale 2015: 20

Patronalism is defined to be a social equilibrium in which individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles such as ideological belief or categorizations that include many people one has not actually met in person. Patronalism, then, involves collective action based on extended networks of actual acquaintance, made up by patrons and clients (often themselves also sub-patrons to their own networks). The strength and efficiency of patronalistic networks depends on the self-fulfilling prophecy of group expectations, by which members *believe* that:

1. patrons continue to have access to valuable *resources* for rewarding loyal members
2. patrons have the power to *enforce* punishment selectively on disloyal members
3. patrons have the capacity to *monitor* clients and sub-patrons*

*Hale 2015: 20–22, 31

The above definition shows that the ‘image’ of the patron’s abilities is the real lynchpin of such large hierarchical networks, which are constructed with horizontal dyads (among equals or with different networks), but foremost with vertical, dependent patron-client relations. Despite the asymmetric power relations, members know each other and trust each other. Networks are ‘sticky’ because members have sunk interests having invested time, resources and energy to join them. Sometimes patron-client relationships are even inherited. Ethnicity and kinship are often the core of these networks, not because they are some “primordial glue,” but because they reflect these sunken interests. The threat of violence impedes any real exit-options for crucial clients.*

*Muno 2013: 37–

44; Hale 2015: 21–22, 36–37

To link this framework with earlier concepts – the patrons’ ‘Weberian’ charisma is necessary to maintain patronal networks and attract them. When leaders do no longer deliver, punish or monitor, the network’s expectations are not met. Nonetheless, for lower members to topple the main patron, they need to initiate collective action from a large part of the network. This can be extremely risky, especially when others are competing and can rat them out to eliminate them. Incumbent patrons of course resort to divide-and-rule tactics to break the collective action capacity of their sub-patrons.*

*Hale 2015: 45

Equally threatening is the rise of rival patronal pyramids that might overtake and oust the patron’s own network. When possible, such competition is dealt with swiftly, thoroughly and violently,⁸ since otherwise these might become new focal points for client allegiances if they are perceived to be more powerful (charisma). When applied to political regimes this is exactly what is meant by personalization. Its consolidation phase is the process of a patron’s mastery over its sub-patrons, and eliminating rival networks. Its effect is a single network, a single pyramid, a personalist regime.

There is clear overlap between Geddes’ concept of personalist rule and Hale’s patronalism, but the former is static, gains empirical validity only after the consolidation phase, and can be used to study regime behaviour at the top executive level, domestically (*vis-à-vis* other societal actors) and internationally (*vis-à-vis* other states). Patronal networks can cross country-lines, but the theory foremost studies internal power struggles within polities. In scope they are not synonymous with personalist regimes, but (like neo-patrimonialism) are pervasive across various regime types. Since the theory encompasses the whole ‘vertical’ network, patronal dynamics can be examined at top, regional and local levels, and broader interactions in patronalistic societies. This chapter employs both approaches to dissect Central Asian political regimes through time, and applies Weber’s types of rulership to probe their legitimacy.

⁸ Like Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the wealthiest Russian oligarch in 2003 with political ambitions, who was considered a threat by V. Putin, and thus dealt with accordingly – charged with fraud, stripped of assets, and jailed until 2013, after which he self-exiled to Switzerland with a fraction of his wealth.

2. Authoritarian Legacies in Central Asian History

Below this author argues that the historical legacy matters when assessing authoritarianism from the top and from below in contemporary Central Asian states, although both levels are of course connected. One aspect is the low level of institutionalization, which was characteristic for the pastoralist political groupings and the sedentary polities alike. Since ancient times, Central Asia has found a way to connect its diverse resource bases, linking military mobilizational networks with agrarian tax bases. In Central Asian history, these lasting bonds were established by charismatic leadership, and upheld by Turko-Mongol cultural traditions. However, both were at odds with legal-rational rulership, and attempts to shift in that direction put strain on existing governing structures in the region. Charismatic-traditional authority was never able to institutionalize without fraying the powerful bond between the two bases. And the few grandiose empires all reached a point of imperial overstretch that could not last over generations with such low levels of institutionalization.

Low institutionalism and charismatic authority go hand in hand and, for centuries, cyclical Steppe empires re-emerged and disintegrated in the Central Eurasian centre.* These cycles waned in the 19th century when traditions diluted and no charismatic leaders could be found to link up the nomadic and sedentary centres in the Central Asian heartland. Soon after, their traditional mobilizational bases were incorporated in the ever-expanding Russian or Chinese empires. Only reproductions of this model on a smaller scale survived, but none of these had the critical mass to halt the encroachment of the rising empires closing in on the Central Eurasian centre. Low institutionalization continued under Tsarist rule, and only with Soviet occupation were modern forms of bureaucratic orders implanted on the Central Asian territories.

The Moscow-led, formally monistic, new Socialist Soviet Republics (SSRs) were left with considerable autonomy, and their institutions coexisted with local, informal networks of governance (clan, mahalla, etc.) that could not be displaced.* To maintain control, the Kremlin tolerated them alongside the new formal state and party structures instead of risking costly rebellions like the Basmachi revolts. Social, political and cultural goals were pursued only in so far as the resistance they provoked was containable.*

First, the author explains the internal workings of pre-modern Central Asian polities and their resistance to legal-rational rulership (2.1). The second part (2.2) covers how the advent of modern,

*See also Chapter 5

*See also Chapter 9

*Stringer 2003: 158

Soviet bureaucratic structures blended with their patrimonial past to imprint a lasting legacy of patronal politics, still present today. In Section 3, the contemporary regimes of Central Asia will be studied in more detail.

2.1 The Turko-Mongol Legacy

2.1.1 Understanding Turko-Mongol Politics

Acquiring the Indo-Iranian heritage they supplanted, the Turko-Mongol polities retained warfare and government models that can be traced back to the Scythians and Saka cultures from the first millennium BC. The latter's military innovation of mounted archery, combining composite bows with *Przhevalski* (Пржевальский) horses, made them the natural rulers of the steppe until the advent of new weapon technologies in the 19th century.

Turkic and Mongol polities have been classified as 'military patronage states' since a nomadic military acquires dominium over an ethnically different, agrarian population. And the key to success in creating large empires has been called a "dual administration system," meaning the skill to govern (and protect) both settled and nomadic populations.* Recently, David Christian launched a new reinterpretation of this system. He finds that mobilizing armies on the steppe was the political equivalent of a livestock muster: people, animals, etc. were scattered in small denominations over large areas. "Pastoral nomadic lifeways trained everyone in the handling and hunting of large animals and the skills needed to navigate over large distances and survive in the steppes, while constant petty feuds over pasturelands, livestock rustling, or vengeance for crimes provided regular training in combat." Only by incorporating more 'grazing land' and coordinating over vast distances, could one create armies of scale.*

*Findley 2005: 57, 84

Mobilizing resources on the other hand, was easier in sedentary societies, where peasants were tied to the land and could not escape taxation. Recruiting armies here was more costly, because labour-intensive agriculture requires manpower. To create empires, it was necessary to yoke together these "two large social beasts: armies from the steppes, and wealth generators from agrarian regions."*

*Christian 2018: 11–12

D. Christian came up with the concept of *smychka* (yoke, *смычка*) to describe the mobilization of a (pastoralist) army in order to dominate agrarian centres and then mobilize their resources. Without control over any rural tax-bases, raiding could

*Christian 2018: 15

Map 11.1 *The Fertile Fringe and the Origins of Steppe Empires*

This map with modern state borders shows the fertile zone stretching across the Eurasian landmass. According to D. Christian, powerful nomadic empires could emerge in the areas where this agricultural zone bordered the steppe (at the agrarian fringe), where resources from both civilisational systems could be mobilized. The map shows the empire of the Xiongnu (here around 1st century BC), the Turkic Khanate (6-7th century), the Mongol Empire (shown with their area of origin in 1206 and at their greatest extent as a unified polity by 1259); the Timurid empire (including raided areas – 14th century), and the last of the true nomadic empires, the Dzhungars (17th-18th century). As shown, all these great Turko-Mongol polities emerged at the fringe of this agricultural zone, but this overview is not exhaustive. (Note that the border of the Mongol Empire in North Asia is tentative.)

Sources:

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 24-26.
 David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia. Volume II: Inner Eurasia from the Mongol Empire to Today, 1260-2000*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018): 12-13.
 Bruno De Cordier, *Een Geschiedenis van Centraal-Azië: Het Onbeloofde Land*, (Leuven-Den Haag: Acco, 2012): 80.
 Peter B. Golden, *Central Asia in World History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 86.
 Carter Vaughn Findley, *The Turks in World History*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
 С. Г. Кляшторный; Д. Г. Савинов, *Степные империи древней Евразии*, (СПб: Филологический факультет СПбГУ, 2005)
 Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5161&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface n.v.

be a short-term (but unsustainable) alternative form of revenue. Future expansion into the steppe would increase the size armies; consequent subordination of new agrarian centres and promoting trade would provide the revenues to consolidate the *smychka*. With few exceptions these all Steppe empires emerged in a zone along the fertile southern fringes of Inner Eurasia, from the Ordos in northern China, through Central Asia to the Pontic steppes, as shown on Map 11.1.*

*Christian 2018: 13–16

Breaking the yoke or toppling its driver was the main way to defeat powerful Central Asian empires. The Han Chinese (206 BC – 220 AD) realized the only way to defeat the Xiongnu would be by “cutting off ‘their right arm’” or take away their ability to draw resources from the oasis city-states in the Tarim Basin and other sedentary tributaries.* Also, succession troubles were often the undoing of these polities.

*Findley 2005: 34

2.1.2 *Caught between Traditional and Charismatic Rulership*

Many scholars have underlined the need for strong leadership to keep the *smychka* together (a skilful driver, a strong yoke (bond), and a whip), hence hinting to the region’s persistent bias toward autocracy. Leaders had to maintain elite-discipline and loyalty in the steppe and in the sedentary centres over vast distances. So – applying Weberian terms – the original leaders needed legitimacy. Charisma played an important role. Loyal followers (kin, clan or personal ties) bestowed their trust in leaders when they forged the original military alliances (of their founding dynasties) in the steppe. Often a new retinue (a group of advisors and staff) was selected, overhauling original tribal hierarchies, by including competent commoners, trusted slaves or adversaries who yielded wilfully.

When a leader’s charisma was ‘confirmed’ through military or political victories, loyalty was consolidated by setting up patronage systems, through which the leader shared revenues. In full patronal fashion, members of his retinue reduplicated this same system with their own followers. C. Beckwith relates this to the Eurasian Culture Complex.* To understand legitimacy in these polities, one needs to consider the military origins (*tümen* system – see below) and the charisma from successful campaigns bestowed to a commander by fellow lords, who themselves had positions in military hierarchy. When steppe empires were created, at the top of the patronal pyramid sat the (military) ruler himself, and much of his charisma flowed from his ability to provide wealth, resources, slaves or trading rights to his retinue.

*Beckwith 2009

Some scholars have warned not to put too much explanatory power on charisma when dissecting the region's pre-modern political systems and state-building processes. All Steppe empires were monarchies and could tap into a rich and widespread Turko-Mongol cultural legacy for legitimacy. Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene has been most outspoken on the over-emphasis on charisma in conventional scholarship. Scholars assign pre-modern Central Asian politics almost always to the irrational, personal, charismatic and impermanent side of the Weberian dichotomies and by stressing the personal charisma of the state-builders virtually neglect enduring political traditions. The Weberian view on personal charisma refers to a revolutionary force, challenging the existing (traditional or legal-bureaucratic) order and is unbound by their norms. However, Chinggis Khan and Timur for instance – both presented as the “epitome of charismatic ‘nomadic warlord’” – did not reject the existing sociopolitical order and did not break with traditions; quite on the contrary.*

*Munkh-Erdene 2018: 78

First, traditional classes existed. In all Turko-Mongol cultures there was the decimal system, which integrated each tribe (*ulus*) into a district hierarchy of military ‘tümens’ (Mongolian: *Түмэн* – one *tümen* equals 10,000 soldiers or households) and other smaller units. In pre-Chinggisid times, the heads of such units held military or military-oriented titles, which over time had become hereditary, like lordships in medieval Europe.* So, an old hierarchy of tribes and clans with such hereditary titles existed, and members of such aristocracy (loyal to the ruler) made up the bulk of the ruling coalition in Central Asian polities.

*Vasyutin 2019: 93;
Munkh-Erdene 2018: 59

A closer look at the ruling coalition in Steppe polities, showed that beside the royal family, they were made up from this tribal aristocracy (*beg*, *beq*, *bey* in Turkic languages), representatives of sedentary populations, religious figures, talented commanders with a common background, personal guards, trusted household staff.* Nomadic khanates did not have a professional cadre (staff) or specialized civil servants. Administrators were mostly relatives of the khan or tribal aristocracy, and their civil governing activities did not require special training; nor did such functions become distinct professions.

*Vasyutin 2019: 94

*Vasyutin 2019: 102

When founding new regimes, rulers definitely relied on personal ties when selecting their staff, and the more charisma they possessed, the more likely they were to go against convention by giving key positions to non-military and non-aristocratic trusted allies. For instance, Chinggis Khan had functionaries with the title such as cook or steward (*ba'urchi* in Mongolian), suggesting

that they were drawn from household staff, and had their original responsibilities expanded from preparing the ruler's food (and protecting him from poisoning) to general provisioning. The title was prestigious and denoted the bearer had personal access to the khan.* This indicates that the creation of founding dynasties was done in charismatic fashion, but with the purpose to realign pre-existing traditions and shift legitimacy to a new family, but not to supplant or overhaul them.

*Allsen 2001: 63; Findley 2009: 82

The selectorate then extended into those ruling members' families, clan or tribal networks; but foremost descendents of those original 'blood brothers' could lay claim to future governing posts. In exchange they had prime pickings from state revenues and ate at the khan's table. Beside assisting him in ruling, they were responsible for the khan's protection, after freely swearing a blood oath. This armed retinue was called *böri* 'wolves' by the Türks, referring to the Turkic origin myth.* And its core group would commit ritual suicide to accompany their khan, if the latter predeceased the group, at least in ancient times, before the nomadic elites adopted world religions (that frowned upon such practices).*

*Findley 2005: 44

*Beckwith 2009:13

Kingship of course was solely reserved for direct (male) descendents or brothers of the khan, but since the Mongols, all successors had to be elected (or confirmed) by the *quriltai* (Mongolian: *Хуралдай*), a political, military council, and one of the few supra-tribal institutions in Steppe polities. Similar assemblies existed before in Turkic polities, functioning also as legal institutions, even though they did not produce 'written' laws. Such assemblies pursued unanimity to bestow legitimacy to people or decisions. Full attendance of the delegations of the ruling coalition was obligatory, as well as the duty to hold such plenary meetings at stipulated times. The refusal of key members to attend reduced its legitimacy, and all members were bound by the legislation produced.* This shows that pre-modern politics were not personalist regarding decision-making, but quite in line with feudal, monarchic practices in other world regions, even without a fixed political centre.

*Hodous 2013: 90–92

Subsequent bloodlines from great leaders, like the Chinggisids, the Timurids, the Dzhungars, or the Mughals all drew their traditional authority from their originators, boosted by personal charisma from their own achievements. Dynastic power transfers became ritualized with ancestral rites and shamanistic ceremonies at *quriltai* conclaves (by physically elevating Khans on a felt rug like their Turkic precursors),* and blended with traditional belief systems; originally, the mandate of heaven, later, Islamic credentials (either descent from the Prophet or endorsement by Sufi brotherhoods).

*Findley 2005: 87

*Munkh-Erdene 2018: 62-63

Second, the ‘mandate of heaven,’ (named *kut* in Turkic; *tiān-mìng* – 天命 in Chinese) was integrated in an old and widespread belief system with one universal monarch (*Shanyu*, *Khaghan*, *Khan*), one ‘high throne,’ one ‘felt-tent *ulus*’ (chosen *tribe*), and one realm.* Turkic rulers have been known to erect steles⁹ with runic inscriptions to propagate their greatness and right to the heavenly mandate.

*Munkh-Erdene 2018: 68-71;
Pochekaev 2016b

This belief system (*törü* in Old Turkic) was a sacred law, not created by men, but by heaven and earth, regulating the world order at various levels, ranging from political order (e.g. dividing ‘*uluses*’ into *ghol* – ‘centre,’ *barungar* – ‘right wing,’ *djungar* – ‘left wing’), to the social sphere (structuring community relations and prescribing individual conduct), but also included postulates on the interaction with land, water, animals, and in the religious sphere: with ancestors, *Bodhisattvas* (enlightened beings), saints and devils. *Törü* thus governs as a divine, normative and moral code, and everybody, including the Khan, must adhere to it (or lose the mandate of heaven and the right to rule).* In many respects, *törü* is the Turko-Mongol equivalent of *dharma*, the cosmic order in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

*Vasyutin 2019: 96

This world order thus structured the larger polities (macro-level) in the same way as it ordered their local components at clan, lineage and primary tribe level (micro-level). Social relations were based on family relations, patronymy (authority of (male) elders and by descent), submission to the clan-leader, adhering to his right of judgements (re-/distribution of resources, military strategy, common law). The latter’s relation with his subjects was modulated by household and military rituals, and hence also constrained by local religious traditions.* Among household rituals, the hearth (*ocak*) was of central focus throughout Turko-Mongol culture:

*Findley 2005: 47

*“Not only did the hearth fire symbolize familial continuity, but the hearth also possessed great spatial and cosmological significance. Dug out by the mother, it implied a gate opened to the ancestor’s nether world. Centrally located in the round felt tent, it symbolized the center of the world. Through the smoke hole above, the hearth was on an axis with the cosmos. (...) The rites performed around the hearth helped to ensure ‘kut,’ the life force that brought children to life, that fell through the smoke hole to bring good fortune to a family, or that conveyed the divine mandate to a ruler.”**

In extension, the ruler was the earthly equivalent of the sky-God, *Tengri* (the supreme divinity of the Turko-Mongol pantheon), with his “queen” or senior wife (*khatun*) the counterpart of *Umay*, the

⁹ Such steles (stone pillars) were literally called “eternal stones” in Old Turkish (Kljaštornyj and Livšic 1972: 72).

goddess of fertility.* (Findley 2005: 44) Their heavenly rule was also conditional on control over a sacred land, forest, mountain or valley, which constituted the religious gravity centre of their belief system. Rulers could lose the heavenly mandate by immoral behavior, and could thus be legally overthrown while a newly favored 'Fortunate' or 'Heaven-favoured' (Turkic: *kutlugh*) obtained the moral right to rule.* Chinese empires had a similar royal belief system, and their own historiography is one long, cyclical tale of the heavenly mandate being passed on from the last holder in one declining dynasty to a new 'son of heaven' (*tiānzi* – 天子) over the centuries.¹⁰

*Findley 2005: 41;
Munkh-Erdene 2018: 65

2.1.3 *Cracks in the 'Yoke' and the Desintegration of Central Asian Empires*

Above, charisma was presented as a way to 'rejuvenate' or 'realign' the long-established Turko-Mongol traditions in favour of new dynasties. In the Weberian sense, it was also a catalyst for innovation: Chinggis Khan had enormous charisma and while drawing on ancient beliefs for his legitimacy, he did also 'revolutionize' them. For instance, he transformed Godly *törü* into royal law and order (*yasa*) to regulate power relations in the ruling coalition (see Box 11.4), and made himself (and later dynasties) the ultimate arbiter to interpret it (instead of the Gods, oral tradition, or soothsayers and shamans).*

*Levi 2020: 122; Pochekaev 2016a/b

Charisma was thus a key element when founding new dynasties and winning (and consolidating) succession struggles. So, a way of consolidating power by a rival fraction without upending the established system.* This resulted in a personal bond between leader and followers (retinue), who together made up the core of the new ruling coalition. Traditional notions of hereditary titles applied, and so political posts were 'bounded' by the original composition of the selectorate. This is still true in contemporary revolutionary regimes: e.g. the position of Kim Il-Sung in relation to his original brothers-in-arms fighting Japanese occupation (1910-1945), whose descendants in North Korea still have a special place in the ruling hierarchy; or Fidel Castro's fellow veteran revolutionary mountain guerrilleros, known as the *generación histórica* of the Cuban revolution (1953-1958). (Centeno 2016; Van den Bosch 2017)

*McCulloch 2014: 3

¹⁰ Some ancient Indo-Iranian polities had very similar concepts for the 'son of God' (like the royal Kushan title *devaputra* in Sanskrit, or *bagapuhr* in Sogdian), some of which devalued over time to mean merely 'lord' or 'prince.' These observations strengthen arguments for the common origin of this Eurasian belief system, even though the directions of dissemination are still disputed today. Even *Khatun* (ruler's wife) has an Iranian/Sogdian etymology. (Sanping Chen 2002: 292-293, 300)

Box 11.4 The Myth of the 'Great Yasa'

The extent to which the 'Great Yasa' of Chinggis Khan was actually a set of codified laws remains disputed. No codex was ever discovered. Roman Pochekaev (building on suspicions of D.O Morgan) makes a compelling argument that the few external imperial sources mentioning the Mongol *yasa* were since long immersed in their own traditions of codified law, so that their authors could not imagine the Great Mongol Empire to be run without significant codification. Considering the rich and pervasive oral Turko-Mongol traditions, the diverse legal traditions of the Mongols' sedentary subjects, and especially the scholarly counterargument that the Mongols must kept such laws 'secret' for themselves; all lend credibility to Pochekaev's explanation that the *yasa* was never a codex to begin with, and hence could not have survived the test of time in such form. The Mongols didn't need nor would have been able to produce a universal legal code that could regulate the relations among such a plethora of different subjects (vassals), let alone their inhabitants' private lives. The *yasa* thus remained a set of royal and war-time decrees, originally stipulated by *törü*, solely regulating the relations and workings of Chinggis' regime.

Sources:

David Ayalon, "The Great Yāsa of Chingiz Khān. A Reexamination (Part A)," *Studia Islamica*, 33, (1971): 97-140.

D.O. Morgan, "The 'Great "yāsā" of Chingiz Khān' and Mongol Law in the Ilkhānate," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 49, no. 1 (1986): 163-176.

Roman Yu. Pochekaev, "Chinggis Khan's Great Yasa in the Mongol Empire and Chinggisid States of the 13th-14th Centuries: Legal Code or Ideal 'Law and Order'?" *Golden Horde Review*, 4, no. 4 (2016): 724-733.

Still the over-production of political elites* increased infighting over patronage with competing claims, while imperial overextension diminished rulers' abilities to monitor and reward loyalty, and long distances made punitive actions more costly. In **nomadic Steppe empires**, the traditional Turkic reliance on lateral succession (between brothers), could lead to a splitting of an empire into two wings (Türks) or more parts (Mongols), since it was highly likely to produce succession disputes among cousins of the next generation.* Despite the feudal infighting, such polities could be rather durable if their scale was manageable and the flow of patronage to the ruling coalition was ensured through trade agreements with neighbouring empires and partners.

*Vasyutin 2019: 94

*Findley 2005: 4-45

Sedentary Turko-Mongol empires faced similar challenges, especially after successors of Chinggis Khan started establishing permanent bases and ruling from cities. Ruling traditions like the Chinggisid *yasa* were still applied to certain military and political practices, but sedentary rulers took over the Islamic customs of their urbanized subjects, generally *Hanafi* jurisprudence (*fiqh*).^{*} However, while nomadic polities could rely on *yasa* and rely upon indirect rule to govern sedentary agrarian or trade centres, the opposite was not true. If power shifted from military-monarchic polities, to pure-monarchic, sedentary systems, the royal-military relations became strained, and so did the foundation of their rulership.

^{*}Levi 2020: 20–21, 122–123

Nomadic subjects resisted institutionalization, and when sedentary rulers rebranded the royal clan conclave (*quriltai*) by doling out patronage in the form of territorial appanages (land grants), they introduced a level of decentralization that was bound to lead to disintegration as loyalties faded over time or through crisis. Successors, educated and raised in cities, lost their touch with the nomad aristocrats on whom they relied for military power and legitimacy. Attempts at centralization (by promoting non-tribal staff to key positions, or at modernization (to gain a military edge by adopting gunpowder weapons and reduce reliance on cavalry armies) seem to have failed in the Central Asian heartland, as nomadic elites resisted giving up their privileges and traditional way of warfare (preferring composite bows).^{*}

^{*}Levi 2020: 152–170

In contrast, later Turkic dynasties, established outside Central Asia, were able to shift to a more centralized, legal-rational foundation for their rulership: the Ottomans adapted Islamic-Perisian bureaucratic practices and rediscovered the ‘Mamluk’¹¹ or *Ghulām*-system (غُلَامَان – *Ghilmān* – *slave boys*) of slave-regiments and eunuchs (trained and educated at their master’s expense) for protection and administrative positions, allowing later Sultans to sever links with the fickle ‘blood brothers’ of their fathers’ original *ghazi*-retinue. The Safavids in Iran drifted toward the legalistically and theologically rationalized Shiism of the *Imamiyyah* sect. The

¹¹ The ‘Mamluk-system’ (مَمْلُوك – *mamlūk* meaning property) was a recurring institution of slave-mercenaries that made up a special military caste in various polities from the Middle East, to Central Asia, to India from the early 9th to the 19th century. Severed from their own kin and tribe, their new personal loyalty to their master (Sultan, Shah) and specialized training made them one of the oldest coup-proofing systems in pre-modern polities. They enjoyed a privileged status and often shared in the spoils of their master, which they protected from enemies both in the palace as on the battlefield. At times Mamluks took over supreme power and created their own dynasties (in Egypt: 1250–1517 and in India: 1206–1290).

Moghuls in India were forced to progressively include Indian Muslims and Hindu nobles in their formalized administration as their empire expanded.*

*Findley 2005: 123;
Callewaert and Goddeeris 2010: 106

Such attempts backfired in Central Asia proper after the 17th century, forcing Khans to restore loyalty in the steppe with costly campaigns, or leaving them stranded in militarily weakened city-states. Often their reduced, smaller agrarian bases did not give rulers the tax revenue to import gunpowder weapons, making encroachment from outside powers who relied on advanced artillery and firearms unstoppable in the long term. When Tsarist Russia and the Qing empire expanded, incorporating more steppe, trade patterns shifted and declined, and thus Central Asian polities lost their critical mass to create a new *smychka*. The last successful attempt was by the Dzhungars (Oirat, 1635-1755) in western Mongolia.*

*Christian 2018: 186-192

In the sedentary polities, Chinggisid royal bloodlines diluted or were supplanted as the *smychka* broke down.¹² Monarchs found backup from a conservative religious clergy that preached acceptance of the (often miserable) status quo, fostering fatalism and lassitude among the population, blocking reforms. Clinging onto these shaky bases of legitimacy, the remaining Khanates of Khiva, Kokand and the Emirate of Bukhara were still barely institutionalized governments by the time before Russian colonization: they had not attempted to modernize the population, declare fixed state boundaries, or impose a national or civic identity. These proto-states were feudal organizations at best and exerted little control over the territory or the population.* Without firm nomadic base nor institutions, khans or emirs had unbridled discretionary powers in creating functions and appointing staff in their cities. Weak central control overlapped with ever-expanding irrigation networks. Nomadic tribes were hired for tax collection or as mercenaries, but fealty from these local lords (*beg*, *beq*, *bey*) had to be constantly renegotiated. Within dynasties successions were often contested and bloody.*

*Collins 2006: 77

*Adle and Habib 2003; Hiro 2009: 30;
Levi 2017; Collins 2006: 77

To summarize, Central Asian polities were established by charisma, but grounded in traditional beliefs (*törü*) and later, fluid legal systems (*yasa*). With increasing territorial scope or generational turnover, the top of patronal pyramids became bloated by competing elites with feudal claims, while personal loyalty to rulers frayed. Nomadic polities would often split into smaller ones retaining

¹² The last Chinggisid khan of Bukhara was murdered in 1747 by their Uzbek Mangit vassals laying the basis for the later Emirate of Bukhara; Kokand was created by Shahrukh Biy, a non-Chinggisid tribal leader from the Uzbek Ming dynasty, and the Khivan Chinggisids were kept on as puppet rulers by the Kongrat (Qonghirat) tribal vassals after 1746. (Christian 2018: 200-201)

original charismatic-traditional legitimacy or just disintegrated. Sedentary polities tried to shift to legal-rational forms of rulership, but in doing so severed the nomadic connection, and thus lost their military advantage, resulting in smaller city-states with limited power over the neighbouring steppe. Having lost their critical mass to build out a new *smychka*, later pre-modern polities could no longer stop the slow onslaught of modern warfare and imperial colonization.

2.2 The Soviet Legacy

When Tsarist Russia annexed Khiva and Bukhara, and replaced Kokand with the Turkestan governate, it did not incorporate isolated, territorial states, but multi-ethnic, dynamic, dynastic patronal trading networks vying for market access with surrounding empires. Their power waxed and waned, depending on the skills of particular rulers (charisma), the productivity of agriculture and the profitability of international trade. The annexed Steppe polities of the 'Turkoman' or the 'Kirgiz'¹³ were even less institutionalized and barely had codified customary law (*adat*) – see also Map 8.1. Tsarist imperial ambitions mainly remained limited to indirect rule, co-opting local institutions and curtailing the influence of Islam by introducing new technologies and social policies.*

After the Bolshevik revolution, the Russian Civil War, various uprisings and Basmachi revolts and the reincorporation of the region, Central Asia would undergo what Joel Migdal has labelled a 'mutual transformation' between formal Soviet institutions and informal, indigenous institutions.* The national delimitation policy of Joseph Stalin would carve out six new nations¹⁴ in five new states, each mirroring the institutional outlook of the central Soviet system. Territorial divisions were superimposed and populations were radically engineered socially, economically and politically through collectivization and sedentarization. Local kin, clan, sub-tribal patriarchal networks re-emerged when *aul* (nomadic kin-village), *qishloq* (settled kin-village) or *mahalla* (urban district) were reinvented as *Kolkhozes* and *Sovkhozes*; with local *soviets* (councils) or *komiteti* (committees) reflecting village elder councils. Restrictions

*Levi 2017; Christian 2018: 199–201;
Collins 2006: 78–80; Hiro 2009: 30–32;
Коккошин 2013

*Collins 2006: 80; De Cordier 2012

¹³ At the time of the Tsarist annexation, Russians erroneously applied the name 'Kirgiz' to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads, barely distinguishing what they called the 'Kara-Kirgiz' (the Kyrgyz) and the 'Kirgiz-Kaysak' (the Kazakhs).

¹⁴ The Karakalpak in Uzbekistan received an autonomous region, but not a separate state like the other five titular nations. The homeland of the Pamiris in Gorno-Badakhshan was never upgraded beyond an Autonomous Oblast' – see also Maps 8.2 to 8.4.

on mobility cemented this state-of-affairs and precluded interethnic mixing (including Russification).*

*Collins 2006: 87-96;
Roy 2000: 86-90

With de-Stalinization after 1956, the USSR's political decentralization would strengthen the Soviet republics' autonomy.* Still, due to their lack of independence, B. Geddes does not classify these new states as single-party regimes, but each Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) did have its own party structure, in which the first secretary and politburo had considerable power and discretion, especially when it came to appointments within the political bureaucracy (*номенклатура* – *nomenklatura*). Top political posts were doled out according to unwritten ethnic quota and sprouted extensive patronage networks that grew and shrank in lockstep with the political fates of their main patrons. These patronal networks were

*Collins 2006: 84

*Hale 2015: 53

not necessarily ethnically exclusive, and often even included Slavs.* Some first secretaries, like Sharof R. Rashidov (office: 1959-1983) in the Uzbek SSR, or Dinmukhamed A. Kunaev (office: 1964-1986) in the Kazakh SSR, without doubt stood at the head of enormous patronalist pyramids, but their forced removal by Moscow shows that their networks cannot be classified as independent political regimes.

The above insights shore up this author's preference to frame the Soviet period in Central Asia as "low intensity totalitarianism."* The new, limited states never had full control over their populations due to the region's geography and thus could not established a pure monistic centre of power. Power centres tolerated independent although unofficial power structures at lower levels. Ideology played an important role in policy-making and culture, but its implementation was challenged by traditional value and belief systems at local levels, and by nationalist projects at the top (at least after the de-Stalinization). So a strict application of J. Linz' concept of totalitarianism or post-totalitarianism is untenable in this case.* S. Kailitz's concept of ideocracy is a better match.**

*Courtois 2006-7: 43

*Linz 2000

**Kailitz 2013

This author argues that the Turko-Mongol legacy of charismatic-traditional rulership halted formal institutionalization processes in Central Asia,¹⁵ making informal organizations the bedrock of its societies. Revolving around trade and challenged by geography, hierarchical patronal networks were the foundation for all social and political organization on the steppe and in the agrarian centres.

¹⁵ It likewise imprinted this legacy on Russia, where early tsars saw themselves as successors of the Golden Horde, and even the most skilled Romanov tsars enjoyed much more personalist power than their European counterparts. (De Cordier 2012: 92; Hoskin 2001; Hale 2015)

Tsarist occupation undercut the independence of the last monarchic nomadic and sedentary polities, initiating a permanent shift to legal-rational rule with increased colonial control. The period between 1905 and 1921 is a story full of crises, institutional overhaul, realignments and new actors, but is beyond the scope of this chapter. As elsewhere it signified the end of real monarchic rule and empire, replacing sacred legitimacy with ideological, modernist beliefs.

The Soviet juncture brought radical transformation in all spheres, but also bestowed the region with a new formal shell that preserved some pre-modern informal institutions at local level. Henceforth, a party-based nomenklatura system would be the formal building blocks in the new polities. Theoretically, in the USSR the selectorate was open to all loyal communists, permitting a social mobility hitherto unknown; also to Central Asians, perennially excluded by aristocratic politics. In reality, racist and colonial obstacles persisted, with ethnic (elder, male) Russians dominating the top networks, aside from a handful of non-Slavs who climbed up to the pinnacles of USSR power (e.g. D.A. Kunaev, Heydar Aliyev, or Eduard Shevardnadze).

While traditional power still smouldered at local level in Central Asia, political legitimacy was now derived from **institutional-charismatic rulership**, or the impersonal charisma of top offices, which its proud occupiers duly used to attract clients and channel patronage into their own networks. Such networks boomed between Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev, but several realignments would take place under Yuri Andropov and especially Mikhail Gorbachev. Notwithstanding the personal attraction of such officials (e.g. republics' first secretaries), their position was dependent on the good graces bestowed by the Kremlin's top Politburo. When promoted, their networks moved up a rung in the nomenklatura, when demoted or banished (and thus unable to reward, punish or monitor), their patronal clients switched camp or realigned. So in Central Asia (as in other SSRs, charisma and patronage were thus intrinsically linked with a given office (*Amtscharisma*)).

The same is true for top USSR leadership positions: whereas Lenin enjoyed true personal charisma as well as impersonal legitimacy, subsequent Soviet leaders relied mostly on institutional-charismatic rulership, derived from their position as first secretary of the CPSU. Stalin – arguably – was in-between, instilling burning admiration as well as icy terror among his followers once his power was consolidated, but even his power (and patronage network) was originally built up from his bureaucratic position under

*Khlevniuk 2015: 38–32; Service 2005

Lenin (setting the Politburo agenda and deciding personal matters) and being his protégé (*Erbscharisma*). Stalin was neither a leading ideologue nor an accomplished military commander.* Adolf Hitler in contrast has been attributed with more personal charisma, not lessened by the power of a previously established office, since he created such functions and accompanying rituals himself. There was no ‘correct line’ in Nazi ideology, no sacred texts and founders who embodied the true belief to which even dictators as powerful as Stalin or Mao Zedong must pay lip service when justifying a change of policy.*

*Breuilly 2011: 495

After independence, new patronal networks were to be negotiated without Moscow’s interference. The single-party systems and national state-planned economies created unique opportunities for former first secretaries to monopolize patronal pyramids as founding presidents, and to personalize power. Section three below analyses the behaviour of these new regimes during their inception, consolidation and – in some cases – collapse.

3. Dynamics of Personalist Rule in Contemporary Central Asia

Between independence and 2020, most Central Asian states have known only one regime: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan all dealt with a leadership change, but not with a regime change. Tajikistan’s first regime (under Rahmon Nabyev) was ousted during the civil war before it managed to consolidate, and by the end of the war, the precarious regime of Emomali Rahmon(ov)¹⁶ came to consolidate power, albeit under Russia’s shielding embrace. Kyrgyzstan has the most dynamic trajectory with three popular revolutions (2005, 2010, 2020), an interim government, and messy successions with Hamletian characteristics. Below, this chapter will discuss and compare various aspects of these regimes in their local contexts through the lens of political regime theories. Box 11.5 provides an overview of how these regimes are classified in recent scholarship.

The parts below are organized thematically, but this section introduction aims to show how they relate to larger theoretical frames as well as to this chapter’s focus on rulership, personalist rule and patronal politics.

Rulership – As in pre-modern times, personal charisma constituted a necessary boost to realign pre-existing structures, or (more revolutionary) dismantle them. Most ‘Founding Presidents’ intended to represent a new, assertive, nationalist wind by criticizing Moscow,

¹⁶ He dropped the Russified ending ‘-ov’ in 2007.

Box 11.5 Contemporary Central Asian Regimes and their Classifications

REGIME TYPOLOGIES AND CENTRAL ASIAN AUTOCRACIES (1991-2020)						
CENTRAL ASIAN REGIMES			Kyrgyzstan 1991-2005 Akayev	Tajikistan 1992- Rahmon <i>until 2015</i>	Kazakhstan 1991- Nazarbayev Tokayev	Turkmenistan 1991- Niyazov Berdymukhamedov
			Kyrgyzstan 2005-2010 Bakiyev		Tajikistan 1992- Rahmon <i>since 2015*</i>	Uzbekistan 1991- Karimov Mirziyoyev
		Kyrgyzstan 2011-2020 Atambayev Jeenbekov				
	Geddes et al.	<i>Personalist regime</i>				<i>Personalist-single party regime</i>
A	Hadenius & Teorell **	<i>Limited multiparty regime</i>				<i>One-party regime</i>
	Kailitz	<i>Electoral autocracy</i>			<i>Personalist autocracy</i>	
B	Levitsky & Way	<i>(Unstable) Competitive authoritarianism</i>	<i>Full authoritarianism</i>			
	Diamond	<i>Competitive authoritarianism</i>			<i>Hegemonic authoritarianism</i>	<i>Closed authoritarianism</i>
	Zakaria	<i>Illiberal democracy</i>				
	Schedler	<i>Electoral authoritarianism</i>				
	Polity IV	<i>Open anocracy</i>	<i>Autocracy</i>			
C	Freedomhouse	<i>Semi-consolidated authoritarian Partly free</i>			<i>Consolidated authoritarian Not free</i>	

Categorical Measures (A & B): Polychotomous (A), Trichotomous (B) – **Continuous Measures (C)**

* Tajikistan made a sharp authoritarian turn by 2015 when also abolishing term limits.

** In this dataset, Kazakhstan was classified as a one-party regime until 1994, and Uzbekistan as a limited multiparty regime until 1994.

Sources: Author's own work based on: Geddes et al. 2012; Wahman et al. 2013; Marin 2016; Gilbert and Mohseni 2011; Wilson 2014.

This Box shows the various ways in which Central Asian regimes can be classified, and this overview is not exhaustive. *Polychotomous* measures (A) – like the one by B. Geddes and her colleagues (used in this chapter) – have complex sorting criteria that differ significantly. In contrast to Geddes, who differentiates according to the type of powerholder, the typology by A. Hadenius and J. Teorell (later with M. Wahman) distinguishes regimes according to their organizational modes of political power, but do not acknowledge personalism. S. Kailitz follows Weber and focuses on patterns of legitimation, adding 'ideocracies' (not shown) to account for communist or other (totalitarian) regimes with ideologies, separating them from the category of post-communist electoral autocracies.

Further, the Box also shows *trichotomous* (B) typologies, which are focused on elections, and try to distinguish between free/unfree and fair/unfair elections, and sort regimes into three large categories (democratic, hybrid, autocratic). No cases shown here fall under the democratic label (with free and fair elections), but Kyrgyzstan's competitive electoral climate (free but unfair) set some of its regimes apart from their regional counterparts. Since trichotomous classifications are used to study the impact and relevance of elections in democratization processes, they are not very useful for Central Asia. Similarly, dichotomous typologies (not shown), with a binary division (democracy/autocracy), cannot be used for comparative purposes in this case.

Finally, *continuous* measures (C) do not have categories, but rather vectors that measure political and civil rights. Cases are thus 'weighted' on scale of 'democraticness' along a large set of indicators that go far beyond minimalist interpretations of democracy. Methodologically, such measures should not be used to categorize regimes, but they still prove to be very useful for observing democratic or authoritarian shifts over time.

Sources:

José Antonio Cheibub; Jennifer Gandhi; James Raymond Vreeland, "Democracy and dictatorship revisited," *Public Choice*, 143, (2009): 67-101.

Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch, "Mapping Regime Typologies," *Przegląd Polityczny*, 4, (2014): 111-124.

openly revering national figures or adopting historical heroes. On the other hand they were careful not to 'rock the boat' and risk upsetting their existing patronal networks, therefore economic reforms and privatization were selective and controlled. Part 3.1 takes a short look at how to contextualize independence and Part 3.7 delves a bit deeper in contemporary regimes' self-legitimation strategies. Box 11.6 explores the famous cults of personality, and how they fit in current modes of rulership.

Personalist Rule – Elsewhere, this author has identified the main four pillars of personalist regimes, which are: coup-proofing, hoarding, repression and gatekeeping. Regimes only need three pillars to stay in power, but can balance on only two for a short time.* The inheritance of Soviet Secret Service systems means that internal coups d'état are not present or a recurrent threat.¹⁷ Civilian (regime)

*Van den Bosch 2021

¹⁷ Islam Karimov however has attempted several coups against Tajik powerholders during the Tajik Civil War, but this was before Russian hegemony was re-established in the region. (Van den Bosch 2020: 85)

control over the military is well established. And most regimes are not affected by the reduced effectiveness of their armed forces as a result of their *coup-proofing* measures, because they are not challenged by external military threats. *Hoarding*, or the domination of patronage networks is addressed in Parts 3.2 and 3.3, which show how resource-export dependency strengthens some regimes. *Repression* and mitigating grievances (through elections and by allowing opposition) are two sides of the same coin, and explained in Part 3.4. *Gatekeeping*, or the manipulation of external relations is dealt with in 3.5, but also features in resource curses (3.3). Kyrgyzstan is by far the weakest of the five regimes, with a limited capacity for repression, security forces with regional loyalties, few assets to hoard or for gatekeeping its international position, and competing patronal networks that cannot be subdued by new powerholders in the centre. Tajikistan has better control over its coercive capabilities, with armed challengers located far from the nexus of power.

Nonetheless, the shift from autonomous (but not independent) party-based Soviet Republics to independent, personalist regimes signified the end of upward mobility for loyal party members. It is true that Niyazov and Karimov kept their old party structures intact, while Nazarbayev, Akayev and Rakhmon found it easier to build out new organizations to capture their patronal pyramids (see also Box 11.5 and Part 3.2). In any case, with this shift, regime selectorates shrank, and ruling coalitions became exclusive for kith and kin only. As in all personalist regimes, this fosters vertical grievances between regime insiders and those excluded and harmed by corruption, and horizontal grievances along ethnic or regional divisions, as patronage is continuously extended and retracted (divide-and-rule, game-of-chairs).

Patronalism – Becoming the lead patron and preventing challengers from emerging has been a basic dynamic in all regimes. In the new republics, this initial realignment toward the new office of president happened at different speeds (Part 3.2), but thirty years later, since pyramids in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have proven durable, each intra-regime leader succession in the region (and wider Eurasia actually) advances our understanding of this delicate and dangerous process in personalist regime life-cycles, as shown in Part 3.7.

3.1 Comparing Decolonial Transitions

Regarding these states' transition to independence, G. Gleason states that some comparisons can be found with African decolonization (1957-1967). M. Gammer finds most parallels with former French African colonies, where leaders similarly did not ask for independence and tried to resist it. Similar issues were the arbitrary borders of the new states, a general lack of capacity and diplomatic experience to function as a new state in the international arena, and the creation of new independence-narratives regarding non-existent national communities.

However, the region's trajectory had some important discrepancies with African decolonization that have shaped the emergence of its new autocratic regimes:

- There was no roadmap in place for leaving the USSR, meaning new leaders had to learn from one another.
- Political opposition was not the key to political change in Central Asia. The absence of an anti-colonial struggle – with the notable exception of Tajikistan's – denied these leaders historical legitimacy.*

*Cummins 2004: 1

- Uneven relations with metropolitan settlers (Slavs) occupying top administrative functions were not cemented with private-property rights. Hence this group had no legal claims to privileges after independence and could not exert much influence on the process.*

*Gleason 1997: 10

- Yeltsin's reluctance to restore Russian hegemony and strengthen ties with the region was in stark contrast to De Gaulle's policy of *Françafrique* aimed at retaining influence. This forced leaders to find alternative partners for development, trade and security during the 1990s.*

*Gammer 2000

- Inseparable linkages with Russia: Moscow had solidly extended its physical infrastructure to the region (communication, transportation, energy, education). African colonies were purposefully underdeveloped and post-independence linkages were weaker due to their physical geographic separation.*

*Gleason 1997: 11

- The 'revolutionary' basis on which militaries were indoctrinated and constructed in SSRs, together with the level of coup-proofing, patronage and political control by secret services, made post-Soviet armies less likely to engage in coup d'états than their African military counterparts, stacked by ethnic out-

groups during colonization and distrusted by first generation leaders.¹⁸

This conducive structural framework lent enormous agency to national elites in Central Asia. Instead of displacing a colonizer, they just had to adopt the state, before rivals at the top could. By channelling the flow of information from a privileged position, leaders played two-level games to boost their national credentials (personal charisma), while using the state's repressive apparatus to smother the sprouting opposition. After the failed August coup against Gorbachev in 1991 and the emergence of Yeltsin, it was clear they need not fear further intermingling in national affairs by the supreme *Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (CPSU). Yeltsin's domestic reorientation after withdrawing the Russian Soviet Federal SR, gave Central Asian leaders unfettered space to diversify their geopolitical ties to balance their former metropole. With the (controlled) introduction of capitalism, these dictators established new connections with the opaque global financial system that became the lifelines of their hold on power.*

*Cooley and Heathershaw 2018

3.2 Building Patronal Pyramids

Andropov's grand anti-corruption campaign, and especially Gorbachev's political *perestroika* and free multi-candidate elections (*demokratizatsiya*), were the figurative 'Armageddon' for the patronal networks of the post-Stalinist old guard in Central Asia. Tainted by corruption scandals, their patrons were dragged away in chains or forcefully retired.¹⁹ Their successors shuffled cadres, but did not last long themselves when faced with the fallout of Gorbachev's reforms (especially *glasnost*). As a consequence, younger, native, reliable candidates – untarnished by corruption or the mismanagement of riots – were catapulted to the highest office. Nursultan Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov first had to consolidate their new position within the *nomenklatura* in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Both rode the transition by boosting their nationalist credentials (language, culture) and criticizing Moscow; disbanding

¹⁸ Coup attempts are so rare in the post-Soviet space that systemic coup-probability of former Soviet militaries has not been questioned after 1991. E. Marat highlights their indoctrination and legacy of *esprit de corps* integrating various nationalities. (Marat 2010) The coup against Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1992 in Georgia was a rare exception.

¹⁹ National first secretaries Inamzhon B. Usmankhodzhaev (Uzbek.); Muhammetnazar G. Gapurov (Turkmen.) Dinmukhamed A. Kunaev (Kazakh.) and Turdakun U. Usubaliyev (Kyrgyz.) were all removed after instigations of corruption.

or rebranding their own communist party (CP) apparatus, outlawing dangerous opposition parties while stealing their (moderate) agenda points; and by using the 1991 August coup as an excuse to cut formal ties with the CPSU. Initially appointed as compromise figures, they needed several years to balance and then dominate existing patronal networks.* Developing the oil, gas and mining sectors was crucial to fuel and stabilize their patronal machines.

*Hale 2015: 139–141, 163–165

In contrast, Saparmurat Niyazov, himself the undisputed patron of Turkmen politics since 1985 was unstoppable once he knew Moscow would no longer intervene. There were no elections and no opposition when he became first president. Balancing the country's five main tribal groupings, he crafted his own patronal network also including non-Turkmen.* Henceforth known as *Turkmenbashi* (Father or the Turkmen), he installed a well-documented excessive cult of personality and pursued a national policy of permanent neutrality, embarking on a course of strict isolation (see also Box 11.6 and Case Study 3 on Turkmenistan by Oguljamal Yazliyeva).

*Horák 2010

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were the exceptions. In the former, Rahmon Nabyev actually had lost his position when Gorbachev came to power in 1985, but was hauled back from retirement just before the first Soviet elections in 1990. Tajikistan's stark uneven development and unforgiving geography resulted in an ethnically split vote during its first presidential election. In an attempt to divide-and-rule the opposition, Nabyev had allowed various parties to register. Backed by state resources he ran on the ticket of the Socialist Party of Tajikistan (a direct continuation of the recently disbanded CP), ending with about 57 percent in the unfair but only real multiparty elections in the region. Bolstered by his victory, he stacked the government with his own networks from the southern Kulob and northern Khujand region, and bluntly started purging and arresting challengers.* Other regional patronal networks rallied against the injustices, mobilized protestors around regional and religious identities, and clashed violently.* After each camp armed their followers, Tajikistan plunged into civil war in May 1992 until June 1998. Nabyev was forced to resign at gunpoint when his convoy was ambushed in September 1992.

*Hiro 2009: 321–324

*Hale 2015: 129–130

In Kyrgyzstan, sudden ethnic clashes and regular street protests were topped up by a stalemate between former CP candidates in the first presidential election in 1990. Nudged by Gorbachev, Askar Akayev, a relative outsider, swept in from Moscow and won the vote. After cold-shouldering the hostile CP structures, Akayev started siding with the opposition and then built out his own party and patronal pyramid. By the mid-1990s he was dictating his own

Box 11.6 The Logic Behind Cults of Personality

*"Khalq, Vatan, Turkmenbashi"
 "One People, One Motherland,
 One Father of the Turkmen"*

- Universal slogan in Turkmenistan

To Western eyes, the excessive promulgation of a leader cult seems ridiculous and backward (although the practice spans all time periods and continents – save Antarctica and Australia – and previously unrecorded Aboriginal personality cults would not even seem that surprising). Still, labelling others' practice of leader veneration a cult is essentially orientalist. Leadership cults as a negative have thus always been something attributed to subalterns, even if the 'West' is not different. Therefore, focusing on a cult's eccentricity actually obscures their varying functional aspects.

For a cult's public, the narrative is meant to weave a natural connection to historical figures, great deeds and the dawn of a golden age, selflessly fought for and heralded by the charismatic ruler. In essence, ruler cults bridge the old and modern, and merge the public with private familiarity, respectively, by linking traditional symbols and sacred rituals and reinventing them for modern purposes, and by portraying otherwise alien, distant, elevated rulers as loving fathers with a mission to protect and care for the 'nation-family.' According to Xavier Márquez, the cult is both a performance of the charismatic power relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the shepherd and his flock, as the "concerted production of communicative artifacts" (from architecture, monumental statues, paintings to verbal praise) that highlight a leader's superhuman qualities and making such processes normative (Postoutenko and Stephanov 2021). Leader cults fare well in totalitarian regimes, because such systems demand active participation of the masses.

Through the lens of regime logic, such cults possess several important functions, and their astounding absurdity fails to undermine their effectiveness. They can be considered a coup-proofing tactic (cf. Milan Svolik): By narrating *ad nauseam* that only one person counts in a given regime, they deprive the masses and other elites from identifying alternative leaders, and batter in the message that resistance is futile. Everybody else has to fade into anonymity; e.g. news media in Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaïre (now Congo) never published the names of ministers, merely their positions. This self-legitimation process is equally important for those top regime supporters that seek to legitimate their own actions, hiding behind the image of the leader. Also is it an integrative function to halt centrifugal forces within the support movement (cf. Ian Kershaw).

Elaborate cults of personality may create problems for successors (like Hugo Chávez's cult in Venezuela that left shoes too big to fill for Nicolás Maduro after the former's death) if they fail to 'inherit' the

charisma of the founding father. After the first non-hereditary successions, Berdymukhamedov and Mirziyoyev both succeeded in building upon the cults of their predecessors by planting their own cults in their shade. A sharp break (as with de-Stalinization) could shatter the whole house of cards, but the process of 'stacking cults' is itself of course constrained or 'bounded', just like hereditary charisma. This is even more the case for hereditary successions, as with the Kim family in North Korea. New innovations can be added, but existing cornerstones of the cult must stay in place. This constrains improvisation and flexibility, and thus hampers autocratic modernization.

Sources:

Natasha M. Ezrow; Erica Frantz, *Dictators and Dictatorships: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes and their Leaders*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

Natalie Koch, "The 'Personality Cult' Problematic: Personalism and Mosques Memorializing the 'Father of the Nation' in Turkmenistan and the UAE," *Central Asian Affairs*, 3, no. 4, (2016): 330-359.

Kirill Postoutenko; Darin Stephanov (eds.), *Ruler Personality Cults from Empires to Nation-States and Beyond: Symbolic Patterns and Interactional Dynamics*, (New York: Routledge, 2021).

Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.)

Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch, 'Irreversible Regime Transitions: The Impact of Hereditary Succession and Personalist Rule in North Korea,' in: Krzysztof Kozłowski, Klaus Stüwe (eds.) *The Korean Peninsula Unification Trajectories: Insights from Poland and Germany*, (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2017), 47-83.

Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch, *Personalist Rule in Africa and Other World Regions*, (New York: Routledge, 2021).

constitution, clamping down on press freedom, and personally appointing regional administrators (*akims*) to counter the autonomy of local patronage networks. By 1996 his network dominated parliament and business: he had won a second presidential election (by arresting all real challengers), had increased his presidential authority *vis-à-vis* the legislature and was siphoning state revenues.*

*Hale 2015: 137-139

3.3 Resource Curses

Rahmon in war-torn Tajikistan proves that national resource wealth is not necessary to build out a patronal network. However, the influence of oil, gas and mineral wealth has been well documented and is particularly pronounced in personalist regimes. No such regime with significant oil wealth has experienced a democratic transition in the last fifty years.* High resource rents stabilize regimes, which “can use political corruption to buy support from key segments of society, effectively outspending other entrepreneurs of violence.”* Oil revenues can be used to erode existing linkages between the opposition and the international community, for instance by buying media networks.* When mismanaged, such rents can lead to the ‘Dutch disease,’ where continued investments in such a lucrative sector lead to a de-diversification of exports, increasing reliance on certain commodities, rendering these states vulnerable to global trade shocks.*

*Guliyev 2014: 4

*Fjelde 2009: 199

*Wright et al. 2015

*Auty 2009; Collier and Goderis 2007; Mehlum et al. 2006; Ross 2003; 2015

All regimes need rents to keep their patronal networks in power (hoarding) and selectively dole out and rotate patronage, impeding sub-patrons to build out their own, independent support bases. Export revenues from Kyrgyz gold mining or Tajik aluminium might pale compared to the windfalls of Kazakh oil or Turkmen gas, but even these industries are lifelines for the eternally cash-strapped regimes in Bishkek and Dushanbe. Lower rents do mean less gatekeeping possibilities, as shown in Part 3.5.

3.4 Multipartyism and Repression

Central Asian leaders use an array of tactics to keep the electoral playing field uneven, although not all of them were equally dependent on electoral victories to stay in power. Within dictatorships there is a sort of equilibrium: When regimes are boosted by resources or have powerful foreign protectors their repressive apparatuses often suffice to eradicate challenges to their rule, in the absence of exogenous shocks. When regimes cannot rely on these factors, they often allow (free) elections, and maintain multiparty legislatures. Dictators do not do this from the kindness of their heart, but to construct a democratic façade for Western donors, and – most importantly – to reduce the information costs of repression. Such institutions thus are aimed at channelling dissent and prolonging autocratic rule.

3.4.1 *Parties, Legislatures and Legal Opposition*

Only since the late 2000s, scholars started to investigate the nature and purpose of nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships. Jennifer Gandhi found that the presence of a formidable opposition compels dictators to make concessions, either by extending patronage or by making policy concessions. Parties and legislatures are thus instruments and forums for soliciting cooperation and negotiation.

Membership in the ruling party offers individuals willing to collaborate with the regime a vehicle for advancing their careers within a stable system of patronage.* Personalist dictators typically create parties to offset immediate threats to their power posed by former elites – and particularly the military. Doing so encourages peaceful mass mobilization and a realignment of elite networks.*

*Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2017: 20

The situation in Central Asia in the early 1990s was slightly different since all first presidents could outlaw their respective CP without repercussions from Moscow, and recycle its resources by rebranding them as new vehicles to garner fragmented patronal networks. Niyazov did so unchallenged and Karimov succeeded in this quite swiftly. Nazerbayev had to wait until the 2000s before being dominant enough to merge all pro-presidential parties into a new *Otan* ('fatherland') party,²⁰ sweeping the 2000 election and creating a *de facto* single-party, personalist regime between 2007 and 2012 with its successor *Nur Otan*.*

*Peyrouse 2012: 353

Policy concessions differ from rents in that they are best made through some institutional forum that lowers the transaction costs of exchanging them for political support. For dictators, legislatures are ideal because they allow for an environment of controlled bargaining. The dictator can select the groups to be granted access and exclude real challengers from registering their party.* Karimov used this tactic in the early 1990s, outlawing the party *Birlik* but not *Erk* when his own regime was not yet consolidated.

*Gandhi 2008: 78

Controlled multipartyism goes a step further, by expanding the number of options for potential rivals and enabling the opposition to choose the degree to which they wish to associate with the regime.* In Central Asia, multipartyism should never be taken at face value. It can be a flimsy façade like in Turkmenistan after Niyazov's death, or it can be evidence of real competition between regional networks, battling in the legislature like in Kyrgyzstan.* Adrien Fauve's chapter on political parties delves deeper into this topic.

*Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; 2007

*Marat 2012

²⁰ A repeat feat in 2006 when a rebranded *Nur Otan* ("Radiant Fatherland"), swallowed *Asar* ("All Together") the political power base of president's daughter Dariga Nazerbayeva. (Peyrouse 2012: 353)

3.4.2 Repression

If authoritarian leaders face a weak opposition or sit on mountains of wealth, they will not need to make concessions, can afford to repress them, and do not have much need for institutions like Niyazov and later Karimov. Niyazov outlawed all opposition parties as soon as they emerged, like *Agzybirlik* (Unity Party) or the 'Party for Democratic Development,' others like the *Türkmenistanyň Respublikan partiýasynyň* could only operate abroad.

The use of force is costly, requiring resources devoted to producing repressive legislation, to publicizing these laws, to policing their obedience, and to punishing offenders.* Scholars have found strong evidence that when dictators channel dissent through legislatures or opposition parties, they often decrease empowerment rights restrictions, like censorship, while increasing physical integrity rights violations, like torture and political imprisonment. By creating institutions, a dictator can draw potential opposition out of the general public and into state institutions, making it easier to identify opponents, monitor their activities, and gauge the extent of their popular support.*

*Gandhi 2008: 76

*Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014

This is well reflected in Kazakhstan's political landscape where journalists, dissidents and opposition parties are singled out for intimidation, extrajudicial arrest and sometimes murder. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have embarked on a different path and are known to wield random, indiscriminate violence on target groups. Without the need to gather intelligence or prove guilt, arbitrary arrests and forced confessions lower the costs of repression. Such repression is effective as long as it is not perceived as indiscriminate by the population, and they continue to self-police their communities.*

*Herreros 2006

In Turkmenistan: "Following an old Soviet tradition, dissidents (and homosexuals) are interned in psychiatric hospitals and drugged, since the constitution requires no legal order for it. Next, the extraction of confessions prior to imprisonment is achieved through beatings, needles embedded in fingernails, electric shocks, rape and boiling."*

*Rubio Terés 2017: 74

In Uzbekistan the number of political prisoners is estimated at around 10,000, and lethal torture continues to this day, including beatings with rubber truncheons and water-filled bottles, electric shock, hanging by wrists and ankles, rape and sexual humiliation, asphyxiation with plastic bags and gas masks, threats of physical harm to relatives, and denial of food or water.*

*Edel and Josua 2018: 888; HRW 2011

3.5 Gatekeeping and Regime Cooperation

Without a ruling coalition to keep dictators in check, consolidated personalist regimes are quite unrestrained in their decision-making.* Consequently, they aim to insulate themselves from foreign intermingling as well. This manipulation of international politics is called 'gatekeeping.'* There are several strategies for doing so. If states have sufficient geopolitical (strategic or economic) clout – like Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan and, to a lesser degree, Uzbekistan – regimes can resist pressure from other states or, alternatively, solicit their cooperation. For example, Kazakhstan's inherited nuclear arsenal in 1990 presented enormous strategic leverage to attract security and trade deals.

Rents from oil and gas are definitely in a different league than revenues from mineral mining. Only the former can reduce or annihilate Western (democratizing) pressure.* With no need for loans, debt-relief, direct foreign investment, or humanitarian aid, unwelcome foreign demands for good governance or democratization can be swept aside by autocrats. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are prime examples, and the development of their energy sectors and the diversification of export markets, have made these regimes impermeable to Western pressure.

Unfortunately, Russian and Chinese leverage is so disproportional that it cannot be simply blocked, so Central Asian regimes have learnt to balance their influence, by diversifying trading partners, pipelines, security alliances, etc. With the departure of US presence in the region, an assertive Russia now dominates the region politically and militarily, but China has the upper hand in trade. Turkey, the EU or other actors play minor roles. Another tactic is to erode or diversify linkages with surrounding states, to lower foreign influence. This is exceptionally difficult for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, since they share borders with Russia (social and economic linkages), or for small and weak states like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (low leverage).

When studying personalist regimes it is key to assess their ability and agency to manipulate the international arena to block undesired pressure or circumvent economic sanctions.* Often foreign policy decisions are motivated by domestic reasons, and a growing literature has emerged on this topic.*

These regimes' drive for averting foreign influence has also led to very low levels of cooperation and international institutionalization in the region as the first presidents have been suspiciously guarding their independence since 1991. After leader turnovers,

*Weeks 2008

*Tolstrup 2013; 2014

*Van den Bosch 2021

*Cooley, 2012; Tolstrup 2013; 2014

*Chiozza and Goemans 2011;
Fjelde 2010; Weeks 2011

and Russia's renewed engagement under Putin, external-driven integration has taken place with the Eurasian Economic Union. By 2012 Putin had started mediating disputes among regional leaders, and rapprochement with Uzbekistan under Mirziyoyev has given a new dynamic to autocratic cooperation in the region. This is real *autocratic cooperation*, extending patronage networks across border, providing external legitimation, and fostering mutual learning to stretch or abolish presidential mandates, finetune repression techniques and improve media control.

3.6 Regime Breakdown and Succession

3.6.1 Breakdowns: Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan

Aside from Nabyev, who just was not a skilled dictator and overplayed his hand when his regime was not consolidated, Kyrgyzstan is the only other country that has had regime turnovers with three 'revolutions' and even two peaceful power transfers before 2020. Attempts to see the Tulip Revolution (2005) through the eyes of the Colour Revolutions or the ouster of Bakiyev (2010) from the wider perspective of the Arab Spring,* have often resulted in classifying Kyrgyzstan as a deviant case.

Hale on the other hand, sees these regime-ousters as the push-back from competing regional patronal networks in combination with the disintegration of an incumbent's patronal pyramid, due to his low popularity. Autocrats can be considered 'lame ducks' when their last mandate is ending (if term limits apply), or if they are getting too old and incapable to decide who should be rewarded and punished. Mass popular protests or sudden economic downturns can have a similar centrifugal effect on sub-patrons.*

By 2000, Akayev was pushing frantically to extend his legal mandate, and his crackdown on the Aksy uprising in 2002, which killed five protestors, was a blow to his legitimacy. His prime minister, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, resigned in protest and later re-emerged at head of an opposition coalition, uniting southern networks. Many of the protestors that overran the government buildings were mobilized from the south. By that time, almost Akayev's whole inner circle had negotiated secret deals with the opposition to abandon their president.*

Bakiyev in turn was more embattled from the start, but actually managed adeptly to keep his opponents divided. Only in 2009, when he entered his second and final term, did he become a lame duck; a situation exacerbated by a deteriorating economy and frequent power blackouts.*

*Baev 2011;
Van Antwerp and Brown 2018

*Hale 2015: 84

*Hale 2015: 194-197

*Hale 2015: 230-231

The latest ousting (of Sooronbay Jeenbekov, in office: 2017-2020) has turned into a creeping coup by Sadyr N. Japarov, a former Bakiyev supporter, who had his hand in organizing the 2010 ethnic clashes in Osh. Japarov was sprung from jail during the October 2020 protests and aligned his patronage networks to win the January 2021 presidential elections.

As mentioned above, Kyrgyzstan's structural factors make regime consolidation difficult. Uneven Soviet development and Akayev's rise as a relative outsider resulted in fickle and shifting patronage patterns, divided along northern and southern lines. Consequent revolutions only contributed to this trend. Economic downturns and limited national resources render elite competition fierce, but make it difficult for cash-strapped rulers to herd sub-patrons under their wings, especially if many local elites benefit from more lucrative (criminal) businesses and are hard to monitor and punish.

3.6.2 *Non-Hereditary Successions*

If the lack of a designated successor can also contribute to a 'lame-duck syndrome,' appointing one too early is possibly even more dangerous. For personalist regimes sons are the preferred option,²¹ followed by brothers or cousins, since due to personal affinity they might not speed up the process and abide their time.* By coincidence, few Central Asian dictators have eligible sons to take over the reins of power, and thus the region is an interesting laboratory to study non-hereditary succession.

*Brownlee 2007

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov's unexpected takeover after Niyazov's death in 2006, or Shavkat Mirziyoyev's succession after Karimov's lethal stroke in 2016 were opaque power struggles behind closed doors. Both regimes are personalist-single party hybrids (see also Box 11.5), where founding presidents co-opted pre-existing party institutions, which might have contributed to more collegial agreements to appoint a successor within ruling coalitions. Nonetheless, power turnovers were accompanied by purges as a successor's new intra-network hierarchy had to be consolidated, and both regimes re-personalized swiftly. Noteworthy is that both successions also opened windows for autocratic modernization and shifts in foreign policy. Turkmen-

²¹ There has not been a single case yet in which a dictator's daughter (or wife) has taken over in a personalist regime. In more collegial autocracies (non-personalist regimes), this has been possible. Nonetheless, as both Nazarbayev and Karimov's daughters have shown, they can play very influential roles within such regimes, even if their political fate is tied to that of their father. (Ambrosio 2015)

istan allowed a multiparty system to redistribute patronage within a legislature and (initially) reduced the cult of personality.* Also, Ashgabat rose somewhat out of its isolation and weaved closer ties with Moscow. Under Mirziyoyev, political prisoners have been released and there has been rapprochement with Moscow as well.*

*Polèse et al. 2017

In **Kazakhstan**, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was appointed by Nazarbayev a year before the latter turned eighty, and endorsed by a fraudulent, blitz election in June 2019. Appointing a (temporary?) successor in time was a tactical move to avoid the lame-duck syndrome and stabilize the country's enormous patronal network. As predicted by some, this change will not affect the basic constellation of power or patronage, but allow for subtle shifts of sub-patrons in a controlled environment.* The success of this non-hereditary succession can only be fully evaluated after Nazarbayev's demise, either by natural causes or if he loses control.

*Freedomhouse UZ 2019; Sattarov 2017

But in **Kyrgyzstan** an appointed successor went rogue. After the fall of Bakiyev, and the 2010 violence in Osh and Jalalabad, an interim government headed by Roza Otunbayeva was set up to secure a democratic transition. Her government resigned in 2011 as planned, and Almazbek Atambayev assumed office after free elections, albeit under a modified political system. After a rather eventful presidency, Atambayev did succeed in getting his groomed successor, Sooronbay Jeenbekov elected in 2017. But soon after, the protégé turned on his former mentor targeting him personally and attacking his network with corruption investigations.* It remains unclear if such clashing network turnovers could have actually de-personalized the regime over time. The absence of a resource curse slows personalization consolidation processes, but increased Russian sponsorship of Kyrgyz presidents might embolden them to overhaul the legal limitations to absolute power. In any case, after the Brutus-like betrayal, Jeenbekov (then still in his first term) was in the process of consolidating his position, when the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. a 60 percent drop in remittances), rising grievances over poor infrastructure and corruption, as well as an unfair parliamentary election, led to a sudden surge of protests in October 2020, after which southern patronal networks realigned, propelling Sadyr Japarov into power, abetted by criminal elements.*

*Mesquita 2016

*Putz 2018; BBC 2018

*Wani 2020

3.7 Legitimacy and Legitimation

In Weberian terms, we witness a sharp decrease of legitimacy in all the new Central Asian states. The personal charisma of the founding presidents waned when promises were not kept and repres-

sion increased, especially during economic downturns. Regimes (temporarily) unable to rely on overt and indiscriminate repression, started tapping into support from legal-rational rulership by orchestrating elections. However, once power consolidated and term limits were abolished, few sources of *legitimacy* remained. Nazarbayev and various Kyrgyz presidents actively tried to solicit external legitimacy, related to international status (associated with membership in international organizations, hosting summits or sporting events, etc.). Only Kazakhstan could rely somewhat on state performance and improving living standards. Many attempted to build out cults of personality (see also Box 11.6) Turkmenistan's weird collection of Guinness world records (e.g. largest Ferris wheel) might be linked with the latter.*

*Malvern 2019

Breaking with the past, the Soviet period had irreparably damaged old sources of traditional (royal or tribal) legitimacy, and uncertain first presidents were wary of co-opting powerful religious belief systems, which might easily slip from their control. As 'atheist' Soviet bureaucrats they could hardly claim devout charisma, but nonetheless adopted and adapted sacred rituals and symbols for their own purposes. All leaders tried to frame their new 'nations' by linking them with historical proto-national identity groups, turning mythical or historical figures into national heroes.

So far, legitimacy has been purely treated as 'the belief that a system is just, proper or legitimate,' mostly in a general, historical context. Sofya du Boulay and Rico Isaacs rightly point out that such an approach lacks the methods to measure this phenomenon empirically, and therefore they propose to focus on *legitimation*, or the active social processes in which regimes create the conditions for the ruled to grant them with legitimacy. In the closed and opaque world of autocracy, the process of self-legitimation can serve as a sub-optimal proxy to study legitimation.* Various strategies can be identified:

*Beetham 1991;
Isaacs and Frigerio 2019

- Charismatic self-legitimation: cults of personality in Kazakhstan and especially Turkmenistan²²
- Traditional self-legitimation: leadership is presented as sanctioned by historical precedent and patterns of the normative traditional order (supported by patronage)
- Legal-rational self-legitimation: based on state-performance and external legitimation*

*Isaacs and Frigerio 2019: 17-41

²² See also Adrien Fauve on the 'sacralization of power.' (Isaacs and Frigerio 2019: 167-188) Others have considered these personality cults to be coup-proofing techniques, or tactics of intimidation. (Svolik 2012, see also: Box 11.6)

Such narratives are constantly constructed and altered in the region, but they are pervasive. Recent scholarship has found evidence of a strong coherent alignment between elite patronalism and the political views of ordinary citizens, regardless of their political regime type.* Citizens understand how patronalism works and know how to function within its system.²³

*Junisbai and Junisbai 2019

Central Asia's unique history has given a particular *couleur locale* to these regimes' self-legitimation strategies, but their current methods of rulership are neither exotic nor exceptional. Personalist rule has been steadily on the rise globally, and may soon take over electoral autocracies as the most common regime type. The longevity of regimes in Central Asia, and in the wider Eurasian region has been remarkable, but not uncommon for such regimes with strong external support, like: North Korea (Kim family, 1950-), Paraguay (Alfredo Stroessner, 1954-1993), Equatorial Guinea (Obiang Nguema, 1980-), or Indonesia (Suharto, 1966-1999).

4. Conclusion

This chapter presented various old and new frameworks that have been used by scholars as theoretical reference frames to study political regimes in Central Asia. By applying three specific lenses (rulership, personalist rule, and patronalism) to the region's historical development as well as its contemporary state-of-affairs, this author aims to stress that Central Asia's political evolution shares many parallels with other regions in the world, but does have its own unique trajectory, tracing back to Turko-Mongol rule and before, which sets it apart from other post-Soviet polities in Eurasia.

The scope of this chapter does not permit an in-depth, dense description of all contemporary Central Asian regimes, and some topics like coup-proofing and the composition of security forces, a deeper comparison of their methods of repression, an overview of their international links to the global financial system, were glossed over. The further reading list will hopefully amend these wrongs.

The common threads throughout these sections endeavour to explain the dilemmas of state building, legitimacy and good governance through a diachronic narrative of low institutionalization, which preserved informal, patronal networks and provided them with a new shell during the Soviet era. The unique decolonization trajectory from the 'Soviet Empire' allowed most established net-

²³ Legitimation narratives can also be identified for leaders' individual policies. For instance, many repressive policies are framed under the slogan of anti-terrorist policies. (Edel and Josua 2018)

works to overhaul their subservient position to the former metropole and construct national patronal systems under personalist rule, overcoming protests by its populations. Some leaders were not up to the task (Nabiyev); others succeeded in building their networks from scratch (Akayev).

The variations in geography, uneven development, resources, state capacity, etc. have launched Central Asian states on very diverse paths, with none currently seeming to head toward democracy. The lens of patronal politics highlights shared organizational structures that betray a common historical legacy, even today. Political regime theories then offer various analytical frameworks to study these states' behaviour in the international arena, regional institutionalization dynamics or autocratic cooperation; as well as their domestic behaviour (co-optation and repression), legitimization efforts and succession challenges.

This author hopes that this chapter may serve as a useful theoretical toolkit, and as a stepping stone for readers to move beyond this general synopsis of regime dynamics and to delve deeper into the study of Central Asian authoritarianism.

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6. Recommended Literature

For global approaches that theorize the workings of dictatorships the author recommends the books and articles by Barbara Geddes Erica Frantz, Natasha Ezrow, and Joseph Wright (and their colleagues). Readers looking for a comprehensive introduction to dictatorship research can consult Natasha M. Ezrow and Erica Frantz (2011). For an updated summary of this subfield of comparative politics (mostly findings from large-N data), see Geddes et al. (2018). As a stepping stone to study the role of institutions (elections, parties), start with J. Gandhi (2008), which also presents some excellent case studies. Likewise M. Svolik and J. Weeks are worth a read.

Specifically on Central Asia, I recommend the advanced theoretical work by R. Isaacs and A. Frigerio (2019), and the slightly older 2012 edition of *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* (20, no. 1), edited by Marlène Laruelle, containing valuable cases by (among others) O. Fisun, M. Laruelle, E. Marat, and S. Peyrouse, all using the lens of neo-patrimonialism. For the general use and application of neo-patrimonialism in different world regions, consult Daniel C. Bach. For Central Asian civil-military relations, see E. Marat (2010), and for its authoritarian media landscapes – E. Freedman (2011). For the ever-elusive Turkmenistani regime, see S. Horák and also his co-authored works (with A. Polese and others).

For personalism, this author's own work, *Personalist Rule in Africa and Other World Regions* (Van den Bosch 2021) is currently the only updated monograph devoted to this topic, and it incorporates all earlier valuable insights on personalism by e.g. Gandhi et al., Guliyev, Frantz and Kendall-Taylor.

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Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch (PhD) studied Area Studies (Slavonic Studies) and Political Science (International Relations) at the Catholic University in Leuven (Belgium) before obtaining his PhD at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (AMU) on the topic of personalist rule in Sub-Saharan Africa, recently revised and turned into a book (Routledge, 2021). He continues to study authoritarian ecosystems as an independent scholar and works at AMU as a project coordinator, often doubling as editor. His research fields encompass theories of dictatorships, the classification of political regimes, autocratic cooperation, democratization, linking domestic elites with foreign policy and IR. With a background in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, he is currently branching out to make new comparisons with other world regions.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**TOPIC 1**

Why has democracy-promotion in Central Asia been unsuccessful so far? What needs to change before this becomes possible?

TOPIC 2

How 'Central Asian' (culturally distinct) are the dictatorships of the five post-Soviet states? How does their 'image' change when they are compared to other non-former Soviet states like Afghanistan or Pakistan, or to the Middle East?

TOPIC 3

From the point of view of regime stability (autocratic survival), which Central Asian regime is most likely to collapse in the near future? Which ones are most inclined to autocratic modernization (i.e. implementing socio-economic reforms in order to stay in power longer), and why?

TOPIC 4

Which Central Asian regime is most likely to de-personalize in the near future?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**ACTIVITY 1**

What is democracy? This activity is aimed at activating and realigning previous knowledge about democracy and autocracy. To avoid misunderstanding with the learning materials and among students, the teacher can do a collective brainstorm in preparation for approaching this chapter. Starting with a clean white/black board, the teacher asks students to come up with the defining elements of democracy, autocracy and/or a political regime. The teacher writes different answers on the board. Then, (s)he systematizes this knowledge in front of the students (grouping elements, redefining, etc.) and uses this session to explain the difference between a minimalist and maximalist interpretation of democracy. (For the definition of a political regime, rely on the version by S. Skaaning used in this chapter.) Benchmarking students' knowledge of definitions will help them to be able to discuss such topics (among themselves) and will make them more sensitive to the intricacies of regime classifications.

ACTIVITY 2

This activity takes place after students have read and understood the chapter. It aims to illustrate that political regimes in pre-modern and contemporary times can be studied using one overarching theoretical framework. It begins with a teacher's introduction and is followed by group work. The teacher's presentation serves to illustrate the influence of pre-modern Central Asian/Eurasian ruling systems in adjacent world regions. After explaining (or directing students towards) the literature on selectorate theory (B. Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), the teacher divides students into groups and asks each of them to look up information on one of the pre-modern Central Eurasian polities (Scythians, Xiongnu, Uyghurs, other Turkic empires, Khazars, etc.) and other Indo-European / Indo-Iranian polities (Celts, Kushan, Gupta, Persians, Rus', Vikings). Each group should formulate answers to the questions below, and later share them in class. In a classroom setting, the teacher organizes each polity in time and moderates a discussion on the following issue: to what degree ruling systems (could) have been exported from Central Asia (through Indo-European migrations). Teachers can consult the first chapter in: Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) for additional context.

Questions for each polity (group):

- Who were the paramount powerholders in this polity? (Defining characteristics)
- Where did their power come from?
- What were their governing institutions?
- Who assisted them in ruling? Did rulers have professional staff? (Defining characteristics)
- How did they choose successors?
- What were the positions and roles of women in government?

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jvgh9ecqL8c&t=11s&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to:

- CASE STUDY NO. 3 by Oguljamal Yazliyeva

559 Виды Туркестана.

Караванъ верблюдовъ съ хлопкомъ.

Camel caravan with cotton.

№ 650. Виды Ташкента. Женская гимназія.

Female gymnasium.

CHAPTER 12

Civil Society Development in Post-Soviet Central Asia

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Keywords:

- Civil Society • State-Society Relations • NGOs • Traditional Institutions
- Media • Women • Youth • Vulnerable Groups • Journalism

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Explain the nature of civil society and its main actors in Central Asia.
- Describe the challenges faced by civil society in the region.
- Understand the links between civil society and democracy promotion.
- Present both the traditional and Soviet legacy in contemporary civil society in Central Asia.
- Explain the context for the challenges faced by women and other vulnerable groups in their bid for active participation in civil society.
- Differentiate among Central Asian countries regarding their state-society-media relations.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- How would you define civil society?
- What is the link between civil society and democracy?
- What political climate is necessary for a civil society to develop?
- What are the most important actors of civil society in your own country/region?

Main questions

- What are the main challenges faced by Central Asian civil society actors?
- What is the Soviet legacy in civil society in Central Asia?
- What is the role of traditional institutions in the region?
- To what extent is civil society independent or suppressed in Central Asia? Where do you see its resilience?
- What are the main challenges faced by women in Central Asian civil society?
- How is the traditional perception of women linked to their position in Central Asian civil society?
- How are state-society relations manifested in the position of media in different Central Asian countries?

Post-reading questions

- What is the role of active civil society for sustainable development goals and human rights promotion? How does a normative outlook on the prescribed role for civil society influence our analysis and expectations for civil society in Central Asia?
- Why does active civil society matter for stability and development in Central Asia?
- How can international institutions (UN, EU, OSCE) contribute to civil society development in the region?
- What is the role of regional institutions (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Economic Union) for Central Asian civil society?

Civil Society Development in Post-Soviet Central Asia

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IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES, civil society is considered an integral part of sustainable development. It is directly linked to the implementation of rule of law, and the promotion of human rights and democracy. In UN strategies on enforcing charters and policy goals like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which act as an umbrella framework to promote prosperity while protecting the planet and promoting human rights, civil society is seen as an intrinsic part to realize these internationally agreed common goals. In a speech, the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated:

*“Civil society is the oxygen of democracy as it acts as a catalyst for social progress and economic growth. It plays a critical role in keeping Government accountable, and helps represent the diverse interests of the population, including its most vulnerable groups.”**

*UNIC 23 September 2015

Today, international organizations acknowledge that when developing strategic documents and action plans without active participation of civil society actors, it is impossible to bring change to societies or effectively address contemporary challenges. At the same time, civil society across the globe is very diverse and its actors vary per region as well as regarding to their participatory roles, state-civil society relations or composition. Thus, while studying civil society of Central Asia, this chapter focuses on the nature of civil society, covering the main actors and their relations with state entities. Central Asia presents a unique case for civil society studies because its active community-based institutions overlap with a state-centric setting, resulting in a passive but salient and resilient civil society.

Earlier research on Central Asian civil society has given great attention to *informal institutions*¹ such as *mahalla*, clan or

¹ Central Asian society accommodates traditional and informal institutions such as the district-level *mahalla* in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan; clan or extended family networks like *Uruu* (урүү) with a *Jamoat* (elder council) in Kyrgyzstan, *Ata* (ама), *Ru* (ру), *Taypa* (тайпа) affiliations in

tribal networks, which are very influential for socio-political life in rural areas. Their role is crucial in social mobilization and political participation processes: especially during election processes such informal networks are actively employed by political parties, in particular by the ruling parties.

At the same time local experts view these informal institutions as major obstacles for democratic governance. According to Asyl Bolponova, post-Soviet political and family clans created wide and ramified patronage networks: they encouraged protectionism, nepotism, and corruption at the top of these power pyramids.* Furthermore, when one analyses the community-based institutions of Central Asia, one finds that they are heavily dominated by male leadership that complements existing patriarchal structures. For instance, in mahalla structures, a predominantly male council administers this community and represents its interests. As a result, women routinely are related to tasks encompassing a duty of care in line with mahalla-ideology, which considers itself like a large family with a gender division of labour.*

*Bolponova 2015: 61

*Corcoran-Nantes 2013: 43

In this context, the values promoted by community-based institutions and traditionalist women do not match those by newer institutions fostered by NGOs. Therefore, international NGOs have become more critical to informal institutions in Central Asia. So, while investigating both forms of institutions in the region it is necessary to study their different structure and function, their divergent roles in social mobilization, civic engagement, and political participation processes. It is also relevant to compare their strengths and weaknesses, and assess their complementary roles in larger civil society and state-society relations, as well as their current challenges.

Earlier research on civil society development in post-soviet Central Asia also draws attention to the different regulatory and suppressive policies of Soviet-educated rulers. Central Asian governmental institutions do not allow the independent development of NGOs, media and civil society actors and returned to a Soviet-era approach, which strict control over non-state actors. Although the number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Central Asia increases year by year, their activities are still strictly regulated by governments, who control such actors with repressive legislation and sometimes overt intimidation and violence.

Kazakhstan, and *Avlod* lineage in Tajikistan; but also larger tribal identities exist in Turkmenistan or like the *Zhuz* (жүз) in Kazakhstan. These institutions are an integral part of Central Asian civil society and can be traced to pre-modern times – see also Box. 9.1.

Regardless of their important role in civil society development, NGOs continue to face strong opposition from governmental institutions. At the same time, public attitudes towards NGO activities in these countries are not favourable. This chapter covers these major challenges faced by NGOs as well as their interrelation with other non-state actors.

1. Understanding Civil Society

1.1 What is Civil Society?

From a theoretical perspective, civil society is very difficult to define due to its various interpretations. In most developing countries, ordinary people still do not distinguish civil society from state institutions or in some countries it is likened solely to NGOs, excluding traditional and informal community-based institutions from conceptual frameworks. However, while defining *Civil Society Organizations* (CSOs), UNDP emphasized “NGOs should be properly understood as a subset of CSOs involved in development cooperation, albeit often one with no clear boundaries.”* In this respect, it would be wrong to associate civil society only with NGOs and human rights organizations. Civil society actors can be any civic group that enables citizens to mobilize and claim their rights and to request government accountability. Therefore, UNDP definitions “include all non-market and non-state organizations outside of the family in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain.”*

*UNDP 2008: 123

*UNDP 2008: 123

Depending on various cultural and traditional worldviews, different definitions persist and this complex phenomenon can be researched from different angles (religious, cultural, economic, political, etc.) and overlaps with other societal spheres including liberalism, democracy, rule of law, media and NGO activities, etc. From a Social Sciences perspective, contemporary civil society is a separate entity from the state and it is composed of independent associations and non-state actors, which act as intermediates for civic dialogue between state and citizens. Another key defining feature is its function, and the primary role of a CSO is to represent the voice of citizens and to remain independent from state entities.

To understand the nature of civil society in the concerned region, it is relevant to investigate what constitute its (main) CSOs? What are their individual roles for political and civic participation processes? How do these roles interact or conflict with one

another? Are they really independent from the state to represent the citizens' voice? And what is the role of media in civil society?

1.2 State and Civil Society Relations

The contemporary understanding of civil society attempts to distinguish this sector from state entities, and to show their interrelation and interplay, to specify its role in political participation and to characterize institutional forms in civil society. Their conceptual separation does not mean state and civil society do not depend on each other. On the contrary, a democratic society requires active dialogue between these two entities. "Neither (...) is seen as acting in isolation. Rather, the state derives its legitimacy through its interaction with citizens and an organized and active civil society."* Civil society should not just exist separately, but should be independent and still able to initiate change and influence state policy. A strong civil society guards such independence and interacts with different state actors as well as with media, playing a powerful role in influencing policies and holding a government accountable. It plays an intermediary role for democratic relations between state and ordinary citizens.

*GSDRC 2016: 3

The next important point on state-civil society relations derives from the concept of citizenship. As scholars have argued: "Gaining citizenship is not only a legal process of being defined as a bearer of rights, but involves the development of citizens as individuals with agency, capable of claiming their rights and acting for themselves."* State and civil society relations require active participation from both sides. It is not just about the state's response to citizens' needs, but also about citizens' civic responsibility and voice in these participation processes. For example, corruption is a problem that needs to be addressed from both sides, and transparency and accountability also depend on active citizens with a clear vision demanding change.

*Benequista 2010: 7

Also civic dialogue is an essential element; and media play a key role in enabling dialogue with state entities. In democratic countries media raise awareness about the main social problems and can bring up major issues for public debate, whereas in authoritarian countries media are often controlled by governments and obstruct the functioning of civil society. For instance, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic "journalists across Central Asia faced severe challenges reporting on the coronavirus crisis, and struggled with a lack of government cooperation, lockdowns, and pressure on resources."* For this reason, while analysing civil soci-

*Sultan 2020

ety development in Central Asia, it is equally relevant to describe the role and status of media; although the scope of this chapter does not allow for a very detailed analysis.

1.3 The Role of Civil Society in Democracy Promotion

According to Kristi Raik's view "the process of democratization includes the creation of civic organizations that are able to perform civic activities, and the development of relations between the state and society so as to allow the latter to contribute to the functioning of democracy."^{*} By this point, democracy as well as civil society are interdependent concepts. When civil society is active and vibrant it can ensure citizen participation.

^{*}Raik 2006: 4

While coining the definition of civil society, J. Cohen and A. Arato drew attention to Alexis de Tocqueville's interpretation, who states that "without active participation on the part of citizens in egalitarian institutions and civil associations, as well as in politically relevant organizations, there will be no way to maintain the democratic character of the political culture or of social and political institutions." The point here is that democracy and civil society are not just interchangeable terms; the success of civil society development tightly depends on democratic governance. When civil society accommodates actively engaged non-state actors, it contributes to holding government accountable and ensuring transparency; and thus helps citizens to better understand their role in civic engagement and political participation processes.

^{*}Cohen and Arato 1994: 19

Evidence from social movements in Eastern Europe and Latin America shows that civil society has an important role in democracy development, especially in countries where societies are vulnerable to authoritarianism. When one analyses Alexis de Tocqueville, Émile Durkheim and Gramsci's definitions, an active civil society guards against the dangers of state despotism and populism. While speaking about the importance of civil society, Katarzyna Batko-Taluc, program director of the Citizens Network Watchdog in Poland, stated that: "active citizenship is the medicine against populism."^{*} Civil society participation is a key indicator of democratic governance. The role of CSOs appears pivotal in standing against dictatorship and raising public concern about abuse of power.

^{*}Batko-Taluc 2017: 1

In Central Asia, the Soviet past and short post-independence history has affected civil society development, particularly in the NGO sector, where all Central Asian states apply regulatory and suppressive measures of control. If Kazakhstan, through state

financing of the third sector, managed to revive the Soviet-era approach to NGO development, countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have gone down another path by suppressing civil society the extent that international and local NGO activities in human rights sector are practically disabled. In the words of a *Freedom House* report, “Central Asia remains the least democratic part of the region (...) and frankly contains some of the least democratic countries in the world.”*

*Putz 2018: 1

In this chapter on Central Asian civil society, it is also essential to study the nature and role of non-state actors, assess their capacity for civic engagement, and delve a bit deeper into their Soviet past to frame contemporary state-civil society relations and participation processes correctly.

1.4 The Role of Civil Society in Political Mobilization

To understand the role of civil society in political mobilization it is necessary to analyse how it is connected with a political system and how civil society can be instrumental in building trust and increasing citizen participation in the political and economic life of the state. Political mobilization cannot be achieved without the support of citizens, which thus shows the important role of civil society actors. In democratic societies NGOs, pressure groups and think tanks have a powerful role in developing evidenced-based policies and counteracting state policies that do not respond to citizens’ needs, but they are also able to rally public opinion into a common viewpoint and mobilize followers accordingly that advocate for citizens’ issues and concerns. Through engaging the population at large, CSOs shape a government’s response to contemporary people-centred challenges connected with health, education, migration, urbanization, environment, inequality and other issues.

With technological advancement, the role of media and civil society has increased in leveraging the voice of citizens and advocating for citizens’ interest. Social media has provided new opportunities to develop virtual tactical tools through organizing online campaigns and petition drives. Scholars have found that “social media platforms such as Facebook can create a populist identity and a sense of solidarity, which allows people to develop a common sense of indignation, anger, and frustration as well as a perception of shared victimhood.”* If one analyses the “Arab Spring” protests or the latest contention in Taiwan or Hong Kong one can observe the powerful role of social media to unite the voices of a large population. In this respect media’s role is a two-way-cutting knife,

*Tamarelli McKeon and
Gitomer 2019: 1

where on the one hand it is seen by state entities as an effective tool to influence public opinion. On the other hand, if civil society accommodates independent media it is considered as a threat to government policy.

In countries where governments issue state propaganda, media is used as the main instrument to get support of citizens and to disseminate key messages on state ideology. For instance, for the past decade the Kremlin-sponsored media have developed TV programmes and talk shows which are an interesting mix of propaganda and analysis, and designed to craft a narrative whereby the West/United States is always out to weaken Russia.* State sponsorship for media and civil society institutions negatively influence civil society development and democracy promotion. In Russia, "Nationwide television stations are all rigidly controlled by the Kremlin. Both electronic and print media in Russia are also largely controlled by the government which affects editorial policies." In post-Soviet countries, independent media is seen as a main threat to state policy. Therefore it is necessary to take a look at the region's authoritarian legacy.

*Blank 2019: 255

*HRW 2017

2. Civil Society Organizations in Central Asia

2.1 Authoritarian and Totalitarian Legacies in Civil Society

According to its definition, totalitarianism is a form of government in which state power is unlimited and controls virtually all aspects of public and private life. This control extends to all political and financial matters as well as the attitudes, morals, and beliefs of the people, of which active participation is demanded.* As for authoritarianism, this model is presented as less aggressive in its attempt to homogenize society. In contrast to totalitarian regimes, authoritarian regimes discourage citizens from actively participating in politics. Instead, they encourage them to retreat into their private lives, to concentrate on work and family, and to leave politics to those who rule.*

*Longley 2020: 1

*Bernhard and Karakoç 2007: 246

While analysing totalitarian and authoritarian legacies in civil society, a certain number of scholars emphasize that late communist societies were rather authoritarian and no longer (or not yet) totalitarian types of dictatorship, justified by their lack of mass political repression, citizens' indifference to the total ideological control or the late nomenclature's scepticism and cynicism.* What was characteristic for communist regimes is that they established

*Vladimirov 1997: 5

one-party systems by destroying the autonomy of other political actors.

Furthermore, most social scientists associate totalitarianism with Soviet Communist regimes due to their lack of common heritage with Western values whereas Central European countries (regardless of the domination of Communist party ideology) had common shared values with the West. Therefore, while comparing democratization processes, Diana Januaskiene has argued that former Soviet countries often did not have the initial factors that could foster democracy, whereas Central European countries enjoyed much more favourable initial conditions and some had a certain degree of democratic experience before the Second World War.*

*Januaskiene 2008: 136

2.1.1 Soviet Legacy on Grassroots Organizations

The civil society of the USSR is characterized as a passive and suppressed society, where all forms of non-state actors were regulated by a Communist Party. Regarding Soviet policy towards non-state actors, Richard Remias has highlighted that – prior to independence – non-governmental organizations in the former Soviet Union (FSU) were regulated by the All-Union Law on Public Associations. This Soviet legislation governed the registration and regulation of political parties, trade unions, and all non-governmental membership organizations.* All-Union law had a strict regulatory policy towards non-state entities. Civil society in the USSR was remodelled through a communist ideological lens, which aimed at distributing ideological messages of the Central Committee through regulation of media and film industry. These industries were seen as the main instruments for constructing and building a new common Soviet identity.

*Remias 2000

Sovietologists have also studied the youth organizations named the *Pioneers* and *Komsomol* (*Комсомол – Коммунистический Союз Молодёжи*) at primary and secondary school level, which functioned throughout the whole Soviet Union. These youth organizations, funded and guided by communist ideology, played a significant role in the education and training of Soviet youth. According to George Avis, “Pioneer clubs and houses offered a broader spectrum of educational and recreational opportunities to supplement the school program.”* These institutions contributed to building a common identity of Soviet citizens from a young age, but were only nominally independent. Since the fall of the USSR, youth has been addressed very carefully in Central Asian countries. While Uzbekistan replaced Soviet youth organizations

*Avis 1987: 149

with the so-called *Kamelot Youth Organization*², Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have been regulating youth through youth committees.

Exceptionally, Central Asian civil society during the Soviet period did encompass informal institutions like *mahalla* structures, clan and tribal networks, which were older and native to the region. Throughout history the nomadic, as well as sedentary peoples of Central Asia organized their politics according to the tribal rules and traditions. The most important units have always been the tribe, clan and the family.* Under Soviet rule those informal systems were initially seen as the main obstacle to the communist ideological project. However, mahalla and clan systems in Central Asia retained their influence during the Soviet period at local and regional levels. Over time Soviet rule either saw mahalla as impossible to eradicate without risking revolt, or they saw them as complementary to Soviet ideological goals.*

*Khegai 2004: 8

*Sievers 2002: 113; 2003

It is argued that the Soviet anti-clan policy, aimed at eliminating clan and tribal networks, did not weaken clan structures and other informal unions. On the contrary, according to Khegai's findings, clans survived and even became stronger. During the 1960s-1970s with Brezhnev's 'stability of cadre' policy, the clan system was completely rehabilitated, even though not officially.*

*Khegai 2004: 9

Both clan and mahalla systems had considerable influence on Central Asian people's lives. These informal institutions were very effective in mobilizing people for community and social events. Particularly, mahalla structures in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could easily be adapted to the Soviet system during the collectivization process.

In this context, all non-state actors, including informal institutions, in Soviet Central Asia were either regulated by central committees or in some other way adapted to the Soviet system, which resulted in a state-centric and passive civil society over time.

2.2 Informal Institutions in Central Asia

The study of civil society in Central Asia requires addressing informal and traditional institutions, which have strong influences on the social and political behaviour of Central Asian people. Among these one can list traditional forms of institutions such as the *mahalla* structure, tribal affiliations, clan networks (Kyrgyz: *Uruu*, Kazakh: *Ru* and Tajik: *Avlod*), and elderly councils (*Jamoat*). In

² *Kamolot* has been functioning since 2001 as a public association to unite the youth of Uzbekistan. A state-funded project, *Kamolot* implements the same functions as the Soviet Pioneers and Komsomol, also organizing youth congresses, which are hosted by government.

contrast to NGOs and media, traditional institutions of Central Asia have a long history and they are very influential in rural areas.

*Cieřlewska 2010: 258

Regarding mahalla and other informal institutions in Central Asia, Anna Cieřlewska argues that those institutions have always played a significant role in maintaining social order and frequently they are more legitimized in the eyes of local residents than formally established organizations of self-government.* Since independence, non-formal institutions could not only adapt to post-Soviet regimes in the region but also gained the trust of citizens in preserving cultural values. Therefore, when analysing political participation processes, one can see how those traditional institutions are still seen as an integral part of society and that state entities rely on them to achieve stability and development. In this respect, they cannot be omitted while mapping CSOs of Central Asia.

Typically for both urban and rural informal networks in Central Asia, their mahalla community members are dependent on these clan-based structures from social and economic perspectives. Communal repairs, the organization of traditional weddings, funerals and national as well as traditional holidays are conducted collectively, which consequently increases affiliation of clan members to their respective kinship group. At the same time, such traditional institutions lock in patriarchal views where the place and roles of women are restricted.

2.2.1 Mahalla

Among traditional institutions, *mahalla* is the most popularly studied one by Western scholars. Mahalla as social institution has long history in Central Asia. With origins of mahalla tracing back to an ancient religious institution, where a Mullah serves as one of the key figures in this social structure dating back centuries. The etymological meaning of the word *mahalleh* comes from Persian, meaning 'town,' and most Islamic societies used the term to denote city districts and villages as well. This institution developed from the sedentary part of Central Asia, where in great cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Andijan, Ferghana and Khujand more complex organizational structures emerged.

Mahalla as a social institution was vital for coordinating activities such as *ashar*³ (which mobilized members for voluntary work

³ Ашар - *ashar* (in Kyrgyz and Kazakh) or *hashar* (in Tajik and Uzbek) means collective work on voluntary basis. It has a long history in Central Asian culture. All community members implement *ashar* in Spring, or help to build houses for community members. During the Soviet period this activity was co-opted by *kolkhozes* (collective farms) for construction and agricultural work.

like building mosques, calling meetings in a *chaikhana* (teahouse)⁴ or coordinating construction works for members). *Ashar* is also an important charity function that goes beyond volunteering activities and helps community members to address social issues at local level. *Ashar* increases community members' participation and strengthens unity in the mahalla structure.

Nowadays, most people perceive mahalla as a small village. Local experts connected this view with the Soviet past, where functions of traditional institutions were co-opted to build *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (collective and state-owned farms). During Soviet rule the government retained mahalla as self-governing residential associations. The mahalla elder (*aksakal*) became a symbolically elected chairperson, whose appointment was controlled by the local party apparatus.* Furthermore, because mosques were run within the mahalla structure, various social practices ensued that were linked to Islam. Traditional forms of obligatory philanthropy existed (like *zakat* – alms giving), which included charitable giving to the community, and provision of food to poorer families at community celebrations.*

*Sievers 2002: 113

*Giffen et al. 2005: 60

However, this connection with religious institutions has other consequences. For instance, women-focused NGOs and human rights advocates argue that having a mosque in the mahalla leads to exclusion and inequality. The role and status of women in mahalla is reduced and justified on religious grounds, while decision-making bodies (like mahalla committees) are attended solely by men. Therefore mahalla – like other traditional forms of institutions – are criticized by NGOs who advocate gender equality.

2.2.2 *Chaikhana*

In mahalla structures the *chaikhana* (teahouse) is considered an essential part of the public sphere. Its role was crucial when religion and traditional institutions were suppressed during Soviet rule. Such teahouses echo Habermas' observations of public institutions, which he compares to the 18th century coffee houses and

⁴ The word '*chaikhana*' (*чайкана, чайхона*) comes from two constituent words – "chai" (tea), and the word "hona" ('*kana*' – room). Tea drinking to meet with community members was a part of the debating culture in the region. Some local experts find this is a separate institution where time stops and everything is plunged into peace, tranquillity and intimate conversations. It is not just a "tea room," it is where all (men) come to tell and listen to the latest news and rumours. It should be noted that mostly men attend tea houses, whereas a woman's visit to a tea house was considered to be extremely inappropriate behaviour. However, contemporary teahouses are client-oriented and women also visit with their family members.

*Habermas 1991: 34

salons in France and Britain, and their pivotal role in developing public discourse. Habermas highlighted that “there was scarcely a great writer in the 18th century who would not have first submitted his essential ideas for discussion in such discourse, in lectures before the academies and especially in the salons.”*

*КысОБ 2003: 1

Coffee houses were typical not only for British and French society but were part of Central and Eastern European society as well. In the case of Central Asia, chaikhana is their equivalent, symbolizing the public sphere of Central Asian society where citizens discuss issues, and politics and even take decisions. Local experts noted that teahouses were a place for philosophical conversations and discussions of vital problems. People do not argue in teahouses, but rather seek truth. Anyone can raise a topic as a teahouse participant.

*Полова 2018: 1

The environment in a chaikhana can be used as a barometer for civil society in different Central Asian countries: public discourses in the teahouses of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the southern part of Kyrgyzstan differ from each other. In Uzbekistan chaikhana guests limit their discussion to social issues whereas in Southern Kyrgyzstan topics can encompass politics, business, elections and criticism of power structures. Besides, as local experts emphasize, chaikhana visitors vary in the region depending on the degree of patriarchy. For instance, in Uzbekistan, they are exclusively male institutions. Even for customer service, owners hire males only.* Throughout the region, one can see in capital cities, where teahouses are client-oriented, that women are also welcomed as visitors.

2.2.3 Council of Elders and the Position of Aksakals

*Kabar News Agency 2010

Former Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva, in her speech for the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking countries that took place in Astana in 2011, highlighted the importance of elderly or village councils (*Jomoat*) in all Turkic speaking countries, considering them a regional institution that meets Turkic traditions.* Her attempt to raise the profile of elderly councils and its regional scope underlines the existing influence of this council in Central Asian traditional society.

International organizations report that there are around 1500 elderly council courts across the Kyrgyz republic. They solve small conflicts among family members and council members carry out a great responsibility in promoting peaceful relations in multi-ethnic communities of Kyrgyzstan. When one investigates Kyrgyz and

Kazakh civil society, it is clear that an *aksakal* (“elder,” also transliterated as *aqsaqal* or *acsacal*, literally meaning “white-beard”) has a powerful role in this traditional structure.

Lately, in Kyrgyz and Kazakh villages, elderly councils started to gain the role of a local court that can solve minor family disputes and – in some cases – ethnic-based conflicts. Their role is crucial in peace-building and peace enforcement in post-conflict areas. As the case of Osh ethnic conflict⁵ in 2010 showed, elderly councils are a pillar in promoting peace: through aksakals exchanging traditional clothes with the other communities in symbolic gestures, and reaching out to youth to make peaceful gestures.*

*Schwarzenbach 2011: 29

Elderly councils contribute to resilient societies. With their role as mediators, aksakals are respected by community members and recognized by local authorities. At the same time, it should be noted that elderly councils are developing in different stages among Central Asian countries. Kyrgyz *Uruu*, Kazakh *Ru*, Uzbek and Tajik *mahallas* and Turkmen clans, all of them have elderly councils and aksakals, however, the degree of independence from the state varies in the region depending on the existing regime.

2.2.4 *Clan and Tribal Networks in Central Asia*

Historically, in Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Kazakh and Karakalpak⁶ societies the clan and sub-clan system had a very strong influence on social and political life. Even during the Soviet rule, clan and tribal networks were carefully addressed. “Clans were viewed by the Soviets as pre-modern, and they successfully pursued a transformative social policy to break down large traditional tribal structures.”* Despite severe suppression of traditional institutions by the Soviet regime, clan and tribal identification could retain its power in rural areas of Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Turkmen and Karakalpak societies. Their function is connected with maintaining social order, and like mahalla structures, nomadic clan and tribal networks

*Chatham House 2009: 3

⁵ In June 2010 hundreds of Uzbek and Kyrgyz inhabitants of the Kyrgyzstan city of Osh were killed in inter-communal violence. This ethnic conflict erupted in the wake of dictator Bakiyev’s ouster during the formation of an interim government led by Roza Otunbayeva. As a result hundreds of thousands of refugees fled from their homes in Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan.

⁶ Karakalpakstan is an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan, during the Soviet national delineation campaigns the *Karakalpak* were defined as a separate ethnic and linguistic group, but unlike the other five republics, their smaller numbers did not merit the creation of a separate state in the eyes of Soviet planners – cf. Map 8.3 and Map 8.4.

Box 12.1 Attribution of Tribal and Clan Affiliations

Example of clan affiliation in a Kyrgyz family

Example of tribal and clan affiliation in a Kazakh family

Source: Author's own work.

address social issues through charity and volunteering activities such as *ashar*.

The next important point in clan and mahalla structures derives from their sense of collective identity and shared common goals among community members. According to Putnam's concept of social capital: "The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself (...) If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital."* Community members in rural areas depend on such clan-based structures for social and economic purposes, ranging from pooling resources and human capital to organize weddings, funerals but also to prepare holidays or coordinate community projects.

At structural level, clan systems differ from mahallas. Clan and sub-clan systems are led by a *Bey* (Kyrgyz: *Biy*, Uzbek, Kazakh: *Bek*, Turkmen: *Beg*, Tajik: *Be*); this head of the clan together with elders have a decision-making role. In contrast to mahallas, clans do not have the connection with religious institutions. Whereas in a mahalla system the Mullah has a decision-making role, in clan systems elderly councils have this more powerful role. According to contemporary *Uruu* (clan) system in Kyrgyzstan, the power of a

*Putnam 2000: 19

Bey has waned, but the eldest person in the *Uruu* is symbolically perceived as the ‘head of the clan.’

Mahalla and clan networks share a value system based on a patriarchal hierarchy. Women are kept out of the decision-making process. Discrimination against women starts at birth, and daughters are considered as ‘guests’ in the eyes of the clan (since they are expected to marry into other clans) – see also Box 13.4. This is visible in clan and sub-clan identification in Kazakh as well as Kyrgyz societies, which are blood and kin-based. For instance, when a child is born in a Kyrgyz family, they inherit a sub-clan identity based on his father’s bloodline, whereas a child born in a Kazakh family gets both their clan and *zhuz* (tribe or horde) affiliation from birth (as shown in Box 12.1).

The next important fact is that clan and sub-clan identification is carefully addressed during marriage. Husband and wife should be from different sub-clans. As for the identity of children, regardless of the ethnicity, nationality, or tribal affiliation of women, solely the husband’s clan and sub-clan will be passed on to children.

Clan and tribal systems have a direct impact on the political and civic participation of women in Central Asian societies. When one analyses a women’s political participation process in the post-Soviet period, one can see how women face challenges in representing their voice. Since independence, women’s representation in political participation has not increased, and has even declined in some cases. One of the main obstacles for women in this regard is the revived role of traditional institutions in the region, which apply and disseminate patriarchal views to structure society.

Finally, while analysing traditional institutions like *Uruu*, *Ru* and mahalla structures in the region, one finds that on the one hand they play a key role in mitigating social problems, but at the same time have a much more problematic role when fostering political participation, because they enshrine gender discrimination, but also by institutionalizing patronage at local level (patron-client relations), which can negatively affect election processes.

3. Formal Institutions in Contemporary Central Asia

3.1 Civil Society from an NGO Perspective

For a full purview of civil society, it is very important to encompass the NGO sector. NGOs not only represent civil society but also play a vital role in holding government accountable and transparent. In democratic societies NGOs actively participate in promoting human rights values, democracy and the application of the rule

of law. Active transnational NGO movements have been crucial actors for achieving international agreements or UN conventions and for setting ambitious common global goals such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite its vital role, NGO sector development has known diverse trajectories in different regions. In Western societies, they are well integrated into political and civic life, while many NGOs in developing countries still face severe restrictions from sovereign governments. Case studies from the NGO sector in Central Asia demonstrate a strong opposition from governmental institutions toward NGOs that promote democracy and human rights. At the same time, public attitudes towards NGO activities within these individual nations are not favourable.

3.2 NGO Sectors in Central Asia

NGOs of Central Asia have diverse areas of operation where they aim to bring forth societal change. Today, there are associations of people with disabilities, NGOs focusing on children, youth, women, elderly people or environmental issues, that function in all five Central Asian countries. However, Human rights NGOs mostly function in Kyrgyzstan, whereas other states have either expelled them from their countries or turned them into state-owned NGOs, which disseminate state propaganda.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that NGOs in social protection and environmental areas function more effectively with less state intervention. Even in Uzbekistan, where civil society is severely suppressed, the state is supportive of platforms that allow NGOs to address social and environmental issues. As an example, the *Central Asian International Environmental Forum* brought together both representatives of environmental authorities and environmental NGOs from all five countries and Afghanistan.* These few sectors thus operate in a small niche where NGOs can function with less restrictions in these state-centric societies of Central Asia. However, they are not fully independent, are also steered by state entities, and do not criticize government policies. Like traditional institutions they are controlled or co-opted by states.

*Zavarzin 2018

Local experts observe a negative public attitude towards NGO activities connected with women's rights and gender equality. Central Asian governments accommodate patriarchal societies and fall short regarding the protection of women's rights, the rights of children and youth participation. Domestic violence and gender-based violence in general are rampant throughout the region:

From female suicide (caused by domestic violence) in Tajikistan to bride-kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, to the insistence that brides must be virgins in Uzbekistan – the problem is deeply rooted in the way society sees women – as property.* In Central Asia, women's rights present a major rift between NGO activities and the workings of traditional informal institutions.

*Valentini 2018: 1

In FSU Central Asia, traditional institutions have revived patriarchal values reintroducing the pre-Soviet attitude towards women. All Central Asian countries have laws which guarantee the equal rights between men and women at all decision-making levels. However, law enforcement processes are backsliding in countries. If one investigates bride-kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan or underage marriage in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, none of the traditional institutions are supportive of women's issues. On the contrary, traditional institutions create cultural barriers for women's political representation and block equal rights for men and women. Hence, among the CSOs, NGOs have an advantage to promote gender equality and children rights. However, NGOs successes are tightly entwined with their relation with the state. And NGO pressure in this regard is not always supported by Central Asian governments.

3.3 Local Media in Central Asia

The earliest research on local media in Central Asia emphasizes that a local print trade sprung up during the era of imperial Russian rule, including an official organ launched in 1870 that also printed (complete with Arabic letters) the *Turkistan Wilayatining Gazeti*.* In this respect, the history of local media in the region starts from Tsarist Russia, which used political power to control the output of the presses through licensing and censorship, whereby ownership of printing presses rested mainly in the hands of Russians.*

*Shafer 2011: 19

*Shafer 2011: 20

During the Soviet period media were part of the ideological 'superstructure' of the communist societies, whereby media was seen as an instrument of political command and control.* Indisputably, the current governments' media policy in Central Asia is deeply rooted in Soviet-era policy. In those times the main principle was subordination of the media to the Party – the "only legitimate voice and agent of the working class."* Although there was hope that the fall of communism would lead to freedom of speech and press freedom, it did not bring change to the media systems. In post-Soviet Central Asia, "for reporters and editors who worked in the Soviet press system, mandatory allegiance to the Communist Party was replaced with demands that they serve as agents of newly engineered and crudely fabricated nationalist ideologies and

*International Media Support 2008: 14

*Freedman 2011: 2

*Freedman 2011: 3

altered national histories directed to glorifying incumbent leaders.”*

*Freedman 2011: 9

Right after the fall of communism the role of media became apparent for nation-building and common identity building in the newly independent states (NIS), which needed to unite multi-ethnic societies. However, none of the Central Asian leaders provided space for independent media. In this regard Eric Freedman argues that national systems of authoritarian rule have succeeded communist authoritarianism, while instruments of democratization, including independent and opposition media, have been controlled, suppressed, punished, and, in many instances, outlawed.*

*Sultonnazarov 2019

What all Central Asian countries share in common is that none of the Central Asian leaders tolerate independent media and they impose severe restrictions on them. Strict state control pertains to almost all media in the region: There are a few independent outlets online that function with support from international organizations but they do not play a big role.*

If one checks the region’s *World Press Freedom Index* ranking (in Table 12.1), according to the *Reporters Without Borders Index*, Turkmenistan is ranked at the bottom, second only to North Korea. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are in the company of Belarus, Turkey, Rwanda and Singapore. While only Kyrgyzstan hovers higher at a position next to Hong Kong, Malta or Albania, meaning state-run media dominate Kyrgyzstan’s media space, which does not tolerate any criticism of the government.

Table 12.1 Freedom Index Rating of Central Asian Countries

Country	2005	2010	2015	2020
Kyrgyzstan	111	159	82	82
Uzbekistan	156	163	156	156
Kazakhstan	119	162	157	157
Tajikistan	114	115	161	161
Turkmenistan	165	176	179	179

Legend: 1 being most free in the world (180 countries), 180 being least free.

Source: Reporters Without Borders, 2005-2020 (www.rsf.org).

*Mijatovic 2011: 12

When it comes to online journalism in the region, internet access remains restricted, websites are blocked and filtered and subject to unwarranted laws and regulations.* Since their independence Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been in total control of their media; in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan most media are state-run or owned by business entities who are loyal to government. As for

Tajikistan, media freedom in the country has been being stifled. If ten years ago the country was ranked 115 it is now placed at 169. In “recent years the Tajik authorities have become obsessed with bloggers and use a kind of Chinese model of strict control and internet censorship, whereby they block specific sites on a daily and even hourly basis, whether it be local, international or social media.”*

*Sultonazarov 2019

3.4 State-NGO-Media Relations and Regional Differences

Many social scientists have expressed their hope for democratic change in Central Asia through the NGO sector. However, as UN reports on human rights issues and OSCE Reports of the *Human Dimension Implementation Meeting*⁷ indicate, Central Asia has been identified as a highly problematic region due to human rights violations and the suppression of non-state actors in the region. When comparing the NGO sectors in Central Asia, experts conclude that: “in Turkmenistan, NGOs are for all practical purposes non-existent whereas in Uzbekistan, they operate under heavy surveillance and tight constraints.”*

*Melvin 2008: 17

After the dissolution of the USSR, international and Western transnational organizations played a key role in the establishment of NGOs, Public Associations and Initiative Groups in the NIS. In 1990s, the number of NGOs in the region, except Turkmenistan, has increased rapidly. However, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and, to some extent, Kazakhstan, managed to revive Soviet-era NGO-policies, where NGOs exist symbolically or work under the heavy supervision of government institutions through legislation. Registered NGOs are actively scrutinized by means of outward reporting requirements. In these countries, NGOs are obliged to report to various governmental organs in order to demonstrate that their activities are lawful.*

*Remias 2000

A USAID report analysing CSO sustainability in Central Asia stated that “Uzbek CSOs are allowed to engage in entrepreneurial activities but must pay taxes on the income. CSOs are also legally allowed to compete for government contracts, but, in reality, only GONGOs⁸ (government-created NGOs) win these awards.”* Kazakhstan is the leading country regarding investments in CSOs through state financing. The latest statistics show that the available government funding for social contracts awarded to CSOs

*USAID 2011: 218

⁷ Europe’s largest yearly annual human rights and democracy conference organized by the *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE).

⁸ GONGO – *Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization* – a NGO set up by a government to mimic civil groups, but promoting state interests.

has grown dramatically in recent years, reaching \$38 million in 2017.* However, state financing of NGOs negatively affects civil society, reducing its independence by encroaching state regulation.

*ICNL 2019a

With the launch of development aid projects through USAID and EU Funding, local NGO sectors have been challenging Central Asian governments, promoting human rights and democracy. The Kyrgyz government-NGO relations were considered relatively vibrant in the region, though during election periods NGOs as well as media face strict regulation from the government. Comparatively, Kyrgyzstan still opened relatively more space for international NGOs, leading to the development of the third sector; with currently over 17,391 CSOs registered in Kyrgyzstan. Although only around 5,700 are operational, they work in a wide range of areas, including human rights, support to vulnerable groups, culture and art, health, protection of the environment, youth and sport, education and advocacy.* However, in January 2020 the Kyrgyz parliament passed the first review of a draft law amending the current legislation on NGOs and legal entities granting the power-holders even more opportunities to control and supervise the activities of civil society.* Covid-19 restrictions increased repression and the new regime in Fall 2020 is likely to introduce other changes.

*ICNL 2019b

*FIDH 2020

3.4.1 Kazakhstan

The latest survey on the status of media in Central Asia conducted by the *Institute of War and Peace* showed that in Kazakhstan most news is state news and journalists only cover topics if they relate to state affairs.* Local experts refer to the role of the first president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who stepped down only in 2019 after 30 years of authoritarian rule and who applied this system of state financing to media and NGO sectors to control and regulate civil society. In contrast, the early years of Kazakh independence had a liberal image, which did not last long. In early 1990s, the Ministry of Information began granting licenses to small television and radio companies at minimal cost. All two hundred companies that applied were approved, gaining access to the airwaves and viewers' television screens.* However, in 1997 the hope for freedom of speech ended when the government held its first auction or, more formally, tender to reallocate private television and radio frequencies. This coincided with Nazarbayev's desire to rein in the media in the pre-election period and to get rid of competitors.*

*IWPR 2018: 10

*Junisbai 2011: 37

*Junisbai 2011: 37

Since 1997 Nazarbayev and his family circle have gained control over media in Kazakhstan. The list of presidential family-owned

media included: the *Kazakhstan Today* news agency; the television stations *KTK*, *NTK*, and *ORT Kazakhstan*; and a number of radio stations, including *Europa-Plus Kazakhstan*, radio *Hit-FM*, *Russian Radio*, and *Radio Retro*.*

*Junisbai 2011: 39

Media control and civil society suppression was achieved through legislative acts that were designed to suppress media. For instance, the National Security law introduced ambiguous concepts such as “the negative impact of information,” which gives the government the right to decide upon the degree of negative impact. This law also contains a clause that allows the authorities to ban any foreign media.* In this regard, the mass media environment in Kazakhstan is characterized by lack of pluralism and prevalence of pro-government outlets, especially among the broadcast media, which often are either directly owned by the state, or run by highly loyal government officials or businesses affiliated with them.*

*IREX 2019: 237-249

*Emrich et al. 2013: 12

3.4.2 *Kyrgyzstan*

According to a *Reporters Without Borders* report on world press freedom, the pluralism of the Kyrgyz media is exceptional in Central Asia but the polarization of Kyrgyz society is reflected both within the media content itself and in the work environment for journalists.* Despite the relative degree of freedom in the region’s media space, journalists are still confronted with the threat of libel suits, assaults, and other sanctions when their reports anger public officials, their allies, and their associates. Fair and accurate coverage of controversial issues, including corruption cases, ethnic clashes, terrorism and religious extremism, remains largely difficult.*

*RSF 2019a

*Wolf 2011: 80

Since independence the first four elected presidents of Kyrgyzstan have applied restrictions to investigative journalism that criticized government policy. If during the President Bakiyev’s rule (2005-2010) critical journalists were subjected to harassment, intimidation, violent attacks or worse, President Atambayev (2011-2017) is remembered for his multimillion dollar lawsuits against media outlets, journalists, and civil society activists.* Former President Jeenbekov (2017-2020) also took a restrictive approach towards media through prosecution and lawsuits against independent and investigative journalists.

*Galdini 2018

Investigative journalists especially are still subjected to physical violence, cyber-attacks and interrogations. One of the recent cases is connected with investigative reporter Ali Toktakunov from *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, who received a credible death

*Radio Free Europe 2020

threat in February 2020 after his team uncovered a massive smuggling scheme⁹ in Kyrgyzstan.* Furthermore, it can be observed that all presidents of Kyrgyzstan have used the government-controlled court system to successfully block websites or freeze media assets. For instance, for the last three years, the *ferghana.ru* news website has been blocked, and opposition TV Channels *Sentyabr* and *Aprél* TV were closed by court order.*

*RSF 2018

Kyrgyzstan is placed higher in the comparative indexes on press freedom, but this position is rather due to its selective approach to free speech repression compared to its neighbours' more total control. When analysing government interventions through the court system to muzzle opposition TV and suppress independent media it is clear that subsequent Kyrgyz regimes, like other Central Asian leaders, apply the same restrictive attitude to journalists and human rights activists. The Kyrgyz Covid-19 response showed how its political system is usurped by presidential rule, suppressing the voice of independent media. Information dissemination on Covid-19 was allowed only through national TV, whereas independent media did not get permission to operate during the lockdown. It showed how the Kyrgyz government has attempted to suppress civil society and independent media severely by manipulating the global pandemic.

3.4.3 Tajikistan

*Gross and Kenny 2011: 123

Like other Central Asian countries, Tajikistan's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and free media. However press freedom has been downgraded intensely during the last ten years. There are cases in post-Soviet Tajikistan where major opposition newspapers have been closed, and foreign broadcasting agencies have been banned from the airwaves.* According to the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan the list of independent and non-state media sources is quite long (see Table 12.2). However, independent reports clearly show that the government controls the media directly or indirectly. The *Media Sustainability Index for 2019* emphasizes that the government maintains total control over private media under the pretext of fighting terrorism, resulting in remaining media outlets applying strict self-censorship.*

*IREX 2019: 271

⁹ The six-part investigative report amassed evidence documenting how a powerful Uyghur family operated an underground cargo empire that moved undeclared and falsely labelled goods from China into Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and other Central Asian states, funnelling and laundering more than \$700 million abroad. The report exposes the alleged central role of former Customs Service Deputy Director and other officials. (Radio Free Europe 2019; 2020)

Table 12.2 Types of Media Sources in Tajikistan

Type of Media Source	State-owned	Non-state / Private
Newspapers*	109	262
Magazines	113	130
Printing houses	36	277
News agencies	1	10
Television companies	14	20

*The total circulation of all newspapers published in 2018 did not exceed 110,000 copies. Regime newspapers like *Minbari Khalq*, *Sadoi Mardum* or *Jumkhuriat* range between 40,000 and 20,000 copies each.

Source: Data from the Tajik Ministry of Culture (IREX 2019: 280)

In press freedom rankings, Tajikistan fell 34 places down in 2016. While some experts connect it with the growing pressure on independent media and outright censorship, others explain it with indirect control and intimidation. Self-censorship in Tajikistan lies beyond the boundaries of legal restriction, it is endemic and fully functioning within journalism’s social code, uninhibited by cultural stigma or taboo.* *Reporters Without Borders* state that harassment by the intelligence services, intimidation and blackmail are now part of the daily routine for those journalists who have stayed behind, and some have reportedly been blacklisted as “terrorists.”*

*Gross and Kenny 2011: 125

*RSF 2019b

3.4.4 Turkmenistan

According to the *Media sustainability Index* report “Turkmenistan remains one of the world’s most secretive countries. Publication of any information deemed against the state view is severely punished, and even data and most official statistics remain state secrets.”* The Turkmen Government controls all media and the media space is under a monopoly of the state. All local media outlets are state-owned, and journalists and editors are expected to unconditionally speak in support of and promote state ideology. Any diversion leads to termination of employment, followed by persecution, including illegal detainment and torture. Turkmenistan is labelled by media watchdog *Reporters Without Borders* as the “news black hole” of Central Asian, where the few independent journalists working for foreign-based news sites have been harassed, arrested, and tortured, even abroad.*

*IREX 2019: 287

*IREX 2019: 290

*Mackinnon 2019: 1

The lack of legislative tools (a regulatory vacuum) with the

*Anceschi 2011: 62

establishment of hegemonic control over all media outlets ultimately allowed the regime to transform the media landscape into a monopoly, with sole rights to registration, financing and publishing.* President-for-life Saparmurat Niyazov (1990–2006) not only isolated Turkmenistan from the rest of the world but also created one of the most repressive regimes in the world, using media only for state propaganda and an extensive and at times absurd personality cult, bestowing himself with the title of Turkmenbashi – ‘Great Leader of the Turkmen.’ Ruslan Maytiev, the founder and editor of *Alternative Turkmenistan News*, has labelled Turkmenistan one of the worst examples of state propaganda, drawing attention to Turkmen media portrayals of the country’s presidents as virtual gods. Turkmen society has lived through this for many decades already. Entire generations have grown up only knowing this.*

*Mackinnon 2019

Current president Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who came to power in 2006 following Niyazov’s death, did not change the regime’s attitude towards media, but did dismantle Niyazov’s personality cult. Even when his own cult is less pervasive, the new powerholders still assign a clear ideological mission to the country’s cultural and mass media workers to propagate a narrative of revival and contribute to Turkmenistan’s moral and aesthetic development.*

*Anceschi 2011: 71

3.4.5 *Uzbekistan*

*Hordegen 2011: 102

The first president of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov not only suppressed civil society and freedom of speech but also left a complex legacy where media is controlled by government through legal regulations. For instance, Article 20 of the constitution legitimates the purposes that statutes affecting individual’s rights and general freedoms must be directed toward. However, the government may restrict the exercise of constitutional rights if justified to protect the lawful interests, rights, and freedoms of others, society, and the state Uzbekistan.* The entire legitimacy of the Uzbek regime was based on Islam Karimov’s image, and state propaganda relentlessly reminded people that Uzbekistan was a “state with a great future” by grace of its founding president.*

*Abdurasulov 2016: 1

Under Karimov’s regime, journalists and human rights activists faced imprisonment and torture.¹⁰ Four years after his death in August 2016, there were reforms that slightly affect the freedom of

¹⁰ According to *Human Rights Watch* an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 political opponents have been imprisoned, whereby out of 34 prisoners profiled in detail by *Human Rights Watch*, 29 have made credible allegations of torture or ill-treatment, including beatings, electric shocks, hangings from wrists and ankles. (Luhn 2015: 1)

press. *Reporters Without Borders* drew attention to the last imprisoned journalists – some of whom were held for nearly 20 years – that have been released, and to websites that were censored for years and have now been unblocked.*

*RSF 2019c

This progress under current president Mirziyoyev, accompanied by strategic reforms in foreign policy, has been welcomed by international organizations and NGOs. At the same time, freedom of press reports for 2020 show that the authorities are in no hurry to carry out the necessary law reforms still constraining the media.* Surveillance, censorship and self-censorship are still present and the current regime maintains a significant level of control over the media.* Key websites such as the *Uzbek service of Radio Liberty*, *Foreign Policy*, *Nastoyascheye Vremya*, *Kloop.kg*, *Snob.ru*, *Cotton Campaign*, *Dozhd TV channel* and *365info.kz* remain inaccessible.*

*Yusupov and Isakov 2020

*Tashkent Times 2020

*IWPR 2019

4. Contemporary Challenges of Civil Society in Central Asia

4.1 Civil Society and Social Capital

Social capital is a concept that gained popularity in the 1990s. There are various forms of definitions of the term but most scholars argue that social capital is centred on social relationships and is defined as a collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations, and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits.* If one investigates CSOs, whether they are community-based or NGOs, their functions tightly depend on reciprocity and mutual benefits. All traditional institutions pursue mutual benefits in their collective action within a strong united network, with higher levels of trust than in any other form of institution or association. The strengths of mahalla and *Uruu* systems are their clear structures, and integrated norms and values that foster trust and unity among members.

*Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009: 480

Fukuyama has stressed that “social capital is frequently a by-product of religion, tradition, shared historical experience, and other factors that lie outside the control of any government.”* In this regard, civil society does not only have a mediating role but also one of fostering social capital. Civil society can gain social capital when members of civil groups actively participate, collaborate and mobilize to hold governments accountable.

*Fukuyama 1999: 5

Civil society actors will always know the needs and concerns of their members better than any government institution. And states can have a serious negative impact on social capital when they start

*Fukuyama 1999: 6

undertaking activities that are better left to the private sector or to civil society.* A state-centred approach erodes trust and ownership in civil society. Since all Central Asian authoritarian regimes survive through divide-and-rule tactics, they regulate and suppress active political participation and popular mobilization in civil society.

However, local experts argue that there are still areas where informal institutions are stronger than government institutions, in particular peace-building and conflict resolution. For example, when civil war erupted in the early 1990s in Tajikistan and when ethnic conflict erupted between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Ferghana Valley in 1990s and in 2010, the driving force for mobilizing warring groups to engage in dialogue during the conflicts and in later recovery phases were the *mahalla* structure, *Uruu*, *Avlod* and other forms of clan and tribal networks. Local traditional institutions understand root causes of conflict in their communities and – without the engagement of local leaders – governments cannot (re)build resilient societies in post-conflict areas.

4.2 Civil Society and Youth

*World Youth Report 2018: 1

The role of youth in civil society has been acknowledged at global level within the frame of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whereby the 2030 Agenda posits that youth (defined by the United Nations as persons aged 15 to 24 years) should be considered across all UN goals and targets.* However the degree of youth participation varies from country to country, depending on the capacity of young people to advocate their rights and also on the attitude of government institutions and civil society actors towards youth.

*UN DESA 2019

According to the 2019 United Nations world's population estimate, 1.2 billion people fall into this category (between ages 15 and 24).* Moreover, the unprecedented number of youth in the Global South presents a great challenge for sustainable development and economic growth. Activating them could trigger a *demographic dividend*¹¹ and therefore countries need to invest in quality education and healthcare, as well as in their civic and political engagement.

Central Asian youth compose an overwhelming proportion of the regional population (around 45% are children and youth under

¹¹ According to UNFPA, the demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, or 65 and older).

Figure 12.1 Population Growth in Central Asia (1990 and 2020)

Source: PopulationPyramid.net 2019, based on: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects 2019.

25). Compared to other CIS countries, Central Asia is undergoing a steady population growth since independence, even with high fertility rates fluctuating due to shifting dynamics of migration and urbanization. The region's poverty and unemployment continue to have disastrous effects on youth development, and more grievances can be expected if education, health and employment sectors fail to cope with this rising young population. So far, intergenerational conflict is low, and labour migration of young men may reduce youth mobilization (and unrest).*

*Nikolova 2020

4.3 Civil Society and Vulnerable Groups

CSOs have a strong capacity for working with vulnerable groups. From a gender-equality perspective there are vulnerable groups such as victims of domestic, gender-based and sexual violence, victims of harmful practices such as underage marriage, forced and arranged marriage, victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Regarding children's rights, vulnerability emerges from child labour (e.g. picking cotton), the need for child protection (from domestic and sexual violence), access to education and health services, the rights of unaccompanied minors, etc. If one analyses other areas of vulnerability such as disability, elderly people, ethnic minorities, labour migrants, people living under the poverty line, the list of vulnerable groups, requiring strong expertise in each sector, increases further.

The creation of pressure groups or associations based on vulnerable groups' interests can make civil society stronger and can complement government efforts to deliver services to these groups and formulate public policies. Often, NGOs working with vulnerable groups are founded on the initiative of personal experiences of members, with insights and passionate leadership. For instance, there is a big difference when an NGO is created just by the government to assist people with HIV or other infectious diseases, or when people who are affected by HIV or other diseases create an NGO to advocate and protect their own rights. Here, Fukuyama's observation that some spheres can be better left to the private sector or to civil society is valid.

Another obstacle is that vulnerable groups are perceived in most countries as mere recipients and not always seen as partners or participants. For instance, when one surveys laws and legislative acts related to people with disabilities, Central Asian countries ensure social protection but their representation at these decision-making levels is lagging behind.

In the region, even while persons with disabilities are frequently identified as a vulnerable group, their vulnerability increases due to prevalent factors such as stigma and discrimination, violence and abuse, restrictions in exercising civil and political rights, exclusion from participating fully in society, lack of educational opportunities, and exclusion from income generation and employment opportunities.* Hence, while analysing vulnerable groups and civil society it is paramount to consider their participation and representation at decision-making levels.

*Schulze and Monjurul Kabir 2013: 18

Central Asia faces a fan of major challenges in these spheres, with much country differentiation according to levels of development. While many issues mentioned here are universal for authoritarian and developing states, exploitative sectors like cotton-picking (child labour), and the pervasive traditional (patriarchal) culture in rural areas (vulnerability of girls and women), bring with them their own specific challenges for local CSOs, leading to slow progress in some of these spheres.

4.4 Women in Central Asian Civil Society

Reports routinely show that women and children in Central Asia are more vulnerable due to the existing socio-cultural structures and the passiveness of civil society, dominated by patriarchal value systems. The list of issues like maternal mortality, underage marriage, bride-kidnapping, domestic violence, etc. can be quite long. All Central Asian countries have a (constitutional) legal basis for promoting women's rights: men and women are declared equal; there exist gender equality laws guaranteeing protection of women from violence and ensuring women's representation. In practice however these countries struggle to enforce their implementation.

According to the latest study conducted by its Ministry of Health in 2012: "more than 20% of marriages in Kyrgyzstan result from kidnappings."* Statistics show that every third married women in Kyrgyzstan is the product of a bride kidnapping and forced marriage, whereas domestic violence goes unreported in most cases. This vulnerability of women to such harmful practices (bride kidnapping, underage marriage, gender and sexual violence) is not only connected with the low awareness among the population about gender equality and women's rights, but is likewise tightly connected with weak enforcement mechanisms of legislative acts.

*Bondal 2018: 1

Regarding domestic violence, Fotima Sharipova, director of the *Women of the East* NGO, referred to the research results of the Tajik-based human rights think tank *Nota Bene*, which concluded

Box 12.2 Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan

Bride kidnapping, also known as *kыз ала качуу* ('take the girl and run' – *кыз ала качуу* in Kyrgyz), is the act of abducting a woman to marry her. This practice may involve several degrees of violence and consent, that is, one must distinguish between consensual bride abduction (elopement agreed beforehand) that appears as a proper kidnapping and a real non-consensual abduction, where the girl is taken with force and without prior agreement.

Especially from the outside, boundaries between the two forms are often blurred as the term *ала качуу* refers to both of these modalities and, even in case of consensual elopement, the bride has to pretend to resist her kidnapper.

Bride kidnappings are not unique to Kyrgyzstan, they are also reported in other areas of the world, such as the Caucasus, Southeast Asia and Africa. However, since the end of the Soviet Union, there has been a steep surge in forced bride kidnappings in Kyrgyzstan.

The action usually begins with the future groom, who, abetted by his friends or relatives, abducts the girl from a place (which can be a street or even her house) into a car and transports her to his house by force or deceit. There, everything has already been prepared for their arrival and a dedicated space for the future bride has been set in the living room behind a thin curtain. Female relatives have the task of convincing the girl to let them place on her head a white scarf that symbolizes her consent. This persuasion process can last hours and days, however, the longer the girl spends inside the house, the more likely she will accept because people outside will start questioning her virginity. In fact, rape is one of the coercive methods used to force the girl to stay. Other strategies include sending curses and making (older) women lie on the doorstep or placing breads nearby so that, if the girl tries to escape, she would have to step over them, which is considered to bring bad luck.

After kidnapping, a woman can still refuse the marriage, but such cases are very rare because it would have repercussions on her and her family's reputation. Leaving the house of the kidnapper makes a woman less appealing towards the eyes of a future husband because she would not be considered a virgin anymore, in addition to somebody that does not respect traditions and Kyrgyz culture. The perspective of having a delayed marriage or not marrying at all, which is undesirable in Kyrgyz society, is also one of the reasons why, once the girl is kidnapped, usually parents do not oppose it.

Even though bride kidnapping is illegal and kidnappers can be sentenced with up to ten years in prison according to Kyrgyz law, punishment of this crime is rarely enforced as bride abduction is often portrayed as being in line with Kyrgyz tradition and therefore socially accepted.

In fact, the idea that bride kidnapping is a Kyrgyz national tradition that was suppressed during the Soviet Union is widespread but

not true. Scholarship has showed that, prior to the Soviet period, forced bride kidnappings happened rarely and it were harshly punished because they went against Kyrgyz customary law (*adat*), which requires the agreement of *both* families to the wedding, and also against Islamic law, which demands consent from the groom and the bride. Occasionally, consensual bride kidnapping in the form of elopement did occur to overcome parents' disagreements and wedding-related expenses; these were against *adat* but at least in line with Islamic law.

During the Soviet Union, all forms of non-consensual marriage were abolished. However, the practice of bride kidnapping has become more frequent and increasingly non-consensual for most of them. After independence, also due to some recent deadly episodes of bride kidnapping, the phenomenon has shocked public opinion, citizens, NGOs and other civic actors, and has thus resulted in more public campaigns to eradicate *ala kachuu* as well as in efforts to elaborate effective law enforcement against this crime.

Contribution by: Alberica Camerani (Dublin City University).

that “50% of Tajik women regularly suffer physical and psychological violence in their homes.” In Kazakhstan, statistics point to 20% and in Kyrgyzstan 30%.* Progress has been slow, and domestic violence and other forms of violence against women still remain a nationwide issue in all Central Asian countries, regardless of their adopted laws and programs.

The key issue hampering progress is connected with gender perception in the region. In Central Asian society, women are relegated to the role of caregiver. Women are expected to be family-oriented and to focus on rearing children. Here, the role of traditional institutions is very powerful in disseminating a value system regarding the rights and duties of women, with the result that at an early age girls are taught that their place is at home and they are discouraged from participation in the political process. According to a survey by SIAR in Kyrgyz society, women face barriers at family and institution level. Focus group results (from surveys conducted in 2017) indicated that women lack the necessary funds and business connections to emancipate. In addition, women are judged on their appearance and the same time they are preoccupied with responsibilities at home. Due to religious restrictions, in rural areas a woman also depends on her husband's permission if she wants to run for office.*

*Bondal 2018: 1

*Valentini 2018: 1

*SIAR 2017

4.4.1 Women in Soviet Civil Society

Considering the Soviet legacy, the equal rights for women were promoted in education and the employment sector. Before, equality in family structures or the labour sector was absent in the region. Under the Soviet regime, women were equipped with new political and economic roles in relation to their family life as well as in their community.

One pillar of Soviet policy intended to extend literacy and educate Central Asian people, including women. This effort has been immortalized in the work of Kyrgyz writer, Chingiz T. Aitmatov, *The First teacher* (*Первый учитель* – 1962), in which the author describes the attempts of communist rule to redefine public attitudes towards women in education.

Gail Warshofsky argues that Soviet attempts undertaken to transform the status and the role of women was connected with their vast social mobilization program aimed to raise the economic and political capacity of the new regime.* Because of the labour demand in the agricultural sector on *kolkhozes* and in big Soviet plants, women needed to participate equally in the development of the communist economy.

*Warshofsky 1978: 3

A key instrument to emancipate women, where the *zhensovet* (женсоветы) or 'women councils' that were installed in Soviet institutions such as government departments, labour sectors, production boards, or delegate assemblies. *Zhensovet* had their representatives in all commissariats of the republics, in the general education system, and in the commissions of the Central Committee of the party.* During Soviet times, their role was to monitor the living standards of women and their families and ensure they were receiving the correct state benefits. They also organized community and educational events and in some cases distributed charity.*

*State Archive of Yaroslav Oblast 2010

*Giffen et al. 2005: 76

As in other Soviet Republics, by the late 1950s early 1960s women councils began to emerge in enterprises, institutions, collective farms, and state farms in Central Asia. The old perception of women's roles in Central Asian society, in which women played a subordinate role in family structures and society, was suppressed and the status of women in Soviet Central Asian society underwent change.

Scholars identify two major waves of *zhensovet* development in Soviet period. The first wave started during World War Two, where women took an active part in the continued collectivization and industrialization period (to replace drafted workers); while the second wave came in the 1980s along with Gorbachev's *Perestroika* policy where women councils were used to expand the social base

of these reforms by broadening their involvement to address political and economic issues.* In 1987 there were over 160 thousand *zhensovet*y, which united over 1,400,000 women activists from all Soviet republics.* The full history of Soviet female emancipation lasted for seventy years and left quite the imprint on Central Asian societies and their active participation in civic and political life by promoting equal access to education, health and the labour sector.

*State Archive of Yaroslav Oblast 2010

*Плюха 1989

4.4.2 The Position of Women in Contemporary Central Asian Civil Society

In post-Soviet Central Asia, some women councils still actively function at local, district and regional levels. Experts also highlight their active work in new spheres like micro-credit provision, or other forms of support and information provision – for instance in raising awareness about domestic violence.* Today, women councils are seen as active stakeholders in promoting gender equality and women's participation. They still provide information on living standards to the local authorities and organize community events. However, they do no longer receive funding from the state to do this and have to find resources elsewhere.*

*Giffen et al. 2005: 76

*Giffen et al. 2005: 76

Women councils have always played significant role in building capacity for women and contributing to their emancipation. Unsecure funding makes them dependent on governments, and the national identity narratives in the NIS have revived pre-Soviet gender perceptions, even undoing some previous gains: In search of the Uzbek national identity, the Karimov regime reverted to traditional ideas about women, and embraced traditional gender stereotypes.* But all traditional institutions like *Uruu*, *Ru*, *Avlod* and *Jamoat* similarly subscribe to such old-fashioned ideas, eroding public awareness of harmful cultural practices and are resistant to seeing women in power.

*Saidazimova 2005: 1

Notwithstanding, the first barriers come from the family structure: At an early age, girls are told that their place is at home, rearing children and overseeing the household. Boys are told that they will become the head of the household. Although young girls are generally good students, they are discouraged from using their education to pursue careers and are instead pushed to focus solely on their families.

4.4.3 Women's Political Representation in the Region

The NIS have been characterized by negative changes for women's political representation. Largely this is connected with

already-mentioned social barriers, violence and discrimination against women –in turn rationalized through tradition and religion. The struggle of women for political representation has to overcome unfair distribution of resources, widespread patriarchal norms and values, increased religiosity (blocking political participation and decline of girls education) and low gender sensitivity.

Table 12.3 Women’s Representation in National Parliaments in 2018

Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
27.1%	19%	19%	25%	16%

Source: data.worldbank.org

The lowest political representation is in Uzbekistan, but the average proportion of women’s representation is only around 21%. Critics also draw attention to the decline of women’s representation at local and city council elections in all Central Asian countries. Despite gender quotas by law, and an extensive legislative base for gender equality, “women are largely excluded from decision-making and hold only 10% of local council seats – part of a steady decline from 19% of local council seats held by women in 2004, to 17% in 2008 and 12% in 2012.”*

*Ширинова 2016: 1

4.5 Social Mobilization and Democracy Promotion in Central Asia

Social mobilization and democracy promotion are tightly dependent on citizens’ active engagement in identifying their own social issues and addressing them with the participation of decision-makers. There is a tight linkage between democracy promotion and social mobilization. Through active participation, citizens can not only change government institutions’ attitudes towards citizens but also can hold government accountable, which is crucial for democratic governance. However, in the case of Central Asia, social mobilization as a phenomenon has two sides:

On the one hand community-based institutions have a lot of agency to unite citizens and they maintain strong networks to mobilize members in addressing social issues and building a resilient society. The chapter highlighted their crucial role in conflict resolution and peace-building in the multi-ethnic societies of Central Asia. Mahalla and clan systems have a tradition of mutual aid and self-help functions, which are crucial for local mobilization. Other long-lived and prevailing traditions of volunteerism such as *Ashar* represent brotherly kinship, the integrity of compatriots

and self-willingness to help one another.* In rural areas, traditional institutions address issues such as water and sanitation, cleaning irrigation systems, installing street lights, levelling roads and other community needs. Their own governments rely on them to provide services to their citizens in rural areas.

On the other hand, the interrelation between citizens and government institutions is still very hierarchically and patriarchally structured. Traditional institutions have no independence. Their own members still do not realize the power they wield regarding social mobilization, which would help citizens to hold government accountable. Unfortunately, the last three decades did not bring major changes for citizens' participation in decision-making. The voice of community members is still not heard during public hearings or budget hearings at local level, because male elders dominate these institutions. To some extent traditional institutions do serve as a platform for citizens to work together with decision-makers in order to address community needs. However, none of them actively focus on building their capacity to protect their group rights and unite their voices to influence decision-makers.

The gender imbalances are a major problem. Women and girls are socialized to be caregivers and family-oriented, whereby they are perceived as vulnerable rather than equal participants in social mobilization process. Women's participation in civic engagement is quite a sensitive issue, especially where patriarchal traditional institutions are dominant.

In such an environment, it is very easy for people to assert that gender equality and women's civic participation are alien to Central Asian society, or that these concepts are imports from the West. Due to general stereotypes, most people question whether a woman can and should combine her civic activism and family life.

Similarly voiceless are the rural youth. These have less knowledge on how to protect their rights and advocate their interests at local level, which is a significant obstacle in promoting youth participation in decision-making. The right to make decisions is usurped by the older generation, and youth never partakes in budgetary or public hearings where issues concerning them could be prioritized.

As for other forms of CSOs such as NGOs, media and academic institutions, they are primarily located in capital cities and hence their role in social mobilization in the countryside is limited. So, neither traditional institutions nor NGOs have an independent voice in engaging citizens in social mobilization in Central Asia.

*Zharkynbaeva et al. 2019: 173

5. Conclusion

This chapter shows that post-Soviet Central Asia has its own unique 'civil society,' a hybrid of inherited Soviet political culture with strong traditional community-based organizations and an urban bias where more formal CSOs stand their ground. The aim of this chapter was to provide a purview of the most important CSOs in Central Asia, and confront Western theoretical concepts with regional realities. The conclusion is that civil society in Central Asia is much more resilient than it would seem at first glance, but the inherent contradictions of these multiple modernities make civil society ineffective to withstand domination by autocratic rule or to foster good governance.

State-media relations did not change much in the post-Soviet period. Media in contemporary Central Asia is still dependent on the state and is largely used as an instrument for state propaganda. State intervention in printing as well as in online media is characteristic to all Central Asian countries. There is total control in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; whereas in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan most media are state-run or owned by business entities close to the power-holders; and Tajikistan sits somewhere in between these two. Everywhere, repression is applied to individual investigative journalists, human rights activists, and independent and foreign media.

Traditional institutions foster societal resilience, local mutual collective action and charity, and can even de-escalate conflict, but their internal patriarchal hierarchy excludes women, girls and youth, especially in rural areas. The strong unity and belonging they propagate comes at the cost of structural discrimination against these latter groups. Endorsed by the ruling regimes and locked into dependency relations (patronage) with power-holders at various levels, they remain entrenched, conservative bastions of elite interests that revive pre-Soviet attitudes to women.

The NGO sector in Central Asia has a short history and three decades have not suffice to develop an independent position. The ruling autocracies regularly attempt to tighten control over NGOs, or manage them through state-funding (GONGOs), excessive regulation, and repression.

As long as civil society remains fragmented and divided, with community-based institutions and formal CSOs unable to find a common voice, civic participation in Central Asian societies will fall short of effective democracy promotion and keeping governments accountable.

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7. Recommended Literature

In particular, the author recommends Eric Freedman (ed.), *After the Czars and Commissars*, for its extensive knowledge on state and media relations in post-Soviet Central Asia. The works of S. Frederick Starr, *Clans Authoritarian Rulers and Parliaments in Central Asia* and Kathleen Collins on clan politics are solid inroads to investigating the impact of informal institutions on regime transformation by exploring clan politics and the complex nature of civil society in the region.

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Baktybek Kainazarov holds an MA in Politics and Society from Lancaster University, an MA double degree in European Studies from Jagiellonian University and Palacky University, a post-graduate degree in peace studies from Innsbruck University, and a PhD in Social Sciences from the Polish Academy of Science, in which he explored the nature of civil society in Central Asia and the role of civil society actors in democracy promotion. In addition to his teaching and research experience at Central Asian and Eastern European academic institutions, he has over ten years of professional experience in international development aid projects of UN agencies (*United Nations Development Program, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteer Program*) and NGOs (*National Democratic Institute, International Organization for Migration, Counterpart International*), where he strengthened his expertise on gender equality, youth empowerment, population studies and civic engagement. His area of expertise extends to community organizing, civic participation and civil society development, with the focus on youth and women.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Reflect on the application of western/neo-liberal approaches to the development of civil society in Central Asia. Give examples and discuss the consequences.

TOPIC 2

Can civil society develop in undemocratic/quasi-democratic societies? Under which conditions?

TOPIC 3

The role of media in civil society development in Central Asia today: prospects and challenges.

TOPIC 4

What are the main challenges in changing the public attitude towards women and youth civic participation?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

This activity consists of developing a group project on women's rights and is thought to be a practical experience of working in a team on a non-governmental project that could be carried out in a Central Asian country.

It starts with an introductory reflection on civil society and women's rights. The teacher provides brief information on the contemporary issues of law enforcement in the topic of women's rights in Central Asia, discussing the domestic and sexual violence, underage marriage as well as underrepresentation of women at the decision-making level. (S)he points out that these continue to be major issues in the region despite the adoption of gender equality programs and legislative acts such as Laws on the Prevention of Domestic violence (passed 2017 in Kyrgyzstan, 2009 and 2015 with amendments in Kazakhstan, 2013 in Tajikistan), amendments to election law (mandatory 30% gender quota in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2020), the amendment to the Criminal Code in 2013 (Kyrgyzstan) that toughens penalties for bride kidnapping, and ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international treaties.

Then (s)he presents a description of two projects (one successful and the second with a lesser impact), which will serve as a point of reference for students' own project (see description of the two projects in the case study no. 4, by Baktybek Kainazarov). Advantages and disadvantages of each project are pointed out. If there is enough time, a detailed comparative case study analysis, based on the two projects, can be carried out by students individually or in groups, either in class or as homework. In cases where there is not enough time, both descriptions can be more generally (less extensively) commented on in a short discussion, or the conclusions can be briefly exposed by the teacher her/himself, pinpointing weak and strong points. In any case, the students should be asked to reflect on which of the projects was more successful, in their opinion, and – more importantly – why.

After the discussion, the teacher divides the class into groups (e.g. 4-5 students in each group) and asks them to develop a project at a local or regional level which will address one of the issues connected with gender equality, women's participation in politics, fighting against domestic violence, underage marriage or other.

Each group addresses the following issues in their project preparation. The teacher may select the points listed below, taking into account the course objectives and the group needs:

- a. Problem identification. The group should choose the issue (education, political participation, domestic violence, sexual harassment and other harmful practices or other), identifying the problem to be solved, as well as a country/area where the project will be carried out. The group also sets a preliminary vision of the team (organization) and of the project (who they are and what objectives they have).
- b. Solutions. What are the proposed ways of solving the issue? What approaches and mechanisms will be applied? What specific changes in policy or law will function as steps toward your long-term objective? What victories or accomplishments will act as benchmarks? What mistakes could be made and thus should be avoided?
- c. Stakeholders mapping. Which organizations or government agencies are in a position to make a decision so that your team can achieve set goals? For instance, if your target is to increase the women's representation at decision-making level, your group should think not only about enforcement mechanisms of gender quota or relevant laws, but also needs to identify decision-makers, organizations or institutions and civil society actors who might share or not share your goals, thus identifying who can be your active partners, who might oppose your goal or try to maintain the status quo.
- d. Strategy/action plan. What type of strategy will your team choose? How will it influence the decision makers the most and why? What will you do to advance your legislative strategy? What are the specific activities of your project to advance your objectives?
- e. Media, communications and messages. 1) Formulate a message which will have four components: (i) the problem that requires change; (ii) the solution and its benefits; (iii) what you are doing to forward the solution and (iv) actions people can take; 2) Develop a logo by which the project or campaign will be recognized; 3) Identify which media reach your audiences; 4) Identify what actions you can take, reports you can produce or event you can hold to create news that will get coverage.
- f. Resources/budget. What is the estimated budget for the project? How do you intend to raise the necessary resources for this project? Who are the potential donors in this area?
- g. Tracking and measuring progress. (i) A timeline should be developed by the team (including: launch of the project, implementation phase, project finalization and reporting). How long will the project last: 6-12 months or longer? (ii) Monitoring and evaluation: at what intervals will you evaluate the overall progress of the project? How will you measure your success at achieving your objectives?

Part of the group activities can take place in the classroom and part as homework. In the first case, for each stage, the teacher sets an approximate time limit to support the time management within the groups. Depending on the course type and the student's needs, feedback could be provided after each stage or after some of them (the first two, especially, require initial feedback: problem identification and solutions).

After the deadline is reached, students present their group projects in a way formerly established by the teacher. The teacher provides feedback to each group and gives an opportunity for all students to comment on the project presentations.

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to:

- CASE STUDY NO. 3 by Oguljamal Yazliyeva
- CASE STUDY NO. 4 by Baktybek Kainazarov

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(View of) Cathedral Street.

CHAPTER 13

Women in Central Asia: Decolonizing Gender Studies

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Keywords:

• Women • Gender Studies • Decolonization • Zhensovety • Polygamy • Kelinism

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Mention important topics within the field of gender studies in Central Asia such as unveiling, polygamy and Zhensovet.
- Explain important historical developments concerning gender in Central Asia.
- Discuss the Hujum period, the Soviet unveiling campaign, and their implications for gender roles.
- Define concepts such as gender, polygamy, *Zhensovet*, *zhenskiy vopros*, *hujum*, *kelin*, and *mahalla*.
- Discuss selected methodological issues related to gender studies in Central Asia.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- How do you define gender?
- What issues (both empirical and theoretical) are at stake when studying gender in Central Asia?
- What do you think are the most sensitive gender issues in Central Asia today?
- Keeping Edward Said's work on Orientalism in mind, to what degree do our own identities (nationality, gender, language ability, class, etc.) matter when studying gender in Central Asia?

Main questions

- What are the relevant issues and concepts to consider when studying gender in Central Asia?
- What historical developments occurred in the Soviet and post-Soviet period with implications for women in Central Asia?
- What does *Zhensovet* stand for? How was it created?
- How has polygamy manifested itself in Central Asian societies?
- What methodological issues one needs to keep in mind when studying gender in Central Asia?

Post-reading questions

- What are the gaps within gender research on Central Asia?
- What is the comparative potential of case studies on gender in Central Asia?
- What are the ethical issues to keep in mind when studying gender in Central Asia?

Women in Central Asia: Decolonizing Gender Studies

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THIS CHAPTER aims to trace trajectories of gender transformations explained through the frame of women agency in post-Soviet Central Asia. This presented process of gender role transformation will be embedded into the contexts of migration from Central Asia (largely male outmigration), economic crisis, lack of social welfare, state fragility and political crisis. The aim of the chapter is twofold: first to shed some light on the trajectories of changing women's roles in the family and in the public sphere, and second, to highlight the importance of decolonizing the field of gender studies in the Global South in general, and Central Asia in particular. Following criticisms of the Oriental approaches in Western scholarship, this chapter focuses on the agency of women and the emergence of new opportunities for women created by Soviet rule and thus avoids the discourse describing women in Central Asia as acting only from a 'position of weakness.'

The text below traces the resilient character of women and their agency, focusing on the post-Soviet period to highlight the increasing importance of women in everyday lives and politics. The chapter is structured in three sections: Section 1 shows efforts towards the liberation of women in the Soviet Union and a partial reversal of these policies in the post-Soviet period, implying a paradox in terms of the importance of the agency of women.

The main argument of the chapter is that despite post-Soviet challenges for women in Central Asia, they continue to play important roles in coping and innovating under worsening economic, political and social conditions. This chapter highlights the complexity of the transformations of the labour market, family structures, and women's institutions. By presenting selected topics and themes, the underlying narrative serves to point out the position and changing roles of women through time.

The chapter starts with a short institutional and historical background on changing gender roles (Section 1), before moving to some more theoretical and methodological reflections on the processes of gender transformation in the region (Section 2), before

Box 13.1 *Hujum* and Revolutionary Feminist Agitation

"To throw off the paranji means to break [completely] with the old ways of life. It means quarrelling with mullahs, quarrelling with all kinds of old-style people in the family and neighborhood, it means standing in defiance of all that is old."

– Serafima Liubimova, *Zhenotdel* activist

In the early years after the Bolshevik Revolution *hujum* was designed as one of the first efforts to free women in non-Russian, mostly Muslim societies occupied by Soviet regime. The goal was to liberate women and girls from patriarchy, seclusion and feudalism by offering them equal access to education, and thus mobilize this segment of the population into the new socio-economic system (local governance and the workforce). In the early 1920s, the Communist Party organized women groups to launch a campaign of unveiling women and freeing them from their male masters, who would hold more than one wife at home. *Hujum* (also *Hudjum* – *Худжум*, from Turkic, literary meaning 'attack' or 'assault') was the name of a famous unveiling campaign centred in Uzbekistan, organized on the Women's Day on 8 March 1927.*

*Northrop 2004: chapter 2

The citation above is from a speech by Serafima Liubimova, a women activist working in Central Asia, addressing a women's congress in Moscow in October 1927.* The *Zhenotdel* (*Женотдел*) or 'women's department' was a special branch of the secretariat of the Bolshevik party devoted to women's affairs, equality within the party and labour unions, and women emancipation through education and awareness. *Zhenotdel* was created in 1919 by two feminist revolutionaries, Aleksandra M. Kollontai (1872-1952, its main ideologue) and Inessa F. Armand (1874-1920, its first director and a trusted aide of Lenin), who initiated legal reforms to grant women the right to divorce, abortion, political participation, and the provision of services for women and mothers. It was closed down by Stalin in 1930, its task deemed 'completed' and some of women's most progressive new rights were curbed.*

*Northrop 2004: 69

*Alpern Engel 1987: 786-788

delving somewhat deeper into two illustrative phenomena: the subservience of the Soviet women's councils (*Zhensoveti*) in Section 3 and the resurgence of polygamy in Section 4.

This work is based on data collected during intensive and longitudinal anthropological research in Central Asia between 2005 and 2019. Mainly anthropological methods have been applied during the fieldwork alongside the policy research conducted in 2010 and 2011. Anthropological research methods include participant observation, interviews, focus group discussions, travelling ethnography, ethnography of communication, fieldnotes, and visual

methods such as photography and film. As a native anthropologist I relied largely on my native knowledge growing up in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and extensively travelling through the region. This also explains the use of the first-person narrative which refers to the insights in this text derived from personal observations and experience.

1. Historical Overview: From Hujum to Zhensovet back to Polygamy

Before national delimitation, Central Asia was known as Turkestan by the Imperial Russian administration and still contained its surviving khanates and emirate, that by 1920 had been turned into people's republics – see also Map 8.2. As Soviet control over these territories increased after the Bolshevik October Revolution (1917-1921) and their suppression of Basmachi insurrections (1916-1924), these former independent polities were radically transformed: physically (new borders), institutionally, politically, and well as socially. Gender roles and the situation of women in Central Asia underwent a total change. The *hujum* campaign was only the beginning of the transformation of women's lives that symbolically marked the end of the total physical invisibility of women in Central Asian (sedentary) societies, who were forced to spend most time at home taking care of the household and rearing children. *Hujum* (see Box 13.1) was a radical campaign for unveiling women, organized by the new Soviet regime in their Muslim frontiers. Reaction to the campaign was strong. Women who participated and dared to publicly shed or even burn their *parandji*¹ (veiling in Purdah style) were not free of risk. Many were punished (or even killed) by family members for rejecting the old order. There was a real human cost to these progressive social changes such as radical unveiling in Central Asia.*

*Kamp 2011

In the emancipation campaigns, education was made compulsory and for all. More women were intentionally and actively recruited to various jobs – particularly within the state administration and government, in order to artificially emphasize the role of women within governance, who could then enrol other women into state activities at all levels. Some local traditions like child marriages were prohibited outright, others like polygamy were

¹ Also spelled *paranji* or *parandja* (паранджа) this refers to the traditional robe for women and girls in sedentary, urban Central Asia (the former city-states of Khiva, Bukhara, Samarkand and Kokand – now mostly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), worn when leaving the house. It is similar to a burka, and covers the whole body while the face is hidden behind a (heavy, black) veil, traditionally made from horsehair, called a *chachvan* (чачван).

repressed by institutionalizing marriage through ZAGS² (registration offices), which over time expanded their role of mere marriage registration and gained significant power within state administration regarding a range of family issues. This was possible through the process of increased bureaucratization or the Soviet system of governance, where one permit depends on another permit (one cannot obtain one *spravka* without the other *spravka*). Important issues relating to employment, trade, opening a business, or regulating an inheritance required a big list of documents including many *spravki* (a common name for a document which confirms something) that were issued by ZAGS, mahalla or other offices.

Interviews reveal that women who grew up during the Soviet Union felt very lucky about their improved situation when comparing themselves to their grandmothers, who had to be fully veiled and accept polygamy, living in Muslim patriarchal societies ruled by religious laws. The comparison the Soviet women made between pre-Soviet and Soviet times sounded like “our grandmothers wore *parandji* and had to be one of many wives and drove donkey carriages living without electricity. If the Soviets would not have come to free us, we would be like in Afghanistan.”³

*Kamp 2011

Despite the real risk of repercussions for that first generation of women,* the Soviet modernization efforts to educate all and break up the traditional social order by launching anti-religious campaigns to motivate female members to become productive members of the labour force, and by investing in infrastructure development and total electrification, reaching to the most remote rural areas in Central Asia. The purpose of industrialization – to exploit the region’s natural resources – is of course clear, although many women expressed positive recollections, grounded in their individual experiences of positive change on the ground, which is largely disconnected from the political background. Despite the major political and religious repression, forced mass population upheavals and other forms of control during Soviet rule,* the real socio-economic change in terms of economic output and social welfare systems introduced by the Soviets, was tremendous: replacing polygamy with monogamy as the pervasive norm, attain literacy rates of more than 90 percent, stimulate a massive increase in the percentage of highly educated women until the 1990s, etc. State planning and social welfare also partly broke up age-old, traditional kinship structures* and radically transformed gender roles.

*Turaeva 2016

*See also Chapters 11 and 12.

Decades of consolidated socio-political transformations com-

² *Запис актов гражданского состояния – zapis aktov grazhdanskogo sostoyaniya.*

³ Citation from interviews conducted in Urgench, 2006.

bined with stagnated economic development, designed according to ideological blueprints and state-planning, had resulted in uneven modernization for Soviet Central Asia and economic dependencies. Post-Soviet Central Asia would undergo new great political, economic, and social transformations after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1990-1991, resulting in economic and political turmoil.

The paths forward for all Central Asian Republics (except Kazakhstan⁴) were challenging and led to a slow erosion of the existing infrastructure, decline in industrial production, loss of jobs and economic deficiencies up to the failure to provide basic provisions. Some scholars of post-Soviet transitions called this backward development a 'de-development' or 'de-modernization',⁵ which is characterized by the erosion of development.* Similar observations could also be heard from female residents of the region, many of whom marked the collapse of the Soviet Union as the start of a stark reversal – in their words: “after [the] Soviet Union broke we went back to stone age.”*

*Ishkanian 2003

*Meurs and Ranasinghe 2003

In Turkmenistan it was most visible how post-Soviet authoritarianism and personalist rule led to a slow but sharp reversal.* The resulting state-wide neo-patrimonial system established various layers of control, where at local level co-opted elders held power over youth and particularly women and girls, who are no longer allowed to wear Western clothing and are forced to put on uniforms in schools or universities, with workplaces imposing other dress restrictions. Turkmenistan became a second North Korea, suppressing anything that hinted at going against the dictated politics and imposed way of living. By now, even youth once studying outside of Turkmenistan are not permitted to leave the territory of the country (passports are not prolonged by the national embassies so citizens applying for extension must do so back home), not to mention that women are not even allowed to drive a car anymore.⁶

*Edgar 2004

⁴ Kazakhstan took a different economic path opening its economy largely to foreign investments and keeping its both political and economic ties with Russia. Please see for more in-depth analysis of Kazakhstan's post-Soviet path of economic boom. (Anceschi 2014)

⁵ In her analysis of women in Central Asia and Caucasus, Armine Ishkanian analyses and discusses this phenomenon of de-development in detail. (Ishkanian 2000; 2003) Other authors who focus on this topics are: Bridger 1987; Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1998; Creed and Wedel 1997.

⁶ I spent my youth in Turkmenistan since my all relatives live there, and outside my family connections, I did a small study in 2005-2006, as well as online research on the topic of radicalization and media use in Turkmenistan. I keep contacts with both friends and family who reside abroad and in Turkmenistan through internet channels.

Box 13.2 Mahalla

Mahalla (mainly in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) is the name for an urban (sometimes rural) neighbourhood considered as an administrative territorial (district) unit with its own office and representatives: it hosts a neighbourhood committee with a local elderly council, a *Zhensovet* council, a police officer and a passport officer *passportistka* (from Russian: a passport officer of female gender).

The mahalla is a neighbourhood consisting of 150 to 1,500 families, which is governed by the mahalla committee, a self-governing local administrative body which is state-controlled and which salaries are also paid by the state.* The leaders of the office are from among the elders of the neighbourhood and the function of the elderly council is to solve small disputes and problems, mobilize members for voluntary work or communal activities. The mahalla also provides social welfare and coordinates charitable activities (*hashar/ashar*).*

During Soviet times, mahallas were a recognized and regulated part of the local administration in southern Central Asia. The functions of the mahalla committees were stipulated by law and they were obliged to report to local governments each month.*

*Urinboyev 2011

*Turaeva 2016; Dadabaev 2013;
Urinboyev 2011

*Dadabaev 2013: 185

Following the post-Soviet economic and political crises, millions of Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Tajiks had to emigrate to feed their families mainly through labour-migration to Russia. Turkmen and Kazakhs did not experience mass emigration like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan itself became another migration destination for labourers from Central Asia. Turkmenistan strove to keep its population from leaving the country by providing the minimum basic support (electricity, cooking gas, water, reduced bread prices, etc.) and paying considerably and comparatively better salaries than in other Central Asian countries could offer (besides Kazakhstan). Turkmenistan started to feel the economic challenges after the falling of oil prices and after the global Covid-19 crisis which resulted in the shortage of food supplies and other financial consequences.*

*BTI 2020

Still hundreds of thousands of Turkmen migrated to Turkey to work or to study there. There is an increasing share of women from Turkmenistan going into small-scale retail trade between UAE, Turkey and Turkmenistan.* Starting from 1970-1980s (as some women remember) small-scale traders and other entrepreneurs were mainly women. As a result, the economic hardships of the post-Soviet period were felt particularly hard by women in Central Asia. This weakened their economic independence and facilitated a shift of norms and roles within families, kinship structures and

*Turaeva 2010

local governance systems such as *mahalla* committees or elderly councils (*aksakal* and others).

Although the hardships detailed above lay largely on female shoulders, women and youth showed continuous resilience to cope with these challenges, which disproves theories claiming the disappearance or absence of women agency. Until recently there were few works that systematically studied the agency of women in Central Asia, and the literature on women predominantly underestimates their agency and roles in marriage, life cycle events, family economics, family planning, their social lives both within kinship spheres and in local communities (such as within neighbourhood and mahallas.) So far I have personally met several mahalla leaders that were women.⁷ NGOs in Central Asia are also largely led by women.

This leads me to a key argument I would like to advance in this chapter, which concerns the agency of women. Although I argued that Soviet rule granted more possibilities to women ever before, the end of the USSR did not only bring economic uncertainties but also led to de-modernization and suppression of women's freedoms and rights under the changing economic and political reality.

This, however, does not mean one can only address this loss of women agency in post-Soviet Central Asia. Despite the widespread situations where women suffered most under the economic collapse, political instability, growing uncertainties and mass emigration, women have continued to show innovative potential and resilience in situations of hardship and seemingly bleak future prospects. This resilience deserves a careful attention since it implies that women in Central Asia are not passive recipients in patriarchal power relations nor according the externally-imposed views on women, but they continue to play crucial, although less prominent or visible roles in the current social systems, dominated by patriarchy, to which they also contribute.

The argument goes beyond the fact that women are oppressed by other women as well as men, and that in order to understand the real situation of women in Central Asia, instead of the prevalent one-sided or binary view, a much more nuanced and detailed assessment is required. Women are both weak and strong, suffering from the same system wherein they also play a part. It is too easy to highlight one side and ignore the other. In addition, it should be borne in mind that continuous struggle, innovation, and suffering from basic structural constraints during everyday

⁷ During my research in 2005-2006 I have met first with mahalla leaders in Uzbekistan, and later with mahalla leaders in Tajikistan (from rural areas).

challenges, occupy the female minds of Central Asia. One should also always contextualize those barriers, opportunity systems, and agency when analysing their position.

The question asked in this chapter is what continuity and changes can be traced through the changing gender roles from early Soviet to late post-Soviet periods. In the late post-Soviet times in Central Asia, more and more women had taken up leading roles in the economic lives of their families continuing the early Soviet efforts to advance gender equality.

However, this was not the case for the higher levels of state administration or for the political and business elites, which remained predominantly male. The disparity between poor and rich became extremely large in Central Asia, and the middle class thinned out after the collapse of the Soviet Union following the economic crises in the 1990s. Emigration became the only way out of poverty for unskilled workers (see also Chapter 21).

After having highlighted the general trends and focus in this section, the remainder of the chapter is roughly structured chronologically to emphasize the role of the Soviet government in the elevation of the status of women (Section 3), and to trace the processes that played out in the aftermath of the USSR (Section 4). Before expanding on selected topics – like ‘Zhensovet’ and ‘polygamy’ – and testimonies from these periods, I will provide a brief introduction on gender studies (Section 2 below) and discuss the general trends within this field focusing on Central Asia.

2. Gender Studies and Some Methodological Reflections

Gender has been brought under the analytical gaze alongside the political transformation of societies where political activism for human equality gained prominence. Gender is directly related to the issues of status, identity and roles within social relations and the social structure of societies. Feminist strands of scholarship advanced the concept of gender as an important social construction, which is directly related to notions of general human equality and the rights of women in the early 1970s. This was the beginning of the career of the concept of gender, after which it became more popular.

American philosopher, Judith Butler in her celebrated *Gender Trouble* questioned the connection between gender and sexuality.* Drawing largely on the works of Foucault, Butler highlighted systemic characteristics of gender regimes⁸ and generally accepted

*Butler 1990

⁸ A regime is defined as a dispersed but powerful set of institutions, practices, and objects following a Foucauldian understanding of regime (Foucault 1975).

gender norms and sexuality.* Joan Scott is one of the authors engaging more theoretically with the concept of gender in contrast to those who dealt with it dominantly in political or activist contexts.* She contributed to the understanding of gendered relations where power plays a central role in the process of negotiating social relations embedded in local economies and politics.*

*Butler 1990; 1993

*Scott 1989

*Scott 1989: 94

The late 1990s were marked by the end of Cold War regime and the proliferation of development programs financed by the West, to be conducted in developing countries, where gender issues were particularly emphasized. Gender and development in the late 1990s focused on such topics as gender and poverty, women's empowerment, gender and politics, and gender in patriarchal societies, among others.* Within the debate of women and development studies, the central issues raised were empowerment, inequality, poverty and sexuality.* Naila Kabeer indeed advocated for raising the issue of sexuality and considering kinship and family, as these play an important role in family planning and gender roles. She particularly drew the attention to male control over female sexuality and women's empowerment.*

*Mayoux 1999; Kabeer 2001; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005; Kishor and Johnson 2004; Mies 1986

*Young 1993; Kabeer 1994; Boserup 1970; Braidotti 1991a; 1991b

*Kabeer 1994

The 21st century saw ultracritical and political engagement of academic scholarship in the times of digitalization, transnational processes, economic, environmental, and political crisis. Most prominently innovative among these, – and concerning gender studies directly – were the postcolonial critiques. One of the celebrated authors in this regard is Chandra Mohanty. With her book she raises issues concerning global challenges of humanity and the position of women within those challenges which cannot be resolved without collective efforts and solidarity with all those who stand for women's rights.* This was a reaction to the fragmentary character of the feminist scholarship and gender studies from the earlier decades where divisions between Western vs non-Western or native scholarship were prominent alongside other disagreements within the same field regarding religion, race and regional divisions.

*Mohanty 2003

Following Mohanty's call for solidarity and recognition of the global character of inequalities in general as well as growing insecurities, researchers started to address the traps of colonial thinking, unequal positioning and power relations, authority over representation, cultural and historical background and sensitivity. Gender issues remain important as long as general inequalities, power differences, and poverty globally persist.* Although the general scholarship on gender issues is relevant to any research on these issues, regional specificities are important to consider as

*Mohanty 2003; Kabeer 2001; Foley-Reynolds 2008

Box 13.3 Defining Gender

The dictionary of Anthropology provides the following definition of gender:

"Gender refers to those culturally assigned behaviours and meanings, such as sex roles, attributed to the distinction all human societies make between male and female."^{*}

*Rhum 1997a: 217

Gender is a socially constructed notion to indicate the relations between human beings in regard to their biological and sexual belonging.* Judith Butler defined gender as "a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender-and desire- where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires." Furthermore, Butler explains that "[t]his conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire."^{**}

*Beauvoir 1953;
Marks and De Courtivron 1981

*Butler 1990: 22

well – I will address these in section 3 – but first a word about the profiles and background of scholars working on gender in Central Asia.

Before starting to do any research and reading about 'the East' and considering sensitive topics such as gender one should be aware of the critical (academic) debate concerning Western scholarship about the East. Since the so-called 'reflective turn,' academic writing has gone through a major transformation after the way scholars tended to represent reality (fieldwork observations, knowledge production) faced strong criticism from decolonizing discourses.* In the field of Central Asian studies there is a clash not only between Western vs. local scholarship but there is third aspect to the struggle for representation and writing cultures – namely regarding the Russian colonial past which still competes for the dominant position within knowledge production in the region (as analysed in detail in Chapter 6.)

*Said 1978; Harrison 2010; Smith 2021

Under the imperial Tsarist regime, Russian scholars dominated the field of data collection from the occupied territories of the empire (e.g. Central Asia or the Caucasus). In the ensuing Soviet era, Russian scholars continued to retain a predominantly leading position in research on all of the Soviet Republics. As a consequence, scholarly literature in any field of study was predominantly in Russian with some limited translations available for 'native' scholars. The centre of research, of ideological production, and of academic discourse was located in Moscow. Until today, Russians

remain in a dominant position within the 'Former Soviet Union' (FSU) as leading scholars that steer academic discourse. In the West the discourse is mainly led by Western scholars who have made successful careers doing their research in post-Soviet space, with Russian scholars reduced to less prominent roles (with some exceptions.)

Anthropological research on Central Asia is still predominantly conducted by Western anthropologists, and local scholarship remains in the embryonic stage – where some basic issues and topics are still uncovered, although by now a good bulk of works has been produced by dominantly Western scholarship. Native anthropologists are increasingly appearing on the Western academic landscape, but still struggle for space and with limited funds. There are very few native anthropologists (from Central Asia) who hold a permanent position or are in a decision-making position within Western academic organizations or academic think tanks, beyond the offices of development and international organisations. When I look at our Africanist colleagues, I observe they are much further advanced in regard to their own representation in knowledge production about the African continent and some kind of balance can be observed when surveying academic landscapes, finding that native scholars occupy prominent positions in the West, while African universities also carry considerable weight in the Anglo-phone academic community.

None of this can be seen in Central Asia. Sexy topics are part of this academic game and are part of career-making strategies, not mentioning the related financial interests (funding). Adeeb Khalid's remark on the scholarship on Soviet Central Asia is telling: "Scholars who invoke postcolonial studies in the study of Central Asia have been much more interested in the cultural work of Soviet power, a much sexier topic than the history of cotton."*

*Khalid 2006: 232

The questions raised before one plans the actual fieldwork and data collection are determined by which aspects and themes are feasible to study, how one organizes access to the field, limitations arising from ethical issues, or safety when doing research. These aspects are particularly pronounced when dealing with such sensitive topics as gender. How can one account for the cultural gender bias resulting from the gender of the researcher? Both quantitative and qualitative research methods demand a sound consideration of such methodological challenges at the stage of research design, before any data collection and subsequent analysis.

In my own research on gender issues I had to consider all those questions, although the fact that I am a native, female anthropolo-

gist raised no problems in terms of access to the field or the question of trust. I faced a more challenging time during the stage of data analysis and actual writing, where questions emerged about authority over representation, and the issue of how to voice my interview partners was difficult for me as I struggled to find a fine balance between being objective and being part of the people I am writing about.

With these reflections in mind, I will now turn to some key topics related to gender transformations, genealogically tracing the same process to the Soviet gender politics which partly inform readers about contemporary issues regarding women in Central Asia, and that in turn expose the complexity of studying these topics.

3. The Legacy of Soviet Gender Politics in Central Asia

Soviet nostalgia is by now a well-documented phenomenon, explained through the major achievements of Soviet modernity on the ground, despite the political agenda of exploitation – exploitation both of natural and human resources – that lay behind these policies.* The often-cited or remembered and undeniable achievements of the Soviet efforts are the boost in literacy to over 95 percent,⁹ in a very short space of time (one could question the means), the infrastructural boom (roads, gas pipelines, as well as electrification of whole countries) and industrialization, and the empowerment of women (against which one could argue that any destruction of tradition is something not good). Also the Soviet social welfare system was one of the central and decisive systems in giving people a sense of security. Trade unions provided benefits for those who were state-employed, including working pensioners and those temporarily disabled by illness or on maternity leave. Membership in trade unions was compulsory, and the membership fee was one percent of the salary. Trade unions provided paid sick leave, annual visits to sanatoriums, and cultural and social organizations for leisure time. Besides, trade unions had funds for holidays, organized trips and travels (*nymëbku* – *putyovki*), children's summer camps, various kinds of awards, and often assigned housing.

I am well aware of the negative sides (and atrocities) of the Soviet system, despite all these visible results such as literacy rates, freedom and equality for girls and women, obligatory school attendance, etc. Nonetheless, in this section I will focus selectively on the part of women's empowerment projects that radically changed

*Kalinin 2011; Mazur 2015; Kamp 2016

⁹ Literacy rates rose from 44% in Soviet Russia in 1920 and from 4% in some regions in Central Asia. (Liebowitz 1986: 161)

the situation for women in Central Asia. Understanding the Soviet roots is highly relevant for the present situation of gender roles today.

The large-scale reforms introduced by the Soviet government, particularly the programs for the empowerment of women, launched a significant change in gender relations and the earliest understanding of gender equality in Central Asia.* Since the *hujum* campaigns, these policies were meant to constitute a decisive break with the old system of family relations and to create a 'Soviet family.' However, as Deniz Kandiyoti argues, emancipatory movements have not always positively affected the rights of women in various Muslim societies. Here she refers to the 'patriarchal bargains' women make within their complex kinship arrangements and highlights the use of coping strategies by women.*

*Massell 2015; Lubin 1981

*Kandiyoti 1987: 275

Of course, not all Soviet efforts to achieve gender equality were successful, but it is important to note that, at least, these policies took most women out of their homes, unveiled them, educated them, and gave them jobs. This process was difficult, prolonged, and not without victims. These efforts started to yield results only after World War Two and were perceived positively by women who enjoyed the freedom and benefits of working and open education only in the 1950s and 1960s. Women born in the early 1950s were encouraged to continue their education, and a considerable number earned advanced degrees. Women who lived in small villages could travel to larger towns and capital cities throughout the Soviet Union to pursue their higher education (like my own mother).

I will now address a key instrument from Soviet gender politics to shed light on an institution that was used to administer those policies. The Soviets actively encouraged women's participation in its institutions to implement emancipation, although political control would firmly remain in the hands of men.

3.1 *Zhensovety* – Women Participation in the USSR

The process and motivations of 'liberation' and 'emancipation' of women under the USSR is critically discussed by many scholars.* Despite the mismatches between ideological discourse and utilitarian goals, the systemic subordination to a men-led party system, one must not deny the dramatic change in the lives of Central Asian women advanced by the Soviets throughout these seventy years of Soviet rule. Of course, tradition and gender expectations could never be fully eroded by these emancipation policies of Soviets. Nonetheless, one can witness what I would call a *gender turn*,

*Akiner 1997; Ishkanian 2003

introduced through education, career promotion and thus status advancement.

*See Box 13.1

The 'Zhensovet' (*Женсовет*) is an abbreviation from '*Zhenskii Sovet*,' which from Russian translates as Women's Committee. These were descendants of the revolutionary 'Zhenotdel.'^{*} (1919-1930) Created in early 1960, although less powerful in scope and autonomy, *Zhensovet* reached out to women and girls to emancipate them by promoting literacy campaigns, access to education and, later, through economic empowerment and social engagements at community level and the promotion of women-leaders. They 'assisted' the party in their work with women by mobilizing women around topics related to women, around priorities primarily set by men. Their activists were responsible for services, traditionally associated with women, like child and health care, thus reinforcing a traditional labour role division by gender. They acted as a lobby, but did not have direct political power (unlike their predecessors, the *Zhenotdely*).^{*}

*Alpern Engel 1987: 791

Despite these paradoxes, their influence was real in Central Asia. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh wrote:

"the Zhensovet delegates were charged with combating the influence of religion in the Muslim regions of Central Asia, but now, they were also responsible for monitoring the spread and popularity of religion in the Catholic regions of the Baltic republics and in the central Russian areas where the Orthodox Church retained a strong foothold. In general, the Zhensovet failed to produce female leaders in the Communist Party, even though they acted as autonomous consciousness raising groups among women."^{*}

*Tadjbakhsh 1998: 171

3.2 *Zhensovet* in Contemporary Central Asia

After the end of the Soviet Union the same organization continued to function in Central Asia, although it changed significantly alongside the situation of women themselves. The same institution, once created to promote equality and emancipation, has been subverted in current practices, where women often find themselves controlled by the *Zhensovet*. Particularly at universities, *Zhensovet* leaders actually make sure that female students 'behave.'

For instance, in the early 1990s, the *Zhensovet* of my university was responsible for keeping a vigilant eye on girls and registering any kind of misbehaviour, instead of watching out for us and for any problems that could arise from gender inequality or troublesome family situations. In this context the mere name 'Zhensovet' would ring all kinds of negative bells for girls, ranging from women-police (watchdogs) to your own mother-in-law, who were after misbehaving girls or student-*kelins* (brides).

If one considers the main, national *Zhensovet* – located in the capital and controlling all national funds to be allocated for programs targeting women (through subsidiary organizations) – this institution actually has real power. NGO leaders (the majority of them women) are usually dependent on the whim of the national *Zhensovet* leader. As gatekeepers of government funding, with various organizations lobbying the council, different power games are played just like in a university, where *Zhensovet* leaders hold sway over other women working for or in the organisation. Taking the example of an NGO in Tashkent where I used to work, the leader (female) had to be on very good terms with the chair of *Zhensovet*, otherwise she would not get her portion of the future project funding.

Armine Ishkanian found that:

*"[In] Armenia the Soviet-era Women's Council (Zhensovet) became the Women's Republican Council in the post-Soviet period with its leader and hierarchical structures intact. Few working-class people or rural residents, or even intellectuals who were not part of the former structures of power, were able to make this transition. These Soviet elites, in addition to possessing the organizing and language skills, also had an advantage of belonging to social networks that put them in contact with the Westerners who control or influence the distribution of grants."*⁹

*Ishkanian 2003: 489

This influence through the distribution of grant money is a powerful tool in the hands of contemporary Women's associations, and puts them in a monopoly-position for funding in this particular NGO sector. One can witness, when tracing projects concerning questions of gender and health deemed eligible for funding in the region (by following up the websites of these associations), that good relations with the national regime are a necessary condition. Also, when surveying the profiles of the leaders of the *Zhensovet* in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan where both chairwomen also occupy top positions within local government, one can only wonder why such women councils are officially registered as NGOs since they are essentially government-sponsored entities (GONGOs).¹⁰

At local administrative level *Zhensovet* can play a crucial role in the advancement of control over the female population, particularly in authoritarian governments such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. A *Zhensovet* can be found within *mahalla* committees in Uzbekistan, and in other countries they are integrated into the local state administration systems. This leads to complex situations where the original purpose of *Zhensovet* (pro-

¹⁰ GONGO stands for: Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization.

Box 13.4 Kelinism – The Subservience of the Daughter-in-law / Young Bride

In traditional steppe society, nomadic daughters-in-law have to make a good impression on their new families – subservience is expected, even to the point of allowing exploitation, and insubordination is commonly punished (violently). Up to 45 percent of Kyrgyz young brides have reported physical and psychological abuse by their in-laws.*

*Akisheva 2021

Arranged marriages used to be the norm (and are still widespread) and constitute a parental transaction with a dowry (bride price or *kalym*), which is the equivalent of a 'refund' for bringing up a daughter and 'giving' her to a new family. Its value is paid in currency, cattle, property and gifts, depending on the groom's family's status and means. This transaction also makes the new family fully responsible for the bride's honour and well-being. It happens that, in order to protect a daughter's chastity and dignity (but foremost the natal family's reputation), girls are thus married off at 14 or 15 years of age (before they are sexually active). This fixation on chastity contributes to the alarming percentage of underage marriages in the region, especially in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and this situation is exacerbated by poverty (when parents need the dowry), or instability (when families cannot protect daughters from assault or rape) – see also Chapter 12.

Paradoxically, a new bride or *kelin* should theoretically be the pride of the family, but they occupy the lowest status rung in her new family, particularly until she produces her first child (or a new (younger) *kelin* of another brother-in-law takes her place). Fundamental decisions about this young woman's life – like whether or not she is allowed to work outside the home, continue with her studies, with whom she can socialize, and how often she will see her natal family – are made largely by her husband, mother- and father-in-law,* to whose house she has moved, and where she usually does most of the serving work. A *kelin* cannot join the table when the family entertains guests, but rather stays in the kitchen. A *kelin* is never called by her name and only recognized as the 'kelin of so-and-so.' Only when she moves out from her in-laws (with her husband), will she be called the 'wife of so-and-so.' And only once she has already married off her own daughters and sons, and thus become a mother-in-law herself, will she finally be called by her name, and given full social status.*

*HRW 2001

*Turaeva 2017a: 139

To be a student-*kelin* is the most challenging when young women have to carry the burden of being *kelin* at the in-laws house where one's education is not valued, and the requirements of studying at a university. Recently, there has a growing interest in studying the concept of *kelinism* in Central Asia.*

*Turaeva 2017a/c;
Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2020

moting emancipation, awareness and autonomy) are completely corrupted to uphold a patriarchal, authoritarian status quo – see also Chapter 12 – even where they still provide (some) needed services. However, a deeper, qualitative analysis of contemporary Zhensovet in such contexts is beyond the scope of this chapter.

4. Gender Roles and the Position of Women in Post-Soviet Central Asia

The end of Soviet rule also meant the end of all social services which were maintained by the Soviet government, such as the social welfare system, free education, free medical services and economic stability (with state salaries set to match average living costs and including benefits). These reversals were disastrous in particular for women and other vulnerable groups (children, the elder, people with disabilities).

For this peripheral region of the FSU, independence brought economic collapse coupled with mismanagement of resources (deep corruption), undemocratic governance (authoritarianism) and informalization of societies in general. This radical difference between Soviet-era stability that many experienced and still remember in contrast to the uncertainty and chaos (*besporyadok*) of post-Soviet times has been the main reason for the growing and persisting ‘Soviet nostalgia.’

The changes have also been described as a step backwards by women themselves. This reversal, according to women testimonies, is identified as a direct cause for the changing gender roles and gender perception within local communities. Some would expect that this ‘backward turn’ (*arqaga qaytdik* in Uzbek) would result in an automatic and immediate return to patriarchal domination in women’s everyday lives, but obviously reality is far more complex. The body of literature on gender studies in Central Asia that focuses on these topics is growing.¹¹

Regarding the loss of agency, post-Soviet economic hardships

¹¹ Marianne Kamp provides a detailed and thorough overview of the literature on gender studies in Central Asia in general, covering the periods of Soviet and post-Soviet times. (Kamp 2009) Gender has been studied by various disciplines and ethnographic studies on gender in Central Asia have produced a significant amount of literature by now: Kasymova 2008; Kamp 2005; Cleuziou and Drenberger 2016. There is also a growing scholarship written by scholars from the region that also consider gender issues, providing a much more in-depth insights enriched with native knowledge: Bekebayeva et al. 2019; Kasymova 2008; Kim et al. 2018; Kim 2020; Kudaibergenova 2016; Tabyshalieva 1997; Tlostanova 2008; 2010; Turaeva 2017b/c; 2018; Suyarkulova 2016; 2019.

have been felt by both women and men. When one asks interviewees who are now the decision-makers and whether men are now the only decision-makers, the answer is *not* a simple 'yes.' On this topic of authority and decision-making power, I was told that "now money decides who is the boss and what needs to be done." This, in theory at least, would imply that there are equal chances for both men and women to become a decision-maker (if they meet the condition of having money), and this would provide the prospect to at least participate (economically) on equal terms not only within the private sphere of family life but also publicly.

The reality is that women are often structurally held back in the public sphere when aspiring to obtain (local) formal political positions, but economically they are quite apt at navigating the informal and formal, as well as the traditional and modern (progressive) contexts in which they operate. Women have some advantages. They can function in professions (regulated, informal or illegal) that cross the prescribed, traditional male-female divided market (much easier than men can), but of course, with spatially-bound, multiple modernities in Central Asia, their agency is much more unfettered in urban areas than in the countryside, where competition for resources is much higher and patriarchy is much more strongly guarded in the public sphere by local, male-dominated patronal networks,* and in the private sphere by family hierarchies.

*See also Chapter 11 on patronalism.

Below I will give some testimonies on one of the remarkable developments in the post-Soviet times – namely the rise of the phenomenon of polygamy. This is not to say that polygamy was totally erased by the Soviets, but the norms surrounding the practice differed. Currently one can witness the popularization of polygamy as a new status indicator (before, in the USSR, it was party-membership or holding an high position within the *nomenklatura* that endowed status). In the post-Soviet period, (visible) material wealth serves to increase status, and one of the signs of being rich is having more than one wife.

From my personal experiences of knowing many 'second wives' and 'extra-marital lovers,' and by being part in their lives into their older age, it became obvious to me that the popularization of polygamy by men is not necessarily a liberal move and 'break' with traditional family models but rather a way to uphold or stress their social status, as well as to manoeuvre out of their arranged marriages. The forms of polygamy exercised or seen in Central Asia are not in favour of women, who largely suffer from it.

4.1 Polygamy: Aimed against Women in Central Asia?

I personally met and was friends with more than 50 women that were second wives or lovers¹² and studied carefully twelve women in such positions from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. I must also note here that all of the second wives I knew were all from urban locations. In the countryside it is almost impossible to do this because in rural areas the community arrangements are closely knit and kinship groups reside densely. It is often the case that a rural migrant in a city or town has a second wife, whereas his first wife remains in the village taking care of his parents. In these cases, most of the rural migrants prefer staying in the town or the city and do not return back to their family.

Most of the second wives I studied were of the opinion that it is better for a woman to be a lover than a traditional wife because the life of a lover is much better than the one of a first and official wife – see also Box 13.4). In their explanations, which were often similar, they often mentioned the freedom from all traditional burdens and wifely duties, better treatment by their men, more presents, more financial support, a romantic relationship, relative independence, and modern (city) life as advantages.

The disadvantages these women listed were the secrecy of their relationship and their indefinite future: because of the age difference men get older faster; and the second wives are left alone (at any time) without a husband and security. This of course can be avoided in the best cases by securing property in the name of the second wives: a car, jewellery (most usual), or even a stable job with a good income, or by establishing a small business which they can run successfully, until it is taken over by the common children in the future.

Two of the twelve women I studied were officially introduced to the family of the husband and were accepted as second wives in order to be integrated into the events and responsibilities. Another one had just moved in with her lover officially after the wife died from asthma (in her late 50s). Second wives obviously tend to avoid those events where the first wife is present. However, situations did occur where one was on good terms with the children of the first wife, some of whom were already adults.

Another six women I got to know had successfully managed to become official wives just in time, by demanding that their lov-

¹² The local names for second wife or more neutral 'lover' (любовник /-ица – *lyubovnik /-itsa* in Russian) are usually negative words such as 'oynash' (ойнаш), literally 'playmate' in Uzbek/Kyrgyz, or 'jeleb' (джелеб / джалаб) meaning 'slut' or 'prostitute' in Turkmen/Uzbek/Kyrgyz/Kazakh and the like.

Box 13.5 Understanding and Defining Polygamy

*Rhum 1997b: 366

Polygamy is an institution of plural marriage that permits individuals to have more than one spouse.* The ancient Greek concept ‘πολυγαμία’ contains *poly* (many) and *gamos* (marriage) and thus literally means ‘often married.’*

There are three forms of polygamy:

- *Polygyny*, when one man is married to several wives
- *Polyandry*, when one woman is married to several husbands
- Group marriage, where several husbands are married to several wives, a combination of polygyny and polyandry*

*Zeitzen 2020: 3

There is a problem with the definition of polygamy depending on the cultural and legal context. For instance, in Inuit culture, when a man lends a wife to a friend, should this be considered polygamy or not, since no marriage did take place. Or like in China where legally a man can marry only one wife, but rich men are allowed to marry a second wife according to customary laws. Anthropologically, one can define polygamy if the second marriage is socially accepted and the children are recognized in a long-term relationship.*

*Zeitzen 2020

ers divorce their official first wives. Of the latter, three of those divorced first wives were kept in the family of their ex-husbands in case the men decided to move out and leave them the house; in other cases parents agreed to building another house for their son’s second wife. The latter scenario was to the advantage of the women-lovers who could then move out (from their (parental) house), but still stay out of the orbit of the traditional kinship norms to live modern lives or independent family lives without the pressure of the extended family.

Divorce (in the above mentioned cases) usually took place at a later age (when the men were in their late 40s and 50s.) Second wives are usually much younger than their partners with an average age gap of more than ten to 15 years, which puts these women into a more privileged position than their older ‘opponents.’ Whereas first wives are busy with childrearing, caring for parents-in-law, and other responsibilities, and have little time to take good care of themselves, second wives care very much about their appearance. For the latter, their looks are their main capital – so these women themselves explained to me – as well as having sex. ‘Being good in bed’ was no less important to their men.

It is important for second wives to own a small business, which is more and more popular among young women to become more or less independent from their families. The older second wives serve

also as 'middle(women)' who do favours to both young women who are looking for partners (to become second wives) and to older men who appreciate the services in helping them find good-looking young candidates for second wives. It is an exchange based on unequal terms. Young women appreciate male candidates with money who can finance their lives and, in an ideal scenario, buy them a flat, a car, and in the best case even a house. For rich men it is a must to have a young good-looking lover, which adds status to their reputation of being able to afford more than one wife or one family. For the second wives, such financial security comes at a cost, with the sacrifice of their reputation.

4.2 A Testimony on Polygamy: a Tajik Businesswoman and Second wife

The story of Nozima is in my opinion tragic but not unusual. Nozima is in her early 40s and is a nurse by education. She divorced after her husband took a lover. With the remittances from abroad (two daughters living in France and Russia), she established a small business of her own as a single woman in Dushanbe. She met her lover (let's call him Rahim) in the polyclinic where she worked as a nurse. He came to her as a patient and as she described him: "he came to me very sick and very badly taken care of (his clothes) and I nursed him back to health and took good care of him and made him good-looking by buying him stylish clothing. I turned him into a *chelovek* again (literary 'human being' from Russian), meaning a respectful person with a status."

Rahim had divorced his first wife but his family remarried him to a young woman from a rich family. The relationship with Nozima was a secret one (she was older than him). Rahim's parents would never agree to this relationship with Nozima because of her age and in general it is frowned upon for a man to have an older woman. The drama reached its peak when Nozima's lover married yet another women in secret and justified his absence with a business trip. The secret of her lover's marriage could of course not be kept for very long, and after Nozima found out about it she decided to leave him.

She later agreed to marry a mullah as a second wife, where his first wife is her friend who herself asked Nozima to marry her husband, justifying this by saying that "it is better my husband has a good loyal woman whom I know and does not marry someone I don't know, who takes my husband away forever." After their *Nikah*¹³ wedding, Nozima is however not left alone by Rahim, her previous lover, who tries to woo her back, making a grand gestures in public.

¹³ *Nikah* is the Islamic marriage ceremony, legitimizing the bond before Allah after which intimate relations are allowed.

However, her new husband, the mullah, cannot afford this theatre, which ruins his reputation. As a result, he leaves Nozima (and she takes back Rahim.)

At the time of that interview (2015) Nozima lived amidst this drama and was torn between her lover and the animosity of his other family (three children). In addition, she has her own children from her own previous marriage who are already adults and living abroad. She is in her early 40s, which is not an ideal age for being an attractive lover, but – in her words – she is a good partner in bed, which is her main capital.

This case of polygamy becomes even more complex when assessing the economic side. Nozima took her lover as a business partner, which also legally binds him to Nozima. Her lover is still bound to his wife according to all traditions (and the law), since they married according to custom and his official wife is from a rich family. This makes each participant in this drama bound to each other. Unlike many cases of second wives, this one is unusual in the fact that Nozima has a stronger position than most young women (owning her own business), and because she renewed the relationship because of her feelings and also partly because Rahim was not willing to let her go and is expected to make a scene with any new partner Nozima would meet. The latter fact that the male lover can dominate in decisions about the relationships that Nozima chooses for herself is problematic and shows how little agency women in such situations have sometimes (despite the partial financial autonomy).

The domination of male partners in decisions about choices for partners is certainly enabled by the prevailing traditional norms and the patriarchal setting of Central Asian societies. These norms certainly are adapted to (ever-)changing gender roles, but never completely give way for equal and liberal principles, which is as much true for Central Asia as the rest of the world.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced various periods of changing gender roles at different historical periods, including current processes of gender transformation in Central Asia. I argued that economic hardships, globalization and increased mobilities created not only challenges for female members of Muslim-dominated societies with a Soviet past, but also created opportunities to innovate and negotiate between modernity and tradition. The latter need to be contextualized within their local understanding of the same (contested)

terms in academic literature. A conscious decolonial approach helps to fuel the ongoing critical discussion of these terms derived from the Western academic debate, and should be contrasted by weighing the views of the women themselves, not merely to provide examples, but question these terms further.

The examples presented in this chapter are not meant to develop new theories or explanatory models to match the situation of the majority of Central Asian women, but rather serve to push critical views within the gender debate which still needs more of a decolonial lens to improve its analytical potential.

Based on the examples drawn in this chapter, I traced gender transformation shift focus from Soviet to post-Soviet through the snapshot analysis of *Zhensovet* and polygamy, interlaced with testimonies from my fieldwork. My goal is to show that the contemporary reality is not as black-and-white as depicted by Central Asian women themselves, who remember the 'good old times' of the Soviet rule (and their own youth) as a time of liberation and the golden age of 'real communism' (at least those who studied and worked at the time), and who contrast this with the post-Soviet period – a dark age, a 'backwards turn' – matching the de-development discourse within scholarly debate.

Women's own perception of older times is an important observation to be considered critically in order to include diverse opinions about historical socio-political events, and about how the same processes are presented so differently by people who lived through them; take *Hujum* for instance.

Women in the FSU should not one-sidedly be treated as passive recipients of patriarchal power and victims, but at the same time these same women can be fighters and leaders as well as survivors of the everyday political and economic difficulties of their post-Soviet realities.

The comparison between only two periods of time (Soviet *vs.* post-Soviet) is a simplified representation, chosen deliberately in order to highlight those economic and social transformations, which are also pointed out by my interview partners. Beside emic (native) comparisons of both periods the chosen topics follow dominant narratives from the existing literature cited in the chapter.

There are also other changes that took place beyond this chapter's discussed local concerns of economic survival – namely accelerated mobility, globalization, trans-nationalization of economic and social relations, political changes, digitalization of societies, changing norms and economies, which also had their impact on the processes described in this chapter.

*See also Chapter 7

*Tucker and Turaeva 2016; see also
Chapter 18.

There have also been many scholarly observations made regarding religious changes in the region from Soviet 'atheism' to a return of Islam in the (post-)Soviet period,* as well as security changes in the region concerning the ISIS threat and its direct influence in the region.*

It is important to consider the continuous empowerment and resilience of women in Muslim Central Asia, from the Soviet period to the present day. The process of the empowerment of women during the Soviet rule in Central Asia is qualitatively different from that of today's processes, aimed at increasing the importance, role and agency of women in political, social and economic spheres.

This continuous dynamic change withing gender roles and tender transformation still needs systematic study, like the feminization of labour and female entrepreneurship in Central Asia.¹⁴ More fieldwork is needed to unearth important economic achievements from the gender perspective and identify crucial developments, which bear the theoretical potential to further reconsider and study gender roles, and rethink the crystallization of new images of women in Central Asia in the past and today.

¹⁴ Despite the large body of literature on the feminization of labour in general, it is scarce on female entrepreneurship, and all the more so in Central Asia. This gap still needs to be filled with qualitative studies and basic ethnographic research. The topics of interest would be the changing family structures, geographies of mobile female entrepreneurs, social norms and religion, analysis of female professional activities and their contribution to the local economies of households, how they manage childcare, etc.

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7. Recommended Literature

Before starting to do any research and reading about the East and considering sensitive topics as gender one should be aware of the critical debate about writing culture, western scholarship about the East. Here I would start reading Edward Said's critical writing about writing on other cultures who raised ethical and moral aspects of doing research in the East. I also recommend the works of Mary Buckley and her introductions on the general situation of women in post-Soviet context which gives a good overview of the Soviet gender politics in general with many elements that pertain to Central Asia. I recommend my own works (R. Turaeva, and those of Marianne Kamp) that provide empirical insights into these various issues related to women and gender in Central Asia.

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Cite as: Rano Turaeva, 'Women in Central Asia: Decolonizing Gender Studies,' *in:* Jeroen Van den Bosch; Adrien Fauve; Bruno De Cordier (eds.), *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2021): 501-532.

Rano Turaeva (PhD) is a habilitating candidate at the Ludwig Maximilian University and visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle Saale in Germany. She is currently working on her second book on migration and Islam in Russia. Before, she edited a book with a colleague from Lund University titled *Labour, Mobility and Informal practices in Russia: Power, Institutions and Mobile Actors in Transnational Space*, published in 2021 by Routledge, and a special issue on Halal markets in non-Muslim countries for the journal *Sociology of Islam*. She has been writing on the topics of migration, entrepreneurship, informal economies, gender, border studies, identity and inter-ethnic relations among many other topics, which she published in such journals as *Inner Asia*, *Communist and post-Communist Studies*, *Sociology of Islam*, *Central Asian Affairs*, *Central Asian Survey*, *Anthropology of the Middle East*, among others. Her book based on her PhD thesis was published with Routledge in 2016 under the title *Migration and Identity: the Uzbek Experience*.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

This written assignment asks students to take a closer look at the traditional practices in the institution of marriage in Central Asia. What status positions can be defined for women within the (traditional) institution of marriage and what roles do women play within the boundaries of each status position? Pay special attention to the concept of *kelin* in Central Asia and their social status, and think about its implications for assigned gender roles among women as well. After considering the relevant literature on marriage and gender roles in Central Asia, students are to reflect on the above issues from a dynamic perspective, having in mind a woman's changing statuses through her lifetime. The listed literature should be prepared or discussed beforehand, so it can stimulate students' critical thinking before they start writing.

Literature to be considered for the assignment:

Rano Turaeva, 'Kelin in Central Asia: social status of young brides as liminal phase', in: S. Roche (ed.) *The Family in Central Asia*, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2017), 171-183.

Rano Turaeva, 'Gender and changing women's roles in Uzbekistan: from Soviet workers to post-Soviet entrepreneurs', in: M. Laruelle (ed.) *Constructing the Uzbek State. Narratives of Post-Soviet Years*, (Lanham: Lexington, 2017), 303-318.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

The students are divided into two groups where one group discusses polygamy in the pre-Soviet period, whereas the other group is to discuss the same phenomenon in the post-Soviet period. In case of a bigger classroom, more groups can be formed – each of them assigned to one of the two periods. Each group takes into account the perspective of both women and men.

The questions to be tackled by each group are:

- What did polygamy practices look like in this particular period, and what was the basis for these practices?
- What was the social function of these practices?
- How were they socially perceived?
- What were the benefits and costs of these practices for the different actors involved?
- How have these practices influenced gender role expectations?

Representatives of the groups present their findings and the lecturer leads a discussion about the differences between both periods and how these practices influenced women's lives in similar and different ways. As preparation, this text is shared in advance:

- Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X51c1khTFlo&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to CASE STUDY NO. 4 by Baktybek Kainazarov

545 Виды Туркестана.

Туземный оркестръ.

Native orchestra.

г. Ташкентъ.
Taschkent.

Вокзалъ.
La Gare

Train station.

CHAPTER 14

Contemporary Central Asian Legal Systems in Developmental Context: Genealogy, Political Economy, State Architecture

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Keywords:

• Soviet law • Post-Soviet Transition • Constitutionalism • Civil Law

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the complex nature of the Soviet legal system and how it shaped and configured the Central Asian republics.
- Relate legal norms and institutions to political, social and economic factors and dynamics.
- Analyse the role of informal norms and processes in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia and their relation to formal legal norms and processes.
- Describe the relation of Central Asian legal systems to post-independence development.
- Distinguish the way civil and constitutional rules and procedures are applied and enforced in Central Asia from the way they are framed and formulated (law in practice vs. law on the books).
- Account for selective constitutional similarities and differences among the five Central Asian states.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- The five Central Asian states all emerged from component Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) of the USSR. What would you expect to find in the legal systems of those states before and after independence?
- Do you think that reform of the legal system in Central Asia after independence should have been a priority? What aspects would you have expected to change?
- If the five Central Asia states all became independent with a common and broadly similar set of legal rules and institutions, would you expect them to diverge with time and, if so, how?

Main questions

- How have Soviet legal concepts, norms, processes, practices, ideas and attitudes shaped Central Asian legal systems?
- How are informal and formal norms and processes interrelated in the Central Asian legal systems?
- What do the developmental trajectories of 1) civil and 2) constitutional law reveal about political, economic, and social dynamics of the five states?
- What and who were the primary drivers of legal change in Central Asian states?
- What were the common features and divergences between the five Central Asia states first-generation constitutions?
- Has law been vindicated as a privileged

instrument of development policy?

- What are the (social and political) roles that the legal system plays across Central Asian states?
- How, by whom, on whose behalf and for what purposes is the law used, deployed and invoked?

Post-reading questions

- What are the roles of extra-legal actors in relation to the legal system: governing networks (cabals, families, clans, dynasties), citizens and consumers, businesspeople and oligarchs, national and multinational or foreign companies, bilateral and multilateral donors?
- When the same people make the rules and have the discretion to apply and enforce (bend and manipulate) them, can further law reform bring about significant political, economic, and social change in Central Asia? Based on what you have learned, do you think the law can serve as a shield against power as well as a sword of power?
- How do you understand recent political developments in Central Asia (e.g. the ouster of Jeenbekov in Kyrgyzstan and the ongoing Mirziyoyev reforms in Uzbekistan) in light of what you know about the role of law and the legal system post-independence?

Contemporary Central Asian Legal Systems in Developmental Context: Genealogy, Political Economy, State Architecture

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THIS CHAPTER seeks to give readers a sense of the nature of the relationship between law (legal systems and institutions, structures and processes), on the one hand, and, on the other, the changing political, social and economic dynamics of the Central Asian polities from the Soviet period through post-Soviet transition to the present day. This is of course the very broad field of Law and Development,¹ updated and reformulated as Law and Transition or 'Rule of Law' (RoL) for the post-socialist and post-Soviet cases.² This chapter examines in succession three particularly illustrative and salient aspects of Central Asian Law and Transition:

1. *Genealogy*: the continuities from Soviet to post-Soviet institutional forms and processes, which are more significant than most analysts allow.
2. *Political economy*: the instrumentalism of civil law (regulating business and commerce) in the distinctive post-Soviet Central Asian political economy of cronyism and networks.
3. *State architecture*: the ongoing experimentation and modification of the governing architecture of the state, typically in the interests of those very networks of social and economic power.

¹ *Law and Development* was coined in the 1960s to reflect the role of law in social, economic, and political change. It denoted an interventionist or instrumentalist view of law – legislation, legal process, and legal education and training – as a tool or lever to facilitate economic and political development in postcolonial or Latin American, African and Asian states. For the classic analysis, see: Trubek and Galanter 1974.

² Upon the collapse of the USSR (as of course of the socialist Bloc generally, commencing in 1989), observers, donors, and ruling elites focused a great deal of attention on reform of the legal system as a privileged means for facilitating and directing both the transition from a command-administrative to a market economy as well from a narrow, elite- or party-based (the Communist Party, CPSU) political system to a broad-based, democratic one. (De Lisle 1999; Carrothers 1998)

The emphasis throughout this chapter is not on *what the law is* (legal doctrine) or *how it is organized, fashioned, interpreted, applied or enforced* (legal logic and legal process). That approach would be the classic remit of jurisprudence or the study of law. Rather, the author here considers *what work law does* (*regulatory, ordering, structuring*), *how it functions*, and *what purposes it serves*. This approach is that of socio-legal studies, taking law as a social system, embedded in and reflective of a particular historical, political, and cultural context.

1. Genealogy: Soviet Templates

An appreciation of the distinctive and formative character of law and legality in the USSR is critical for an analysis of Central Asian law and development since independence. One can identify four principal dimensions of this inheritance: (1.1) institutional-constitutional: the form of the state and the legal system; (1.2) a political or ideological inheritance: the role and function of law and the legal system; (1.3) a conceptual or jurisprudential inheritance of categories, their hierarchy, and of basic legal concepts and ratio; and (1.4) a distinct practical or legal-cultural inheritance.

1.1 Institutional-Constitutional Inheritance

For the Central Asian republics, both their generic governance architecture (the system of administration) and their specific legal architecture (the body of rules and the system for making and enforcing them) were Soviet-designed and -produced. But perhaps most significantly, they owe their very existence as states in the first place to Soviet legal-constitutional design: they are Soviet constitutional artefacts. The basic morphology of this crucial institutional inheritance remains abundantly evident across the five states even after three decades of post-Soviet transformation and divergence.

Uniquely across post-Soviet independent space, the five Central Asian republics had no pre-Soviet, or even pre-modern, coherence as polities. They were carved out of the territories of two post-Timurid khanates and an emirate (Khiva, Kokand, and Bukhara) across the Oxus-Jaxartes Basin, and surrounding nomadic steppe-lands (Turkmen and Kazakh), which had been annexed and/or conquered by Tsarist military forces over the 19th century. These territories were reconstituted as five Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs or Union Republics) in the course of a 1920s Soviet constitutional process and project of **ethno-territorial federalism**: governing a

multi-national imperial space by assigning sub-state homelands or autonomies to recognized ethnic groups or 'nationalities.' The USSR in 1923 was established as a federation of constituent Union republics, the original four of which had effectively federated by treaty to form the Union, and which in time grew to number 15 (at one point 16). Over the next twelve years, the five Central Asian SSRs assumed their familiar geographic and demographic configuration, their borders and populations, through a process of so-called '**national delimitation**' (commenced by Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities) and determination of constitutional status.

The USSR had been a great modern laboratory for constitutionalism, and Soviet constitutional design was innovative and altogether distinct in its amalgam of a principle of conciliar representation at all levels, from local soviets or councils to the Supreme Soviet (or Council), a **federation of nested ethnic autonomies** (Union Republic, Autonomous Republic, Autonomous Province, Autonomous Area), and a socialized economy grounded in a state monopoly of the means of production and state organization and operation of commerce (a State Plan) guiding state enterprises), all overseen by a unique political agency, the Communist Party. The Central Asian Republics all carried this constitutional DNA.

From the moment each had been established and equipped with its own Union Republican constitution³ until the Union's collapse in 1991 and their transformation into independent states, they underwent foetal development in the Soviet womb. They had been the object of strenuous and protracted legal development efforts, all shaped and directed by authorities at the centre in the context of a *practically convenient and ideologically significant* infrastructure of governance – the Union (*ethno-territorial federalist*) project. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were all beneficiaries of initial and ongoing centrally-originated and -directed processes that:

- established them in the first place as jurisdictional units: Soviet Socialist Republics.
- supplied them with an entire constitutional apparatus of government: legislature (Republican Supreme Soviet and lesser

³ The Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs were created after the dissolution of the Turkestan Autonomous SSR (ASSR, a prior, lesser-ranking autonomous jurisdiction) in 1924; the Tajik ASSR within the Uzbek SSR was elevated to a full SSR in 1929; the Kyrgyz ASSR established within the Russian Republic in 1924, together with the Kazakh ASSR, initially established within the Russian Republic in 1920, achieved SSR status in 1936, see also Map 8.4.

provincial, district, and local soviets), executive (Union-Republican ministries, departments, and agencies), and judiciary (Union-Republican Supreme Court and lesser courts) and procuracy (Union-Republican Procuracy).

- guided and facilitated their subsequent adoption of Union-Republican legislation.
- provided for the centralized training of legal system administrators, bureaucrats, and professionals (judges, prosecutors).

The Central Asian Union Republics, on the basis of the *formal* sovereignty they had enjoyed under the USSR Constitution, in late 1991 acquired and asserted *actual* state sovereignty under international law. They carried over with them into this new status a full armature of governing and administrative functions and offices, including legal and judicial functions and offices. They became states after having been fully kitted-out proto-states for many decades, with parliaments, ministries, bureaucracies, and courts.

1.2 Conceptual-Jurisprudential Inheritance

The legal systems of the five republics were all conceptually derived from the Russian legal tradition as carried over and carried on the **Russian tradition** of legal categorization and legal thinking, formatively influenced the German branch of Civil Law over the course of the 19th century, and inflected and developed further by 70 years of 'Socialist Law' – which brought about many changes and modifications but left intact the conceptual framework, the basic categories and concepts, of Russian law.

The Soviet multinational federal project noted above contemplated a gradual approach to communism, over the course of which the uneven development among the diverse Soviet nationalities would be compensated for by a kind of targeted development assistance from Moscow to the peripheral, underdeveloped regions, including Central Asia. Western donors in the post-colonial world turned to law as a tool of modernization in the 1960s Law and Development movement and moment,* encompassing both the elaboration of substantive and procedural law – civil and criminal codes and corresponding codes of procedure, together with subsidiary legislation – and institutional capacity-building for judiciaries, procuracies, and the bar. But the Soviets had pioneered a strikingly similar campaign in one country decades earlier as Soviet 'legal development assistance' was channelled from the centre to the periphery, from the Soviet 'North' to the Soviet 'South,' including Central Asia.

*Trubek and Galanter 1974

The pattern of **Soviet law** was essentially one of central production and peripheral reproduction: instead of Union-wide (federal) legislation, model codes or general principles were drafted at the centre for adoption-cum-modification at the level of Union republics. Moscow effectively composed the theme, and coordinated Tashkent or Ashgabat in producing the variations – for civil code provisions and constitutional provisions alike. The five Central Asian Republics thus each adopted Criminal and Civil Substantive and Procedural Codes (along with subsidiary and supplemental legislation). All of the 15 constituent republics, including the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Tajik, and Uzbeks SSRs, came to share a fundamental legal-institutional, legal-substantive, and legal-procedural design, with a very few (for the most part trivial) individual features. Like their insignias or flags (hammer-and-sickle with distinctive ethno-national adornments), the legal frameworks and systems of the Central Asian SSRs were but variations on a common Soviet theme. As developed below, this congenital resemblance has survived the disintegration of the common and nurturing Soviet matrix as well as the subsequent divergence of the independent Central Asian governance and legal systems.

1.3 Political/Ideological Inheritance

Independent Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also carried over and carried on a Soviet-derived tradition of a **strong commitment to formalism** and to the ordering of social and economic relations by published and generally enforced rules and procedures. Paradoxical as it may sound to many who look back through a post-Cold War lens and imagine that the USSR typified discretionary or arbitrary rule and comprehensive bureaucratic control, it was if anything excessively *juridified* – that is, ordered through formal legal rules and procedures. After an initial experimental period of so-called war communism and rule by decrees, with Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1922, the Bolsheviks retreated to a conventional legal framework of codes, statutes and subsidiary legislation, initially as a temporary expedient or concession but ultimately as the spine of so-called socialist legality. Perhaps surprisingly, civil law continued to serve as the bedrock of the Soviet economy, rather than a pure system of administrative law, as a radical faction of Soviet lawyers had anticipated and advocated. Soviet state enterprises at the end of the 1920s acquired a fairly conventional form of legal personality, and thereafter entered into enforceable contracts with one another to meet the requirements of the State Five-Year Plans.

*Yurchak 2013

A curious corollary of the commitment to formalism and proceduralism in late Soviet times was an increasing attention to performance and **performativity**, such that much compliance with the norms of collective life – e.g. participation in Komsomol activities – became ritualized and largely devoid of intent or content.* This aspect of performativity was similarly evident in large-scale mobilization for particular purposes deemed important by the leadership, such as the discussions and public campaign around the 1977 Brezhnev Constitution, which was of trivial substantive consequence for most Soviet citizens but exhibited the characteristic self-performance style of the Soviet state.

1.4 Practical/Legal-Cultural Inheritance

The Central Asian states have all acquired a reputation for a high degree of discretionary or informal application and enforcement of legal normative acts and subsidiary regulations, particularly by persons in authority or wielding social, political, or economic influence. While this phenomenon is often pejoratively termed corruption, it is rather wider than the straightforward perversion or misapplication of general public norms for specific private ends. It reflects a distinctive set of habits, practices, and attitudes in relation to laws and regulations, a *legal culture* of selective compliance and informal circumvention or variation, inherited from the Soviet era, albeit with extensive subsequent reworking, adaptation, and development.

In the USSR, the ideological avowal of and rigorous commitment to **legal formalism** applied equally to the grand affairs of state and the routines of citizens' everyday lives – from the drafting, promulgation, and adoption of the new Brezhnev constitution in 1977 or the deliberations of rule-making bodies – whether the Union Supreme Soviet at the apex or a rural Turkmen Soviet – to individual applications for a residential permit or a stay at a state enterprise sanatorium. Nonetheless, the application, operation, and enforcement of legal rules and procedures was ubiquitously and notoriously subject to informal negotiation and variation, to soften the rigour and lighten the compliance burden. From black market operations involving state goods siphoned from factory stores or official circuits to bribes for school placements or a higher place in a queue for scarce consumer items, **informality** was rampant across Soviet society and the Soviet economy, which was characterized as an economy of favours or *blat* (*блат* – connections).*

*Ledeneva 1998

systematic and regularized, not occasional or individual, and were typically administered and organized in and by a complex web of networks across Soviet society. Those networks were based on a spectrum of relationships or ties: clientelistic-bureaucratic, professional, institutional/organizational (from schools to army units), or affective (clan or family-based). Soviet legal culture was thus a strange combination of hyper-formalism ('socialist legality'), anti-formalism (peremptory decisions notwithstanding general rules, perhaps most notoriously political control and persecution by the security agencies), and rampant informality.

2. Political Economy: Civil Law, Market Commerce, Crony Capitalism

Now that readers have an understanding of the emergence of the Central Asian states from the Soviet legal-institutional matrix, this part turns their attention to the legal reforms underlying marketization, and specifically the shift to a civil legal architecture premised on and privileging private property and private contract (rather than a socialist legal architecture privileging public or state contract and property). The author considers in turn: a) late Soviet-perestroika reform; b) CIS-led and donor-assisted post-independence reform; c) subsequent developments and divergence across the region.

Perestroika reform – The transition to a market economy from a state-controlled and -dominated economy had been underway in the Central Asian SSRs, along with the rest of the USSR, over the five years before the Soviet collapse in 1991. Mikhail Gorbachev was a lawyer and had made law reform the principal instrument and focus of his larger efforts at reconstruction – *perestroika* – of the Soviet economy. The 'Fundamentals of the Transition to a Market Economy' (a late-Soviet instance of Union guidelines for Republican legislation noted in the previous section) had been adopted by the USSR Supreme Soviet to guide the efforts of the individual Republics already underway to bring in a new generation of Civil Codes. The unexpected acquisition of independence in 1991, rather than marking a sudden and dramatic break in law reform, rapidly accelerated a process that had already commenced.

CIS Model Civil Code – Much as the perestroika-era reforms had been coordinated and facilitated by a superior instance, so too were the post-independence reforms. The foremost civil law experts from

*Blumenfeld 1996

*Maggs 2003

Russia (then in the process of completing the draft of its own Civil Code, which served as the template for the ensuing *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS) drafting process),* and six of the newly independent former SSRs, among them Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, assembled in St Petersburg in 1993-4 under the auspices of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, to draft a Model Civil Code.* Additionally, after the break-up, both the availability and the desirability of international technical assistance from advanced market jurisdictions were significantly enhanced. The Model Code experts benefitted as well from expert technical assistance provided by a team of Dutch civilists, whose Civil Code, the *Burgerlijk Wetboek*, had been comprehensively reformed in 1992 and was considered the most advanced on the Continent. The Model Civil Code proved perhaps the single most consequential and influential piece of post-Soviet basic market-orientated law reform and furnishes a perfect example of the simultaneous presence in a single process – in this instance in a single chamber – of endogenous and exogenous factors in the legal transition moment: Russian, Central Asian, and Western European.

In Civil Law or Code jurisdictions like France or Germany, like the USSR and its constituent SSRs, and like their successor Central Asian states – but unlike common law jurisdictions such as Australia, England and Wales, or Kenya – the Civil Code is basic scaffolding for contractual and delictual (tort, or harm) and other fundamental legal obligations between natural persons (individuals), between legal persons (businesses and organizations), or between one and the other. It has a foundational or constitutional significance, and all other civil legislation – statutes regulating joint-stock companies or particular kinds of transactions or obligations, like franchising or banking – is deemed subordinate to it. It sets forth such basic parameters of a market regime as property and the rights that may arise in relation to it, legally enforceable promises (terms of a contract), forms of business and other legal subjects, legal capacity, and much else. The Civil Code elaborates the basic rule of the game for a market economy: who has legal rights in what and in relation to whom; how those rights can arise, be assigned or altered; and what actors can do to assert or protect them in court if they are challenged or violated. For these reasons, **reform of the civil code** in the independent Central Asian states was deemed a cardinal priority in the shift to a market economy (in which individual actors were the default legal subjects) from a command-administrative system (in which the State was a privileged legal actor enjoying a monopoly on the ownership of the means of production and state property was the privileged form).

The reform of the civil code was grasped by all actors – legal and governing elites of the new states as well as international donors and advisors – as the indispensable prelude to and plinth for all the considerable legal work involved in reconfiguring the inherited late-Soviet legal framework to one fit for use in a modern market economy. Civil law reform as part of a much larger package of interrelated law reforms including criminal law, constitutional law, administrative law, business and banking law, communications and media law, among much else, was understood as a privileged instrument for accomplishing the ideal neo-liberal transition to a market economy and to a governance system based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In other words, law was championed as the essential instrument of development – economic, social, and political. The Central Asian states emerged on the world stage at the height of the so-called ‘Rule-of-Law’ (RoL) moment,* which had come to characterize international development assistance policy and practice at the turn of the 1990s – an institutions-focused refinement of the original 1980s neo-liberal macroeconomic restructuring policy recipe of privatization, deregulation, and liberalization.

*Trubek 2006; Carrothers 1999

Vastly more bilateral and multilateral development donor policy attention, pressure, assistance, programming and funding (from the *World Bank* and other development banks, UNDP, OSCE, and the EU as well as US, European, and Japanese official development agencies as well as foundations like the *Soros Open Society Institute*) was channelled toward law reform in the post-socialist transition. More than had ever been the case since Law and Development emerged as an academic field of applied research and donor intervention in the 1960s and 1970s and since targeted technical assistance for institutional capacity-building in the legal and judicial sector was first identified as an important dimension of development assistance (notably in Latin America and Africa). RoL or Law and Transition was “Law and Development 2.0,” and the Central Asian states were major beneficiaries as legal technical advisors with competencies in particular areas of law deemed priorities by donors (notably civil and commercial law, including capital markets, insolvency, and secured transactions) were dispatched to assist in drafting relevant legislation (as well as to provide training and capacity-building for judges, advocates, prosecutors, and justice personnel).*

*De Lisle 1999; Newton 2003

Subsequent Development and Divergence – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all used the Model Civil Code as the template for drafting their own new Civil Codes, adapting it to their respective needs or interests and – in the 25 years since – they have each amended numerous provisions. (Turkmenistan has remained an outlier; rather than adopt the Model Code, it commissioned the drafting of a new code, with German technical assistance, and based on the German Civil Code – *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* or BGB). The initial adaptations and the subsequent amendments reflected divergent conceptions of political economy and paths of transition. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, for instance, moved away from state domination of the economy more readily, and – sooner than Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – relaxing residual restrictions on the ownership in land, for example, or permitting a greater or more flexible range of business forms. The changes to the Civil Codes represented as well refinements and reforms identified over the course of years of application, commentary, critique and analysis by local and foreign experts, and cumulative court decisions, as well as comparison among the four cousin jurisdictions and model code adopters, and especially with the Russian Federation, which continued to exercise significant influence as a respected senior authority – and hence trendsetter – in civil law reform throughout post-Soviet space.

In no single instance, however, could any of the initial adaptations of the Model Code as drafted, nor any of the multiple amendments in the four states, be deemed somehow to reflect the ethnic or particular culture or history of the states. Indeed, the very search for or question about authentic ‘national’ (i.e. cultural or pre-Soviet) traits in the Central Asian civil codes is redolent of a renascent legal Orientalism.* Much more to the point in the reform of civil and commercial legislation more generally across the region was the tension between the views of powerful Western states and interests with a particular **neo-liberal reform agenda** and the views of national political elites with distinct developmental priorities and concerns (e.g. preserving a much broader and directive role for the state in the management of economic performance, as in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan).

But in a fundamental sense, the conceptual idiom of Central Asian civil law – across all five states and reflected not just in the codes but in the host of subsidiary legislation – remains Russian law in its Soviet-mediated form. Indeed, the Russian language continues to be the default language for legal drafters, and translation into the national language (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, or

*Rasulov 2014

Turkmen) is often a formality after the fact, of finding or inventing equivalents for long-established Russian legal terms and definitions. The legal centre of gravity for Central Asia will remain Russian for the foreseeable period, and although Socialist Law has passed, a post-socialist (or post-Soviet) legal family is recognisable. However widely the codes have diverged from one another, they are all closer (with the arguable exception of Turkmenistan) in their substance and the very formulation of their provisions to post-Soviet Russian legal developments than to any models from the 'far abroad.' If Soviet Civil law (and Soviet Law more generally) was a distinct nuclear family of SSRs (comparative lawyers accorded Socialist Law separate legal family status alongside the Continental or Romanist and Common Law families), post-Soviet civil law remains very much a distinct family (however much extended) certainly for Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, together with the Russian Federation itself.

The **post-Soviet Central Asian legal family** also shares a distinct legal culture, in part a lasting birthmark of its genesis from an anomalously state-centric legal and social order, in part an adaptation to new market opportunities and incentives for accelerated and prodigious wealth-creation (the rise of politically-connected or -based oligarchs and natural resource barons and baronies), and in part a consequence of background cultural norms of informality and affective obligations (often misunderstood and simplified as the lasting force of clan ties). The Central Asian states have become known for a series of scandals involving high officials and well-connected businessmen, typically part of governing networks.

Many of the fundamental distinctions and oppositions of civil law, such as that between public and private legal persons and relations, have been blurred or disregarded. An avowed object of neo-liberal donor policies had been to ensure as complete an evacuation of the state from market affairs as possible, to be secured in the civil code: civil law was after all the royal road to 'civilizing' the law, making it presumptively a vehicle for private rather than state purposes and designs. A stark example of the instrumentalization or manipulation of legal provisions for extra-legal purposes, or the informally mediated application of formal laws and procedures, is afforded by the phenomenon of *reiderstvo* (*рейдерство*) or company raiding, frequently encountered in Central Asia, in which powerful actors (connected to governing networks) seize companies and assets on the basis of forged or fraudulent documents or record, and obtain through influence and bribery the collusion of courts, prosecutors, and officials to launder or legalize their

actions. Raiding is always carefully prepared in advance with the connivance of lawyers and relies on mastery of the applicable laws, procedures and regulations.*

*Shelley and Deane 2016

In Kyrgyzstan in 2005, for example, interests close to President Bakiyev's son Maksim orchestrated the raiding of a prominent Russian-owned mobile telecommunications company, 'BiTel,' by physically seizing assets and asserting company ownership on the basis of forged documents and 'bizarre' court decisions, presumably obtained through undue influence.* The ability of politically connected and economically powerful actors and networks in Central Asia to manipulate the civil code and subsidiary legislation domestically is matched by their international sophistication in structuring complex ownership chains and devising elaborate business transactions across many jurisdictions to accomplish corrupt schemes, as evident in the serial fraud and embezzlement cases in foreign courts involving Kazakh bankers and businesspersons.**4

*UKPC 2011: §40

*LaPorte 2017

3. State Architecture: Constitutional Dynamics and Network Governance

Having explored the distinctive dynamics and functions of private law (governing the business relations of civil subjects with one another) in the Central Asian states, now the chapter explores similar issues respecting public law, and specifically the constitutional reforms underlying the structure and functions of government, representative and accountable decision-making, and elections. The modern Central Asian constitutions have been in ferment over three decades, subject to frequent and in some cases sweeping amendments or even wholesale replacement (e.g. Kazakhstan in 1995, Kyrgyzstan in 2010). One can even speak of generations of constitutions, albeit unevenly across the cases: initial post-collapse, consolidation, and reform constitutions. The prestige and prominence invested in constitutionalism by Central Asian elites has perhaps been unsurprising. For one, not only were the independent Central Asian states themselves products of a Soviet constitutional process, but the first generation of post-Soviet constitutions arose in the context of the most comprehensive constitutional reform and revision exercise in the history of the USSR – over *perestroika*. For another, they acquired their independence just at the triumphalist moment, post-1989, moment when liberal democratic constitutionalism had come to achieve a hegemonic status and be effectively enshrined as an international norm of governance.

⁴ See also the works of A. Cooley and J. Heathershaw for patterns of Central Asian political and economic corruption. (Cooley 2012; Heathershaw and Cooley 2017)

To approach these five constitutions from the perspective of a comparative constitutionalist and to simply analyse their substance – the powers of President or Parliament, the representation formulas, the procedural mechanics of law-making, the bills of rights, the role and remit of constitutional courts – is in some sense to miss the most compelling and instructive features of their story. For it is indeed a story – a constitutional chronicle of the vicissitudes of power and politics – as much as it is a legal text. The author describes and analyses below: (3.1) the genesis or constituent moment; (3.2) the constitutional architecture and dynamics of the first-generation constitutions; and (3.3) the trajectories of constitutional amendment and development.

3.1 Constituent Moments

A constitutionalist cannot gauge the significance of the first-generation constitutions on the basis of the substance of the provisions alone, without taking into account the constituent moment and all the factors at play. As constitutional specimens, they are not remarkable: they don't exhibit boldness or imagination of design. They are nonetheless compelling for their reflection of a particularly fraught and fateful conjuncture, the very distinctive circumstances and context of their drafting,* notably regarding the following aspects:

*Newton 2016: 93–124

Instrumentalism – They were 'instrumental constitutions,' facilitating and furthering elite purchase on power. The precipitous manner in which the USSR came undone – unravelled by treaty just as it had been created by treaty⁵ – left the peripheral leaderships intact and in power, as stewards of the now independent Central Asian States. Without a shred of a Rawlsian 'veil of ignorance,'⁶ the reigning authorities (in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan headed by the SSR Party Secretary) asserted constitutional design

⁵ The December 1991 Belavezha Accords that at one stroke renounced the 1922 Union Treaty and established the anodyne *Commonwealth of Independent States*, did not feature among its attendees any of the Central Asian leaders – ironically, its signatories were the three European/Slavic signatories of the original 1922 four, a gesture of some latent contempt for the other SSRs which had only been constituted once the Union had been established, like the Central Asian five.

⁶ American philosopher John B. Rawls (1921–2002) suggests that when establishing a 'social contract' we should imagine sitting behind a 'veil of ignorance' that keeps us from knowing who we are and identifying with our personal circumstances. By being ignorant of our circumstances, we can more objectively consider how societies should be governed, which should be the 'original position' for lawmakers to begin to structure society according to the principles of freedom, equality and fairness.

prerogative for a system they stood to dominate, and disfavoured arrangements which might threaten their continuation in power, presently or prospectively. A greater or more consequential conflict of interest could scarcely be imagined.

Plan of Government not Limited Government – As a result, the first-generation constitutions represent less an authentic experiment in limited government than a ‘plan of government,’ a set of governing blueprints elaborating a functional division of governing labour (among executive, legislative, and judicial offices). Offices were envisaged as designated vehicles for prospective or actual office-holders, rather than as objects of open contestation – nowhere more evident than in the contemplated Presidencies. In every single one of the five cases, the serving leader who supervised the constituent process came to hold the highest office under the resulting Constitution. Of course, any constitutional arrangement, like any proposed charter, is a gamble or a wager, since its designers cannot predict or control its future course or development, however carefully they contemplate contingencies (elections, parliamentary bills, death or incapacity of office holders, national emergencies among them). But the Central Asian leaderships took particular pains to ensure the government they designed was unlikely ever to limit or constrain their exercise of supreme authority.

State sovereignty – At the same time, the elites manifested, and the constitutions reflected, the paramount need to secure a fragile, unsought, and unexpected state sovereignty. The Central Asian party leaderships had always been particularly dependent on Union structures, support, and direction and were especially exposed after the Soviet collapse. The tumult of *perestroika* and the inglorious fall of the Party elites at Union-level placed a premium on stability and integrity, to which the constitutional drafters responded.

Closed drafting – The constitutions were drafted by commissioned experts and the opportunities for extended deliberation and citizen participation were sorely constrained. Ironically, the late Soviet constitutional reform processes, seeking to redefine the basis of the Soviet federation and combining market and non-market elements, displayed considerably greater ingenuity and experimentation than the constituent processes in the newly independent Central Asian states, which were undertaken early in the post-independence period by expert drafting groups – as a rule, without significant public consultation or extended consideration of available models and cumulative comparative constitutional expertise.

Constitutional performativity – The Central Asian states found themselves confronting a world which entertained high expectations of late 20th century states at a moment of apparent Hegelian culmination.* A sophisticated and robust constitutional architecture and a vibrant constitutional process were inescapable indicia of merited statehood and mature statesmanship in the New World Order. The Central Asian states understood that what was required of them was a compliance exercise or a performance,* an understanding which strongly resonated with the performativity dimension of Soviet life and the Soviet state.

*Fukuyama 1993

*Heathershaw 2013

3.2 First-Generation Architecture and Dynamics

Although, unlike the Civil Code and for self-evident reasons, there was no Model Constitution or any CIS or other joint sponsorship, nor any apparent coordination or consultation among the drafting groups in the respective states, the inaugural constitutions (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan 1992, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan 1993, Tajikistan 1994), nonetheless exhibited unmistakable commonalities as well as some salient divergences.

Presidentialism – All five Constitutions were uniformly ‘presidentialist,’ providing for a President with powers to appoint or dismiss the Prime Minister⁷ and members of the cabinet as well as apex officials across government, including the judiciary and the procuracy and the elections commission, as well as to initiate legislation and the constitutional amendment process, and to rule by decree. The degree of presidential authority in the first-generation constitutions was already sweeping and the presidential administration swiftly consolidated and thereafter augmented its supremacy in each constitutional order (shadowing the functions of virtually the entirety of government and inviting comparison with the CPSU as effectively a guiding authority for state decision-making generally).

Representation – The structure (unicameral versus bicameral) and the representational basis for parliaments showed significant variety across the five constitutions, but parliamentary powers and prerogatives remained limited *vis-à-vis* presidential: even legislation was not a parliamentary monopoly, thanks to the decree-making authority of the executive, and parliamentary capacity to constrain presidential authority was generally limited to impeachment, procedurally improbable and politically unimaginable.

⁷ Turkmenistan lacked an office of Prime Minister altogether.

Anomaly – The one real departure among the first generation constitutions was the Turkmenistan *Halk Maslahaty* ('People's Council'), ostensibly established as a supreme representative organ of *people's* power, distinct from the three branches of government bearing supreme *state* power, composed of senior-most officials across national and local government, and entrusted with the highest matters of state, but really serving at presidential behest.* It was abolished after the death of the first president, but not before its remit was massively expanded by a 1999 amendment (adopted by statute not referendum) to enable it to amend the Constitution directly, as it did thereafter.

*Šir 2005

Rights – The comprehensive catalogues of rights in the constitutions, fully reflective of the developed human-rights-consciousness of the age (and tracking the International Human Rights Covenants), stood in striking contrast to the ineffectiveness of citizens' capacity to assert them and the state's commitment to protecting them, as the further course of Central Asian constitutional history demonstrated, and the states acquired a reputation for neo-Soviet repression (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan notoriously).

Demos – The five constitutions all ritually invoked the constitutional *demos* in a 'we the people' preamble – the people of *Kazakhstan*, of *Uzbekistan*, of *Tajikistan*, of *Kyrgyzstan* and of *Turkmenistan* (i.e. the citizens of the polity not the titular ethnos). As Soviet 'nationality-autonomies' (the substate counterpart of nation-states), the five republics were constituent parts of a multi-national political and social project. But once independent, they became ethnic majority states without any role in or regard for a larger vision of diversity or pluralistic self-understanding. Despite the gestures towards civic inclusiveness in the preamble and the obligatory non-discrimination provisions of each constitution, the constitutional protection and guarantees of minority rights were not especially robust and the recognition of the majority language as the state language was not auspicious. The curtailment of minority language use, discrimination in employment and government service, and exposure to inter-ethnic violence has borne out the regrettable lack of adequate constitutional safeguards for minorities across the states (Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Uzbek Tajiks).

Local colourlessness – Save Turkmenistan, the first-generations constitutions, much like the civil codes, exhibited little local colour, flair or variation on conventional constitutional norms, apart from

borrowing for the newly established parliaments and parliamentary chambers culturally resonant names from the national language (e.g. the Turko-Persian-derived term ‘Majlis’ for Parliament). Religious parties were banned and no constitutional accommodation was made for Islam whatsoever; indeed Islamic observance has been closely controlled and regulated by state religious affairs bodies and state licensed *muftiates* (Muslim community leadership) across the region in a manner clearly derived from Soviet practice.

Constitutional regulation – Again, save Turkmenistan, all constitutions provided for some degree of constitutional self-policing – a tribunal for purposes of constitutional review of legislation and variably of other normative, executive, and judicial acts. The composition and status of the body, the standing to bring constitutional appeals, and the scope of review varied. Only in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan did a culture and a practice of constitutional jurisprudence really take root subsequently (and decisions, albeit sophisticated, have virtually never held against or checked presidential control or authority).^{*} Nonetheless the constitutional tribunals have been invested with much solemnity and ritual (particularly in Kazakhstan), again suggesting the importance of constitutional performativity – the use of law for signalling and performative functions.

^{*}Toktuzgaeva, 2019: 198–240

3.3 Trajectories

The further fate of the five constitutions and the cumulative record of changes serve as a kind of documentary chronicle of the vicissitudes of power-holding elites. As a rule, any initial democratic or liberal expectations were progressively disappointed and ultimately dashed, as the constitutional entrenchment of presidential power enabled the governing patronal networks subordinate to the president in all five states to grow ever more politically entrenched (albeit dynamically, as factions and personalities within networks relentlessly contested for dominance, a common pattern across post-Soviet space).^{*} All this took place in the teeth of sustained international scrutiny and criticism of authoritarian constitutional provisions and unfair elections. The two anomalous cases are Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, in which constitutional politics were forced open – by a war in the first case, and by an unusually high degree of regional factionalism and public restiveness in the second. Tajikistan’s constitution was closed again as soon as the war ended.^{*}

^{*}Hale 2015; Engvall 2014; 2016; Heathershaw and Cooley 2017; Newton 2019

^{*}Newton 2016

*Ishiyama and Kennedy 2001

Superpresidentialism – A distinct regional trend emerged in the first cycle of the consolidation and further augmentation of Presidential authority, at the expense of other parts of the government, and qualifying as ‘superpresidentialism.’* A prime example was the presidential suspension of an insufficiently pliant parliament (still called the Supreme Soviet) less than a year after Kazakhstan’s 1993 constitution came into force. Interim rule by presidential decree followed, along with the adoption in 1995 of a much more strongly centralized (and presidentialized) constitution in which the office of the president was elevated above the three branches of government. The Kazakh President by subsequent constitutional amendment was designated ‘First President,’ a unique office with yet augmented powers. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the president acquired effectively unconstrained despotic authority.

Indefinite tenure – A corollary of superpresidentialism has been the elasticity of terms, term limits and election frequency, in the interest of prolonging the incumbent president’s tenure, across all five states: either by extending the term under an existing constitution (Kazakhstan 1995, Uzbekistan 2002, Turkmenistan 1994 and 1999 – the second time for life), or resetting the clock after an amended constitution (Uzbekistan 2002, Kazakhstan 1999), or removing term limits (Kazakhstan 2000 yet again, and Tajikistan 2003). With the very significant exception of Kyrgyzstan, which alone among the states has conducted what are generally acknowledged to have been free and fair presidential elections in 2017, elections have been carefully stage-managed and effectively uncontested, even with the participation of ostensible opposition candidates. Election laws have been deployed, with the collusion of courts and officials, to frustrate and disqualify any genuine opposition, a manipulation of the law akin to the corporate raiding described above and a demonstration of the manner in which Central Asian networks and elites achieve their ends by using and weaponizing the law (including emphatically constitutional law), not by circumventing or violating it.

Serial amendment – All five constitutions have been amended multiple times – see Table 14.1 – except for the 1999 Tajik and 2006 and subsequent Kyrgyz amendments, the amendments have all been top-down, designed and initiated by the ruling authorities, and – where they have not explicitly enlarged the reach and remit of executive authority – have either introduced technical and subtle rule changes arguably in the interest of governability or

calibrated reforms to decompress and open marginally what has largely remained a closed-access political order (e.g. Uzbekistan 2011, tellingly adopted by statute not referendum). Again, except for the Kyrgyz and Tajik cases noted above, the amendment referenda, always carrying by prodigious margins, have typically served as public exercises in participatory constitutional performativity (as might be said of elections more broadly, particularly presidential elections, which recall routine Soviet election rituals).*

*Newton 2019

Table 14.1 Frequency of Constitutional Change in Central Asia

Country	# changes	Years of subsequent changes
Kyrgyzstan	7	1996, 1997, 1998, 2006 (post regime change), 2007, 2010 (new edition, post regime change), 2016
Kazakhstan	5	1995 (new constitution), 1998, 2007, 2011, 2017
Tajikistan	3	1999 (post conflict), 2003, 2016
Turkmenistan	6	1995, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2016
Uzbekistan	3	2003, 2011, 2017

Source: Author's own work.

War and Peace – Tajikistan's first-generation constitution was delayed by the outbreak of civil war in 1992 and was amended in accordance with an internationally brokered peace agreement that guaranteed a 30% quota in government service for the *United Tajik Opposition*, the coalition of Islamic and other insurgent groups who had fought the government forces. The amendments established an upper house to afford regional representation in a maximally divided polity and allocated a third of the seats in the lower chamber on a PR⁸ list to enhance the chances for representation of minority parties; simultaneously legalizing religious parties for the first time in any of the states. The 2003 amendments however began a roll back of the reforms and the reassertion of central prerogatives and control. The opposition was squeezed out the lower chamber in subsequent elections and religious parties re-banned.

Constitutional battleground – Kyrgyzstan, like Tajikistan, is emphatically an outlier among the five, for very different reasons. Kyrgyzstan has witnessed far and away the most frequent and sweeping constitutional changes as the constitutional parameters themselves (presidential versus parliamentary balance of power, representation formulas for parliament, see Figure 14.1) became the theatre of a protracted struggle between the networks organized

⁸ Proportional Representation: allocating (parliamentary) seats by use of multi-candidate party-lists applying a proportional electoral system.

around the president and networks organized around parliamentary deputies with strong local bases. Despite the ousting – in the face of widespread street demonstrations – of two presidents in succession (Akayev in 2005 and Bakiyev in 2010), and the adoption in 2010 of a reform constitution which brought in a quasi-parliamentary system with greatly circumscribed presidential and commensurately enlarged parliamentary powers (including a regionally unique single seven-year presidential term limit), patronal networks re-emerged and reasserted themselves around the office of successive presidents (Atambayev after 2011 and then Jeenbekov after 2017, who in fact became the third president to be ousted after public demonstrations in 2020).

Figure 14.1 Kyrgyz Constitutional Amendments (1993-2016)

Source: Author's own work.

4. Conclusion

Having analysed three Central Asian developmental contexts of law, it is important for readers to understand that the genealogical context partially but profoundly determines the political economic and state architecture contexts. The exorbitantly state-centric Soviet concept of law, together with the proliferation of 'workarounds' – techniques of manipulation or circumvention – by its addresses (e.g. through connections, *blat*) has had fateful consequences for the successor Central Asian states. Notwithstanding the vanishing of both Soviet ideology and socialist organization, they all demonstrate the primary valence of law as a privileged tool of power – economic and political – rather than as a societal shield against power (although ordinary Central Asian citizens, like their Soviet counterparts, remain adept at deploying workarounds, e.g. to secure a business licence or a medical certificate). Law continues to be elaborated, applied and enforced in conformity with strict procedures but remains nonetheless subject to endless adjustment and recalibration in the interests of governing networks and their agents or actors, from micro-level judicial and administrative decisions to macro-level constitutional amendments. Moreover, Central Asian institutional and constitutional forms, and indeed the very existence of the 'stans' as ethnic homelands, are derivative. They also continue to exhibit a distinctive Soviet-style performativity and punctiliousness of form in matters from the registration of business ownership to constitutional referenda.

Readers should also be aware from the analysis of civil law and constitutional law in the second and third sections above that the factors shaping the form and function of Central Asian legal systems, rules and processes, are by no means only endogenous. Central Asian civil legislation was never framed purely nationally or regionally, for domestic application only. The wiring of Central Asian business and commerce, from banking and finance to oil and gas extraction and uranium mining, into vast circuits of global exchange, has transformed the legal arena as much as the political or economic arena. As the stakes have gone global, the Central Asian states have both mastered the complex transnational legal-institutional terrain and adapted their own legal environment to facilitate successful integration into Asian, European and overseas markets – the kind of legal inter-operability that allows foreign investors to establish or acquire and transact with Central Asian businesses and Central Asian interests to establish or acquire and transact with foreign businesses. The drive of interna-

tional donors in Central Asia to bring about a comprehensive Plan-to-Market transition premised on the paramount role of law – civil and commercial law, constitutional law, and the over-arching rule of law – was received and adapted locally and forms part of the complex set of shaping factors for contemporary Central Asian law.

Finally, readers should appreciate from the descriptions and analyses of both civil and constitutional legal developments in Central Asia that the five states have followed distinct trajectories, like a Roman candle firework – launched from one point but following out separate spark trails. Law appears to have been more a dependent variable than a determinant, reflecting divergences in political economy (more entrepreneurial in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, more state-controlled in the other states) and societal and political dynamics (pluralization of power in Kyrgyzstan, manifest in a more parliamentary state architecture).

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6. Recommended Literature

Unfortunately, there are few English-language sources that address in a comprehensive way the 'problem set' and topics covered in this chapter expressly as they relate to Central Asia. There are general English language versions of the legislation of most post-Soviet states – particularly the Russian Federation but including the Central Asia states as well – but these generally have little analytic, critical, or contextual content. There are also general post-Soviet law textbooks and studies of legal and judicial reform processes, but overwhelmingly focused on the Russian Federation. Other works of a more general political or social science nature, examining post-Soviet societies generally and incorporating Central Asia (e.g. Henry Hale's *Patronal Politics*, 2014), include some useful and pertinent discussion of legal system dynamics. Below are the few works with a critical focus on Central Asian legal systems in context and through change; those by A. Rasulov and P. Maggs examine civil law; by J. Engvall and S. Newton constitutional law; and by D. Galligan and M. Kurkchiyan and also M. Sadyrbek the relation between formal norms and informal customs.

Jan Engvall, "From Monopoly to Competition, Constitutions and Rent Seeking in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism*, (10 February 2017).

Denis J. Galligan; Marina Kurkchiyan, *Law and Informal Practices: The Post-Communist Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Compare the constitutional systems in two contemporary Central Asian states in light of what you have learned about Soviet constitutionalism.

TOPIC 2

"Civil law rules of property and contract in Central Asia have ostensibly been designed 1) to establish a 'level playing field' for all economic actors, great and small, and 2) to fence off business and commerce from politics." Discuss, in light of Central Asian governing networks.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

This activity is designed to enable students to approach the question of designing legal frameworks for Central Asian states not from some hypothetical, Olympian perspective but as particular interested actors who want to secure or preserve their advantage or position now or in future and who may not act honorably or scrupulously – who may cheat, now or in future.

The teacher divides the class into five representative groups: 1) the President or existing political leadership, 2) a consortium of emerging business interests who have acquired significant assets, 3) a group representing legal system professionals (lawyers and judges), 4) a group of NGOs representing vulnerable societal groups (pensioners, single mother, low-income households, casual laborers) and 5) a group representing petty traders and small businesses.

The teacher asks each group to consider 1) civil legislation establishing the basic rules of property, contract, and liability for harm caused and the basic forms of business, and 2) basic constitutional principles including the relations and powers of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and the rights of citizens. Each group must then draw up a list of five ranked priorities for each of the two cases and defend and explain them to the class. For instance, NGOs might want to prioritise for the first case (civil code) the recognition of a separate category of 'social organisation' and for the second case (constitution) freedom of assembly, or standing before the Supreme Court to make claims of infringement of basic rights by state officials. Small businesses might want to prioritise ease of setting up a business for the civil code or a procedure for challenging official acts (like the denial of registration or a license).

The exercise could be run several times, and each time the teacher can add a different initial condition or factor for students to take into account. For example, after students had prepared a list of priorities in a general way, the teacher could ask them: suppose you are interested not strictly in provisions which you would be expected to obey, but provisions which, when the time came to apply or enforce them, you could manipulate or work around or turn to another purpose, how would that change your selection or ranking? Or, suppose you have just emerged from an entirely state dominated or controlled system, like the Soviet one, how would that change your selection or ranking?

This serial exercise could lead in unexpected directions, depending on what students came up with or how willing they were to think 'outside the box,' to see themselves as powerful actors now or in the future, and to approach basic legal rules as 'players' or 'gamers.' The teacher can also join the group discussions to try to provoke students to consider possibilities they might not otherwise consider, for instance: suppose you as the consortium want to be in a position to bribe judges or to ensure you have 'friends in high places' or to be appointed to ministerial posts, how would that change your proposals now as you think ahead? At the same time, the teacher could ask the small business or the NGO group: if you know now that the consortium interests are scheming to be able to bribe judges or to be appointed officials in the future, how might you change your priorities now to thwart such an outcome?

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://youtu.be/tPJ_Njuqly4

Circus and Coliseum Theatre.

PART IV

EXTERNAL INTERACTIONS

CHAPTER 15

History and Evolution of Geopolitics toward Central Asia

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Keywords:

• Classical Geopolitics • Critical Geopolitics • Geostrategy • Geo-ideology

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the importance and diversity of geopolitics in relation to Central Asia.
- Explain the geopolitics of Central Asia on a wide historical scale, long before geopolitics was defined as a scientific discipline.
- Be aware of changes in the geopolitical map of Central Asia in different historical periods.
- Give examples of the role of outside powers in the geopolitical construction of the region.
- Apply different geopolitical concepts to Central Asia to both geographical and historical perspectives.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What is geopolitics?
- What is Central Asia? How would you define this term? How has it been defined historically?

Main questions

- Which aspects are essential to setting up a geopolitical image of the region both from inside and outside?
- How was Central Asia historically conceptualised in reference to external powers before the 19th century?
- How were the concepts of the 'Great Game' and the 'New Great Game' linked to Central Asia geopolitics?
- What are the risks of a dogmatic or oversimplified use of geopolitical concepts in relation to Central Asia?

Post-reading questions

- Read additional texts on classical, neo-classical or critical geopolitics mentioned in the chapter (Mackinder, Haushofer, Kjellen, Mahan, Spykman, Brzezinski, Huntington, Ó Tuathail, etc.) and perform critical analyses of their relevance to the Central Asian region.
- How could we apply different kinds of geopolitics to the Central Asian region? Try to apply environmental geopolitics, and feminist geopolitics to Central Asia.
- Study selected periods in Central Asian history from the point of view of different geopolitical concepts. For example, try to answer questions such as:
 - a. How to consider the geopolitical and cultural connotations of Iran and Turan in Central Asian geopolitics in the Middle Ages and today?
 - b. Why would European powers send their envoys to Central Asian rulers from Samanid, Seljuk, Timurid, Shaibani or Safavid dynasties? What geopolitical interests they might have followed?
 - c. How did the waves of Turkic tribes shape the ethnic composition, environmental issues, economic situation and cultural life in Central Asia?
 - d. How did environmental geopolitics impact the end of the Timurid empire?
 - e. How did the shift of geopolitics to maritime politics impact the isolation of Central Asia and its subordination to Russia several centuries later?
 - f. Which geopolitical factors (or the absence of them) enabled the Bolsheviks to regain control over the region after the Civil War?
 - g. Why and to what extent did the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan disrupt the existing geopolitical balance? Consider the geopolitical consequences of the Soviet presence in that country.

History and Evolution of Geopolitics toward Central Asia

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THIS CHAPTER presents an overview of the very term geopolitics at different times and in various geographical spatial settings. The author explains the main theoretical concepts in geopolitics starting from the beginning of the discipline up to their contemporary use by the critical geopolitical school, Russian geopolitical school and others. Frames related to Central Asia are at the centre of this study. Readers should distinguish different approaches of geopolitics in the context of International Relations, Political Science or Geography as such.

In addition to other chapters in this volume, the geographical definitions of Central Asia show the different views on the regional geopolitics in the past. The general idea is that geopolitics was an inseparable part of global political history. This text provides a critical view on the biases of geopolitics locking in hegemonic worldviews and political opportunism. Consequently, geostrategy prevails over geopolitical concepts, in the past as well as today, even if the terms are often blurred. Moreover, the 'image' of the region in terms of critical geopolitics (see lower) is a crucial factor when studying the geopolitics of (not only) Central Asia.

This text presents a basic overview of geopolitical concepts, and it cannot cover the topic exhaustively. For those interested in more in-depth information, the author provides links to further readings containing key works on this topic at the end of this chapter.

1. Between Geopolitics, Geostrategy and Geo-ideology

*"Geopolitics is a modern word
– the picklock that promises
to explain and understand
everything"*

- Pascal Lorot

The very term geopolitics often include a wide range of messy and intermingled meanings and (mis)interpretations. Geopolitics attempts to research the interaction between geographical deter-

minants and politics as well as history. It means that geopolitics is usually located in-between the two disciplines – Geography (mainly political) and International Relations (IR). Despite the attempt to determine these different fields, the boundaries between them are delicate and blurry. Different authors include under geopolitics:

1. The derivative of academic disciplines such as political geography and IR
2. The practical policy-making (geostrategy)
3. Popular geopolitics through media
4. Geo-ideology

These divergent aspects, to a large extent, have determined its character and approaches to geopolitics. The ever-changing political environment and specific historical settings make geopolitics highly volatile and unstable discipline. As a consequence, the definition of geopolitics (as noted by Ó Tuathail)* is inveterately ambiguous as the significance of geopolitical concepts might change in the course of history and with the change of the world order.

*Ó Tuathail 1998

In practical terms, geopolitics tends to answer the questions related to the states or political entities within the particular geographical, historical, political, social context. It is connected with a host of questions dealing with:

- Power structures (what are the most significant powers in the world/region and what are the relations between themselves and with other states/entities?)
- Identity (“we” and “they” oppositional dichotomy)
- Labelling of territories (groups of states, classifying regions, and other delimitations) and their functions

1.1 Classical and Neoclassical Geopolitics

“Political geography researches the state from the geographical space, while geopolitics looks at the geographical space from the state’s point of view”

- K. Haushofer

Geopolitics as a scientific discipline was established at the beginning of the 20th century. Its conception is usually linked to the works of Rudolf Kjellén, Sir Halford Mackinder, Alfred Mahan and Friedrich Ratzel.* The discipline was derived from a social Darwinist approach imagining states as living organisms (organic geopol-

*Ó Tuathail et al. 1997; Ratzel 1903, Mahan and Westcott 1999; Holdar 1992; Stogiannos 2019

itics), which expand and fail in pace with their hegemony, technological advancement or population growth. All these pioneers connected the study of geography with practical politics, even if such a connection was determined rather by day-to-day politics and the topical geopolitical interests of the respective powers or – in other words, geostrategy. All policy-makers were mostly engrossed with power struggles and seeking hegemony.

In this regards, Halford Mackinder was preoccupied with the threat to Britain juxtaposing Sea and Land powers. At the same time, Alfred Mahan worked out the strategy for the extension of American Sea power. Their ideas influenced their later heir, Nicholas Spykman, who became a critical disciple of both. He adopted the Sea/Land division of the world, adding airpower as the crucial part of the struggle for hegemony. Moreover, he anticipated the geopolitical thinking and practical policy concerning Soviet Bloc containment after World War Two. In Ratzel's case, geopolitics is based on the connection between static space and states as living organisms rooted in the ground.* The concept was adopted by German Imperial policy and in its extension of "living space" (*Lebensraum*). These ideas were embraced by Karl Haushofer and his German geopolitical school, reflecting the post-WWI situation.* This first phase of "classical geopolitics" degenerated after the defeat of Nazi Germany and general condemnation.

Not surprisingly, in classical geopolitics a "geographical space [is considered] an existential pre-condition for all politics."* As we can observe even from this short overview, classical geopolitics is connected rather with geostrategic thinking that is reflected in the foreign policy, especially that of great powers. Geopolitical concepts are framed in and determined by a certain political context as well as the background of scholars. Consequently, classical geopolitics might be considered a highly volatile discipline depending on the political situation. It is usually connected with the great powers, whose representatives are often convinced to maintain their states' "greatness" even through minor and economically useless acquisitions.* However, we cannot forget that geopolitics can be also a part of the discourse of smaller states or empires as Drulák* demonstrated on the example of Czechoslovakia.

Nevertheless, classical geopolitics was further used as a standard analytical tool for policy-makers legitimizing realist approaches (*Realpolitik*). The ideas of Mackinder and Spykman were a cornerstone of US and other Western powers' strategies as presented by Donald Mainig in 1956 and Colin Gray in 1977. The very term geopolitics was revived as a theoretical framework in the late 1970s

*Ratzel 1903: 75-76

*Costachiu 2011

*Bassin 2004

*Morrison 2014a: 137

*Drulák 2006

Box 15.1 Western 'Classical' Thinkers on Geopolitics

Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922) – Swedish political scientist and politician (member of the parliament). Founder of the term “geopolitics” (1900), however, the definition of the state remains his main contribution to the political geography and geopolitics. He considered it as a living organism (organic state theory). He determined the state based on five principle aspects – geography, ethnicity, society, governance and (added later) economy. The first two aspects – territory and population – were cornerstones of the state (“the territory is the body and the population is the soul”), while the last three elements were considered as impacted by the land and population and belonged to a cultural form of the state. He suggested the idea that the organic state succumbs scientific laws (birth, death, diseases) and that wars are a remedial process that removes the old and ill states. The German school of geopolitics adopted these aspects in between the world wars. As a politician, he was a follower of conservative “*Realpolitik*.”

- Rudolf Kjellén, *Staten som livsform [State as Lifeform]* (1916).
- Rudolf Kjellén, *Innledning til Sveriges geografi [Introduction to Sweden's geography]* (1900).

Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) – British political geographer and professor at the University of Oxford. In his determinist conceptualization, a state and its position in the world were predestined by its geographical location. History consists of powers that were able to control the geostrategic regions. Initially, sea powers controlled these regions, while with the development of land transport (especially railways) land powers were able to capture the central geostrategic areas (Heartland) – See Map 15.1. Later he elaborated this theory of Heartland in more detail and adapted it to political and geopolitical world of his time. His most cited claim (“Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the world.”) marks Central Asian as part of the Heartland.

- Halford Mackinder, “The geographical pivot of history,” *The Geographical Journal*, 23, (1904): 421-437.
- Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Holt, 1919).
- Halford Mackinder, “The round world and the winning of the peace,” *Foreign Affairs*, 21, (1943): 595-605.

Alfred Mahan (1840-1914) – US naval officer and academic. As one of the other Anglo-American founders of geopolitics, he saw the world as a binary system – the sea and land powers (US, Great Britain, Germany, Japan versus Russia and China respectively). Such division also supported his racist differentiation between the Anglo-Saxon and Slavic/Chinese nations, and he did not doubt the supremacy of the former. He claimed that the conquest of the land is less important than control over the ocean and oceanic trade routes. He considered access to open sea, controlling seaports, the number and the distribution of the population as critical preconditions for the power status. In order to achieve and maintain the sea power status for the US, he suggested

(among others) the establishment of the military bases in the “choke points” such as Hawaii Islands or the Panama channel (analogically Suez channel, Gibraltar, Aden, Hormuz or Malacca straits as well Bosphorus-Dardanelles route). Contrary to Mackinder he followed Sir Walter Raleigh (1829): “for whoever commands the sea commands the trade; whoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.” His views impacted geopolitics as well as geopolitical strategies of France, Germany, the UK or Japan.

- Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660–1783* (1890).

Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) – German zoologist, ethnographer and geographer, founder of political geography, the discipline often connected with geopolitics (or used as *alter ego* of geopolitics). His views on geography followed the ideas of Alfred Mahan about sea powers. He also advanced the organic state concept, i.e. the state as a biological organism. As the supporter of this concept, he defined the state through its natural conditions (area, relative geographical position, borders or physical geography). The summary of his thoughts is gathered in his pioneered book ‘*Political Geography*’ (1897) that made him the founder of this research field. In the next stage, he brought forth the idea of state behaviour following the theory of social Darwinism. Within this concept, states (just as other organisms) fight for their living space (*Lebensraum*). According to his theory, a state tends toward constant natural expansion and fights for space (*Kampf um Raum*) using its natural borders (rivers et al.) to become powerful enough and secure itself against others (like Germany 1901-1945).

- Friedrich Ratzel: *Anthropogeographie* (1882).
- Friedrich Ratzel: *Politische Geographie* (1897).
- Friedrich Ratzel: *Der Lebensraum* (1901).

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) – A German officer and professor of geography, the founder of the German geopolitical school and its influential journal ‘*Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*’ (1924). Haushofer based his ideas on organic state theory and interconnection of theory and practical politics. To this aim he advocated thoroughly factual (including cultural and historical) knowledge of a particular region (preceding Area Studies). The conflicts between states are, according to him, inevitable as they fight for survival. It meant that current geographical conditions are volatile, that borders could be challenged, and that change is brought through action (including the war). In this system, each state struggles for its level of autarchy and living space (*Lebensraum*) that does not suffice for all. For political purposes, he created the concept of World Pan-regions (Map 15.2) with a leading state (one being ‘*Eurafrica*’ with Germany as a decisive power). The Pan-regions are competitive internally but not among themselves. Each Pan-region is economically self-sufficient and dominated by a single ideology.

- Karl Haushofer, *Grenzen in ihrer geographischen und politischen Bedeutung* (1927).
- Karl Haushofer, *Geopolitik der Pan-Ideen* (1931).
- Karl Haushofer, *Weltpolitik von heute* (1934).

Map 15.1 Mackinder's Heartland vs. Spykman's Rimland

Before the ascent of air transport, Sir H. Mackinder (1861-1947) found that control of the continental 'Heartland' can assure world domination. He redrew the boundaries of the pivot area several times (1904, 1919, 1945) to adjust to political realities. His theories inspired geostrategies used by the Allied intervention during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921), the Nazi eastward invasion, and later US containment policies during the Cold War. Criticized by N. J. Spykman (1893-1943) for overrating the strategic value of land power, the latter argued that the 'inner crescent' or 'Rimland' as he renamed it, was the key to control the world island, and thus the "destinies of the world."

Sources:

Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics of the World System*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 18.
B. W. Blouet, "Sir Halford Mackinder As British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919-1920," *The Geographical Journal*, 142, no. 2, (1976): 228-236.
N. J. Spykman, *America's Strategy and World Politics* (1942).
N. J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (1944).
Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=3245&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface NV.

Map 15.2 Haushofer's World with Pan-regions

K. Haushofer and his colleagues supported German international dominance by creating the theory of the 'Pan-regions,' continent-sized blocks with a leading (industrial) power and a resource periphery. He distinguished between four regions and their respective hegemonies: Eurafrika (Germany), Pan-America (USA), Pan-Russia (Russia), Pan-Asia (Japan) – an intermediate stage before the expected global German dominance. In an earlier (1920s) conceptualization by R. Coudenhove-Kalergi, The British Commonwealth is denoted as a separate Pan-region (coloured in grey). Subsequent geopolitical frameworks dropped the idea of Eurafrika after WWII and the waning of colonial ties. This geopolitical approach of Pan-regions nourished later ideas of natural influence zones for great powers, to which many geostrategists still adhere today.

Sources:

Richard N. R Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Pan-Europa*, (Wien-Leipzig: Pan-Europa Verlag, 1922).

D. H. Deudney, "Geopolitics," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2020).

Karl Haushofer, *Geopolitik der Pan-Ideen*, (Berlin: Zentral-Verlag, 1931).

John O'Loughlin; Herman van der Wusten, "Political Geography of Panregions," *Geographical Review*, 80, no. 1, (1990): 1-20.

Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=3245&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

and 1980s (after a temporary neglect in wake of Nazi geopolitics) when neoclassical geopolitics were used to analyse the ongoing struggle between the USA and USSR. It was used by practitioners from think tanks close to the State Department and political advisors to US presidents and the White House; with such thinkers and inner circle advisers like the famous Zbigniew Brzezinski or Henry Kissinger, or contemporary consultants like Robert Kaplan.*

*Hepple 1986; Kaplan 2012

In contrast to classical geopolitics, these authors, claiming allegiance to 'neoclassical' geopolitics, considered more than just static geographical conditions as determinants of geopolitics and also included dynamic political, economic, social, cultural and other factors. Nevertheless, in the academic context, neoclassical geopolitics was preferably connected to **geostrategy**; i.e. how states/powers should behave in a particular geographical and geopolitical setting.

In some cases, the geostrategy could take a form of a state-ordered or unchallengeable doctrine, turning it into **geo-ideology**. Those geopolitics that became geo-ideology are usually connected with authoritarian states and regimes.¹ We could observe this process after the revival of geopolitics in post-Soviet Russia when it reappeared as a discipline in Russian politics after it had been officially abandoned for years, although in reality of course, it was used throughout the whole Cold War. Initially, in the early 1990s, Russian geostrategy was trapped within the classical Russian geopolitical dichotomy between 'Western' and 'Eurasian' geopolitical conceptual thinking. The latter, now called the 'neo-Eurasian geopolitical school,' was developed by its founder Aleksandr Dugin (1997) and became the most viable and the most cited school in the country.* By the end of the 1990s, the latter prevailed and became a kind of ideological construct for Russian foreign policy, an ideational foundation for the construction of Russia's image in external and internal political messages. The doctrine shifted from a geopolitical concept towards a geostrategy as it became the fundament for Russian foreign policy helping to re-establish Russia as a great power under the leadership of Vladimir Putin (1999-). Finally, the specifics of Russia's greatness within its own geographical space (including a Russian sphere of interests and the concept of 'we – Russia,' and 'they – the West/others') turned it to a kind of state imperative, and thus a geo-ideology. As described lower, other forms of neo-Eura-

*Tsygankov 2003; Laruelle 2008

¹ There exists a bias in this regard – that geopolitics of democratic regimes grounded in concepts such as '*Françafrique*' or 'American exceptionalism' are usually not considered ideological in nature.

sianism have emerged throughout the post-Soviet region, of which the most recognizable concerns Eurasian integration (formulated by Kazakh president Nazarbayev); even though this neo-Eurasianism should be considered as a geostrategy and not a geo-ideology.

Although our focus on Central Asia deals mostly with authoritarian regimes, the geo-ideology might find its place in fully democratic systems as well. L. Ahnström analyses the idea of a unified Europe and EU in a geo-ideological framework with both positive and negative connotations for different groups of a plural society.* Alongside the European unification postulate, the idea of neoliberalism and democracy prevailed in political and academic discussions in the post-Cold War world. Francis Fukuyama presented the most well-known concept of this kind in his famous 'End of History.'* A growing number of authors, particularly from the former Communist regions or from authoritarian regimes tend to look at these neoliberal and democratic concepts critically, labelling them democratic or neoliberal geo-ideology. (*Scekic et al. 2016; Golubchikov 2016). Last but not least, the very idea of the United States as a specific and exclusive geographical entity and culture also became a kind of unchallengeable imperative of its domestic and foreign policy.

*Ahnström 1993

*Fukuyama 1992

Therefore, the concept of geo-ideology can be considered as another derivate of geopolitics. Geo-ideology merges the two fields of study – geopolitics and political ideology. It shows the geographical space as determined by and for a particular action; the political establishment making such claims considers this as inherent or irreversible. At the same time, geo-ideology lies on the thin border between a geopolitical construct (e.g. EU development as a community of democratic and plural states) and geostrategy (e.g. Russian/Kazakhstani foreign policy).

In sum, the classical and neoclassical geopolitics represent mostly the activities of political decision-makers and practitioners within a particular space. As such, the discipline is often not considered purely academic, particularly by the representants of critical geopolitics, even while such ideas and resulting decisions are, generally speaking, connected with real geostrategy and the making of foreign policy.

Box 15.2 Different Branches and Subtypes of Geopolitics

	Primary Authors	Amalgam of:	Distinguishing attributes
Geopolitics			
<i>Classic</i>	Original (imperial) thinkers (early 20 th century)	Geography & politics	Bounded by historical context Legitimizing a political project
<i>Neo-classic</i>	(Realist) scholars, strategic planners, policy-advisors	Geography & realist political theory	Updated theory to contemporary context Legitimizing a political project
<i>Popular</i>	Journalist, news media; popular science	Political geography & foreign policy news / analysis	Bounded by a political view/ agenda
Critical geopolitics	Academics, scholars	Geography & political science	Critical analysis of geopolitical concepts
<i>Environmental</i>	(idem)	Environment & politics Climate change	Political impact and policies of environmental issues (sustainability, security and scarcity)
<i>Reel</i>	(idem)	Discourse analysis & propaganda politics	Studies power projections and their spatial impact
<i>Feminist</i>	(idem)	Geopolitics & gender studies	Identify the role of marginalized groups in other geopolitics
Geostrategy	Policy-advisers, think tanks	Geography & foreign policy	Legitimizing a foreign policy
Geo-ideology	State-ideologues, policy-advisers	Geography & political ideology	Advocating a political world view
Geo-economics	Academics, scholars	Geography & political economy	Transnational cooperate behaviour Focuses on economic policies, integrations and interactions
	Policy-advisers, (political) economists	Geopolitics & foreign economic policy	Economy as a weapon
Astropolitics	Policy-advisers, think tanks	Space geography & space policy	Space politics Encompasses (neo-)classic, geostrategy and critical approaches

1.2 Critical Geopolitics and Derivates

"All the leading geopoliticians were conservative white male imperialists who sought, in their own way, to explain and justify imperial expansionism by their own particular national state or, as they and others often termed it, their "race."

- Gerard Ó Tuathail

The end of the Cold War brought about two important events in geopolitics. Within the first one, three types of geopolitics were firmly established, according to J. Agnew and L. Muscarà:*

*Agnew and Muscarà 2002: 176

1. (Neo-)Classical geopolitics was often connected with political advisory, political analysis, think tanks (with their policy papers) and policy-makers in general.
2. Popular geopolitics represented the comments, columns and short essays in newspapers and other media, including recently developed social media comments on contemporary international relations.
3. Critical geopolitics justifies its existence as a more academic discipline based on strictly scientific methods.

Although scientifically codified by the late 1980s-early 1990s, the beginnings of the critical geopolitics took root in the post-WWII disapproval of classical geopolitics due to its associated connection with Nazi ideology (just partly justifiable). Classical geopolitics was abandoned by a substantial majority of geographers, even though the struggle of both superpowers (USA and USSR) and their blocs behaved within frames of classical geopolitical postulates.

The Cold War brought new challenges to geography and geopolitics. The anti-colonial struggle and the emergence of 'The Third World' required a new definition of geographical space with new global (China, Japan, India) or regional (Iran, Egypt, Brazil) powers coming to the stage in a disrupted bipolar world order – see also Map 15.3. Saul Cohen introduced the idea of a multipolar world as well as the concept of geostrategic regions (naval versus continental trade powers) and hierarchically lower geopolitical regions (the Middle East, South East Asia, etc.).* Political geographers extended the scope of their research of the state and its place in the world to new contexts such as environmental issues or non-state actors. Critical geopolitics also prevailed in many dissident groups in the Soviet blocs, including Václav Havel's 'anti-political' politics in Czechoslovakia.*

*Cohen 1973: 59-89

*Havel 1985

Map 15.3 The ‘Third World’ according to A. Sauvy

Used since 1963, and originally coined by French economic historian Alfred Sauvy (1898-1990) in 1952, derived from the French ‘tiers monde’ referring to the ‘third estate’ of the French Revolution. The ‘Third World’ was a residual category mostly for former colonies or underdeveloped countries that were not part of the First (capitalist Western) World, nor the ‘Second’ (Communist states). With the spread of Communism it became difficult to classify countries like Cuba, Vietnam or Ethiopia, and after the Cold War the term lost all analytic clarity. Despite being replaced by other (vague) geopolitical frames like the ‘Global South’ or ‘developing states,’ the concept of the Third World still lingers in political worldviews.

Sources:
Leslie Wolf-Phillips, “Why Third World?: Origin, Definition and Usage,” *Third World Quarterly*, 9, no. 4, (1987): 1311-1327.
Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=3245&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

Critical geopolitics as a scientifically anchored discipline evolved at the beginning of the 1990s with the works of Simon Dalby and Gerard Ó Tuathail* and was methodologically set up a few years later.* The school, among others, researched the social construction of classical geopolitics (images and narratives on boundaries and national interests) and challenged classical geopolitics for its discourse.* The geographical space is perceived not merely as a physical reality, but rather as socially constructed. It is not space (states, regions, borders), but the social construct of space that determines political decisions (this thinking in fact led to the term anti-geopolitics).

*Dalby 1991; Ó Tuathail 1992

*Ó Tuathail 1996; Ó Tuathail et al. 1998

*Amineh 2002

The critical approach considers the geopolitics and geography of the world as a “product of histories of the struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space.”* Of course, the approaches mentioned above are not separated; on the contrary, they intermingle in the mass of geopolitical texts being produced by academics, policy-makers, journalists and other persons dealing with geopolitics. We can also speak about “geopolitics from below.”* It reflects the image of the politics within the society and media more than the focus on decision-makers and political elites.

*Ó Tuathail 1996: 1

*Ó Tuathail et al. 1998: 245-255;
Mamadouh 1998

Throughout the last 30 years, critical geopolitics overwhelmingly prevailed in scientific discourse, encompassing articles in the most prestigious journals such as *Political Geography*, *Geopolitics* and others. Critical geopolitics, with their focus on multiple actors and factors, quickly developed into several other academic fields that extended its primary attention beyond states.

Environmental geopolitics is considered to be one of the most extensive fields of study both on a global and regional scale.* The relations between behaviour or the very existence of states and environmental changes is a critical issue in this field. From the critical point of view, environmental geopolitics also researches the role of the environment in the political discourse – narratives, practices, and other processes across human and physical realms.*

*Ó Tuathail et al. 1998; O’Lear 2018;
Flint 2017: 245-282; Dalby 2014

*O’Lear 2018: 2

Environmental geopolitics includes physical geography crises (long-term drought, change of river beds and flows), sudden environmental changes or disasters (volcano eruptions, an outbreak of detrimental animal species, pandemics) or anthropomorphic activities (pollution, the disappearance of arable lands due to over-use of fertilisers, monoculture agriculture). The very existence of natural resources (water, oil, gas, metals, cereals), and the ability of states to extract and export them, significantly determines the

geopolitical weight of the state or the region, today and in the past. The question of overpopulation or depopulation is also included in this branch of geopolitics. This environmental focus also serves the securitization of the problems of the state, nation or whole regions.

“Reel” geopolitics (from: ‘movie reel’² – a cinematographic term) might serve as another example of geopolitical derivatives.* This critical discourse analysis within critical geopolitics in terms of (special) cultural dominance or subordination. In this sense, Central Asia is still much within the influence sphere of Russian and, partly, Turkish or Indian reel geopolitics. By identifying frames from geostrategy and neoclassical geopolitics, reel geopolitics study film-makers and movies to promote geopolitical goals (e.g. the supremacy of the US or other powers through Hollywood blockbusters).

*Power and 2005

Feminist geopolitics contests both classical (or neoclassical) as well as critical geopolitics and attempts to involve also non-players (not only women) into the geopolitical discourse.* Feminist scholars of geopolitics, of course, do not deal only with gender issues and gender balance in the classical geopolitics and geopolitical discourse, but extend the scope of their research to other marginalised groups, treating women as an avant-garde.* (Hyndman 2004; Clark 2017; Dixon and Marston 2016) The flow of feminist geopolitics also turned from a rather academic discipline to more practical research.*

*Massaro and Lill 2013;
Massaro and Williams 2013

Astropolitics – The geopolitics of the space or outer geopolitics developed not only from critical geopolitics but logically extended from classical and neoclassical geopolitics and geostrategy.* Astropolitics based in neoclassical theory even extended Mackinder’s definition into space, claiming that “who controls low-Earth orbit controls near-Earth space. Who controls near-Earth space dominates Terra. Who dominates Terra determines the destiny of humankind.”*

*Koopman 2011

Space geopolitics enhanced not only space races as observed during the peak of the Cold War and within the growing China versus US/EU rivalry, but also Earth geopolitics. In this regard, the equator regions became a fundamental component of the geopolitics due to more cost-effective (and cheaper) launches at this

*Deudney 2020

*Dolman 2005: 6-7

² A movie reel is a light circular frame designed to store a (10-minute) analogue, motion-picture film.

latitude comparing to its higher latitude counterparts.* Practically, regarding Central Asia, it favours Kourou to Cape Canaveral not mentioning Baikonur or Vostochnyi launch pads (the latter might decrease in geopolitical significance).

*Dolman 2005: 68

Geo-economics – The transformation of geopolitics from the state to the corporate sector under the support of supranational organisations such as the *International Monetary Fund* or *World Bank*. Support of liberalism and free movement of the capital does not limit itself by national state borders any longer. This branch studies economic warfare in hegemonic power struggles between nuclear powers, where conventional or nuclear standoffs are no longer feasible.

The concepts mentioned above, however, are far from being separate approaches without overlay in focus and practice. These (and other branches of geopolitics not mentioned here) show that we cannot use the general scheme that: critical/environmental/feminist geopolitics correspond to academic geopolitics/political geography; while (neo-)classical geopolitics are considered within the realm of practical geopolitics or IR. In this regard Box 15.2 presents only a tentative overview and classification. All these categories are often highly permeable and volatile, which makes the application of geopolitics more disorganised and harder to grasp.

In the following section, the author focuses mostly on the different geopolitics and geostrategies touching upon Central Asia in various historical settings. The author claims (using the example of Central Asia) that the geopolitics and geostrategy were part of human history long before the establishment of a modern geopolitical discipline.

2. Historical Geopolitics in Central Asia

The overview in the first part provided a short introduction to geopolitics. It presented the development of geopolitics as a scientific field of research or a tool for political practitioners. At the same time, one might expect that a similar way of thinking took place even before geopolitics were established and defined. One might even presume that geopolitical thinking goes far deeper into the history of humankind. The rulers of the past undoubtedly thought about their politics within a particular geographical space, while their advisors did not have less influence on their rulers than contemporary scholars and think tanks have on policy today.

Niccolò Macchiavelli with his treatise *The Prince* (*Il Principe*, 1532) wrote not only one of the essential books for political scientists, but also laid, in some way, the foundations of political science and also geopolitics. In the Islamic world, works of **Ibn Khaldun**³ (1332-1406) (*al-Muqaddimah*, *Prolegomena*, المقدمة ابن خلدون in Arabic, 1377) and **Nizam al-Mulk/Neẓām al-Molk** (1018-1092)⁴ (*Siyāsāt-nāmeḥ*, *Order of the Realm*, سیاست نامه in Farsi, exact year of publication unknown) and other political philosophers could also be considered as contributors to the foundations of geopolitics. In this way, regarding Central Asia, this author argues that these ancient geopolitics should be considered 'historical geopolitics' and can be traced back long before the establishment of the modern scientific discipline that gave it its current name; despite the fact that such legacy is often neglected by political scientists solely focused on modern and contemporary politics.

Central Asia performed as both subject and object of geopolitics many times throughout history. This part provides a short overview of the historical geopolitics of Central Asia. It shows that concepts of pre-scientific geopolitics can be considered through prisms of contemporary geopolitics, both classical and even critical. This chapter also attempts to classify the concepts in terms of their academic (as classical literary works) or practical political impact. The selected examples provided in the text should lead to the more profound reflection on the historical roots of the field as well as on the (often neglected) fact that the contemporary political processes used to happen in pre-modern past merely using different tools and means.

The overview that follows does not have the ambition to be a comprehensive or exhaustive compilation of all manifestations of geopolitics in region's history. An outline of all the concepts can be found in Box 15.3. It aims to demonstrate that geopolitics are not

³ Ibn Khaldun. Arabic historian (1332-1406). He was one of the first historians who researched the mechanisms of societal development. He saw this process as constant with repeating historical cycles based on the interaction between settled civilization (*ḥaḍāra* - حضارة) and nomadic culture (*badāwa* - بدآوة). The breaking points of these cycles, in his vision, are caused by cataclysmic events such as wars or epidemics. (He himself was a witness of the Black Death.)

⁴ Abu Ali Hasan Nizam al-Mulk/Neẓām al-Molk (1018-1092) was a Persian scholar and politician. He was a vizier (minister) at the court of the Seljuk and was responsible for creating the state's administrative system and cementing internal stability in the empire. His most famous publication is 'Siyāsāt-nāmeḥ,' the book of his experience as vizier about political systems, government institutions, habits and traditions of Seljuk society.

just an invention of the last 100-120 years. Students of history might include geopolitical concepts into their historical research. At the same time, political geographers, political scientists, IR experts, et al. might realize that such historical perspectives continue to matter either as reinventions, or because contemporary issues are often just parts of long-term metahistorical processes.

The post-Soviet period we live in now often attempts to portray the Central Asian region as a playground of (renewed) geopolitical battles (virtual or real) since the USSR's dissolution (often in extension to the 19th century 'Great Game'). However, we should realize that this relatively short period starting from 1991 ignores several thousand years of Central Asian history.

2.1 Strategic Linkage Systems before Geopolitics

Central Asia was the crossroad of civilizations and trade in the Eurasian continent for centuries. Its geographical location in the middle of the Eurasian continent predetermines (in terms of classical geopolitics) the region to be an influential geopolitical space. Depending on how powerful or weak internal settlements were inside the region (nomadic and settled empires or their hybrids), its politics influenced other regions or were affected themselves by outside empires and cultures.

Unlike other regions with clearly defined internal borders or with a firm geographical core, Central Asia had quite open and volatile borders. In some cases (e.g. pre-Islamic periods) we cannot politically define the region at all, while during some periods (Russian and Soviet empires) this delineation was more transparent and formalized. This volatility also created fickle geopolitics in and surrounding the region that altered in pace with the region's internal composition, the power of local states, the existence or absence of powerful states in adjacent regions and the reach of their respective cultures, the vulnerability of the region toward migration waves, internal cultural processes (such as nomadic sedentarization), the situation in local and trans-Asian trade and economy and many other factors.

Undoubtedly the changing composition of people based on internal and external conflict together with migration affected the geopolitics of Central Asia. The region is geographically open to migration waves, typically leading from North to South (cf. the migration of Iranian tribes to contemporary Iran and adjacent regions, the Russian advance in the region) and from East to West (e.g. Turko-Mongolic migrations). This population influx contrib-

uted significantly to the social intercourse of local peoples. Constant population exchanges, as well as variable borders, make local populations adaptive and flexible. Nevertheless, it was the system of trade routes (later called the “Silk Road”), that made Central Asia an established part of Eurasian geopolitics. The opposite was also true – the decline of these transcontinental trade exchanges substantially decreased the geopolitical significance of the region. Later, the region’s geopolitical significance was restored not as a result of the emergence of a strong local polity, but due to the almost whole-Asian rivalry of two European superpowers.

Generally, outside invasions brought about different geopolitical concepts, starting from Alexander the Great’s extension of Hellenic civilisation, continued through the mythological concepts of Iran and Turan, Islamic geopolitical dualism and the classic European vision of Central Asia (up to Russian-British expansion in 19th century). The precise delineation of borders and the disappearance of ‘blank spaces on the map’ in Asia defined the evident geopolitical units in Central Asia that have been preserved up to today.

Alexander the Great his empire was one of the first periods when Central Asia played a peripheral albeit significant role in geopolitics. Alexander III of Macedonia (356-323 BC) conquered large tracts of the region and, as denoted by contemporary local historiographies, was the founder of several cities and married (among other) with a Sogdian/Bactrian (or Scythian in Greek sources) princess Roxana (Roxane, ‘Ρωξάνη in Greek).^{*} His military campaigns destroyed one of the most powerful geopolitical players of this time (Achaemenid Persia as well as smaller Mesopotamic states). He shortly united a vast unified geographical space with a common geopolitical idea cemented by the Greek Hellenistic language and culture. Central Asia became a peripheral part of that empire, but maybe for this reason, Greek culture was preserved there long after the disappearance of Ancient Greece or Alexander’s empire.

^{*}Пьянков 2013: 539-567

Alexander the Great and Greek heritage resonated through the region’s political science, historiography, literature and folk tales.^{*} Notably, medieval Islamic sources cultivated a geopolitical image of Alexander (Iskander) that is alive even today. The Persian poet, Nizami Ganjavi his *Eskandar-nāme*/*Iskander-nāme* (اسکندرنامه – The book of Alexander, 12th century) is one of the brightest examples of Alexander the Great’s cultural geopolitical influence. The legends of Alexander the Great are widespread throughout Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan and several nationalities (e.g. Hazaras in Afghanistan) refer them in their historiography and even connect their ethnic roots to Alexander’s period.^{*} Even if the ini-

^{*}Manteghi 2018

^{*}Warren 2018

tial advance was driven by the geostrategic reasons (i.e. classical geopolitics), the long-term extension of Greek cultural space falls under critical geopolitical frameworks.

Although named as such substantially later (19th century), the **Silk Road** concept (*Seidenstraße*) is another example of historical geopolitics in Central Asia. The name was coined in 1872 by the Prussian geographer baron Ferdinand von Richthofen to denote the system of trade routes across the region that might not have been considered a geopolitical project at the time of its existence.* The Silk Road of course was a nexus connecting goods as well as ideas, know-how and technologies and culture. Several Chinese inventions (like paper or gunpowder) would have reached Europe much later if these routes had not existed. Unconsciously this network turned into a significant global space (regardless of the politics it contained) long before the European overseas discoveries and opening of new maritime global routes. German geographer von Richthofen understood its importance and conceptualised this geocultural phenomenon, based on its most recognizable commodity – Chinese silk.*

*Hansen 2012

*von Richthofen 1877

At the same time, this historical trade network allowed geostrategic thinking in the states emerging and perishing along its routes. Without this network, we would not be able to analyse Chinese-Central Asian-Persian-Middle Eastern-Ancient Mediterranean civilizations' bilateral and multilateral relations. Chinese empires, Parthian and Sassanid Persia, as well as Roman and later Byzantium empire, were for a long time the most dominant players in this geopolitical setting. Central Asia became the most vulnerable part on the linkages starting from the outskirts of both Chinese and Persian states. In the course of history, the Silk Road was often partially ruled by Persia and China, but they usually did not touch each other with a common border, especially when buffer states emerged in the region. This kept the eventual geopolitical rivalry between the two peripheral powers at a marginal level. Central Asia became one of the key links on this longer trade route network, extending to South Asia and South East Asia and the Swahili coast of Africa, with much variation through the centuries.

Influenced by migration waves and the establishment of a strong empires in between (Kushan (1st to 4th century), Hephthalites (5th to 7th century), Turkic (6th century onwards), the region became a volatile bridge between China and the rest of the world. From the other side, Central Asian states became the lynchpin of a geopolitical rivalry between Persian and Roman/Byzantium empires with changing coalitions and borders.* In this regard, one cannot speak

*Qiang-Kordosis 2018

Box 15-3 Main Geopolitical Concepts Covering Central Asia

CONTEXT	WHO	FRAMEWORK	ISSUE AND IMPACT	JUSTIFICATION FOR:	TYPE
<i>Pax Alexandria</i>	Alexander the Great	The advance of Greek army	The crash of traditional empires (mainly Achaemenid Persia)	Extension of the Greek culture and influence	Geostrategy
			The domination of the Greek culture in the region for the next centuries	Western civilizational mission	Critical geopolitics (cultural imprint)
The Silk Road	From the Ancient empires up to today	Transcontinental trade flows (mostly the East-West axis)	Economic development (trade)	Trade and cultural exchange Enhancement of political ties of the states on this network	Geoculture and classical geopolitics
			Cultural influence	Military expansion and conquering new territories (Persia, China, Central Asian empires) Counterbalancing Russia and Chinese dominance in the region (US New Silk Road concept) Extension of geopolitical influence (China Belt and Road Initiative)	Classical Geopolitics
			Cultural heritage (Silk Road tourism)	Cultural exchange and trade patterns	Critical geopolitics
			Expanding of Arab empire at the expense of other empires Establishment of <i>modus vivendi</i> with non-Islamic populations Administrative regulation of Muslim territories (especially towards non-Muslims)	Military expansion of Arabic invaders Dominating trade flows Establishment of Islamic states and Islamic law	Classical Geopolitics
Iran-Turan Mythological Persian past <i>Pax Mongolica</i> <i>Pax Timuridae</i>	Arabs and Muslims (later Persians in Central Asia)	Arabic expansion and the decline of Byzantium and the Sasanid empire	Establishment of Islamic religion and overthrow of other religions	The spread of Islam	Critical geopolitics
			The spread of Persian culture and civilisation (written partly in Persian and partly in Arabic)	Cultural expansion	Cultural geopolitics
			Re-establishment of the great Persian empire and revival of Persian culture		Classical and critical Geopolitics
			Establishment of unified cultural and economic space across the north Eurasian continent Unification of Central Asian and Persian territories	Development of culture and science in Samarkand	Classical and critical Geopolitics
Great Game (XIX century)	Great Britain	British and Tsarist advancement (India and the CA steppes respectively) Russia is seen as a threat CA is a battleground	Containing Russian advance Drawing defendable borders	Mobilize resources to defend the empire Expansion into Afghanistan	Geostrategy

CONTEXT	WHO	FRAMEWORK	ISSUE AND IMPACT	JUSTIFICATION FOR:	TYPE
<i>Great Game (XIX century) (continued)</i>	Russia	Autonomous processes have led to a semi-natural expansion in CA (a power vacuum)	Finding a natural border to protect the empire's soft underbelly Capturing the "Silk Road"	Establishment of direct trade links with China and India Expanding its imperial conquests Getting access to sea-routes	Geostrategy
World War Two Nazi conquest	Nazi Germany	Invasion of USSR, the mortal enemies	Defeat the USSR Capturing Ukraine (grain) Turning CA into a buffer zone	Lebensraum racial ideology Extension of spheres of influence	Geo-ideology Geostrategy
Soviet-Afghan War	USSR	Invading and transforming Afghanistan	Pacifying resistance	Supporting of the leftist regime in Afghanistan	Geostrategy
The New Great Game	USA	Stopping Soviet invasion (keeping the iron curtain intact)	Foster rebellion	Roll-back Communism Domino-effect	Geostrategy
	USA	The geopolitical shift of Central Asian countries	Expansion of economic ties and humanitarian aid in the region	Growing influence over the region at the expense of Russia	Geostrategy
Neo-Eurasianism	Russia	The dissolution of USSR	Keeping the former Soviet state in the Russian zone of influence	Establishment of economic and military integration (Eurasian Economic Community/Eurasian Union, Collective Security Treaty Organisation) Maintaining the "Russian world" (i.e. Russian sphere of influence)	Neoclassical geopolitics Geostrategy Geo-ideology
Greater Central Asia	USA	War in Afghanistan	Involvement of Afghanistan as the hub linking Central and South Asia	Ending the conflict in Afghanistan	Geostrategy
The New Silk Road (One Belt – One Road / Belt & Road Initiative)	China	Growing Chinese power and geopolitical vacuum in the region	Linking Central Asia (and Eurasian countries) with China through the system of bilateral and multilateral agreements	Chinese economic expansion	Geostrategy
Eurasianism	Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan is a bridge between (other) great powers and the centre of CA	Boost internal and external legitimacy of Kazakhstan	Keeping the current regime in power and blocking unwanted foreign influence from outside geopolitical players (multivector foreign policy)	Geopolitics
Neo-Turanism	Hungary	Anti-Western realignment of Uralo-Altaic nations	Supporting discourses for Eurosceptic Hungarian elites	Terminate Hungary's alliance with the Euro-Atlantic community	Geostrategy
Neo-Panturkism	Turkey	Turkey as an example of transformation	Linking Central Asia (and Azerbaijan) with its Turkish "older brother"	Expansion of Turkish influence in the region	Geostrategy
Neo-Ottomanism / neo-Osmanism					Geo-ideology

Source: Author's own work.

about the geopolitics of the ancient and medieval Silk Road, but rather about the geopolitics focused on access to and control over the trade routes, together with the transfer of knowledge and cultural influence.

Popularized by von Richthofen, throughout the 20th century the Silk Road became the object of academic geopolitical discussions. The term initially resonated as a geocultural concept with all its romanticism starting with Jules Verne's fictional hero, Claudius Bombarnac, an explorer and traveller along the route fostering exotic fascination for largely unknown regions with readers in Western Europe and North America.* Based on this orientalism it is not a surprising that the term Silk Road became highly popular for creating different geopolitical concepts when borders to Central Asia and China opened at the beginning of 1990s. Western scholars and, consequently, their politicians adopted this term as a mantra for classical and critical geopolitics, and geostrategy as well, respectively.* As a tool to expand geopolitical influence the New Silk Road also resonated in Japan and China.*

*Starr and Kuchins 2010;
Laruelle 2015b
*Winter 2020: 10

The contemporary much-discussed *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI or *One Belt One Road* and other names) under Chinese leadership has been a logical next step in this process. As a comprehensive geostrategic as well as geopolitical concept, it encompasses numerous political, economic, cultural and social events and initiatives. It became one of the most cited geopolitical concepts of that kind along with the 'Monroe doctrine' in America, the 'Bipolar world' in the second half of the last century or the EU geopolitical, geo-economic, geocultural, geostrategic and geo-ideological project.

The projection of 'ancientness' with romanticism into the contemporary world, concerning the material support of China toward different projects under a single ideological umbrella, has boosted the image of the initiative, and contributed to the China's growing global influence. The idea of a New Silk Road, adapted initially by the West in its approach towards Central Asia and later adopted by China with its meticulous promotion of the idea, became the favourite label for enhancing the co-operation with Central Asia from outside.* In the case of the Silk Road, it is not an event or historical concept, but a rather contemporary (or modern historical) projection of what we today would call a revived geopolitical concept from the past and a reinvigoration of what was hardly understood as geopolitics in its own time (if we discount the geopolitical rivalries of concrete empires in a concrete historical period).

*Beckwith 2009: 264–265

2.2 Civilizational Frames before Geopolitics

Coming back to our historical overview, contrary to the idea of the Silk Road that geopolitics invented in the recent past, Central Asia had become a part of an Islamic geopolitical worldview. The expansion of Islam through Arabic military campaigns led to the creation of bipolar geopolitical concepts – *dār al-islām* (دار الإسلام – ‘realm of Islam’) and *dār al-ḥarb* (دار الحرب – ‘realm of war’) worked out by Islamic scholars in the Abbasid Caliphate.* However, this geopolitical division was not strict with the lands in between these two worlds, allowing for various nuances: *dār al-sulḥ* (دار الصلح – ‘realm of treaty’), *dār al-‘ahd* (دار العهد – ‘realm of truce’), *dār al-amn* (دار الأمن – ‘realm of peace’).^{*} Central Asia was incorporated into *dār al-islām* in the eighth century, and the border of this realm determined its position. After the Talas battle in 751 (a clash of Chinese and Arab troops), and the subsequent defeat of the Chinese Tang army, Islam anchored in Central Asia, and the expansion of Buddhism was discontinued. Chinese influence diminished in the region except for today’s Uyghur lands currently encompassing its Xinjiang province (新疆 – *Xīnjiāng*, ‘new frontier’) and some Inner Chinese regions dominated by Muslim populations. In addition to Islam, Persian culture (now revived under the Islamic context) underwent its renaissance starting from the 9th century and turned the Central Asian region into the pillar of Persian and Islamic culture.* (See Map 15.5) Classical geopolitics expressed through the military campaigns later modified to cultural and religious expansion of Islamic and also Persian civilization creating images of a coherent geocultural space in terms of critical geopolitics.

*See Map 15.4

*Mendel 2013

Legendary **Iran** (*Ērān*) and **Turan** (*Tūrān*) – concepts based on the interaction of two dichotomic dyads (settled vs. nomadic and later Iranian vs. Turkic) – are another example of historical geopolitics in the region. These terms became the subject of political interests several times in history under different circumstances. Turan was incorporated in the Pahlavi texts including the *Avesta*, a collection of Zoroastrian religious texts, and a geographical piece of work *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* (Farsi: شهرستانهای ایران‌شهر – *Provincial Capitals of Ērānšahr* completed in the eighth to ninth century). In both texts it juxtaposes nomadic branches of Iranian people living in the north with settled populations in Persia. The Persian poet, Ferdowsi in his *Shahnameh* (Farsi: شاهنامه – *Book of Kings*, 10th-11th century), a national epic of Greater Iran, referred to an ancient Persian mythology and introduced the legendary king

Map 15.4 Islamic Caliphates (622-750)

This map with current state borders shows the territorial expansion under Muhammed (622-631) or the original *dār al-islām*, the swift expansion under the Rightly-Guided caliphs (631-661), and the later annexations by the Umayyads (661-750) until the Abbasid revolution (750). The Abbasid victory in the battle of Talas (751) stopped a large Tang (唐朝) force, and the ensuing An Lushan rebellion (755-763) weakened the latter to such a degree that it precluded further Chinese attempts to dominate Central Asia, hence allowing the Abbasids to consolidate their power.

Sources:

Rafis Abrazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 15.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 18-19.

Bruno De Cordier, *Een Geschiedenis van Centraal-Azië: Het Onbeloofde Land*, (Leuven-Den Haag: Acco, 2012): 80.

Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=119801&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

of Iran Fereydun/Afrīdūn (آفریدون/فریدون) with his three sons Salm (Rum), Tur and Īraj representing three geographical entities – Rum (Roman Empire, Asia Minor, generally considered the West), Tūrān and Iran/Ērān. This literature provided us with a vivid description of this interaction, starting from conflicts up to co-operation and cultural exchange.

The images of Iran and Turan would later be reinterpreted and became the subject of ideological and geopolitical abuse – see Map 15.6. In a European imagination, they were treated as the interaction between civilization (Iran) and backwardness (Turan). Pan-Turkism used this term for the idealisation of Turkic history in its historiography.* The idea also fascinated contemporary Central Asian rulers like Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan, who wrote about it in his *Ruhnama*.* Also, the idea of Turan was adopted at different stages of Russian Eurasianism.*

*Yalçinkaya 1997

*Türkmenbaşy 2001

*Wiederkehr 2007

Both terms were used as an image or notion for a particular

Map 15.5 Islamic Caliphates and Emirates (9th-10th century)

This map with current state borders shows the remaining territory directly under Abbasid (751-1258) control by the 9th century (**A**), the remainder of the Umayyad dynasty and their caliphate around Córdoba (**E**), as well as the Idrisids of Morocco (788-958 – **D**). The Aghlabids (800-909 – **C**) and Tahirids (821-873 – **B**) were independent emirates, only nominally under the suzerainty of the Abbasids. The Saffarid emirate (881-1000 – **F**) with capital Zaranj would later take over from the Tahirids; until they themselves were defeated at the battle at Balkh (900) and subsequently lost most their territory (except for the Sistan region) to the Samanid emirate (875-999 – **G**), becoming their vassals. While the last three emirates (**B**, **F**, **G**) had clear cultural ties with Persia, only the Tahirids and especially the Samanids (with capitals in Bukhara and Samarkand) actively facilitated the spread of Iranian-Islamic culture to Central Asia.

Sources:

Rafis Abrazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 16-17.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 20-25.

Bruno De Cordier, *Een Geschiedenis van Centraal-Azië: Het Onbeoefde Land*, (Leuven-Den Haag: Acco, 2012): 52, 66.

Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=119801&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

geographical space determined not solely by its ethnic origin but also as a civilizational gap. Although both components – Turkic and Persian – often intermingled in the course of history (in the culture, literature, traditions and habits, language, etc.), they were still considered as a kind of separate identity. In this regard, the imagining (literature, scientific and political) of Iran and Turan's dichotomy (with its cooperative and competitive character at the same time) could be a topic for critical geopolitics.

Map 15.6 Imaginations of Iran & Turan – Great Tartary – Great Bukhara

Last but not least, the military conquests of Chinggis Khan and Amir (Beg) Timur (Tamerlane) are examples of geopolitical concepts that emerged from inside the wider Central Asian territory. These emperors gathered vast swathes of Eurasian territory and turned the region into the most powerful geopolitical centre of the

Map 15.6 Imaginations of Iran & Turan – Great Tartary – Great Bukhara

This map shows the approximate boundaries of Iran and Turan, Great Tartary and Great Bukhara according to (later) European cartographers unfamiliar with the geography. In the 15-16th century, Great Tartary was larger and had sub-divisions like ‘Lesser Tartary’ (A), ‘Independent Tartary’ (B), and ‘Chinese Tartary’ (present day Xinjiang - C). However, Lesser and Chinese Tartary were excluded in later (18-19th century) projections as portrayed here. For general orientation, the map is portrayed with current state borders, but keep in mind that with few sources these “Western imaginations” had to be constructed from even older descriptions vaguely locating polities at rivers and near seas. All of these rather generic place names would be replaced only when new explorations provided updated geographic details of current political entities in the region in the late 19th century.

Sources:
Thomas Kitchin (Kitchen), “Map of Karazm, Great Bukharia and Turkestan,” in: John Green (ed.), *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, (London: Thomas Astley, 1745).
“Iran und Turan, Persien, Afghanistan, Beludschistan, Turkestan,” (Neue Bearbeitung von F. von Stülpnagel), Stielers Hand-Atlas, (Gotha: Justus Perthes, 1843).
John Cary, “A New Map of Chinese & Independent Tartary,” (London: Engraver, 1806).
Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5161&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface NV.

---- TIMURID EMPIRE

Map 15.7 Pax Mongolica & Pax Timuridae

This map with current state borders shows the expansion of Mongol rule over time and the later successor empire of Amir Beg Timur (Tamerlane). The first stage illustrates the core area controlled by Temüjin (ca. 1160-1227) when he was elected as Chinggis Khan in 1206. The second stage shows the territory controlled by the Chinggisids at the time of Mönke Khan's death in 1259. The final stage before the fatal disintegration, shows the empire's old subdivisions and each de facto autonomous 'ulus' at the time of death of Kublai Khan in 1294 just before the ensuing succession disputes and civil wars. (Note that the border in North Asia is tentative.)

The Great Khanate, declared in Chinese tradition as the Yuan dynasty (元朝 – pinyin: Yuán Cháo) in 1271 by Kublai Khan would become the first non-Han group to rule over the whole of the China and would swiftly sinicize. The other three uluses would turkicize: The original Ulus of Jochi (Chinggis' eldest son) became the Golden Horde (Mongolian: Алтан Орд) and later broke down in smaller Tatar khanates. The Il-Khanate (Mongolian: Хүлэгийн улс) would be taken over by Hülegü Khan (grandson of Chinggis, from his son Tolui) but ceased to exist by 1357, fatally weakened by the black death. The Chagatai Khanate (named after Chinggis' second son) was partly absorbed by the Timurids by the mid-14th century and slowly disintegrated afterwards, losing the remainder of their domain to the Dzhungars in 1705.

The Timurids were prone to raid and contributed to the growing weakness of the neighboring Il-Khanate and Great Khanate. Timurid influence by 1405 was thus felt (and resented) far outside their core territory (raiding areas are included on the map), and their legacy continued long after their demise in their offspring outside Central Asia: the Mughal dynasty in the Indian subcontinent.

Sources:

Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): map 24-26.

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 38-45.

Bruno De Cordier, *Een Geschiedenis van Centraal-Azië: Het Onbeoorloofde Land*, (Leuven-Den Haag: Acco, 2012): 80.

Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=51618&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

continent known as *Pax Mongolica* and (analogically) *Pax Timuri-dae* – see Map 15.7. Although both empires were created by military campaigns and by conquered flourishing cultural centres with significant cruelty. They later accepted local cultures, and even reinvigorated old cultural and trade centres with new cities with an intensity reminding the megalomaniac construction works of contemporary authoritarian rulers. (The “new” architecture of the Timurid capital Samarkand is the brightest example).

These young and dynamic empires were able to challenge or even eliminate the most important geopolitical players of their time. They firmly established their empires on the maps of Eurasian powers and secured their position for at least another century with their dynasties, even though descendants embroiled these legacies with dynastic infighting leading to a gradual fragmentation of the conquered territories. At the same time, both Chinggisid and Timurids dynasties supported the cultural, economic and trade development of their empires. Lacking the military abilities of their founders and conquerors, successors focused on preserving the territory conquered by their ancestors. Their initial short-term military expansion was replaced by a century-long cultural and economic prosperity with an even longer imprint on science.* Framing these empires within the geopolitical field, one cannot treat their existence as a single continuous geopolitical concept. Both empires undoubtedly had their own geocultural and geo-economic impacts across the continent they dominated. Their geopolitical interpretations started much later and developed (among others) in the post-Soviet period.

*Starr 2013

These five examples mentioned above represent different types of historical geopolitical concepts in Central Asia, starting from political and military conquests followed by cultural expansion up to the mythological concepts often reinvented in the modern period. This shows that geopolitical thinking is not just a matter of classical or critical geopolitics of the last 150 years. The diversity of these forms of historical geopolitics also underlines the high volatility of Central Asian regional borders and power structures.

3. The Great Game in the 19th and the Beginning of 20th Century

For several centuries, limited European involvement in the region subscribed to the image of faraway regions inhabited by Tartars (*Tartarie*) or associated with political-cultural centre of the region's best-known city state, Bukhara (*Boukharie*) – see Map 15.6. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from 1771 defines Tartary as follows:

*"TARTARY, a vast country in the northern parts of Asia, bounded by Siberia on the north and west: this is called Great Tartary. The Tartars who lie south of Muscovy and Siberia, are those of Astracan, Circassia, and Dagistan, situated north-west of the Caspian-sea; the Calmuc Tartars, who lie between Siberia and the Caspian-sea; the Usbec Tartars and Moguls, who lie north of Persia and India; and lastly, those of Tibet, who lie north-west of China."**

*Encyclopaedia Britannica 1771: 887

These images were part of an exotic world with partly mythological associations.* The portrayal of the region in the 17-18th century was often based on the accounts of sporadic travellers, traders and envoys from the Middle Ages such as Marco Polo (1254-1324) or the Spanish diplomat, Ruy González de Clavijo, who travelled to Timur's court in Samarkand in 1403.

*Gorshenina 2014

Starting from the beginning of the 19th century, more frequent explorations by Europeans began to reopen the Central Asian region. Russian diplomats, merchants and travellers regularly reported about the situation in three Central Asian states (the Bukhara emirate, the Khiva and Kokand khanate). Soon the region became the subject of interest, particularly for two leading powers – Tsarist Russia and Great Britain. However, the region remained a construct created by the imaginations based on old accounts and sparse information from trade, political and spy expeditions.

*Marco Polo 2005; Clavijo 2005

How was this image of the region influenced by imperial stereotypes and the imaginations of politicians on both sides? British politicians, diplomats, geographers and later geopoliticians were mostly "obsessed" by a potential Russian advance from Central Asia to British India. The containment of this eventual expansion became the principal framework which determined the British approach to the region. The newest research shows that Russian empire was too preoccupied with the mere conquest and administration of the newly acquired territories in Central Asian region and did express little interest in a further advance to the south.* Nevertheless, the idea of "Cossacks watering their horses in the warm waters on Indian Ocean," appeared in the British (and also US) political and diplomatic stereotypes until deep in the 20th century. This thesis influenced most of the founders of geopolitics in Britain. At the same time, the very term '**Great Game**' to denote this British-Russian rivalry in Asia became a famous phrase (promoted by Rudyard Kipling and later Peter Hopkirk and others), and is still in use today in different contexts.

*Morrison 2014b; 2017

The Russian advance in Central Asia was rather the matter of historical circumstances and intertwining processes than the result of some clear, coherent geostrategy. Already at the begin-

ning of the 18th century, Kazakh khanates asked the Russian empire for protection, an act which at the time was rather symbolical than having any practical consequences. However, continuous raids from the East and internal disputes within the Kazakh khanates resulted in Kazakh attacks on Russian positions and caravans forcing the Russian army to move into the 'Kipchak' (Eurasian) steppe (*Dasht-e Qibchaq*).

Tsarist General V.A. Perovskii his (failed) march on Khiva in 1839 could be considered a prelude to systematic geopolitical advance, with trade prospects and liberation of Russian slaves as some of the main official reasons. In any case, this expedition turned out to be a single attempt to attack Central Asian states in the first half of the 19th century and become a disaster for Russian army due to bad planning of the expedition for wintertime (and consequent climatic conditions). Later, the necessity to unify the defensive lines starting from *Verny* fortress (*Форт Верный*, Alma-Ata, today: Almaty) to *Fort Perovskii* (*Форт Перовский*, today Kyzylorda in Kazakhstan) established in the 1850s caused another wave of advances into Central Asian territory. Taking Tashkent was the logical next step to capture the natural centre of the region and this ended the half-century-long dispute between the Kokand khanate and the Bukhara emirate.

The defensive reaction of local states forced Russia to push forward from Tashkent towards Samarkand after the victory over the Bukharan army. The resulting elimination (in the case of Kokand 1876) or subordination of Central Asian states (Bukhara, Khiva) mimicked in a more successful way what the British Empire intended to do in Afghanistan but failed at with the disastrous British-Afghan campaigns.

The Russian-British crisis in 1878 was the only real challenge to the British colonial empire in the Indian peninsula – see Map 15.8. Before the end of another Russian-Ottoman War in 1878 Russian General M.D. Skobelev (nicknamed: the 'White Pasha') and others prepared the plan for Russian advance to India through Afghanistan to attack Great Britain "at the place they are the least prepared."* There were even rumours purposely spread around Turkestan about the planned campaign, intended for British intelligence. Russian diplomatic missions to Kabul were interpreted by the British as a direct threat to their Indian possessions. When the British launched their second expedition to Afghanistan (1878-1880), it seemed that the world was at the close of a monumental clash of the two most powerful geopolitical players in Eurasia. However, the Russian army was realistically not ready for such a geopolitical

*Скобелев 1883; Снесарев 1903

Map 15.8 *The Great Game in Central Asia in the 19th Century*

This map shows the Tsarist Russian and British advance from 1711 to 1907. The dates indicate the conquest of cities or areas. Planned since 1854, but delayed by the Crimea War, the Russian invasion of the sedentary part was not undertaken until 1863. As the Russian sphere of influence shifted closer to British India's borders and interest zones, the former's move towards the Kushka river and Panjdeh oasis (and clash with Afghan emirate forces) triggered the so-called Herat crisis in 1885 forcing both great powers to regulate their zones of interest. From British perspective, the Indian subcontinent is protected in the north by its natural mountain ranges like the Himalaya, and only vulnerable for invasions though the Khyber Pass (Hindu Kush) – even Alexander the Great and Timur Beg used this route – and hence their obsession with securing and fortifying this region, and trying to impose control over Afghanistan (resulting in two failed campaigns). Once borders were diplomatically established between Russia and its (new) neighbours (1864-1895), both Russia and Great Britain agreed in 1905 to cede the Wahan mountains to Afghanistan (as a buffer zone), and subsequently specified respective zones of influence (like in Persia). (The British zone in Persia was more to the south and is not shown on this map.)

Sources:

Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003): 63-64.

Riaz Dean, *Mapping the Great Game: Explorers, Spies and Maps in 19th-Century Asia*, (Oxford: Casemate Publishers, 2019): 28-29.

Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia. A Study in Imperial Expansion. 1814-1914*, (New College-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Hu Zhiding; Lu Dadao, "Re-interpretation of the Classical Geopolitical Theories in A Critical Geopolitical Perspective," *Journal of Geographical Sciences*, 26, no. 12, (2016): 1769-1784.

Map created by editors, designed by Typeface nv.

game, and they did not interfere into the British-Afghan war. The distance from the rest of the Tsarist empire, its adventurist character, the complicated logistics of supplying the giant army required for such a campaign, made it unrealistic, and even Skobelev himself abandoned the idea.

Geopolitical tensions continued with the acquisition of Turkmen lands in the 1880s. From a geopolitical point of view, this campaign mostly filled the vacuum between the two empires, although it once again revived the image of a Russia stretching to the 'warm seas.' When Russians reached the Pandjeh oasis 100 kilometres from Herat in 1885, it looked inevitably (from the British perspective) that the campaign was about to move further south into Afghanistan. However, Russian leadership did not consider any other advance in the region. When the "Herat crisis" was settled at British-Russian level, the geopolitical rivalry turned into a matter of specification and delineation of respective zones of interest.

This overview does not intend to excuse the Russian territorial expansion and atrocities of the Tsarist army. It is also not intended to claim that the Russian conquest of Central Asian was made 'by accident' or 'by default.' Similar to the British Empire and the British India administration, such geopolitical thinking was present in (at least) some part of the Russian leadership. The idea of a Russian-British geopolitical struggle was voiced both in Russian Turkestan and in Saint Petersburg circles. Nevertheless, even at the peak of geopolitical clashes in Central Asia between 1878-1885 no policy-maker or even influential theoretical strategist, geographer or geopolitician in the Russian capital supported the idea of direct Russian-British confrontation. Even before the capture of Tashkent, many circles in Saint Petersburg did not understand (let alone approve) the reasons why Russia should advance into this territory. Even if Russian intelligence and army officers made reconnaissances of the terrain and continued to observe affairs in Afghanistan, any real intention to invade the country and disrupt the geopolitical balance never came up as a realistic prospect.

With the delineation of their respective interest zones in 1895-1907, 'The Great Game,' as pundits euphemistically called these series of events between Russia and Britain on Central Asian territory, diminished. Geographically, at least, the territory of Central Asia was finally defined. The very term of 'The Great Game' is often connected with other geopolitical struggles of the time (e.g. over Iran or Afghanistan). British geographers and policy-makers tend to put this concept within the same category as the 'Scramble for Africa,' denoting the imperial drive for African colonies and in

particular the British-French rivalry to link their African territories from north to south and east to west, respectively.⁵ However, Russian-British rivalry in Central Asia is hardly comparable to the British-French struggles over Africa. Russia did not intend to enter open conflict with Britain, particularly in such a remote place as Central Asia.

The First World War shortly revived the geopolitical game around the region which was already recognized as an integral part of the Russian Empire. This flare of interest can be traced back to new players entering the geopolitical rivalry in the region – notably the Ottoman Empire and Germany. Ottoman Empire and its rulers were highly respected personalities in Central Asia.* The intense contacts between Russia and the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 19th and 20th century as well as the rise of the Jadid (modernizers) movement in Central Asia helped to spread Pan-Turkist ideas. These circulated mostly in some intellectual circles in Bukhara, Khiva and Turkestan and were not reflected in local politics.* On the contrary, Russian Turkestan, the Bukhara and Khiva administrations mostly suppressed the movement.

The end of World War One shortly revived the Great Game concept.* With the chaos in Central Asia after the Bolshevik revolution (1917), an intensified Turkish-German destabilization effort launched a massive campaign with pan-Turkist propaganda (backed by German support) in Turkestan, Khiva, and particularly Bukhara, as well as in the Kashgar region. Afghanistan became the heart of these operations, with its direct borders to both British India and Russia.* Out of the two, British India was a much more attractive territory for German colonization plans. As Bolsheviks did not (initially) have many resources to counterpart German-Turkish envoys and smuggling of guns, British officers headed by Frederick Marshman Bailey were sent to the region to counter German-Turkish influence in the region.*

For the same reason, British troops occupied and supported the short-lived Transcaspian government in 1918.* However, this

*Vámbery 1865: 154-155, 484-486

*Khalid 1999

*Usmanova 2016; Landau 1995: 52-56

*Ряполов 2007

*Bailey 2002

*Morris 1977; Sargent 2004

⁵ This 'Scramble' reached its peak roughly at the same time as the 'Great Game' with the Fashoda-incident, a military stand-off in 1898 between British and French troops in a town that is now called Kodok (Kothok) in South Sudan. The ensuing French surrender gave rise to the so-called 'Fashoda-syndrome,' a term coined by Gérard Prunier, to denote the tendency in French African policy to (proactively) defend 'their' influence spheres, especially from Anglo-Saxon encroachment, confirming a geopolitical worldview of being locked in a perpetual cultural war with anglophone countries.

Great Game became just a short episode in Central Asian history: the end of the war signified the retreat of German and Turkish propaganda and the regaining of Russian (Soviet) control over the region, through the rolling back of foreign geopolitical interventions. Turkestan (Central Asia) became a recognized part of the newly consolidated Soviet empire. Its significance shortly boosted as the forefront for exporting the Bolshevik Revolution eastwards, mainly to British India (after their failure to do so in Europe). The universalist character of their Communist ideology (as a justification) enabled the Soviets to go beyond the established geopolitical borders recognized a few decades before.

Nevertheless, any such actions were swiftly countered by British diplomats. Afghan Emir Amānullāh Khan also deemed suspicious Soviet activities on Afghan territory undesirable, and after the fall of the Bukharan emir and his flight to Afghanistan (where he was received as an honourable guest of the Afghan court), Soviet inroads in the country were undone.* The Soviet-Afghan treaty in 1921 sealed the failure of the hoped revolutionary march eastwards, cooling down geopolitical rivalry around the region once more.

*Панин 2001

4. Central Asian Geopolitics in the Soviet Period

After 1921 Central Asia was considered an unchallengeable part of the USSR, until the 1980s, despite the activities of Central Asian emigration trying to promote the idea of an independent Turkestan and criticizing the Sovietization of the region.* Geopolitical rivalry over the region only peaked before and during World War Two. A German and Japanese diplomatic mission unsuccessfully attempted to establish their intelligence service among former Basmachi families⁶ to prepare an attack against the Soviet Union from the south. After the opening of the Eastern front in 1941 Central Asian exiles in Afghanistan declared their readiness to co-operate with German, Italian or Japanese embassies in a plan to re-establish the Bukharan emirate under the leadership of the dethroned emir, Alim Khan, living in exile in Kabul. However,

*Шокай 1935; Тоған 2011

⁶ The Basmachi movement (басмачество) was an anti-Soviet insurrection that started in 1917 and after waning successes was finally subdued by 1926 (although pockets of resistance remained). The protracted uprising consisted of various groups ranging from Muslim traditionalist, Jadid reformers, local village or clan leaders, to common criminals. The pejorative term, derived from the Turkic word *basmak* (to attack or raid), connotes banditry. Fighting resumed shortly in reaction to Stalin's collectivization policies.

the defeat of the Nazi Army near Stalingrad in 1942-1943 and counter-activities of Soviet and British diplomatic missions and their agents in Afghanistan scattered Turkmen, Tajik, Uzbek or Kyrgyz leaders living in the country.*

*Тихонов 2008

For Nazi Germany, 'Turkestan' (containing the Central Asian Soviet republics), was merely the secondary geopolitical goal after eventual victory over the Soviet Union. There was no concrete plan for what to do with the region, which was usually vaguely mapped as one of the commissariats or puppet states intended to create a cordon sanitaire around defeated Soviet Union.* In this sense, dreams of several Central Asian emigrant circles in Europe (e.g. *Veli Kayyum* in Germany) about the declaration of an independent Turkestan using Soviet War prisoners from the region was never seriously considered by Nazi strategists. The *Wehrmacht* considered the so-called Turkestani legion (Soviet POWs from Central Asia) mostly as "cannon-fodder."** The ultimate defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 again threw Central Asia out of classical geopolitics once more for more than three decades.

*Kokebayeva 2016

**Калишевский 2010

Interest in Central Asia reappeared again in the 1980s, with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The country was an important intersection of the geostrategic game of both sides in the region throughout the 1950 to 1970s. Prime minister Muhammad Daoud successfully manoeuvred between the global powers, soliciting aid: starting from the late 1950s, the Soviet bloc provided the country with several credits and technical assistance as well as weaponry and military training for Afghan officers. Soviet construction teams also built several industrial enterprises and new transport infrastructure including the Salang tunnel (the shortest and the most direct connection between the northern region and Kabul). The country was the third largest one in the Third World receiving development assistance from the Soviet Union (after Egypt and India), which exceeded American support threefold by 1977.* Afghanistan also did not join any pro-Western alliance (such as CENTO)⁷, which was considered anti-Soviet in Moscow.

*Noorzoy 1985: 159-161

From the other side, US assistance helped to increase agriculture production; particularly the Helmand Valley Project for irrigation and dams is worth mentioning here. With aid from the US and other Western nations, Afghanistan substantially increased its system of education, including the construction of the Kabul

⁷ The *Central Treaty Organization* (CENTO) or 'Baghdad Pact' was a Middle Eastern military alliance of the Cold War (1955-1979) modelled on NATO.

*Коргун 2004: 304–322

University campus.* This policy of balancing geopolitical rivalry (*bi-tarafi* or *بی‌طرفی* – ‘neutrality’ in Dari) became a key factor of Afghanistan’s economic growth and stability.

Paradoxically, educational reforms and increased student numbers opened the way for societal radicalization and the emergence of radical movements both of the Left/Soviet-oriented activists and Islamists on the opposite side. The shift to the Left after Muhammad Daoud’s coup in 1973 swung Afghanistan’s geopolitical orientation to the Soviet camp. The country’s ongoing economic crisis further galvanized both ideological camps. Beyond the US/USSR rivalry, other Asian and Middle Eastern countries such as Pakistan, India, Iran or Gulf states became involved to pursue their own geopolitical agendas. The dissatisfaction of radical leftists allied with the USSR resulted in another coup in 1978, which pushed Afghanistan decisively into the Soviet bloc and broke up geopolitical zones of influence existent since the end of the 19th century. In this situation, the Soviet intervention in December 1979 was in some way inevitable for the Kremlin in order not to ‘lose face’ in what was considered a geopolitical high-stake game. Since the late 1970s, the fruits of Afghan geopolitics turned sour: The geopolitical rivalry was no longer expressed in the amount of aid one side could muster for the state, but in the amount of military support to one’s particular warring side. Apart from its disastrous consequences inside Afghanistan itself, this pivotal event also pulled Central Asia back into regional geopolitics.

5. Post-Soviet New Great Game and Beyond

When the Soviet army entered Afghanistan at the end of 1979 and in 1980, Central Asians made up a substantial part of the troop deployment. They were sent to the country not only as interpreters or in construction battalions but also as a kind of ideological examples for their ethnic counterparts in Afghanistan demonstrating the advantages of the Soviet system. Central Asians (as most of the other Soviet soldiers) however, were attracted by the Western lifestyle and Western consumer goods available in Afghanistan. Some of them were susceptible to the Islamist propaganda in the country originating from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other surrounding states. Several later leaders of Islamic movements in post-Soviet Central Asia trace back their military experience as well as their ideological indoctrination from their deployment in Afghanistan. A new round of geopolitical struggles began even before the USSR collapsed.

5.1 US Geopolitical Frameworks

The Soviet dissolution left the region in a geopolitical vacuum, which was quickly filled by other players. Mackinder or Spykman's theories (see Part 1.1 higher) reappeared again in the discussions about the region and Central Asia became an often-debated subject of geopolitical studies. Researchers and geopolitical strategists even attempted to redefine the region into smaller units such as Central Eurasia, Greater Central Asia, Turkic Union, Central and South Asia. This geopolitical struggle discourse adopted the name 'New Great Game' from the 1990s. As in the 19th century, this "game" was partially real in the field and partially virtual to affirm the status of a particular great power. It reflects (and still does) several aspects of geopolitics (both neoclassical and critical) as well as geostrategy.

The theoretical discussions dealing with the geopolitics of the region and the revival of the Great Game concept intermingled with geostrategic rivalry trying to pry the region from Russia's influence sphere. The new Central Asian states themselves reacted with the proclamation of their multi-vector politics trying to benefit as much as possible from this geostrategic rivalry. Such an approach did not deny continued partnership (be it real or virtual) with Russia, the legal successor of the USSR. However, it was aimed at balancing that relationship by establishing close co-operation with other geopolitical centres.

With open borders, politicians, business people and civil sectors started to operate in the newly established countries, while Central Asian leaders appeared side-by-side with world leaders. These appearances were used as a manifestation of their internal legitimacy. The number of summits, as well as the order and rank of the official visits paid to each country, determined their virtual geopolitical weight.

Geopolitics also impacted economic co-operation, which was aimed, in many cases, at redistribution and reorientation of industries of oil, gas and other raw materials exports. New economic co-operation went hand-in-hand with rising corruption of the new powerholders and their regimes. Finally, the proliferation of international and national NGOs was intended to enhance the civil sector in the respective country or stimulate their rehabilitation (as in the case of post-civil war Tajikistan). Gradually, however, the leadership of the newly established authoritarian regimes observed these activities with growing suspicion and considered them as another tool of foreign geopolitics and even a kind of neo-

*Clarke 1999: 373

liberal geo-ideology intended to threaten their political systems.* Many NGOs were almost entirely expelled from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan or their operation severely limited in Tajikistan or Kazakhstan, after being branded agents of a soft geopolitical game.

The US and Europe initially expressed lukewarm interest in the region. In the early 1990s US foreign policy was occupied with the Middle Eastern agenda – War in Kuwait, Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and Iran. Moreover, the US and Western Europe initially struggled with a lack of experts on the region. Despite the development of large Sovietologist schools, few scholars understood the underlying processes of the region, while experts on the Soviet Union were often trapped by outdated frames of Cold War thinking.

*FREEDOM Support Act 1992;
Lake 1993; Tarnoff 2007

This led to a mushrooming of Central Asian or Central Eurasian studies in the 2000s. Central Asia was included in the FREEDOM⁸ Support Act from 1992 as well as in the policy-paper of Anthony Lake (*From Containment to Enlargement*), which argued in favour of US support for the transformation of post-Soviet bloc states to democracy, human rights and market economy.* The declared goal was to contain an alleged geopolitical expansion by Iran or return of Russia to Central Asia. This policy resulted in the boom of different NGOs wherever they were allowed. This policy was considered (especially by Central Asian authoritarian regimes) as the determinants of the later colour revolutions in Eurasia, albeit not directly coordinated, they were condemned for being facilitated by US and EU foreign policy.* The events in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (and similar processes in Georgia and Ukraine)⁹ were portrayed as a breach of Central Asian state sovereignty, and neighbouring regimes rallied to prevent replication in their own countries.

*Beacháin and Polese 2010

However, already in the mid-1990s, new geostrategic concepts for Central Asia saw the light of day – see Map 15.9. Initially, the US Middle Eastern Department (spearheaded by Bernard Lewis (1916–2018), a respected policy advisor and Middle East expert) worked out a new approach to Central Asia with its inclusion into

⁸ Abbreviation for: *Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act*.

⁹ Chronologically, scholars identified a ‘Bulldozer revolution’ in Serbia in 2000, a ‘Rose revolution’ in Georgia in 2003, an ‘Orange revolution’ in Ukraine in December 2004 and then a ‘Tulip revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan in early 2005. Pundits have labelled the 2010 ouster of Bakiyev in the latter country a ‘Melon revolution’ (*дынная революция*) – but the denoting of colours, fruits or flowers, and especially the label ‘revolution’ actually obscure the varying underlying processes and different political contexts in which these contestation events (and others not mentioned) unfolded.

Map 15.9 Post-Cold War Geostrategies of the US toward Central Asia

Soon after 1991, Central Asia was added to the Middle Eastern geostrategic projections, as shown by the new operative concept of the “Greater Middle East,” prompted by Bernard Lewis. By the mid-1990s, after the Tajik civil war and the fall of Kabul by the Taliban (1996), Zbigniew Brzezinski reconceptualized the region as the “Eurasian Balkans” in analogy with the Yugoslav-crisis. After 9/11, with the ensuing War on Terror and US-led intervention in Afghanistan, a renewed Western presence in the region led to great power frictions between the US, Russia and China, triggering memories of the old Great Game. Under the umbrella term of the “New Great Game” rivalling geostrategic projects have been identified, like S. F. Starr’s interpretation of “Greater Central Asia,” which currently has been supplanted by Russia’s “Eurasianism” and especially China’s Belt and Road Initiative project.

Sources:

Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, (New York, Basic books, 2007).

Bernard Lewis, “Rethinking the Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs*, 71, no 4 (1992): 99-119.

Stephen Frederick Starr, “In Defense of Greater Central Asia,” (Washington-Stockholm: *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program*, 2008).

Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5161&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

*Lewis 1992 what was called “**The Greater Middle East.**”^{*} Later, when Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017) presented his *Grand Chessboard* (1997), this quickly became one of the most influential texts on how to view the region in US foreign policy in the late 1990s. Based on Mackinder’s heartland theory he launched the concept of the “**Eurasian Balkans.**” The famous security advisor had singled out Uzbekistan as a leading geostrategic partner and this approach became ostensibly visible after 2001 and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan.^{*} Uzbekistan in 2001–2005 became the principal point of US foreign policy, which leased military bases for operation *Enduring Freedom*. Access was retracted after US criticisms against the Andijan massacre in May 2005, but later covertly reopened.

*Brzezinski 1997: 121

The political analysts emphasised the new stage of the so-called ‘New Great Game,’ where US involvement in the region would eventually be much more active.^{*} Based on the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, S. Frederick Starr presented an updated and involved vision of US foreign policy in (what he calls) **Greater Central Asia**. Afghanistan should have played a key hub for regional transport and trade, linking Central and South Asia.^{*} The regions were to be connected at both strategic and administrative level. Within the US State Department, the region was transferred from the ‘European’ to the newly established ‘Central and South Asia Department’ and a Special Envoy for Central and South Asia was appointed. Central Asia, in these views, became an arena of three geopolitical powers – Russia, US and China with a secondary role of other regional powers such as India, Turkey or Iran. The primary purpose of this system was to bring the region out of Russian and Chinese dominance or, at least, substantially limit their influence.

*Blank 2001

*Starr 2005

In 2011 the concept of a common Central-South Asia region was extended to further focus on transport links between the two regions, as well as their linkages with the outside world, bypassing Iran and Russia. This ‘**New Silk Road Initiative**’ should have heralded a new US strategy after its troop withdrawal or substantial reduction of the US presence in Afghanistan. However, this concept has never taken off, and since 2014 one can observe a steady drop of US interest in the region, resulting in rising Russian and Chinese influence and the partial engagement of other regional powers. On academical level, this was also reflected in reduced support for Central Asian studies throughout the US. The ‘New Silk Road’ belongs to those theoretical concepts that are subjects of critical geopolitics. These concepts operate on the symbolic rather than real level.

Bernard Lewis, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Stephen Blank, S. Freder-

ick Starr and others represent the school of neoclassical geopolitics developed in the US after the Second World War. Their ideas have had an enormous impact on the US State Department and the development of its foreign policy toward the region, and in extension, on Eurasian history.

5.2 Russian Geopolitical Frameworks

In Russia, a new geopolitical school of thought developed the concept of **neo-Eurasianism**, which has become the primary bedrock of neoclassical geopolitics in Russian foreign policy-making since the 2000s. Central Asia's role in this concept was derived from some aspects of Mackinder's theory about the rule over Eurasia.* Central Asia was revived as a vital partner for Russia in this Eurasian framework, but the position of the region differs significantly from other geopolitical concepts. While other powers and their geopolitics place the region into the centre of their geopolitics, Russia's Eurasianism policy grants the region merely a secondary position at the southern edge of Eurasia.*

*Дугин 1997: 44;
Megoran and Sharapova 2005

Contrary to the US, where the polemics about regional geopolitics continued unabated since the 1990s, Russian Eurasianism has been much more consistent and unchallenged. To some extent, it has turned into a geo-ideological doctrine that is not subject to change or challenge. It enables Russia to project a steady and clear geopolitical frame on Central Asia or other regions of interest in sharp contrast to the constant US discussions and mixed foreign policy signals to local authoritarian regimes, oscillating between military and economic support, to human right abuse criticisms and the promotion of democracy or good governance.

*Laruelle 2015a: 363

With its own clear and constant image, Russian foreign policy can formulate its imperial ambitions in political, economic but also cultural fields. Such a doctrinal way of thinking also delineates new geopolitical borders between those with democratic and neoliberal geo-ideologies (the so-called West), and their critics (Russia and other countries). This concept considers the Euro-American approach to Central Asia (and not only there) through geo-ideological lenses. Therefore, contemporary authoritarian systems (also outside the region) consider any democratization attempts in the former Soviet space (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.) as a geopolitical and geo-ideological intervention which has to be contained.

Moreover, the Russian vision is still closer to frames with which many local policy-makers grew up during Soviet times and that are

still part of the current Russian discourse. In other words, Russian discourse often connects with the local population and its elites use familiar language, concepts and reference frames that are easily understood by a substantial part of society. This is a significant advantage compared to other geopolitical concepts coming from other powers, which have to be explained from the beginning.

In practical terms, the implementation of Russian geostrategy in the region includes, among other things, the establishment of several economic and military successor organizations to replace the dysfunctional Commonwealth of Independent States. These institutions (such as the Eurasian Economic Community/Eurasian Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization) were intended to keep or (re-)integrate the post-Soviet space, including Central Asia, back into the Russian sphere of interest; Russia's so-called 'near abroad' (*ближнее зарубежье* – *blizhneye zarubezh'ye*).

5.3 Chinese Geopolitical Frameworks

China became involved in the 'New Great Game' relatively late, although other geopolitical writings recognized it as a power in the 'game' as soon as the USSR dissolved. The revival of the Silk Road concept linking Central Asia with China was mentioned even back in the early 1990s.* By 2000 China was indisputably considered as one of three principal geopolitical players in the region.* China was more preoccupied with settling the 'new' borders¹⁰ and establishing friendly relations with the new Central Asian states in their first decade after independence, rather than imposing some geopolitical concept. Nevertheless, it was clear that whatever role China might play in the region, it would substantially determine regional geopolitics.

The sharp increase of bilateral trade at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s turned China into a crucial external factor in the region. Even if the geopolitical struggle between the US, Russia, China and, eventually, other players was expected, one can also observe a struggle of competing geopolitical concepts over the region. As scholar A. Cooley anticipated and US Deputy Secretary of State, Antony Blinken affirmed, the region did not become the subject of a zero-sum game power struggle by outside powers.* Notwithstanding some exceptions, so far the surrounding powers

*Walsh 1993: 279–281

*Rumer et al. 2007; Cooley 2012

*Cooley 2012: 7; Blinken 2015

¹⁰ The Sino-Soviet border in Central Asia had remained disputed after a short border war in March 1969 following the Sino-Soviet split. A cease-fire resulted in a return to the status quo, but the precise delineation had remained unresolved.

have behaved rather in a complementary than a competitive way with one another. Russian-Chinese relations followed this path ostensibly, even setting up a joint international organization with Central Asian states in 2001 (the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* – SCO). Bearing this in mind, this author posits that China is likely to refrain from getting involved in the internal affairs of Central Asian states (or the region in general) unless developments harm its national interests. Even in case of a hypothetical conflict in the region, China will probably prefer to write off part of its enormous investments in the region than to get involved directly in its pacification, except when conflict affects its import of strategic resources (mainly gas in this case).¹¹

Apart from this factor, China's main geopolitical interests relate to security and the containment of disorder on its border, not allowing its spread into Chinese territory (especially not to its utmost western province, Xinjiang, containing a large, aggrieved Muslim population).

The role of Central Asia in the current Chinese geopolitical strategy is based on several main factors. Firstly, the region is considered a reservoir of natural resources and the construction of pipelines, rail and road connections to China (starting from the 2000s) follows the first imperative of feeding their modern empire with necessary resources. However, one has to admit that Central Asia is one of many locations (albeit conveniently located close to its border) for extracting resources to China. But, even the much-discussed **Silk Road Economic Belt** (*Belt and Road Initiative*) rather fits into a global plan than a regional framework for Chinese foreign policy-makers. Interestingly, this system of transport corridors and huge Chinese investments (proclaimed in 2013) carries out the strategy initially invented but not realized by the US.

Secondly, the stability and securitization of Xinjiang (the most remote region from the centre) are highly essential for the Chinese political system. It includes its economic development with massive investments into local industries and services as well as, at the last years, growing repression of local Turkic populations forcing them to assimilate, preventing any irredentist plans, and counter-ing claims for (real) autonomy and militant radicalization.*

For the same reason, it is unlikely that Chinese leadership is willing to extend its direct political control over the region and

*Chung 2018; Greitens et al. 2020; Harris 2019

¹¹ In similar fashion China has sent peacekeeping troops (under the umbrella of a larger UN-operation) to the conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan to oversee its significant oil-interests.

allowing millions of other Muslims from Central Asia into Chinese orbit. Indirect political control over the region through a system of bilateral relations and the extension of its economic interests are among the main goals determined by the Chinese government. The quest for political stability turns Chinese political involvement in the region into a kind geo-ideological frame based on authoritarianism as an inherent tradition in the region. Any geo-ideological challenge to this concept is considered undesirable to Chinese interests. This approach coincides with both the Russian as well as many Central Asian elites' views.

At the same time, the main market for Xinjiang products lies just beyond the borders of Central Asia, whose impoverished population (the majority) is not able to afford more than simple, cheap and (often) low-quality products fabricated in Xinjiang. Therefore, territorial expansion is not on the short- or medium-term agenda of China, even if (government-funded) rising Han migration to the region might change this approach in some distant future.

Chinese strategy in the region lies within the sphere of neo-classical geopolitics, mostly guarding its interests while trying not to harm the interests of others. Peaceful resolution of eventual conflicts (economic, military) at bilateral or multilateral level is the highest priority in this geopolitical thinking. Simultaneously, political control is less critical at this stage, although the more economic interests China acquires in the region, the more this will require its political and security involvement.

5.4 Other Geopolitical Frameworks

5.4.1 Turkish Geopolitical Views

Turkey became one of the first actors in the field recognizing the 'newly independent states' (NIS) in the post-Soviet era. Initially, the Turkish geopolitical idea was also based on their version of Eurasianism. Ideologically, several Turkish intellectuals reincarnated the idea of pan-Turkism or pan-Turanism in a new form.* The concept imaged Turkey as a leader of brethren states from China to the Balkans.* It included plans for developmental and informal political co-operation (with Turkey as a model for a secular state), increased economic ties (imaging Turkey as a bridge between Central Asia and Europe), and fostered the spread of cultural influence due to the proximity of language and culture.*

Turkish presidents Turgut Özal (*in office*: 1989-1993) and Süleyman Demirel (*in office*: 1993-2000) enhanced co-operation with the region based on regular informal meetings with regional leaders.

*Cohen 1992

*Hunter 1999

*Bal 2000

They also supported the establishment of a development aid organisation (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı* – ‘Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency’ – TİKA), which aimed to provide economic assistance and foster cultural and educational exchange. Turkish schools opened across the whole region and quickly became famous and prestigious places to get a high-quality education. In US policy, Turkey was granted an important role in Bill Clinton’s dual-containment policy against Iran and was to serve as an alternative to the alleged spread of Iranian religious influence over the region. However, the idea of Turkic unity quickly evaporated, partly due to complications of mutual relations with some Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan), a retreat of openly pro-Turkish leaders (*Abulfaz Elchibey/Əbülfəz Elçibəy* in Azerbaijan) or the growing interest of other powers (return of Russia into the post-Soviet area).

Turkey was also not able to satisfy the economic needs of local governments expecting more financial support. The Turkish model of secular democracy in the 1990s did not become attractive for the Central Asian (increasingly) authoritarian regimes. Portraying itself as the “big brother,” Turkey’s advances were interpreted with growing caution in the region.^{*12} There was also a lack of proper expertise on Central Asia among Turkish foreign policy-makers and analysts. The proximity of language did not imply closer culture rapprochement. Turkish representatives underestimated the strong Russian and Soviet legacy with firm economic, language or cultural ties to Russia. At the turn of the century, Turkey became a secondary geopolitical player in the region once greater powers (re) asserted their dominance. This does not mean that Turkey does not play any role in Central Asia, but its position is far below its own expectations in the early 1990s. In the recent period, however, Turkish prime minister and president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attempts to revive the geopolitical position of Turkey in the world under the geo-ideological framework of neo-Ottomanism (or neo-Osmanism) and support of Turkish and (selected) Islamic brotherhoods. Regarding the strong positions of Russia and China in Central Asia, the Turkish influence is still minor in the region and does not intend to encroach upon the interests of these great power.¹³

*Larrabee and Lesser 2003: 100-101

¹² Chinese leadership also pressured Turkey to dial down its pan-Turkist overtures to Uyghurs. (Shichor 2009)

¹³ Typically, Turkey inconsistently refuses to comment on the situation of Uyghurs in China, although they can be considered part of the Turkic world.

5.4.2 Central Asian Geopolitical Views

Apart from outside powers, the new Central Asian states also considered themselves active players in the renewed Eurasian political context, bringing forth new geopolitical ideas, often reflecting the personal ambitions of their respective leaders.

Kazakhstan's first president Nursultan Nazarbayev (1991-2019) has been most enthusiastic about the geopolitics of the region and the whole of Eurasia.* He picked up on the old Eurasian idea, but

*Mostafa 2013

modified it. Contrary to the Russian view, **Kazakhstani Eurasianism** was intended to place his country at the heart of the continent and act as a peaceful bridge between Europe, East- South- and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. In practical terms, the Kazakh president attempted to create different kinds of supranational economic, political or security entities. It started with the idea of a Eurasian Union* and the subsequent involvement of Kazakhstan in nearly all Eurasian integration processes (Collective Security Treaty Organization (2002-), Central Asian Union (1994-2004), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001-), Eurasian Economic Union (2014-), et al.).¹⁴ Moreover, Kazakhstan initiated a pan-Asian Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, which was intended to become an OSCE analogue for Asia. In recent years, Nazarbayev turned his attention back to co-operation in Central Asian proper. In addition, Kazakhstan also claimed a European position by applying for membership in various European institutions (including the European Football Association) and played an active role in them (e.g. the OSCE chairmanship in 2010).

*Назарбаев 1997

The first president of Uzbekistan, in an early stage of his presidency, also advanced the idea of Central Asian unity with Tashkent as the natural heart of the region. He revived the idea of Turkestan to replace the usual definition of Central Asia by referring to the prevailing Turkic heritage (thus excluding Tajiks in this way). At the same time, Islam Karimov rehabilitated the historical name Turkestan, which can be traced back to the 19th century even before the Russian conquest.* However, later on, these geopolitical ambitions were altered to suit the country's course of isolationism and 'unique' development path. Geopolitical ideas were worked

*Каримов 1997

¹⁴ The CSTO was created from the Collective Security Treaty or Tashkent pact (1994). A new CAU has been proposed by Nazarbayev in 2007 but further integration was blocked by Karimov. The Chinese-led SCO was created from the Shanghai Five group in 1996, an organization aimed at delineating their common borders and fostering cooperation. The Russian-led EAEU also has several predecessor treaties, tracing back to the CIS itself.

out rather theoretically in Uzbekistan. Just after Karimov's death (2016), the new leadership became more interested and involved in the development of new geopolitical frames for the region from an inside perspective. Following this new approach, Uzbekistan was actively involved in the Central Asian summit in Astana in 2018, followed by a similar meeting in Tashkent 2019.*

*Horák 2018

6. Conclusion

The chapter provides an overview of the most important geopolitical thinkers and concepts since the conscious establishment of geopolitics as a discipline. It demonstrates its transformation from geographical frames – through its role in political consultancy, to its expansion into a full scientific field, and its fragmentation into numerous branches that emerged foremost in the last 30 years.

Geopolitics is often perceived as a field for studying the contemporary world exclusively. But at the same time, we should not forget that geopolitics have been part of politics even in its pre-scientific period. Even if elaborated in a less scientific form, and while the very term 'geopolitics' was not used, several historical geographical concepts and geographical thinking as such resemble to a large extent our contemporary geopolitics. Such historical geopolitics (which also might be called "geopolitics before the geopolitics") contribute to our understanding of earlier politicians or rulers, and serve to unpack the ideas of geographers and historians of the past. Central Asia serves as an ideal polygon to explain such historical geopolitics in one particular region.

On the other hand, geopolitics as a discipline often suffers from two simplifications. Firstly, the widespread usage (or rather overuse) of geopolitics in popularized form by media, politics, political analysis or Academia leads to puzzlement in the field.

Secondly, the dogmatic vision of some geopolitical postulates affects an expanding circle of geopolitical users, including those who are involved in political decision-making processes. This approach might lead to unmalleable geo-ideological views and stereotypes; for example, the unfaltering belief in a bipolar world led to an undervaluation of processes heading towards its dissolution. Persistent stereotypes in set minds are visible in practical politics even today. For researchers, to understand these locked viewpoints in geopolitics is one of the essential components of research in political science, history or social sciences in general.

In some cases, the dogmatic thesis regarding the supremacy of democratic principles and democratic systems over others (as

viewed mainly from authoritarian contexts) has fostered the counter-stereotype that the geopolitical expansion of democracy is a threat for existing alternatives. Dealing with Central Asia or other post-Soviet authoritarian regimes, researchers often encounter a critical approach to such Western geopolitics. In this particular case, the dogmatic perception of geopolitics has fuelled rivalry along a clear dichotomy of 'us' and 'Western democrats.' Consequently, some non-democratic states adopted retaliatory and defensive steps against their alleged geopolitical rivals from the West. Using (or abusing) the openness of democratic systems enables to imposition of a general relativist discourse that challenges back the very existence of democratic consensus.

This chapter sets up the necessary hermeneutic foundations for readers to acquire a better orientation in this field and to identify the eventual misuse of geopolitics or geopolitical concepts. Last but not least, having a good grasp of the historical as well as contemporary geopolitical schemes and stereotypes, contributes to a better understanding of the region under analysis.

As for Central Asia, the reader should now be able to ascertain the region's political geography in different times, be aware of its fluid (and not dogmatic and unchanging) geopolitics. Also, the application of geopolitical (and geo-ideological) concepts to the region underscores the significant agency of external powers as well as local states in these processes.

Going through the different geopolitical concepts and geostrategies concerning Central Asia, one should conclude that classical geopolitics is often a virtual game played on a cabinet 'chessboard.' From the point of view of critical geopolitics, Central Asian geopolitics is full of historical images and projections (Great Game, Silk Road) often unconsciously used to bring forth new ideas recycling old frames to make them understandable for the non-expert policy-making community (leadership, ministers, cabinet staff).

Some geopolitics and geostrategies radically reduce complex realities for practical purposes: From the supply side, this does not mean that the authors of (neo-)classical geopolitical works are not familiar enough with the region. However, excellent regional experts are often not heard in these inner advisory circles, and complex academic analyses seldom meet the practical needs of foreign ministries. Strategists within respective ministries and think tanks are not able to consider all regional nuances, which are sometimes quite significant.

From the demand side, politicians and decision-makers are not able to absorb detailed briefings about specific issues and regional

complexities, since they deal with many multilateral or bilateral levels of international interactions. Nevertheless, adapted strategies are passed on to concrete practitioners (i.e. diplomats who attempt to apply these concepts to reality in the field), which in turn, encounter numerous obstacles to realize such a top-down general strategy. As a result, the effectiveness of geopolitical concepts is often reduced and they remain within the realm of virtual reality, reflecting poorly on in-the-field diplomats or involved scholars. It is the space between theory and practice, where intertwined webs of ideas, connections, texts and personalities give shape to conceptual amalgams from which the 'real' geopolitics and geostrategies are grown.

At the same time, the significance to Central Asia of geopolitical concepts for foreign policy-making cannot be denied. Neither can their real-life consequences for the region, and their triggering of real reactions by actors inside the region, and among other great powers. These frames are an inseparable part of the foreign policy of great powers: their vision of 'we' and 'they,' their self-imagined position in the international hierarchy of states, etc. Furthermore, the resulting policies affect local states despite any distorted interpretations of history, politics, society, economics or other aspects of each geopolitical region. For this reason, the study of geopolitics remains as salient today as it was one hundred years ago.

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8. Recommended Literature

The literature on the geopolitics of Central Asia can be divided into two main categories. The first one consists of general geopolitical readings starting from the classical geopolitics (Holdar, Mahan and Westcott, Megoran and Sharapova, Ratzel, von Richthofen) through the critical geopolitics (Ó Tuathail et al.) up to the modern realist geopolitical and geographical concepts (Fukuyama, Kaplan, Lewis). This category also includes the universal books on geography and geopolitics: Agnew and Muscarà, Cohen, Flint, Kaplan.

The second category deals directly with the geopolitics of Central Asia. Not counting the classical geopolitical frames (Mackinder), history itself provides an important tool to understand the roots of Central Asian geopolitical concepts. Readers can benefit from studies covering the historical background (Beckwith), including searching for less geopolitical, but rather more historical approaches containing new insights (Morrison). The definition of the region also constitutes an essential part of geopolitics (Gorshenina, Ismailov and Papava). Simultaneously, the books analyse the regional geopolitical dynamics (Cooley); some of them also became the classical readings (Brzezinski, Starr).

Finally, geopolitical knowledge on Central Asia should also include local approaches from contemporary Russian and Central Asian thinkers and politicians, for example: Dugin, Karimov, Nazarbayev.

John Agnew; Luca Muscarà, *Making political geography*, (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road. A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

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Stephen Frederick Starr, *In Defense of Greater Central Asia*, (Washington & Stockholm, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2008). http://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2008_09_PP_Starr_Greater-Central-Asia.pdf.

Ferdinand von Richthofen, "Über die zentralasiatischen Seidenstrassen bis zum 2," *Jahrhundert. n. Chr. Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, no. 4, (1877): 96–122.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Based on this as well as other handbook chapters, compare the tools/factors (military, economic, political et al.) of external powers that held influence in the region in the 19th and 20th/21st centuries.

TOPIC 2

Analyse the different geopolitical concepts of Central Asia in the USA, Russia, Iran, China and others, and compare them with other regional approaches throughout history (for example, in Africa).

TOPIC 3

Alternatively work out the strategy towards Central Asia from the perspective of:

- Russian Empire versus British India/British Empire in 1830s and 1890s respectively
- Nadir Shah in Persia versus Ottoman Empire
- Qing China (Manchus)
- Russian Empire in the 18th century
- Persian Safavid Empire
- Spanish Empire in the 15th century
- Byzantine Empire
- Roman Empire in the 2nd century

The list is not complete; you may include other historical European and Asian powers as an option.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

In this activity students use Google Earth (or a similar application; a globe can be used as an offline alternative) to look at Central Asia from the point of view of Beijing, Brussels/Berlin, Delhi, Moscow, Teheran and Washington (possible some other great power capitals). You can centre the application (the globe) in the cities mentioned above and see how Central Asian region looks from their view. In other words, try to think how an average political analyst (not the regional specialist) or strategic planner/foreign policy decision maker (without a proper regional background) would see the region. The following questions are posed by the teacher: what does Central Asia look like (can you see it as a single region/could you distinguish every single state)? Which place/country/capital in the region seems to be central for them? What would such a person associate with the region or specific regional state? Why should (s)he consider it geopolitically important for the power (s)he represents?

This activity can be done individually (e.g. as homework) or in plenary (the teacher shows different views of Central Asia and students comment spontaneously), as well as in groups (each member of the group concentrates on a specific view/vision and then in groups these visions are contrasted and conclusions are formulated). In each case, the possible geopolitical repercussions of a specific way of looking at Central Asia are discussed.

ACTIVITY 2

In this activity, students (individually, in pairs or in small groups) go through the different maps of Central Asia (included in the reader/cloud of this handbook). They are asked to focus on the borders of the region and/or within the region and to answer the question: what caused the shift of the borders? It may be useful for both the teacher and the students (depending on the course and the needs of the group) to refer to chapter I./2. of this handbook ("Defining and delineating Central Asia") and/or II./3. ("Regional and intercontinental exchange spaces").

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul_mTdgsC8U

CASE STUDY

To read the case studies for this chapter, go to:

- CASE STUDY NO. 2 by Svetlana Gorshenina
- CASE STUDY NO. 5 by Slavomír Horák

Ташкентъ. Гурунчъ-базаръ въ старомъ городѣ. № 17.

Gurun market in the old city.

CHAPTER 16

Between Myth and Reality: The Restoration of the Silk Roads in Central Asia

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Keywords:

- Belt and Road Initiative • China • Soft Power • Infrastructure
- Pipelines • Transport • Debt • Geopolitics

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Contrast the historical Silk Roads with the context, stakes and goals of the contemporary Silk Roads projects.
- Understand the multiplicity of the contemporary silk roads projects and of their geographic, economic, political and social components.
- Assess the *Silk Road Economic Belt's* (SREB) potential positive impacts and threats on the economy and societies of Central Asia.
- Debate the current and future sustainability of the SREB in Central Asia.
- Elaborate on the geopolitical questions, including alliances and rivalries, that the SREB raises among the main foreign actors in the region (Russia), and beyond (South Asia, Japan, Western countries etc.).

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What are the major existing trade and communication corridors on other continents in the contemporary world? What are their main economic, political and social dimensions?
- To what extent is Central Asia a geostrategic region and therefore a stake for a global geopolitical competition?
- How does Beijing conceptualize its foreign policy, especially in its periphery, i.e. in South, South-East and Central Asia?
- What are the current main weaknesses of Central Asian economies and societies, and – hence – how can foreign initiatives impact them, positively or negatively?

Main questions

- How is the legacy of the historical silk roads relevant today? How does it help us understand the stakes and challenges of the contemporary silk roads?
- What is *Silk Road Economic Belt* (SREB) and how is Central Asia integrated into it?
- How will the SREB impact the economies of Central Asia?
- What are the concerns related to the sustainability of this project?
- What is the cultural dimension of SREB?
- In perspective of China's past policy and global ambitions, how does Beijing instrumentalize the SREB?
- How do foreign actors respond to the implementation of the SREB in Central Asia? Are foreign actors proponents, forced allies or opponents of the Chinese silk roads?

Post-reading questions

- Should Central Asian states be viewed as pawns of China's influence? What is their margin of autonomy to negotiate the SREB and Chinese influence?
- What is the future of the SREB in regards to China's (non-)sustainable political and economic system?
- The SREB: an asset or risky tool for China's influence and image in Central Asia?
- Are the SREB projects able to contribute to Central Asian populations' social progress and wellbeing as claimed by China?
- Is the SREB a (de-)stabilizing factor for Central Asian states?
- Is the SREB used as an instrument of Chinese soft power in the region and beyond?

Between Myth and Reality: The Restoration of the Silk Roads in Central Asia

SÉBASTIEN PEYROUSE
George Washington University

THIS CHAPTER addresses the multiple economic, political, social and geopolitical dimensions of the various ‘silk roads’ projects in Central Asia to go beyond oversimplifying narratives and reveal the complexity and the multiple stakes they imply for these countries’ societies and future political paths. It will focus on the Chinese *Silk Road Economic Belt* (SREB), which – thanks to China’s economic power and growing influence in the region and the unprecedented investments it intends to bring – has largely overshadowed previous and parallel projects.

On 7 September 2013, in a speech at *Nazarbayev University* in Astana (Nur-Sultan), Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed that “China and Eurasian countries undertake a grandiose joint project, the Silk Road Economic Belt by creating a vast economic network capable of connecting China and South East Asia to Europe through Eurasia via roads, highways, railways, and information technology networks.”* Xi Jinping asserted that the project would restore a golden age of historical silk roads that brought “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”** for more than fifteen centuries until they declined, according to the most common historiography, with the advent of sea routes at the end of the 15th century.

China’s initiative to restore the silk roads in Central Asia is not unprecedented. Inspired by popularized writings about the historical silk roads or by international organizations such as UNESCO, which claimed that contemporary societies could draw many valuable lessons from the silk roads, several Central Asian governments as well as countries outside the region have tried to re-capture this vision of early globalization with concepts to mould the future through new modes of cooperation that supposedly would overcome both traditional divisions and the new rifts that emerged after states in the region gained their independence in 1991.*

In the 1990s, various international organizations tried to reinvigorate the region’s historic role as an intercontinental trade hub by initiating wide-scale land transportation projects such as the

*Xi Jinping 2014: 338–342

**Xi Jinping 2017a

*Chin 2013: 194

SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt	NSR	Polar Silk Road (Northern Sea Route)
CMREC	China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor	MSR	21st Century Maritime Silk Road
NELBEC	New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor		
CCWAEC	China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor		
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor		
BCIMEC*	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor		
CICPEC	China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor		

Map 16.1 China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

This map shows the continental SREB with its six originally planned economic corridors and its maritime counterpart (MSR) as they were designed at their inception in 2013. In addition, it shows the projected NSR added to China's Arctic Strategy in 2018.

*Note that the BCIMEC was removed from the updated 2018 BRI vision due to India's misgivings about sovereignty and Chinese geostrategy. In response, China has started developing CMEC (the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor) instead and is currently also pursuing more closer bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh.

Map created by editors, adapted from: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5161&lang=en in line with terms and conditions of use, designed by Typeface nv.

Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) or the *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program* (CAREC) and promoting free movement between Asia and the West through the heart of the Eurasian continent.

In addition, several other countries, such as Japan, Korea, and later the United States, initiated trade corridors inspired by the silk roads concept to give new impetus to their economic relations with the Central Asian states and counter the influence of other regional players, thereby reviving practices described by McKinder's theories on who controls the heart of Central Asia controls the world,* see also Box 14.1.

*Megoran and Sharipova 2013

Many of these projects have, however, fallen far short of expectations. Most have been undermined by their initiators' inability to fund the costly development of transport infrastructure, by the reluctance of rival regional players to see economic flows and hence part of their political influence slipping away, and by the economic protectionism of some Central Asian states, and even isolationism, especially in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan under former President Islam Karimov.

Despite the difficulties experienced by previous efforts, China took up the challenge by initiating an upscaled version of the historical silk roads. This consisted of developing economic cooperation on a global scale through building the *Silk Road Economic Belt* (SREB), composed of continental trade routes across the Eurasian continent combined with sea routes connecting China to the five continents, all integrated under the broad and commonly used umbrella of *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), formerly known *One Belt One Road* (OBOR, 一带一路, *Yìdài yìlù*), which altogether involves 70 countries. Much more than a simple intercontinental transport corridor, the BRI is a multidimensional project, ranging from opening multiple free trade zones to cooperation in most economic sectors, including primary (agriculture, industry), secondary (manufacturing), tertiary (services) and quaternary (knowledge, education, research and development) sectors. Moreover, the BRI includes a strong cultural dimension by suggesting strengthened exchanges and mutual learning between the civilizations along the silk roads.* Finally, it has a political dimension that advocates a concept of a "community of shared future" that Beijing assumes as an alternative to the alleged unipolar world dominated by the West.*

*Xi Jinping 2015

*Xi Jinping 2017b

Yet, since its inception, the SREB has raised heated debate among political, expert, business and academic circles, both at the regional and international level. Assuming that the lack of connec-

Map 16.2 The BRI in Central Asia

This map of Central Asia shows the major transport routes of the NELBEC running from Chelyabinsk to Nur-Sultan (Astana) and onwards to Almaty and Khorgos; and the connections of the CCWAE with one arm connecting Tehran and Ashgabat with Tashkent and Almaty to China, and the other arm remaining in Kazakhstan linking China with the Seaport Aktau. Currently there is only a road connection from Osh to Kashgar, and plans to replace it with a railroad are heavily criticized as better alternatives are in place. Beside these transport corridors, the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) subsumed the pre-BRI oil-pipeline running from Atyrau to Dostyk/Alashankou and two gas-pipelines, one from Turkmenistan (Turkmenbashi) and the other starting from Kazakhstan (Uzen) both passing Tashkent to Khorgos.

Sources:
Pter Bucky: Tristan Kenderdine, "The Ferghana Valley Railway Should Never Be Built," mei.edu, (17 March 2020).
"China's Maritime Silk Road initiative increasingly touches the EU," European Parliament Briefing, (March 2018).
Cameron Evans "Central Asian NGOs raise concerns about BRI projects," The Third Pole, (17 November 2020).
"Mapping the Belt and Road initiative: this is where we stand," Mercator Institute for China Studies, (7 June 2018).
"The trains and sea port of One Belt, One Road, China's new Silk Road," The Straits Times, (14 May 2017).

Map created by editors and designed by Typeface nv.

tivity among these poorly industrialized and landlocked countries is to blame for their underdevelopment, some politicians and scholars have presented the SREB, and more widely the BRI, as a win-win situation where states' participation is voluntary.* More critical approaches have denounced it as the embodiment of a policy that provides China essentially unilateral benefit and furthers its ambition of worldwide domination, suspecting China's overwhelming political and economic power may weaken the development, autonomy and even stability of the region.

*Fangye Zhou 2019b: 6

"In today's global information age [when] victory may sometimes depend not on whose army wins, but on whose story wins,"* it is essential to disaggregate a discourse and dig into the multiple components and the complexity of contemporary silk road projects. This chapter brings elements to reflect on the supposed economic, social and political impacts of the silk roads projects on the current and future development of the region. More broadly, it addresses the rationale and relevance of contemporary silk roads projects, which aim to 'restore' long intracontinental routes supposed to connect the Far East to the West via Central Asia, inspired by historical silk routes, significantly rewritten, and applied in a global 21st century context where economic factors, transport and modes of development have changed substantially.

*Nye 2014: 20

This chapter is part of wider research carried out since 2008 on the political, economic and social impact of the growing engagement of China with Central Asia, and on Central Asian perceptions of Chinese involvement in the region. It has been written mainly on the basis of English and Russian language literature on the SREB and some forty interviews conducted since 2013 in each of the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan, as well as interviews with Chinese academics, think tank experts, traders and businessmen in Xian, Beijing and Shanghai.

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section considers the historical silk roads and their impact on the current narrative. It contrasts some components of the historical silk roads – presented and instrumentalized in current narratives to meet some specific political and economic ends – with historians' analyses over the last ten years, which have debated the complexity of the development and decline of the historical silk roads. The second section presents the main silk road projects initiated since independence both by international organizations and outside countries, and intended to bring Central Asia back to its role of intracontinental hub. The multiple dimensions of SREB's economic engagement in Central Asia are presented in the third section. This is followed by

an analysis of the anticipated impact of the SREB on Central Asian countries' economies, and of the economic rationale to recreate intracontinental land corridors throughout Eurasia in the context of the 21st century. Section five and six address respectively the political and geopolitical dimension of the SREB. They elaborate on the significance of the political influence that China can exert on the region and on possible regional geopolitical and geo-economic reconfigurations that could emanate from China's impact in the region through the SREB. In conclusion, this chapter questions the sustainability of the project in light of the benefits and challenges that the SREB is or may be facing in China and Central Asia.

1. Historical Background: Debating the Substance of the Silk Roads

Initiated by the Han dynasty in the second century BC, the silk roads take their name from the lucrative trade in silk and other commodities carried from the East to the West through Central Asia over the course of two millennia.* Besides trade, scientific knowledge, such as mathematics, new techniques in many sectors like porcelain manufacturing, metal-work and cuisine, and culture, including various literature and musical genres circulated widely on the silk roads.* Religious movements, such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, Buddhism, also proliferated.* Besides contributing to the wider circulation of religious beliefs, monks and missionaries brought substantial knowledge of hitherto isolated inland regions.* In the seventh century, Tang Buddhist monk Xuanzang left a geographical account of the "Western Regions,"¹ which remained the core of Chinese geographical knowledge about Central Asia and India for centuries.

*Gernet 1996: 119-120;
Loewe 2008a: 164

*Whitfield 2015;
Beckwith 2009: 155-156

*Foltz 2010

*Loewe 2008b: 670

1.1 The Silk Roads Misconception

Despite these roads' undeniable contribution to the development of trade and culture between the East and West over a long period of time, popularized writings have overused the concept of the silk roads, both in forms and substance. Historians have addressed the often revised and idealized descriptions of the silk roads, such as the improper characterization of the two terms 'road' and 'silk,' the alleged permanent character of these roads during almost two millennia, and the causes and date of their decline.

¹ 大唐西域记 – *Dà táng xīyù jì* – *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*.

1.1.1 Recent Use and Oversimplification of the Silk Roads

The term ‘silk roads,’ which is used to refer to the trade routes that ran throughout Eurasia from their creation to their decline suggests a term used throughout their full period of existence. Historians have shown, however, that the name was invented later and used retroactively. While it commonly refers to a history spanning several millennia, the very term “silk roads” (German: *Seidenstraßen*) appeared only in the 19th century under the pen of the German explorer Baron (*Freiherr*) Ferdinand von Richthofen.* Moreover, he used the term only concerning the historical period of the Han dynasty, from 206 BC to 220 AD.* At the beginning of the 20th century, the term was taken up by a German geographer, August Hermann, who published several works and an atlas on the subject, but got little public recognition. The term “silk roads” was used in the title of a work for the first time in 1938, published by the Swedish geographer and explorer Sven Hedin.*

*von Richthofen 1877: 96-122

*Waugh 2007: 5

*Hedin 1936

Looking at the words themselves, “silk,” used as a generic word to substantiate the concept, and “road,” often used in the singular, are oversimplifications. Although silk, thanks to its light weight and a strong demand on the European markets, was certainly one of the goods sold across the continent,* it did not constitute the main commodity of continental trade along the so-called silk roads,* which rather was dominated by a multitude of products such as paper, precious metals, carpets, gold, glass, food and manufactured products, tea, spices, or even animals such as horses. Besides, many of these goods had a far greater influence than silk and reflected technological advances of the time, such as paper, cotton or gunpowder. Moreover, the depiction of the ‘silk roads’ as reflected in some popular literature or political narratives omitted the less glorious aspects such as the trade of slaves* and the spread of disease. Roads were an essential transmission route for the bubonic plague bacteria and contributed to the spread of the black death in Europe in the 14th century.*

*Mokyr 2003: 369

*Millward 2013: 20

*McNeill 2010: 287

*Barisitz 2017: 10-11

Beyond the diversity of trade, the very term ‘road’ (according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*) suggests one main corridor on which a flow of goods would have been transported over its entire or most of its length by Chinese traders traveling to the West, and encountering an opposite flow of Western merchants traveling to China. However, as evidenced by historians, the circulation of merchandise was more local than global; goods were transported by the same traders over an often limited geographic section, and were exchanged multiple times. Moreover, the plurality of the routes

is often underestimated, both by their number and by their geographic orientation. The so-called 'silk roads' were less a set of a few east-west linear routes and more a network of multidirectional routes,* including north-south corridors, which involved the region comprising what is now north India and Pakistan.*

*Barisitz 2017: 10

*Xinru Liu 1988; Millward 2013: 21

1.1.2 *An Alternation of Flourishing Periods with Slowdowns*

*Xi Jinping 2017d: 546

Historians and Chinese authorities have also qualified the alleged security of trade along these routes,* which would have opened a period of peace and prosperity and made the Eurasian continent an indivisible area unified by the friendship of trade and peaceful relations. Such narratives ignore the insecurity on these routes, where traders were often robbed by bandits, and where conflicts between competing states or local political changes disrupted the networks. The silk roads went through a chaotic history, alternating periods of flourishing with slowdowns, with three main periods of prosperity, whose long-term peaceful nature is also questionable.

The first main period of prosperity corresponds to an important expansion of Chinese territory under the Han dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD), in particular under the emperor Wudi (141-87 BC, 汉武帝 刘彻 – *Hàn wudì liúchè*) who conquered Xinjiang and the region of contemporary Central Asia. Along with the Han's military expansion, exploration missions were sent to the region, allowing China to access new wealth and assert its prestige over its neighbours. The most famous mission was conducted by Chinese imperial envoy Zhang Qian in 114 BC. This mission was first and foremost aimed at seeking allies to fight militarily and settle the nomadic Xiongnu peoples who resisted the Han advance,* and was therefore not the campaign of peace depicted in some Chinese narratives.* It, however, enabled the opening of communication and trade routes destined to form one of the essential axes of the silk roads, starting from the current city of Xian (formerly Chang'an) in Shaanxi province and extending to the Mediterranean coast via Xinjiang and Central Asia.*

*Tansen Sen 2014

*Xi Jinping 2014: 338

*Gernet 1996: 120; Hansen, 2012: 14

*Twitchett 1979: 32

*Twitchett 1979: 35

A second period of prosperity began under the Tang dynasty (618-907) which was one of the most prosperous of the time.* The Tangs embarked on conquest campaigns in the second half of the seventh century in the Tarim Basin, in Dzhungaria and in the Hi valley, then in what is today the Central Asian region.* They established Chinese protectorates and secured the roads connecting them. This dynasty considerably extended the geographical extent of its political and commercial relations with the Central Asian

region, and further, with the Byzantine Empire, the Arab empires of Umayyad then Abbasid, the Persian Sasanian Empire, and India. In the eighth century, the city of Chang'an (长安 – *Cháng'ān*), today: Xi'an: (西安 – *Xī'ān*) was considered one of the wealthiest and most developed cities in the world. This period was, however, short-lived. First, the end of the Tang dynasty during the An Lushan rebellion from 755 to 762 led to a partial abandonment of the silk roads. Second, the Chinese were forced to yield the region to the invading Arabs in the middle of the seventh century, who had come to propagate Islam and fragilized the trade in the region.*

*Foltz 2010: 85-104;
Golden 2011: 50-62

A third flourishing period coincides with the Mongols' conquest of Central Asia, Persia, India and even part of Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries.* The Mongols conducted a strategy of recruiting traders, artists and craftsmen in the conquered territories to help them manage their empire. This policy facilitated trade and cultural exchanges on Eurasian routes, making Central Asia a link between Europe and China for about a century.* Flows slowed down with the dismantling of the Mongol empire, as well as a decline in nomadic populations due, among other things, to the black death.

*Allsen 2001: 17-50

*Xinru Liu 2010: 109

1.2 Causes of the Decline of the Silk Roads

A part of historiography has associated the decline of the silk roads with the opening of sea routes with the West in the 15th century by Vasco da Gama and his successors.* Moreover, the Chinese authorities have coupled this with a victimizing narrative, arguing that China's isolation and the end of the silk roads resulted from the political and military offensives of foreign powers, in particular European powers.* However, this narrative ignores the periods of decline or interruption in trade routes, which resulted from changing internal and regional political contexts and thus largely preceded the opening of the sea routes by Western navigators. China's victimization narrative also omits a number of causes immanent to China, including rising xenophobia under the Yuan and Ming dynasties, which led the country to limit its interaction with other countries and to step back from interaction with the Old World.*

*Dong Xiangrong 2019: 61

*Hayes 2019: 5

*Hayes 2019: 5

Sea routes did have an undeniable impact on land routes. They significantly reduced the cost of transporting many commodities from China, in particular heavy items such as ceramics, hence undermining the role of overland routes. However, postulating an almost unique causal link between the shipping routes opened by

European navigators in the seas of South Asia in the 16th century and the decline of the overland silk roads avoids a discussion of the complexity of the interaction of historical, economic and political factors. The development of sea routes did not put an end to trade via land routes but meant that goods transported for medium-range regional trade had to be of high value relative to their weight and were carried over a shorter distance. Moreover, dating the impact of shipping on land routes to the 16th century ignores the history of the merchant navy. By the 13th century, China had opened maritime links involving the Indian Ocean, the East African coast, the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea.* Trade on land routes nevertheless continued and even experienced a period of prosperity in the 13th century. In addition, although maritime trade was cheaper, it was limited – up to and including the 16th century – by the size of vessels, the seasonality of winds, and the hazards of sea voyages. In the 16th century, the English explorer Anthony Jenkinson observed that caravans from China had been interrupted not by seaways but by several years of war, and that nonetheless goods such as *musk*, rhubarb, satin, and *damask*² continued to arrive in Central Asia from the Cathay area.* The continuation of land trade through Central Asia is also attested to by explorers and missionaries who travelled along these roads, such as the Jesuit Bento de Goes,³ who – in the beginning of the 17th century – joined a merchant's caravan in Yarkand and travelled from western China to Kabul. The Qing dynasty's archives (1644-1912) attest to exchanges and research on Kazakh silk preferences.

*Boulnois 1966: 40-60;
McNeill 2010: 998-999

*Millward 2013: 83

The periods of growth and decline of the two modes of transport between China and the West were not systematically opposed. They were sometimes concomitant, although with varying intensities, which also resulted from the Chinese and foreign political context. Both modes declined at the end of the Ming dynasty, due, among other reasons, to the European expansion in Asia and to China's domestic priorities. Chinese trade was further devastated by the process of European colonization in various parts of Asia and by the two Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860). Yet, even on the land routes, trade persisted – albeit on a smaller scale. Chinese traders continued an intense trade in silk textiles with Central

² *Musk* is an aromatic substance obtained from animal glands or plants, traditionally used as a base in perfume, ointment or medicine. *Damask* is a luxury textile (usually silk) with reversible patterns weaved into the cloth, named after Damascus, the city renowned for its weaving quality in the Middle Ages.

³ In Portuguese he is known as Bento de Góis (1562-1607).

Asians in the 19th century* until these routes were cut by the Russian invasion of Central Asia and, later, by the inclusion of Central Asia into the Soviet structure.

*Millward 2013: 21

The multiple dimensions of the silk roads, the alternation between flourishing times and slowdowns, and the multitude and evolution of traded commodities, make them a concept that, as stated by James Millard, “is far from clear exactly what, or where, that ‘silk road’ was.”* Yet, examining the complexity of the historical silk roads is essential to understanding the rationale of the contemporary projects they inspired and which claim to revive popularized elements that may not necessarily have been true, and to evaluate their impact on the current and future path of Central Asia.

*Millward 2013: 20

2. Reinventing the Silk Roads

2.1 Putting Central Asia Back at the Heart of Intercontinental Transport

After a century of Russian-Soviet domination and an almost complete breakdown of direct political and economic ties between Central Asia and the rest of the world, the independence of the five states has sparked some governments in the region, as well as in other countries, to try to bring the region back to its historical role as a commercial and cultural hub in the heart of the Eurasian continent. Several international or regional organizations, such as the *Economic Cooperation Organization* (ECO), the *Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia* (CICA), and the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO), have been created by or have integrated some or all of the Central Asian countries in order to improve regional trade and political relations. Moreover, some international organizations or foreign states have used the metaphor of the Silk Roads to initiate projects developing transport corridors across the Eurasian continent and facilitating Central Asia's access to world markets.

The first one was the *Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia* (TRACECA). Created in 1993 and funded by EU member states, TRACECA is an international transport program which originally involved the five Central Asian countries and the three Caucasus countries, later joined by Moldova, Ukraine, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria. It aims to open up Central Asia and the Caucasus to world markets via a long transport corridor connecting China to the Black Sea and, along this corridor, to significantly improve road and rail transport and harmonization of transport policy.

A second project, the *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program* (CAREC), was created in 1997 and includes the five countries of Central Asia as well as Afghanistan, Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Pakistan and China. Funded by several international institutions, including the ADB, EBRD, IMF, IDB, UNDP,⁴ and the World Bank, this program aims to build on the economic expansion of China, Japan, India, Pakistan and Russia to develop Central Asia as an international transport and trade hub. CAREC has developed six major north-south and east-west transport corridors within the region, and along each of them has funded the development of transport and energy infrastructure to improve regional trade and facilitate coordination among international institutions unaccustomed to cooperating with each other.

In addition, several countries have initiated projects to boost their economic relations with and trade routes through Central Asia. In 1997, Japan initiated its 'Silk Road Diplomacy,' which was the first diplomatic initiative advocating the revival of the Silk Road within Central Asia. Five years later, Japan strived to promote closer energy relations with the region by launching the "Silk Road Energy Mission."* In 2009, South Korea also used the label of the silk road in developing its economic relations with Central Asia, Russia and China and securing its access to Eurasian resources.*

In the West, the United States too embarked on the dream of reviving the historical silk roads. In the mid-2000s, it launched its *New Silk Road Initiative* to spur economic development and bolster stability in the region by increasing and diversifying trade flows between Central and South Asia.* This initiative was supposed to be implemented by improving roads, railways and border-crossing facilities across the two regions, by developing regional energy markets, especially through the support of the Central Asia-South Asia regional electricity grid (CASA-1000) and the funding of energy transmission lines and hydropower plants, by strengthening customs and border operations, and by bringing states into multilateral trade institutions.*

These projects, however, fell significantly short of their goals. Their implementation has been undermined by: structural problems such as customs barriers; by local corruption, which contributes to making these states some of the most business unfriendly in the world; by the reluctance of some governments to engage in

*Dadabaev 2019: 4; Len et al. 2008

*Dadabaev 2017: 30-41; Evans 2012: 74

*Peyrouse and Raballand 2015: 405-420

*Hormats 2011

⁴ ADB – *Asian Development Bank*; EBRD – *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development*; IMF – *International Monetary Fund*; IDB – *Islamic Development Bank*; UNDP – *United Nations Development Programme*.

regional cooperation, especially Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan under former President Karimov; and by the unwillingness of certain regional or international actors, including China and Russia, to let rival states such as Japan or the United States gain a solid economic foothold in the region. Second, a common thread has been the inability of the initiators to provide the substantial funds necessary to make a significant physical improvement in the region's transport infrastructure. Rather than resulting in the integration of Central Asia into a trade corridor connecting the Asian continent with Europe and the Middle East, the metaphor of the silk roads has materialized, at best, as the strengthening of bilateral relations between Central Asian states and the initiators of these projects.

2.2 Upping the Ante: China's Belt Road Initiative

Based on its exponential economic growth and on its increasing engagement in Central Asia since the 1990s, China has taken up previously aborted or rival regional integration projects by initiating in 2013 the *Silk Road Economic Belt* (SREB) to stimulate regional connectivity and integration across the Eurasian continent. The SREB is a component of Beijing's global and new foreign policy *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), which involves China's economic investments in over 70 countries.

2.2.1 A Long-Thought-Out and Long-Term Project

The BRI, and – under it – the SREB, are part of a long-term strategy, comprising both a long process leading to its conception and announcement and a long-life expectancy. Although touted as a new benchmark of China's foreign policy initiated by Chinese President Xi Jinping, * the BRI is rather the outcome of gradual foreign policy reforms which aimed at putting an end to Mao's isolationist policies and aggressive export of China's political system.* In 1978, Deng Xiaoping initiated a first phase of this political reorientation with the 'Open Door Policy' (门户开放政策 – *Ménhù kāifàng zhèngcè*),* aimed at gradually reintegrating China into the world economy by opening the country to foreign investors and developing foreign cooperation.* This policy gained new impetus in the 2000s with the 'Go Out Policy' (走出去战略 – *Zōuchūqu Zhànlüè*), which intended to fulfil some of China's most urgent economic needs, such as gaining access to raw material essential to its economic growth and supporting its companies in increasing their production by increased access to foreign markets. This significant revision of China's foreign policy was integrated into the

*Dinh Trinh Van 2019: 30

*Summers 2016: 1634

*Yahuda 1983: 125-160

*Watson and Luolin Xin 1986: 91

first three five-year plans of the 21st century, i.e. the Tenth (2001-2005), the Eleventh (2006-2010) and the Twelfth (2011-2015), which all stressed China's need for global engagement in order to secure its economic development.*

Designated as the leading part of China's new opening-up policy, the BRI was outlined in the *Thirteenth Five-year Plan* (2016-2020), which devotes a full chapter to it.* In 2017, its integration into the constitution of the Communist Party of China at the Party's 19th Congress made it part of China's global strategy, which is expected to be maintained after Xi Jinping leaves office or dies. The BRI's long-term time frame has been coupled with its globalized space frame. The initiative is supposed to put China at the forefront of economic engagement on the five continents, including in Africa and Latin America, by combining the SREB with a maritime dimension, i.e. the *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, and involving some 4.4 billion people, i.e. 62 percent of world population.

3. Central Asia in the Silk Road Economic Belt

3.1 The Central Asian Corridors

The BRI's overland component, the SREB, involves the entire Eurasian continent, from the north with Russia and Mongolia to south and southeast Asia with Pakistan, Indonesia and Myanmar. It is materialized through six major corridors:

1. New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELBEC)
2. China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor
3. China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC)
4. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
5. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor⁵
6. China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor*

*Deepak 2018: 3

⁵ Note that development on BCIMEC stalled with increasing Chinese-Indian tensions, the latter blocking progress on sub-regional projects citing sovereignty issues. Since 2018, the BCIMEC has been removed from the overall BRI umbrella program and Beijing has shifted to closer bilateral cooperation with Myanmar: The CMEC (*China-Myanmar Economic Corridor*) will run from Yunnan Province of China to Mandalay in Central Myanmar. From there it will head towards Yangon, before terminating at the Kyaukpyu *Special Economic Zone* on the Bay of Bengal. (Aneja 2019)

Central Asia is integrated into two corridors. The first one, the *China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor* (CCWAEC), departs from Xinjiang, crosses the special economic zone of Khorgos, which today has become one of the biggest dry ports in the world, and joins an already existing or developing network of routes connecting the five countries of the region. The second corridor, the *New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor* (NELBEC), or 'Second Eurasia Land Bridge' (Xinjiang-Kazakhstan-Russia), goes from Xinjiang to Russia via Kazakhstan. It starts from Lianyungang port, goes through Xinjiang, and comprises (at least) two routes through Kazakhstan, via either Almaty or Nur-Sultan (Astana). Both the CCWAEC and the NELBEC entail the construction of new roads and rail tracks, but also integrate some already existing transport networks, which are set to be improved with BRI support.

Like all SREB corridors, the CCWAEC and NELBEC have a transcontinental dimension. The CCWAEC is intended to allow multiple ramifications between the five states of the region and to open it to a wider geographical area including Ukraine via Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia.* The CCWAEC should also serve as a gateway to South Asian and Middle Eastern markets, and to hydrocarbons in the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey and Iran. This connection is supposed to be materialized, among other projects, by a railroad connecting Xinjiang with the Persian Gulf through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

*Luft 2017: 33

The NELBEC corridor aims to reduce the transit time from the Chinese port of Lianyungang on the east coast of China to the ports of Western Europe, in particular in Germany and the Netherlands, with uninterrupted connections via the main Chinese cities of Lanzhao, Wuhan, Yiwu, Xian and Urumqi then through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland and the Czech Republic. Eventually, the NELBEC should integrate a long corridor between China and Istanbul, with branches to the Middle East and Africa.*

*Pomfret 2018a/b: 7

Finally, the southern part of Central Asia is connected to other SREB corridors linking China with South Asia. The development of the *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor* (CPEC) with the Karakorum Highway facilitates Pakistan's access to Tajikistan from Gilgit-Baltistan via China without crossing Afghanistan.*

*Wolf 2020: 77

3.2 Along the Transport Corridors: The Stakes of China's Energy Security

Road and railway layouts, as proposed since the 2000s in Sino-Central Asian bilateral cooperation agreements and since 2013 in the framework of the SREB, are part of Beijing's wider economic strat-

egy – which includes ensuring China's energy security by facilitating its access to hydrocarbon resources in foreign countries.

The significance of the energy component in the SREB is reflected in the proximity of the transport corridors with the energy corridors. The CCWAEC follows the China-Central Asia gas pipeline, which departs from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and passes through Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan to reach the dry port of Khorgos. Several of the SREB's infrastructure development projects have been developed to improve access to their deposits by energy producing countries. In Kazakhstan, the construction of the USD 261 million Arkalyk-Shubarkol railway gives better access to coal deposits in Shubarkol and ore deposits located in the central part of the country.* The development of the energy sector has also entailed the construction of processing structures for raw materials, such as the oil refinery in the *Dangara Free Economic Zone* in Tajikistan and the modernization of old Soviet structures, such as the Shymkent oil-refining factory.*

*Aminjonov et al. 2019b: 9

*Islam 2019: 297

Beijing also is seeking to demonstrate its commitment to 'win-win' cooperation by combining its own energy interests with the development of energy security in the countries involved in the SREB. China supports costly energy production projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, countries which face energy shortages every year, such as the two USD 350 million combined heat and power plants in Dushanbe that are funded by a credit loan from Exim Bank of China and the China Development Bank.* Besides, by launching in April 2019 the concept of the *Belt and Road Initiative International Green Development Coalition*, China also aims to demonstrate its commitment to the development of clean energy and environmental sustainability, and through this framework it funds costly projects shunned by other investors, such as the construction of the USD 152 million Kербulak hydroelectric station on the Ili River in Kyrgyzstan and the LNG production plant by Gaz Onimderi in Taraz in Kazakhstan.*

*Aminjonov et al. 2019a: 9

*Aminjonov et al. 2019a: 1, 5

3.3 The Multidimensional Investments of the BRI

Finally, the SREB supports the development of a multitude of economic sectors to facilitate Central Asian domestic production and export part of it to China and beyond. This multilayer economic involvement abroad is also part of China's strategy to address the long-standing issue of its companies' overcapacity. Firms specializing in sectors like construction or steel which had previously benefited from massive government spending on domestic infrastruc-

ture projects have seen their activities significantly decline due to a slowdown of China's economic growth from 2014.* One of the BRI's core strategies, therefore, consists of supporting Chinese companies to keep their production high by using their machinery, parts and equipment in the BRI infrastructure projects, by helping them to access or create new foreign markets for Chinese products,* and by relocating some of them abroad to offset demand that has declined in China's domestic market.* Despite the absence of official data, the presence of Chinese companies has increased since the launch of the SREB, with several dozen located in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.*

*Djankov and Miner 2016: 12

*Drache et al. 2019: 43

*Djankov and Miner 2016: 12

*Kursiv.kz 2019; Orozbekova 2016; Azia Plus 2020

China has engaged in the Central Asian agricultural and agro-industrial sectors under the BRI umbrella by developing 19 projects worth some USD 1.7 billion in Kazakhstan* and by participating in the construction of an agro-industrial park near Bishkek to develop local food production for the Kyrgyz market and for export to China.* The BRI has put an emphasis on heavy industry, especially metallurgy, by supporting the exploitation of ore mines, such as the copper mine in the city of Koksai, Kazakhstan, the construction of processing plants, like the copper-smelting factory in East Kazakhstan, the production of cement in Chinese production plants in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and chemical production in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

*Islam 2019: 297

*Levina 2019

The BRI also aims to develop cooperation in new sectors such as the digital economy, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology.* Its "Digital Silk Road" builds fibre optic cables in Central Asia, which are designed to supplement the BRI's physical infrastructure while introducing common technical standards in low income countries, most of which have limited access to Internet services. Finally, trade and capital flows are supposed to be facilitated by the opening of several free trade zones in Kazakhstan – for example in Aktau and in Khorgos, which is today the largest dry port in Asia.

*Xi Jinping 2017c

3.4 The BRI's Multiple Sources of Funding

The BRI transport corridors and economic development projects throughout Central Asia and beyond have been supported by multiple sources of funding. Most importantly, Beijing has created two funds dedicated to the BRI – the *Silk Road Fund* (SRF) and the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) – demonstrating, unlike previous or current projects of other countries, its capacity to fund its wide ambitions.

The SRF, established in 2014, is a state-owned Chinese invest-

*Joshua 2019: 127

ment fund funded by the *China Investment Corporation* (CIC), the *State Administration of Foreign Exchange* (SAFE) and several Chinese banks. Created with an initial capital of USD 40 billion, to which USD 15 billion was added in 2017 for infrastructure construction, the SRF prioritizes investment in projects related to the BRI.* Created in 2015, the AIIB is meant to support BRI projects by funding infrastructure to improve connectivity. With a capital of over USD 50 billion, it has 78 member states from five continents, including several high-income countries such as Australia, South Korea, Germany, Italy, France and Switzerland, as well as Saudi Arabia. Most of the projects for which the AIIB provides loans are in countries and regions along the BRI. The AIIB sets itself apart by funding projects declined by the main international financial organizations such as the IMF and the WTO, and by offering loans on lesser terms and without imposing conditions for economic and political reform, for example to privatize or deregulate state-owned companies.*

*Joshua 2019: 172

In addition to these funds, Chinese banks such as the *China Development Bank* (CDB), the *Industrial and Commercial Bank of China* (ICBC), the *Bank of China* and the *China Construction Bank*, the *Exim Bank of China* are a major element in financing costly SREB projects, providing for example, along with many other loans for development projects in Central Asia, USD 1.7 billion for five SREB road construction or renovation projects, USD 243 million for the rehabilitation of the Dushanbe-Kulma-China border road and the construction of the Khatlon tunnel in Tajikistan, and USD 185 million for the construction of a north-south route through Kyrgyzstan.

Some of the costliest SREB projects are also funded by international organizations: 3.4 billion of the 6.6 cost of construction for the Kazakh section of the 'East Europe-East China' highway will be shared by various international financial institutions, including the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, the *Islamic Development Bank* and the ADB.

*Kushkumbayev 2015

Finally, some projects are funded by Central Asian states without loans from any tertiary party. Nur-Sultan/Astana has integrated more than ten large BRI projects into its 'Nurly Zhol' (Bright Path) transport infrastructure development and modernization program since 2014* and funds the totality of at least five of them, amounting to almost three billion US dollars. These projects are part of the BRI rationale to facilitate transport within a country and to open it up to the external markets. Nurly Zhol funds the construction of

a railway line between Shalkar and Beineu, which aims to reduce the cargo traffic route from the east to the west of the country by 1,000 km, as well as the renovation of port facilities in Kuryk in Mangistau Region and in Aktau in order to increase Kazakhstan's marine transit capacity and stimulate freight shipments to Europe and the Middle East via Azerbaijan and Iran. Funding by other states for their own projects has, however, been mostly symbolic, often below five percent – as shown, for example, by Tajikistan's minimal funding of sections of its Vahdat-Yovon railroad, or by Kyrgyzstan's rehabilitation of the Osh-Batken-Isfana highway, the rest being funded on the basis of Chinese credits and loans.

4. Between Myth and Reality: Extent and Limits of the SREB's Economic and Social Profits in Central Asia

With the development of the BRI, the Chinese authorities claim to open an “era of win-winism” (共赢 – *gòng yíng*), cooperation (合作 – *hézuò*), and mutual benefit (互利 – *hù lì*),* which will replace what they portray as the dysfunctional economic globalization as practiced over the last 30 years and provide instead a new and inclusive model of globalization.* This Chinese narrative about the BRI/SREB, however, does little to overcome the concept's opacity or answer questions concerning its alleged economic and social contribution to the region or more broadly to the sustainability of its planned transcontinental corridors.*

*Dunford et al. 2019: 152

*Lei Zou 2018: 138

*Cooley 2015; Laruelle 2018

4.1 Enhancing Connectivity in Central Asia

Lack of infrastructure in Central Asia is a major obstacle to development and integration into supply chain economics. This results in 50% less economic opportunities for the region, as measured in terms of world gross domestic product (GDP), than for European countries.* Central Asian countries need significant investment in their transportation infrastructure, estimated at 7.8% of the region's GDP, higher than for Southeast Asia (5.7%) and for East Asia (5.2%).* Chinese proposals for large and costly transportation structure projects, which governments in the region, especially low-income Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, cannot fund themselves, are therefore likely to be appealing to this geographically landlocked region.

*ITF 2019b: 9

*OECD 2018: 6

The modernization or construction of new roads and railways is supposed to reduce both the cost and time for transportation of goods and people and make Central Asia an interregional trade and transit hub. In Uzbekistan, the Chinese-funded construction

of a railway between the cities of Angren and Pap, including an 11-mile tunnel, has lowered transport costs for passengers between the two cities by 35%, and the price of transporting hydrocarbons and derived products by 50%.* In Kazakhstan, investments in the domestic road and rail network have contributed to increasing domestic freight turnover by 250% between 2015 and 2017,* while the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan highway supposed to be completed in 2021 will cut transport time between eastern China and Iran by half as compared to the current route, which sends goods to Shanghai for onward shipping to Iran. The easier and faster movement of goods is supposed to entice companies to export their production via land routes and thereby generate substantial transit income; in Kazakhstan, the growth in container transit due to the SREB is expected to add five billion dollars a year to the state budget.*

The expected long-term benefits of the SREB depend on two essential factors, first on the physical sustainability of the routes and the capacity of the states to maintain them, and second on the economic sustainability and relevance of the development of inter-continental land routes.

4.2 The Question of Land Route Quality and Maintenance

China has made its capacity to build large-scale transport infrastructure in a short time frame into a brand symbolizing its engagement and efficiency. This has, however, raised questions about the sustainability of the projects. Several studies have shown that China tends to underestimate the costs of infrastructure projects by about 30 percent, which may result in trade-offs concerning quality.* Moreover, infrastructure maintenance, which usually requires at least two percent of the investment cost of the asset per year, has been often overlooked in project planning and budgeting. For example, the maintenance of the USD 1.6 billion Angren-Pap railway would cost USD 32 million annually.* This question is particularly acute for economically weak states such as Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan, where road maintenance requires political authorities to allocate budgetary resources for a task that they may not see as a priority. This also presupposes that countries have the institutional capacity to deliver effective operational and maintenance services, which, in Central Asia, may not be the case.* In the region's often harsh climatic conditions, the poor quality of some of the roads built by China, combined with the lack of maintenance, have raised questions about their sustainability and, hence, their expected long-term contribution to local economic development.*

4.3 A Route Does Not Necessarily Mean Trade Development

Major investments in transport infrastructure do not necessarily lead to significant improvements in trade flows. In Kyrgyzstan, despite the development of road connectivity, the volumes and values of export and import with China did not increase between 2013 and 2017.* Several elements may undermine the economic relevance of the assumed corollary impact of land route construction on trade development.

*Mogilevsky 2019: 86, 90

First, some corridors or routes can be negatively impacted by rivalry with other geographically close BRI and non-BRI corridors. According to surveys released by several economists, the potential of CCWAEC is likely to be significantly outstripped by the NEL-BEC which is considered to be the one with the greatest potential, and by the *Northern Eurasian Corridor* (China-Russia-Europe via the Trans-Siberian railway), which itself is not a BRI corridor.* In addition, the combination of railways and roads risks accentuating some routes' redundancy and competition, and leads to only a partial usage in relation to their total capacity.*

*Linn and Zucker: 20; Johns et al. 2018: 32–33, 45–47

*Mogilevskii 2019: 90

The unbalanced development of trade resulting from competition among routes risks leading to a biased concentration of funds on some specific corridors at the expense of others for which substantial funding or loans have already been committed by the countries involved. In addition, committing substantial funding to a specific corridor might compel some states to cut investments in other sectors, in particular those related to the development of human capital, as well as for remote regions not connected to the corridor, which could further deepen geographical gaps in development inside the country.* As argued by R. Mogilevsky, roads and corridors beneficial to Chinese-Central Asian trade would still need to be connected by additional new routes, which would be beneficial to Central Asian domestic needs and serve remote and underdeveloped regions.*

*Lall and Lebrand 2019: 4

*Mogilevsky 2019: 88

Second, politicians and transcontinental corridor planners have postulated a corollary between the construction of land routes and the development of intracontinental trade based on two main criteria: shorter distance and time gained. However, for importers, exporters and freight forwarders, transport reliability and predictability – which depend on the regulation of transport services and on the reliability of border-crossings – significantly outweigh the savings obtained by reducing direct transport cost with shortened distances.* The SREB, like most previous 'silk roads' projects, has underestimated the impact of poor governance in border agencies,

*Arvis et al. 2010: 15–24

slow processing and duplication of tasks between border countries, and the unfriendly business environment in the region. Moreover, the difficulties in regional transport are made worse by the neo-patrimonialism and corrupted nature of the political elites in many of the Central Asian regimes, who have controlled foreign trade as a personal underground source of income and therefore have resisted trade liberalization. When local decision-makers have been forced to open border crossings, as happened when the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) agreements came into force in 2015, they responded by imposing measures to increase levies elsewhere, in particular at the external borders leaving the EAEU. Hence, while the transit time has been greatly reduced between Kazakhstan and Russia, it has increased significantly between Kazakhstan and China.* Ultimately, the success of the SREB and of any other transport corridor through the region assumes a major reshaping of the local neo-patrimonial systems to remove barriers that persisted despite the development of trade between Central Asia and the rest of the world since the 2000s.*

*Cooley 2016: 19

*Cooley 2016: 18

4.4 Distance as an Essential Criterion: A Historical-Economic Misinterpretation?

Although issues related to Central Asian neopatrimonialism and corruption may be addressed over time, land corridors will still be dominated by maritimization of world transport. Since 1950, maritime trade has expanded extensively. In 2019, more than 90% of cargo was carried by sea transport.* This trend is likely to be confirmed in the coming three decades, with more than three-quarters of all movements of goods expected to be carried out by ship by 2050, while road and rail transport will make up 17 and 7 percent respectively of movement of goods. However, land traffic will be mostly used for shorter distances, while maritime transport is expected to cover most of the movement of goods over long distances.*

*Marine Traffic Data 2019

*ITF 2019a: 37

Although 1.7 times longer on average than land transport, maritime transport offers many advantages. It avoids the innumerable hazards linked to border crossings and corruption in transit countries and therefore, unlike road or rail transport, is more predictable and reliable. Moreover, and importantly, maritime transport is generally five times cheaper than land transport.* Since the invention of containers, the increase in ship transport capacity has considerably lowered costs, and the world fleet continues to adapt quickly to the growing demands of international transport, such

*ITF 2019a: 179

as with specialized ships for agricultural goods. In addition, deregulation on a global scale has lowered transport costs, including through an increasing number of ships that are registered in developing countries where regulations are not as strict in terms of taxation, security, or labour. The increasing maritimization of the global economy, in particular in the Pacific region, has made distance and time less important for routes. This might not be to the advantage of landlocked Central Asia. Overall, even if all infrastructure and regulatory issues in the involved countries are addressed, the portion of total trade flow between China and Europe which could be shifted from sea to land routes is likely to remain small.*

*Vinokurov et al. 2018

The challenges faced by land transportation do not, however, make the SREB an irrelevant concept. First, rail can be an attractive mode for transporting highly time-sensitive goods, such as perishable food. Second, even if the figures for inland transport remain very low as compared to the total global transport of goods, in absolute value it could contribute significantly to the development of the region's economies.* An improvement of land infrastructure, combined with investment in multiple economic sectors, could bring potentially significant benefits to Central Asian populations by improving transport sustainability, developing local and foreign trade, and by contributing to local employment. Some roads funded by China have had undeniable benefits, including bringing substantial quantities of more affordable Chinese products to often impoverished local populations, and raising the transit value of some isolated and mountainous regions such as the Pamir region in Tajikistan. However, whether the overall SREB benefits materialize will depend on the ability of both China and the Central Asian states to realize these investments and make them sustainable.

*Mogilevskii 2019: 90

4.5 A Fragile Balance between Investment, Debt and Development

Although some loans have been provided by multilateral SRF and AIIB funders, most of the debt held by Central Asian countries is owed to Chinese banks, in particular the *China Development Bank* (CDB), the *Industrial and Commercial Bank of China* (ICBC), the *Bank of China*, the *China Construction Bank*, and the *Exim Bank of China*. The opacity of the loans from these banks and, consequently, on debt management by Beijing in the event of debt distress, raises questions about the ability of Central Asian states to repay.

4.5.1 *The Thorny Question of Debt Refund*

The BRI is unlikely to cause a systemic debt problem in the regions where it is implemented. Taking on debt can be a catalyst for economic growth if the borrowing country is able to refund, as exemplified in countries like Ethiopia which has become one of the most rapidly growing economies in the world.* However, the risk of insolvency can be significant in low-income countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, whose debt to China accounts for between 30 percent and 16 percent of their GDP (vs between 3 and 6 percent for the other countries of the region).*

*Hurley et al. 2018: 13

*Trilling 2019

The ability of Central Asian countries to repay will rely on several unpredictable factors. First, this will hinge on whether the expected improvements in macroeconomic variables resulting from the investments made possible by loans materialize and generate the higher profits needed to repay the debt. Moreover, 85 percent of Chinese loans are in dollars,* which increases further the risk of debt distress to Beijing for countries with weak currencies, such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which have had to devalue their currencies several times since the inception of the SREB.

*Trilling 2019

The opacity of the Chinese lending system and of Beijing's response to debt distress are of particular concern. Fifty percent of Chinese overseas loans are not recorded by the World Bank and thus are not included in official debt statistics, making it difficult to accurately assess the value of the debt owed by a country to China. Moreover, China and its Central Asian contractors have released little reliable information on the terms of the loans, which raises questions about the latter's debt portfolios. Their ability to repay will rely on several factors that are kept unclear, such as the proportion of short-term to long-term debt, or the access to concessional financing, which will be essential to combine development with debt sustainability and to decrease the risk of defaulting on the part of the borrower.*

*Hurley et al. 2018: 4

Moreover, China has been reluctant to participate in multilateral approaches to debt relief, which contrasts with many other major creditors, all of which participate in multilateral mechanisms dealing with sovereign defaults, such as the 'Club de Paris.' There are therefore no multilateral or other frameworks to help define China's approach to debt sustainability problems. To date, China has provided debt relief to countries suffering debt distress on an ad hoc and case-by-case basis. The case of Sri Lanka illustrates a potential scenario that the poorest states may face. While Colombo has been unable to reimburse a USD 8 billion Chinese

loan with 6 percent interest which was used to finance the construction of the Hambantota Port, China agreed in July 2017 to a debt-for-equity swap accompanied by a 99-year lease for managing the port. Such a scenario is already taking shape in Central Asia where Tajikistan has ceded silver deposits and gold mines to China as the result of the inability to repay a loan, raising significant local concerns about the future state sovereignty.*

*Eurasianet 2018; 2019

4.5.2 The Impact on Local Industry and Employment

Chinese investments are meant to contribute to the diversification of Central Asian states' economies, hitherto overly concentrated on only a few sectors, such as hydrocarbons and some agricultural products. Through this diversification, the SREB endeavours to bring knowledge, skills and employment to the region where, despite the absence of official figures, unemployment is a significant issue.*

*Lei Zou 2018: 157; Shen Minghui 2019: 182-183

Since the exponential growth of Chinese investment in the region since the second half of the 2000s, the growing imbalance between Chinese industrial power and industrial underdevelopment in Central Asia has raised increasing local concerns. China's strategy, which consists of making of the SREB an export route for its industrial production, has been perceived in the region as potentially weakening local manufacturing industries unable to face Chinese competition, increasing local unemployment, and reducing Central Asian economies to the role of producers and exporters of primary resources.* Such a scenario could, moreover, result in excessive dependence on China in sectors as diverse as automobile spare parts, electronic goods, construction materials, clothing, and food, and therefore risk the region's economic sovereignty.

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 167-170

The alleged positive impact of the SREB on local employment due to the hiring of Central Asians in Chinese companies established in Central Asia, has been contested on a regular basis at the local level.* Although some Central Asians are hired in the Chinese Joint Ventures, China's strategy of relocating its companies abroad to alleviate their overcapacity at home undermines the alleged positive impact on local employment. China mitigates the risk of increased unemployment on its territory by recruiting the majority of workers from among Han Chinese by offering wages higher than those available in China. In Kyrgyzstan, the Osh-Sarytash-Irkesh-tam and Bishkek-Naryn-Torugut roads, partly funded by China, were built by a workforce consisting of 30 percent local employees and 70 percent Chinese workers.* The low recruitment of local

*McGlinchey 2019

*Li-Chen Sim and Aminjonov 2020

labour has been further compounded by the lack of qualified local labour in a region where one of the major obstacles to employment is the gap between education and employers' expectations.

5. Beyond Economics: The Political Component of the SREB/BRI

Based on its economic engagement around the world, Beijing claims that the BRI is a global project that differs from the way other world powers engage through zero-sum games or winner-take-all principles, and instead promotes "a path of cooperative games, solving not only the problems of China, but also of other countries through cooperation and mutually beneficial actions."^{*} Beijing has constructed this narrative to meet three intertwined objectives. First, it is meant to respond to the aforementioned concerns about implementation and sustainability of the SREB in Central Asia with public diplomacy and soft power tools.^{*} Second, it is meant to present China's alleged economic success in the international arena as an alternate model of development, different from the *Washington Consensus*⁶ model, and from which other states could draw inspiration. Third, it is meant to attract worldwide endorsement for Chinese political values,^{*} bring legitimacy to China's single party political system and Chinese-style capitalism, and secure the loyalty of its own population. In other words, Beijing intends to assert its status as a great power by carrying out the 'China dream' (中国梦 – *Zhōngguó mèng*) within and beyond its borders.

*Wei Liu 2018: 44

*Peyrouse 2021

*Fangye Zhou 2019a: 33–36

5.1 Responding to Local Concerns

Despite twenty years of increasingly prominent political, economic and security relations, China remains a little known, poorly understood country for most Central Asians.^{*} Its growing influence in the region since the 2000s, which may be significantly strengthened with the SREB, has increased feelings of Sinophobia and could eventually negatively impact China's regional policy.^{*} The Chinese question gives rise to more and more debates, as does the relationship with Russia, the West, or Turkey, although China is not yet considered as bearing a choice of civilization – unless as a threat – which might carry Central Asia in a new direction. Very

*Chen and Jiménez-Tovar 2017: 442

*Vakulchuk and Overland 2019;
Peyrouse 2015

⁶ The *Washington Consensus* is a set of economic policy guidelines for developing countries adhering to neoliberal logic, promoting the free market and the reduction of state involvement in markets. The name is derived from the development programs launched in the 1980s by the IMF, World Bank and US Treasury (all based in Washington DC). The term was coined in 1989 by John Williamson, a British economist.

few Central Asian academics or experts say to be inspired by Chinese-style mono-partyism or references to Beijing's communism, with those in favour of authoritarian regimes as the only counterweight to Islamism or 'democratic chaos' endorsing the example of Russia or Belarus, or advocating for a specific national model. Moreover, China still belongs to the domain of the unknown for most ordinary Central Asians. Public opinion displays much greater interest in questions of economic development and foreign policy, and their impact on Central Asia, while knowledge of China's traditions, and culture remains weak. Phobias and myths on this country have increased since the 2010s.* The available surveys reveal that Soviet clichés have been replaced over the last two decades with criticisms of the poor quality of Chinese products and fears of the 'yellow peril.' Violent incidents over the last several years which targeted Chinese traders in Central Asian markets, the growing debt to China, the potential consequences of China's economic presence and political influence – including through the SREB – have provoked increasing criticisms in local newspapers, academic, expert and online publications.* Finally, the revelation of the 're-education' camps, in which several thousand ethnic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz living in China would be interned, contribute to mistrust over the intentions of China in general, and of Beijing authorities' relationship to Islam and Muslim peoples.

*Сатпаев 2013

*Алимов 2014; Stanradar 2020

Beijing has therefore integrated a 'charm offensive' into the SREB, intended to break down cultural barriers that feed stereotypes and apprehensions, and to promote Chinese culture and the alleged benefits of its economic development model and political system.

5.2 Promoting Chinese Culture through Media, Language, and Education Assistance

Beijing has launched a wide range of cultural initiatives which, initiated within the framework of its bilateral policies or the SCO, have been integrated into the BRI strategy to promote a positive image of China.* It has funded exhibitions, conferences and books on China, and has relied on its overseas media, which is promoted by Xi Jinping as a critical tool for "presenting reliability of China's publicity and the China's stories, voices and characteristics."* A major component of China's cultural soft power policy has been the opening of fifteen Confucius Institutes in Central Asia to teach Chinese language and culture. The popularization of the Chinese language is viewed as the best carrier to promote Chinese, and

*Peyrouse 2021

*Arif 2017: 4

*Sheng Qin 2019: 191-192

“enable officials, entrepreneurs and ordinary people in countries along the Belt and Road to gain an in-depth understanding of China’s long history, its unique development model, its pluralistic society.”* Confucius Institutes are also part of the economic dimension of the SREB. Some of the institutes, for example in Dushanbe, are affiliated with Chinese companies, provide vocational training, and award stipends to engineers, technicians and translators destined to work in Sino-Tajik heavy industry companies to receive further training in China.*

*Stanradar 2018

*Lie Ma 2016

In May 2015, *Xi'an Jiaotong University* created the University Alliance of the Silk Road,* presented as an academic arm of the BRI foreign policy initiative; several universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have joined the alliance, including *Nazarbayev University* and *Al-Farabi Kazakh National University*. This initiative places China’s efforts to help develop local education within the SREB. In addition, since the end of the 2000s, the Chinese government has opened and funded several Chinese departments in local universities and provided Chinese teachers. Since 2007, universities and higher education institutions in China have hosted an increasing number of foreign students. Although a majority of these students come from Southeast Asia, more than 13,000 Kazakh students, 10,000 Kyrgyz students, nearly 4,000 Tajik, and 1,500 Turkmen students study in China every year.* The interest of youth in Central Asia to attend Chinese universities has been fostered by a combination of social, geographical and economic factors. In a region with high unemployment rates, China is hailed for its ability to provide high-level technical and scientific training and thereby open up promising career prospects, which the SREB is supposed to bring.

*Шустов v2018; Изимов 2014

5.3 Presenting China as an Alternative Development Model

Through the BRI, China has aimed to set itself up with its economic partners as a non-threatening and reliable partner. This policy has consisted first of using its status as a developing country to demonstrate engagement and solidarity with other developing countries or with countries in transition, and its contribution to local economic progress and local populations’ well-being. To that end, China, including through the SREB, has invested in Central Asia in economic sectors indispensable to the local development but where Western countries and companies have been reluctant to engage due, amongst other things, to the unfriendly business climate.

Second, China has sought to emerge as exemplifying an alternative economic model which advocates a “Beijing Consensus” versus a “Washington Consensus” at a time when “the underlying impact of the international financial crisis keeps emerging; the world economy is recovering slowly, and global development is uneven; and countries still face big challenges to their development.”* China has assigned itself a quasi-messianic function, responding to what it assumes are the expectations of politicians and scholars around the world who, focusing on what they perceive as the limitations of economic globalization under the impulse of neoliberalism and its alleged harmful effects on the sustainable development of the world, advocate finding alternative paths to globalization and new models of development. In many developing countries, China has been praised for having successfully resisted pressure from the World Bank and the IMF to privatize its state companies and drastically reduce its public spending. Instead, Beijing believes its policies have demonstrated its own ability to initiate substantive but progressive reforms while retaining control over its economy and preserving regime security. This approach has been attractive to other authoritarian regimes, who claim it is their right to conduct their economic policies according to their country’s own characteristics. The Chinese approach has also caught the interest of populations that were disappointed or impoverished by the liberal reforms introduced by international organizations in Central Asia and elsewhere. In Beijing’s narrative, “the BRI is becoming China’s approach to participate in global economic cooperation, improve models of global development and global governance, promote a healthy economic globalization, and build the community of shared future for mankind.”* The Chinese model has resonated somewhat in Central Asia: in a study conducted in Kazakhstan by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, a higher number of Kazakhstanis (9.5%) prefer the Chinese model of development to that of the United States.*

*Xi Jinping 2015

*Xi Jinping 2018

*FEF 2016: 158

5.4 Countering ‘Western-Centred’ Political Values and Promoting the ‘China Dream’

By making the BRI a symbol of the revival of the Silk Roads, whose historic and cultural heritage is supposedly shared by all countries around the world, Beijing intends to promote the ‘China Dream’⁷ (*Zhōngguó mèng*) to the international community. Used by the Chinese president for the first time in November 2012, this con-

⁷ Also translated as ‘Chinese Dream’ to contrast it to the ‘American Dream.’ (Mitchell 2017)

*Xing Li 2015: 513–516

*Hunter 2009: 388

*Shiyuan Hao 2018: 116

*Omelicheva 2015: 63

*Callahan 2015: 2

*Xinhuanet 2014

*Miller 2019: 28

*Islam 2019: 10

cept pledges to establish a community of common destiny among China and participating states* while asserting the necessity to take into account and accept different political and cultural paths on a global scale. The ‘China Dream’ is part of a Chinese narrative that advocates Asian values as a way of unifying states in the region and disparaging so-called Western values, such as democracy, universal human rights, or freedom of expression, as allegedly neither desirable nor globally transferable.* This approach is embodied in the narrative about the BRI presented as “respecting other nations’ choices pertaining to development, enhancing dialogues between different civilizations, seeking common ground while reserving differences.”* At the same time, China has preached a type of democracy merged with national characteristics, i.e. “with China characteristics,” including the single party system* and so-called Asian concepts such as family-centred stability. This approach has materialized in Central Asia as the development of diplomatic relations, support for local regimes’ authoritarianism, and “building the positive Chinese self through the negative exclusion of otherness.”* In other words, by campaigning to delegitimize so-called Western powers and values. The expected success of the BRI therefore is to become an essential instrument for Beijing to “participate and lead, make China’s voice heard, and inject more Chinese elements into international rules”* as well as to seek a “new type of great power relationship” and demand that China be treated as an equal.*

Finally, Beijing wants to make the ‘China Dream’ – and through it the BRI as well – a tool to legitimize its policies among its own population. It is seen as a major step towards regaining and amplifying national pride after the defeats and humiliations that followed the historical fall of the Silk Roads, ranging from the first Opium Wars (1839–1842) through the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945. It is presented as a nation rejuvenation program (民族振兴 – *mínzú zhènxīng*), a dream of the whole nation, as well as of every individual, supposed to bring to China civilizational prosperity, and able to mobilize the whole population under the flag of patriotism.* The ‘China Dream,’ and with it the BRI, therefore constitute a global concept that would meet the aspiration and achievements of the Chinese people, (人民幸福 – *rénmín xìngfú*) and create an osmosis between collective and individual interests, while justifying the pre-eminence of the former over the latter.

6. The Geopolitical Impact of the BRI

The amount of Chinese investment, the unprecedented scale of the SREB/BRI and its expected impacts are likely to shake up further the geo-economic and geopolitical context in Central Asia triggered by the fall of the Soviet Union and the exponential engagement of China. Since the 2000s, Beijing's economic involvement in Central Asia quickly outweighed other players in the region such as Turkey and Iran which, after Central Asian independence, were expected to play a major role in cultural, linguistic and religious links. Importantly, China has gradually questioned the leading role of Russia in the region. Moreover, with the SREB, China is supposed to succeed where other silk road projects or other analogous economic corridors have failed. Overall, through its long-term investments, a trend accentuated by the BRI, China has been able to fill a vacuum and invest in an economic and political space that most other players in the region have been unable to occupy due to lack of interest (India, Pakistan, USA) an inability to fund the necessary investments in Central Asia (USA, EU), or to political and economic setbacks (Russia).

China's growing influence in the region with the SREB has brought into question the role and influence of other players in a region which some, like Russia and India, consider to be their extended neighbourhood.* Some have seen the SREB as a chance to strengthen their own relations with the region. Iran and Pakistan, thanks to their geographical proximity and existing or planned direct transport connections, see in the SREB an opportunity to strengthen their economic ties with the region and hence increase their political influence, although for South Asian states, such perspectives remain hindered by the unstable political and security context in Afghanistan. Japan and Korea, which have strived to build economic relations with the region since the 1990s, could benefit from SREB corridors connecting China with Central Asia, although such a perspective might come up against the ambitions of China, which would be unlikely to let rival political and economic states prevail in the region. The SREB could therefore confirm a trend visible since the 2000s of other regional and Western players relegated to a secondary role and dwindling influence in the region.

Importantly, the SREB also calls into question the role of Russia, the main player in the region, and of the regional structures Moscow dominates, in particular the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU). The Kremlin at first perceived the initiative as a confir-

*Nag 2019: 175

*Gabuev 2015: 61-78

*Pomfret 2014: 57

mation of China's emerging rivalry and intention to pull the five Central Asian republics away from Russia's sphere of political and economic influence.* With the SREB, Beijing is also reclaiming an economic space that the EAEU was trying to return to the Russian fold. The SREB's regional and transcontinental dimension also takes a stance opposite to the ongoing criticism of the EAEU which, despite officially being a free-trade market, has imposed import duties on its external borders and therefore created a highly restrictive trade barrier for non-member states.* Finally, Moscow viewed the SREB as a threat to Russia's aspiration to serve as a bridge between Europe and Asia, in particular via the Trans-Siberian Railway development project, which is potentially challenged by Chinese-built roads and railways bypassing Russia via Central Asia.

Since 2015, however, the Kremlin has adopted a more conciliatory approach to China by attempting to synchronize the BRI with the EAEU and integrate the former into a vast 'great Eurasian partnership' project. The partnership stipulates the simplification and regulation of trade exchanges between the two structures and aims to eventually create a free-trade market involving bilateral and multilateral agreements at the regional level between members of the EAEU and SCO, as well as with the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) and with European Union countries.

Moscow's move towards the BRI stems from several pragmatic interests. In the two years following the announcement, the economic crisis in Russia, due to the fall in hydrocarbon prices and Western sanctions, has compelled the Kremlin to decrease or withdraw its investments abroad, including in Central Asia – which has diminished its credibility and regional influence. Moreover, several EAEU members, particularly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, have expressed increasing reservations about the less than expected impact of the EAEU on their economic development, on Moscow's one-sided decision-making within the organization, and on what they see as a closed structure that significantly impacts their trade with Beijing, which had become fundamental to the development of these bordering countries.

By framing its involvement according to criteria that could meet both Moscow and Beijing's interests, Russia has hoped to reduce the economic asymmetry with China and to exercise greater control over Chinese involvement and thereby preserve its own influence in the Eurasian space. Agreement also would be an opportunity to display Moscow and Beijing's ability to put aside their rivalry. For the Kremlin, the BRI is, however, likely to remain a China-domi-

nated initiative, based essentially on bilateral relations, concealing China's ambitions in Eurasia under the guise of multilateralism, and raising questions about cooperation between the two states, which is likely to be eroded by tensions and mistrust.*

*Коммерсантъ 2016

7. Conclusion

In the first three decades since the countries of Central Asia declared their independence, the numerous silk road and trade corridor projects initiated to restore the region to its 'historical' role as an economic crossroads and meeting point of civilizations have been viewed as tools meant to contribute to the region's development, to overcome the crises caused by the fall of the USSR, to rebalance the influence of actors in a region that for more than a century and a half was dominated by Russia, to develop and take advantage of the country's resources, and to open up investment and export opportunities. In addition, the hoped-for economic progress was also expected to become a source of stability in a volatile region, lying at the gates of even more volatile Afghanistan.

Most silk road projects have faced the constraints of *Realpolitik*, such as the need to obtain substantial funding to implement wide economic ambitions, the difficult conditions for attracting investment in the region, foreign countries' peripheral interests in the region that may be inconsistent with the involvement that such initiatives would require, and the geopolitical games between rival foreign states in the region. As a result, many silk road initiatives have not really been implemented in practice, sometimes appearing in an essentially rhetorical form that symbolizes for some, like the United States or Japan, their commitment to the region. While the development of some transcontinental corridors like CAREC are still underway, the restoration of the silk roads is today mainly embodied by the Chinese SREB initiative which, thanks partly to China's investment capacity and its growing influence in the region since the second half of the 2000s, has overshadowed all other similar initiatives.

Yet, China will have to demonstrate the sustainability of its initiative in the medium and long term. The SREB's success will rely on China's ability to realize the promised 'win-win' nature of the project, to ward off growing Sinophobic trends in the region, and to convince interested countries outside the region of the relevance and non-threatening nature of the Chinese concept of a 'community of shared future.'

The stakes related to the impact of the SREB in Central Asia are

part of a longer-term question that goes back to the impact of and local responses to Chinese investment since the 1990s, well before the announcement of the SREB by Xi Jinping in Astana (Nur-Sultan) in 2013. Significant Chinese involvement in the region through the SREB is not new, but rather feeds questions debated for years about China's involvement in the region. The sustainability and acceptance of the SREB by local stakeholders will depend on the capacity of the Chinese and Central Asian governments to counter the risk of pigeonholing the region into the role of a raw materials exporter to China, of an instrument for the development of Xinjiang, and of a recipient of the powerful Chinese manufacturing industry to the detriment of the development of local industry. In the event of debt distress, the economic autonomy of the states of the region could be weakened by increasing Chinese control over their economic resources and development. Moreover, China will have to demonstrate the social benefits allegedly brought by the SREB, such as the development of local employment, and to counter criticism that the Chinese silk roads are first and foremost a tool to address the overcapacity of Chinese companies as well as China's own domestic unemployment issues.

The alleged multilateral dimension of the BRI – which is supposed to secure balanced political and economic relations among all participating states – vs bilateral and hence unbalanced relations with China given its economic and demographic power, still needs to be demonstrated. With the SREB, China seeks to implement what it failed to within the framework of the SCO, i.e. to include the Eurasian space into a wider free trade area. This project had raised strong resistance from the Central Asian states and from Russia, which were worried about the risk of growing Chinese economic domination over the region through multiple bilateral political and economic agreements made under the guise of alleged SCO multilateralism.* These concerns are replicated in the SREB/BRI framework; although presented as a multilateral trading framework, the BRI has raised concerns that its formally multilateral framework is in reality a tool for Beijing to advance its interests through essentially bilateral activities.*

*Cooley 2012: 78-79

*Denisov 2020: 13; Li Xing 2019: 1-27

China, however, does not bear all the responsibility for the sustainability and impact of the SREB in Central Asia. Central Asian officials have a significant role to play in securing their fair sharing of the economic and social benefits, which could be brought by the Chinese initiative. In the context of neo-patrimonialism prevalent throughout the region, however, as Alexander Cooley has mentioned, "it is not clear why predatory elites and kleptocrats with

access to new sources of rent will productively invest these funds in regional follow-up entrepreneurial efforts rather than divert these revenue streams offshore.”*

*Cooley 2015

The very concept of the SREB raises wider economic questions. First, its proponents will have to demonstrate that creating economic corridors inspired by history can be adapted to the political and economic context of the 21st century, can generate the purported trade flows on an intracontinental scale from East to West and reciprocally, and can bring profits to the Central Asian States and raise the image of their assumed geographic position at the heart of the Eurasian continent. Should this not be the case, the development of land infrastructure, instead of being a significant game changer, could instead reinforce a paradigm which makes overland transportation networks essentially limited trade connections between inland areas of the post-Soviet region,* and which, in the Central Asian case, would serve mainly Chinese interests by connecting them to Xinjiang and hence be inconsistent with Beijing’s claimed objective of developing intracontinental trade.

*Vinokurov and Libman 2012: 94

Second, the SREB/BRI also raises questions about the relevance of a ‘big push,’ i.e. the assumed causal link between large-scale public investment on the one hand and development and growth on the other* as claimed by Chinese authorities. Some surveys have argued that there is only a weak and short-term association between investment spending and growth, with lagged impacts proving insignificant.* Moreover, and importantly, as argued by A. Presbitero, “investment and infrastructure projects are less likely to be successful when they are undertaken during periods of higher than average public investment.”* The BRI “big-push” approach, i.e. the connection of intensive investment in a short period of time with growth, still has to be demonstrated.

*Hurley et al. 2018: 4; Easterly 2001

*Warner 2014: 1

*Presbitero 2016: 30

Finally, while the Silk Roads were, to some extent, an area for the exchange of ideas and religious tolerance, Xi Jinping’s growing authoritarianism and denigration of human rights principles, including religious freedom, embodied for example by the repression of Islam and the creation of concentration camps in Xinjiang, significantly undermines the Chinese concept of the new silk roads as roads of tolerance, and raises questions about the political influence of China and the SREB on Central Asian political elites and societies. Beijing’s support for local authoritarianism might have a damaging effect on the future commitment of Central Asian states to the development of democracy and human rights through their participation in international organizations like the United Nations and the OSCE. Overall, the SREB, and more widely the BRI, raise

multidisciplinary questions, including political, economic, social and cultural questions to which China and other SREB proponents will have to respond, both at the global level and more specifically at the Central Asian regional level, to realize mutual benefits and the 'win-win' dimension of the initiative.

8. Bibliography

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9. Recommended Literature

James Millward's concise book is an excellent basis for understanding the historical background of the Silk Roads and how it reflects on the resurgence of the concept in the 21st century context, in particular as it relates to its Chinese variant. The volume, edited by J. Linn and L. Zucker, and the one by M. Laruelle, present a collection of articles which address multiple subjects related to the Chinese Silk Roads and will provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of specific questions discussed in this chapter, including the Central Asian perception of the SREB. For readers interested in more information on the debates over the impacts of the Silk Roads, E. Vinokurov and A. Libman's volume and Peyrouse and Raballand's paper address the potential economic fragilities of the concepts of Chinese or American continental silk roads. A. Cooley's paper includes the important but understudied political impact of the BRI project. The geopolitical dimension – in particular the reception of the project and its impact on Russia, and the engagement of actors like Japan – is very well debated in A. Gabuev's and in T. Dadabaev's articles.

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Sébastien Peyrouse (PhD), is a research professor at the Central Asia Program in the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (George Washington University). His main areas of expertise are political systems in Central Asia, economic and social issues, Islam and religious minorities, and Central Asia's geopolitical positioning toward China, India and South Asia. He has authored or co-authored several books on Central Asia such as *Turkmenistan. Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe), *The "Chinese Question" in Central Asia. Domestic Order, Social Changes, and the Chinese Factor* (London, New York: Hurst, Columbia University Press) and *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development* (Armonk: ME Sharpe), and published many articles, including in *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *China Perspectives*, *Religion, State & Society*, and *Journal of Church and State*.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

In the light of the various elements presented in the chapter, what are the main development, progress or risk factors of the SREB for the Central Asian economies and societies? Is the SREB and the influence of China a stabilizing or destabilizing factor?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Students should work in different groups to assess the positive and negative impacts of the SREB in Central Asia. Each group will address this issue from the point of view of different actors and therefore take into account the subjectivity that the SREB brings. The groups will then convene for a joint plenary discussion. Overall, the objective of this activity is to reflect on whether it is possible to reconcile the expectations, objectives, criticisms and contradictions of the different actors and, based on these conclusions, to what extent the BRI could be a win-win agreement, as claimed by China.

First, the teacher creates three groups. Each will be discussing the implementation and impact of the SREB in Central Asia from the point of view of a different actor or group of actors. This interaction can start with a form of in-group brainstorming (in this case, the teacher reminds the students that brainstorming consists of writing down all possible ideas, without selecting only the ones that seem 'correct' and rejecting the 'wrong' ones). Students are asked to write down the main ideas of their group (and being provided with a sheet of paper and markers or an editable online document to work on). They are also informed that each of them will be representing their group at a later stage.

- **Group 1** takes the perspective of the Central Asian political authorities and populations. Based on the chapter, this group lists what it considers to be the positive impacts of the SREB on Central Asia and, in their negotiations with Beijing, what should be the priority of SREB investments and commitments to respond to the economic and social problems facing the region. Secondly, the group lists what it considers to be the main risks of SREB, and possible ways to mitigate them – either through domestic measures, through negotiations with China, or with other foreign stakeholders.
- **Group 2** focuses on China's interests in Central Asia. In particular, it will attempt to assess whether China has the capacity to respond, and if so how, to the growing concerns expressed in Central Asia on the implementation of SREB, on possible economic imbalances, indebtedness, and how to improve its image in the region.
- **Group 3** should take the perspective of a third party. Since this handbook is part of a European project, we suggest focusing on the EU and how it perceives SREB in Central Asia. Does this third party actor see the SREB as an asset for the region, a development factor capable of contributing to its stability, or should it fear the influence of China in the region, and would it challenge the economic and political interests of Europe? What

economic, social and political role can Europe assert in Central Asia facing the Chinese presence as reflected by the SREB? How should the EU respond to this project?

A second step will be to bring the three groups together to compare their results and discuss to what extent the perceptions and objectives of the different actors are reconcilable, appear negotiable, or are contradictory, or even irreconcilable. This includes questions such as: can Central Asian states find strong enough partners in third-party actors to balance the negatives of SREB? Do they have the capacity to resist Chinese power, both in bilateral and multilateral relations? Such a discussion can take place in plenary (the whole class) or students can work first in small groups (each formed by representatives of previous groups 1, 2 and 3). The teacher will make the decision depending on their preferences and such factors as the overall class size and the time at their disposal.

CASE STUDY

To read the case studies for this chapter, go to CASE STUDY NO. 2 by Svetlana Gorshenina and CASE STUDY NO. 5 by Slavomír Horák.

ТАШКЕНТЪ.
TASCHKENT.

Окраина стар. города.
Périphérie de la vieille cité.

On the edges of the old city.

Ташкентъ. № 5.
Сартская арба въ старомъ городѣ.

Sart chariot in the old city.

CHAPTER 17

International Relations in Central Asia: A Focus on Foreign Policies (1991-2020)

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Keywords:

- Foreign Policy • International Relations • Globalization • Regional Integration
- Multi-vector Policy • Permanent Neutrality

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Describe the key elements of the Foreign Policies (FPs) of the five Central Asian states.
- Give arguments to explain specific choices of the five Central Asian states in their FPs, keeping in mind global, regional and domestic factors.
- Assess the impact of 9/11 on Central Asian FPs.
- List the main organizations and relevant issues on the regional level in Central Asia.
- Point out both reasons and difficulties for the regional integration of the Central Asian states.
- Discuss the impact of geographical isolation on the choice of FPs of the Central Asian states.
- Explain the role of the presidents in each Central Asian state since their independence.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- Who were the presidents of the five Central Asian states between 1991 and 2020?
- Who are the regional neighbours of the five Central Asian states?
- What are the natural resources and their extent in each country of Central Asia?
- What are the major turning points in world politics that have impacted the Central Asian states since their independence?

Main questions

- What have been the priorities of the US and EU in Central Asia since 1991? How would you compare their policies?
- How did Russian FP evolve after 1991?
- What are the priorities of Chinese FP in Central Asia?
- Which security issues dominate the IR in Central Asia?
- How do domestic issues impact Central Asian FP at the regional and global level?
- What do the multi-vector policies consist of? And the 'permanent neutrality'?
- What are the various constraints and the drivers that lead to the establishment of FPs in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- How does the issue of hydrocarbons and their transport condition the FPs of the Central Asian states (based on the examples of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan)?
- What are the key elements of each Central Asian country FPs?

Post-reading questions

- How can you estimate the impact of the Covid-19 health crisis on IRs in the five Central Asian countries? Will the consequences lead to more regional integration?
- What is the impact of the Afghan issue in the IRs of the five Central Asian states for the last decades?
- In your opinion, what has been the impact of the large number of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan on its FP for the last 30 years?
- How does civil society impact the FP choices of Central Asian states?
- What do you think about a possible impact of the Uyghur issue on the relations of the five Central Asian states with China?

International Relations in Central Asia: A Focus on Foreign Policies (1991-2020)

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THIS CHAPTER¹ describes how Central Asian states have entered the international community since the moment of their independence. It examines how each of them built its own foreign policy (FP) and entered into a dialogue with foreign partners from 1991 until 2020. What doctrines have been driving these states for thirty years? How can one explain these choices and analyse their consequences at various levels (global, regional, and domestic)?

Central Asia can be considered as a ‘laboratory’ for studying the reorganization of the Heart of Eurasia’s international relations² after each historical, economic and strategic upheaval that occurs in the region, century upon century up to now (see Chapter 15).

In fact, since the end of the USSR, we can read a large number of proposals, reflections, cross-studies to deal with the “strategic emptiness”^{*} that characterizes Central Asia, an area that reappears like a *terra incognita*, each time it leaves an imperial order under which it generally constituted a periphery, to return to a mosaic of quite antagonistic and landlocked states.³ This is the reason why it is also depicted as a “victim of its past, hostage of its future.”^{*} However, these new ‘nation-states’⁴ (created on the basis of Soviet national republics and their legacies), unexpectedly became inde-

^{*}Baumard 2012

^{*}Costa Buranelli 2014: 131

¹ The author would like to thank Florian Mattern, IFEAC intern, for language editing, and also expresses her gratitude to the IFEAC trainees who prepared these appendixes: Gabrielle Denis and Irène Hebrard for Box 17.1, Philippine Raphaneau for Box 17.2, and Mathilde Touretz for Box 17.3.

² International Relations (IR) will here be considered a branch of Political Science concerned with relations between nations and primarily with Foreign Policies Analysis (FPA). It consists of the scientific study of the international connections between the world’s sovereign states or nation-states, all activities existing between states and institutions on the international level, between international non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations.

³ A landlocked state is a country that does not have territory connected to an open sea or ocean, or whose coastlines lie on endorheic basins. This notion has important conceptual implications. (Tanaka 2015)

⁴ A nation-state is a sovereign state of which most of the citizens or subjects are united by factors which define a nation, such as language, common culture, values, patrimonial heritage. (Opello and Rosow 2004)

pendent in 1991 and had to quickly “build their future” to become part of the international community. To do so, they created and implemented foreign policies of their own. Consequently, their FP decision-making process will also have to account for this multi-causal basis.*

*Breuning 2007: 168

With the end of the Cold War and the reconfiguration of world order, the international community acknowledged the appearance of five new Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It was then urgent to integrate them into international organizations (IOs) and diplomatic frameworks where their respective FP would operate.

*Ripsman et al. 2016

In order to analyse how the Central Asian foreign policies were elaborated, this chapter relies on neo-classical realism.* This theoretical framework is most appropriate to deal with IR in the post-Soviet space in the context of their complete overhaul after 1991. It considers the main role of the state as a reference and highlights the linkage between internal characteristics (such as their leaders, foreign affairs ministers, and regimes – together their ‘Foreign Policy Executive’ – FPE) with the ways these countries conduct their military, diplomatic and economic policies.

A three-scale analysis allows us to go slightly beyond the ‘state-centred’ approach (which nevertheless appears mandatory for the study of the region) by introducing the global and regional context as well as the domestic factors at work (in Section 1). By doing so, the author will be able to go upstream of these formulations and ‘factual results’ of the Central Asian states’ FP in Section 2. Thus, she will try to explain their choices, main tendencies, preferences, the different options they have, and identify what actors are able to influence them. To achieve this, the author also applies Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to detect whether and how the weight of the identity, history, experience of their leaders, bureaucracy or civil society influence the conduct of their FP,* all these features being included in their ‘black box,’ which combine “rational and ideational variables.”*

*Alden and Aran 2017

*Juneau 2012

A multi-level study is indeed essential for understanding the FP and national strategies developed by Central Asian states in order to integrate world politics. This means highlighting the key moments for these states in their relations with global and regional actors over the past thirty years.

1. The Context Created by 'Great Gamers'

In December 1991, when the Soviet system collapsed, the international community acknowledged the appearance of five nation-states as a new political, strategic, and economic space called Central Asia, thus neighbouring China, Afghanistan, Iran, and the Russian Federation (the USSR successor state). This took place in a moment when world order was reshaping and Central Asia was seen as a buffer zone that had to be quickly secured.

Three months later, on 2 March 1992, with the help of Turkey, the five countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were granted a seat at the UN, a platform each of them would use on its own behalf, or jointly, with a single regional voice, depending on the circumstances.^{5*} They all joined the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* in 1992 (OSCE), as well as the NATO *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) in 1992 (a bilateral program) launched by the NATO's *Council of North Atlantic Cooperation* renamed *Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council* (EAPC) in 1997.*

*Costa Buranelli 2014

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012

Since then, these states have entered the globalized world and have thus experienced the accelerated circulation of ideas, people, capital and goods resulting from the improvement of transport and information technologies. But also, they have suffered like any other state, from domestic, regional, and global problems related to these circulations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, radical Islam, drug trafficking, etc.

In order to better structure the studied period, it will be divided into three phases and three turning points: the **1991-1999 decade** is mainly devoted to the global, local and domestic impact of the Soviet collapse along with its political, economic, social, and psychological consequences on the positioning of all actors. The **second decade** is intense at the global, regional, and national levels. It begins with September 11 ('9/11') as a major turning point, followed by the American military invasion of Iraq in 2003, continues with the 'Tulip revolution' in Kyrgyzstan and the events of Andijan in 2005, the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, and finally ends with the second Kyrgyz revolution of 2010. The **third decade** begins with social unrest in Kazakhstan during 2011 and the launch of the Chinese *One Belt One Road* initiative (BRI) in 2013, the creation of ISIL (ISIS) in 2014 as the second turning point, followed by the Russian

⁵ This comprehensive study by Filippo Costa Buranelli on a specific dialogue using the UN as a scene to express internal tensions among states is quite rare in the specialized literature. (Costa Buranelli 2014)

annexation of Crimea, the start of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, continues with the Covid-19 pandemic, and ends with the ‘third revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan at the end of 2020 presenting a third turning point. This chronological interlacing, mixing events on a global and domestic scale, constitutes the breeding ground in which the choices, and achievements by all the actors in their diplomatic, strategic and economic postures will be inscribed.

By presenting the evolution of the four main global powers’ strategies towards Central Asia,⁶ the author aims to portray the power relations as well as the constraints and agendas linked to the global context leading Central Asian States to build their FP.* The chapter defines these major powers as ‘great gamers’ in reference to the strategic rivalry between British and Russian empires for the control over the region in the 19th century (see Chapter 15). The author identifies and treats them as follows:

- The **USA**, as the (global) hegemonic power which very much benefited from the collapse of the USSR.
- The **Russian Federation**, as the region’s historical tutelary power since the Tsarist colonization, with the Soviet regime subsequently holding sway over the region.
- The **People’s Republic of China (PRC)**, as the rising power and close neighbour looking to secure its transit infrastructure to the West.
- The **European Union (EU)**, as a generous donor, which did not invest to promote its local image until recently, now trying to provide Central Asian states with an alternative political model to those of China and Russia.

Numerous state actors in the field of IR rushed into Central Asia and sought to position themselves correctly after 1991, aiming at exerting political influence and accessing new markets. These actors include major powers mentioned above, but also middle-size ones (Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and other Middle Easter Muslim states). Non-state actors invested the region as well, such as financial institutions (IMF, World Bank, EBRD, AfDB), multinational corporations (Indian Mittal for steel production, American Chevron in the oil sector,

⁶ For a while, the English-speaking literature focused more on their strategy *vis-à-vis* Central Asia states than the other way round. (Jackson 2010; Kavalski 2012; Lewis 2012; Warkotsch 2007)

Canadian Centerra Gold for mining, South Korean Daewoo in the car industry, etc.). Many international non-state actors⁷ similarly got involved (e.g. Soros Open Society), including new religious movements, such as evangelists or Tablighi Jamaat (see Chapter 7). They needed to adapt to versatile local conjunctures, while following their own agenda, continuously negotiating with a “new-old” elites on which they strive to implement a ‘soft power’⁸ toolkit.* Elites are both “new and old” because political and economic leaders were often already at high positions before 1991 but then suddenly gained international importance and recognition, after having been limited to inner Soviet power struggles during the USSR.

*Nye 2005; 2011

1.1 The USA and Central Asia: Back and Forth

The United States, the only remaining superpower after the fall of the USSR, had to demonstrate its interest towards a region adjoining China to the East, Afghanistan and Iran to the South, and Russia to the North.* This was a crucial momentum for gaining a foothold in a so far relatively inaccessible strategic space (from the point of view of the US), exactly at a time when the internet spread out across the whole world. In this regard, the development of digital infrastructures and the dissemination of ideas through these networks initially served US influence well.

*Brzezinski 2012

For three decades, American FP to Central Asia has been characterized by finding a balance between the advantages of its geo-strategic location, the attractivity of its economic potential, and its own democracy-promoting agenda.* This period can be divided into two phases: the first one from 1991 to 2001, where energy security was crucial, then a second phase starting after 9/11, much more focused on the ‘War on Terror’ launched by George W. Bush, giving southern parts of Central Asia a major strategic importance, considering its borders with Afghanistan.

*Brzezinski 2012; Yazdani 2007

During this first period, three objectives were pursued by the United States: to manage the Soviet legacy of nuclear weapons kept within the borders of Kazakhstan, to help the young Central Asian

⁷ Non-state actors include organizations and individuals that are not affiliated with the government or funded through its structure. These include corporations, private financial institutions, and NGOs, as well as paramilitary and armed resistance groups.

⁸ Soft power is defined as “the ability to influence others through the attraction of culture, values, and policies.” (Roselle and Miskimmon 2014: 72) Although theorized in the 1990s by Joseph Nye, this practice has been widespread since at least the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648 and the creation of the concept of State. (Nye 2005)

Box 17.1 The Caspian's 'Special Legal Status' – Neither Lake nor Sea?

Together with the Ferghana Valley, the Caspian is one of the most important economic hubs in Central Asia. With its hydrocarbons and caviar, it attracts both foreign investors and Western governments. The Caspian Sea today faces multiple challenges, such as environmental problems that are likely to increase with the ever-quicken pace of its hydrocarbon extraction, and have shown dramatic growth rates since the 1990s.

On top of this, the fall of the Soviet Union has also affected and complicated the governance of this water body. While only two countries bordered the Caspian in the Soviet era (Iran and the USSR), there are five today (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan), and finding a consensus among them has been challenging: disagreements in the post-Soviet era were rooted in the legal qualification of this body of water: Is it a 'lake' or a 'sea'? Over twenty years of negotiations were necessary to fill the Caspian's gaping legal void. On 12 August 2018, the five littoral states signed the *Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea* in Aktau, Kazakhstan, where they opted for a 'special legal status,' rendering the Caspian neither sea nor lake.

The Caspian has thus been largely preserved as a shared area, with its seabed and underwater resources spread across the five countries. If the five states had opted for the 'sea' status, the Caspian would have been divided into national sectors, as required by the *Law of the Sea* codified in the 1982 Montego Bay Convention. If the 'lake' status had been retained, the exploitation of resources would have required common decision-making. As it stands, the 2018 Convention establishes the Caspian's 'special legal status' and may serve as a basis for the resolution of existing and potential territorial conflicts between the signatory states, but this lack of status does not provide for a clear partition of the waters and its resources.

The significance of the treaty is manifold. Its political, economic, and environmental implications should be considered. First, in political terms, the five littoral states have explicitly exempted themselves from international legal provisions, and thus allowed themselves to continue exploiting hydrocarbons on their own terms. In fact, the 2018 Convention would potentially allow Turkmenistan to build its long-awaited subsea pipeline. While that project was previously opposed by Russia and Iran, the Convention has opened new perspectives for its implementation, as only those states that are territorially involved in projects – in the case of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan – may now voice their concerns over exploitation modalities.

Russia and Iran's historic domination over the exploitation of the Caspian's resources would thus seem to be waning. Nevertheless, the treaty has been hailed as a diplomatic success in Russia. As the financial viability of the Turkmen-Azeri pipeline project appears more and more questionable, it would seem that signing the treaty was a mere demonstration of good will at little to no expense for Moscow. Moreover, the Convention allows Russia to consolidate its military presence – if not outright dominance – in the region, as it forbids third countries to establish military bases on the Caspian.

Beyond the five littoral states, the treaty is of great geopolitical significance to the EU, whose energy supply could be significantly diversified with the

transcaspian pipelines projects. The European Commission has gone so far as to designate the Turkmen-Azeri project as a 'Project of Common Interest' and finance preliminary research. Second, the economic implications of the treaty may be measured through the number of projects implemented since its signature. Paradoxically, projects currently under implementation are not related to the hydrocarbon sector; they rather involve subsea fibre-optic cables, scientific cooperation, and anti-poaching strategies. In particular, two subsea fibre-optic cable projects aim to better connect Asia to Europe through the digital grid; one is being implemented by Azerbaijan (*AzerTelecom*) and Kazakhstan (*Transtelecom* and *KazTransCom*), and the other by *AzerTelecom* with Turkmenistan's *Turkmen-tel*. Both projects aim to strengthen the domestic digital markets around the Caspian and attract foreign investments in non-oil sectors. By contrast, it seems unlikely that the notorious pipeline projects will see any light of day in the near future, in large part due to their questionable financial viability.

Also, there is considerable room for improvement as regards to the Convention's environmental implications. Industrial pollution caused by hydrocarbon exploitation and its implications for flora, fauna, and water levels are not addressed in the text. Although the convention protects beluga whales through fishing quotas, seals do not benefit from any kind of protection despite their status as 'endangered,' and 'bloodied' waters continue to frighten local residents on a yearly basis. (The water changes colour to a bright red as a result of algae overpopulation, caused by the rapid reproduction of these unicellular bacteria).

Contribution by: Gabrielle Denis and Irène Hebrard (i.c.w. IFEAC).

states to secure their territorial integrity, and to reorganize the pipelines and transit routes from Central Asia in order to escape Russian dependence.* Progressively, the US clearly identified Kazakhstan as an essential partner, despite its competition with neighbouring Uzbekistan for regional leadership and capital flow. The US appreciated the flexible attitude of the Kazakhstani elite towards Western investors, as well as their willingness to cooperate in the denuclearization process. Moreover, as a supplier for raw materials, Kazakhstan became very attractive to American multinational corporations such as Chevron or ExxonMobil.

*Rumer et al. 2016

A major step was made when members of Congress were persuaded about the importance of Central Asia and the Caspian Basin (see also Box 17.1), defining it as a "priority area of interest," which is clearly stated in the Silk Road Strategy Act voted in 1999.* The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 was subsequently updated in 2006 and later replaced by the New Silk Road Initiative in 2011. However, a few months before 9/11, there was a position put forward by several American policy advisors, who kept urging that the US should not limit its role in Central Asia to peacekeeping and

*Rakhimov 2015

conflict prevention activities. They successfully argued that NATO had to be convinced to focus beyond Afghanistan, by looking up North and extending missions to the Caucasus and Central Asia, which would lead to the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Centrasbat (a Central Asian Battalion created for joint peacekeeping/humanitarian military exercises).

1.2 The 9/11 Trauma: A Global Turn

The USA completely changed its position towards Central Asia after the events of 9/11, which marked a turning point in global politics, with its effects felt in Eurasia. This led to the decision, with the approval of Russia, to open American military bases in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan between September and October 2001. For a moment, Central Asia became a crucial region of interest for the USA, but after getting their military bases, Americans did not get involved much in local politics. They were much more concerned with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan under the frame of operation Enduring Freedom, as well as tracking down Bin Laden. This situation lasted differently depending on the country but came to an end with the closure of all American bases in Central Asia (2005 in Uzbekistan, 2014 in Kyrgyzstan).

Little by little, since the, American influence stagnated in Central Asia, notably after the “colour revolutions” (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan) were attributed to US actors by national leaders. This also coincides with the obsession over the global threat of terrorism playing a key role in the US FP.* This trend increased with the rise of the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) since 2014, whose emergence is also sometimes attributed as a result of American FP by some of Central Asian citizens or leaders,⁹ even if recent interviews conducted with ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ who departed from Kyrgyzstan and finally came back, show on the contrary, that their motivations are mostly linked to the willingness to help fellow Muslims oppressed in Syria.*

*Ashraf and Aslanova 2021

Another important moment is the financial crisis of 2007-2008, which saw the explosion of the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States, before leading to global financial shock undermining confidence in most economies of the world, including those of developing countries.* As stated by Richard Pomfret, the Central Asian national economies were “not integrated into the global economy in a particularly complex way,” despite their openness.* The most affected country was Kazakhstan, which suffered from internal banking problems derived from the burst of the housing market bubble, especially in Astana and Almaty. Other states were

*Subbarao 2008

*Pomfret 2009

⁹ Author’s direct field observations (2016-2020).

less affected, especially Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, because of their limited connection with global markets. The situation was worse in Kyrgyzstan, where the economy depends much more on Kazakhstani banks. In Uzbekistan, the conservative approach of the National Bank, quite isolationist, insulated this financial sector.

The year 2014 represents the second milestone for American policy in Central Asia, more particularly with the start of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 did not have much of an impact on Central Asia despite the drastic changes in White House policy towards Iran. In addition, the *US Agency for International Development* (USAID) is still very active, with the United States being a major donor to Kyrgyzstan.*

*Mallet 2019

The aftermath of the situation Central Asian states faced during the Covid-19 pandemic raised the lack of resurgent US influence through economic and health aid aimed at rebuilding damaged local economies.

The *United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025*, issued in February 2020 to promote stability and economic prosperity in the region, appears to be the last official document inspiring FP towards Central Asia for the US. President Biden's announcement on April 13, 2021, regarding the final withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan (symbolically set for 11 September 2021) is likely to cause serious turmoil. Yet, according to some Russian experts on Afghanistan, the forthcoming departure of US troops does not necessarily mean the end of American presence, as negotiations are ongoing about possible new bases in the region.¹⁰

1.3 The Comeback of Russia

The evolution of the Russian FP toward Central Asia between 1991 and 2020 is well documented.* One can define two time periods: one under Russian leader Boris Yeltsin, and a second under Vladimir Putin's presidency (Dmitry Medvedev's office did not influence FP that much). Between 1991 and 1999, under Yeltsin, Russia consciously ceded influence in Central Asia, because such presence was considered too expensive for its budget.* The creation of the *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO) signed in 1992 in Tashkent between the Russian Federation, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and a year later joined by Belarus, represents a minimal basis to hold ground in the region.

*Kazantsev 2008; Freire 2009

*Zvyagelskaya 2004

¹⁰ Author observations from the (online) international roundtable at the University of St-Petersburg, titled: "Central Asia: Security problems in the context of the long term Afghan conflict," on 22 April 2021.

Box 17.2 The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO: 上海合作组织 - Шанхайская организация сотрудничества), or Shanghai Pact, is the largest regional institution in the world. The SCO was formed in 2001 from earlier the Shanghai Group (1996) bringing China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and (later) Uzbekistan together in order to develop a transborder mutual alliance with aims of safeguarding their shared borders and reinforce antiterrorism cooperation. Thanks to its joint efforts, regional stability and security have greatly increased. Exchanges between adherents are equally highly increasing. Gradually, the organization has shifted its agenda onto economic and cultural cooperation, which has resulted in them having a combined GDP of 12.6 billion dollars in 2017. The “Shanghai spirit,” its fundamental principle, based on ‘mutual trust, reciprocal benefits, equality, consultation, respect and pursuit of common development goals,’ has been at the heart of their successful work. Their openness and eagerness to collaborate with other regional suitors has led them to accept India and Pakistan within their members in 2017 at the initiative of Russia which attempted to balance China’s rising influence. Other countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus, Mongolia have observer status. The SCO’s main overarching ideal is to advocate a multipolar world to counter the idea of a world dominated by the USA alone, the West has been critical of SCO activities, because they enshrine and cement authoritarian values in the region.

Contribution by: Philippine Raphaneau (i.c.w. IFEAC).

With the advent of Yevgeny M. Primakov at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1996, “the defense of post-Soviet space” rhetoric surfaced along with the idea of resorting to multilateralism¹¹ to counter American hegemony after the Cold War. The election of president Vladimir Putin in March 2000, also marked the desire to re-establish Russia as a great power through economic modernization and the use of realism and pragmatism in all fields, including IR. * From that moment, President Putin frequently reasserted Central Asia as Russia’s natural sphere of influence due to its vital strategic importance to national interests, thus extending the Kozyrev doctrine of the ‘near abroad,’ (*ближнее зарубежье* – *blizhneye zarubezh’ye*), a space over which Russia must keep on exercising its grip, as a natural zone of influence, in line with its geo-ideology of

*Kazantsev 2008

¹¹ Multilateralism, as opposed to unilateralism, is a form of association of three partners or more in IR. It allows small actors to be heard, beside great powers, suitable in a more and more complex world. This doctrine got an increased audience since the second half of the twentieth century. It is useful to note that this is also a doctrine defended by the American geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski.

neo-Eurasianism (see also Chapter 15). This is the reason why, after 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, some Central Asian leaders such as Kazakhstan's N. Nazarbayev came to realize Russia's ability to threaten their domestic interests: suddenly the Russian diaspora became worrisome (again), leading to tactical support from Central Asian governments to nationalist groups pushing for traditionalist agendas: the 550th anniversary of Kazakh 'statehood' celebrated in 2015 epitomizes this trend.

At the same time, the Russian Federation has forged an alliance of interest with China, through the 2001 transformation of the Shanghai Forum (from 1997) into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO – see Box 17.2), advocating for a 'multipolar world' to counter American dominance. The 2014 turning point in Russian FP (marked by the annexation of Crimea) was followed by Western economic sanctions, and led Moscow to push for closer ties with Central Asian countries, through regional cooperation (cf. Eurasian Economic Union – EAEU) and security dialogue with China. This situation lasted at least until 2017 when the Russian side realized that the intensified security policy of the PRC would come at the expense of Russian interests in the region.* Thereafter, the Kremlin invited India and Pakistan as new members of the SCO in order to mitigate Chinese influence.

*Jardine and Lemon 2020

Russia strives to retain its influence in Kyrgyzstan through its airbase in Kant, located 50 km northeast of Bishkek. Russia also forged a major partnership with Tajikistan during the civil war (1992-1997). In addition, it has remained closely linked to Turkmenistan in order to benefit from preferential gas rates for as long as possible. In three decades, these rates have fluctuated a lot and clients also varied (Ukraine, China). Finally, the Russian Federation had to develop an essential collaboration with Kazakhstan in order to delimit their 7591 km of common border, with its first agreement in January 2005, its first border marker placed on May 2009, this demarcation should take ten to fifteen years to be completed. The Baikonur Cosmodrome (rocket launch site), being a Russian enclave, is also a crucial issue (with long-term agreement signed in 2004 until 2050)

Russia's economic links with Central Asia remain very strong, based on various infrastructure projects such as the *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation* (CAREC) Corridor 3, also known as the "Bishkek-Osh Road," funded by the *Asian Development Bank* (ADB). It connects Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to Russia in the North, and Afghanistan in the South. The creation of the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) which includes

*Rakhimov 2015

Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, in 2014, with Commission headquarters located in Moscow, also demonstrates the Russian Federation's willingness to retain power in much of the post-Soviet space, trying to counter the rise of the Chinese influence.

Russian soft power in Central Asia is also deeply rooted in cultural-linguistic proximity resulting from decades of Tsarist and then Soviet rule over the region, especially in spheres of media, TV and Internet throughout Central Asia.* Moreover, the presence in Russia of around ten million seasonal migrant workers from Central Asia has been a sensitive topic of bilateral relations for each Central Asian countries with Russia (see also Chapter 21 on Migration). In 2019, out of these migrants, 3.4 million were officially registered and the rest was considered illegal.* This phenomenon underlines a form of interdependence between the former empire and its peripheries: These migrant workers are crucial for the Russian economy – in which they occupy certain specific niches by providing cheap and exploitable labour force (agriculture, construction, transport). But they are important as well for their respective countries of origin: according to official data, almost 50% of Tajik GDP and 35% of Kyrgyz GDP is provided by remittances.* The figures reach almost 18% for Uzbekistan. This situation was disrupted twice: First by the effect of Western sanctions against Russia after 2014, then even more so because of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak since Spring 2020. Millions of unemployed migrants had to return back home and still experienced difficulties going back to Russia one year later, in Summer 2021.

Regarding other social linkages, the number of students from Central Asia studying in Russia has been on the rise, reaching already 57,300 in 2011-2012, with 28,300 among them coming from Kazakhstan.* This contributes to Russian influence in the region in line with the “Russian World” (*Русский мир – Russkiy mir*) program, which includes “cultural, linguistic, values and religious orientations.”* On 15 October 2020, the Russian Federation proposed a new dialog format for its Central Asian strategy called “Central Asia+ Russia.”* In this context, Russia and China are now competing. The usual division between Russia playing a role in security issues and China focusing on the economy is fading.*

1.4 The Chinese Strategy: between Consistency and Perseverance

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a direct neighbour to three Central Asian countries (out of five). The Chinese strategy towards

the region has proved very coherent over the past three decades. It revolves around three main actions:

1. Settling border disputes
2. Supporting authorities to fight the 'three evils' as described by the Chinese authorities (extremism, terrorism, and separatism) which extend to the Uyghur crisis and the Taiwanese question
3. Consolidating economic ties through: free trade zones, significant investment in infrastructure development, and financial loans to governments

However, there still remains a complex 'Chinese question,'* articulating the reactivation of ancient vassal relations* and ambient Sinophobia: anti-China protests have occurred regularly in Kazakhstan (2016, 2019, 2021) and there was also a bombing at the PRC embassy in Kyrgyzstan (2016).

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012

*Swanström 2004

The formation of the *Shanghai Group* in 1996, later transformed into the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO – see Box 17.2), which brings together China, Russia and the countries of Central Asia (except for Turkmenistan), was promoted as a new opportunity of accrediting the concept of a multipolar world, a counterweight for Western influence. The 'Shanghai spirit' therefore induces a non-interference of SCO members in their respective domestic affairs. Other macro-regional heavyweights were later added to the club, such as India and Pakistan in 2017, along with several observers (Mongolia in 2004, Iran in 2005, Afghanistan in 2012 and Belarus in 2015).

China's Foreign Policy differs according to the countries of Central Asia,* but it pursues one goal, spreading its soft power based on economic capacities and cultural assets.* In this regard, China seeks to attract Central Asia's students, partly to counter Western influence. The number of Central Asian students in China is steadily growing.* As put by Thierry Kellner, this is "the quiet rise of China in Central Asia" considering its exit from marginality, now occupying the centre of the regional scene.* Finally, with Xi Jinping coming to power in the PRC, Central Asian political leaders have started to question the 'mutual' benefits of such developmental support,* mainstreamed since its 2013 launch into the gigantic program called *One Road, One Belt* (OBOR), now more often referred to as the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), intended "to increase regional trade, ensure energy security and guarantee Beijing's regional influence" – see also Map 16.1 and 16.2 and Chapter 16 for more on the controversial issue of loans and debts.

*Niquet 2006

*Clément 2019

*Sadovskaya and Utyasheva 2018: 118

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009;
Kellner 2007; 2016

*McBride 2015

Moreover, for nearly thirty years, China has ensured its energy security through bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan for both oil and gas (a 30-year agreement was signed with president Niyazov shortly before he died in 2006). The same approach applies in relations with Uzbekistan for gas only (granted in 2017 with the status of “most favoured nation treatment”), backed by major projects such as the “Uzbekistan-China” gas pipeline (also: *Central Asia-China pipeline* – cf. Map 16.2) jointly operated by *Chinese National Petroleum Company* (CNPC) together with *Uzbekneftegaz*. Similar deals have been closed with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan regarding electricity.

Nevertheless, the main gas provider for China became Turkmenistan in 2009, to the point where – in 2019 – the PRC was almost the only client for Turkmen gas exports. Thanks to its early acceptance within WTO in 1998, Kyrgyzstan has come to be considered an ‘economic hub’ by China. This allows for the re-export of products from the PRC to other WTO members, notably through the Dordoy Bazaar, located in the Bishkek suburbs (cf. Chapter 22). The scheme has been deeply affected by the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the EAEU in 2015 (see Box 17.3).

China also maintains solid economic links through the Kazakh development project *Nurly Zhol* or ‘Luminous Path,’ tied to the BRI since 2015. It has developed Special Economic Zones, such as the ‘dry port’ of Khorgos in Kazakhstan, which acts as a gateway to Europe for China.

Last but not least, the PRC conducts a less conditional investment policy, in comparison to the EU (no reforms attached): 2% or 3% loans are easy to get in order to implement “large and medium-sized infrastructure projects generating both economic and social benefits for the recipient country.”* As a result, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have become heavily indebted to the PRC National Bank (see Section 2 below).

It remains under question whether the economic and psychological cost of the Covid-19 pandemic will impact Chinese projects in Central Asia, even if the PRC tried to avoid international blame thanks to its ‘vaccine diplomacy.’*

*Hai Tian 2018: 23

*Smith 2021

1.5 The European Union in Quest of a Proactive Strategy in Central Asia

The EU hesitated for a long time before stabilizing a clear strategy towards Central Asia. Although it has brought significant funding in support of many structural reforms since 1991 (TACIS, TRACECA, TEMPUS, *Erasmus*, *Erasmus+* programs since 2014), the European Union suffered from a lack of visibility as a single

donor structure, while it was at times even the most generous. In June 2007, a common strategy for Central Asia was formulated for the first time, with the concept of EU as a single actor.* Since then, specific policy instruments financing reform projects in various sectors such as the rule of law (human rights, legal norms, civil society), public administration, agriculture, health, environment, and also culture and education, were acclaimed by local partners who deployed a great deal of know-how in order to win the calls for tenders.*

*Warkotsch 2010

*Казанцев 2009

At the same time, the EU has promoted numerous investments in the field of energy and transport thanks to the activities of the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (EBRD). For example, the EU is the main trading partner of Kazakhstan (40% of its foreign trade) and the number one foreign investor in the country (60% of FDI).

More recently, the EU strategy was updated. During his 2018 speech on the State of the Union, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker called for the EU to act as one on the world arena, defend democratic values and turn its back on poisonous nationalism. "We will always be a global payer but it is time we started being a global player too." These statements were concretely incorporated in the new EU strategy, presented in Bishkek in July 2019, by Frederica Mogherini in person (then acting as the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy). In this new strategy, the EU takes stock of other major geopolitical and economic actors that exercise their influence in the region (Russia, China and the USA) and identifies preferred areas of intervention.* Among the priorities of the EU in the region, the transition to a green and diversified economy, as well as the creation of more efficient regulatory system in the field of services, security, connectivity and e-government play a key role.

*Gussarova and Andžāns 2019

The region's proximity with Afghanistan is a real concern for the EU,¹² several cooperation programs are set up in this area to manage borders (BOMCA), regulate drug trafficking in particular (CADAP), to train people in the field of counter-terrorism (LEICA) and ultimately contribute to bringing peace and stability in the region.¹³ For instance, the EU is promoting specific trilateral (EU-Afghanistan-Central Asia) cooperation programs (involving

¹² Several EU members, such as France, Germany or Italy have a long-term collaboration with Afghanistan. For instance, in 2022 Afghanistan and France celebrate a hundred years of cultural collaboration in the field of archaeology.

¹³ *Border Management Programme in Central Asia* (BOMCA); *Central Asia Drug Action Programme* (CADAP); *Law Enforcement in Central Asia* (LEICA).

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) e.g. for the emancipation of Afghan women through education. Generally speaking, a sustained dialogue between the countries of the region is crucial to the European FP in Central Asia: in official documents, it is repeatedly presented as necessary to foster dialogue between the five countries.¹⁴ The issues relating to the environment and human security in particular are targeted in this respect.*

*Hébrard 2019

1.6 Middle Powers in Central Asia

Beyond the obvious competition between global players, other state actors are highly active in the region: some are almost neighbours, some could seem less evident to the non-specialists, but they remain crucial in order to better understand all interests at stake. The literature about these regional middle powers is quite rich.

Turkey reacted quickly in the early 1990's to the advent of the post-Soviet Central Asian states. At first, Turkish leaders had great strategic, political and economic ambitions but had to revise them later.* Indeed, the US encouraged Turkey to fill the geopolitical vacuum left by the end of the USSR in order to avoid Iran's breakthrough. The country branded itself in the region as an experienced elder brother capable of showing Central Asian states their way on the world arena. Both public and private Turkish actors were rapidly settled in the region and their presence, in the early 1990's, was very perceptible in the trade, banking, education and religious sectors.

*Bal 2008

In 1992, the Turkish government had established the *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency* (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı* – TİKA) to develop a strong collaboration with Central Asia. Since then, a lot of Turkish goods were available in Central Asian bazaars, sometimes introduced locally by informal commercial routes that escaped taxes, known as the “suitcase trade.” Beside these activities, in 1993, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey have established the *International Association of Turkish Culture* (TURKSOY) to promote their cultural exchanges. One year before, the Turkish education ministry had launched an initiative known as the ‘Big Student Project’ to simplify the integration process into Turkish universities for students coming from Central Asia. In addition, Ankara has established two Turkish-speaking universities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan which were still active in 2021 and a network of high schools in all Central Asian republics (closed in Uzbekistan after a few years, then later in Turkmenistan.*

*Balci 2003

¹⁴ Turkmenistan's ‘permanent neutrality’ prevents it from joining such forums.

Ankara has also tried to appear as the leader of a new Turkic international organization, even if nowadays Kazakhstan is more dynamic, economically speaking.¹⁵ Summits gathering Turkic heads of states were organized, the first one taking place in 1992 in Ankara. Later on, in 2006, under the aegis of Kazakhstani president Nazarbayev, the idea to transform such consultations into a circle of “Turkic-speaking states” resulting in the 2009 creation of the *Turkic Council (Türk Keneşi)* or *Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (CCTSS)*.

In the religious sphere, Turkey's FP is multifaceted and has been favoured by a range of public and private actors. The main public actor is the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), functioning quite as a Ministry of Religious Affairs. For historical reasons, it was a minor player in Turkey's FP for quite some time. Today, it shows a significant presence in Central Asia through education, by building mosques and distributing religious literature. As for the non-state religious movements, four spiritual leaders operate in Central Asia: Osman Nuri Topbaş, Süleyman Tunahan, Saït Nursi and the most important, Fethullah Gülen who was running influential educative organizations in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan collaborating with Turkish businessmen. So far, Turkish influence in Central Asia is more seen in terms of soft power or by its visibility in the landscape (e.g. the recent great mosque of Bishkek, but also universities, schools, etc.), than through direct investments. The internal rift between the Turkish ruling power and the influential Fethullah Gülen in Central Asia,* which intensified from 1992 until 2013, has caused damage to Turkey's cooperation model. Nevertheless, Turkey remains a provider of jobs for Central Asian migrants and a vacation destination for Central Asian middle-class tourists.

*Balci 2003; Hendrick 2013

Iran tried to take advantage of the collapse of Soviet Union to set a new FP directly devoted to increasing its influence over Central Asia. Iran, bordering Turkmenistan, ensures the territorial connection of Central Asia with the Middle or Near East. So far, Turkmenistan has been the main receptacle of Iranian economic influence, mostly limited to the oil and gas sectors, but also in infrastructure projects. Suffering from a negative image on the international scene, even in parts of the Muslim world, Iran was forced to reduce its ambitions in the field of religious activism, as Central Asia is mostly Sunni-oriented. Nevertheless, Iran exerted some political influence in Tajikistan (having a Shia minority – see

¹⁵ According to World Bank data, Kazakhstan had a \$9,731 GDP per capita in 2019, higher than Turkey's GDP (\$9,042).

also Map 7.1) during the civil war, acting as a mediator for inter-Tajik negotiations. Iran's relations at the highest level with Kazakhstan are excellent, based on good mutual understanding in the economic field and the crucial question of the legal status of the Caspian Sea (see Box 17.1). On the other hand, diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan have always been difficult, despite repeated visits by Iranian officials.

Regardless, the past three decades have yielded meagre economic results, because of two mutually reinforcing factors: on the one hand the sanctions against Iran, the cause of its diplomatic and economic isolation, and on the other hand, the geopolitical competition for influence in Central Asia – a structurally dependent region in which such a country as Iran lacks financial or commercial means and religious proximity. However, Iranian diplomacy maintains an optimistic speech and has been pushing for its accession as a full member of the SCO since 2008,* continuing to put emphasis on security cooperation and investment needs in the region.* Iran has embassies in all five Central Asian countries, but still faces stiff competition from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries of the Middle East such as Qatar.*

*Scita 2018

*Zarif 2017

*Beaud 2019

Other Middle Eastern Muslim states, although dealing differently with Central Asia than Turkey or Iran, are definitely interested in accessing these markets and are lobbying for Islamic revivalism. Thus, Iraq was courting the new republics from 1 January 1992; Egypt recognized Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan on 22 January the same year (and later created an Islamic Institute in Almaty). Saudi Arabia recognized Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on 23 February, and Bahrain Turkmenistan on 25 February; Libya did the same with Kazakhstan on 13 March, whereas Syria sent diplomatic delegations to Central Asia on 25 March 1992. During the past three decades, various Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE exerted political and spiritual influence on Central Asia. Beside numerous investments in the energy sector, finances, infrastructure or religion spheres, they also actively compete for academic influence and humanitarian aid, building hospitals for example.*

*Haddad and Hachem 2019

South Korea has specific ties with Central Asia, notably because of the 1937 deportation (under Stalin) of 127,000 Soviet Koreans, mostly from the regions of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk (see also the Buddhist minority on Map 7.1). This tragedy, 60 years later, opened a window of opportunity for South Korean entrepreneurs who

rapidly connected with this very active diaspora (almost 250,000 people in Central Asia, called the Koryo-mar), located mostly in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

During the first two decades, South Korea initiated many economic, political, and cultural projects in Central Asia, trying to act as a regional and even global player with significant results after twenty years.* South Korea aims to develop bilateral and regional relations such as the 'Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum,' a dialogue platform launched in 2007. Despite the pandemic, it hosted its 13th summit in Seoul on 25 November 2020, chaired by MFA Kang Kyung-wha in the presence of his counterparts from the five Central Asian countries. Korean strategy aims at decreasing the region's dependence on China and the USA.

*Fumagalli 2012

With Uzbekistan, bilateral trade volume rose 27% in 2019 as compared to 2018. Partnerships with Japan and Korea have an estimated impact of 40,000 jobs created, and generate \$1.14 billion in exports. In 2016, South Korea invested \$4 billion in the *Ust-Yurt Gas Chemical Complex* project, a 50-50 joint venture between *UzbekNeftGaz* and a consortium of three major Korean investors (*Lotte Chemical, Korea Gas Corp, GS E&R*).

*IFEAC 2020a

With Kazakhstan, South Korea has signed a new program called 'Fresh Wind' in 2019, aimed at broadening the range of cooperation between the two countries. In 2018, the incomes related to bilateral trade reached \$2.2 billion. South Korean investors have invested in more than 300 companies in Kazakhstan.*

*IFEAC 2020b

Pakistan, as well as India, are historically linked to Central Asia through the famous figure of Babur,¹⁶ a Timurid of Samarkand and founder of the Great Mughal dynasty. This legacy is nowadays put forward by Pakistani leaders in order to legitimize their interests in the region. But if India still had close ties with the USSR, this was not the case of Pakistan, which had to entirely remodel its relation with Central Asia from scratch after 1991. Since then, it has been pursuing a pan-Islamic policy (initiated during the previous decade by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq), combining ideology and commerce. It experienced a new development after joining the SCO, first as an observer in 2005, later as a full member since 2017. The other medium-sized players: **India**,* the only non-communist country with a diplomatic presence in the region before 1990, and **Japan**,* a generous donor and eager trading partner, have also taken part in this reconfiguration of international relations for three decades in the region. Cooperation is mostly bilateral, and situated foremost in the spheres of trade (e.g. uranium exports to India) or

*Троицкий 2013

*Bolonina 2019

¹⁶ Babur was born in Andijan (1483) and died in Agra (1530).

nuclear non-proliferation (Japanese-Kazakhstan forums). Physical remoteness has left these three states outcompeted by other middle powers and the Great Gamers: for instance, the separative distance in the case of Japan, or the lack of connecting infrastructure with India due to mountain ranges and insecurity.

Rakhimov 2015 Central Asian leaders have sought to maintain a geopolitical balance between the four great gamers, as well as with these middle-size actors who both compete among each other and thus are eager to cooperate with every country. Nevertheless, beyond these international interactions between global powers and regional heavyweights, affected by major events and world politics, one cannot ignore the regional issues and local dynamics.

2. The Regional Level: Exogenous vs. Endogenous Issues

For the first time in their short history, the new Central Asian states have become direct partners of global and regional powers. Nevertheless, they also had to partner with one another, after being federal entities of the USSR. They needed to learn how to solve common problems.

Söderbaum and Ojendal 2001 Instability following the end of the Cold War, together with globalization trends, forced the nation-states to reposition themselves in a moving international order, where new actors emerged. This situation is also analysed as a “structuring vector of global governance” at the regional level.* In other words, they are politically structured subcontinental groups led by state actors, permanently interacting with non-state actors, substate entities, local structures (companies, universities) and international institutions.*

*Farrel et al. 2005

*Ettne 1994; Ténier 2003

Nye 2013 In this chapter, the author applies to Central Asia Joseph Nye’s definition of an international region “as a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence.” The geographical component, as well as the historical and cultural background (cf. Chapter 5) generated mutual interdependence articulated to legacies of Soviet governance (cf. Chapter 19).

*Paramonov and Strukov 2015

IR in Central Asia at the regional level features two opposite fields of forces, the one coming from outsiders or neighbours, which we will call exogenous, the one from inside the region – endogenous – taking into account the agenda of each president. As a matter of fact, the latter mostly favour bilateral cooperation, despite personal competition between them.* These two field forces generate sub-regional structures which frame cooperation between polities of the region and with external neighbours. Obviously, they compete

to attract foreign investments because of their natural resources. Both sides have to deal with sub-regional issues such as security threats, water use (involving all Central Asian states plus Afghanistan and China). Some other issues mostly affect two countries: the legal status of the Caspian Sea (cf. Box 17.1) with high stakes for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and the Aral Sea (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) – see also Chapter 20. Natural resources and energy issues are too broad of a topic to be treated in detail within the scope of this chapter, but need to be mentioned anyways. More information about the region's economic transformations can be found in Chapter 19.

2.1 Integration Forces at Regional Level

One first step made in 1993 by the leaders of the five states was to reaffirm the region as 'Central Asia' (*центральная Азия*) including Kazakhstan, instead of 'Middle Asia' (*средняя Азия*) and Kazakhstan,' as often referred to during Soviet times. This was a clear affirmation of their independence.

Next came the nuclear issue, which demonstrates a real regional approach shared by all of them. Kazakhstan was the initiator of the *Almaty Declaration* in 1992 acting the establishment of a nuclear-free zone, then adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in 1997, reaffirmed in 2000. The *Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone* (CANWFZ) treaty* was signed on 8 September 2006 at Semipalatinsk (Semey), then ratified by the five states between 2007 and 2008.* It is a legally binding treaty signed by all five Central Asian states, by which they commit not to manufacture, acquire, test or possess nuclear weapons. The treaty entered into force on 3 March 2009.

*ACA 2021

*NTI.org 2020

One more common project was the creation of the *International Fund to save the Aral Sea* (IFAS), Kazakhstan, again, was the first to lead this organization, from 1993 to 1997, then Uzbekistan, 1997-1999, Turkmenistan, 1999-2002, Tajikistan, 2002-2008, then Kazakhstan once more until 2011.

Despite these important achievements – which underline common views of the five Central Asian leaders (even if these are rare) – there has been much criticism levelled against the poor results of regional integration.^{17*} However, a trend of more positive assessments is emerging, especially since the advent of a new president in

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012;
Paramonov and Strukov 2015

¹⁷ The study made by Vladimir Paramonov and Aleksej Strukov, two experts from Uzbekistan, shows the internal point of view of Central Asian States, and points to the specific approach and interests of foreign actors. It also presents the various reasons why each Central Asian state does not want to cooperate with the others. (Paramonov and Strukov 2015)

*Svante et al. 2018

Uzbekistan (Shavkat Mirziyoyev) in December 2016.* It remains to be documented whether the 2020 pandemic crisis has had a positive impact on their willingness to further cooperate at the regional level.

To understand what elements could influence the future development of intra-regional and extra-regional cooperation vectors for the Central Asian States, the author will briefly quote the list of “given” issues established by the SENnECA¹⁸ conference in Almaty, in January 2019, held in order to prepare update the EU strategy toward Central Asia:

- Geography, borders and accessibility (landlockedness, enclaves, exclaves)
- Climate change and the consequences of global warming on socio-economic well-being (cf. Chapter 20)
- Population and urbanization in light of the rising growth rate (cf. Chapter 22)
- Current culture and identity issues, the impact of religion (cf. Chapter 16) and nation-building processes¹⁹
- Common historical heritage, the closeness of most titular languages (except for Tajik) plus the persistent use of Russian language despite some decline (cf. Chapter 8)
- All the above mentioned aspects and the increased risk of instability, in light of the weakness of political institutions across the region.*

*Gussarova and Andžāns 2019

Besides these ‘given’ issues, Central Asian states have had to deal with several risk factors. After the collapse of the USSR, they had to manage the threat constituted by the civil war in Tajikistan, then the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the global security problem of terrorism, and the rise of ISIS, appealing to young adults in the region and migrants settled in Russia, Turkey, etc. They had to solve a lot of economic and financial problems inherited from the Soviet times: interweaving supply systems (food, fuel, electricity), environmental issues (Aral Sea crisis, inter-state water sharing), legal aspects (border delimitations), commercial transit routes and tax regimes, transnational crime (narcotics, smuggling etc.).

¹⁸ SENnECA (*Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia relations*) was a Horizon 2020 project (2018-2019) tasked with preparing recommendations for the EU Commission for an updated Central Asia strategy.

¹⁹ Underlining the distinctiveness of each Central Asian country in addition with current processes of religious identity building that can limit prospects of regionalization.

This is the reason why, besides their voluntary membership to the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS) in 1991, they have tried to create regional structures in order to push for integration, thus satisfying demands formulated by global powers and international organizations. Hence – as clearly shown in Table 17.1 – except for Turkmenistan who always adhered to strict neutrality (see below), Central Asian (exclusive) integrative initiatives have mostly been talking shops, which in time have been overtaken by exogenous initiatives. Founded in 1994, the *Central Asia (Economic) Union* (CAU/CAEU), later (in 2002) renamed the *Central Asian Cooperation Organization* (CACO), initiated by Nazarbayev, was dissolved in 2005 in favour of the Russian initiative EurAsEC,

Table 17.1 *Selected International Organizations in Central Asia*

ABBREVIATION, NAME AND ISSUES OF FOCUS		Created in: (or ratified in CA)	Dissolved in:	Initiated (or dominated) by:
Environmental & Nuclear Proliferation				
IFAS	<i>International Fund for saving the Aral Sea</i>	1993	-	CA (KAZ)
CANWFZ	<i>Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty</i>	2006/9	-	CA (KAZ)
Economy & Trade				
CIS	<i>Commonwealth of Independent States</i>	1991	-	Russia
CAU* / CAEU* (1)	<i>Central Asian Union / Central Asian Economic Union</i>	1994/8	2002	CA (KAZ)
CACO*	<i>Central Asian Cooperation Organization</i>	2002	2005	CA (KAZ)
EurAsEC*	<i>Eurasian Economic Community</i>	2000	2014	Russia
EAEU* (2)	<i>Eurasian Economic Union</i>	2014/5	-	Russia
BRI (3)	<i>Belt and Road Initiative</i>	2013	-	China
Security (defence, border control, terrorism)				
CICA*	<i>Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia</i>	1992	-	CA (KAZ)
CSTO*	<i>Collective Security Treaty Organization (Tashkent Treaty)</i>	1992	-	Russia
OSCE	<i>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</i>	1973 (1992)	-	West
NATO EAPC / PFP	<i>NATO Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council / Partnership for Peace</i>	1949 (1992)	-	West
SCO* (4)	<i>Shanghai Cooperation Organization</i>	2001	-	China

* Turkmenistan is not a member

(1) CAU/CAEU even had a brief, limited military dimension during the Tajik Civil War, after which end in 1997, Tajikistan could join (in 1998).

(2) The EAEU constituted a merger with the EurAsEC, the Eurasian Customs Union and the Single Economic Space.

(3) See also Chapter 16 on the BRI.

(4) The SCO was created from a forum to delineate and secure the border between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, known as the Shanghai-5 or Shanghai group. (cf. Box 17.2)

Source: Created by the editors.

later (2013) revamped by Moscow as the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) and merging with the *Eurasian Customs Union* (that previously (since 2010) had been the *Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia*) and with the *Single Economic Space* (SES), an earlier established single market. Unlike its predecessors, the EAEU seems durable, with an integrated single market of 180 million people.

Like the failure to establish a single market by themselves, security cooperation has also been externally led, by the Russia-dominated CSTO, and later the Chinese-Russian-led SCO (cf. Box 17.2). Kazakhstan, in line with its Eurasian geostrategy, has most often taken the initiative, and for instance did kickstart the *Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia* (CICA), still active today. Due to the active wooing of middle powers (see Part 1.6) and their need to balance the 'Great Gamers' Central Asian governments have been keen to enter broader macro-regional organizations such as the *Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD), the *Organization of Islamic Cooperation* (OIC), or the Turkic Council (since 2009).

Now concerning the outside influences or 'drivers' at regional level, the author can point out two main issues: the Afghan and the Uyghur factors.

2.2 Factor 1: The Afghan Issue or the "Afghan endless war syndrome"

For many decades, the presence of Afghanistan as the most problematic neighbour has placed Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and even distant countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in front of five major security threats, as shown in a 2017 CSIS²⁰ report:

- Smuggling by militants
- Infiltration of extremists
- Direct Taliban attacks
- Destabilizing refugee flows
- Indirect involvement in the conflict *

*Safranchuk 2017

To cope with these threats, Central Asian States have relied on the US, the main strategic acting player in the region after 9/11. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have helped US forces to run operations in Afghanistan by providing military bases in exchange for military and economic aid. The US presence in Central Asia rapidly

²⁰ CSIS stands for *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, a Washington DC-based Think Tank.

concerned the Russian Federation, which has worked to keep its influence in the region by opening its own military airbase in Kant, Kyrgyzstan in 2003.

Thus, political instability which marks the history of Afghanistan, a transit country despite all turbulences and risk, reached a turning point in 2014.* Since the start of the partial disengagement of US forces in Afghanistan in 2014, the reduction of US aid, and the closing of military airbases (Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in 2005, and Manas in July 2014), the role of these neighbouring countries has evolved. Indeed, the prospect of the completion of the ISAF²¹ military mission in Afghanistan troubled Central Asian States, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, whose regional margin of manoeuvre was considerably reduced. The visit of State Secretary John Kerry in November 2015, the first of this kind after the visit of Hilary Clinton at the OSCE summit in Astana in 2010, was made to calm them with promises concerning the control of borders, counter-terrorism measures and a new negotiation format called “5+1” promoting dialogue among the five states of the region (not including Turkmenistan), under US patronage.*

*Landler 2014

*Weitz 2015

In 2018, during its presidency of the UN Security Council, Kazakhstan put the regional economic integration of Afghanistan on the agenda. Moreover, Afghanistan has a decisive role to play in connecting oil rich Central Asian States, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, to energy-demanding South Asia with the gas pipeline project called TAPI²² since 1995. On the other hand, the Central Asian states provide Afghanistan with a northern route to export goods, across the Caspian Sea, to Azerbaijan and Europe. Some major energy contracts were signed between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, especially concerning electricity.

Neither Afghanistan nor its Central Asian neighbours, particularly Tajikistan, have believed that the Afghan government could handle extremism and terrorism by itself. As a result, these leaders voiced that they would not oppose maintaining a foreign military presence (primarily US and NATO) in the region. During Donald Trump’s presidency, the process of reducing US forces in Afghanistan continued. It ends with the advent of Joe Biden who promised in April 2021 that the return of the last American soldier on duty in Afghanistan would occur (symbolically) on 11 September 2021, after twenty years of operations.

²¹ ISAF stands for *International Security Assistance Force*, the NATO led mission in Afghanistan.

²² TAPI stands for the ‘Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline,’ a project that has been notoriously delayed due to the insecurity situation in Afghanistan and funding issues.

Even if the security issue is not solved at all, Afghanistan is increasingly viewed by Central Asian states through the prism of economic opportunity. The bilateralism of the 2000s has been replaced by an active multilateral approach. Until 2014, each of the Central Asian leaders acted unilaterally with Afghanistan, trying to balance both Russian and US influence. This can be seen in the numerous recent initiatives, discussion platforms, ‘formats,’ ‘processes’ like: the Moscow one, the Kabul one, the Central Asia + Russia one. All these initiatives underscore the concern of regional and global actors to prepare for future developments on the ground.

2.3 Factor 2: The Uyghur Issue

The difficult situation of Uyghurs in China is not new and has been an issue for at least half a century. The PRC’s government plan was to dilute the Uyghur protest through the spectacular economic development of the *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* (新疆维吾尔自治区 – *Xīnjiāng Wéiwú’ěr Zìzhìqū*). Around the regional capital Urumqi, Chinese authorities claim they need to counter what they call ‘the three evils:’ nationalism, separatism, and terrorism. This has to be understood in the framework of the BRI project, promoted in 2013 by Xi Jinping, which progresses as if no resistance was allowed. Hence the terrible campaign of cultural, linguistic, and religious “de-uyghurization” that has dramatically impacted Xinjiang since the Summer of 2017 and has resulted in the creation of internment camps for millions of Uyghurs.* Chinese authorities consider this issue an internal security problem and deny the international community the right to interfere in it. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have quite numerous communities of Uyghurs residing on their respective territories but want to avoid any confrontation with the PRC on this matter. The EU and US reaction to this issue has been quite ineffective.

*HRW 2018

3. The Domestic Level

This section aims to highlight, at the domestic level, the variables that can influence the FP of Central Asian states.* The author will analyse the toolbox used by political leaders and FP actors, who rule in line with their Soviet legacy (a centralized system leaving no room for social contestation) and try to divide-and-rule interest groups. Here, determinist approaches linked to geographic or economic constraints will be articulated and linked with globalization trends, which supposedly reduce the role of ‘the state’ in IR.

*Ripsman et al. 2016

The political elites who gained power over the newly independent states (NIS) in the 1990s were trained under Soviet rule. The first three tasks they faced were to “brand their national State,”* become the most attractive in the region for foreign investment, and quickly assert their sovereignty. They also had to bargain with the growing influence of multinational firms, especially energy giants.* Besides, Central Asian states entered the world arena at a time when the agency of non-governmental or trans-national actors was still very much on the rise.* Last but not least, they had to invent a sustainable legal environment to reassure investors, in order to convince them (and major donors) of the feasibility of investing, thereby national leaders even (temporarily) allowed political rights (and protests) and party pluralism in the early 1990s, once again closing that political space after foreign investments had been secured.

*Marat 2009

*Ipek 2007

*Jocelin and Wallace 2001;
Reinalda 2009

One cannot deny the crucial role of the interest groups that surround the leader in each country and force him to constantly play the role of an arbiter. But, dissensions which have arisen over the years, including within the families of first presidents (like in Kazakhstan), show how these polities are in the grip of fierce economic and political struggles,* which are hardly limited to the national framework. But even if there have been echoes abroad (corruption scandals, *WikiLeaks* and *Panama papers*, long-term trials in the US or UK), the general course of FP was little affected.

*Satpaev 2007

In this chapter, the author would like to reaffirm the persisting role of political leaders and presidents in Central Asia: Their charisma propagated in the media, on which they have a strong influence, publicly propagating their vision of national and personal interests; their authoritarian practice of power, and the systems of regulation and co-optation it is based on (cf. Chapter 11). These points do constitute the main source of information on the elaboration of FP, in addition to official websites of presidential administrations (e.g. *Akorda.kz* for Kazakhstan) and the MFA for each of these states, together forming the Foreign Policy Executive (FPE).

Thus, it is essential to recall the Soviet origin and formation of all the political leaders who became the first presidents in FSU Central Asia and the nature of the mimetic regimes they have established: Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan (1991-2019), Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan (1989-2016), Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan (1991-2005 – the only one who was not a General Secretary of the national Communist Party, but president of Academy of Science in Kyrgyzstan), Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan (1985-2007) and Emomali Rakhmon in Tajikistan (from 1992 until today).

In order to understand their political and social programs at the domestic level (both in form and content), which fully irrigate their vision of IR, one must recall the first years of independence: a major economic and psychological crisis generated by the Soviet collapse, the real fear of destabilization, social unrest and distrust from new leaders toward the societies they were governing. Indeed, they considered that what remained of the Soviet *socium* (universal society), could resurface after 1991 under the Western label of ‘civil society,’ appearing as a result of Western techno-politics affirmative action and their toolkits. This dramatic vision included the growing share of economic actors, NGOs, associations, and cross-regional networks, and with it, the threat (in their eyes) of political opposition, from inside and outside the country.

Aided by their secret services, each Central Asian leader undoubtedly plays a significant role among the power holders, the FP decision-making, as well as in the media coverage of important events. It is not surprising that their first reaction toward any social or political event in their country will be to trace the foreign origin of it just like during Soviet times. Their second reaction will be to surround themselves with their close relatives to ensure their loyalty – daughters, sons, sons-in-law (although these tend to be less secure) – and grant these high positions in the regime while at the same time refraining from grooming them for succession, (like in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan). Such system of governance, has been labelled as “neo-patrimonialism,”* personalist rule and patronal politics – cf. Chapter 11.

*Izquierdo-Brichs and Serra
Massansalvador 2021

Fortunately for researchers who are interested in content analysis of official narratives, Central Asian leaders, in their quest for media coverage and international recognition, have been known to be prolific writers, even if they use ghost-writers. All of them publish books and pamphlets explaining their doctrines.²³ All of these, despite the different domestic agendas of their “authors,” show a great deal of pragmatism and political vision especially regarding their own forces and weaknesses and how to best use them to gain visibility, attention, interest, or new opportunities.²⁴

On the one hand, the president-in-charge, together with a few

²³ For example, 16 books have been published by President Nazarbayev. (Elbasy.kz 2021a) Other presidents, such as Karimov, or Niyazov beside his famous, allegedly sacred, book *Ruhnama*, were also quite productive. For instance, at the National Library in Dushanbe, there is a whole exhibition of the many books officially published by Rahmon.

²⁴ Their preoccupations could be summed up as follows: Where are we located? What do we have to offer? Which of our partners will grant us the most economic sovereignty, the best loans? What are the problems we have in common?

young English-speaking well-educated advisors, will have worked hard to elaborate *ex-nihilo* FP visions. A few of them would hire foreign advisors such as Alex Moscovitch from 1991 to 1996,²⁵ or Chan Young Bang²⁶ for economic reforms, or even Great Britain's former prime minister Tony Blair and Austria's former chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, working alongside Kazakh advisors such as Marat Tazhin and Adil Tursunov, all forming their own interest group, exerting pressure, with direct access to the head of state.* Other experts include the famous US advisors, Zbigniew Brzezinski and S. Frederick Starr (in Uzbekistan), or Anders Oslund, a Swedish economist, who worked for President Akayev in Kyrgyzstan from 1998 to 2004 (after advising President Yeltsin in Russia, then Kravchuk in Ukraine).

*Satpaev 2007; Breuning 2007

On the other hand, all leaders had to find solutions to cope with limited human resources when setting up a diplomatic network on several continents, under the supervision of a Minister of Foreign Affairs, who would implement the FP. In most cases, especially during the 1990s, the people heading MFAs in the region were unknown on the international scene, except maybe for the poet-politician Oljas Sulemeynov. His fame and charisma was so significant that some viewed him as a challenger to Nazarbayev. Consequently, he was sent abroad, first as the Kazakh Ambassador to Italy, then to Paris at UNESCO. It is also noteworthy that the current president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, had served in the same position (heading the MFA in 1994-1997 and 2003-2007), whereas Islam Karimov's elder daughter (Gulnara Karimova), was appointed deputy foreign minister for international cooperation in cultural and humanitarian affairs, in February 2008, and later became the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the UN in September of the same year.

As a matter of fact, in the early 1990s, they had to learn how to play the game of IR and learn the foreign language of democracy, liberal market and human rights, also labelled under the frame of "good governance"* at the time, in order to benefit from US and EU financial or technical aid. This was the case for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan for about a decade before Russia's come back to the region (under V. Putin), based on autocracy promotion.

*Atlani-Duault 2007

²⁵ Alex Moscovitch (1911-1996) was a French political and political advisor, who became the economic advisor of Nursultan Nazarbayev (after serving as advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev from 1989 to 1991), he promoted the idea of "Astana, city of the future." (The author thanks Sanat Kushkumbaev to recall this forgotten French expert.)

²⁶ Chan Young Bang (1936-) was the first director of KIMEP university in Almaty (formerly: *Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research*).

Tajikistan was delayed in this process because of the Civil War (ended in 1997) while Turkmenistan on the other hand immediately argued that they were not ready for democracy yet.

Thus, during the first decade of independence, the two most important states in the region, Kazakhstan by grace of its size and the subsoil deposits, and Uzbekistan for its population, fought for regional leadership, which, so far, has ended in the victory of Kazakhstan. That did not stop them from sharing a common dis-possession syndrome towards foreign companies: local governments used complex oil and gas deals as a self-defence tool against globalization, seeking to reassess sovereignty by increasing state shares, pushing for local employment, etc.* It appears quite obvious that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were caught in the throes of a post-Soviet contradiction which forced them to court their former Western ideological counter-models, to open up their economy and accept liberal agendas while not alienating influential neighbours such as Russia and China.

*Poujol 2004

So far, their tailor-made FP was elaborated considering their situation as landlocked countries. (Indeed, Kazakhstan is actually the largest landlocked and transcontinental country in the world.) As a consequence, diversifying clients was necessary to export, oil, gas, uranium (for Kazakhstan), gold (for Kyrgyzstan), gas and cotton (for Uzbekistan). This way, cooperation with the USA and the EU helped to lower dependence on Russia as the sole destination for raw materials. In such a context, the choice of Kazakhstan not to turn to Russia to dismantle its nuclear arsenal, but to the US, has undoubtedly accelerated its accession to regional leadership to the detriment of Uzbekistan.

To focus on **Kazakhstan** here: Its situation pushed it in the direction to elaborate a so-called multi-vector policy, maybe under the influence of the US (Brzezinski) strategy, borrowed by the Kazakh president,²⁷ who presented this option six months after independence, in an interview on 16 May, *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, a national medium.* It was followed by hyper-activity at the international level, driven by a desire to place the country among the “30 most developed countries in the world” during his successive terms.* On 29 January 2014, President Nazarbayev renewed the FP concept for 2014 to 2020, and reaffirmed the need “to understand multi-vector politics and the balance between allies by adapting it to international developments” and pleaded for “friendly and predictable relations with all states” while playing an “important role in world affairs.”* This explains Astana’s persistent desire to act as

*Hanks 2009

*Akorda.kz 2012

*Akorda.kz 2012

²⁷ This is a point made by a prolific expert on Central Asia, Aleksandr Knyazev, during an offline discussion, 17 April 2021.

a negotiating platform in various conflicts (for example, the ‘Astana process,’ initiated in 2017 for Syria, between Russia, Iran and Turkey).

As President Nazarbayev said in 2005, to encourage his regional partners to direct efforts towards common external threats:

“We are again witnessing superpower rivalry for economic dominance in our region. We have to address correctly this new global and geo-economics challenge. We have a choice between remaining the supplier of raw materials to the global markets and wait patiently for the emergence of the next imperial master or to pursue genuine economic integration of the central Asian region (...) I choose the latter (...) Further regional integration will lead to stability, regional progress, and economic, military and political independence. This is the only way for our region to earn respect in the world. This is the only way to achieve security, and to fight effectively against terrorism and extremism. Regional integration will advance the interests of all the common folk that live in Central Asia.”*

*Cacianalyst.org 2005

After his resignation in March 2019, Nazarbayev’s personal website started praising the benefits of his model of internal politics and FP based on “peace and social harmony,” called the “Kazakh way” or the “Nazarbayev model.”* However, new president Tokayev is facing the rise of competing elites and fragmented spheres of influence of external powers in various regions of the country, which can provoke the relative weakness and instability of his central government.* Thus, President Tokayev, former MFA, has presented a new concept of FP for 2020-2030 on the presidential website Ak Orda,* portraying Kazakhstan as a “listening state.” The problem is, Tokayev does not have much room for manoeuvre because former president Nazarbayev retains significant powers. It is possible that he seeks to stand out through a more sovereigntist policy, relying on the nationalist section of his (s)electorate.²⁸

*Elbasy.kz 2021b

*Paramonov and Strukov 2015

*Akorda.kz 2020

Interesting also is how **Uzbekistan** transformed its double land-locked situation into a political tool, to appear as a Central Asian bridge – and therefore unavoidable and indispensable – in addition to its demographic weight,²⁹ and its strategic capability to fight against the rise of political Islam in Central Asia.³⁰ Here, one must

²⁸ This idea was promoted by Dosym Satpaev during a conference organized online by Eastern Circles (Sciences Po Paris), on 20 April 2021. (Eastern Circles 2021)

²⁹ In 1991 the population of Uzbekistan was 21 million people, as compared to 16.5 million in Kazakhstan, according to the World Bank. Nowadays, there are 33 million inhabitants in Uzbekistan, according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs’ statistics from 2020.

³⁰ See President Karimov’s recurring warnings before the UN General Assembly, repeatedly drawing the attention of the International Community toward the situation in his country.

*Pomfret and Anderson 1997

highlight the specific Uzbek option for its multi-vector FP, which shows a pendular polarity: the USA on the one hand, and Russia-China on the other. This can be seen as a recurring geopolitical hesitation, officially called “gradual openness to the market economy”^{*} until the death of Islam Karimov in September 2016 and the election of his former Prime Minister, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Uzbekistan, in the late 2000s and early 2010s, acted more like a besieged fortress, threatened by permanent instability from its neighbours.

*Arbobova 2020

*Paramonov and Strukov 2015

As for **Tajikistan**, after the end of civil war in 1996-1997, the continued influence of Russia and the need to attract new investments prompted President Rahmon to adopt a multi-vector FP as well, which was even written into the Tajik Constitution as the only policy that can accommodate the country’s national interests.^{*} At the regional level, Tajikistan is mostly focused on its relationship with Uzbekistan for numerous reasons.^{*} Although, since 2015 Tajikistan has shown a willingness to free itself from Russian influence (exercised in part by the use of seasonal Tajik migrants as leverage), and from China (which holds 53% of its external debt), with Dushanbe starting to court India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (the latter which aims to counter Iranian influence).^{*}

*Mamedov 2017

*The Diplomat 2015

Last but not least, the absolute reverse consisted in the dismissal of any foreign ideological interference. This was the choice of **Turkmenistan** since the very first days of its independence, as set out by the Turkmen president Niyazov (AKA Turkmenbashi), who claimed that his country was not ready yet for democracy and pluralism. This explains why he created the concept of ‘permanent neutrality,’ unanimously endorsed on 12 December 1995 by the UN. The second President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who has been in power since February 2007 (after his predecessor’s death in 2006), pursued the same policy while now participating in a greater number of multilateral meetings³¹ to showcase their doctrine as a historical model for relations with other nations and states.^{*} (Kyrgyzstan’s FP is more fickle due to its greater number of subsequent FPEs, but always based on pragmatism – an overview is provided below, in Part 4.3.)

*Rumer 2002; Petric 2012

On the other hand, all sectors of Central Asian societies experienced another type of interaction: the more or less massive arrival (depending on the country), of external actors which constituted the most challenging issue for the political sustainability of the post-Soviet elite in power.^{*} The spread of the internet and the

³¹ On 1 April 2021, he participated in a summit of the Turkic Council, and urged to strengthen cooperation in energy security. (Mfa.gov.tm 2021a)

access to social networks have dramatically deepened the integration of the Central Asian states and their respective societies into the global connected world. But at the domestic level, as elsewhere, new networks increasingly appeared as a space of contestation of the authoritarian leaders and their entourage,* which until then had almost total control over any decision in matters of internal and foreign policy. Moreover, during the first decade of independence, all Central Asian political leaders also feared the emergence of powerful interest groups, and insulated these from power so as not to lose it themselves. This rising threat has increased over time.

*Wood 2019

At the domestic level, the potential participation of social actors, interest groups, transnational networks, criminals, or drug traffickers, in the development of internal policy is easier to describe than showing their real impact on FP making. Studying social movements in relation to a foreign policy problem (Eurasian integration or Chinese investment, for instance) can help, in this respect, by tracking downward reactions of the regime.

Was it the Solzhenitsyn Declaration on the legitimacy of the Russian northern Kazakhstan diaspora that benchmarked and bound Kazakh FP with Russia? Did the silent dismay expressed by Uzbek people in 2003 against the intervention in Iraq prevent President Karimov from lining up behind the American coalition? Or, when the Chinese started to rent lands around Kazakh villages that ended by a new land property codex (in 2016), did the government had to give up its project because it was confronted by increasing anti-Chinese demonstrations? Another example is the media investigation against corruption scandals like the one that erupted in 2019, implicating the head of the Kyrgyz customs, Raimbek Matraimov, in trafficking from China, and money laundering carried out in Dubai and Turkey.*

*Occrp.org 2020

In all these cases the impact on FP remains limited. In this regard, the new Kyrgyz president Sadyr Japarov, who came to power after the protests against the legislative elections in October 2020, might reframe the country's FP, considering his alleged links with the same Matraimov and now that the 11 April 2021 referendum, confirmed by almost 80% of cast ballots, can legitimize a deep constitutional change, granting him full presidential powers without parliamentary check. (See also Chapter 10 on referenda and Chapter 14 on constitutional amendments in Kyrgyzstan.)

In this regard, pressure groups are real and they can affect and change policy at domestic, regional, and local levels, but – as explained in Chapter 11 – the (personalist) ruling regimes dominate the foreign policy executive (FPE) and thus formulate FP.

Box 17.3 The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

The Eurasian Economic Union (*Евразийский экономический союз – ЕАЭС*) was first created on 29 May 2014 by treaty between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. This collaborative project was largely led by the first Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and supported by his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. This economic union is characterized by its desire to promote free trade between the member states and by its multilateral dimension. This integration project, often portrayed as an attempt to restore the Soviet Union model and strongly decried by the United States, is nevertheless, officially, purely limited to the economic field.

With the Minsk Agreement of 10 October 2014, the foundation of the EAEU thus endorsed the disintegration, and then dissolution of its predecessor, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). On this occasion, its five members (Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) therefore chose to dissolve that community with the vision of joining, in a near future, an upgraded economic union. Membership negotiations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan took longer to finalize, with Kyrgyzstan joining the EAEU on 6 August 2015 (after Armenia joined as a new member on 2 October 2015), and with Tajikistan currently recognized as a candidate for membership.

Eventually, as declared by the EAEU Commission, the Union could also attract the following states: Bulgaria, Cuba, Finland, Hungary, Mongolia, the Czech Republic, Venezuela and Vietnam. In other words, the EAEU's ambitions for the economic cooperation go well beyond the former Soviet territory, targeting states with a common communist heritage, taking on the "best values of the Soviet Union" (in the words of Vladimir Putin).

In terms of functioning, the Union operates mainly through the *Supreme Eurasian Economic Council* (Heads of the Member States) and the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council (consisting of the Heads of the governments of member states). The EAEU's day-to-day is mostly run by the *Eurasian Commission*, which is modelled on the *European Commission* but in effect is largely dominated by the Russians (with headquarters in Moscow, with Russians providing 84% of its staff, in the addition to their choice of Russian as working language).

In this respect, it can be argued that the EAEU's operations are primarily intergovernmental even if some are, to a lesser extent, also supranational (e.g. custom policy, competition regulations). The EAEU administers a vast common market of 180 million inhabitants, representing an annual GDP of about \$5 trillion. Furthermore, its competences and field of action are vast: supporting the free movements of goods and services, providing incentives to foreign investments, provision of common policies' guidelines in the macroeconomic sphere (energy, transport, industry), anti-trust regulations, etc. Finally, this Union constitutes part of the continuity of the set of financial and commercial partnerships signed between the NIS of the former USSR in order to curb the economic slump caused by the dissolution of the USSR.

Contribution by: Mathilde Touretz (i.c.w. IFEAC).

They are the gatekeepers of a state's international relations through control over the foreign policy executive. So, while leaders might allow concessions domestically, or have the media present they are implementing them, it is their domestic regime logic that primarily determines FP, and not external pressure groups or other sub-state actors.

Of course, FPs have not been static. Central Asian societies have experienced numerous changes over the last three decades, even in very conservative and closed states such as Turkmenistan. These changes have been provoked by a succession of crises: economic shocks (the Asian crisis in 1997, then the 1998 Russian financial crisis, the subprime-mortgage crisis 2007-2008), up to the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. Central Asian societies are fractured along a dividing line between a growing share of the population claiming strong attachment to Islam, partly composed of "reborn Muslims" following the path of Salafization,* which is increasingly conservative and responsive to populist slogans, and a small fraction of the urban middle classes still sensitive to Western liberal discourse and practices. Let us analyse now, country by country, how the FP of each of the five highlights their national situations and identity.

*Mullojonov 2017

4. Five Foreign Policies from 1991 to 2020: Global versus Local Timelines

Central Asian states were at the margins of the international community during the 1990s, despite their efforts to forge bilateral and multilateral relations. Nevertheless, they have joined most of the international organizations driven by a quest for recognition on the world arena. Kyrgyzstan was the first to join the *World Trade Organization* (WTO) in 1998 after being the first to introduce its national currency (*Som*) in May 1993 (followed in November by Kazakhstan – with *Tenge*). Later on, Tajikistan became the 153rd member of WTO in 2013, then it was Kazakhstan's turn as the 162nd in 2015.

This gradual integration to global trends was of course perturbed by the Covid-19 pandemic. 2020 remains a unique moment in the history of IR, with the closure of land borders and most of the planes parked at airports. International trade has shrunk drastically, focusing on humanitarian aid, masks and respirators. New loans have been taken out by several countries in Central Asia, excepting Turkmenistan, the only country in the world not to have reported a single case of Covid-19. Nevertheless, one can observe

the increasing wish of Turkmenistan to increase its participation in world affairs.³²

The following Section presents the key elements constituting the FP of each Central Asian country over the past three decades.

4.1 Kazakhstan: A Multipolar Doctrine Balancing Interests among Global Powers

Kazakhstan³³ is a regional heavyweight. It shares borders of about 7000 km with Russia (the longest land border in the world), 1400 km with China, 2330 km with Uzbekistan, 1212 km with Kyrgyzstan, and 413 km with Turkmenistan. Being a sovereign State since 25 October 1990, Kazakhstan was the last Central Asian Soviet republic to proclaim its independence on 16 December 1991, a few days before joining the CIS.

Kazakhstan has promoted itself to the world, claiming to be:

- A “Land bridge” between China and Europe.³⁴
- A nuclear weapon-free zone (after renouncing its (1400 war-heads-large) nuclear arsenal under the strong injunction of the US and disposing of it with the latter’s help in December 1991).*
- A place for inter-ethnic and inter-religious consensus and a platform for negotiations to solve conflicts in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

*Marat 2012: 64–65

Kazakhstan joined the UN on 2 March 1992, with the help of Turkey, and then became a member of numerous IOs. Its choice for a multi-vector doctrine based on multilateral/bilateral agreements allows it to balance Russian, Chinese and US interests. From 1992 until 2019, president Nazarbayev has deployed all his energy to internationalize the country and keep it attractive for investment and cooperation. Its current GDP per capita is \$9,056 in 2020.*

*Tradingeconomics KAZ 2021

President Nazarbayev also invented his own, original doctrine of neo-Eurasianism, which he presented in Moscow in 1994³⁵ later

*Назарбаев 1997

³² For instance, it has finally presented the wish to get the observer status at WTO in July 2020, being the last country of Central Asia to apply to this major organization.

³³ According to official statistics, its population in 2020 was estimated around 19 million with 64.4% of Kazakhs, 23.7% of Russians, 2.9% of Uzbeks, 2.1% of Ukrainians, 1.4% of Uyghurs living in a large territory of 2.7 million km². (Worldometer KAZ 2021)

³⁴ Referring to Zbigniew Brzezinski’s opinion about the high geostrategic importance of Eurasia (pivot land) in his numerous books, following MacKinder – See also Chapter 15 and Map 15.9.

³⁵ See the website of the Kazakhstani MFA its special section devoted to ‘Eurasian integration.’ (Gov.kz 2021)

incarnated in the form of the EurAsEC (*Eurasian Economic Community*), and the *Eurasian Customs Union*, but also in the strategy of the *Single Economic Space*, later merged within the EAEU (see also Box 17.3 and Table 17.1) from 2015. In 1996, he declared Kazakhstan's aims to become one of the "30 most developed countries in the world" and moved the capital city from Almaty to Astana (today Nur-Sultan). From that moment, Astana has become the centre of intense political and diplomatic activities,* with many international events taking place, such as the "Astana Expo" in 2017. Since December 2016, he has promoted the "Astana process" as a dialogue platform with Russia and Turkey for the peace process in Syria.

*Fauve 2015

Kazakhstan, branded as a crucial link between China and Europe, Afghanistan and Russia, is keen to participate in many transport projects, such as the 'Central Asia-China Pipeline' from 2009, and the *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation* (CAREC) Corridor 3, financed by the ADB. So far, its international agenda has been built around its oil resources as well as its other natural resources, producing massive quantities of uranium (43% of world supply in 2019). From 2013, Kazakhstan has reinforced cooperation with Russia in the framework of the *Caspian Pipeline Consortium* (CPC) for oil transportation, equally owned by both countries, but also with China and its *Belt and Road initiative* (BRI), for instance by setting up the *Astana International Financial Centre* to streamline business investments by "connecting economies of Central Asia, the Caucasus, EAEU, West China, Mongolia, the Middle East and Europe."*

*Aifc.kz 2021

For three decades, Kazakhstan has widely diversified its partners, developing a particular interest toward the EU, which became its first economic partner and promoted regional integration (EurAsEC from 2000 to 2015). The website of the Kazakh MFA presents the official FP concept for 2014-2020. It demonstrates the will to keep on diversifying partners while granting a significant place to regional neighbours. Nonetheless, there have been concerns about infiltration, especially by religious movements and their radicalization. The influence of non-state actors such as the *Tablighi Jamaat* arriving from Pakistan (although banned in all Central Asian countries except in Kyrgyzstan), as well as the attraction exercised by the *Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL) on younger generations until 2019 have risen concerns of potential destabilization.

Since the Autumn of 2016, after the death of the Uzbek president Islam Karimov, bilateral relationships have changed for the better. Despite a few incidents at the borders, the relationship

with Kyrgyzstan is stable. A lot of Kyrgyz citizens are working in Kazakhstan and the integration of Kyrgyzstan into the EAEU has reinforced the economic significance of Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan is still the closest neighbour, linked through military treaties such as the *Eternal Fraternity Treaty* from 1997, and their Free Trade Agreement (FTA in 1995). In regard to their relation with Turkmenistan, the problem lies in the extraction and transportation of crude petroleum and gas to Iran, which is forbidden because of US sanctions. A *Strategic Partnership Treaty* was signed between the two countries only in 2017, the same year as the agreement on the Turkmen-Kazakh border. With Tajikistan, relations are more distant, although the first treaty between the two countries was signed as early as 1993.

Interestingly, Kazakhstan is the only country of Central Asia where Sinophobia and Russophobia coexist,³⁶ which is a sign of how public opinion views current FP. As a matter of fact, at the meeting of the *Economic Council* of EAEU on in May 2020, President Tokayev refused to sign the political integration project for 2020-2025, arguing it needed “further study.”

Kazakhstan has led the OSCE from January 2010 for one year and was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council from January 2017 to December 2018. It takes over the chairmanship of the Group of 32 *Landlocked Developing Countries* (LLDCs) for the period 2020-2021, at the UN. It has observer status in the Non-Aligned Movement. In 2020, Kazakhstan possessed 64 foreign embassies and 94 consulates, and hosted 68 embassies in its capital.

4.2 Uzbekistan: After the Karimov Era or How to Go International Again

*Worldometer UZ 2021

*Tradingeconomics UZ 2021

With an estimated 33.469 million inhabitants in 2020:* 83.8% Uzbek, 4.8% Tajik, 2.5% Kazakh, 2.3% Russian, 2.2% Karakalpak, 1.5% Tatar; a per capita GDP of \$1,532 in 2018,* Uzbekistan is the most populous among the Central Asian republics, the first to have asserted its sovereignty in June 1989, before gaining independence on 31 August 1991, and joining the CIS on 21 December 1991. It is also the only double landlocked state in the world (beside Liechtenstein), having only neighbours with no access to any ocean, and sharing borders with all other four Central Asian States (the Aral and Caspian Seas are geographically lakes).

The former first secretary of the Uzbek CP, Islam Karimov, was elected president of the republic with 87% of the votes in December 1991. From that moment on, he implemented a gradual reform policy called the ‘Uzbek way’ under strict state control by fear of

³⁶ Original idea from Dosym Satpaev. (Eastern Circles 2021)

falling under the influence of foreign actors. In its FP, Uzbekistan has immediately adopted a multi-vector strategy with a priority to other Central Asian States, which does not mean that their mutual relationships were easy. Until recently, various antagonistic projects of border delimitation and water resource management have dramatically complicated bilateral relations with its neighbours.

Uzbekistan joined the UN on 2 March 1992, with the help of Turkey. It signed the intergovernmental military alliance better known as the *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO) on 15 May 1992 in Tashkent. It became a member of the CSTO from 1992 to 1999, withdrawing then joining once more from 2006 to 2012. Uzbekistan has signed and ratified a few other military treaties: the Convention banning biological weapons, ratified in 1996, all UN agreements on the fight against terrorism (11 conventions and 2 protocols) and ratified the Semipalatinsk Treaty in 2009, joining the CANWFZ.

It is a member of all UN organizations, a member of the Non-Aligned Movement since 1993, and of the SCO since 2001 (cf. Box 17.2). Its priorities until today relate to the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the management of environmental problems such as in the Aral Sea. This is why Uzbekistan agreed to be a co-founder of the *International Fund to save the Aral Sea* (IFAS) in 1993, has ratified the Kyoto Protocol³⁷ in 1999, signed the Paris Climate Agreement in December 2015 (COP 21³⁸), and is a member of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*.

Soon after independence, Uzbekistan showed much concern about Islamic issues on the internal and external scenes, with almost 97% of its population being Muslim. It joined the Islamic Cooperation Organization in 1996. President Karimov is known to have tried to regulate the Islamist pressure by opposing any political movement operating on its territory, with links in Afghanistan or Tajikistan. Authorities have regularly denounced the rise of political Islam on its territory at the UN General Assembly, then blamed external interference after 2001.

Uzbekistan hesitated a lot on strategic partnerships between Russia and the USA, regularly shifting alliances. After a first decade under the Russian military umbrella of CSTO, there was a change of policy, especially after February 1999, following multiple

³⁷ A global treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

³⁸ COP stands for *Conference of Parties*, the apex decision-making body of the *United Nations Climate Change Framework Convention* (UNFCCC). COP 21 was the conference held in Paris from 30 November to 12 December 2015.

(allegedly terrorist)³⁹ attacks in Tashkent. With the 9/11 events the Uzbek government adopted the American position, authorizing the opening of an American military base in the Karshi region (in the south of the country), which provided logistics for operations in Afghanistan, with the consent of Russia. Later, the US signed a 'Declaration of Strategic Partnership' in 2002 with Uzbekistan, which could not prevent, after 2005, a period of difficult relations. Indeed the Andijan events on 13 May 2005* consolidated Uzbekistan's return under the Russian orbit⁴⁰ – see also Box 18.1. These tragic events were dramatic for the image of the country and led to the shutting down of the *Karshi-Khanabad* (K2) US military base.

*Beehner 2006; Rodriguez 2005

The next decade saw the progressive isolation of Uzbekistan in world affairs, except for by Russia, China, and other members of the SCO. Nevertheless, it was visited by UN Secretary-Generals Kofi Annan in 2002, and Ban Ki-Moon in 2010 and 2015.

When Shavkat Mirziyoyev (former Prime Minister) took over after Islam Karimov in December 2016, a new political and economic climate became possible: economic reforms (privatization of state enterprises), progressive re-opening of the Uzbek market to foreign investors and significant improvement of the relations with Central Asian neighbours.* Deep FP changes happened at both infra-regional and international levels. For that moment on, Uzbekistan has been reinforcing its multi-vector policy of openness, particularly focusing on tourism and connectivity projects such as the CAREC Corridor 3.

*Shiek 2018; Teles Fazendeiro 2018

For several years, Afghanistan was considered less as a threat by Tashkent, and more of an economic partner to be integrated in the region. The 'Termez Cargo centre' was created as a trade border area. Since 2016, the new president Mirziyoyev has taken up an important role in the peace building process in Afghanistan with the organization of the 2018 Tashkent 5+2 (USA & Russia) conference. Mirziyoyev's visit to Russia in April 2017 marked a clear rapprochement in all areas, particularly in the fight against radicalization and terrorism.

At the same time, after the death of President Karimov (2016), changes in the relationship with the US also occurred, through President Mirziyoyev's visit to Washington in 2018, and the visit of

³⁹ Abdumannob Polat and Nickolai Butkevich stress that the Karimov regime used the attacks (six bombings in 16 February 1999, which killed 16 people, injuring over a 100) as FP policy leverage, but that the true motivations behind them might never be fully disclosed. (Polat and Butkevich 2000) – See also Chapter 18.

⁴⁰ The 'Strategic Partnership Treaty' was signed in June 2004, the 'Declaration on the Deepening of the Strategic Partnership' in June 2012.

Mike Pompeo in February 2020 in Tashkent (as well as Nur-Sultan) to promote US strategy in Central Asia for 2019-2025.* Furthermore, a meeting followed up in Tashkent with the MFAs of the five Central Asian States through the C5+1 platform for peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

*US 2019

With Tajikistan, after two decades of hostile relations, both countries agreed to remove the landmines on their common borders and solve demarcation problems. Uzbekistan finally accepted the construction of the Rogun Dam (cf. Box 20.1), despite the water consequences being deemed unfavourable for the country.

Concerning the relations with Kyrgyzstan, both states agreed to a new demarcation of their common borders. Uzbekistan has signed a Treaty of Eternal Friendship in 1996, of strategic partnership in 2017, and the same year a treaty on mutual borders. Unlike isolationist President Karimov, Mirziyoyev seems convinced that a good relationship between Central Asian States on all issues (water sharing of the Amu Darya river, improvement of communication and trade) would promote stability and economic sustainability. Relations with Kazakhstan concerning border issues focus on the prevention of drug trafficking from the South. With Turkmenistan, the agreement is mostly economic, with infrastructure projects implemented since 2009, such as the 'Central Asia-China Pipeline' and the 2018 agreements on inter-regional cooperation. Uzbekistan has to deal with more than 1.5 million Uzbek migrants working in Russia (maybe more) in 2018, and five million elsewhere in the world (South Korea, US, Europe).

The vision of a new integrated and interconnected region, put forward by the Uzbek President Mirziyoyev, seems to be welcomed in Central Asia and beyond.* Uzbekistan has initiated negotiations for joining the *Eurasian Economic Union* in 2019. Relationships with distant partners are on the rise. They include political and economic relations with the EU, improving since 2011, with the comeback of the EU delegation in Tashkent, the participation at the meeting of MFAs of the EU and Central Asia in November 2017 in Samarkand. Relationships with Germany, South Korea (illustrating Tashkent's strategy to diversify its partners to decrease its dependence on Beijing and Washington), and Japan are strong. In March 2018, the first meeting of the Consultative Council of Heads of State of Central Asia was held in Nur-Sultan, on Mirziyoyev's initiative. The second one was held in Tashkent, on 29 November 2019, with the presence of the President of Turkmenistan.

*Putz 2017

Uzbekistan had established relations with a great number of countries. The first to recognize its independence was Australia in

December 1991, the last one being the Republic of Nepal in January 2019. There are 45 embassies and 8 consulates in Tashkent, and 48 Uzbek diplomatic missions abroad. The country is gaining influence at the regional level and started to challenge Kazakhstan again, for the second time after 1991 (e.g. Tashkent assumed chairmanship of the CIS in 2020). The same year, the Covid-19 pandemic showed the involvement of international partners in bringing health aid to the country, ensuring its reintegration into the ‘Concert of Nations’ since 2017.

4.3 Kyrgyzstan: A Semi-democratic Island, at the Heart of Foreign Influences

Kyrgyzstan is one of the most landlocked countries of the former Soviet republics, located between Kazakhstan, China and Tajikistan. After proclaiming its sovereignty in December 1990, this young state of 6.613 million inhabitants estimated in 2021 out of which Kyrgyz (73%), Uzbek (14%), Russians (5%), Dungan (1%), Uyghur (0.9%), Tajik (0.8%) gained independence on 31 August 1991, joined the CIS on 21 December and obtained a seat at the UN on 2 March 1992.

*Worldometer KYR 2021

With only few natural resources (gold in the Kumtor mine, electricity, cattle breeding), its GDP per capita was around \$300 in 2000,* later reaching \$1,116 in 2019. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan has shown a specific path for many aspects including foreign relations at the very beginning of its independence. Being a close partner of Russia and Kazakhstan after the creation of the CIS in December 1991, it introduced its own currency in May 1993 (highly stable compared to the Uzbek *Som* and the Kazakh *Tenge*). This caused trouble with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan until the creation of the *Central Asian Union* in January 1994 together with Tajikistan – see Table 17.1. Kyrgyz forces contributed to the CIS peacekeeping mission during the first years of civil war in Tajikistan. But when it comes to the Kyrgyz economy, it is highly dependent on grain imports from Kazakhstan and fruits and vegetables from Uzbekistan.

*Tradingeconomics KYR 2021

The country attracted a large number of international organizations, including NGOs,* and survives thanks to numerous loans. After three decades of independence, Kyrgyzstan remains strongly under Russian influence, at political, economic, security and media levels.* The number of Kyrgyz migrant workers living in Russia reinforces this situation. Kyrgyz GDP depends for almost 30% on their remittances, dramatically impacted by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Good proficiency of the Russian language

*Petric 2015

*Laruelle 2015

is generally maintained in urban areas where 36.9% of the total population was located in 2020.*

*Tradingeconomics KYR 2021

Kyrgyzstan is an appealing market for the PRC, to which it has been indebted for thirty years, now up to 40% of GDP, reaching \$1.8 billion in 2019,* for a total external debt of about \$5 billion. It also serves as a hub for transferring Chinese products to the rest of post-Soviet countries and Europe. Despite an ambient Sinophobia, China is present in Kyrgyzstan through numerous investments, a massive presence of goods, and workers in the construction sector. Nevertheless, the current tragedy of the Uyghurs in China (since the Summer 2017) also impacted external relations. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan hosts a large community of Uyghurs from China, despite the government's efforts not to interfere.

*Standish 2021

The construction (since 2015) of the bypass road Kochkor-Osh to complement the only connecting route North to South (the Bishkek-Osh axis), the sustainable development project of Issyk-Kul and the opening of a new railway connecting the Chinese border in the south of the country will offer new solutions for opening up Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, the PRC will be the main beneficiary of these initiatives, especially in terms of exporting goods. All of these projects are financed by the *Asian Development Bank* (ADB).

The European Union is developing a large number of projects in Kyrgyzstan, in the agricultural, health, justice, civil society, and environmental sectors. The EU delegation in Bishkek is very active. As a matter of fact, it was in Bishkek that the new EU strategy dedicated to Central Asia was presented on 7 July 2019. The Arab countries, in particular the United Arab Emirates (albeit not very visibly) are also quite active in Kyrgyzstan, in particular in the field of diplomacy as well as in the spheres of religion,* health, education, and tourism.

*Kabar.kg 2018

From the early 1990s until today, its multi-vector policy was marked by the search for balance between various actors of IR. Its relationship with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan during the first two decades was difficult. From 2017 onwards, that situation has been improving, but recurring incidents at the Kyrgyz-Tajik⁴¹ and Kyrgyz-Uzbek borders are still to be deplored because of the tensions from the villagers engaged in smuggling and drug trafficking or fighting for their share of land and water use, despite the authorities trying to negotiate for years.

Kyrgyz FP is somehow situated between Kazakh 'diplomatic activism' and the so-called 'permanent neutrality' of Turkmeni-

⁴¹ See the recent deadly conflict around the Vorukh enclave in April 2021 (36 victims on the Kyrgyz side and 19 on the Tajik side, according to official statements).

*Petric 2012; 2015

stan. Kyrgyzstan is a country that relies heavily on international aid and the massive action of NGOs.* This situation is likely to worsen after the Covid-19 pandemic crisis (lack of vaccines), although the country has been widely supported by the international community since the end of the USSR. Because of the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, the country has further increased its debt ratio with foreign partners and the levels of poverty are rising alarmingly.

Political changes driven by the new president Sadyr Japarov – who adopted of a new Constitution in April 2021, enlarging his power to the detriment of Parliament – will impact the domestic policy of Kyrgyzstan much more than its FP, which seems to have almost no alternative but to strike a pragmatic balance between donors, bankers and great powers. Sadyr Japarov made his first official trip abroad by visiting Russia on 25 February 2021.

4.4 Tajikistan: The Price of Civil War and the Weight of External Ideologies

Having proclaimed its sovereignty in June 1990, Tajikistan gained independence on 9 September 1991. It joined the CIS at the end of December, after presidential elections which led to the victory, with 57% of the votes, of the communist candidate Rahmon Nabyev, against the so-called Islamo-democratic coalition opposition (31%), a unique situation in the region to the point of causing a civil war from 1992 to 1997.

*Worldometer TAJ 2021

*Tradingeconomics TAJ 2021

With 5.2 million inhabitants in 1989 – including 62.3% of Tajiks, 23.5% of Uzbeks and 7.6% of Russians (many of whom later emigrated) – Tajikistan is the only Iranian-speaking republic in Central Asia. In 2020, the population was estimated at 9.722 million* with a majority of Tajiks (84.3%), and 13.8% of Uzbeks and 200,000 Ismaili's from the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) – see also Map 17.1 and Map 8.4. It is also the poorest country of Central Asia, with a GDP per capita that reached \$1,025 in 2017.*

Tajikistan is the only Central Asian Republic whose exit from the Soviet system was accompanied by a complete change in its geostrategic situation. The outbreak of the civil war in 1992 kept the country in the orbit of Russia for a decade (Tajikistan still depends on 85% of Russian exports). After recovering peace and stability, Tajikistan was keen to develop, as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had, adhering to a multi-vector FP with a preference for bilateral relations. The Tajik MFA aims to respond to 'priority strategic objectives:' ensuring energy independence, overpassing communication deadlocks (roads, etc.), food security, and acceleration of the country's industrialization.

It joined the UN in March 1992, as well as other universal IOs such as the World Bank, IMF, and the *Food and Agriculture Organization* (FAO). It also joined region-specific or continental IOs, such as the *Economic Cooperation Organization* (ECO⁴²), the *Islamic Cooperation Organization* (ICO), then the SCO and the *Eurasian Economic Community* (EurAsEC) in 2000 as a founding member (until 2015). All these affiliations show a will to diversify partners and opportunities without alienating Russia or China, the latter who are committed to retain their strategic influence in the country. One should not forget its policy toward the US as well, which received support from Tajikistan in the context of its 60-country military coalition for its interventions in Afghanistan after 9/11.

The first decade of independence was marked by the country's strong economic political and security dependence on Russia. The 201st Motor Rifle Division, a section of the Russian Federation army, was based in Tajikistan and played a (controversial) role in the civil war.* At that time, Russian troops guarded the Tajik border with Afghanistan. Then came the 9/11 juncture with the opening of US and French military air bases. In October 2004, the Russian base was renamed and became the '201st Military Base.' In the meantime, a bilateral agreement was signed with Russia about the withdrawal of Russian border patrols (effective in September 2005). Nevertheless, in September 2013, the Russian government granted \$200 million in arms and military equipment to Tajikistan, in order to get permission and continue using the military base on its territory.

*Orf 2001

Tajikistan's FP is greatly impacted by the situation in Afghanistan, with proliferation risks linked to drug trafficking and armed Islamist groups. All these issues urged the development of international cooperation. During the first two decades of his presidency, President Rahmon has constantly invoked the proximity of the Afghan border as a major destabilizing factor in Tajikistan. The country's participation in the 5+1 group – formed to settle the Afghan conflict (with the US) – demonstrates to what extent the Tajik government needs international partners to understand their own constant preoccupation.

The question of Islam, which is the religion of the overwhelming majority of the population, cuts across all areas of the country's internal and external political life. After the end of the civil war in 1996-1997, Tajikistan was the only country in Central Asia to integrate representatives of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) into

⁴² ECO was founded by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, under a UN charter, encompassing a trade block of Muslim-majority states stretching from the Mediterranean to Central Asia, formerly known as the *Regional Cooperation for Development* (RCD) set up by the (same) regional members of the *Central Treaty Organization* (CENTO) in 1964.

political institutions, for a few years, until it was finally banned in 2015 and its members put in jail or forced to seek refuge abroad.

Iran was very involved in Tajik domestic policy during the civil war, but relations are not serene, even if Tajikistan supports the Iranian candidacy for the SCO (Iran being an observer state from 2005). Later, in 2015, with the promulgation of its 'Concept of Foreign Policy,' Tajikistan was the only country to indicate a decree that stipulates "de-ideologization of interstate relations, establishment and intensification of equal and mutually beneficial relationship with countries all over the world."^{*Mfa.tj 2015} Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is a major medium-size actor in Tajikistan, as are the United Arab Emirates, whose activities are altering the urban landscape of Tajikistan. It is a major provider of investment and credit (e.g. for the construction of the Grand Mosque in Dushanbe), trying to divert Tajik society away from Iranian influence.

China became a powerful economic and financial partner of Tajikistan after the end of the civil war. In 2002, the border disputes which hampered good neighbourly relations were solved. Chinese companies are involved in many urban projects led by the Tajik government, some of which imply the destruction of large parts of the capital Dushanbe. Tajikistan's total external debt amounted \$3.7 billion in October 2020 and is increasing since 2021. Its main creditors for direct public debt are the Eximbank of China (\$1,123,310,000), Eurobonds (\$500,000), the World Bank (\$346,100,000), and the Asian Development Bank (\$390, 810,000).^{*CABAR 2021}

Tajikistan aims to develop tourism and facilitate access to its territory with the introduction of electronic visa. The high number of Tajik migrant workers in Russia, sending remittances and providing almost 50% of its GDP in 2019, has provoked a large-scale impoverishment of the country. The Covid-19 quarantine in Russia (in Spring 2020) put thousands of Tajik migrants out of work. The country aims to diversify its international partners to avoid massive dependency on Russian and China. Beside its established connection with Saudi Arabia, it tries to develop projects with Pakistan, Japan and India.

Tajikistan is a member of OSCE, which supports many NGO and humanitarian programs as well as reforms in the country. It was one of the two last states to finally recognize the existence of Covid-19 on its territory, at the end of April 2020.

4.5 Turkmenistan: The Doctrine of 'Permanent Neutrality' and How to Escape from It?

With 6 million inhabitants estimated in 2020* – among them 85% Turkmen, 5% Uzbek, and 4% Russian – Turkmenistan proclaimed its sovereignty on 22 August 1990, to gain independence on 27 October 1991. It joined the CIS and the OSCE on 21 December the same year, and obtained a seat at the UN in March 1992. These were the only few cases when this specific state joined multilateral organizations, whose original standpoint of strict neutrality is the cause of its relative isolation.

*Worldometer TURKM 2021

Thus, Turkmenistan embarked on a specific path that is both authoritarian and conservative, based on the concept of 'Positive neutrality' which became 'Permanent neutrality' in December 1995.* This choice might be explained as an attempt by Turkmenistan to distance itself from Russia and other foreign influences. However, paradoxically, it did not prevent the country from being the bearer of an 'open doors policy' with neighbouring regional powers. The country encouraged foreign investments from the US, Turkey, Iran and China, Arab countries to a certain point. It trades with Russia, Ukraine, China, especially through the development of (energy) transportation infrastructures (foremost for its gas exports).

*Denison 2009; Peyrouse 2011; Anceschi 2009

Nevertheless, it appears to be the least active Central Asian country on the international scene: Turkmenistan rejected almost all multilateral security initiatives, except for the *Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty* (CANWFZ).

Iran was considered its major economic partner during the 1990s and was the first to open an embassy in Ashgabat (followed by the opening of the Sarakhs-Mashhad railroad in May 1996, and the commissioning of a 200km gas pipeline on 29 December 1997). However, Iranian officials criticize Turkmenistan for its active cooperation with Israel, particularly in the field of hydrocarbons and artificial irrigation. The two million Turkmen living in Iran and the million residing in Afghanistan are also important elements in respective bilateral relations.

The relationships with Russia under Saparmurat Niyazov, the first president (and former secretary of the Turkmen CP since 1985), were quite difficult because of gas issues and the former's political involvement in the internal Turkmen scene. Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, second president after Niyazov's death in 2006 has followed the same FP for ten years. Since then, however, he has progressively extended international cooperation, undoubtedly in

order to avoid being too connected to China, its only remaining gas buyer.

Relations with Afghanistan also confirm the latter's role of 'lone rider' in the region. While other Central Asian republics officially stand against the Taliban through the 'Northern Alliance,' Turkmenistan, under the guise of neutrality, responded favourably to Afghan efforts to improve bilateral trade relations until September 2001. In addition, it seriously considered promoting the American idea of banning Iran, pushed by the Unocal Oil Company, which has for years been seeking to pass pipelines through Afghanistan southwards, in the direction of the Gulf of Oman in Pakistan. Thus, its long border with Afghanistan, through which tons of narcotics pass annually, weakens Turkmen society, causing devastation among the population. In addition, this commercially active border is worrisome to the president of neighbouring Uzbekistan, who sees trade bypass his own territory.

Turkmenistan's economy is mostly dependent on gas exports. It ranks among the world's top gas-rich states but exports almost exclusively to the PRC via pipelines built by Chinese companies and paid for with Chinese loans. There is also the 'Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline,' at a very unclear stage of completion and with an estimate price tag of \$10 billion. Nevertheless, its GDP per capita in 2020 was supposed to reach \$8,312.* Nevertheless, the totalitarian nature of the regime, and the limited circle of local elites who actually benefit from the gas wealth make Turkmenistan a relatively poor country.

On 17 February 2017, its MFA issued a decree framing the "Concept of foreign policy of Turkmenistan for 2017-2023" in 17 points:

*The first point stressed on "broad and multi-format cooperation with the United Nations, (...) a strategic vector of the international activities of our neutral state. Turkmenistan will promote 'water diplomacy' (art. 3), improve the transport system (art. 5), continue cooperation with OSCE, Islamic Cooperation Organizations, Non-aligned Movement, with CIS and will consider cooperation with SCO (art. 6). It will develop as well multilateral relations with closest neighbors (Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (art. 7) as well as Caucasian states Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova as "traditional partners" (art. 10)."**

*Mfa.gov.tm 2021b

Turkmenistan's official FP concept papers show that beyond "Permanent Neutrality," the country now seeks to break from isolation and engage further in the concert of nations. This explains the emergence of a new concept called "Pragmatic neutrality."* On 29 November 2019, president Berdymukhamedov attended the second

*Yapici, 2017

*Tradingeconomics TURKM 2021

Consultative Meeting of Central Asian heads of state (in Tashkent), showing willingness to engage in integration processes, focusing mainly on transit issues, the region's trade potential, and strengthening water and border security with Afghanistan.

On 4 May 2020, he participated in a videoconference organized by the Non-Aligned Movement, in order to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic, although it did not report any case of contamination from January 2020 until June 2021. Thus, Turkmenistan is facing a deterioration in its relations with the USA, who have offered medical aid to a government that denies the pandemic on its soil. Nevertheless, there is an official vaccination policy. Also, on 16 May 2020, Turkmenistan officially asked the WTO to be integrated as an observer in this organization, which should also improve its relations with the EU.

5. Conclusion

Central Asia today is part of the global community, after becoming a geostrategic concept (end of the 19th century) and being a Soviet periphery for 70 years. The thirty years that have passed since the end of the USSR have enabled it to assert its identity, based on the uniqueness of its historical and cultural experience as a part of Chinggisid empires, then Timurid empires, then a colony of the Tsarist power between 1850 and 1917, then SSRs until 1991. All this common heritage, articulated in the cult of a strong leader, pragmatic social turnover, Soviet inclusion while remaining "Muslim," passive (sometimes active) resistance against Soviet secularism, etc., has created a unique ground for their representations and behaviours, which constitute a link between these five Central Asian societies, their five states and five specific development paths after independence.

During the post-Soviet era, the transformations of political systems occurred under the continuity of the elites (leaders, close advisors, etc.). Each state had to build its own FP with the outside world, thanks to the human resources trained under another ideological system, but capable of reactivity, pragmatism and efficiency before the advent of a new generation, less Sovietized, connected to the digital global networks and acclimated to the outside world.

Maybe this period of thirty years was necessary to recycle the past, more precisely its Soviet heritage in terms of domestic human resources, psychologic representations of the "good foreigner" and the "bad one?"

Interactions between global powers, middle-size actors and

newly independent Central Asian states were rapidly defined as the new “Great Game” in reference to Russian and British competition in the region during the 19th century (cf. Chapter 15). It was an intellectual reflex to give sense, by appealing to a well-known concept, to a new, chaotic world. But in fact, this must and can be seen as competition of global and regional powers in a multipolar world.*

However, Central Asian countries focused more on pipeline projects and geopolitics than on their own involvement in “the Great Game,”* considering their own domestic limits and remoteness.

*Hiro 2009

*Pomfret 2010

Meanwhile, the US and Russia, were actually going back and forth in an opposite temporality. While Americans gained a foothold in what they considered as a strategic space that cannot stay ‘empty’ (on the western flank of China, northern Afghanistan and Iran), Russia under Yeltsin disengaged from a ‘too expansive Central Asia,’ a posture that was quickly abandoned with the advent of Vladimir Putin in 1999. Then, Russia came back to Central Asia in order to counterbalance the increasing weight of China, while the US, in September 2021, is finalizing its military disengagement from Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the PRC sought to pursue its quiet rise in Central Asia for three decades. It has first promoted the concept of a multipolar world with the creation of the SCO, before embarking on its pharaonic “Silk Roads” (BRI) project. With its updated strategies the EU dreamt (in vain) of spreading democratic influence and structural reforms in the new connected Eurasian space. But at least some “niches” of influence are still available alongside the “big two” (too big!) superpowers, China and Russia.

On the other hand, the five Central Asian states pursue five different FPs, although with many common aspects, united by pragmatism, a capacity to adapt to what is expected from them, an overvaluation of their economic potentials, and identifying their own strategic meaning in geopolitics. They have a common denominator based on an ‘open door policy,’ or a somewhat ‘lesser evil’ policy which could be expressed as follows: “the Russians, we know them and we anticipate them; the Americans, we don’t trust them; the Chinese, we fear them.”⁴³

In addition, Central Asian states face internal and geo-economic threats: the ‘Afghan endless war syndrome,’ the Uyghur issue, water security. They are all suppliers of raw materials and can therefore consider themselves in competition facing foreign demands. However, they do not seem to worry countries in East and Southeast Asia, in terms of power and influence. From that perspective they are perceived as ‘the empty heart’ of Asia.

⁴³ Author’s discussion with Central Asian experts in Bishkek (2017).

Central Asian States are definitely part of the global world. Like many other countries on this globe they have experienced the political and economic disruptions in 2001, 2008, 2014 and 2020, in addition to the regional challenges, which together form the 'great chessboard' that these five states have learnt to navigate so well in the last thirty years.

6. Epilogue: The Consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Until the end of 2019, IR in Central Asia could easily be summed up as a bidding war of soft power channelled through investment projects, contracts, spheres of collaboration and trade, which could possibly involve a share of hard power from time to time, particularly in the area of military and anti-terrorist cooperation.

However, the complex problems that will arise from the 2020-2021 pandemic relate to the reconstruction of international dialogue and the reopening of borders on the one hand. And on the other, the response of each government to the economic and social crisis (unemployment, increased poverty, inflation) caused by the pandemic and its multiple consequences.

The new international situation that emerged from the global Covid-19 pandemic at all levels (economic, strategic, political, humanitarian, social, cultural), has necessarily impacted the IR of the five Central Asian States. A crucial question will be that of the rebuilding of an international order acceptable to the people, and more likely to respond effectively to the new economic and health threats that have been correlating with ecological and environmental questions. There is a global consensus about the need to act collectively, which first depends on a better understanding of IR, in Central Asia as elsewhere.

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8. Recommended Literature

This chapter presents the FP of the five Central Asian States over a period of thirty years, which explains the extent of the concerned bibliography. The author has chosen to indicate two atlases in order to be able to visualize the national spaces and the borders of Central Asia and its neighbours, as well as several theoretical works allowing to better assimilate the perspective we have taken to reconstruct this problem. Note also the clear bibliographic imbalance between the approach of global players in Central Asia and the state-centred domestic approach (produced by Central Asian and even foreign researchers). Thus, one can find a large number of studies relating to the FP of global actors in Central Asia for which many books have been written (some useful examples of which are given below) compared to those relating to the Central Asian states FP. In the latter case, one rather finds more articles and reports than monographs. It is to be hoped that this imbalance will be restored thanks to the work of future researchers.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Argue about the logic behind Kazakhstan's diplomatic hyperactivity in relation to the weight of its neighbors and its desire for sovereignty.

TOPIC 2

Describe the Central Asian region in 2040, as if it was fully integrated with (or dependent on) China: the stages, the means used by the Chinese power and the political and social situation in each Central Asian state's territory.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

This activity is dedicated to the competition of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for leadership in Central Asia. The class is divided into two parts: one will be focusing on Kazakhstan and the other on Uzbekistan. In case of a bigger classroom, each side can be separated into smaller groups to ensure the quality of discussion and enable the participation of each student is (e.g. 4-6 people per group). There will be three stages of group work. First (1) each group, after a short brainstorming, writes down a list of their state strengths and weaknesses as a regional leader. Then (2), they discuss and write down the economic choices made by the two countries during the first decade of independence. For this part, students can consult Chapter 19 and the data provided in the Activity 1. (Economic Simulation Scenario) or other data provided by the teacher. In the third stage (3) the group discusses the personal choices of the country first presidents (especially their nation-building vision) and how they affected their foreign policies and position.

Then, both groups come together in a general discussion on why Kazakhstan took the leadership, without forgetting the recent return of Uzbekistan to the forefront of the regional scene.

After this discussion, students are proposed an exercise in "alternative history". For this activity it is advised to have mixed groups (with students who previously worked on Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan put together). They are asked to imagine a situation where Uzbekistan possessed the Soviet nuclear arsenal (instead of Kazakhstan) and thus could leverage this in exchange for foreign direct investment in the early 1990s. The groups should think about what such a change of circumstances would have meant for both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Was this factor a defining one or did other factors have a more relevant middle term importance? Again, the insights are shared in an open discussion, led by the teacher.

ACTIVITY 2

Students will work in pairs to take stock of how the Covid-19 pandemic affected each country's economy and social fabric and on how to manage possible solutions. They will try to evaluate the situation after one year of the pandemic when little by little the borders began to reopen and international trade and contacts to resume. Each pair is encouraged to:

- Discuss the political, economic and social context of each state when the pandemic appeared.
- Check the population density, the relevance of cross-border trade connectivity, migration patterns and how these interacted with the pandemic. What can the pandemic's impact on these spheres mean for their future socioeconomic recovery?
- Look for information about various internal and regional decisions connected to the sanitarian crisis.
- Gather all the international proposals in the humanitarian field in Central Asia.

The goal is to establish a ranking of the five countries, illustrating which is most likely to recover first and escape the economic downturn. There is no right answer and the rankings will probably differ between each pair, so the most important thing is that the students are able to motivate their choices while working in pairs. It will be especially interesting to discuss which countries will rank in the middle and why.

After having presented and contrasted their rankings in a plenary discussion, a final part of the activity is initiated. In groups they will try to answer the question: which countries are most likely to cooperate in the future to implement changes in regional integration to mitigate the fallout and prevent future harm?

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNbRPCrKaKM&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

Street eatery.

CHAPTER 18

Terrorism and Security in Central Asia

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Keywords:

• Terrorism • Violence • Security • Securitization • Discourse • Islam • War on Terror

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the meaning of terrorism and its goals.
- Compare the concept of terrorism to other types of political violence.
- Assess the impact of the global 'War on Terror' in Central Asia.
- Give examples of events that have been labelled as terrorist incidents in the region.
- Explain how terrorism can be and has been appropriated in the region.
- Comprehend the consequences of presenting terrorism as a major threat in Central Asia.
- Critically interpret texts on terrorist events in Central Asia.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**Pre-reading questions**

- What is terrorism?
- Why is terrorism often taken to be the primary threat emanating from Central Asia?
- How can the concept of terrorism be appropriated?

Main questions

- What are the two main features of terrorist action?
- How did the global 'War on Terror' affect our understanding of Central Asia's international security?
- Who appropriated the concept of terrorism in Central Asia and with what purpose?
- Which events in Central Asian countries have been labelled as terrorist incidents?
- What are the consequences of the narratives that connect Central Asia to terrorism?
- How should the concept of terrorism be applied to Central Asia?

Post-reading questions

- How is terrorism connected to other forms of political violence? Give examples from Central Asia or a different region.
- Why can it be difficult to study terrorism in a region?
- What are the consequences of attaching a specific type of threat, terrorism for example, to a specific region?
- Have other global regions been likewise affected by the global 'War on Terror' or is Central Asia a unique case?

Terrorism and Security in Central Asia

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ON 6 NOVEMBER 2019 twenty masked individuals attacked the border post between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. According to Tajikistan's National Security Committee, the offensive, in which seventeen people were killed, had been orchestrated by the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL).^{*} A few external observers, however, called into question the Committee's claim on the basis that the details surrounding the incident had not yet been uncovered.^{*} The government of Tajikistan had already acquired a reputation for purposefully labelling opposition groups 'terrorist.' It had previously accused the *Islamic Renaissance Party* (IRP – Tajik: *Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston*) – once the strongest opposition group in the state until its outlawing in 2015 – of killing foreign cyclists in the summer of 2018, even though most evidence pointed to ISIS at the time. Credibility issues aside, others took the accusation at face value. The *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO), for instance, accepted Tajikistan's version of events, publicly condemning the attack later that month.^{*} The incident was thus interpreted in two ways: either as confirmation of the gravity of Central Asia's terrorist threat or as manipulation by self-interested politicians.

*DW 2019

*Putz 2019

*Asia-Plus 2019

All in all, determining whether an action is or was a case of 'terrorism' remains a matter of controversy in former Soviet Central Asia (Central Asia henceforth). That controversy is only exacerbated by the region and terrorism both being routinely taken as analogous to one another. A pervasive source of concern, terrorism gradually turned into one – if not the main – reason for the United States' diplomatic initiative in Central Asia. Upon visiting the region in 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry underscored "counter-terrorism" as a US priority in that part of the world.^{*} The European Union (EU), too, takes a similar approach. In its webpage dedicated to Central Asia, the EU commission justifies its Partnership Agreements (PCAs) with assuaging threats, terrorism in particular:

*US Department of State 2015

*EU Commission n.d.

“Bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) provide a framework for EU relations with Central Asian countries. The PCAs cover the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, illegal activities, money laundering, irregular migration and readmission, asylum, border control, customs and legislative cooperation.”*

*Allison 2008; 2018

Other major powers, Russia and China especially, echo those aims. The SCO – of which all Central Asian states are members, excluding Turkmenistan – lists terrorism as one of the three evils (separatism and extremism being the others).^{*} So great is that concern that a *Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure* (RATS) was created in Tashkent under the SCO framework.

*Global Terrorism 2018

On top of how international powers take issue with terrorism, many external observers also take for granted the links between terrorism and Central Asia. After all, three out of the five Central Asian republics (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) share a border with Afghanistan, a country which has been immersed in protracted armed conflict since the end of the Cold War. Afghanistan was also Al-Qaeda’s base of operations at one point, the Islamist group responsible for the 11 September 2001 attacks (9/11 henceforth) in which nearly three thousand people were killed. Indeed, according to the *Global Terrorism Database*, 18% of registered terrorist attacks in 2018 (9607 in total) occurred in Afghanistan, making it the cornerstone of the worldwide counterterrorist effort.^{*} Also because of 9/11, the USA launched the ‘War on Terror,’ a global effort – predominantly led by Washington – to neutralize terrorist threats worldwide. As a result, the USA opened military bases in Central Asia at one point, namely in Uzbekistan (2002–2005) and in Kyrgyzstan (2002–2014).^{*} Russia too followed suit by maintaining its military base in Tajikistan and also by opening another in Kyrgyzstan in 2003. In like manner, China opened its own military base in Tajikistan in 2019, allegedly to protect its borders from potential terrorist incursions.^{*} On top of the international focus on Afghanistan, several Central Asian leaders have also listed terrorism as one of the main threats in the region, as shown below.

*Andréani 2004; Roberts 2005

*Blank 2019

The term ‘terrorism’ is thus ubiquitous in the region: a source of both domestic and international interest in Central Asia. In the face of the overwhelming global concern, why the controversy? Why do some experts question the suitability of the term and the extent to which the threat is serious in the region? By all accounts, the threat seems more than obvious given Afghanistan’s civil war and just how much it has been emphasized by international and domestic observers alike. In any case, the controversy springs partly from the

lack of credibility indicated above; the term has been appropriated by local authorities and also systematically underscored by foreign observers. Proximity to Afghanistan notwithstanding, Central Asia has witnessed only a few terrorist attacks over time. Suffice it to say that in the 2018 summary, "Trends in Global Terrorism," Central Asia is not mentioned once.* Instead, Germany and France witnessed together more attacks over the course of that year than all the five Central Asian republics combined. Even those Central Asians who participated in or else planned attacks outside their home region – such as Sayfullo Saipov, who drove into pedestrians in New York City in 2017, killing eight people – seem to have been radicalized elsewhere; not in Central Asia. All these issues call into question the degree to which the region and terrorism ought to be juxtaposed with one another.

*Global Terrorism 2018

All the same, irrespective of whether the links are considered tenuous by some, the fact remains that the region is perceived as crucial to global counterterrorism efforts, if not also a source of terrorism itself. Readers need, therefore, to understand how that came to be the case before addressing the nature of international security in the region; otherwise, they risk reproducing the connection between Central Asia and terrorism in far from appropriate situations. Hence, to foster a more nuanced understanding of terrorism and its relationship to the region, this chapter highlights the background reasons for the controversy highlighted above. It outlines a few key features of Central Asia's security, especially how they were interpreted and reproduced over time, and the consequences of having the region systematically linked to global terrorism.

The chapter begins by pointing to a few definitions and debates surrounding the practice of terrorism. Afterward, it accounts for how Central Asia was and is linked to this broader international security concern. The chapter briefly demonstrates thereafter how the concept of terrorism was propounded as well as appropriated by Central Asian authorities, who often spoke of terrorist threats – mainly Islamic extremism – before it became a widespread international concern. To put it briefly, it was both the global focus on terrorism and Central Asian leaders' political agendas that helped consolidate the relationship between the region and terrorism. The chapter subsequently points to the repercussions of that relationship, such as how it affects the study of narcotics' networks and authoritarianism, also offering a few concluding remarks as to how readers of the region can potentially approach the issue.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that despite the chapter

taking a more sceptical route toward terrorism, it does not in any way claim that there are no security threats in Central Asia, nor that threats emanating from terrorism and terrorist recruitment ought to be simply side-lined. Instead, it presumes that the application of certain labels – terrorist for one – requires utmost caution at the risk of oversimplifying our understanding of the region and of also ignoring other security issues. Moreover, as counterterrorism tends to require the use of exceptional methods, such as the suspension of civil liberties,* the concept should not be taken lightly.

*Wilkinson 2011

1. Terrorism: Concept and Phenomenon

As with most political and legal concepts, the definition of terrorism has been a source of major debate among scholars and legal experts alike. In view of how often the term “terrorist” itself has been appropriated by sundry politicians, it is no wonder that efforts to provide a catch-all definition have often failed. At any rate, to avoid the debates to which the term is connected, one can approach the phenomenon by addressing the nature of terrorist action itself, more so than the character of its perpetrators. In other words, this chapter addresses the types of actions broadly conceived as being terrorist in nature. Hence, it is less concerned with whether a group or an individual ought to be labelled conclusively as a terrorist in detriment to other legal concepts. As noted below, groups that often make use of terrorism also apply additional coercive methods to achieve political goals. Terrorists can also be guerrilla fighters, secessionists, and so on. Bearing these considerations in mind, the literature tends to agree on two baseline features of terrorist action:

- It encompasses the use of violence with political intent.
- It is applied mainly to horrify in such a way as to convey a message to a broader audience, insofar as the victims of an attack are less important than the symbolism they engender.*

*English 2009; Wilkinson 2011;
Andréani 2004; Roberts 2005

The importance of the political intent separates terrorist acts from types of violence that are acted out because of private, individual motives, such as a personal act of revenge. The interest in conveying a message, furthermore, suggests that both the victims and the location of the attack are of less tactical concern than having the attack witnessed by – or at least reported to – a much larger audience. As a result, Richard English characterizes terrorism in the following manner:

“Terrorism involves heterogeneous violence used or threatened with political aim (...); it possesses an important psychological dimension, producing terror or fear among a directly threatened group (...) in the hope of maximizing political communication and achievement (...); it represents a subspecies of warfare, and as such it can form part of a wider campaign of violent and non-violent attempts at political leverage.”*

*English 2009: 24

The focus on the psychological message, communication or publicity to which English refers separates terrorism from other military and/or violent tactics. Guerrilla warfare, for instance, is meant to force the opponent to change policy by way of attrition – mainly by using small-scale attacks and tactical retreats – and to avoid open confrontation. As a result, the intended victims – the soldiers or regular fighters of an opponent’s armed forces – are the actual targets of a given operation. Terrorist actions, by contrast, take the victims as symbols; what matters more is the shock conveyed to a much larger audience than their combat role. To take an example, the 9/11 attacks targeted symbolic structures, the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, and thus were meant to reach both global and American audiences. As a result, their destruction would not necessarily ‘defeat’ the USA or fully compromise its underlying capacities. To put it differently, terrorism strives to instigate fear, but it rarely compromises the capabilities of any one actor. The USA was the global military superpower before 9/11 and it remained so afterward. Guerrilla warfare and symmetric warfare, by contrast, are designed to strike at and damage those capabilities; their destruction wears out the combatant and their ability to reach a military victory.

Bearing the significance of fear and communication in mind, terrorist attacks seek to escalate conflict with a view to achieving the following goals:

- To ensure that domestic and international attention remains concentrated on a certain struggle.
- To force an adversary to respond violently and callously, with recourse to more means than is otherwise necessary, such that it compromises its political and moral standing.
- To frighten an enemy into submission.
- Or to strengthen the distinction between enemy and friend to the effect of polarizing a given political community.

Such attacks are more often deployed together with other tactics. Many groups, armed forces, and individuals have used terror

*Schelling 2008

*Law 2016

*Jackson 2005: 59

tactics over time to secure obedience and to deter popular insurgency.* That said, some modern political projects have regarded the systematic use of terror as crucial to prompting political mobilization.* Building on the premise that terror reinforces friend-enemy distinctions, the use of symbolic attacks against non-combatants in such situations is more than an occasional tactical choice; rather it becomes the very means by which to foster conflict in the first place. It seeks to force people to take sides, regardless of whether they were indifferent to a cause before the conflict ensued. Bearing that example in mind, the “war on terrorism” allowed for “the discursive creation of an external ‘other,’ who reinforces the identity of the ‘self.’”^{*} In this way it sustained and legitimized the political objectives of those who enacted terrorism in the first place. For those who were unaware that they were in the midst of a war, terrorist attacks are meant to awaken them permanently.

2. Terrorism: a Growing Threat within the Global Order

Apart from whether certain political groups have increasingly applied terrorism, the global concern with the phenomenon has grown over the past decades. International law conventions, most especially, reflect that concern, as per below:

- Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft (1963)
- Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft (1970)
- Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation (1971)
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons (1973)
- International Convention against the Taking of Hostages (1979)
- Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (1979)
- Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (1988)
- Protocol to that Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf (1988)
- Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection (1991)

- International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997)
- International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism (1999)

Besides international legal conventions, as the global War on Terror came to define USA priorities and those of other international powers, not least Russia and China, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed resolution no. 1566 in 2004. In doing so, it defined the aims and scope of the practice, including the extent to which it had become a priority for global security:

“criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature.”*

*UNSC 2004

That the Central Asian republics became independent in a time of expanding precautionary measures against terrorism (as per the conventions above) does not itself explain why terrorism was also increasingly associated with the region. It was instead ideas about local history, the location of the five republics and new explanations for (in)security that both constituted and reproduced this association.

2.1 Making Sense of the Future through the Past

As no states in Central Asia with those borders or even names had existed prior to the Soviet Union, academics and political analysts built on the past to ascertain the future. In other words, they began debating the challenges that the region would face on the basis of their past and shared culture. Given that the republics consisted of predominantly Muslim and Turkic-speaking populations (Tajikistan being the exception), the ‘Nationalist Secular’ versus ‘Muslim’ dichotomy became one of the main heuristics with which to depict their political orientations. To that effect, the “collapse of Marxism-Leninism created an ideological vacuum, which only nationalism or Islam could satisfactorily fill.”* The dichotomy instigated, in turn, a debate on whether or not the five republics were likely

*Hiro 1994: 317

Fazendeiro 2017 to pursue the Islamist-fundamentalist route promoted by Iran, or instead take the more Western-friendly approach of Turkey.

At any rate, most Central Asian leaders took a mixed path, seeking to overcome the dichotomy. They underscored, on the one hand, their Muslim credentials, while distancing themselves, on the other, from what they considered to be more extreme versions of political Islam.* That said, events in the republics also helped to foster the dichotomy. In the early 1990s, for example, when some conservative groups in Uzbekistan sought to pressure their President, Islam Karimov, to recognize the country as an Islamic republic, local and international observers increasingly feared the prospects of Islamism rising in Central Asia. That many of those groups later fought in Tajikistan's Civil War and moved to Afghanistan, where they founded the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU), served to bolster those fears, even though the latter was seriously handicapped after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2002. All the same – as certain manifestations of Islam were prohibited in the region,* and also viewed with apprehension worldwide – Central Asia gradually came to be construed as a potential incubator of Islamist revivalism, even terrorism.

*Khalid 2007; Malashenko 2001

In short, both the demography and cultural heritage of Central Asia came to play a role in constructing the dichotomy according to which the region was viewed.* Were that not enough, the situation in Afghanistan only consolidated this perspective.

*Fazendeiro 2018

2.2 Central Asia: Afghanistan's Neighbour

As Central Asia became independent, Afghanistan was fraught with internal strife. The Soviet Union's failed invasion of the country in 1979 and its inability to foster a lasting agreement among competing factions in the aftermath of its retreat had not ended the armed conflict. On the contrary, as the war progressed and as the Taliban – an Islamist group led by Pashtun militants – came to control the country throughout the mid to late 1990s, Central Asia entered the international spotlight.

*Jonson 2006

The region was indeed perceived as being susceptible to instability, not least to suffering the spillovers of Afghanistan's armed conflict. That perception had several repercussions. For one, it prompted Russia to take a more pro-active role in brokering a peace in Tajikistan's Civil War, which was officially settled in 1997.* The USA, too, came to pay much closer attention to the region, stepping up its security relationship with several Central Asian states. It is also no coincidence that the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* was constituted in 2001 (the first members of which were China,

Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and that one of its principal mottos was, among other things, the struggle against extremism and terrorism.*

*Allison 2008

2.3 Failed Statehood and Terrorism

Besides Central Asia's regional cooperation and struggle against Islamism, theories of conflict in the early 1990s consolidated the connection between Central Asia and its susceptibility to terrorism. In the aftermath of the Cold War, a broader academic and political debate about the causes of internal armed conflicts engendered new ways of thinking about political violence. In the face of the early 1990s civil wars – Yugoslavia's fragmentation (1991–2001), violent conflict in Somalia (1988–) and the Rwandan genocide (1994) – scholars considered the extent to which the global arena was subject to a 'new' type of war.*

*Kaldor 1999; Berdal 2014

As explanations spread and circulated, the concepts of fragile and failed statehood were put forward to make sense of post-Cold War conflicts. The underlying consensus was that a state which was unable to monopolize violence, provide public goods and guarantee popular well-being was 'fragile' and susceptible to 'failing.' As a result, it was opening itself to internal strife and to wreaking havoc across a region:

"As those states descend into violence and anarchy-imperilling their own citizens and threatening their neighbors [sic] through refugee flows, political instability, and random warfare, it is becoming clear that something must be done."*

*Helman and Ratner 1992: 3

As such theories proliferated, further explanations were proounded. Indeed, the rise of terrorism was soon tied to the absence of strong statehood. To that end, failed states were considered terrorist harbours in the aftermath of 9/11:

"Because failed states are hospitable to and harbor [sic] nonstate actors – warlords and terrorists – understanding the dynamics of nation-state failure is central to the war against terrorism."*

*Rotberg 2002: 86

Those who considered the links between terror and failed statehood were bearing Afghanistan in mind. Al-Qaeda had successfully sponsored the Taliban in the Afghan Civil War, later acquiring, as a result, a strategic foothold from which to coordinate its offensive against the USA. In any case, whether failed statehood prompts terrorism lies far beyond the remit of this chapter. The point is that Central Asia was Afghanistan's neighbour, allegedly

proving the connection between failed statehood and the spread of terrorist networks.

Besides the matter of neighbourhood, Central Asia was increasingly linked to terrorism given its fragility or potential for failure. Were authoritarianism to become too severe or were the Central Asian republics to become incapable of providing adequate public services, failed statehood would loom on the horizon and, with it, the prospects of violent conflict and terrorism.*

*Kubicek 1998; Menon 2003; Rashid 2008

3. The View from Below: Domestic Explanations for the Rise of Terrorism

Despite an international arena that increasingly viewed security in the region through the prism of terrorism and counterterrorism, local authorities also played a major part in both building and reproducing that threat.

3.1 Good and Bad Versions of Islam

As international observers debated over the Secularism-Islamism dichotomy, Central Asian authorities also spelled out their ideas about how Islam, tradition, and secularism intertwined (or not). In doing so, they dispelled the misleading juxtaposition with which some analysts perceived Islamism and Secularism.* And yet, as persuasively demonstrated by Mariya Omelicheva, the relationship between good and bad Islam was applied by local leaders to advance their own view of nationhood and authenticity.* Starting with Kazakhstan, it “clearly differentiated between the peaceful and non-threatening Islam of the Kazakh people from dangerous Islamic varieties that are inimical to their ‘authentic’ Islamic tradition.”* Likewise, authorities in Uzbekistan, the most populous Central Asian republic, “mobilised Islamic faith for fostering nationalism, and also presented himself as its symbol.”*

*Khalid 2007

*Omelicheva 2016

*Omelicheva 2016: 151

*Omelicheva 2016: 155

That Central Asian leaders pushed for a distinctive version of national (good) Islam says more about nationalism than terrorism. That said, as the global War on Terror increasingly targeted various Islamist groups, the dichotomy of bad versus good Islam reinforced the terms according to which the region was viewed. As a result, the Central Asian republics risked being overtaken by more radical – or fundamentalist – adherents to political Islam.

3.2 Casting Political Rivals Aside

Before the global War on Terror became a pivotal American – though also global – concern, the concept of terrorism had long been applied by local authorities who sought to tarnish rivals and cast them as threats to the incumbent regime. This was especially the case in Uzbekistan, where Karimov made ample use of the term to disparage not only the potential adherents to “bad versions” of Islam, but also the leaders and members of opposing political parties. Karimov accused, for instance, several political rivals and adversaries of plotting attacks in the country’s capital in 1999, even though the extent to which they cooperated with one another remained tenuous at best.*

*Polat and Butkevich 2000

It is important to bear in mind that, despite the misleading appropriation, many Central Asian republics, mainly those bordering Afghanistan, were threatened by enemy incursions. To take an example, in the summers of 1999 and 2000, members of the IMU managed to enter Kyrgyzstan from Afghanistan, sparking a domestic and international debate about the extent to which the region’s borders were porous or left unprotected.* But even in this case, some analysts interpreted the incursion to be more about drug smuggling than an effective terrorist offensive.*

*Malashenko 2001

*Makarenko 2004

In fact, due to its proximity to Afghanistan, a major global opium exporter, Central Asia has routinely been studied under the prism of the terror-crime nexus (see for example S. Mullins and J.K. Wither).^{*} To that end, some policy analysts assess the region on the basis of whether drugs transported across it are a source of terrorist revenue. Hence, in the name of curbing crime and terrorist financing, considerable financial resources have been distributed to reinforce local border infrastructure. And yet, the exact nature of such networks and their effects have also been questioned, as it is unclear whether such routes do more to assist specific political clienteles than non-state terrorist actors in Afghanistan and elsewhere in Central Asia.*

*Mullins and Wither 2016

*Bjornehed 2004; De Danieli 2014

3.3 Internal Legitimacy and Authoritarianism

With growing international concerns over the need to placate terrorism worldwide, many of Central Asia’s leaders invoked their success in counterterrorism as evidence of their legitimate rule. This became even more the case in those republics which were taken to be in the frontline of the global War on Terror, and which had hosted American and *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) bases designed to ward off the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. For instance,

Karimov took 9/11 to be proof that his counterterrorism policy had been accurate since the outset.* (Fazendeiro 2017)

Building legitimacy on the grounds of how local leadership had curbed terrorists also became a source of international recognition, the effects of which are indicated below. American politicians, for example, despite their reluctance to countenance local human rights' violations, praised those republics that had remained stable since independence. US Secretary of Defence, William Perry, for instance, referred to Uzbekistan as an "island of stability," a label later deemed crucial to reinforcing the country's importance to the "Global War on Terror."* (Fazendeiro 2017)

*Kubicek 1998; Schatz 2009

It is also worth bearing in mind that Central Asian stability has been of interest to academics.* With regard to terrorism, political science literature often finds strong positive correlations between the degree of authoritarianism and the inexistence of terrorism. That some of the more repressive Central Asian states have adopted state legislatures and authorised a few opposition parties may have worked to engender said stability and to prevent political discontent from exacerbating.

*Aksoy et al. 2012

4. Consequences: a Debate among Scholars and Experts

With international and Central Asian domestic arenas converging on the need to placate terrorist threats – especially those spawned by certain Islamist groups – the consequences for the region were manifold. Researchers on Central Asia have consistently revealed as well as debated the effects of having Central Asia connected to global terror threats.* These debates are in no way meant to downplay the security concerns which affect the region. As per the examples above, Central Asian republics have had to deal with some extremist political views, potential border encroachment, and instability along the region's southern border.

*Lemon 2019; Heathershaw and Megoran 2011; Horsman 2005

And yet – despite the systematic international and local concern with terrorism, to the effect that it often sets the agenda for bilateral and multilateral cooperation among states (as has been the case for US foreign policy and the SCO's agenda in the region) – Central Asia has witnessed few terrorist attacks (see introduction). As a result, scholarship has increasingly debated the extent to which the threat is overblown or even accurate. To take an example, as the war in Syria escalated with the rise of ISIS to power, John Heathershaw and David Montgomery sought to dismiss claims made by the International Crisis Group about the links between radicalization and Islam. This view was subsequently echoed and

supported by other academics.* (Heathershaw and Montgomery 2014; Lemon 2014; 2015; 2018) Others, however, acknowledge Central Asia as a potential and actual source of terrorist recruitment, to highlight the extent to which threats in the region are real and should at least be taken seriously.*

*Matveeva and Giustozzi 2018

The debate is relevant to the effect that it showcases how certain labels, such as terrorism, are applied to explain and justify policy, especially counterterrorism. Furthermore, irrespective of whether the threat is exaggerated or not, the fact that terrorism is very much considered one – if not the main – source of insecurity in the region, raises three issues worth bearing in mind: overstating danger, justifying authoritarianism, and setting out the basis for international recognition.

4.1 Overstating Danger

One of the principal critiques associated with the link between the focus on terrorism within Central Asia is that it only serves to reproduce the image of the region as a place of danger.* Terrorism is not the only reason why references to danger persist, as allusions to the 'New Great Game' have helped disseminate that discourse. As such, the need to question systematic references to terrorism is meant to 'desecuritize' international and domestic agendas – borrowing a term here from Security Studies jargon. That is to say, the goal is to discuss the region, including its security, in such a way that it is not always overridden by the concern with terrorism.

*Heathershaw and Megoran 2011; Horsman 2005

Those who seek to make sense of Central Asian international politics, even more so of the threats by which it is usually depicted, need to understand just how much their interpretations build on or otherwise dispute prevailing characterizations of the region. This is not to say that danger does not in any way exist, nor that it should not be underscored, but that the choice to label terrorism or any other threat has to be done with caution.

4.2 Justifying Authoritarianism

As aforementioned, some Central Asian leaders have often justified the need for stability with references to persistent security threats. Perhaps the more notorious of such examples was Karimov's defence of the Andijan Massacre of 2005, in which, according to government sources alone, 187 people were killed. Karimov quickly sought to connect the assailants to the global War on Terror, underscoring the extent to which some locals had been assisted by foreign extremist groups.* The event played a major role in reshaping

*Megoran 2008

Box 18.1 The Andijan Massacre

The events of 13 May 2005 in Uzbekistan have been told under the narrative of countering terrorism. A group of 23 businessmen were under trial on charges of Islamist extremism, while thousands of people gathered outside the court, already for some days, protesting against government repression and for a free trial. Many of the protesters worked in factories run by these businessmen. On that May day, a group of armed men attacked government buildings in the city of Andijan and stormed the local prison releasing the 23 men. Under presidential orders, the military opened fire over the crowds, the “armed insurgents” as the authorities named them,* killing hundreds of people. In the aftermath of the “Tulip Revolution” in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, the violent repression came about as the silencing of any attempts at a similar movement in the country. President Karimov made clear he would not tolerate opposition or revolts.* The authorities claimed extremist Islamists with Western support were staging a coup. The US military base on the Afghan border was shut down following these events, and Uzbekistan sought closer relations to Moscow. Accounts of the events remain contradictory, with some stating the seizing of weapons and opening of the prison gates were deliberately allowed to turn the peaceful protests into a terrorist attack. In February 2020, Uzbek Deputy Prosecutor-General Svetlana Artykova conceded in an interview that there were “mistakes,” and “innocent people” were killed. In her words, “communications were bad, the commanding officer either didn’t hear the orders in time or misunderstood them; there were no proper preparations (...) we made mistakes.”** The official narrative was cracked, but unclarity remains.

*Kendzior 2007

*D. Kislov cited in: Mirovalev 2015

*D. Kislov cited in: Mirovalev 2015

*Pannier 2020

understandings of the region, especially within the USA, as some government officials had fewer qualms in voicing their discontent over the shortfalls of providing far too much political support to the “stable” Central Asian states during the global “War on Terror.”* In any case, like many events in the region that were subsequently labelled ‘terrorist,’ observers and academics alike debated the accuracy of the official narrative.*

*Fazendeiro 2017

*Akiner 2005; Megoran 2008

In short, labelling rivals ‘terrorist’ work in favour of securing an incumbent’s rule, more so than calling it into question. Much like systematic references to danger, the trenchant commitment to underscoring insecurity may do little to foster political pluralism in Central Asia.

4.3 Understanding the Basis for International Recognition

Central Asia’s connection to global terrorism also shaped how it came to be recognized in the international arena. In other words,

Central Asian actors gained visibility by being associated with a certain discourse, terrorism for instance, a discourse that opened a gateway to international political support and economic aid. To that end, Central Asia's position in relation to regional groups and organizations has frequently been analysed on the basis of how many states – such as China, Russia, and including the Central Asian republics – share common security and terrorist threats, among other issues.* To that effect, reproducing the discourse may not only be in the interest of securing an incumbent's rule, but also of gaining international support. Likewise, the focus on threats offers a means of attaining the perks associated with political visibility, such as development aid.*

*Russo 2018; Allison 2008; 2018

*Duffield 1999

5. Conclusion

The chapter argues terrorism and Central Asia are often taken to be overlapping, but that this is in fact a reductive over-simplification, potentially distorting the way in which the security of the region can and has been approached. The appropriation of the label 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' has allowed for the use of exceptional measures that curtail individual freedoms, as well as legitimated policies and practices that reflect authoritarian practices. Three main points in this regard should therefore be taken into consideration when studying terrorism in Central Asia: overstating danger as a way of advancing a certain political agenda; justifying authoritarianism as a means by which to provide security; and setting out the basis for international recognition in exceptional times and in the face of exceptional threats. As mentioned, this is not to say that terrorism is not a threat in Central Asia. Rather this approach to terrorism-related dynamics is meant to signal significant side-effects upon studying terrorism in the region. The way in which labels and discourse contribute to legitimizing certain political decisions are important to bear in mind when conducting informed analysis.

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7. Recommended Literature

Terrorism has been extensively researched and written about in International Relations. That said, for a broader take on the meanings of terrorism and its historical manifestations, each of the books written by R. English and P. Wilkinson, coupled with R. Jackson's article, offers an excellent introduction into the phenomenon and how it has traditionally been approached. On how terrorism has been presented in Central Asia, including its regional and international repercussions, S. Horsman and E. Lemon provide excellent theoretical and empirical insights. Likewise, to understand how terrorism itself connects to other broader security concerns in Central Asia, as well as how they reproduce fear and danger, J. Heathershaw and N. Megoran's article is a pivotal source.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Pick a potential or existing security threat in Central Asia and assess the repercussions of having it labelled as either a case of crime, terror, or insurgency. To what extent do each of those concepts affect how the region is viewed, including the policies which ought to be applied? Justify your explanation with examples of Central Asia's role in the so-called 'War on Terror'.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

The teacher should pick several media articles – from different national and international sources – that cover some of the attacks that have occurred in the region since the beginning of the so-called global 'War on Terror'. These articles covering the events surrounding the Rasht Valley in Tajikistan in 2009 and 2010 are good examples:

- Catherine Putz, "Discussing Violence and Terrorism in Tajikistan: an Interview with Edward Lemon," *The Diplomat*, (20 November 2019).
<https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/discussing-violence-and-terrorism-in-tajikistan/>
- "SCO condemns IS terrorist attack on border post in Tajikistan," *Asia-Plus*, (20 November 2019).
<https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20191120/sco-condemns-is-terrorist-attack-on-border-post-in-tajikistan>
- "Tajikistan: 17 killed in border outpost attack," *DW* (6 November 2019).
<https://www.dw.com/en/tajikistan-17-killed-in-border-outpost-attack/a-51129060>.

In groups, students should then read said articles with a view to gauging how the same and similar events were presented by journalists, reporters, and international commentators. They should subsequently discuss how often the concept of terrorism or terrorist appeared and the extent to which that label was either considered appropriated or exaggerated by such reporters and local actors. They can also discuss how these texts, or the narratives present in them, could contribute to presenting Central Asia as a place of danger, to justifying authoritarianism or to the international visibility of the Tajik government.

To finalize, the teacher can ask the participants to determine what those articles say about security in Central Asia, including how it is regularly depicted by the press and politicians alike.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnamgYOlwdY&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

Melon sellers.

PART V

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER 19

Facing the Soviet Legacy: Political Economy and Development Patterns in Central Asia

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Keywords:

• Political Economy • Development • Natural Resources • Economic Transition • Trade

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Assess the continuous impact of Soviet legacies on the political economy of the Central Asian states.
- Present the changes in the political economies of the Central Asian states after 1991 and their development strategies.
- Describe the principal components of the political economies of the Central Asian states and assess their strengths and weaknesses.
- Discuss Central Asia's rentierism and compare it with forms of petrostates emerged in other regions of the world.
- Evaluate critically the nexus between the region's political economy and the consolidation of Central Asian rentierism.
- Describe the engagement of international actors in the Central Asian economies.
- Evaluate the Central Asian states' development strategies in terms of their sustainability.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What is political economy?
- What do you know about the Soviet economic system (planned economy)?
- What do you know about the economic features of the Central Asian states?

Main stage questions

- What was the role of the five Central Asian SSRs in the Soviet centrally planned economy and how did it affect their development?
- Did the Central Asian states transform economically after 1991?
- In what ways did their economic development strategies differ?
- What are the main political and economic features of rentierism in the Central Asian states?
- In what ways did international actors influence the political-economic development of the Central Asian states?

Post-reading questions

- What are the reasons for the different development paths in the five Central Asian states?
- How can the different outcomes be traced back to their individual starting points at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union?
- In what ways will Chinese influence transform the economies and the political landscapes of the Central Asian states?
- Could the global move towards a post-oil future be a chance for a democratic transformation of the Central Asian states?
- In the context of climate change and the global energy transition, to what extent can these countries' development strategies be characterized as sustainable?

Facing the Soviet Legacy: Political Economy and Development Patterns in Central Asia

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THE ESTABLISHMENT of viable strategies of economic development has represented one of the most daunting tasks faced by the Central Asian leaders in the early 1990s, when the disintegration of the Soviet Union had become a political reality and the 15 Soviet republics were catapulted to independent statehood. The dismantlement of the Soviet economic ensemble exerted particular pressure on the Central Asian elites, who presided over economic systems deeply entrenched in primary activities – natural resources extraction, agricultural production – and, therefore, were profoundly dependent upon the processes of commercial interaction, infrastructure integration and republican cross-subsidisation that so markedly defined intra-USSR economic relations for almost 70 years.

Nevertheless, overcoming the Soviet Union's economic legacies was far from the sole hurdle to the development of Central Asia's economies in the post-Soviet era. The progressive crystallization of authoritarian politics in the region subjugated economic policy-making to the power considerations of the Central Asian elites, who had to address a series of policy conundrums with serious implications for the stability of the non-democratic regimes that emerged in the region during the 1990s. These conundrums were ultimately related to the *de-etatization*¹ agendas attempting to dismantle the state-command economy imposed by the Soviet Union. In outlining the contours of independent economic policies, every Central Asian state had to assess the opportunity to introduce sweeping structural reforms to ensure macro-economic

¹ From the French *étatiser* – to bring under state control. De-etatization is the reversed process, with the goal of transforming state-owned enterprises into private or mixed enterprises with partial ownership by the public sector, usually by creating market conditions and increasing the economic effectiveness of previously state-owned enterprises.

stability, while the leaders of the region's hydrocarbon producing states (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) had to consider whether the onset of rentier dynamics was conducive to short-term authoritarian consolidation and medium-term economic growth.

Assessing the continuing sustainability of the economic policies supporting the political agendas of the Central Asian regimes is the ultimate end pursued in this chapter. In establishing a comprehensive framework to evaluate critically such sustainability, the authors articulate here a multi-layered argument that, ultimately, queries the viability of the political economy of post-Soviet Central Asia. To this end, the chapter delves into Central Asia's development strategies through a multifocal analytical lens, namely one which looks at the past by investigating the composite role played by the region in the Soviet economy, while probing more recent developments associated with the establishment of commercial and infrastructural policy frameworks designed to maximize the economic potential of post-Soviet Central Asia as well as preserving the authoritarian logic that defines governance in the region.

1. The Central Asian Republics in the Soviet Planned Economy

The Soviet Union (USSR) was organized as a confederation of 15 republics with a centrally planned economy.² The means of production were publicly³ owned, with the all-Union government executing the public's ownership rights on its behalf.* In capitalist societies, production decisions are predominantly driven by consumer preferences; the Soviet economy was entirely based on strategic planning decisions made by party and state organs. This principle was systematically applied to the whole economic process – “[from] what to produce, to whom to deliver the product, from whom to obtain inputs, and in what quantities.”*

*Barner-Barry and Hody 1995: 140

*Nove 1986: 8

The actual planning and implementation were executed by the *Gosplan* (*Госплан* – *Государственный плановый комитет* – ‘State Planning Committee’) in collaboration with other economic organs, such as all-Union economic ministries.* Annual, quarterly and monthly planning was completed on the basis of prospective plans issued by the political leadership on the one hand and requests and proposals by republican (and sub-republican) organs⁴

*Gregory and Stuart 1990: 166

² The system was sometimes also referred to as “command economy;” see for example: Gleason 2003.

³ Until Gorbachev's reform attempts in the 1980s, private property only existed in a small degree mostly in agriculture and small-scale handicraft.

⁴ Republican and regional party representatives, the republican *Gosplany*, and republican ministries were the most relevant amongst peripheral organs involved in Soviet planning.

and trade organizations on the other. In an idealized and simplified depiction of the complex planning process managing the Soviet economy, the *Gosplan* assessed and weighted all these inputs, allocated the respective production targets and required resources to the responsible ministries, which, in turn, proceeded to set detailed targets for the individual enterprises under their control.*

*Gregory and Stuart 1990: 167

The Soviet economy was planned as a single unit following development strategies decided from central organs in Moscow;* the individual republics' economies were designed to serve first and foremost the needs of the system as a whole.* Such hierarchical organisation was mirrored in the structure of the planning apparatus. Republican representatives were part of the planning process at every step: local political representatives were involved in the strategic planning process, plans drafted by the republican *Gosplany* "influence[d] the central plan in some degree,"* republican ministries were responsible for enterprises "of predominantly local importance"* and cooperated with central authorities on the governance of enterprises with national importance. Final decisions over general development strategies, however, rested with the all-Union institutions.*

*Pomfret and Anderson 2001: 185

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: 136;
Suesse 2014: 5

*Nove 1986: 53

*Suesse 2014: 6

*Nove 1986: 54

As its complexity increased after regular rounds of reforms, the system could not be handled by the central authority alone, elevating the involvement of republican and regional organs to a crucial role in Soviet economic management.* This pattern applied to the actual execution of the plan in the republics, a task that was mostly performed by local bureaucrats and enterprise managers. There were evident limits to the range of eventualities to be taken into account by the planning system, so republican, regional, and local agents had to be "given some de facto freedom of action,"* especially in the day-to-day regulation of local enterprises, as well as in lobbying central ministries to increase allocations for their regions.* In Central Asia, the consolidation of this peculiar planning praxis led to the establishment of a distinct class of elites, who were part of, and often played critical roles in, the Soviet economic decision-making process and subsequently came into important positions in the newly independent Central Asian republics.

*Suesse 2014: 6

*Suesse 2014: 6

*Suesse 2014: 6

1.1 The Central Asian Countries as Raw Material Producers

As we have seen above, development strategies and long-term economic planning decisions in the Soviet Union were predominantly made by the central authorities in cooperation and negotiation with local political and economic elites.* Throughout the Soviet

*Suesse 2014: 5; Kalinovsky 2018b

era, the five Central Asian SSRs were targeted by often grandiose development initiatives.* From the 1950s onwards, the Soviet leadership embarked upon the elaborate task to transform the Central Asian economies, at the time mostly built around manual cotton production, into industrialized – and therefore ‘modern’ – socialist economies and societies. Scholars and planners from Central Asia, supportive of those operating from the centre of the Union, made a significant contribution to this large-scale transformative process.* Although the initially ambitious expectations that were linked to this endeavour were subsequently questioned and partially abandoned by Soviet planners, the Central Asian republics underwent an astonishing transformation process – the consequences and contradictions of which are still felt today.*

*Kalinovsky 2018b: 207

Ultimately, the economic role assigned to the Central Asian republics in the Soviet division of labour was that of producers of raw materials. Their economies were designed to provide raw materials like cotton, cereals, and fossil fuels for further processing into finished goods at the centre or in other dedicated regions within the Soviet Union.* The planners’ explicit focus on raw material production led to the expansion of the cotton sector in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan,⁵ the extraction of increased quantities of minerals and fossil fuels in Kazakhstan, while cementing the role of gold extraction as a major activity in Kyrgyzstan’s development path.* The imposition of an ultimately narrow economic focus did moreover lead Central Asia’s Soviet leaders to neglect other sectors of the economy, articulating as a consequence a very limited understanding of the constituents of economic development at republican level. At the end of the Soviet era, a peculiar structure of production had intervened to shape Central Asia’s economic activity, as illustrated in Table 19.1.

*Pomfret and Anderson 2001: 186

*Pomfret 2019: 4; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: xvi

Beyond its extensive extractive and heavy industries, Soviet Central Asia had a “very limited industrial base.”* A few light industries provided products as part of production chains that generally started and ended in the European parts of the Union, however, most finished products arrived from other Soviet republics.*

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: 264

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: 264

1.2 Infrastructure

The Soviet industrialization efforts based on “excessive territorial specialization”* created specific infrastructure and production networks that significantly constrained the development strategies available to the Central Asian countries. These networks were pred-

*Dabrowski 2016: 5

⁵ In 1990, Uzbekistan was with 397,000 tons the second largest cotton exporter world-wide while Tajikistan was the fourth largest with 200,000 tons. (Pomfret 2019: 56)

Table 19.1 Soviet Republics: Structure of Production as a Percentage of USSR Total (1989)

	Oil	Gas	Steel	Cotton	Cotton Cloth	TV sets	Fridges	Grain	Milk	GNP
Russia	91.1	76.6	57.7	-	71.3	45.3	56.0	52.7	51.8	61.1
Ukraine	0.9	4.2	34.7	-	6.9	35.6	13.5	24.3	22.7	16.2
Belarus	0.3	0.04	0.7	-	1.7	10.8	11.3	3.5	7.0	4.2
Uzbekistan	0.4	5.2	0.6	61.0	5.6	-	2.7	1.1	2.7	3.3
Kazakhstan	4.1	0.9	4.2	3.7	1.8	-	-	11.6	5.0	4.3
Georgia	0.03	0.01	0.9	-	0.7	0.6	-	0.4	0.7	1.6
Azerbaijan	2.2	1.5	0.5	8.6	1.6	-	5.7	0.7	1.0	1.7
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	1.4	6.8	5.6	1.6	3.0	1.4
Moldova	-	-	0.4	-	1.9	0.9	2.5	1.6	1.4	1.2
Latvia	-	-	0.3	-	0.7	-	2.7	0.7	1.8	1.1
Kyrgyzstan	0.03	0.01	-	0.8	0.8	-	-	0.9	1.0	0.8
Tajikistan	0.04	0.03	-	10.8	1.5	-	-	0.2	0.5	0.8
Armenia	-	-	-	-	1.1	-	-	0.2	0.5	0.9
Turkmenistan	0.9	11.5	-	15.1	0.3	-	-	0.2	0.4	0.7
Estonia	-	-	-	-	2.4	-	-	0.3	1.2	0.6

Source: van Selm 1997; originally taken from Goskomstat

icated upon the preservation of an open-border regimen connecting the union republics and, therefore, normally spanned across the territories of multiple SSRs.* This peculiarly integrated system led to lasting interdependencies that, to this day, continue to affect the cooperation between the Central Asian countries.* Central Asia's energy exchange is the most telling indicator of the Soviet Union's systemic peculiarity. In the summer, the mountainous republics (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) produced electricity through **hydro-power** and delivered it to the other Central Asian republics; during the winter, the supply of electricity to the region as a whole was determined by the intra-regional circulation of capacity generated by energy-rich Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.*

Their profoundly centralized nature constitutes another salient feature of the infrastructure and production networks established in the Soviet Union. Insofar as economic decisions were made, or at least had to be approved by central party and government organs located in Moscow, production networks and supply chains of key goods were also oriented towards the centre of the Union.* In this sense, **railways and pipelines** built in Soviet Central Asia all led to the territory of the RSFSR: the first rail connections to China and the region's southern neighbours, including the Islamic Republic

*Suesse 2014: 5

*Olcott 2005: 9

*Gleason 2003b; Kalinovsky 2018a

*Pomfret 2003: 8

Map 19.1 Soviet Petroleum Deposits and Pipelines (1982)

Source:
US Central Intelligence Agency 1982.
Map created by editors, designed by Typeface nv.

of Iran, opened as late as the 1990s; energy transport infrastructure delivering Central Asian resources to the Chinese market was not completed until the mid- to late-2000s. Likewise, most major flight routes and phone lines had to pass through Moscow.* As a consequence, the centralized and periphery-unfriendly nature of the Soviet economic system often reduced “local institutions to transmission belts for decisions taken in Moscow.”*

*Pomfret 2003: 12-13

*Suesse 2014: 5

On a broader level, the physical/geographical structure of the Soviet oil and gas industry embodied another relevant example of such centralization. Crude oil and natural gas extracted in Central Asia were transported via pipelines to the territory of the RSFSR and thereon shipped to refineries located in other parts of the Union and beyond. From 1970 onwards, oil was transported through the Atyrau-Samara pipeline, a section of the *Druzhiba pipeline* that brought crude from several Soviet oil development areas to Europe.* Throughout the Soviet era, this was Central Asia’s only oil pipeline: post-Soviet Kazakhstan had no choice but to access this pipeline to export its crude until 1997.* In turn, Central Asian natural gas extracted from fields located in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was shipped via the *Central Asia-Centre pipeline* to the RSFSR.* A more precise visual representation of the interconnectedness of intra-Union energy trade at the eve of *perestroika* is offered in Map 19.1.

*Heinrich 2018: 199

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: 173

*Heinrich 2018: 200-201

1.3 Trade

The centralized nature of the Soviet economy did moreover determine the establishment of peculiar commercial systems in each of the Central Asian SSRs. The Soviet economy was “insulated from the global economy,”* insofar as trade flows within *and* beyond the Union were integral to the planned economy and therefore controlled by the Soviet planners. As a consequence, the Central Asian republics had minimal direct commercial contacts with the outside world: in 1988, 85-90% of Central Asia’s trade was conducted within the Soviet Union.* Table 19.2 illustrates in greater details the Union-centric commercial outlook of the Central Asian SSRs at the end of the 1980s. Another revealing example for Central Asia’s **relative isolation** from the world economy is the number of Joint Ventures (JV) with foreign partners: in 1990, the Central Asian SSRs hosted only 0.016% (25 out of 1,542) of all Joint Ventures operational in the Soviet Union.*

*Pomfret 2003: 8

*Pomfret 2019: 202n1

⁶ Although Russia takes up the vast majority (1,072 out of 1,542) of the JV, Central Asia together with Armenia and Azerbaijan have by far the least.

Table 19.2 Interrepublican Exchange & Foreign Imports/Exports (in %) in Republican Trade (1989)

	Imports		Exports	
	Interrepublican exchange of home-made goods	Foreign Imports	Interrepublican exchange of home-made goods	Foreign Exports
RSFSR	50.75	49.25	67.5	32.5
Ukraine	73	27	85	15
Belarus	79	21	91	9
Uzbekistan	86	14	85	15
Kazakhstan	83.5	16.5	91	9
Georgia	80	20	93	7
Azerbaijan	75	25	94	6
Lithuania	83	17	91	9
Moldova	82	18	95	5
Latvia	82	18	92	8
Kyrgyzstan	80	20	98	2
Tajikistan	87	13	86	14
Armenia	82	18	98	2
Turkmenistan	86	14	92	8
Estonia	81	19	90	10

Source: Çeviköz 1994; originally taken from Vestnik Statistiki, No. 3/1990.

2. Responding to the Soviet Union's Economic Legacies

This section of the chapter will discuss the continuing importance of the legacies⁷ of the Soviet economic system for Central Asia's economic transformation and the different directions taken by the economic and development strategies at play in the region during the post-Soviet era. It is our aim here to show that the economic structures developed in and inherited from the Soviet Union constrained the development options available to the newly independ-

⁷ In Mark Beissinger's and Stephen Kotkin's words, a legacy is "a durable causal relationship between past institutions and policies on subsequent practices or beliefs, long beyond the life of the regimes, institutions, and policies that gave birth to them." (Beissinger and Kotkin 2014: 7) In this view, legacies are not direct reminders of macrohistorical change per se: they constitute "what enables particular practices or beliefs to endure (and sometimes, to reemerge) – often in new form and to new purpose – in the context of large-scale macrohistorical change." (Beissinger and Kotkin 2014) Here legacies are defined as value-free, for a different view on legacies in the context of post-Soviet Russia, see for example Clifford G. Gaddy, who sees legacies as a constraint on future economic activity allocation. (Gaddy 2014: 53)

Table 19.3 Average GDP growth (1991-2018)

	1991-1997	1998-2004	2005-2011	2012-2018
Kazakhstan	-7.66	7.54	6.93	3.69
Kyrgyzstan	-6.29	4.36	4.03	4.27
Tajikistan	-11.61	8.20	6.77	6.99
Turkmenistan	-8.93	16.04	10.44	8.14
Uzbekistan	-2.13	4.63	8.24	7.19

Source: World Bank 2021

ent Central Asian states. We will also note that, ultimately, the legacies of the Soviet planned economy determined both parallels and divergences in the economic strategies implemented in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union.*

*Blackmon 2009

The Central Asian republics chose vastly different transformation and development strategies after the Soviet collapse in 1991. **Kyrgyzstan** embarked on fast and extensive economic reforms consisting of privatization, and liberalizations of prices, trade and exchange rate, becoming the posterchild of liberal capitalist transformation in the post-Soviet region.* It was strongly supported in this endeavour by international institutions like the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) and the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (EBRD).* Nevertheless, these reforms achieved mixed results, as underpinning economic transformations were not accompanied by the necessary social and political changes, leaving Kyrgyzstan with economic decline and deindustrialization, rampant corruption and an ultimately impoverished population. **Kazakhstan** initially followed Kyrgyzstan's liberal and reformist path; however, its privatization process (particularly that focused on the large natural resource sector) was soon associated with widespread corruption and crony capitalism.* **Uzbekistan** conversely opted for a gradual transition* while **Turkmenistan** showed little signs of economic and political reforms.* **Tajikistan** emerged from the Soviet Union as the poorest republic and its transition was severely delayed and disrupted by the civil war that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While the structures of the centrally planned economy were dismantled, the development of new institutions and structures necessary for a functioning market economy was delayed.* However, despite these differences, the Central Asian republics' economies continue to rely on an unsustainable development model. There are multiple dimensions to this problem, however, and these will be discussed here focusing on two interconnected aspects of economic diversification and re-integration.

*Stefes and Wooden 2009: 16

*Pomfret and Anderson 2001

*Pomfret and Anderson 2001

*Spechler 2008

*Pomfret and Anderson 2001

*Pomfret 2019: 181

2.1 The Central Asian Republics’ Quest for Diversification

The Central Asian republics ultimately failed to move away from the path of raw material production set by the Soviet planners. Notwithstanding the frequent public announcements of ambitious diversification strategies and the continuous work of national economic re-imaginings made by Central Asia’s post-Soviet leaders, their economies remain, to this day, still heavily dependent on the production of primary goods and the export of raw materials,* as confirmed by the data showcased in Table 19.4.

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: 136

Table 19.4 Central Asia: Exports (as % of total exports) by Sector (2018)

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
All food items	5	12	10		15
Ores and metals	12	15	36		12
Fuels	70	6	7	77	7
Manufactured Goods	12	26	18	10	30
Agricultural Raw Materials			17	11	
Other	1	42	12	1	37

Source: UNCTAD STAT (unctadstat.unctad.org).

By highlighting the disproportionate impact that energy exports continue to exert on the external economic activity of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Table 19.4 captures the consolidation of rentier patterns in the economic development strategies that crystallized in Central Asia’s two **petrostates**. The entire Turkmen economy revolves around the extraction and export of natural gas: World Bank data highlighted that, in 2014, the energy sector accounted for 35% of Turkmenistan’s GDP, 90% of total exports, and 80% of fiscal revenues.* Almost two thirds (62.3%) of Kazakhstani exports are linked to the hydrocarbon sector,* confirming that, as of this writing, the trend of the early 2000s – when the ratio of energy revenues over total state revenues rose from 5% in 1999 to 28% in 2004* – continues to be relevant for the Kazakhstani economy at large.

*World Bank 2015

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: xvii

*Bayulgen 2009: 180

An externally-generated rent has to be regarded as the key marker defining the economic activity of both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; Central Asian rentierism⁸ is however far from the

⁸ Rentierism is a theoretical framework to explain performance, sustainability and state-society relations in countries that generate a large proportion of their income from rents, or externally-derived, unproductively-earned payments (usually the sale or transit of resources like oil, gas or minerals).

Box 19.1 Resource Curses

The most influential theory concerned with the impact of natural resource endowment on the development of resource-rich states is the resource curse theory. The theory is also highly popular in policy and advisory circles. Heavily summarized and simplified, the theory states that natural resource endowment (especially oil) does not automatically translate into beneficial economic development, but in the majority of cases is detrimental to the political, economic, and social development of fossil fuel rich countries (cf. Karl 1997; Ross 1999; Humphreys et al. 2007) – for the post-Soviet region see for example: Auty 2001; Gel'man and Marganiya 2010.

The discussed negative impacts are wide-ranging and reach from economic consequences like 'Dutch Disease' – a phenomenon where oil revenues lead to a high exchange rate and therefore hinder competitive exports in non-resource sectors – to a higher prevalence for violent conflicts, corruption, and authoritarianism and social impacts like less press freedom and less gender equality. (Gel'man 2010)

More recently, the resource curse theory has been criticized by scholars because of its deterministic outlook (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017) that sees negative effects as inevitable, and attention has shifted to the conditions and factors that enable these negative impacts and consequently also to the question of how resource-rich countries can avoid the resource curse. These approaches incorporate a wide variety of potentially contributing factors into their analysis – the impact of good governance and different institutions (Kalyuzhnova 2006; Jones Luong and Weinthal 2010), specific historic and cultural circumstances, a variety of different actors, especially the transnational oil companies, cf. the 'corporatist resource curse' (Sovacool 2011).

Sources:

Richard Auty, "Transition reform in the mineral-rich Caspian region countries," *Resources Policy*, 27, no. 1, (2001): 25-32.

Vladimir Gel'man, 'Introduction,' in: Vladimir Gel'man, Otar Marganiya (eds.), *Resource Curse and Post-Soviet Eurasia: Oil, Gas, and Modernization*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010): 1-22.

Vladimir Gel'man; Otar Marganiya (eds.), *Resource Curse and Post-Soviet Eurasia: Oil, Gas, and Modernization*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

Macartan Humphreys; Jeffrey Sachs; Joseph Stiglitz, *Escaping the Resource Curse*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Pauline Jones Luong; Erika Weinthal, *Oil is Not a Curse: Ownership Structure and Institutions in Soviet Successor States*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Yelena Kalyuzhnova, "Overcoming the Curse of Hydrocarbon: Goals and Governance in the Oil Funds of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan," *Comparative Economic Studies*, 48, (2006): 583-613.

Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Michael Ross, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse," *World Politics*, 51, no. 2, (1999): 297-322.

Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Benjamin Sovacool, "Cursed by crude: the corporatist resource curse and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline," *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 21, no. 1, (2011): 42-57.

Beblawi 1987 ideal type of rentier state outlined by Hazem Beblawi. While observing the onset of rentier dynamics in Central Asia's petro-states, we noticed the presence of a generally less stratified social structure and the crystallization of rather inefficient pathways to rent re-distribution, with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan failing to execute large-scale welfare programmes targeting their population.* At the same time, Central Asia's economic patterns seem to be diverging from strategies at play in contemporary rentier settings, and those that crystallized in the Arab Gulf more in particular.

*OECD 2020; HRW 2020

*Coates Ulrichsen 2017

The political, economic, and social consequences of dependence on resource exports and rents for the Central Asian republics are varied. Matters of post-rentier consideration,* especially economic diversification, are not exerting any role in the management of rentier economics in either Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, which puts into question the medium-term viability of their respective economic models, as the twin eras of post-oil and post-gas appear to be rapidly approaching.

The recent intensification of climate change and the corresponding global move towards renewable energy raises many questions on the sustainability of the economic development choices made across Central Asia. What will happen when the European Union – the Central Asian republics' biggest hydrocarbon export market – fulfils its ambitious decarbonization strategy and moves towards a post-oil economy? Irrespective of the debated question of whether we have already reached demand-driven 'peak-oil',* or whether Chinese and Indian demand for hydrocarbons will outstretch it a bit longer, the accelerating energy transition already made renewable energy options (especially wind and solar) economically competitive* and dampened the oil price and it is questionable whether it will ever recover to previous heights.*

*van de Graaf and Bradshaw 2018;
Fattouh et al. 2019; Skalamera 2020

*Fattouh et al. 2019: 45

*Skalamera 2020: 1624

While major oil companies and other major oil and gas exporting countries like Saudi Arabia have started to invest heavily in renewable energy (RE) development, the share of renewable energy in *total final energy consumption* (TFEC), as well as the share of electricity generation, is still exceptionally low in the hydrocarbon rich countries of Central Asia (see Table 19.5). Although Kazakhstan has adopted the language of sustainability, green development, and alternative energy sources in recent years – arguably in order to attract Western investment – real change is slow and largely motivated by outside actors like the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (EBRD).* The fact that international institutions are the drivers of a debate about energy transition in Kazakhstan

*Vakulchuk and Overland 2018; Koch
and Tynkkynen 2019

Table 19.5. *Renewable Energy in Central Asia*

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Renewable Energy (RE) consumption (% of TFEC), 2017	1.6	24.5	41.7	0.1	2.4
RE electricity generation (% of total)	10	91	93	0	10

Source: IRENA (*irena.org*).

is not surprising, as civil society is weakly developed and therefore the energy debate (mostly in the form of debates about the distribution of oil and gas revenues) has been historically driven by the government and international organizations.*

*Vakulchuk and Overland 2018: 143

Their immediate answer to the coming energy transition seems to be a turn towards China, as we will discuss in more detail in the following section. However, in light of China's beginning attempts to decarbonize its economy, this can only be understood as a medium-term strategy. Curiously, while China is a big investor in Central Asia's hydrocarbon sector and is (one of) the largest export markets for Central Asian hydrocarbons, it is also a big investor into renewable energy in the region.⁹

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, on the other hand, have very few natural resources with the notable exception of their significant (and politically controversial) hydro potential – Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's relatively high percentages of RE electricity generation (see Table 18.5) are almost exclusively based on hydropower. Therefore, their trajectory of economic development had to rely on different strategies, which did however encounter little to no success.

Throughout the post-Soviet era, **Kyrgyzstan** grew increasingly dependent on revenues at the *Kumtor goldmine* – an economic entity that, in 2018, singlehandedly contributed (depending on the source) between 9% and 18% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP* and almost 45% of the country's industrial output* – and on money remitted from Kyrgyz workers living abroad, and predominantly from Russia: World Bank data confirmed that, in 2019, a staggering 28.5% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP was generated by money remitted from abroad.* The Kumtor goldmine – one of the largest goldmines in the world – has been developed since 1997 as a joint venture between the Kyrgyz government and the Canadian company *Centerra* (formerly called *Cameco*).* It has been the object of repeated controversy over the

*Bhutia 2019; Pannier 2020

*Pannier 2020

*World Bank 2021

*Pomfret 2019: 158

⁹ Kazakhstan is a telling example here: Although half of China's massive investments in Kazakhstan (US \$27.6 billion) flows into oil and gas projects, China is nevertheless also the biggest investor in renewable energy in Kazakhstan. (Skalamera 2020: 1631)

Table 19.6 Exports by Uzbekistan (2000 and 2010)

	Cotton	Energy products	Fruit and vegetables	Precious metals	Copper	Cars	Textile products
2000	31.9	11.9	2.5	25.1	4.5	2.2	5.4
2010	13.5	25.4	9.3	23.7	4.6	4.1	5.0

Source: Pomfret 2019.

Fumagalli 2015 extent of foreign ownership and fair distribution of profits, environmental and health damages (on a cyanide spill in 1998 see B. Pannier*), but also rent-seeking and corruption allegations.**

*Pannier 2020

**Pomfret 2019: 169

Tajikistan emerged out of the Soviet Union as the poorest Central Asian state; its economic performance was further compromised by the civil war fought between 1992 and 1997. As a consequence, Tajikistan's economic reforms and its access to the global economy were heavily delayed and ultimately hampered by a series of structural factors. Lacking exploitable natural resources except water, the Tajik economy has struggled with falling output from its cotton exports and the foreign currency influx from the Soviet-built aluminium smelter as part of the South Tajik Territorial Project.*

*Pomfret 2019: 182

*World Bank 2021

Between 2005 and 2019, remittances accounted on average for a staggering 34.69% of Tajikistan's GDP.* However, dependence on remittances is an inherently unsustainable concept. Remittances make a country dependent on other economies – in the case of the Central Asian republics this is mostly the Russian economy.*

*Garibov 2020; OECD 2018

Therefore, economic slowdown and shocks in the Russian economy like in 1998, 2009 and 2015, led to a sharp fall in remittances – with workers in Russia losing their jobs and returning home exposing the fragility of the Kyrgyz and Tajik economies.* In addition, research shows that remittances do not contribute to long-term development in Central Asia. Remittances are primarily used to lift poor families out of absolute poverty through consumption and are not being invested into small businesses or education.*

*Pomfret 2019: 175

Throughout the Karimov era (1992-2016), **Uzbekistan's** economy continued to be defined by cotton, energy and gold exports. As can be seen in Table 19.6, cotton exports have declined massively in the 20th century, while gas exports are increasing,* leaving the country pursuing an uneasy balance between energy self-sufficiency and export ambitions.

*Pomfret 2019: 107

The Karimov regime deliberately overlooked the implementation of structural economic reform in the early post-Soviet era, withdrawing into a cocoon of economic autarky that left Uzbekistan isolated *vis-à-vis* global economic relations. A controlled agenda of economic liberalization has to be seen as the very core

of the programme of authoritarian modernization that is unfolding under the leadership of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who rose to power after Karimov's sudden death in 2016. The achievement of rapid yet steady economic growth has to be regarded as the kernel of Mirziyoyev's economic programme: by engaging Uzbekistan with international financial organizations, attracting a substantive flow of foreign direct investment, and more generally opening up the economy to the forces of globalization, the Uzbek government is unravelling Karimov's problematic economic legacy. While Mirziyoyev's structural aspirations for economic reforms remain limited, the government incentivized development in a range of structural sectors, including agriculture, tourism and the energy industry while, at the time of writing, the achievement of full convertibility for the Uzbek *Som* has to be regarded as the most significant reform implemented by the new regime in the economic realm.

2.2 The Central Asian Republics' Quest for (Re)integration

In the following part, we shift our attention on the different attempts whereby the Central Asian republics approached regional and global (re)integration initiatives.

2.2.1 Regional Integration

To address the economic ramifications of Soviet disintegration, the post-Soviet states have embarked upon multilateral initiatives aimed at re-creating collaborative frameworks to foster trade cooperation and, more widely, economic policy harmonization. The degree of success encountered by such initiatives varied greatly, depending on the particular historical juncture at which they were founded and, most importantly, their core membership: for the most part, however, post-Soviet multilateralism did predominantly involve a series of "rhetorical entities."^{*} The many obstacles encountered on the path to post-Soviet multilateralism prevented large-scale organizations, such as the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS), from having any significant impact on the economies of its member states,^{*} while leading to rapid failure a series of more targeted initiatives, including the Free Trade Zone between Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.^{*}

This overall picture of policy confusion and economic disintegration becomes more apparent if our attention zeroes in on Central Asia, where, from the 1990s until the mid-2000s, successive attempts at regional economic integration encountered no visible

^{*}Libman 2017: 81

^{*}Khitakhunov et al. 2017: 60

^{*}Mostafa and Mahmoud 2018: 163

*Gleason 2001;
Krapohl and Vasileva-Dienes 2020

*Burunciuc and Izvorski 2019;
Vakulchuk and Overland 2019: 116

*UNDP 2020

success.* To date, Central Asia remains one of the most dis-integrated regions in the world, featuring marginal amounts of intra-regional trade, a generally low trade complementarity, and dramatically low levels of mutual investment amongst the five economies in question. Statistical evidence pointing at scarce economic interaction is supported by a wider observation on the lack of relevant policy fora to harmonize economic decision-making at regional level: as of this writing, there is no multilateral economic organization that unites all five Central Asian countries.* Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of both the *World Trade Organization* (WTO) and the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU), whereas Tajikistan is a member of the WTO. Uzbekistan had recently re-entered negotiations to join the WTO after pausing the accession process 15 years earlier* and is considering options to formalize its association with the EAEU. Turkmenistan has not joined any of the major frameworks of economic coordination, and such systemic isolation incidentally expands well beyond the economic realm: unlike its other regional counterparts, Turkmenistan declined to join the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO).

2.2.2 Central Asia in the Global Economy

As we have seen above, the Central Asian states' economies in the Soviet Union were almost exclusively based on intra-union ties; they had almost no connections to the economy beyond the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this extreme isolation left the newly independent states (NIS) of Central Asia with strong infrastructural linkages and industrial ties to Russia and other important production sites in the Soviet Union: their connections to countries beyond the former USSR were however very limited.

The sudden appearance of international borders between the 15 Soviet successor states disrupted the established transportation links that crossed formerly irrelevant domestic borders, and new "border and custom controls and, quite frequently, visa requirements, created an enormous challenge to intra-regional trade and to the domestic movement of people and goods within individual countries, (...)."*. The unexpected internationalization of the Soviet economic relations led Central Asia's raw material industry – once part of union-wide systems of production* – to lose important partners across various production chains as well as accessible markets to export its products. Due to a fundamentally weak infrastructural configuration, the almost total absence of commercial

*Batsaikhan and
Dabrowski 2017: 299–300

*Balmaceda 2017: 411–412

ties beyond the former Soviet Union and the inability “to compete under the new market conditions,”* this dual loss could not be compensated for through new and profitable trade links and, in the early post-Soviet era, led to a partial de-industrialization of the Central Asian economies.*

*Batsaikhan and Dabrowski 2017: 299

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: 264

Once the USSR had ceased to exist, the fundamental interconnectedness that defined the Soviet infrastructure network translated into a natural advantage for the former centre of the Union. The “steel logic of the pipelines,”* which, due to their material features, are not easily removed, diverted or built, presented post-Soviet Russia with “an inordinate level of power,”* as both a fossil fuel supplier to European countries and a gatekeeper for the access of Central Asian energy resources to far-flung markets located beyond the Soviet territory.

*Balmaceda 2017: 417

*Balmaceda 2017: 411

The long-term monopoly exerted by *Gazprom* over the transit of Turkmen natural gas captures in full the advantage enjoyed by the Russian Federation *vis-à-vis* Eurasian resources. Until late 2009, the Soviet-built *Central Asia-Centre pipeline* represented the only major¹⁰ route for the export of Turkmen gas beyond Central Asia. Throughout this timeframe, the Kremlin exerted an indirect yet ultimately very firm control over the export options available to Turkmenistan, engaging in continuous pricing disputes* and unduly exerting pressures in successive negotiations to finalize gas contracts between the parties.* This monopoly was interrupted by the construction of the Central Asia-China pipeline, which entered into line in December 2009, opening an era in which the energy relationship with the People’s Republic of China had rapidly become the cornerstone of the entire Turkmen economy. As we will see below, this apparently positive development – export diversification had represented a long-term objective of successive regimes in Ashgabat – intervened to question the overall viability of the Turkmen economy broadly defined.

*Sagers 1999

*Pannier 2009

Despite the considerable investment of the last few years, “lack of connectivity between Central Asia and the outside world”* continues to represent an often insurmountable obstacle for trade and development, relegating Central Asia to a role of “persistent periphery.”* Soviet infrastructural legacies and the Central Asian

*Batsaikhan and Dabrowski 2017: 297

*Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013: xvii

¹⁰ While the bulk of Turkmen gas was exported *via* this pipeline throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, the construction of two short pipelines connecting the Turkmen network with northern Iran allowed, from the mid-1990s onwards, the delivery of steady gas volumes – which reached a top of 10.2 bcm in 2010 – to the Islamic Republic of Iran. As of this writing, the delivery of Turkmen gas to Iran is at best intermittent, due to ongoing price and payment disputes between the two countries. On Turkmenistan’s energy exports, see: Yusin Lee 2014.

republics' position at the periphery of global trade flows and major economic centres and their landlocked geography make them dependent on a few (neighbouring) export markets and therefore vulnerable to economic shocks affecting these trade partners. Moreover, the connections that exist are to a large degree based on the export of primary products (see Table 19.4).*

*OECD 2018

The notion of Central Asia's peripheral/isolated nature is challenged by a look at transnational financial and business networks. While the movement of people and goods is restricted by geography, economic flows, and regulatory burdens and borders, Central Asian elites and their money are not restricted by any such constraints. As various leaks and investigations into offshore havens like the Panama Papers confirmed, "autocrats and their cronies use Western financial, legal, policing and political systems to both extend their power back home and to selectively access Western institutions, status symbols and legal protections."* In this reading, Central Asia's rampant corruption is not rooted in the region's culture, history or societal structures alone, but is enabled and enhanced by the complacency of Western institutions and politicians.*

*Cooley and Heathershaw 2017: x

*Cooley and Heathershaw 2017: xi

Out of the **new economic frameworks** established in recent years, the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) and China's attempts to create a New Silk Road – the so-called "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI)¹¹ – have to be regarded as the initiatives featuring the highest potential to affect the economic strategies of the Central Asian states.

The EAEU developed out of a series of initiatives to establish a customs union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus (2010) and a Single Economic Space (2012). These initiatives eventually led to the signing of a treaty in May 2014 and the official launch of the EAEU in January 2015.* The EAEU membership eventually expanded to Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, which joined in January and May 2015 respectively. The EAEU is modelled after the European Union, aspiring to establish an integrated and harmonized single market with free movement of goods, services, capital and labour across its membership.* Despite the existence of a common customs territory, common customs tariff and a common institution governing trade policy,* the EAEU has to date exerted limited impact on the Central Asian member states, mostly due to the fundamental inconsistency through which the treaty's provisions have been applied since 2015.*

*Mostafa and Mahmoud 2018: 164;
Roberts and Moshes 2016: 543

*Khitakhunov et al. 2017: 61

*Libman 2017: 81

*Anceschi 2020: 137-147

¹¹ The initiative was originally called "One Belt one Road" (OBOR), for more background on the BRI see also Chapter 16, "Between Myth and Reality: The Restoration of the Silk Roads in Central Asia," by S. Peyrouse.

Figure 19.1 Central Asia: Top Trade Partners (% of total trade – 2019)

Source: European Commission (ec.europa.eu).

The *Belt and Road Initiative* is not based on a formal trade agreement, nor does it represent an organization pursuing economic integration across Asia and beyond: rather, it implements spatially China’s plan to complete more than 100 small- and large-scale infrastructure projects “that would improve China’s connectivity with Western Europe via Central Asia and Russia, including roads, railroads, pipelines, industrial parks, and special economic zones.”*

The plan, incidentally, was announced by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in September 2013, during a speech delivered at Nazarbayev University in Nur-Sultan.

*Vakulchuk and Overland 2019: 115

The BRI – which is underpinned by a widely recognized anticipation for large-scale investments from Chinese companies, institutions and the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank** – follows up on the steady increase of Chinese economic influence in Central Asia: between 1991 and 2016, total trade turnover between the parties grew by 60 times* and – as confirmed by the data reported in Figure 19.1 – China has consolidated, at the end of the 2010s, its position as one of Central Asia’s top commercial partners.

*Hong Yu 2017

*Vakulchuk and Overland 2019: 115

China’s influence as a key export destination for Central Asian energy is growing steadily. The nature of the Sino-Central Asian partnership is nevertheless very much in flux. A series of interlocking factors – rising demand in China and the still limited export options for the Central Asian energy producers on the one hand and, on the other, the historically low energy prices crystallized in the mid- to late-2010s and beyond – established an increasingly asymmetrical relationship equation wherein China wields ever-expanding negotiation powers over its Central Asian partners.*

*Jardine 2020

The case of **Turkmenistan** exemplifies the one-sidedness of the China-Central Asia economic relationship. *China National Petroleum Company* (CNPC) – the first foreign company to be allowed an upstream stake for the development of Turkmenistan's onshore gas reserves – negotiated a pay-or-purchase agreement to regulate both the construction of the Central Asia-China pipeline and the commercial framework arising from the entry into line of this pipeline.* On the basis of this agreement, the debt contracted by Turkmenistan during the pipeline construction phase and the development of the Galkynysh field in south-east Turkmenistan was to be repaid through the delivery of gas volumes at reduced prices. Throughout the 2010s, as *Gazprom* had withdrawn from the Turkmen market and Turkmenistan's relationship with Iran had become generally unstable, China rapidly rose to represent Turkmenistan's sole gas partner: in 2019, 80% of all Turkmen exports were purchased by China.* As Turkmenistan's commercial outlook came to revolve almost exclusively around China, the provisions of the CNPC deal intervened to place the government in Ashgabat in a rather difficult predicament: Turkmenistan began to reap increasingly smaller revenues for the export of progressively larger quotas of natural gas to China. The intensification of its gas relationship with China, in this sense, had a devastating impact upon Turkmenistan's medium-term economic viability, leading to the complete dismantlement of the social economy* and, more recently, the consolidation of worrying dynamics of food insecurity across the Turkmen territory.*

Central Asia's high **debt burden** emerges in this sense as another apparent signal of the region's growing economic dependence on China. As Central Asia's largest creditor, China accounts for "anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of new foreign debt in the region."* In 2019, almost half of Kyrgyzstan's debt (1.8 billion out of 3.8 billion US dollars) was owed to *Eximbank* – the *Export-Import Bank of China* – and almost half of Tajikistan's debt was owed to China too.*

3. Conclusion

Despite the vastly different development strategies selected by the Central Asian states, they all share the ultimate failure to reform their economic systems. Their economies are still heavily dependent on production patterns established in Soviet times: various attempts to diversify these patterns did not yield the expected results. The leaderships' uneasy relationship with the introduction

*Bohr 2016

*Bhutia 2019

*Anceschi 2018

*HRW 2020

*Jardine 2020

*van der Kley 2020

of meaningful forms of economic change forced the Central Asian economies to shift from one dependency to another: yesterday's economic dependence on the Soviet centre, and the Russian economy more in general, has been now replaced by a dependence on foreign investment and expertise.

Critical to the instigation of such extreme forms of dependency is the logic of authoritarian governance that so markedly characterized Central Asian politics and policy-making throughout the post-Soviet era. We witnessed the replication of these dynamics across the resource divide that defines the political economy of post-Soviet Central Asia.

After independence, the elites' overreliance on pre-existing production patterns facilitated the consolidation of kleptocratic patterns of resource management. It is precisely for this reason that the governments of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – Central Asia's key hydrocarbon producers – never engaged in meaningful programmes of production diversification, allowing the crystallization of rentier economic dynamics in their respective landscapes. Presiding over the region's resource-poor economies, successive leaderships in Kyrgyzstan and the Rahmon regime in Tajikistan failed to offset the negative effects of de-marketization. The latter passively approached the issue of economic reform while, early in the post-Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan completed a significant programme of structural reforms to privatize large segments of the Kyrgyz economy. Interestingly, this chapter has noted that, despite such diametrically opposite approaches to reform processes, the two states are now embedded in similar forms of dependency, as they both rely on capital remitted from abroad, while remaining caught up, perhaps more worryingly, in China's suffocating debt trap.

The process of economic opening that Uzbekistan has embarked on since the presidential transition in 2016 intends to address the manifold ramifications of the isolationist autarky that defined the political economy of the Uzbek state throughout Islam Karimov's long presidency. A renewed attention to regional connectivity, a manifest interest in globalizing the Uzbek economy, and the establishment of systemic reform packages, are indicators that Uzbekistan's economy is changing – albeit within the pathway to authoritarian modernization designed by Shavkat Mirziyoyev. As economic change, in this context, remains divorced from political liberalization, it will be to non-democratic agendas that the political economy of Uzbekistan is expected to respond in the years to come. This scenario, as this chapter has argued, is likely to be replicated across the Central Asian region.

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5. Recommended Literature

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

Is there a connection between the emergence of rentierism in Central Asia and the consolidation of authoritarian governance throughout the region?

TOPIC 2

Should the international community address the political and economic development in contemporary Central Asia? Write a policy report for an international donor organization working in one of the Central Asian countries.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

To carry out this Economic Simulation Scenario, the teacher divides the class into four groups. Every group represents the leader/leadership group of a Central Asian country in early 1992 – a few weeks after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The groups' task is to transform the economy of their newly independent country from being a part of the now disintegrated Soviet system into an autonomous national economy.

The students have to decide how they would develop their country's economy:

- Would they opt for a swift implementation of the economic reforms prescribed by the Western economic advisers or would they implement gradual reforms? To what extent would they implement market reforms?
- Would they engage the international community and try to attract foreign investment, or would they rather isolate their country?
- How would they deal with their country's resource endowment or absence of it, respectively? How would they account for a future without natural resources? They also should consider the implications of their strategic choices in the age of advancing climate change.

Students discuss for 15-20 minutes within their group and afterwards present their strategies and the reasons why they came to their conclusions.

Students should use the knowledge about the Central Asian countries' different starting points and development they gained by reading this chapter. In addition, they can use the following information and statistics:

As presented in the tables, Kazakhstan was by far the largest country in the region in terms of territory but ranked second after Uzbekistan in population size. Turkmenistan – although bigger in size than Uzbekistan – had the smallest population. Kyrgyzstan was the smallest of the 4 countries and had a population that was only significantly larger than Turkmenistan's.

The four countries also diverged significantly in their resource endowment. Kazakhstan had abundant natural resource reserves: it possessed 1.8% of the global crude oil reserves, 0.5% of natural gas reserves, 3.8% of the global coal reserves and the 3rd largest uranium deposits worldwide. Whereas it was a major coal producer during the Soviet Union, its (offshore) oil and gas resources for the most part have not been developed. Turkmenistan too had one of the largest gas resources in the Caspian region, and was ranked the country with the 4th largest reserves globally. Kyrgyzstan on the other hand had only insignificant natural resources, but a large undeveloped hydropower potential. Lastly, Uzbekistan had significant natural gas and uranium resources, but its economy in the Soviet Union had been dominated by the cotton industry.

The distribution of the labour force in the Central Asian countries showed significant differences too. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were dominated by employment in the agricultural and service sectors and the industrial sector only accounted for a small part of the labour force. While Turkmenistan's labour force was mostly employed in the service and industrial sectors, Uzbekistan on the other hand had the highest percentage of employment in the industrial sector.

Table 19.7 Central Asia: Size and Economic Indicators in 1992.

	Population (in millions)	Area (in sq.km)	GDP per capita (1992)	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, (% of GDP, 1992)	Industry (includ- ing construc- tion), (% of GDP, 1992)	Services (% of GDP, 1992)
Kazakhstan	16.4	2,699,700	4936.99	23	37	47 (1993)
Kyrgyzstan	4.5	191,800	845.71	37	36	23
Turkmenistan	3.9	469,930	2845.46	10	12	79
Uzbekistan	21.4	425,400	842.82	35	36	29

Source: World Bank Development Indicators 1992.

Table 19.8 Resource Endowment in Central Asia (2012)

	CRUDE OIL (reserves in Mt, 2012)	NATURAL GAS (reserves in bcm, 2012)	COAL (reserves in Mt, 2012)	URANIUM (deposits in kt, 2012)
Kazakhstan	4 082 (12 th largest globally)	1 950 (18 th largest globally)	25 605 (8 th largest globally)	279 (3 rd largest globally)
Kyrgyzstan	5	6	971	
Turkmeni- stan	204	10 000 (4 th largest globally)	-	-
Uzbekistan	-	1 661 (0.9% of global reserves)	1 375 (15 th largest globally)	47 (2.2% of total global reserves)

Source: IEA.org 2012.

Table 19.9 Labour Force & Employment in Central Asia (1992)

	LABOUR FORCE, total (in million)	EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE (% of total employment)	EMPLOYMENT IN INDUSTRY (% of total employment)	EMPLOYMENT IN SERVICES (% of total employment)
Kazakhstan	8.0	43	17	40
Kyrgyzstan	1.8	41	20	39
Turkmenistan	1.4	16	33	51
Uzbekistan	7.9	34	39	27

Source: World Bank Development Indicators 1992.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

Part 1 and 2: <https://youtu.be/ZfHb-OTYKzU>

Part 3: https://youtu.be/cwcf3_l7z5E

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to CASE STUDY NO. 6 by Bhavna Davé.

№. 614. Видъ Ташкента. На верблюжемъ базарѣ.

In the camel market.

CHAPTER 20

Environmental Geopolitics in Central Asia

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Keywords:

- Environment • Environmental Geopolitics • Natural Resources
- Human Security • Resource Nationalism • Water • Climate Change

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the historical and political roots of environmental issues in Central Asia.
- Explain how environmental geopolitics can be used to analyse environmental issues across scales.
- Present and explain how environmental issues relate to human security.
- Identify and explain key environmental issues in Central Asia.
- Assess and compare the different policy responses to environmental issues in the region.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What is the 'environment'?
- What is a 'resource'?
- For any environmental problem, what kind of individuals and institutions might be impacted?

Main questions

- What is a scale and how is it understood in environmental politics?
- What is human security? How does a human-security lens on environmental issues differ from a state-security lens?
- What Soviet policies continue to impact Central Asian states' environments today?
- What are the main environmental challenges in Central Asia today?
- How do environmental issues cut across the scales of land, food, and bodies? Be able to give examples.
- How have actors at different levels and positions in society (individual, urban, rural, state, transnational, corporate, private, governmental) responded to environmental issues in the region? What are the policy responses they have been adopted for different issues?

Post-reading questions

- How does a human security approach to the environment help us think about the multiple scales that are relevant for addressing environmental issues?
- To what extent should we focus on the past in considering environmental challenges in Central Asia? Is it counter-productive to blame the past? Is a future-focused approach more helpful?
- Who are the relevant stakeholders in addressing Central Asia's environmental policy challenges going forward? What kinds of actors need to be brought together in addressing climate change and energy transitions? And how might this be done effectively?

Environmental Geopolitics in Central Asia

NATALIE KOCH
Syracuse University

THE ARAL SEA was once a large inland sea that supported a thriving fishing community, scattered in small villages around its edges. Today, there is only a desiccated sea, more dusty seabed than water body. This was just one outcome of Soviet policies to develop the 'Virgin Lands' of the arid Central Asian steppe for wheat, rice, and other water intensive crops, such as cotton. The Amu and Syr Darya Rivers were diverted to new agricultural fields, cultivated by members of the region's newly collectivized farms – becoming a hallmark of Soviet bureaucrats' efforts to manage people, territory, and resources in Central Asia. Eventually, too little water reached the Aral Sea, its shores receded, and the exposed seabed became a large salt flat. As winds swept over the vast Central Asian steppe, dust storms came to plague the area, spreading salt and toxic chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides across the entire region's farmland and into people's lungs. As the situation worsened, however, water continued to be pumped to irrigate fields and even after independence, cotton production continues to define economies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. But what of the people directly impacted by this situation? What did the disaster mean for them? Why did some stay, and others leave? And what does it mean for environmental geopolitics in Central Asia today?

The North Aral Sea region is now largely abandoned, but local residents that have remained have never reached a consensus about exactly what went wrong. As they tell their personal stories, a curious mix of fact, rumour, pride, and despair imbues their understanding of the sea, their health, and their attachment to their tragically contaminated homeland. Their stories were briefly the focus of international attention, when outside observers started to worry about 'water wars' in Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most locals dismissed this as sensationalism to sell the troubling allegiance between international aid organizations and local elites. The concerns of local fishermen were not those of suit-clad urbanites (see Figure 20.1).

The Aral Sea situation encapsulates many of the paradoxes of power and place that characterize environmental geopolitics in

Figure 20.1 Former Fisherman in the North Aral Sea Region

© Natalie Koch 2005 – used with permission.

Central Asia. Locals could not escape the immediacy of the damage wrought on the natural environment that sustained them, but these challenges also bound them to a much broader geopolitical context that structured their lives and their livelihoods. Like Kazakhstan's other designated 'ecological disaster zone,' the Soviet-era Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site region, residents in these areas face serious environmental and health challenges, and represent some of Kazakhstan's most marginalized citizens. But curiously, they do not always hold the government responsible for the situation.

Aral Sea residents often fault their national leaders for the environmental challenges they face. But just as many are inclined to place the blame with broader geopolitical challenges, such as foreign neighbours disrespecting international agreements or the Russian space program in Baikonur. Overall, however, the people most impacted by environmental degradation are often reluctant to describe themselves as 'victims' and, in many cases, actively resist being labelled this way. Locals do suffer from dramatic environmental harms impacting their health and prosperity, but they are often dismissive of their severity, or sometimes their existence altogether.* What explains this seemingly paradoxical pattern of local dismissal, and the failure to demand state-scale action? Is it merely symptomatic of deep social marginalisation, an authori-

*Koch 2018; Stawkowski 2016

tarian system, or is there something larger at work? What are the political ramifications of these localized interpretations of environmental degradation, and what do they mean for actors and relationships at different scales in Central Asia? And what makes these ecological narratives and the issues themselves *geopolitical*?

This chapter introduces the politics of environmental issues in Central Asia, past and present, through the lens of ‘environmental geopolitics.’ Although ecological processes and the non-human parts of our world are key to understanding nature-society relations, environmental geopolitics places humans and politics at the centre of the analysis. The goal is also to move beyond ‘state-centric’ approaches to politics, which confine political issues to the scale of the territorial state, and instead incorporate closer attention to the *human* scale and local politics. Environmental geopolitics emphasizes how nature-society relations always involve the intertwining of scales – binding together individuals, materials, institutions, and ideas across space and time. This lens offers a multi-scalar view on environmental challenges, which can explain why those residents of the Aral Sea region feel the way they do about their local ecology, and how broader issues related to the natural world are addressed across the region. After further outlining this framework and the related concepts of human security and resource nationalism, the chapter sketches the Soviet-era policies toward the environment and natural resources that lay the groundwork for contemporary environmental geopolitics in Central Asia.

1. Environmental Geopolitics and Security

1.1 Environmental Geopolitics

Environmental geopolitics begins with humans because politics is a human affair. In contrast to ecology’s stronger focus on non-human processes, environmental geopolitics is a way of studying the *political geography* of environmental issues at many different scales. ‘Scale’ is a fundamental concept in geography, which refers to how we imagine the world and social life as unfolding at different levels or sites of analysis – such as the individual, bodily, neighbourhood, village, city, region, state, continent, world, etc. None of these scales are pre-determined or fixed, nor do they exist in a clear hierarchy from small to big. Rather, geographers argue that our understanding of scale is always changing, since they have to be imagined and brought to life through social interaction and political institutions, like a regional administration or a transnational organization such

as the European Union. People, things, and ideas are constantly moving between scales. This is abundantly clear when considering how some environmental issues might be understood as 'local' problems, like pollution of a town's farmland from a nearby factory, or 'global,' like rising sea levels from climate change.

Geopolitics is frequently presumed to be about the global scale, but geographers reject this notion. Instead, scholars working in the field of critical geopolitics have argued for over 30 years that geopolitics can only be understood if we take into account all scales. Methodologically, this can be challenging and, indeed, some issues truly require a more focused scalar analysis. Often, the important question for analysing environmental geopolitics depends on the communities affected by or engaging with a particular issue. Rising sea levels from climate change may be a good example of a global issue, but this is especially the case when viewed from the perspective of scientists who need world-wide data to model future changes, or international organizations that need to develop policy programmes to address it. However, when the focus is shifted to planners tasked with monitoring land use in coastal communities or islands, these global processes might impact them in different ways. Local resources and needs are necessarily brought into the picture. Likewise, such changes may impact women, the disabled, ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, or the poor in different ways, and at the global scale, those scientists and policy-makers may be in a position to account for this in their work, should they choose to engage with those data. In this instance, the most localized and the global scales come together.

Ultimately, *all* environmental issues cross many scales and environmental geopolitics, as an analytical framework, emphasizes this fact. This multi-scalar approach is needed to adequately investigate environmental issues in our current era of global connectedness. Political economy today is arranged around transnational flows of goods and commodities, but the way these flows are patterned easily "obscures the simple point that environmental degradation is often geographically distanced from elites who benefit from the commodities produced in the process of degrading environments."^{*} The multi-scalar approach of environmental geopolitics also demands attention be given not just to space, but also to time.

Time is especially important in understanding environmental politics because the processes of environmental change can be sudden or extremely slow, and everywhere in between. Environmental catastrophes like flash-floods or the 1986 Chernobyl meltdown are rapid and, precisely because of how visible they are,

^{*}Dalby 2000: 86

often lead people and politicians to demand rapid responses. Other catastrophic events, like the contamination of a territory's air and water from uranium mining or the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, are slow and quiet. These issues are rarely the subject of political intervention before the disaster has reached a kind of extreme tipping point. This difference of temporal scales is important because these slow processes of 'slow violence' are easily overlooked, as Rob Nixon notes:

"Politically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match. Stories of toxic buildup, massing greenhouse gases, and accelerated species loss due to ravaged habitats are all cataclysmic, but they are scientifically convoluted cataclysms in which causalities are postponed, often for generations."^{*}

^{*}Nixon 2011: 3

This 'unequal heft' carries over to how the media reports on different kinds of environmental problems, as well as how they are addressed politically. For Nixon, the challenge of addressing the 'slow violence' of most ecological threats is related to their temporal scaling, which runs counter to the fast-paced cycle of spectacle and sensationalism in mainstream media.

Environmental geopolitics thus highlights the multiple temporalities of environmental issues – not arguing that it is 'better' or 'worse' to focus on faster versus slower processes, but rather simply recognizing that there *are* different time scales and that their significance again depends on the communities in question. For example, the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 was spectacular, sudden, and sensational for the general international community. For residents of the areas directly surrounding the nuclear reactors, it was also sudden and spectacular, but it never quite disappeared from their lives. Rather, it was transformed over the course of decades into an elongated cataclysm reflected in the contamination of the land, their homes, their social fabric, and their bodies. This same process of elongation characterizes the environmental tragedy of the Aral Sea region. It is not a singular disaster zone. Rather, it is the accumulation of decades of cascading environmental legacies of the sea's disappearance and its implication for generations of people living in this area. In contrast to the rapid pace of spectacle, the slow violence associated with this environmental disaster is not flashy and, save for the occasional disaster tourist, is mostly over-

looked – by the media, politicians, and so many others.

1.2 From State Security to Human Security

The notion of ‘security’ is also central to how nature-society relations are articulated and which environmental issues are defined as a problem (or not), for whom, and by whom. As feminist and critical security studies scholars argue, whenever something is categorized as a security ‘threat,’ it is essential to ask *who* is defining that threat. Environmental geopolitics builds on these insights about how different issues are perceived as environmental ‘threats,’ emphasizing that “there is a geopolitics of how environmental problems are represented.”* That is, how problems are defined and how stories about them are then shared is a geopolitical question – implicating a vast array of power relations, forms of expertise, and questions of authority:

*Castree 2003: 427

“We cannot, in other words, ‘read-off’ how interstate relations will be changed by the environmental problems of the new millennium as if we can all agree on what the ‘facts’ of the case are. While these problems are undoubtedly real, there is no objective perspective on their nature, causes, and solutions. Instead, we have an array of actors – such as states, NGOs, quasi-governmental bodies, and environmental scientists – all claiming to know the ‘truth’ about these problems (to the extent that what is defined by some actors as an environmental ‘problem’ is not seen as one by others).”*

*Castree 2003: 427

Environmental geopolitics thus asks how specific actors advance different ‘geopolitical environmental discourses,’ which ‘frame’ environmental issues in one way or another: “The framing process works through a process of discursive inclusion/exclusion, as some things are deemed ‘legitimate’ subjects for debate while others are simply off the agenda.”*

*Castree 2003: 427

Analysing the framing strategies of environmental discourses recognizes that actors in different political situations will all have something different at stake when it comes to an environmental disaster. For example, the leaders of the Soviet Union suffered from a crisis of legitimacy after Chernobyl and may have felt that the disaster posed an existential threat to the Soviet state. This state-defined security threat differs dramatically, however, from the security threat it posed to the people living around the facility, some of whom lost their lives and others of whom lost their income. Here again, we see a similar dynamic in the Aral Sea region: the Soviet state did eventually become alarmed at the sea’s disappearance, but this was because it threatened their lucrative extraction of cotton

and other agricultural products from the region which was essential to balancing state budgets through foreign exports. This was a very different security threat from local fishermen, whose livelihoods were threatened by the collapse of the fishing industry and whose families were breathing toxic dust and drank contaminated water every day. These examples both point to an important distinction between conventional notions of state security and *human security*.

'Human security' is an approach that foregrounds the needs and priorities of ordinary people in a security realm.* It stems from the recognition that defining security is a political act. Some speakers are in a better position – politically, culturally, socially – to define threats as they see them. Or as scholars put it, some individuals have more 'discursive resources' than others. They are better able to advance their vision of security and threats, and to be heard. As such, acts of defining 'security' often reproduce uneven power structures in society. Security has long been associated with the state and state institutions, so it remains largely discursively controlled by state-based actors. Military apparatuses or intelligence services of a country, for example, are commonly understood to be reservoirs of knowledge and expertise about security threats. Yet these institutions have an interest in reproducing their own power and their own worldview – increasing budgets to buy fighter jets and bombs and hire more soldiers, for instance, rather than considering a broader understanding of security threats among ordinary people, like access to clean air, drinking water, and soil. Scholars and policy-makers advocating a 'human security' lens have therefore sought to shift the analytical focus away from statist approaches to highlight the concerns of the more vulnerable or less politically influential actors, who are often silenced or ignored in discussions about what security challenges a state faces, where, and why.

Environmental geopolitics takes the human security approach seriously, while also recognizing that the definition of 'security' will always be a field of political contest. So, in its multi-scalar approach, it examines how competing notions of security are imagined, narrated, and challenged. This is especially important for understanding the policies that have arisen in Central Asia to address the region's diverse ecological issues, whether related to global issues like climate change or more local issues like mineral extraction or water use. These issues all have different costs and opportunities for individuals based on their unique position within society, as well as where they live. Their significance also varies

*Gjølrv 2018; Reardon and Hans 2010; Tanaka 2019

substantially based on an individual or a community's broader value system – that is, how the natural world is ideologically interpreted and what people deem to be a 'good,' 'moral,' or 'ethical' way of interacting with it.

Such ideological narratives form the basis of culturally- and politically-specific 'environmental imaginaries,' which must also be accounted for in the analysis of environmental geopolitics, and which require relating contemporary politics with environmental history. Environmental imaginaries are loose sets of ideas "that groups of humans develop about a given landscape, usually local or regional, that commonly includes assessments about that environment as well as how it came to be in its current state."^{*} They consist of stories, images, and values ascribed not just to landscapes, but also to natural resources, ecological forces, and other more obviously human-influenced sites like farms or canals. As with security discourses, environmental discourses will shift according to local dynamics and who in a particular context has the discursive resources to promote their visions and values to a broader public.

^{*}Davis 2011: 3

Prior to Soviet integration, for example, nomadic residents of Central Asia imagined the steppe as a tremendously valuable place for grazing and supporting a vibrant, healthy community organized around pastoralism.^{*} When Russian and Soviet colonial authorities came to the region, however, they rejected (or simply overlooked) this environmental imaginary that ascribed value to the steppe, and instead considered the landscape to be a 'wasteland,' which needed to be brought under cultivation through intensive agriculture and modern waterworks,^{*} or which could justifiably be obliterated through nuclear weapons testing.^{*} The environmental imaginaries imposed by Soviet planners and state-builders had dramatic consequences for the people, the land, and left long-lasting environmental legacies that the region continues to grapple with today. But the Soviet understanding of the natural world did not appear out of thin air, nor has it entirely disappeared in contemporary Central Asia – it too has a genealogy that must be taken into account to understand environmental geopolitics in the region today.

^{*}Cameron 2018; Edgar 2004

^{*}Peterson 2019

^{*}Brunn 2011

2. Soviet Environmental Legacies in Central Asia

2.1 Legacies of the USSR

In 1924, Lev Trotsky wrote: "Under socialism a man will become a Superhuman, changing courses of rivers, heights of mountains and nature according to his needs and, after all, changing his own nature."^{*} This telling quote was just the beginning of a wider Soviet

^{*}Bolotova 2004: 110

culture of relating to the natural world, based on the ‘high modernist’ notion of Man mastering Nature, which became entrenched around the world from the 1800s on.* High modernism and the ideals of environmental mastery largely spread through the circuits of Western colonialism, but it was also deeply influential in the Russian and later Soviet imperial project. Trotsky’s vision is just one example, but it is indicative of what became a broader narrative within the Soviet Union, which glorified the noble ‘Soviet man’ conquering nature. This trope became a fundamental part of the country’s nationalist stories of success and was routinely repeated to stimulate national pride among ordinary citizens.*

*Scott 1998

Soviet nationalist narratives about conquering nature were embedded within wider geopolitical imaginaries and processes, which positioned the USSR as an actor within a world of competition and cooperation. In the nationalist storyline about nature, the more extreme the environmental conquest, the better it was supposed to advertise the glories of the communist system over that of capitalism. This conquering ethos was manifested in efforts to advance extractive industries in the Soviet Union,* as well as the pursuit of nuclear dominance. Under socialism, ‘man’ did indeed become Superhuman thanks to these nuclear interventions, which not only produced nuclear landscapes, but also nuclear bodies, as citizens became contaminated from regular exposure at power plants to accidental bystanders of the Chernobyl accidents to the use of human subjects during nuclear weapons testing in Kazakhstan’s Semipalatinsk.*

*Bolotova 2004; Josephson 2010; 2013; McCannon 1995; Richter 1997

The costs and benefits of environmental change everywhere are unevenly distributed. Elites shaping policies about natural resources have positions of power to benefit from these decisions, while peripheral places and people tend to bear the brunt of their costs due to their lack of political influence and overall resources to resist. Not only are poor and otherwise marginal populations more likely to suffer from the resulting environmental harms (such as polluted water, air, or land), exposure to these harms in turn reinforces these groups’ marginalization. This pattern is visible in most colonized places across the world, as decision-makers in the colonial metropole sought to extract valuable natural resources from the periphery. In Soviet Central Asia, natural resource management, including agricultural, water, and energy policies, were controlled by central planners in Moscow. As in other colonial settings, Soviet development plans institutionalized economic and power structures that essentially treated the region as a frontier for extractive industries – specifically targeting the production of raw

*Kotkin 1995

*Brunn 2011; Dalton and Garb 1999; Garb and Komarova 2001; Petryna 2002; Werner and Purvis-Roberts 2007; 2013

Figure 20.2 Soviet Posters Propagating Modernization
Soviet posters urging peasants in Uzbekistan to speed up cotton production (left)
and to see water and soil as a source of food (right), 1920s.

Source: Mardjani Foundation. (Trilling 2013)

resources like minerals and oil, as well as agricultural products like cotton, which could earn hard currency in international markets (see Figure 20.2).

Due to their often unspectacular nature, environmental problems are easily ignored or side-lined by dominant actors who benefit from policies that produce them, like mining, weapons testing, or commercial agriculture. This kind of ‘slow violence’ can be difficult to redress, but activist groups nonetheless work to get environmental issues into the news in other ways and try to mobilize marginal populations by joining forces with actors working at other scales, such as global protest movements, to effect change. Such collective political actions about the environment are referred to as ‘eco-mobilization’* and they were central to the nationalist protest movements in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Under the rubric of ‘eco-nationalism,’ many of the titular national groups in the USSR (i.e. those for whom a Soviet republic was named) framed these protests in colonial terms. That is, they blamed local problems on colonial exploitation of Soviet (read, Russian) policies, which in the environmental realm, amounted to ‘ecocide’ of the national group and its homeland. Activists focused on the devastating and ever-increasing effects of Soviet systems of energy, production, and extraction, and their mobilization efforts were a major part of the success of the broader opposition movement that eventually led to the USSR’s dissolution in 1991.*

*Wooden 2013

*Dawson 1996; Fagan and Carmin 2011; Feshbach 1995; Henry 2010; Josephson 2013; Agyeman and Ogneva-Himmelberger 2009; Rezun 1996; Richter 1997; Weinthal 2002; 2004

Although mobilizing tremendous support during the era of Gorbachev's *glasnost*, most environmental movements collapsed once the successor states gained sovereign status. Or, if they remained, they tended to deliberately stay away from 'sensitive' issues and instead focused on 'promoting issues like biodiversity through educational projects wherein they can avoid confrontation with government elites and win support from international donor organizations.'* The reasons for this pull-back are diffuse, but the result across the post-Soviet space has been that environmental issues are frequently removed from national political agendas. Kyrgyzstan may be an exception on this account,* but in much of Central Asia today, environmental issues have been relegated to second-tier priorities. The result is that the tremendous environmental degradation that unfolded during the Soviet times still has not been adequately acknowledged or remedied – even in some of the most dire sites that everyone recognizes to be dangerous, like Semipalatinsk.

*Jones Luong and Weinthal 1999: 1273

*Wooden 2013

In addition to the nuclear and water issues already noted, most countries in the region have built their economies around resource extraction, including the export of oil, gas, rare earths, and precious metals. The states of Central Asia today are thus challenged by a *dual burden* of coping with inherited Soviet environmental legacies, alongside those wrought by a heavy reliance on extractive industries, which are polluting and produce many immediate and long-term environmental harms. In this respect, they are similar to other postcolonial states treated as 'peripheral' sites of extraction, now struggling to break out of the unequal centre-periphery relationship institutionalized through resource relations. The dual burden that results from continuing to rely on polluting and environmentally hazardous industries is thus a major challenge facing citizens in Central Asia. It is further exacerbated by broader political governance challenges – what some scholars have described as the state's simultaneous 'absence' and 'presence.'

In the face of state 'atrophy' after the Soviet collapse, ordinary Central Asians often feel simultaneously *dependent on* and *independent from* the whims of the state-scale actors.* Governments can feel both intrusive and ever-present through various methods of surveillance, but also completely absent due to their failure to provide basic infrastructure, ensure a clean natural environment, and stop contamination from irresponsible private or state-owned enterprises. These paradoxes are arguably at the heart of citizenship in any setting, but are cast in stark relief under the extreme circumstances of ecological travesty combined with poverty and

*Laszczkowski 2013

*Freedman and Neuzil 2016;
Jiaqiao Qi and Evered 2008;
Werner and Purvis-Roberts 2013;
Wooden 2013

the failure of federal agencies to meaningfully intervene through introducing progressive environmental policies in Central Asia.*

2.2 Resource Nationalism Past and Present

The region continues to grapple with major environmental legacies from the Soviet era, but these issues cannot be understood apart from the political structures and mindsets of political leaders and ordinary people. So if local governments fail to act to clean up pollution, is this just because of a lack of resources or lack of citizens' demands? To what extent do the persistent environmental imaginaries of the Soviet era shape how people view the natural world today, their right to live in a clean environment, and how the land and water should or should not be exploited for wealth-generating activities?

One way of understanding how governments and citizens in Central Asia answer these questions is through the lens of 'resource nationalism.' Resource nationalism is a form of nationalist ideology, applied to political and economic thinking about how a state and its population should manage and distribute profits from natural resource extraction. It involves uniting discourses of national pride to a country's natural resources. It can be used in many ways, such as when specific actors invoke the need for 'national prosperity' to promote extractive industries or other forms of exploiting a country's natural environment. From the other side, it can be used by actors who oppose extractive projects, such as activist groups that want to preserve local ecology and resist environmentally harmful practices.*

*Koch and Perreault 2019;
Artman 2021; Wooden 2013

Resource nationalism can, in short, be used by people with starkly contrasting political agendas. Yet in all cases, the general argument is broadly the same: that the people of a country, rather than corporations or foreign entities, should benefit from the resources lying within the territorially-defined state. Resource nationalism is thus a geopolitical discourse about sovereignty, the state, and territory, as well as a discourse about the rights and privileges of citizenship, national identity, and the values a group assigns to the natural environment and raw resources like oil, gas, rare earths, and precious metals. Since so many different actors may work with its rhetorical toolkit to advance their own ideas about these themes, environmental geopolitics is well equipped to analyse how these issues cut across social, spatial, and temporal scales. The approach thus works to account for this vast array of factors influencing how ordinary people relate to resource nation-

alist discourses, and helps shed light on when, where, how, and for whom resource nationalism becomes salient. Here again, history is needed to contextualize what this has looked like in Central Asia.

During the Soviet times, resource nationalism was bound up with the conquering ethos discussed above. The Soviet territory was imagined to be a rich reserve that could – and should – be tapped to advance the nation's prosperity and, in turn, advance the Soviet cause on the world stage.* The Soviet-era conquering ethos tied to resource nationalism persists in many successor states today. It is vividly illustrated in Russia, for example, where President Vladimir Putin has advocated for strong state control of Russia's natural resource sectors as a means to reassert the country's global influence after the collapse of the USSR. In his dissertation, *Mineral and Raw Materials Resources and the Development Strategy for the Russian Economy*, he argued that in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, natural resource economies are Russia's best hope for future development and rebuilding its international prestige.* While much has been read into Putin's thesis (and whether he actually wrote it at all), the text represents and legitimates a particular ideology of resource nationalism – not just in Russia, but across the post-Soviet sphere.

*Bolotova 2004; Breyfogle 2018

*Putin 1997

This is especially the case in Central Asia, where leaders have partnered with many Russian-owned resource extraction conglomerates. They have also followed Putin's lead in *re-nationalizing* extractive industries (including oil, gas, metals, and more) after they were privatized following the break-up of the Soviet Union.* Across Eurasia, there was significant backlash against early post-Soviet privatization plans, followed by a demand for *re-nationalizing* the resource sector (Putin's thesis being essentially a treatise promoting this agenda). This raises questions about how leaders have sought to use resource rents to stabilize and popularize their governments, as well as how citizens respond to the ideological justification that necessarily accompanies these shifts in thinking about who owns and who should profit from the country's resource wealth. Putin and other leaders in Central Asia, like Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev and Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, have used the logic of resource nationalism to justify policies of state-led extraction, but it is also important to ask how the same language is used by ordinary citizens and activist groups, who seek to participate in political discussions about how profits and harms from resource exploitation are distributed.

*Domjan and Stone 2010; Koch 2013; Øverland et al. 2010

In some cases, people might use resource nationalist tropes and ideals to contest extraction regimes in their country, while

Box 20.1 Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan's Hydropower Resource Nationalism

Resource nationalism, as a malleable discourse, can be applied to many different political agendas. The multi-scalar approach of environmental geopolitics therefore does *not* assume that resource nationalism promoted by governments will actually translate into popular sentiments of support. But sometimes it can. This is exemplified in the case of hydropower development projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and specifically the Rogun Dam and Naryn Cascade (Kambar-Ata-1 and 2), dam projects of each country respectively. Prior to the 1970s, large dam projects were treated as important nationalist icons around the world, supposedly symbolizing a country's modernity and its ability to 'conquer' nature. But as Amanda Wooden et al. note, dams have since become the target of environmental protests all around the world.* Yet in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, there is overwhelming popular support for the countries' Rogun and Naryn projects. Both were initially conceived during the Soviet times, but – where construction started – it was not completed before the collapse of the USSR.

The new governments of independent Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan nonetheless remained committed to the projects, primarily because they faced – and continue to face – crippling energy shortfalls. Furthermore, because of how water and energy transfers were arranged among the Central Asian states upon independence, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are forced to buy coal, natural gas, and oil from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. These bills have been difficult for the countries to meet at times, so the suppliers – and Uzbekistan in particular – have cut off service and left populations without energy. These interlocking issues have been woven into resource nationalist narratives about developing the dams as a source of hydropower, which are consistently promoted by governments in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In face of opposition from downriver neighbours – and again Uzbekistan in particular – the leaders in both countries simultaneously claim the nation's right and ability to master *their own* natural resources to develop and prosper, as well as the nation's strength and ability to prevail in the face of foreign opposition.

Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon, for example, exclaimed in a national address in 2010: "Rogun is a source of national pride for every citizen of Tajikistan and a symbol of pride for our present and future life! Rogun is a symbol of the life of our nation, a symbol of life and death of the Tajik state!"* That same year, in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, while ethnic strife was threatening to tear the country apart, the news of the opening of the Kambar-Ata-2 Dam was "the only positive, potentially unifying piece of news," around which the population rallied.* Indeed, even where citizens are critical or resentful of their leaders, the governments' application of resource nationalism to these iconic dam projects has largely been successful in garnering at least some popular support – where there might otherwise be none.*

*Wooden et al 2016: 52

*Menga 2015: 486

*Wooden et al. 2016: 55

*Wooden 2014

Sources:

Filippo Menga, "Building a Nation through a Dam: The Case of Rogun in Tajikistan." *Nationalities Papers*, 43, no. 3, (2015): 479-494.

Bruce Pannier, "Oil, Water Mix To Improve Central Asian Relations," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, (1 March 2019). <https://www.rferl.org/a/oil-water-mix-to-improve-central-asian-relations/29798147.html>

Amanda Wooden, "Kyrgyzstan's Dark Ages: Framing and the 2010 Hydroelectric Revolution." *Central Asian Survey*, 33, no. 4, (2014): 463-481.

Amanda Wooden, Jeanne Féaux de la Croix, David Gullette, 'The "Great Future of the Country"? Dams and Hydroelectricity Discourses in Kyrgyzstan,' in: Eric Freedman; Mark Neuzil (eds.), *Environmental Crises in Central Asia: From Steppes to Seas, from Deserts to Glaciers*, (New York: Routledge, 2016): 52-64.

others might draw on it to affirm the state's right to exploit natural resources within its territory. Consequently, expressions of resource nationalism can rarely be categorized as 'pro-state' or 'anti-state.' Views on resource use are extremely complex and varied, and can depend on many geographic factors – like a person's political, economic, and social status, religious values, and where they live. At the broader level, they can also depend on questions of state power and institutional strength; cultural and historical identity narratives; the variation of resources in a given country; economic diversity more generally, political traditions surrounding activism and populism; and global networks beyond multinational corporations like consulting companies, international activist networks, etc. Given this mix, expressions of resource nationalism are quite unpredictable. Furthermore, resource nationalism can be applied to the natural world more broadly, as well as non-extractive industries, such as the nationalist mobilization around dam construction and hydroelectric projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (see Box 20.1).

Environmental geopolitics helps in understanding domestic expressions of resource nationalism, but it also helps to break down foreign discourses about resource geopolitics in a particular country or region. For example, a critical approach to geopolitics rejects the commonplace clichés applied to Central Asia as a 'grand chessboard,' where Great Powers compete over its vast natural resource wealth.* Analysts who diagnose regional politics in this way often stress elite politics and caricature politics in resource-rich states

*Kleveman 2003

as being defined by a sort of ‘ruling bargain,’ whereby citizens are said to exchange political rights for state ‘welfare.’ These readings are not only essentialist, but neglect many other scales at which the impacts of resource extraction are felt. Without taking into account the human security aspects of extraction, important questions of how individuals with differing political and material resources engage the language and state-based ideals of resource nationalism.

3. Environmental Challenges in Central Asia

A grounded approach to environmental geopolitics is necessary for understanding the role of popular agency in shaping a state’s resource politics, as well as where the effects of environmentally-harmful resource extraction and lingering environmental legacies of Cold War geopolitics and colonialism are truly felt. Environmental issues in Central Asia are so wide-ranging that they cannot be exhaustively detailed here. This section thus homes in on two exemplary nodes: (1) water, cotton, and hydropolitics; and (2) nuclear landscapes, extraction, and energy. This focus is not meant to diminish the importance of other issues like smog and air pollution, wildlife habitat destruction, and ecosystem-wide effects from climate change. Rather, the two nodes presented here illustrate the multi-scalar character of nature-society challenges that an environmental geopolitics perspective brings into focus.

3.1 Water, Cotton, and Hydropolitics

Soviet citizens were largely aware of their local environmental problems, developed over decades of applying ‘brute force technology’* to master nature and extract resources from nickel, tin, and uranium, to vast amounts of cotton. But it was only in the mid-1980s, with the loosening of media restrictions under Gorbachev’s *glasnost*’ reforms, that domestic and foreign audiences became aware of the full scope of the disasters faced around the region. In Central Asia, one issue that grabbed international attention was the disappearance of the Aral Sea. Once the world’s fourth largest lake, the Aral had been reduced to several small lakes and a dusty, dried up seabed by the 1980s. When *glasnost*’-era reporting shed light on the crisis, outside observers were instantly distressed, especially since they had become increasingly concerned about potential conflict over water in Central Asia.

Water is a natural resource, but it has a special status within this category as a ‘life essential.’ Whereas we might imagine a

*Josephson 2002

world that does not use or value gold, humans cannot live without water. Like all resources, water has specific material qualities and its own politics. But these politics are often not as simple as state-centred security commentators tend to imply. At the end of the Cold War, policy analysts became preoccupied with identifying 'new' security threats on the horizon. Certain hawks in this policy community hypothesized in the 1990s that threats would now stem from 'unconventional' sources. One popular idea tied the future of conflict to the planet's growing environmental degradation, said to be exacerbated by new levels of international connectedness.* The 'environment-conflict thesis' posited a new era of scarcity-induced fighting over resources, and one thread of this was the so-called 'water wars' thesis. It was built on essentialist thinking about geopolitics and security, and a strong dose of colonial racism,* but it nonetheless brought a great deal of attention to Central Asian water geographies and 'hydropolitics.'

*Kaplan 1994

*Dalby 1999

The 'water wars' thesis was attractive to security hawks in the 1990s because it justified their continued demands for funding and other resources, while building on seemingly 'common-sense' ideas about the world's diminishing freshwater reserves and the new political environment in arid regions of the world like Central Asia. In the post-Soviet context, then, at a time when the Aral Sea basin was being carved up into a number of sovereign states, the dried-up lake seemed a prime candidate for pushing the region to the brink of war over water.* International organizations rushed to get involved, aiming to prevent the imagined 'coming anarchy' of water wars in Central Asia.* It turned out that that the region's water wars were precisely that – imagined. No wars were ever fought over water in Central Asia (see Box 20.2). One of the major reasons that outside observers so readily assumed there would be conflict over water in Central Asia is because it is largely a desert environment, meaning that water is in limited supply. The idea that water is scarce in deserts is not necessarily false, but it must be taken in context. This is because the very concept of 'scarcity' is socially and politically constructed. This history of water use in Central Asia illustrates this process vividly.

*Micklin 2002

*Zinzani and Menga 2017

Water 'scarcity' is, in brief, the result of human decisions about how it is used. Prior to the introduction of new Soviet economic and agricultural policies, water had been sustainably managed for centuries in Central Asia. In the Soviet system, control of water resources was taken away from locals and given to central planners, which resulted in the widespread destruction of regional management and distribution systems.* Soviet policies also called

*Micklin 2007; Weinthal 2002

Box 20.2 Why Were There No “Water Wars” in Central Asia?

In the early 1990s, as the Soviet successor states became independent and more Soviet environmental legacies came to light, the international community was anxious that Central Asian states would go to war over water. This did not happen. Many reasons might be at work, but two are especially pertinent to explaining why there were no water wars.*

*Koch 2016

(1) *The environment-conflict thesis is fallacious.* The environment-conflict thesis, which suggests that states and other actors will resort to violent conflict under conditions of resource scarcity, does not hold up theoretically or empirically. Specifically with regard to water, there are almost no historical cases where shortages have led to armed conflict. Instead, water scarcity is far more likely to result in cooperation. Furthermore, demand for natural resources is inherently political, since it is defined by management priorities, settlement patterns, land use, etc. As such, scarcity itself is always a political phenomenon. This means that scarcity in and of itself can never cause conflict. The environment-conflict thesis thus suffers from the problem of causal inference, insofar as scarcity is not a cause but an intervening variable that might result in violence. The political climate in which scarcity occurs is what makes war likely, not scarcity itself. Furthermore, most scholars agree that when it comes to natural resources, the stakes are generally far too low and the risks too high for states to start an armed conflict. Cooperation, not conflict, offers more rewards, as the leaders in Central Asia quickly learned in the 1990s.

(2) *Water sharing and cooperation created opportunities for the Central Asian states.* Water wars predictions were often tied to the question of how the Central Asian states would manage water as independent states, when they were previously all part of the same country – the Soviet Union. International observers assumed that the leaders of newly independent states would naturally feel themselves in conflict with the others and would selfishly try to grab resources for themselves and their communities. Not only was this view on these actors’ willingness to cooperate too pessimistic, it also did not consider physical geography. The Aral Sea basin includes diverse landscapes and, given their terrain, the upstream states where the rivers originate, such as Tajikistan, can only use a limited amount of the water for agriculture. These states might dam the rivers, but the water does eventually make its way to the downstream countries. For both upstream and downstream states, access to water creates a significant bargaining opportunity. Policy-makers in both contexts have thus been far more inclined to bargain to secure what they want, whether it is water or something else in exchange for water. Picking up arms, however, would nullify these opportunities.

Sources:

Jon Barnett, "Destabilizing the Environment-Conflict Thesis." *Review of International Studies*, 26, no. 2, (2000): 271-288.

Ken Conca; Geoffrey Dabelko, *Environmental Peacemaking*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

Natalie Koch, "Why no 'Water Wars' in Central Asia? Lessons Learned from the Aral Sea Disaster," *PONARS Eurasia*, Policy Memo 410, (2016). <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/why-no-water-wars-central-asia-aral-sea-disaster>

Sandra Postel; Aaron Wolf, "Dehydrating Conflict," *Foreign Policy*, (18 November 2009). <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/18/dehydrating-conflict/>

for the specialization of Central Asia in cotton production, beginning as early as the 1920s, but most famously following the 1953 initiation of Khrushchev's 'Virgin Lands' campaign. To bring huge swaths of Central Asia's arid lands under cultivation, planners proposed massive industrial-style systems of irrigation and dams. These water projects centred on the region's two main rivers, the Syr Darya to the north and the Amu Darya to the south, which feed into the Aral Sea (all states in Central Asia fall within this Aral Sea drainage basin). In the mountainous upstream parts of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, dams were built, and downstream in the flat, steppe territories of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, vast networks of canals siphoned water to farms. That water was largely going to irrigate vast cotton fields across the region.

Cotton was described as 'white gold' by Soviet leaders, for the currency it could earn on foreign markets, leading them to pursue a 'cotton at all price' agenda in Central Asia. Cotton is an extremely water-intensive crop to begin with, but policies also failed to promote efficient water use: incentive structures for farmers and managers were organized around production quotas rather than resource conservation. Inefficient water use also resulted from perverse incentives in the system of building canals – rewarding gross output, measured in terms of kilometres of canals built or tons of earth moved – which discouraged conservation and instead solidified elite patronage networks that quickly came to characterize Central Asia's agricultural sector.*

Some of the region's most ambitious irrigation projects were spectacular – circulating in the media as icons of Central Asia's modernity, such as Turkmenistan's Kara Kum Canal. This

*Markowitz 2013; Spoor 1998; Weinthal 2002

Figure 20.3 Unlined Irrigation Canal in Northern Turkmenistan

© Natalie Koch 2014 – used with permission.

Zonn 2014 1375-kilometre canal was begun in 1954 and completed in 1988. It carries water from the Amu Darya River across the Kara Kum Desert and, remarkably, is navigable by boats. Stunning images of Turkmen dressed in their full ethnic attire in speedboats broadcast this image of modernity and environmental mastery to the rest of the Soviet Union and beyond.* Most irrigation canals stemming from these primary arteries were of extremely poor quality, however, and almost always remained unlined (meaning there was no concrete used to line them; they were simply dirt trenches). This led to the loss of enormous amounts of water to seepage, as well as evaporation in the desert climate – a problem that is still experienced across Turkmenistan and other parts of Central Asia today*

*Turkmenworld 2015

*Koch 2015

(see Figure 20.3).

These hydro-political projects were undertaken in the name of ‘economic development,’ despite the fact that they eventually led to economic and environmental disasters across huge portions of Central Asia. But the spectacle of greening the desert was seductive and after meeting with early ‘success’ in the 1950s, the Virgin Lands campaign continued to expand into the 1960s, bringing even more land under irrigation and further expanding river water diversions. These diversions meant a massive drop in river water flowing to the Aral Sea (see also Map 20.1), which was needed to sustain its level and its saline balance. The sea once sustained a vibrant fishery that supported thousands of local residents. This had entirely collapsed by the 1970s, when salt levels became too

high for fish to tolerate. In addition to this and other biodiversity losses, the sea's disappearance meant the disappearance of habitat for migratory waterfowl. Beyond the immediate littoral zone, impacts of the disaster were felt widely, as dust storms spread tens of millions of tons of dust and salt, polluted with pesticides, over the whole basin beginning in the 1970s. Not only were these storms carrying toxic and small-particulate dusts that harmed humans, they were also depressing crop yields by spreading salt-laden dust throughout Central Asia.

The ecological changes accompanying the desiccation of the sea had tragic consequences for the inhabitants of the region. Already suffering from poverty, the local population was and continues to be ill equipped to cope with the degradation of their environment and the loss of livelihood. Many fishermen and others stay in the region out of attachment to the land or lack of resources to leave. In other cases, people simply feel stigmatized by their compatriots when they go to town and people recognize them as coming from an 'ecological disaster zone.' For example, as one Aral Sea resident described it in 2005, "Well, when I go to other cities, many people ask, 'Where are you from?' I say, 'From Aral'sk.' They all get scared, thinking that in the 'ecological disaster zone' we are all sick."*

*Koch 2018: 94; Stawkowski 2016; White 2013

This kind of social stigmatization is layered on top of an already-intense sense of powerlessness among village residents. They generally felt government officials should take charge of the matter, but they expressed no inclination to take matters into their own hands through the initiation of armed violence, as in the 'water wars' thesis. Violence, from their point of view, would be worse than futile. Central Asia's hydro-politics have never been defined by violent conflict. There are occasional community-level spats over water allocations, and sometimes national elites grumble about them too. Simmering frustration over water access may be common in Central Asia – as in nearly everywhere else in the world – but people and politicians have been quick to learn that they benefit most from cooperation. And yet, while there has been no armed conflict surrounding water in the region, the broader environmental and economic structures related to water and agriculture do represent a form of violence. This is the 'slow violence' discussed above: those most impacted by the regional water problems – those for whom the stakes are highest – have never posed a threat to peace, while local elites fail to invest in their population's health, alternative economic opportunities, and environmental remediation.

Cotton is still an important source of income today across the region. Whereas Kazakhstan has been able to economically diver-

Map 20.1 Environmental Pollution in Central Asia

Map A shows Central Asia and its main areas affected by the ‘slow violence’ of wind erosion, overgrazing, salinization and desertification, and other areas polluted by oil and gas extraction, mining, or intensive agriculture as well as water basin contamination from these industries.

Map B shows the evolution of the shrinking Aral Sea in the last six decades with its slow recovery in the last decade.

Map C provides a close-up of the nuclear testing site near Semipalatinsk.

(Note that the transcription of place names differs from the general standard used in this handbook.)

Sources:
Stanley D. Brunn, ‘Fifty Years of Soviet Nuclear Testing in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan: Juxtaposed Worlds of Blasts and Silences, Security and Risks, Denials and Memory,’ in: S. D. Brunn (ed.) *Engineering Earth*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011): 1791. (Cartography by Dick Gilbreath)
Philippe Rekacewicz, *Central Asia in Peril*, GRID-Arendal/UNEP, (June 2002). Map based on: Ruben Mnatsakanian, *L’Héritage écologique du communisme dans les républiques de l’ex-URSS*, (Paris: Frison-Roche: 1994); Атлас СССР, (Москва: Главное Управление Геодезии и Картографии при Совете Министров СССР, 1985).
Nikolay Vasilievich Aladin; Valentina Ivanovna Gontar; Lyubov Vasilievna Zhakova; Igor Svetozarovich Plotnikov; Alexey Olegovich Smurov; Piotr Rzymyski; Piotr Klimaszynski, ‘The Zoocenosis of the Aral Sea: six decades of fast-paced change,’ *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 26, (2018): 2228-2237.

Map created by editors and designed by Typeface nv. Map A was adapted from Rekacewicz (2002) (<https://www.grida.no/resources/7432>) in line with GRID-Arendal’s open access license and its terms and conditions of use; For Map B permission was obtained from authors; Map C was adapted under a fair-use license.

sify away from water-intensive crops of cotton, wheat, and rice, which prevailed in the Soviet times, its southern neighbours of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan continue to rely heavily on cotton production for export. Meanwhile, as global warming takes its toll on the glacial landscapes in Central Asia's mountains, local communities face increasing uncertainty related to water management, as well as an increasing number of devastating flash floods. The region's glaciers are rapidly disappearing, which is already impacting downstream river flows in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya and their tributaries.* With this shifting water balance to come, decision-makers will less credibly tout the Soviet-era narrative of environmental mastery, but will be forced to think across different time-scales to truly account for the unpredictability of the region's hydro-political future.

*Menga 2018;
Shahgedanova et al. 2020

3.2 Nuclear Landscapes, Extraction, and Energy

Central Asia's dual burden of Soviet environmental legacies, combined with on-going ecological degradation stemming from a heavy economic reliance on polluting industries, means that it can be difficult to focus on the future, both for ordinary citizens and elites. The region's history with nuclear weapons testing and uranium mining is emblematic. From 1949 to 1989, the Soviet government conducted almost 500 nuclear tests in northeast Kazakhstan's Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site (colloquially referred to as the 'Polygon') – see Map 20.1. These were both aboveground and underground and. However conducted, they exposed thousands of people living in the immediate area and millions across all of Central Asia to nuclear radiation. Despite the catastrophic health effects, including high rates mortality, cancers, and birth defects, citizens of the region were deliberately deceived about the testing and some were even used as test subjects themselves.* Kazakhstan's long-time president, Nursultan Nazarbayev (r. 1989–2019), routinely condemned this past and worked to build a reputation around various feel-good nuclear peace-building initiatives.* Yet his government systematically failed to redress the environmental harms or even prevent further harms to citizens, as it continued to expand and reap enormous profits from the global export of uranium.

*Brunn 2011; Werner
and Purvis-Roberts 2007; 2013

*Ambosio and Lange 2014

Following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and a growing anti-nuclear movement, Soviet "experts" began diagnosing the public's supposedly irrational responses to nuclear risks as "radiophobia."* By pathologizing opponents' fear, Soviet authorities sought to dis-

*Stawkowski 2017b

KEY EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES BY COUNTRY	
KAZAKHSTAN	oil, gas, petrochemicals, uranium, copper, zinc, tin, ferrous metals
KYRGYZSTAN	gold, mercury, uranium, rare earths, gas, petrochemicals, hydropower
TAJIKISTAN	hydropower, silver, gold, aluminium
TURKMENISTAN	oil, gas, petrochemicals, cotton
UZBEKISTAN	oil, gas, gold, uranium, copper, lead, zinc, tungsten, ferrous metals, cotton

Map 20.2 Natural Resource Extraction in Central Asia

Sources:
Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), map 3. Map created by editors and designed by Typeface nv.

credit them. Environmental groups persisted in their protests, including most prominently in Central Asia, the *Nevada Semipalatinsk NGO*. But as noted earlier, activist groups were largely dissipated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some, such as *EcoForum* in Kazakhstan, have nonetheless continued their advocacy and have been increasingly critical of institutions like *Kazakhstan's Institute of Radiation Safety and Ecology*. *EcoForum* has publicly accused the Institute of failing to take appropriate remediation efforts in and around the Semipalatinsk testing zone, which they say has amounted to criminal negligence of the health of hundreds of thousands of people, as well as profiteering by allowing new mining and other business enterprises to take place within the old testing zone.* Relying on the Soviet toolkit, officials have used the 'radiophobia' fiction to reject their critiques, labelling as "irrational and alarmist those who question possible health risks or call for more stringent security measures."** Other activist groups – such as those protesting toxic debris and rocket fuel, which increasingly contaminates the steppe from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in southern Kazakhstan – have faced nearly identical critiques. In this case, activists are instead accused of "cosmophobia" – a 'psycho-emotional disorder' characterized by irrational and exaggerated fear of the space industry.*

*Stawkowski 2017b: 358

**Stawkowski 2017b: 360

*Kopack 2019: 557

Government dismissals of environmental activists' concerns are not entirely surprising in the context of authoritarianism, but the wanton neglect for the health and wellbeing of the population is hard to paper over with invented psychological rhetoric. Real and significant as the ecological problems are, Kazakhstan's leadership does not just tamp down opposition because it represents a civil society challenge to autocratic rule. Officials are also careful to stop any movements that would make potential investors wary of coming to the country – jeopardizing their economic ambitions for national development agendas, as well as their ability to enrich themselves personally. This pattern is common to countless other countries, democratic *and* authoritarian, where a relationship of dependency emerges between political elites and leaders of ecologically damaging industries, whether production-oriented or extractivist.*

Mining and other extractive sectors are especially problematic from the *human-centred* standpoint of environmental geopolitics, since they use so many toxic chemicals and, in turn, produce dangerous by-products that must be carefully collected, stored, and disposed of to reduce environmental harms. These are costly processes so where laws are absent or ill-enforced, industries have an

*Engels and Dietz 2017;
McCarthy 2019;
Myadar and Jackson 2019;
Swann-Quinn 2019;
Veltmeyer et al. 2014

Box 20.3 Rare Earths in Central Asia

Rare earth elements (REEs) are a set of 17 chemical elements, divided into two subgroups – ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ REEs. They are used to manufacture a wide range of products, ranging from *dysprosium*, which is used in commercial lighting, lasers, magnets, and hard drives; *rhenium*, used in jet engines; and *osmium-187*, used across the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries. All countries of Central Asia except Turkmenistan have potentially vast reserves of REEs, though they are most accessible in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, given their well-established mining histories. (Mihalasky et al. 2018) Kyrgyzstan has at least 20 recognized rare earth sites and, in fact, its Kutessay-2 mine produced about 80 percent of Soviet rare earths, largely for its nuclear program. (Peyrouse 2013) REEs are also commonly produced from the by-products of uranium mining, uranium ‘tailings.’ Kazakhstan is a global leader in uranium production, so its potential production is vast, though many other states in Central Asia also mine uranium.

Contrary to the name, REEs are not rare. They are actually quite abundant, but minable deposits typically coincide with hazardous elements, including uranium, thorium, arsenic, fluoride, and other heavy metals. (Klinger 2017: 1) This means that mining tends to produce substantial environmental harms and to adversely impact human health, not just of the miners, but also of the communities and natural world far beyond, as toxins contaminate waterways, the air, and land. Until 2010, 97 percent of REEs were sourced by Chinese suppliers. However, China’s government began to face the alarming realities of environmental crises in mining regions and moved to shut down small producers, and imposed new export quotas. This led international companies and foreign governments to a frantic search for new REE suppliers – leading Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to sign numerous deals with actors in Canada, Germany, France, Japan, South Korea, and Russia shortly thereafter.

Central Asia’s leaders were previously uninterested in developing the REE sector because of the high costs associated with extraction, as well as the lack of an obvious export market. (Voloshin 2012) With the pull-back of Chinese suppliers, the economic boon had them quickly reconsidering. Not only are these new deals bringing much desired FDI, the shift in Chinese policies sent REE prices rocketing up: the price for dysprosium, the element Kazakhstan has largest and easiest access to, rose from (US) \$110/kg in 2008 to \$2,031/kg in 2011. (Klinger 2017: 4) Many REE projects in Central Asia are still in their early stages, but given the region’s troubled record with environmental harms from mining, the expansion of REE production in Central Asia may bode well for state coffers, but not for local communities.

Sources:

Julie Klinger, *Rare Earth Frontiers: From Terrestrial Subsoils to Lunar Landscapes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

Mark J. Mihalasky; Robert D. Tucker; Karine Renaud; Ingrid M. Verstraeten, "Rare Earth Element and Rare Metal Inventory of Central Asia," *U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 2017-3089*, (2018).

Sebastien Peyrouse, "Race for Rare Earths in Central Asia," *National Geographic*, (20 August 2013), <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2013/08/20/race-for-rare-earths-in-central-asia/>

George Voloshin, "Kazakhstan Set to Become Major Source of Rare Earths in CIS," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 9, no. 165, (2012): <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-set-to-become-major-source-of-rare-earths-in-cis/>

incentive to take shortcuts that result in the pollution of waterways, land, and the air. All countries in Central Asia have significant extractive sectors (cf. Map 20.2). Some of these are well-established, largely developed during the Soviet times like oil, tin, and uranium, and tend to be controlled by state enterprises. Others are newer and developed in partnership with international firms, like Kyrgyzstan's Kumtor Mine owned by the Canadian *Centerra Gold company*, and even newer projects tied to rare earths mining (Box 20.3).

No matter how 'remote' extractive industries and governments may claim their operations are from population centres, environmental impacts are never isolated to one small site alone. Their effects amplify in both predictable and unpredictable ways. Water contamination always courses through the rest of the network, downriver or through aquifers. Or, returning to Kazakhstan's Polygon region, nuclear-contaminated coal and other resources extracted from the test site are shipped around the region, reverberating across Central Asia's borders and into unsuspecting people's homes.*

*Stawkowski 2017a

The extraction of oil and gas is a typical starting-point for analyses of environmental issues and challenges in Central Asia. It is discussed last in this chapter, however, to move away from conflating the region's geopolitics and its natural resources with hydrocarbons.¹ Of course, proven reserves are significant, especially in Kazakhstan, which ranks 12th globally for oil reserves, 15th for gas, and in Turkmenistan, which ranks sixth globally for gas* The traditional reading of Central Asia through the lens of oil and gas is problematic, however, because nature-society relations encompass much more and because the direct environmental impact of

*US EIA 2020

¹ For more on this topic consult also: Graybill 2017; Koch 2013; LeVine 2007; Najman et al. 2008.

Figure 20.4 Poster for Kazakhstan's EXPO-201. Poster includes images of wind turbines, a green planet, and other iconic buildings in the capital.

Source: ShareAmerica 2017.

the sector affects relatively few individuals – although off-shore extraction in the Caspian Sea has adversely impacted threatened species of sturgeon and Caspian seals.* Yet from the human security standpoint, the right to clean water, land, and air of millions are more proximately jeopardized by the issues discussed above. That said, the burning of fossil fuels is well known to be the leading cause of climate change. The impacts of this are far more diffuse, spatially and temporally, but as noted already, they are nonetheless beginning to take on more immediate expressions in Central Asia.

Some officials have taken note – not just of the changing climate realities, but also the broader political and economic opportunities of responding to climate change. Predictably, elites have thus far targeted the opportunities to entrench or expand political and economic rewards in their efforts to address the challenges of hydrocarbon dependency in Central Asia, rather than centring the health and wellbeing of their populations. Again, the case of Kazakhstan is exemplary. In 2017, the country hosted a second-tier

*German 2016; White 2019

World's Fair – EXPO-2017 – with the theme of 'Future Energy' (see Figure 20.4). In his opening speech for the event, President Nazarbayev outlined an optimistic vision for Kazakhstan's transition to renewable energy and a 'green economy,' setting ambitious energy transition goals for 2050. As in other realms, these efforts to 'green' Kazakhstan are not the product of public discussion, but are imposed in a top-down fashion and developed in collaboration with international organizations – including the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, the *Clean Technology Fund*, and the United Nations, and various foreign companies from China, India, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates to promote the renewable energy sector. Luring potential investors to Kazakhstan's renewable energy sector is a major goal for political and financial elites, who are like those in so many other corners of the world today in hoping that by using the language and modern image of sustainability, their high-profile 'green economy' projects might generate a broader FDI ripple effect.*

*Koch and Tynkkynen 2020

The image-consciousness manipulation of sustainability rhetoric – or 'conspicuous sustainability' – is not inherently 'bad.'* It is meaningful on a rhetorical level, and could lead to real policy changes down the line. But it nonetheless belies the fact that the region faces significant barriers to renewable energy adoption, including the fact that actors in non-renewable energy continue to exercise policy dominance, the lack of appropriate infrastructure, local expertise, corruption, unattainably high capital investment costs, and more fundamentally, household affordability challenges given widespread poverty.* This litany of challenges underscores the need for experts with significant environmental management and logistical skills, but also requires a long-term vision of the future and concern for ensuring 'just transitions'* in Central Asia's energy landscape.

*Grydehøj and Kelman 2017

*Karateyev et al. 2016;
Karateyev and Clarke 2014

*Jasanoff 2018

Yet even NGOs have learned to operate through the logic of 'conspicuous sustainability.' Long working in authoritarian settings with governments and people uncomfortable with civil society activism, they continue to focus on less politically sensitive issues and precluding "overly critical evaluations of industrial development that fits international conceptualizations of 'green economics.'"* Authoritarianism and crony capitalism continue to checker the region and, in this context, the human and the *humane* remain largely absent from the re-visioning of environmental geopolitics around renewable energy. Until there is a shift from flashy new 'green' buildings characterizing 'conspicuous sustainability' to instead become grounded in the everyday lives of humans, the

*Wooden et al. 2016: 58

geopolitics of renewables, like traditional hydrocarbons before, threaten to jeopardize the human security of ordinary Central Asians.

4. Conclusions

Environmental challenges, whether climate change or industrial water pollution, are always a question of the future: what kind of environment are we leaving to future generations? Can they build prosperous and healthy lives from the land, water, and air in the place they call home? In Central Asia, focusing on the future may appear difficult, given that it has to grapple with so many difficult environmental legacies of the Soviet Union. Yet if environmental geopolitics trains us to think across scales and to see all scales as interwoven, it becomes clear that all futures will be tied to all pasts. This chapter has shown that the material realities of Soviet legacies are extremely important. But the political and cultural understandings of nature are just as important, since these 'environmental imaginaries' determine how people today and in the future relate to decisions about environmental protections, resource use, and energy systems. Will they protest or even prevent environmental injustice, or will they let it unfold by adopting a 'business as usual' approach?

The region is not a 'grand chessboard' torn apart by resource conflict, as prognosticators supposed in the 1990s, but prevailing nondemocratic political configurations mean that the ambitions of short-sighted political and financial elites prevail. Rather than investing in *social justice*, they still tend to prefer quick returns in developing environmental and social policy. So while climate change undeniably means that changes are on the horizon, environmental geopolitics in Central Asia will continue to revolve around the most fundamental questions of political geography: *who gets what, where, when, and how?* To the extent that we can successfully shift our lens from protecting human security rather than state security, and from the sensationalism of mainstream reporting on environmental spectacles to the 'slow violence' of most ecological threats, we might yet imagine a more progressive environmental geopolitics *for* Central Asia.

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6. Recommended Literature

There is no single book that covers the topic of environmental geopolitics in Central Asia in its full breadth, though Paul Josephson's books provide a useful introduction to the history of Soviet environmental policy, while Adam Fagan and JoAnn Carmin's edited book on 'green activism' in post-communist Eurasia help to contextualize how this history has been interpreted by its contemporary inheritors. In studying the politics of the environment, most scholars of Central Asia emphasize particular issues, such as the important introductions to the region's water politics in the books of Filippo Menga, Maya Peterson, and Erika Weinthal. Beyond water, scholars have published on a wide range of environmental issues and how they intersect with power relations, identity politics, and social justice in individual book chapters and articles – many of which are found in the Bibliography of this chapter. Those with a special interest in the theoretical framing of 'slow violence' and 'environmental geopolitics' are especially recommended to review the books of Robert Nixon and Shannon O'Lear respectively.

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

TOPIC 1

What are the main environmental challenges in Central Asia today, and how can policymakers think across different scales to address the human security challenges they pose?

TOPIC 2

How does the past relate to the present when understanding environmental challenges in Central Asia? How important is an understanding of the historical causes of an environmental problem to addressing it in the present?

TOPIC 3

Using one of the examples of resource nationalism from the chapter, explain how different actors have used the basic argument of resource nationalism in contrasting ways.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

In groups, students should choose one of the environmental issues discussed in the chapter (water, nuclear contamination, energy) and think of a similar problem in their home country. They should create or fill in a side-by-side list that compares the Central Asian case with that of their home country on the following points: (1) issue; (2) cause; (3) actors/stakeholders affected at local, regional, national, international scales; (4) potential sources of remediation. They can then discuss broader questions, like those in the post-reading section above, and considering specifically what does this comparison teach us about how environmental geopolitics differs from place to place, even when the ecological issue might be the same or similar?

Depending on the course and group needs, the teacher can choose, as a point of reference for comparison, a different country or countries, other than the students' home country.

ACTIVITY 2

Start by reading Box 20.1 and providing the students with a few additional newspaper articles about the Rogun Dam.

The following texts may be of use (the teacher may also select different ones):

- "The Rogun Dam: A Source of Division in Central Asia", *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, (2 December 2016). <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/66334>
- "Tajikistan's Rogun Dam Begins Operations", *The Diplomat*, (20 November 2018). <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/tajikistans-megadam-rogun-begins-operations/>
- "Tajikistan's massive Rogun hydropower dam: a blessing or a curse?", *bne IntelliNews*, (18 October 2019). <https://www.intellinews.com/tajikistan-s-massive-rogun-hydropower-dam-a-blessing-or-a-curse-169691/>

The teacher assigns the students to two groups, with one group representing the Tajik government supporting the construction of the Rogun Dam, and another group representing environmental activists who oppose it. The groups will have to debate in favour of their position, making specific reference to the concept of 'resource nationalism.' In case of a bigger class, the students will be divided in more groups (each side will be represented by more than one group). Having in mind the quality of in-group cooperation, they should not exceed six people.

First, each group writes down at least three arguments to defend their position. Then, they are asked to come up with a slogan and possible ideas to sway public opinion (e.g. with a reference to resource nationalism). Depending on the time at the teacher's disposal, they may consider asking the students to create a poster, a short video or an infographic as a visual element of their campaign.

In the next step, a representative of each group holds a short (e.g. 3-5 minute) press conference, exposing their arguments. Later, the public can ask questions. Additionally, after each group has spoken and answered questions, a final debate between both sides, moderated by the teacher, can be held. The activity is concluded with a group discussion about how different actors can use resource nationalism to very different ends.

LINK TO VIDEO

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49UGzhAc4h4&ab_channel=EISCASEurasianInsights

Russian-Asian Commercial Bank.

Ташкентъ. Улица въ старомъ городѣ.
Taschkent. Rue dans la vieille cité.

Street in the old city.

CHAPTER 21

Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Laws, Policies and Effects on Sending States

Bhavna Davé

SOAS University of London

Keywords:

- Eurasian Economic Union • Migration • Labour Migration
- Migration Laws • Migrant Legality • Remittances

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the historical context and economic, demographic and political factors leading to labour migration from Central Asia to Russia.
- Analyse the laws and measures enacted by the Russian state to regulate migration and their effects.
- Identify the connections between Russia's migration laws and practices and migrants' legalization, their ethnoracial profiling by the officials, media and society, and corruption.
- Assess the impact of migration on sending states' policies, on their family and social structures.
- Examine the socio-economic effects of migrants' remittances on the sending states.
- Develop a critical perspective on the prevalent myths about migration including those about 'threats' to security and order.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Pre-reading questions

- What is distinctive about the migration and mobility patterns within Eurasia?
- Which countries are the major migrant-sending states within the region?
- Why there was no noticeable migration within the region during the Soviet period and why has the process intensified in the past two decades?
- What key issues and outcomes should we look for when we talk about migration in the region?

Main questions

- Why are many migrants still working 'illegally' or 'informally' in the region?
- Why have Russia's migration regulation policies taken a coercive turn in recent years, leading to a securitization of migration?
- What does migrant informality/illegality mean in practice for individual migrants? In what aspects is their situation vulnerable?
- What were the consequences of introducing the 2015 reforms of the patent system for migrants?
- To what extent has labour migration facilitated economic development in the migrant-sending Central Asian states?

- How is migration transforming the family structure, community life and citizenship in the migrant-sending states?
- How is the Eurasian Economic Union shaping labour mobility in the region?
- What are the key myths and stereotypes about migration, labour mobility, and migrants prevalent in the region?

Post-reading questions

- Why does the Russian state not have a coherent policy to attract migrants and aid their legalization, despite its shrinking demographic potential and growing dependence on migrant labour?
- What major shifts should be anticipated in the migration and mobility patterns across the Eurasian region in the coming decade?
- What are the intended and unintended effects of migration regulation/control discourses on states in the region?
- Will Russia continue to remain a key migrant-attracting destination in the years to come?
- What is the link between migration and security? What accounts for the increasing tendency by the governments in the region to see migration as a security threat?

Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Laws, Policies and Effects on Sending States

BHAVNA DAVÉ
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THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION has emerged as the main destination for various forms of population mobility in the Eurasian region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Of approximately 145 million people inhabiting Russia, about 11.8 million or about 8.5 percent are migrants. Almost 95 percent of these hail from the former Soviet territories linked by the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS) visa-free regime,¹ which renders the labour migration processes as ‘internal.’ 60 percent of the migrants in Russia, numbering 5 to 5.5 million, are from the three Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. As per estimates in early 2019, migrants from Uzbekistan numbered 2.1 million, followed by 1.3 million from Tajikistan and 716,118 from Kyrgyzstan.*

The focus of this chapter is on migrant workers from the above three Central Asian states who enter Russia under the visa free system to look for work but are required to meet the numerous legal and bureaucratic requirements to be able to work legally in Russia. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, other two Central Asian states, categorized as upper-middle-income countries by the *World Bank*, are not major migrant-sending states.²

Kazakhstan is the second most popular destination, after Russia, for labour migrants from these three states as a prospering economy with an annual GDP of \$181.2 billion,* which is more than double that of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan combined. Most of these are seasonal workers, engaged in circular labour mobility, working informally without documentation, which makes it very difficult to determine their precise numbers. Nearly two-thirds of all migrant workers in Kazakhstan are from Uzbekistan, almost a quarter from Kyrgyzstan, and about ten percent are from

*Мкртчян and
Флоринская 2019: 15–19

*World Bank 2018

¹ The visa free regime of the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS) comprises of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

² While up to 500,000 citizens of Kazakhstan are estimated to be in Russia, most of these are students and others working as qualified professionals, with a very small number working as labour migrants.

*Dave 2014

Tajikistan. While the wages earned by migrants in Kazakhstan are much lower, it is easier for them to work informally and adapt due to cultural, linguistic and religious affinities.* Turkmenistan is not part of CIS' visa-free regime though there is a significant number of its citizens working abroad – mainly in Turkey – with whom they have a visa-free regime.

Central Asians migrants have continued to dominate the 3-D ('dirty, dangerous and degrading') job sector, providing indispensable unskilled and semi-skilled labour in areas such as construction, retail trade, catering, cleaning, and domestic care. Migrants from the three Central Asian states comprise over half of all migrant workers in major cities and surrounding regions, particularly Moscow, St Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Kazan and also work in remote and sparsely inhabited regions from the Arctic, Siberia to Yakutia and Kamchatka in the Russian Far East. Their non-Slavic appearances, Muslim heritage and lack of native proficiency in Russian make the Central Asians focal points of anti-migrant propaganda and anxieties stoked by media and officials, and frequent targets of ethno-racial profiling by the police.³

Citizens of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan need to obtain a work permit (*patent*), pass an exam of proficiency in Russian language, and pay a monthly tax – which varies according to the city and region – in order to be able to work legally in Russia. Since Kyrgyzstan became a member of the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU), its citizens have been exempt from all these requirements. However, all migrants – including those from EAEU – are required to have mandatory residency registration and a written contract with the employer to work legally in Russia.

This chapter analyses key legal, institutional mechanisms and informal processes that characterize labour migration from Central Asia to Russia. It examines processes that have led to the shift from an informal to a coercive regulation of labour migration in Russia, leading to an increasing securitization of migration. The chapter identifies the laws and policies that in fact make it difficult for migrants to obtain fully legal status in the face of pervasive corruption and anti-migrant attitudes fuelled by state officials and media. Finally, the chapter analyses the effects of labour migration on the sending states, their social structures and family and concludes with some observations on the prospects for integration of migrants in Russia and the establishment of a single Eurasian labour market.

³ Other key group of migrants are from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus with their numbers ranging between 450,000 to 650,000.

1. Russia as a Migrant Destination

In the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became a recipient of a diverse categories of migrants: ethnic Russians and various Russian-speaking populations from the former Soviet republics, refugees from the conflict zones in South Caucasus, Transdniestria, Tajikistan, and those arriving under the policy of seeking return 'compatriots' (*соотечественники* – *soot-echestvenniki*). Ethnicity was the most important determinant of these migratory movements, with almost three million Russians or Russian-speaking groups arriving in Russia for settlement. Russia's economic revival from the late 1990s onwards, and a steady demographic decline, triggered labour mobility from the former Soviet republics, which was facilitated by the visa free travel within the CIS, as shown in Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1.

Russia's declining demographic potential and labour shortages had already become visible from the 1980s during the Soviet period with regions of Central Russia, Siberia and the Russian Far East experiencing a deficit of labour force. Lowered life expectancy due to deterioration in living conditions and medical care since the Soviet collapse exacerbated the shrinking of its population and labour force.*

*Heleniak 2008: 29–67

The Soviet efforts to encourage the youth from the labour-surplus rural regions of Central Asia to work in the labour-scarce regions of *Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic* (RSFSR) during 1970s and 1980s did not yield many results. Inadequate Russian language facility, unfamiliar cultural conditions and absence of social network, together with bureaucratic restrictions such as the *propiska* (*прописка* – residence permit) deterred Central Asians from going to the European parts of the Soviet Union.

Since the 1990s, the influx of Russian-speaking groups from the former Soviet territories has contributed to Russia's demographic growth while labour migration within the Eurasian migration system has supplied the necessary labour force to the Russian economy. Almost 95 percent of all migrants in Russia arrive under the CIS visa-free system. Russia formally began to contribute to international population mobility patterns as a host to migrants from the 'near abroad' (*ближнее зарубежье*), comprising of former Soviet republics, and emerged as the second largest population of immigrants in the world in early 2000s, after the US.* Russia is currently the third largest migrant-receiving country after the US and Germany. It also ranks third (after India and Mexico) in emigration numbers, having lost 5.3 million people over last two and a half

*Heleniak 2002

*Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017

*Деминцева et al. 2019

*Ivakhnyuk 2008;
Ryazantsev and Korneev 2013

*Abashin 2016: 16–34

decades as a result of emigration.* Demographic prognosis suggests that Russia could lose 11 to 13 million people by 2030 due to emigration, low birth-rates and inability to attract more migrants.*

The labour mobility patterns within the Eurasian Migration System* are a combined product of the CIS visa system and the existence of prior economic, political, cultural linkages and transport channels between Russia and the former Soviet republics. Demographic and economic disparities in the framework of metropole-periphery relations have produced push-pull dynamics, with youth from rural regions in Central Asia filling in the various labour niches in Russia. A common cultural legacy and the spread of Russian as *lingua franca* have also facilitated labour mobility.*

The prevalence of the visa-free regime and absence of laws governing labour mobility at least until the mid-2000s contributed to a vast number of migrants working informally, without proper documentation. Although Russia began enacting laws to regulate migration from 2006 onwards, and introduced a complex set of documentation requirements for legal employment, still an estimated 25–40 percent of migrants lack the complete set of required documents and have a fluctuating registration/documented status. This means that they remain invisible in the existing categories or in the statistics. The diverse trajectories of migratory movements, which include seasonal, short-term, circular migration spanning to multiple locales, compound the difficulties in ascertaining the numbers of migrants in Russia at one time. Finally, there is no clear definition of who is a migrant and how they are to be counted. In the absence of proper data, methodology and consultation with experts, the federal and regional authorities do not have reliable data on the labour resources and jobs available in the country and the demand for migrant labour in various sectors of the economy.

Migrants from Ukraine – about 2.6 million in total – form the largest group of all migrants. Though their numbers are estimated to have declined since 2015 due to the protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine, they still comprise the largest group of migrants. Ukrainian citizens, as well as over half a million migrants from Moldova, tend to work informally and are virtually indistinguishable from locals though formally they are required to have a work permit or *‘patent’* and abide by all labour regulations that apply to migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Figure 21.1 Migration to and from the Russian Federation (in thousands)

Source: Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), "International Migration" (2020)

Table 21.1 Demographic Growth in Russia through Migration 2014-2019 (in thousands)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
International migration - total	67,1	62,2	92,2	64,9	57,1	98,0
From CIS countries:	64,0	62,0	88,6	63,7	54,9	86,4
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	4,1	2,5	3,2	1,9	3,0	5,9
<i>Armenia</i>	5,8	6,4	2,4	2,4	4,9	12,8
<i>Belarus</i>	3,2	1,7	0,5	3,3	3,5	2,8
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	12,4	11,4	11,5	10,2	10,4	16,1
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	4,8	1,6	5,5	4,1	4,8	7,6
<i>Moldova</i>	4,4	4,6	4,9	2,1	3,0	2,2
<i>Tajikistan</i>	5,0	-0,4	7,3	8,5	12,1	14,2
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	0,8	0,7	0,4	0,7	1,0	1,7
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	11,6	-13,2	6,2	3,1	4,8	6,9
<i>Ukraine</i>	11,8	46,7	46,7	27,3	7,4	16,1
From other countries:	3,1	0,2	3,6	1,2	2,2	11,6

Note: Data only compare time periods from January to April for each year.

Source: Никита Мкртчян, Юлия Флоринская, "Миграционный Прирост: аномальные показатели", *Economy Times*, (22 Июля 2019).

2. From Informal to a Regulated Labour Migration Regime

The vast size of Russia's informal economy, coupled with absence of laws regulating the migratory processes, created propitious conditions for migrants to work informally, giving rise to circular or pendulum migration. Migrants would typically spend three months (the length of permissible stay stamped on the migration card which had to be surrendered upon exiting the country) to work in Russia, return home and soon re-enter with a new three-month stay permit. Labour migration from former Soviet territories, especially from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan into Russia had already become a systemic phenomenon by the late 2000s.

A law passed in 2006 requiring migrants to be registered with the employer to work legally marked the first attempt in Russia to regulate labour mobility. However, the law was criticized for clamping down on freedom of movement and locking migrants into a servitude relationship with the employer, thus enhancing their vulnerability to exploitation.*

*Общество 2008

A more concerted effort to regulate the informal labour mobility and employment within the *Eurasian Migration System* (EMS) came with the introduction of a work permit or 'patent' in 2010. The patent initially was to be issued for a fixed term (up to one year), requiring payment of a monthly fee or tax to enable the city or regional authorities to earn revenue. The initial fee was about \$30, but then the amount has more than doubled since and varies according to city or region. The *patent* introduced in 2010 only allowed migrants to work for an individual household and required them to produce a litany of documents (such as residency registration, medical insurance, tests proving that one is free of various infectious diseases), within a short time frame. It was simpler to approach an 'intermediary' (*посредник* – *posrednik*) – who could be an uncle, a friend or a legal firm with close ties to migration officials or police – and pay the standard fee that ranged from \$300–400 in order to expedite the process. A shadow market of all categories of migration documentation – ranging from registration, migration card with an extended term, 'patent', residency permits, new passports – began to thrive, blurring the distinction between authentic and 'fake' documents.* Moreover, the acquisition of legal documents and status became contingent on migrants resorting to numerous 'illegal' means and procedures.*

*Reeves 2013

*Dave 2014

The introduction of the *patent* in 2010 had no visible impact on reducing the number of migrants working without a permit and aiding them to become legal. Migrants began procuring patents as

a relatively easy means of acquiring legal status while continuing to work informally in the commercial sector. Amendments in 2013 restricted migrants to staying in Russia for 90 days in a 180-day period, thus putting an end to the pattern of circular migration whereby they would cross the nearest border in order to obtain a new migration card (granted for a 90-day period) in order to re-enter the country. Furthermore, since the patent was meant to enable low-skilled migrants to work for an individual only, commercial firms seeking to hire skilled foreign workers had to undergo complex procedures to apply for a very limited number of quotas for the hiring of skilled foreigners.

Persistent labour shortages in various skill categories turned the quotas into tradable commodities as firms set up by influential individuals bought quotas wholesale through connections and resold them for profit to smaller firms and de facto employers. As a result, a veritable shadow migration industry* has emerged in Moscow, St Petersburg, percolating further to other major cities and regions with labour deficits. It comprises of legal and illegal networks and formal and informal connections that encompass brokers, labour recruiters, business, corrupt state officials, travel agents, lawyers, bankers, interpreters and housing agents, as well as human smugglers and traffickers, who have an interest in and tend to facilitate the continuation of migration.*

*Castles 2004

*Dave 2014; Schenk 2018

2.1 Battle against 'Intermediaries' and Corruption

Reforms in 2015 led to the scrapping of the quota system and a restructuring of the patent system, with the introduction of a single or unified patent abolishing the distinction between working for an individual and a firm. In addition to producing a vast array of documentation, migrants also had to pass a test of proficiency in Russian language, history and laws. The push for reforming the patent system came from the Moscow city administration headed by its mayor Sergei Sobyanin. Sobyanin had already been lobbying for the establishment of a new 'one stop' migration centre to handle all documentation, administrative and financial aspects connected to migration, especially the acquisition of patents, and similar centres are being set up in other major cities as well.

The aim was not just to regularize the supply of labour to the capital but also to enable the city administration to collect revenues in the form of monthly payments from migrants who were working for commercial firms without authorization. Moscow and the Greater Moscow Region attract an estimated 28 to 30 percent

of all migrant workers working in Russia, thus between 2-3 million. recognizing the importance of migrants as both a labour as well as a financial resource, the Moscow City administration was involved in a competition with the *Federal Migration Service* (FMS), a quasi-independent body that had been in charge of migrants administration.

Following successful lobbying by Sobyenin, new *Multifunction Migration Centres* (MMTs) began operating in Moscow city and in Moscow oblast'⁴ from early 2015. The establishment of MMTs has led to a sharp increase in payments from patents in 2016 compared to the previous year with migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan being the key contributors.* About 52 percent of all patents issued are for migrant workers in Moscow, St Petersburg, and the Moscow and Leningrad regions. The Moscow region is benefiting substantially from the monthly tax paid by migrants. It collected about 10.5 billion rubles (\$24 million) from the payment for patents in 2015, 12 billion rubles (\$26 million) in 2016, 14 billion (\$28 million) in 2017 and about 16 billion (\$30 million) in 2018. The revenues earned by Moscow city from patents in 2016 and 2017 were reported to be higher than the tax paid by the top oil and gas companies.

While the increase in revenues from patents is cited as an indicator of the 'legalization' of migrants, there is no reliable data on what percentage of migrants have acquired patents. As of early 2019, an estimated 30-40 percent of migrants were still working informally, opting not to apply for a patent due to its rising cost. The monthly tax payment for a patent in Moscow and St Petersburg was about \$80 in 2018 and a further ten percent increase has come into effect from 2019, denoting a near tripling of its cost since it was introduced in 2010. Among all the patents issued in Moscow in 2017, the share issued to Uzbeks was 46 percent, to Tajiks 32 percent, to Ukrainians 12 percent, to Moldovans 7 percent and to Azerbaijanis 3 percent.*

*Dave 2018

The patent is only a legal permit for temporary work: in order to be legally employed, migrants need to also conclude a legal written work contract with their employers, who typically refuse to sign a contract in order to avoid taxes, and offer a slightly higher pay in cash. As a result, many migrants are working and living in a condition of quasi-legality and fear of deportability. The incidence of 'illegal' employment among Kyrgyzstani migrants remains high, despite the fact that they no longer require a patent to work due to their membership of the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU). This is because many Kyrgyzstani citizens are working without signing a

⁴ Oblast' (область) – Russian subnational administrative unit – equivalent of a region or province.

*Lipman and Florinskaya 2019

work contract either due to lack of knowledge or lack of regard for laws. Employers also typically refuse to sign work contracts and prefer to hire them informally. The high visibility of migrants from Kyrgyzstan – an estimated 500,000 work in Moscow and the Moscow region alone – has made them more liable to be targeted for documentation checks and for soliciting bribes. As migrants pay fines or bribes to avoid arbitrary arrests, detention, re-entry bans, and deportation, they inadvertently get caught in the system of corruption that condemns them to quasi-legality.

2.2 Anti-Migration Attitudes and Stereotypes

As noted earlier, Russia is a relatively new entrant to the field of international labour migration. A rapid increase in population mobility since 1991, along with a lack of established mechanisms for managing the increasing dependence of its economy on migrant labour and enabling a legalization and adaptation of migrants to an urban milieu, have stretched the Russian state's ability to regulate migration and deal with its consequences.

Demographic decline and economic stagnation, a biased portrayal of migrants in the media, a pervasive public ignorance of the economic contribution of migrants and the growing dependence of the economy and labour market on migration on the one hand, and politically expedient anti-migrant rhetoric by politicians and officials on the other, have led to a rise in anti-migrant attitudes. Migration has become the collective explanation for all the unresolved issues and the easiest issue around which to mobilize public opinion and enhance the government's ratings. The government's support and tolerance of racist and anti-migrant rhetoric has allowed the police to target migrants for arbitrary and unlawful documentation checks on the streets, harass migrants, and threaten them with deportation or detention in order to extract bribes.

A survey conducted by Russia's *Levada Centre* in 2016 showed that the majority of Russians (52 percent) agreed with the statement, "Russia for ethnic Russians," while nearly 70 percent of respondents said that the government should restrict the influx of Central Asian migrants and that undocumented migrants should be expelled from Russia.* It should be noted that the questions in public surveys and questionnaires themselves tend to be biased and the results are used to affirm the pervasive racist and anti-migrant attitudes.

Anti-migrant sentiments and rhetoric have become particularly

*Light 2016; Gorodzeisky et al. 2015

pronounced in Moscow and St Petersburg, which have a high share of migrants. Migration was the central issue framing the debate in Moscow's mayoral election in September 2013 with both candidates – Sergei Sobyenin, the incumbent mayor and Alexei Navalny, the opposition candidate – promising better opportunities to Muscovites and a city cleansed of illegal migrants. Both were reinforcing the myth that migrants are depriving Russian citizens of jobs when in fact they are doing most of the 3-D jobs, which offer much lower wages and are shunned by locals. They were also propagating the stereotype of Central Asian migrants as working “illegally,” i.e., without a patent. In reality, the share of Ukrainians and Moldovans working without a patent and official work contract is even higher. However, they are able to blend in easily with the locals on the basis of their appearance and native Russian language and are far less targeted for checks and penalized for working without patents. Central Asian migrants are habitually blamed for the increase in criminality and deterioration of public order through spurious statistics and disinformation in state-controlled media.

3. The Shift to a Coercive Migration Policy

*RIA Novosti 2012

The concept of migration put forward by president Vladimir Putin in 2012 spelled out the key directions, objectives and strategic plan of Russia's migration policy and called for enhancing Russia's migration attracting potential.* Notwithstanding these sporadic ‘liberal’ pronouncements and calls to improve Russia's migrant-attracting potential, Russia's laws, policies and governance of migration and migrants has remained state-centric and state-controlled. The absence of a normative dimension in laws that protect civil or human rights, the presence of a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy and court system and the strong hold of the security services (*силовики* – *siloviki*) have led to a steady turn towards a coercive and punitive migration-regulatory regime. The prevalent state-centric discourse prioritizes national security, the protection of domestic labour markets, and the protection of national cultures and ways of life against ‘incursions’ by migrants.

3.1 Stringent Laws for Combating ‘Corruption’ and ‘Illegal Migration’

The adoption from late 2013 onwards of stringent laws to control circular migration by restricting migrants' terms of stay to 90 days in a 180-day period, led to a wave of detentions and deportations of migrants who were unable to regulate their status in the shortened time frame. A controversial law introduced in 2014 made migrants

who have committed two or more ‘administrative violations’ to be liable to be banned from ‘re-entry’ (*запрет на въезд – zapret na v’ezd*) into Russia. Not only was the ban applied with retrospective effect, it was imposed automatically by the central database on migrants upon registering these ‘violations,’ without the migrants knowing that they had been banned from re-entry. Most violations were of a minor and bureaucratic nature – pertaining to lapses in registration, overstaying the authorized term of stay, violating traffic laws, etc.

By the end of 2014 over a million migrants were issued re-entry bans for three to five years. The number of those facing re-entry bans in early 2018 reached almost 2 million, primarily affecting citizens of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Many Kyrgyz migrants have been able to obtain amnesty due to their admission into the EAEU.* It should be noted that deportations, expulsions, as well as the threat of deportability are commonly deployed by governments to reduce the number of unregistered or undocumented (often erroneously referred to as ‘illegal’) migrants.* Such measures often produce an appearance of state exerting control over migration, but in reality fail to reduce the number of migrants as states often lack the resources to deport or expel every ‘illegal’ migrant. Most migrants often remain in the host state in a condition of deportability, which renders them more vulnerable to discrimination as well as harassment and exploitation by the police and officials.*

*Kubal 2016

*De Genova 2002: 419-447

*De Genova 2002: 419-447;
Markovska et al. 2019: 145-162

The Russian government’s drive to combat ‘illegal migration’ and ‘corruption’ targeted the functioning of the *Federal Migration Service* (FMS), a quasi-independent structure, which handled migrants’ documentation and registration, the issuing of patents, and also the adaptation and integration of migrants. The FMS was blamed for inefficiency, corruption and soliciting payments from numerous ‘intermediaries’ (*posredniki*) who were selling the requisite documents to migrants by procuring illegal payments.* The FMS became a target of criticism by the various *siloviki* structures – Ministry of Interior, Federal Security Service – as well as by the Moscow city administration for its failure to ‘legalize’ migrants, for becoming a corrupt body controlled by the various ‘intermediaries’ and ‘ethnic interests’ and for failing to raise revenues.

*Графова 2015; Fergana.ru 2016

FMS was dissolved in 2016 and the functions of migration governance and control were taken over by the Ministry of Interior, which is staffed by military and security officials. While the dissolution was justified as a necessary measure to curb the endemic corruption in migration regulation, all functions related to migrants’ documentation – registration, obtaining patents, resi-

dency permits, etc. – were transferred to the *Multifunction Migration Centres* (MMTs) in Moscow city and the Moscow region and, subsequently, in other major cities. The abolition of FMS enabled the Ministry of Interior and the *siloviki* structures to enhance their control over migration. It also allowed the Moscow city and regional administration to draw financial benefits from migrants by collecting revenues from patent and registration fees.

3.2 Securitization of Migration

The state-controlled Russian media has also been very effective in its negative portrayal of migrants as ‘illegal,’ ‘criminal’ and ‘corrupt,’ constituting a threat to security and public order and as harbingers of social practices and values alien to Russian society and its culture. The *siloviki*-dominated government has linked migration with threats of terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal border movements, which implicate Central Asian migrants. The complicity of the state-controlled media has led the state structures to successfully use the language of fear and danger to construct the security threat posed by migrants, and to rally popular support.

The recruitment of Central Asians – particularly those working in Russia – into international terrorist activities such as fighting for ISIL (ISIS), has drawn the attention of local and international media. While no reliable figures are available, the number of Russian citizens/Central Asians recruited into international terrorist networks is estimated to be about 5000. The majority of these are Russian citizens from the North Caucasus. Russian citizens of Caucasus and Central Asian origins have been accused of involvement in a number of terrorist acts in Russia – notably the bombing in the Saint-Petersburg metro in 2017 (the accused were Russian citizens of Kyrgyz descent).

As noted by scholars of International Relations, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, the ‘securitization’ of particular issues becomes possible when an actor (the state) frames the issue as an existential threat and the audience (population) accepts it as such. Once issues such as migration are securitized, it becomes easier for the state to obtain popular support to call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat.*

*Buzan and Wæver 2003: 491

Enhanced security measures came into effect on the eve of and during the World Cup Football tournament held in Russia in the summer of 2018, leading to an intensification of document checks on migrants in the streets, at metro and rail stations, airports, bazaars, supermarkets and any official institutions. In response, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs even issued a statement

urging its citizens and former citizens (about half a million Kyrgyzstani migrants live in Moscow) not to loiter around the stadiums, or any 'football places,' to avoid places popular with tourists where a high police presence is expected, and to generally remain extremely careful so as not to provoke any suspicions.

4. The Effects on the Migrant-Sending States in Central Asia

4.1 Remittances and effects

Migration has become an integral component of politics, economy, society, household and family relations in the Central Asian states, and also an agent of transformation. Virtually every family has someone who is working in Russia as a labour migrant, and receives remittances.

Migrant remittances have become a lifeline of the economies of these three Central Asian states, making contributions that range from 15 to 45 percent of the *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP) of the respective states: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan fall in the top ten remittance-receiving countries in terms of remittances as a share of GDP.*

*World Bank 2017

4.1.1 Tajikistan

Tajikistan was the first state to experience a high scale of labour migration. The civil war of 1993-1995 caused widespread socio-economic damage and displacement, causing many members of the intelligentsia and educated middle classes to seek refuge in Russia. The fragile economy at the end of the civil war also gave rise to a wave of migration of the rural youth to Russia for temporary work to escape poverty and deprivation. Until about 2006, Tajikistani citizens comprised the largest number of Central Asian migrants in Russia and the term Tajik initially was used as a collective term to refer to any Central Asian working in Russia.

Tajikistan was the topmost remittance-dependent economy in the world with migrant remittances peaking at 47 percent of the GDP in 2013. Migrant remittances have contributed to a decrease in poverty levels in Tajikistan from 81 percent in 1999 to 31.5 percent in 2015.*

*Radio Ozodi 2018; Betti and Lundgren 2012: 395-408

The slump in the Russian economy and fall in the value of the ruble have lowered the share of remittances to between 35-40 percent since 2017, which still denotes a high share of the GDP. The settlement of more Tajik families in Russia has also led to a lowering of the share of remittances.

Having accepted migration as a necessity, the government in Tajikistan has enacted policies that acknowledge the centrality of labour migration in the country's social and economic development. Tajikistan has a dual citizenship agreement with Russia, which allows its citizens to obtain Russian citizenship without being required to relinquish Tajik citizenship. About half a million Tajiks are estimated to have obtained Russian citizenship,* though since 2014 Russia has streamlined the policy of granting citizenship. Russian citizenship or dual passports offer psychological security rather than economic gains, political status or legal protection.

*Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017

4.1.2 *Uzbekistan*

Uzbekistan was a relative late starter in migration to Russia, though currently it is the largest migrant sending state from Central Asia. Labour migration flows from Uzbekistan began from early 2000s and accelerated due to the lack of gainful work options in the rural areas, repression following the crackdown on protestors in Andijan in 2005, and the availability of better wages in Russia. For many young Uzbekistani citizens in rural areas, going abroad to work was also a way of avoiding the induced "voluntary" labour in the cotton plantations, or subsisting on agricultural lands.

President Islam Karimov (1991-2016) had not only denied the scale of labour migration but also chastised migrants for being greedy and degrading themselves by doing 'dirty jobs' abroad in order to earn quick money. In contrast, the current president Shavkat Mirziyoyev has acknowledged a positive contribution of migrants to the economy and wellbeing in rural areas. Indeed, the share of migrant remittances in Uzbekistan's GDP is steadily rising. It was estimated to be about \$3.9 billion in 2018, around 8 percent of the GDP.*

*Eurasianet.org 22 May 2018

Uzbekistan under Mirziyoyev has launched efforts to establish consulates in a number of major cities in Russia, set up a state commission to study migration and conclude bilateral agreements between ministries and government agencies in Russia for a state-organized labour recruitment (*оргнабор* – *orgnabor*) of migrants. The state is thus seeking to become a major stakeholder in the self-organized patterns of labour mobility by its citizens. Yet its efforts to organize labour mobility are likely to be limited in scale as most migration is self-organized, occurring along existing informal channels and migrants' networks. Migrants either directly obtain jobs or opt to pay intermediaries and legal firms to circumvent the restrictions, regulations and tax imposed by the

state and are unlikely to be drawn into a state-organized supply of workers to Russia. Few migrants believe that a state-organized migration will provide better work conditions and protect them given the pervasive lack of trust in the state and its institutions. The cautious liberalization under Mirziyoyev has stimulated some economic growth and incentives for some migrants to return after a temporary labour stint.* But there is no conclusive evidence of an overall decline in the numbers as new migrants, often from the same family or network, tend to take the place of returnee migrants.

*Eraliev 2019

4.1.3 Kyrgyzstan

Socio-economic deprivation and political instability in Kyrgyzstan, intensified after the 'Tulip' revolution of 2005, the overthrow of the corrupt regime of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2010, followed by ethnic conflicts in the Osh region in the south have triggered further labour migration. A majority of migrants come from the poor and densely populated rural regions Osh, Jalalabad and Batken in the south.

Remittances comprised 34.5 percent of GDP of Kyrgyzstan in 2017,* though have declined since as more Kyrgyzstani citizens are settling down in Russia. Remittances have led to a decline in poverty levels in Kyrgyzstan from 55.3 percent in 1999 to 32.1 percent in 2015, with the change most noticeable in its poverty-stricken southern regions.

*World Bank 2017

Kyrgyzstan has accepted migration as a salient element of its economy and is enacting measures to improve the conditions of migrants and to present itself as taking care of its citizens abroad. It has launched more far-reaching, albeit not so effective measures to provide legal assistance to migrants in order to ease conditions for travel and protect their rights.

Membership of the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) has led to a surge in the number of Kyrgyzstani citizens in Russia – about 710,000 work in Russia and around half a million of these are estimated to be working in Moscow and the Moscow region. However, this has not enhanced their legal status. The number of Kyrgyzstani citizens falling foul of migration regulations and committing 'administrative violations' – failing to declare residence registration within the specified period of arrival, working without concluding a legal contract – remains high.* The reasons are mixed: lack of awareness and regard for the laws and procedures, reliance on dubious intermediaries, 'relatives' and 'friends' for attaining legal documents and the belief that paying bribes is essential to avoid problems such as deportation or detention. This weakness

*Caravanseraï 2018

*RFE/RL 2012

is exploited by the officials who target them for routine checks for soliciting bribes. The incidence of obtaining fake or counterfeit documents also remains higher among Kyrgyzstani citizens.*

For a limited period between 2007 and 2012 Russia simplified the procedures for obtaining citizenship for citizens of Kyrgyzstan. Although Russia and Kyrgyzstan do not have a dual citizenship agreement, many Kyrgyzstani citizens who had to renounce their citizenship upon becoming Russian citizens have managed to regain Kyrgyzstani passports using informal and illegal networks after having obtained Russian citizenship. Russian citizenship has not necessarily turned them into full-fledged Russian citizens due to the widespread practice of ethno-racial profiling by police and officials in Russia for documentation checks.

4.2 Effects on Social Structure and Families

*Lemon 2016

While remittances have reduced overall poverty levels, improved the socio-economic status of families, they also increase income inequality in the sending countries. The governments of all three states have failed to promote economic reforms and development and undertake measures to enable rural youth to obtain better skills, create jobs that pay decent wages, combat nepotism and corruption. Instead of protecting their citizens against racial attacks and exploitation, the security officials of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have intensified surveillance of their citizens working in Russia under the guise of controlling the spread of Islam-based activism.* The ruling elite in Tajikistan has sponsored elaborate constructions of mosques and objects of national 'prestige,' while also strengthening surveillance and control of its citizens.*

*RFE/RL 2019

*Danzer et al. 2013

Remittances have also led to an increase in conspicuous consumption for the purpose of demonstrating status, and produced new hierarchies.* Structural problems such as corruption, and a lack of suitable economic policies to help small business and safeguard investments, have deterred investment in the local economy and infrastructure.

Nonetheless, by improving living conditions, labour migration has helped defuse social and economic tensions in migrant-sending states. The gainful employment of the youth and working age population abroad has served as a 'safety valve,' considerably ameliorating the potential for socio-economic disaffection and instability, while increasing remittance-based dependency on Russia.

The early phase of labour migration was almost exclusively defined by the preponderance of young men from rural areas, with limited education and skills, going to Russia to earn for weddings,

buying a house and starting a family. As per data in 2015, women comprised 31 percent of labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, 13.4 percent from Uzbekistan and 9.6 percent from Tajikistan* though their share has steadily continued to rise since. Older women, especially divorced or widowed, tend to comprise a higher share of women migrants. With a continuing rise in number of women amongst migrants – with many women joining their husbands or close relatives to work – a shift from the traditional male-dominated migration to family migration can be discerned.

*Rocheva and Varshaver 2017: 91

As many male migrants have been unable to go to Russia due to the ban on re-entry, their family members – siblings, wives, and other less experienced persons of the extended family with less social capital – have embarked for work in Russia. Many migrants have also opted to acquire a ‘second wife’ and set up new families by either abandoning their families in their countries of origin or maintaining an informal polygamy. These practices are leading to a transformation of traditional family patterns.* Acquiring a Russian citizen spouse in order to obtain the relevant documents to remain in Russia has become especially common among those facing deportation orders, re-entry bans or simply lapse of status.

*Thibault 2017

The availability of alternative mobility routes and trajectories for Central Asians – many Uzbeks work in South Korea, Turkey, UAE, EU and southeast Asia – could over time reduce the scale of migration within the *Eurasian Migration System* and weaken the ability of Russia to attract migrant workers from within the CIS visa free regime, including within the framework of the EAEU.

The numbers of migrants tend to fluctuate according to season, economic opportunities in donor or recipient countries as well as the laws and policies governing migration in the host country. Economic recession in Russia, the growing cost of staying and working legally or raising a family, accompanied with the tightening of migration regulation have led to a fluctuation in the number of migrants going to Russia to work. The decline in the Russian economy so far has not led to a significant decrease in the number of migrants as the established family and social networks continue to stimulate new migration. The volume of remittances has shrunk due to the higher costs of working legally in Russia. However, the fall in remittances is probably also due to a larger number of migrants settling in Russia with their families. An upward trend in sending remittances is again becoming visible since 2018. There is no way of telling/predicting whether these migration trends will continue. According to data from the Central Bank of Russia, of the \$13.99 billion in personal remittances sent from Russia to other

*Eurasianet.org 2019

members of CIS in 2018, about 68.1 percent went to the three Central Asian countries.*

5. Conclusion

The 2012 *Concept of State Migration Policy*⁵ promised a liberal turn by acknowledging the need to enhance Russia's migration-attracting potential to stimulate demographic and economic growth. But subsequent policies have failed to adopt comprehensive policies to address the demographic, socio-economic realities and implement effective regulations to enable migrants to work legally, be included in the labour market without exploitation or discrimination, be entitled to equal pay and pension and be accepted in the socio-economic fabric of the society.

The procedures for acquiring work permit, settlement, employment and citizenship remain cumbersome, corrupt and also change frequently. Economic stagnation in Russia and a turn towards a punitive migration regime have considerably increased the transaction costs for migrants for working in Russia. The complicity as well as active endorsement by the state and its legal institutions in the media portrayal of migrants as criminals, a threat to security and to 'Russian values,' along with persistent anti-migrant rhetoric by officials, serve to reinforce negative popular perceptions of migrants and enhance their vulnerability.

Second, Russia has a complex and variegated set of laws, regulations and procedures governing labour mobility, work permits, settlement and citizenship. Migrants fall under diverse and variable legal categories and statuses: temporary or short-term workers, migrants with families who renew the patents annually, migrants with residency permit and long-term settlement and those who have obtained Russian citizenship under the previously existing simplified regime or as part of bilateral agreements. In the absence of appropriate laws and institutional mechanisms for receiving migrants and regulating their status, many migrants remain excluded or only partially incorporated in the formal labour market, social structure and public life.

Third, the various state-sponsored programmes for aiding 'adaptation' and 'integration' of migrants have remained highly ineffective: they are executed by bureaucrats without a strategic plan or vision of what 'integration' means and often without meaningful funding and guidelines. With the abolition of FMS, its functions of adaptation and integration of migrants have been taken over by

⁵ Концепция государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на период до 2025 года. (Гарант 2021)

the Ministry of Interior, which is part of the *siloviki* structure. At the same time, Russia lacks effective institutions and practices for combating radicalization in non-violent ways.*

*Omelycheva 2009

Finally, the expansion of EAEU (*Eurasian Economic Union*: originally comprising of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and joined in 2015 by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) is often viewed as a step towards the creation of a single Eurasian labour market as it has simplified requirements for migrants from member states to live and work within it. EAEU member states do not require patents or take the Russian language proficiency exams. Notwithstanding these relaxed requirements conferred by their membership of the EAEU, citizens of Kyrgyzstan still face discrimination by the authorities and other obstacles to working legally, similar to those faced by Central Asian labour migrants from non-EAEU countries.

Fewer than 20 percent of all migrants come from EAEU member states. Migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and also Azerbaijan by far outnumber EAEU migrants, not to mention 2-2.5 million Ukrainians and over half a million Moldovans. There has been much speculation about Uzbekistan joining the EAEU in the near future, which would also enhance the prospects of Tajikistan becoming a member. However, without adequate laws, institutions and procedures, it is doubtful if membership of the EAEU could lead to a substantial improvement in the legal status and economic and social inclusion of Central Asian migrants.

While the EAEU has emphasized regulation and management of labour migration and the creation of a single Eurasian labour market, it is too early to identify movement towards an integrated labour market within the EAEU. Moreover, EAEU member states are yet to align their domestic policies and bureaucratic institutions for management of migration and have only shown a formal compliance with its objectives and regulations.*

*Schenk 2017

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7. Recommended Literature

Below readers will find several more (and very recent) works expanding on the topics discussed in this chapter. But in addition, the author would like to recommend one seminar and two reports as relevant visual materials. The seminar (1) expands on the impact of Covid-19 on migration processes in the region, ongoing at the time of writing. And the two reports (2 & 3) help to put faces to the issues presented in this chapter, by providing testimonies with real insights into the lives of Central Asian migrants.

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Cite as: Bhavna Davé, 'Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Laws, Policies and Effects on Sending States' in: Jeroen Van den Bosch; Adrien Fauve; Bruno De Cordier (eds.), *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2021): 857-881.

Bhavna Davé (PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University, NY) is Senior Lecturer in Central Asian Politics in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS, University of London. She has published on issues of labour migration in Kazakhstan and Russia, language and ethnic identities, minorities, elections and patronage in Kazakhstan, and EU-Central Asia relations, labour migration in Kazakhstan and Russia, the role of the Russian Far East in Russia's 'pivot to Asia' policy, social and security implications of China's Silk Road economic development initiative in Central Asia and India-Central Asia relations. Her current research and writing are centred on: 1) the political economy and legal framework of labour migration in Russia and Kazakhstan; 2) geopolitics in Eurasia, and the consequences of China's Belt and Road initiative for Central Asian states; 3) the strategic role of the 'priority development programme' of the Russian Far East as part of Russia's pivot to Asia policy. She is the author of the book *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (Routledge: London, 2007). She is editor of *Modern Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009), a four-volume reference collection, which is part of Routledge's series on *Critical Issues in Modern Politics*.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

The proposed topics can be combined in one assignment or treated separately:

TOPIC 1

How has Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdowns, limits on travels and mobility affected labour migrants in Central Asia?

TOPIC 2

How has Covid-19 and the economic slowdown affected the demand for migrant labour in Russia?

TOPIC 3

What are the socio-economic, political and cultural effects of the economic slowdown produced by Covid-19 on the migrant sending states? You may focus on any one country in Central Asia or compare any two states.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

The teacher divides the class into groups (ideally, 6). Each group will be discussing and answering a question listed below (either chosen by them, assigned randomly or selected by the teacher). All questions are related to this broader, main question for the discussion: What key changes in the migration laws and regulatory framework in Russia would you propose in order to provide greater legal protection to the migrants?

Depending on the number of groups (and students), one or two questions are assigned to each group:

- a. Should Russia do away with the practice of migrants requiring a fixed term 'patent' in order to work legally? What other arrangements or laws can be introduced in place of the patent? Should the migrant registration requirement – *propiska* – be annulled? What are the other mechanisms that the state can use in order to compile data on foreign migrant workers, their place of residence and employment?
- b. What laws, policies and reforms are needed to address the pervasive prejudice against Central Asian labour migrants and their continuing portrayal as 'illegal', 'criminal', 'unwanted'?
- c. Will the extension of the membership of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan enable migrants from these states to acquire greater legal protection? How will the widening of its membership affect the migrants from Kyrgyzstan, which is already a member of the EAEU?
- d. What measures can the migrant-sending states take in order to protect their citizens working in Russia?
- e. How have the lockdowns, border closure and overall shrinking of the economy due to Covid-19 affected the migrant workers who are already in Russia as well as their families in the home countries?

The students discuss their questions for 15-20 minutes within the groups, writing down their recommendations, together with arguments and possible counterarguments. In their discussion they are asked to make use of the information, ideas and analysis presented in this chapter and additional readings recommended at the end of it. Then each group presents their overall findings (recommendations) as well as the reasons for these to the class. Both the teacher and other students provide feedback for their proposals.

A follow-up activity could be a collaborative writing exercise with the goal of preparing a document with written recommendations for the governments of Russia and the Central Asian states, based on previous discussion held in class. For this purpose new groups would be formed: this time comprising of one representative of each of the previous groups. For example, if six questions were discussed in six groups (a-f), new groups will be formed by six representatives (a-f), each having discussed a different question before. In the new groups, the students are assigned a role of “experts” in the topic they had previously discussed with their groups and they collaborate in the recommendation writing process.

VIDEO

To see the recorded lecture for this chapter, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwDRxiUqxhU>

CASE STUDY

To read the case study for this chapter, go to CASE STUDY NO. 6 by Bhavna Davé.

Native workshop.

CHAPTER 22

Between Sotsgorod and Bazaar: Urbanization Dynamics in Central Asia

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Carleton University

Abel Polese

Dublin City University

Keywords:

- Urbanization • Demographic Change • Ideological City-Building
- Industrialization • Mega-Projects • Infrastructure • 'Smart' Cities

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Describe urbanization processes in Central Asia during and after the Soviet era.
- Compare historical and contemporary urbanization patterns across Central Asia.
- Explain the links between the environment and urbanization.
- Explain the concept of mega-projects with examples from the region.
- Understand the challenges and future prospects of urbanization in the region.
- Assess urbanization dynamics and their underlying social, political, and economic forces.
- Understand different models of spatial development and urban growth in Central Asia.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**Pre-reading questions**

- What is urbanization?
- What spatial characteristics define Central Asian cities?
- What is driving urbanization in Central Asia? How have these drivers changed over time?
- How are rural and urban areas connected to one another in the region?

Main questions

- Which urbanization patterns were characteristic of the Soviet era?
- How have urbanization trends changed since the 1990s?
- What is the role of historical legacy in the development of Central Asian cities?
- How have the unique contexts of each Central Asian country impacted their processes of urbanization?
- What factors pose challenges to Central Asian urbanization? What areas hold opportunity?
- What are the links between the environment and urbanization?
- How is city building connected to event hosting, regional infrastructure, and extraction industries?

Post-reading questions

- Is urbanization a necessary or inevitable process?
- How is urbanization linked to culture, politics, and the economy in Central Asia?
- Are certain patterns of urbanization preferable or more resilient than others?
- What are future urban development directions and opportunities in Central Asia?

Between Sotsgorod and Bazaar: Urbanization Dynamics in Central Asia

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AS OF 2020, over 20% of the world's population inhabits the 600 largest cities, which account for more than half of global GDP. By 2025, it is expected that this percentage will grow to 25%, accounting for more than 60% of global GDP. Emerging economies will be particularly affected by this trend, with their urban populations expected to double between 2000 and 2030, resulting in many urban aggregates tripling in size from 200,000 to 600,000 square kilometres.* Although Central Asia lags behind these dramatic urbanization trends,* the region still hosts 273 cities, gathering a population of 74.3 million, of which a large part is living in urban areas in Uzbekistan (50.1%), Kazakhstan (57.7%) and Turkmenistan (52.6%), whereas Tajikistan (27.3%) and Kyrgyzstan (35.6%) lag well behind.*

*Eshonov and Kamilov 2013

*Restrepo Cadavid et al. 2017

*UN population 2020

For the purposes of this chapter, urbanization may be broadly defined as the process of people moving from rural to urban areas. Such processes may sound straightforward and are often presumed to be the result of people looking for better opportunities and moving to places where these are available. However, urbanization is actually far more complex. An increase of urban population could instead be the result of administrative reforms or expanding urban areas to include nearby villages. As an example, the government of Uzbekistan in 2009 reclassified 965 large rural settlements into towns, which resulted in an increase in the country's urban population of 4.4 million. As a result, as of 2012, the country's urban population totalled 15,143,200, or 51% of the country's overall population. This was due to a combination of administrative reform and urban migration.*

*Uzbekistan Statistics 2012

Statistics on urbanization in Central Asia – as elsewhere – are, therefore, the result of many interconnected factors. Migration undertaken in efforts to escape poverty and vulnerability may be one factor. But, one should also consider the quality of urbani-

zation policies anticipating and accommodating growth as other factors. When regional and territorial development programs are successful, cities may have less allure. The same can be said if a government is able to effectively manage local governance systems, city budgets, industrial development, and tax systems that eventually influence industrial development (or lack thereof), and jobs in a given area. Other factors on urbanization may include migration management and how urban planning and development initiatives respond to these challenges.

Stemming from these concepts, this chapter provides an overview of the changing urbanization dynamics in Central Asia. It begins with a discussion of the Soviet era before moving on to unpack urbanization patterns since independence. It then considers some of the aspects that have been mostly affected by urban change over the past thirty years. Our goal was to provide a comprehensive – although not exclusive – range of topics that are at the centre of Central Asian urban studies. This includes the use of natural resources and the geography of the region – characteristics that in turn have an effect on the development of infrastructures; but also the everyday dimensions of urbanization that intertwine with the redefinition of urban and national identities and, in general, nation-building efforts. At the crossroad of these conditions, one can place the development of mega-projects, bearing both ideological-identitarian and practical-logistical concerns. The authors conclude with the future of Central Asian urban studies, by looking at the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), and possible future directions of study, such as smart cities and environmental development.

Given the limited space and breadth of the task, the authors have not attempted to include these aspects of urbanization extensively. Not even a singular book would suffice to cover the topic. Nevertheless, this chapter focuses on the topics that seemed most relevant at the time of writing, so as to provide an introduction of topics and literature that may enable the reader to have a starting point when developing this or that aspect of Central Asian urban issues, depending on the field of study, interests, and ambitions.

1. Soviet-era Urbanization

Between 1926 and 1989, the total population of the five Central Asian republics went from 13.7 to 49.1 million, with a three-fold increase in the share of urban population (from 13.4% to 45.6%) – see Table 22.1 (below) for country-specific statistics. This was accompanied by an average increase of twelve years in life expect-

tancy between 1950 and 1990, alongside mortality dropping by almost half during the same timeframe.*

*UNDESA 2011

Despite this period of dramatic growth, the foundations of settlement in Central Asia were set far earlier over the course of the region's millennial-long history. Bukhara and Samarkand – once major medieval centres for Islamic theology and culture – became crucial nodes along the original Silk Road.* Less internationally recognized settlements also flourished along the Silk Road as fortresses or pit stops, including Ashgabat (*Ashkhabad*), Bishkek (*Pishpek*), Tashkent (*Toshkent*), and Shymkent (*Chimkent*). These nodes then acted as starting points for Soviet urbanization policies. In some cases, Soviet approaches carried forward Imperial Russian policies,* like in the development of Almaty, developed first as the fortification, Verny (*Форт Верный*). In other cases, urbanization was largely boosted by Soviet planning. For example: in Karaganda, where prisoners were deported *en masse* to work in the extraction industry; in Namangan in the Fergana valley, where many food factories were located; and in Dushanbe, an old village developed into a town to serve as the capital of the Tajik SSR.

*Asimov 1999; Buell 1979; Shishkina 1994

*Allworth 1994

1.1 Ideological and Industry-led Urban Planning

In the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet architects and urban planners based in Russia began establishing organized approaches to city development and produced comprehensive plans to guide urbanization.* The spatial arrangement of land uses in cities was structured with industrial efficiency and citizen welfare in mind. New industrially focused settlements across Central Asia were then founded following similar blueprints. The impact of industrialization was so significant that, in 1985, industrial output in Central Asia was 225 times greater than it had been in 1913. The population of urban areas also expanded a dramatic tenfold during this period (1913–1985).*

*Косенкова 2018; Лавров 1950

Still, the rapid construction of industrial cities for agriculture and extractive industries meant that new settlements were determined more by natural resource availability than proximity to existing urban cores. This, in turn, led to spread-out urbanization patterns. Most of the newly established towns were referred to as 'monocities' (or company towns), revolving around a singular industry and attracting residents who could be employed in favour of their support. Given the design of Soviet industrial chains that overwhelmingly connected back to the Russian Federation, the newly established industrial areas were often far better connected to processing networks outside their own republic borders than to

*USSR Statistics 1987: 17; Nutter et al. 1962

Box 22.1 The Design Ideals of a 'Sotsgorod' or 'Soviet City' and the Soviet 'Microrayon'

"The new way of life must be born as a natural result of the new organization of labor and housing"

N.A. Milyutin, 1974

In the 1930s, Nikolay Milyutin proposed a new paradigm of urban development for the 'Sotsgorod' (*соцгород* or 'Socialist City'). His concept was predicated on the layout of sequential industrial production processes – from raw material extraction to working and finishing factories – all flanking a linear rail line. Milyutin assumed that a linear model of development would most efficiently meet Soviet society's new demands since it related directly to the linear nature of industrial production and offered new opportunities for communist-style communal living. A crucial aspect of his Sotsgorod was the separation of land uses, the influences of which can be seen in the urban plans of Central Asian cities like Leninogorsk, where factories are separated from housing districts by a narrow sanitary zone. Other linear approaches to urban development were also proposed at the time, including those of Mikhail Okhitovich and Ivan Leonidov (cf. A. French).

In the areas of existing settlement facing rapid urbanization, rather than creating new cities, Soviet planners designed peripheral 'microrayons' (*микрорайон*) or neighbourhood districts comprised of mid-to-high-rise buildings with residential and institutional uses. Such districts relied on prefabricated concrete construction and standardized floorplans. They followed the modernist design principles of the era, including the separation of residential buildings from one another with large green spaces.

Broadly speaking, the concepts of Soviet urbanism were formed in reaction to the over-crowded living conditions, social inequality, and hygiene issues of the 19th century industrial city. With such concepts, Soviet planners presumed technological and industrial advancements could support the growth of communism through urbanization. Common to all such urban environments was the modernist valorization of technocratic urban development, with transportation networks, new forms of industrial production, and social engineering through spatial restructuring being crucial aspects of the envisioned plans.

Sources:

Anthony French, *Plans, pragmatism and people: the legacy of Soviet Planning of today's cities*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995): 40.

N.A. Miliutin, *Sotsgorod - The Problem of Building Socialist Cities*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974).

other nearby communities. This logistical arrangement has today left a strong legacy of deficient national-level connectivity.* Catalysing Soviet urban planning aspirations was the earthquake-induced destruction of Ashgabat in 1948 and Tashkent in 1966, which provided Soviet authorities with an opportunity to reconstruct these capitals more in line with communist ideology.*

*Taaffe 1962

When designing such settlements, great attention was paid by Soviet architects and urban planners to the procedures of industrial production. In such mono-towns and cities, there would be specially designated zones for factories, freight, institutions and worker dwellings. Since large numbers of Central Asia's urban areas were established in this manner, they further reflect Soviet innovation in urban design and planning, and the desires of Soviet planners to use city development as a means of promoting communist ideology.*

*Bell 1999; Raab 2017; Diener and Hagen 2013

While efficient during the Soviet era in terms of structuring urban design around manufacturing needs, given their focus on singular industries these settlements are today overwhelmingly vulnerable to market fluctuations and to the availability of raw materials reserves. Because of this, by the 1990s, many Soviet industrial mono-towns/cities established only decades earlier began showing signs of deterioration, unable to adapt to the capitalist economy.

*Andrusz 1984; Bater 1980; French and Hamilton 1979; Morton and Stuart 1984

When towns and cities were constructed anew by the Soviets across Central Asia in the 20th century, they were done so with the express purpose of accommodating the USSR's central command economy – see Box 22.1.* The placement of cities and industrial sites was largely focused on serving the agricultural economy and the formation of urbanized zones with significant extractive industries. Many of these new Soviet towns and cities further took the form of secret areas designed for scientific and military use.* Existing regional epicentres also greatly expanded during the Soviet era through the construction of peripheral 'microrayons' or residential districts.

*Stringer 2003

Development initiatives were further pursued well beyond these major cities, impacting medium and small-sized settlements that similarly supported the interests of Soviet planning policies. These smaller settlements performed as epicentres for trade and power, but their formal urban development was typically secondary to economic priorities. The physical development of Central Asia was also enhanced because of World War Two, when industries from the USSR's more western territories were evacuated to Central Asia. Between 1941 and 1943, 142 enterprises were relocated to

*Gentile 2004b; Hømland and Jørgensen 1998; Rowland 1999

Kazakhstan, 30 to Kyrgyzstan and 109 to Uzbekistan. The wartime industrialization of Turkmenistan was largely associated with the evacuation of industrial facilities in World War Two and the active development of hydrocarbon resources. After the war, the country developed natural gas production, oil refining, and machine-building, as well as increased cotton production. To meet the needs of these industries, transportation and irrigation infrastructure were built. In particular, the construction of the Kara Kum Canal between 1950 and 1970 gave a powerful impetus to the development of agriculture. In 1960, Central Asia's urban population was twice as large as it had been in 1940, with industrial output expanding fivefold over the same period.*

*Eshonov and Kamilov 2013

Further regional development occurred after 1960, when the South Tajik territorial-industrial complex (TIC) in Tajikistan was established, accompanied by: the Navoi Mining and Metallurgical TIC, the Almalyk-Angren TIC, and the Ferghana Petrochemical Complex in Uzbekistan; and the Kustanai and Pavlodar-Ekibastuz TICs in Kazakhstan. Workers for these settlements were shipped in from other parts of Central Asia – and sometimes the rest of the USSR – significantly increasing the urban share of the population and the development of cities in the region. This was not always the case, however, as some regions with fast demographic growth (like: Andijan, Namangan, Ferghana, Tashkent, Samarkand, Kashkadarya, Khorezm and Bukhara) were not matched by a significant investment in complexes for economic production to absorb their growing population. Other regions remained largely underdeveloped (such as: Syrdarya, Djizak, Surkhandarya and Karakalpakstan), paving the way for long-term inequality.* As a result, after 1991, many urban settlements in Central Asia experienced economic decline and hence a decrease in local budget revenues, resulting in deteriorating urban infrastructure, partly due to their limited capacity to manage urban development under new market conditions.

*Eshonov and Kamilov 2013

1.2 Soviet-era Demographic Influences on Urbanization

Although the population of the Central Asian republics increased 3.6-fold during the Soviet-era (between 1926 to 1989), with a steep increase in urban population, this was not a unidirectional nor homogeneous process. Both Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, for example, registered negative urbanization trends during some portions of this period. The earliest decades of Soviet rule in Central Asia were marked by intense population decline as severe famine

and the policies of war communism made their way across the region. In the two Kazakh famines of 1919-1922 and 1932-1933 alone, over two million lives were lost.* Then, beginning in the 1940s, population rates took a more positive trend and growth steadily persisted throughout the remainder of Soviet rule. Much of the growth during the Soviet period was the result of natural factors; the rise in life expectancy and birth rates, coupled with a drop in mortality rates produced a dramatic 360% increase in population across Central Asia in the decades of the Soviet period.

*Buttino 1990; Cameron 2011; Conquest 1986

Table 22.1 Central Asian Demographic Change During the Soviet Period

Republic	1926 (in million)	1989 (in million)	% Urban in 1926	% Urban in 1989
Kazakhstan	6.20	16.46	12.1	57.1
Kyrgyzstan	0.99	4.26	8.4	38.1
Tajikistan	1.03	5.09	10.3	32.5
Turkmenistan	1.00	3.52	13.6	45.1
Uzbekistan	4.54	19.81	22.3	40.6
TOTAL	13.7	49.1	13.4	45.6

Authors' own work, based on Soviet Census Data of 1926 and 1989. These numbers represent present-day geographic boundaries of these republics. In 1926, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Karakalpak Autonomous Republic (today part of Uzbekistan) were a part of the Russian SFSR; Tajikistan was a part of the Uzbek SSR.

Sources:

Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года, (М.: Издание ЦСУ Союза ССР, 1928): Том 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17.

Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Распределение городского и сельского населения республик СССР по полу и национальности.

Further Reading:

Ira N. Gang; Robert C. Stuart, R., "Mobility where mobility is illegal: Internal migration and city growth in the Soviet Union," *Journal of Population Economics*, 12, (1999): 117-134.

The fastest growing republic in terms of population was **Tajikistan**, reaching a population of 5.2 million in 1990 with 31.7% living in urban areas (against 9% in 1913). Urbanization of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic was a result of the rapid concentration of production in large cities, the creation of numerous settlements in

new development areas (in connection with the construction of the Nurek Hydroelectric Station and the flooding of rural areas) and the concomitant mass movement of people from villages to cities and urban-type settlements. However, after reaching a historic high in urban population of 36.9% in 1970, the share in Tajikistan began to decline and, following the USSR's collapse, fell down to 26.5% in 2000 – see also Table 22.2 lower.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan experienced a fourfold growth in their population during Soviet times. **Kyrgyzstan** went from 1 to 4.3 million, while its urban population went from 12.2% to 37.8%. The period from 1926 to 1939 saw significant demographic growth (averaging 3.2% per year) and the highest annual urbanization rates in the history of Kyrgyzstan (around 6.8% per year). Between 1950 and 1960, population growth averaged 2.2% a year, while urban population increased by 4.3%, far exceeding the growth rate in rural areas (of 1.3%). Between 1979 and 1989, Kyrgyzstan's population increased by 2.0%, with similar growth rates in urban and rural areas. There were notable differences, however, between the northern and southern parts of the country. In the north, the urban population grew faster than the rural population; in the south, the highest population growth rates occurred in several rural areas of the Fergana valley and remote mountain villages. Except for a few old industrial towns and settlements, urban population growth was insignificant.

Uzbekistan experienced an increase from 4.6 to 20.3 million with an urban share of the population growing from 22% to 41.5%, stimulated by industrialization and mass migration of people from other regions of the Soviet Union, both during war-time (1941-1945) and in the post-war period. During the 1966-1970 period, there was an increase in urban population (mainly in the city of Tashkent) due to an influx of people from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and other Soviet republics. In the second half of the 1970s, however, external migration turned negative due to the outflow of a nonindigenous (mainly Russian) population from the country – not only from cities, but also from rural areas.

In absolute terms, the **Kazakh republic's** urban population during these years grew even faster (by eight-fold – from 1 to 8.2 million). In the period prior to World War Two (1924-1941), the population growth rate averaged 2.5%; between 1959 and 1970 it reached 4.1%; and between 1970 and 1990 it dropped to 3.15%. Demographic growth was mainly driven by increases in the rural population, which, by 1990, had grown 2.2-fold over 1959. **Turkmenistan's** population growth happened at a slightly lower rate, passing from 1 to

3.6 million by 1990. The largest change in the country happened in urban population, from 0.14 to 1.6 million.

2. Post-Independence Urbanization

Independence from the Soviet Union brought radical disruptions that in turn resulted in significant changes in urbanization policies and trends. The most significant change was the transition from a planned to market-based economy. Although this did not happen overnight, it radically changed the social fabric of the region. Goods that had been in high demand only a few months prior became undesirable, while goods that were previously readily available became scarce. When the demands of goods produced by Soviet monocities dwindled, that settlement typology became destined for austerity. This had an immense impact on migration. Almost overnight, millions of workers had to look for employment far away from their place of residence and often outside their current republic borders. This affected not only rural areas but secondary and tertiary urban areas that witnessed emigration to capital cities, or even to other Central Asian republics and Russia. Emigration had to be addressed by the newly sovereign governments that were now free to decide autonomously on their industrial policies and could address their national necessities through more targeted urbanization measures.

Given their range of adopted governance structures – from democracy to autocracy – each country established its own procedures and mechanisms for managing socio-economic change. At the same time, several challenges continue to be shared across the region. If urban development during the Soviet era was able to largely avoid having to accommodate existing built fabric when establishing new towns and cities, the post-independence era witnessed governments struggling to adapt their development goals to their Soviet-inherited legacies. The primarily industrial settlements that have become ill-suited to today's capitalist economy must now be revisited and supplemented with new paradigms of economic productivity.

In addition to reflecting the arrival of a market-based economy, urban development in the post-independence period has been marked by new political, ideological, and nationalistic pursuits that combine state-building with nation-building, and that reposition individual countries relative to their government's desires for the future.*

*Laruelle 2013

Box 22.2 Aral Sea Revitalization Efforts

The revitalization of the Northern Aral Sea has been an ongoing initiative since the 1960s, aimed at improving environmental and ecological conditions by mitigating the sea's physical deterioration and ameliorating agricultural and fisheries damage. A key component of a joint World Bank & Kazakh government revitalization project has been the 8-mile long Kok-Aral Dam, which divides the sea's upper and lower sections. Completed in 2005, the dam is being used to accumulate water in the northern sea.

The Aral Sea was once one of the world's largest freshwater reserves. It deteriorated significantly in the second half of the 20th century as a result of Soviet agricultural policies which diverted water from its two tributaries, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, for cotton cultivation. This deterioration had direct impacts on the region's fishing communities that were reliant on the sea for their livelihoods. The environmental problems linked to sea evaporation, including severe wind and dust storms – coupled with vanishing economies and pervasive health concerns – drove up emigration and poverty.

For decades, the area entered a downward spiral of de-population and decreased living standards, first severely impacted by poor Soviet water and agricultural policies, then by broader state disregard and infrastructural deficiencies. Since the 2010s, however, there have been signs of revitalization in Aral, including the opening of new shops, cafés and religious facilities. Today, one-tenth its original size, the Aral Sea is overwhelmingly concentrated within Kazakhstan. A decade after the joint World Bank and Kazakh government project, fish production and living conditions have improved in the localized area surrounding the North Aral Sea. Settlements proximate to the South sea, however, remain disadvantaged and subject to dust storms, water scarcities, and low rates of biodiversity. (For more information on environmental issues see also Chapter 20 by Natalie Koch.)

Sources:

Lindsey Harriman, "Thematic focus: Environmental governance, Ecosystem management, Climate change; The future of the Aral Sea lies in transboundary co-operation," (United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), 2014).

E. Курбанбаев; С. Курбанбаев; О. Артыков, *Аральское море и водохозяйственная политика в республиках Центральной Азии*; (Нукус: Каракалпакстан: без. изд., 2010).

2.1 Post-Independence Demographic Influences on Urbanization

Although the general trend of population growth across Central Asia continued during the post-Independence period (with the exception of Kazakhstan), there were changes in the rates of urbanization in each republic, including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all experiencing periods of de-urbanization* – see Table 22.2. On some health-related fronts, there has been a reversal of Soviet era progress: in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, for example, life expectancy fell during the 1990s, and infant mortality rates again rose in Kazakhstan.*

*UN Population 2020

*UNDESA 2010

Table 22.2 Central Asian Demographic Change Post-Independence

Republic	1989 (in million)	2018 (in million)	2018 % Urban
Kazakhstan	16.46	18.28	57
Kyrgyzstan	4.26	7.06	36
Tajikistan	5.09	9.10	27
Turkmenistan	3.52	5.85	52
Uzbekistan	19.81	32.96	50

Sources:

Authors' own work based on Soviet Census Data from 1989 and United Nations Population Division, 2018 estimates (СССР Печенушь 1989; <https://population.un.org/wpp/>).

Immigration, emigration, and displacement have also greatly contributed to changing urbanization patterns in the post-independence period. While the primary lure for settlement in the region continues to be the largest cities (places like: Almaty, Astana, Ashgabat, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Tashkent), there remain state efforts to support peripheral mining and agricultural areas, and to revitalize rural regions impacted by environmental degradation, such as the North Aral Sea – see Box 22.2.*

*Harriman 2014;
Курбанбаев et al. 2010

Over the past few decades, there has also been great volatility in the region's demographic trends. For example, following independence, Kazakhstan saw two decades of dramatic population shifts, including the emigration of over 3 million people and the internal migration of over 6 million.* In Kyrgyzstan, the first two decades of independence were marked by particularly low rates of population growth (0.3% per year), most of which took place in rural areas, resulting in significant declines in the country's share of urban population (38.2% in 1989; 34.8% in 1999).*

*Eshonov and Kamilov 2013

*Kyrgyzstan Statistics 2018

Regarding emigration, since the 1990s, many residents of Central Asia have departed for other countries in search of employ-

Box 22.3 Environmental Impacts on Settlement in the Ferghana Valley

The interconnected impacts of environmental threat, climate change, population migration, and politics on settlement patterns can be witnessed most palpably in the Ferghana Valley. With a population of roughly 12 million, patterns of migration and settlement in the area are largely shaped by changes in the environment and politics. Communities are frequently impacted by flooding and landslides – environmental threats that are further complicated by climate change and the Valley’s socio-political dynamics, as well as recurring conflicts. Often property rights, access to land for grazing, and resource management (especially that of water) are unclearly defined and result in tensions amongst different ethnically and nationally aligned residents.

Sources:
Philip Shishkin, *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia*, (Yale University Press, 2014).
S. Frederick Starr (ed.), *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, (New York: Routledge, 2011).

ment. Region-wide displacement from several area conflicts has also left a mark on urbanization patterns and on the demographic compositions of cities. For example, the ethnically and culturally diverse Ferghana Valley divided between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan has seen numerous waves of conflict and displacement* – see Box 22.3. Tajikistan’s civil war also caused large waves of displacement and emigration, inducing much local demographic change.* As a result of the war, hundreds of thousands of Tajiks became internally displaced persons (IDPs), with tens of thousands more fleeing across the border into neighbouring Afghanistan. As of 1995, the majority of these IDPs and refugees have returned, reversing displacement-driven urbanization trends.* In Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, there are also Afghan refugees who, alongside returning populations, need to be integrated locally; likewise for Tajik refugees in Turkmenistan.*

In the urban cores of the region, the impacts of demographic shifts on urbanization have been most apparent regarding segregation,* urban renewal/gentrification,** and the departure and arrival of ethnic minorities.* In addition to this, with much of the building stock and industrial equipment of Soviet era industrial settlements now more than half a century old and many skilled workers having emigrated elsewhere, the long-term viability of industrial towns and cities is a regional concern.

*Borthakur 2017
*Heathershaw and Herzig 2013
*Abazov 1999
*UNHCR 2009
*Gentile 2004a;
Gentile and Tammaru 2006
**Bissenova 2014
*Найдич 1997; Садовская 2016;
Сидоров 2003

2.1.1 *Links between Geography, Natural Resources, and Urbanization*

Over the past century, agricultural production has played a strong role in Central Asia's economy, heavily shaping its development patterns.* Today, the agricultural sector is confronted with several constraints tied to the region's challenging geography and depleting natural resources.* For example, the misalignment of regional water reserves and arable land raises questions about the long-term feasibility of regional agricultural production and in turn its impact on urbanization patterns. While Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan possess sufficient water reserves to promote the growth of their local agricultural sectors, they remain deficient regarding arable land. The arid and mountainous geographies of both countries render industrially scaled agricultural growth largely infeasible.

*Nutter et al. 1962

*Spoor 1995

Facing the opposite challenge, Kazakhstan has a large land mass of 2.725 million km², which is roughly 1/3 comprised of the Steppe's fertile and arable land. Because of this, the country possesses sufficient land reserves for agricultural growth, but it has insufficient water reserves to support such endeavours. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, scarcities in both water and arable land mean that agricultural production has continually struggled and will become increasingly infeasible into the future. As local agriculture wanes, settlement patterns will also be impacted, with a high likelihood of migration to urban cores, resulting in cities coming to play a larger role in the region. In the future, urban areas, too, will be confronted with geographic constraints and limits on natural resources – be it limited supplies of land in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, or limited water resources in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Additional connections between the environment and urbanization can be witnessed with regard to: (1) natural disasters; (2) Soviet-era industrial contamination; and (3) the growing threat of climate change. As former epicentres of nuclear experimentation, mining, chemicals production, and mass agriculture, the rural areas of Central Asia have been negatively impacted by decades of intensive Soviet development.* Contamination has produced a landscape that has lost much of its ability to support fishing and agricultural industries. For these reasons, residents with the means to do so have often sought livelihoods outside rural areas, migrating to cities.

*Komarov 1981

Parts of Central Asia remain prone to natural disasters, including landslides and earthquakes, which are exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, a remarkable 3,000+ earthquakes of different magnitudes are registered annually.* On

*WB and GFDRR 2015: 26

Map 22.1 The Largest Cities in the USSR in 1989

Source: Adapted from: Aleksandr Trubetskiy 2017 (sahat.me), based on 1989 USSR census data, used in line with its creative commons license
Map created by editors and designed by Typeface nv.

top of this, the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan have been subject to environmental disasters, such as floods and landslides, with entire communities forced to evacuate, often becoming internally displaced and in need of long-term resettlement. Their arrival to nearby urban areas places burden on host communities and disrupts the established urban planning processes of these towns and cities. Such displacement brings together long-term issues of urban governance with short-term humanitarian concerns, further introducing international actors into governance in the region.

2.1.2 *Post-Independence Links between Infrastructure and Urbanization*

Infrastructure, including roads, railways, public transportation, and public utility networks, are also contributing factors to urbanization. The existing infrastructural networks of Central Asia largely established during the Soviet era have since greatly deteriorated requiring substantial investment for their improvement. Shifts in the direction of regional connectivity since independence have also rendered many aspects of Soviet-era infrastructure obsolete. For example, Central Asia's rail lines have far fewer East-West connections. This means that to reach a different region of the same country by train, it may be necessary to first cross an international border. Given the ineffectiveness of this inherited system, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have since reconfigured their national rail lines to move away from Soviet-era networks.

Irrespective of Soviet inheritances, the vast geography and spread-out nature of settlement in Central Asia continues to mean long travel journeys for passengers and high transportation costs for freight companies. These distances, likewise, render improvements to infrastructure and telecommunications expensive and laborious undertakings. Infrastructure deterioration is further exacerbated by the local climate (with harsh winters) and geography (difficult terrain) negatively impacting the durability of roads and public utility networks.

In the region's largest cities, state efforts are now being made to improve infrastructure, including public transportation services. This comes after years of their post-independence neglect. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, tramway and trolleybus networks were significantly downsized in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. They continue to operate in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, yet do so at high costs.* Private-sector Marshrutka operators filled the gap in most instances and continue to be a popular transportation choice.

*Sgibnev 2014

Box 22.4 Central Asian Bazaars

Bazaars are part of the urban and everyday landscape in Central Asia. Often developing at strategic points on the Silk Road, they were and are a crossroad between cultures, ethnicities and people from different places and specialisations. What is possibly striking in Central Asia is the variety of different people who come from the four corners of the region to a single place to exchange, trade, network and contribute to the politics of the everyday. (Spector 2017)

In an effort to compromise between local habits and Soviet planning, a large bazaar was developed in each of the five Central Asian capitals, alongside with some degree of tolerance towards local and less structured bazaars. After independence, the thirst of modernization and the introduction of shopping malls has generated two trends. Some of the historical bazaars such as the 'Green Bazaar' (Kazakh: *Kök Bazaar*) in Almaty or 'Chorsu' (Uzbek: *Чорсу бозор*) in Tashkent have been maintained. Some others have been erased and replaced by more modern constructions that do not necessarily offer the same experience, quality or dynamics. In particular, Dushanbe's Green Bazaar (Tajik: *Бозори Шохмансур*) and Ashgabat *Altyn Asyr* (or 'Tolkuchka' – *Толкучка*) have been flattened down and replaced by modern-looking constructions. The *Dordoy Bazaar* (Kyrgyz: *Дордоў Базары*) in Bishkek deserves a special place, in countertendency from the others, has actually evolved, and become a major reference for traders in Central Asia, after Kyrgyz independence.

Alongside bazaars located in the capitals, some other historical bazaars can be found almost in every region or district and some of them have a particular social or economic relevance like the *Pan-jshanbe Bazaar* in Tajikistan or smaller ones like the *Urgut Bazaar* in Uzbekistan.

Source:

Regine Spector, *Order at the Bazaar: Power and Trade in Central Asia*, (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2017).

As the capitals of Central Asia seek greater regional and international connectivity, air transport has also grown. Dramatic new airports and airport terminals in Ashgabat, Nur-Sultan, and Dushanbe signal government desires for foreign visitors and international recognition. Likewise, dramatic highway proposals in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been key components of state-building.

3. Urbanization and the Everyday

*Lefebvre and Levich 1987;
Sztompka 2008

The turn to the *everyday** has significantly widened the potential and scope of Central Asian studies. Cities are no longer understood

merely as abstract places where formulaic policies are conceived for urban development. On the contrary, they have become places where these policies are lived, performed, and renegotiated through visible or invisible actions. Assumptions about the alleged passivity of populations have quickly been challenged by studies suggesting that contributions to the political life of the region should be sought through informal social capital,* institutions and actions, a process that James C. Scott calls ‘infrapolitics’ and that consist of actions that, although performed by actors unaware of one another and often uncoordinated, once repeated millions of times have a substantial effects on top politics.*

*Pichler and Wallace 2007

*Scott 1990: xiii

This novel perspective has encouraged urban scholars to concentrate on phenomena that have widely been overlooked. Places like bazaars (see Box 22.4), neighbourhoods like the Uzbek *Mahalla*, (cf. Box 13.2) for example, have been elevated to real institutions, capable of providing alternative views on the way cities, and, in particular, their public spaces, are lived.* Public space becomes a place where policies are renegotiated, where societal relations emerge, where cultural nuances spring to offer a different view on the city and its parts.

*Cieślowska 2013;
Erkinovich et al. 2020; Urinboyev 2011;
Urinboyev and Svensson 2014

The liquidation or constriction of such informal institutions, and their replacement with more formalized ones, can thus become indicators of many other hidden phenomena. Such relationships can be seen in everything from cultural preferences and the modification of consumers habits (relative to food and cleanliness obsession, for example), to views of more traditional forms of control by the state that aim to homogenize, harmonize, and standardize.* This is, among other things, the destiny of the main Turkmen bazaar (“Tolkuchka”) that has been replaced by an aseptic structure where there is a designated place for each vendor and product. Such changing relationships are also visible in the study of bazaars as resources, where they fulfil not only networking functions, but also contribute to the survival of small cross-border traders.*

*Scott 1998

*Cieślowska 2013

3.1 Urbanization, Identity and Nation-building

Changing cityscapes have been highly impacted by post-independence inter-ethnic relations. Cultural de-Russification, along with the enhancement of national languages and cultures, has transformed cities in several ways. For example, there is now an emphasis on national languages, which has led to the significant marginalisation of local Russian speakers. If Almaty and Bishkek have maintained a substantial Russian-speaking environment, other

Box 22.5 State Spectacle and Urbanization

The overwhelming attention paid by governments to capital cities in Central Asia has made them magnets for investment, migration, and population growth – not only due to their perceived employment opportunities, but for their ideological prestige. State spectacle plays an important role in such processes and can be understood as the use of both the built environment and large-scale events to produce positive impressions of a country. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been leaders in this regard, with both having spent millions of dollars on capital city development and event hosting. A similar emphasis on centralized development can be seen in the three other Central Asian countries, where much socio-economic activity and spectacle is concentrated in capital cities.

Sources:

Laura L. Adams, *The spectacular state: Culture and national identity in Uzbekistan*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Laura L. Adams; Assel Rustemova, "Mass spectacle and styles of governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61, no. 7, (2009): 1249-1276.

Natalie Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle: Space, Synecdoche, and the New Capitals of Asia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

cities have seen a rapid decline in the local use of the language. Ashgabat, as well as all other Turkmen urban centres, have not only phased out Russian but also the Cyrillic alphabet. This happened, as well, in Uzbek cities, where the Latin script has been introduced. A similar transition to the Latin script is targeted for Kazakh cities by 2025.

On a different front, several countries have attracted greater attention to their capitals through new government buildings and capitol complexes* – See Box 22.5. For example, in 1997, the Kazakh government moved the country's capital some 1,200 km from Almaty to Akmola (*Ақмола, aqmola*), inaugurating the new left bank of the city as the transformed capital, Astana.* The decision further affected the geopolitics of the country given that the new capital was located further north in a Kazakh-speaking region, in contrast to Almaty where Russian was widely used. Underscoring the perpetual lure of post-independence nation-building in the region, in March 2019, the capital of Kazakhstan was renamed from Astana to Nur-Sultan, commemorating the departing President Nursultan Nazarbayev, after his official resignation. The everyday identity of Nur-Sultan, and in general Kazakhstan, continues to be impacted by the spectacular growth and construction

*Hughes 2017; Koch 2015; Kuru 2002; Polese and Horák 2015

*Fauve 2015; Koch 2018; Köppen 2013; Laszczkowski 2016

of the new capital, where grandiosity in buildings has become part of the tangible national heritage, further creating distance from the country's past.*

*Fauve 2015; Koch 2018; Laszczkowski 2016

Such iconic city-building has been visible to an equally high degree in Tashkent and Ashgabat, where whole neighbourhoods have been demolished and reconstructed under the auspices of modernity* – See Box 22.6. Ashgabat has further seen a rise in new statues and monuments that shift attention away from the past toward the present, in turn creating a new de facto conception of national identity.*

*Lillis 2017; Matyakubova 2020; Pikulicka-Wilczewska 2019

*Polese and Horák 2015

3.2 Mega-Projects

One of the most prominent ways governments have used city spaces for post-independence state-building has been through iconic mega-projects. These projects are largely designed to attract international attention and to increase global notoriety. They are dramatic in terms of their scale, cost, and construction. Such iconic projects also carry nationalistic messages, meaning they should be seen as integral components of state image-making campaigns.

Mega-projects in Central Asia have taken on a variety of forms, including infrastructure, places of worship, event-hosting venues, and commercial-residential districts. While mega-projects may be positive for select demographics and key stakeholders, depending on their implementation these projects can lead to collectively detrimental outcomes, such as: gentrification; displacement of vulnerable populations; and a loss of heritage. Mega-projects may further lead to the accumulation of large state debts.

The Rogun Dam in Tajikistan is a mega-project that initially commenced during the Soviet era in 1976, but then faced protracted, frozen construction.* As of 2017, the \$3.9 billion USD project is once again being actively pursued by the Tajik government as part of contemporary state-building efforts. Over the course of the dam's ongoing construction, it has faced widespread criticism. Rights groups have drawn attention to the poorly executed resettlement of area residents and the government of neighbouring Uzbekistan has voiced concern over the dam's impacts on regional water reserves.*

*Menga 2015

*HRW 2014; Reuters 2018

Monumentally scaled mosques have also become a form of mega-project in the region. As an example, the 'Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque' (*Türkmenbaşy Ruhy Metjidi*) on the outskirts of Ashgabat in the hometown of former president Saparmurat Niyazov was built in 2004. Following Niyazov's death in 2006, it has housed his body in a custom-designed mausoleum.* The current

*Koch 2016; Koch et al. 2018

Figure 22.1 Examples of Mega-projects in Central Asia

Turkenbashi Ruhy Mosque (Gypjak (also Kipchak), Turkmenistan) –
© Natalie Koch 2014 – used with permission.

Hazrat Sultan Mosque (Astana (now Nur-Sultan), Kazakhstan) –
© Natalie Koch 2013 – used with permission.

Box 22.6 Re-settlement, Displacement, and the Costs of Urban Renewal

Amidst state desires to bolster economic performance through new large-scale development, there has been a tremendous amount of demolition, dispossession, and forced displacement. For example, the proposal for the new \$1.3 billion USD Tashkent City business centre – announced in 2006, then revisited in 2016 and now slated for phased completion into 2021 – is emblematic of this process.* While the project promises to transform Tashkent's downtown core into a new regional business centre, to do so the government must first undertake mass evictions of existing residents to clear the project site.

*Tashkent City 2021

Outside this specific project, forced evictions associated with urban renewal have taken place in other Central Asian cities. In 2015, for example, 50,000 people were forcibly evicted in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan as part of preparations for the Asian Games. Throughout the 2010s, the Tajik government announced plans to demolish parts of Dushanbe's Sino district in order to construct new neighbourhoods.* The numbers of those displaced as a part of such projects has been tremendous, reaching into the tens of thousands.

*Parshin 2013; Adineh 2017

title of Central Asia's largest mosque belongs to Kazakhstan's 'Hazrat Sultan Mosque' (*Aziret Sultan Meshiti*) located in Nur-Sultan. (For pictures of these mosques, see Figure 22.1.) Completed in 2012, it can accommodate up to 5,000 people. The Kazakh government has already announced plans to surpass this record, however, with a new mosque to be located in central Nur-Sultan, accommodating 30,000 worshippers and possessing 130-meter-high minarets.* As these projects exemplify, the Kazakh government is working hard to hold on to its position as a regional development leader through mega-projects – a process that began with the dramatic construction of the country's new capital of Astana in 1997.

*Tengrin News 2019

In several Central Asian cities, the construction of mega-projects has been closely tied to the hosting of international mega-events. One of the largest has been the International Exposition (EXPO-17), hosted in Astana between June and September of 2017. In preparation for hosting, twenty-five hectares of downtown land were slated for the development of pavilions and support facilities. The event's theme was 'Future Energy,' which served as an additional platform for the Kazakh government's launching of a 'smart city' campaign – cf. Figure 20.4. Concerning possible future directions of urbanism in Central Asia, EXPO 2017 showcased seventeen energy-generating projects intended to provide new energy paradigms for the region.

3.3 Infrastructure and China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI)

The announcement of China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), or 'New Silk Road,' in 2013 has re-activated international interest in the future development trajectory of Central Asia. The project involves land routes across the region and promises to use new regional infrastructure to expand local industrial production and economic growth. Key components of the initiative are already underway, including the completion of the Angren–Pap electrified railway line in eastern Uzbekistan; the Uzen–Bereket–Gorgan rail line between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran; and the rail connection between China and Kazakhstan linking to Kazakhstan's Khorgos dry port. Parallel to these railway expansions, there are plans for an international highway linking China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. While no Tajik rail connections have been constructed to date, China has invested in a 350-km highway that connects the north of Tajikistan at Chanak to Dushanbe.

For Central Asian countries, such infrastructure will be a strong catalyst for future economic development and urbanization. It will further provide new opportunities for strategic geopolitical alignment across the region. Various governments have already started to move in this direction. Some are further using the BRI to push forward their domestic development agendas. For example, while setting up its national-level *Nurly Zhol Infrastructure Plan*, Kazakhstan located key points of confluence with the BRI. Along similar lines, Kyrgyzstan has expressed interest in becoming a regional digital epicentre by drawing on the passing of fibre-optic lines through local areas as part of a 'Digital Silk Road.' Geopolitically, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have used the initiative to push for deeper-level international relations with China in the fields of science, culture, and industry.

Shifting regional alliances tied to the BRI are, therefore, longer-term considerations for their impacts on urbanization patterns. While the influence of Russia remains significant in Central Asia, other alliances are gaining ground, including between the five Central Asian countries. The Central Asian mining industry is also likely to benefit from the BRI through increased Chinese interest in copper, gold, and uranium mining. This suggests that the region's historical focus on extractive industries (and on the establishment of urban areas in support of them) is not entirely headed toward obsolescence.

4. The Future of Central Asian Urban Studies: The ‘Smart’ City Urban Development Model and its Discontents

Along with what could be considered more traditional topics in Central Asian studies, some new issues have emerged in recent years. In particular, Central Asian governments have to varying degrees shown interest in global shifts in technology and the environment – topics that might become major focuses for research and planning over the next few years. This is especially the case in relation to smart cities, a phenomenon appearing most prominently in Kazakhstan (see Box 22.7).

The “smartness” of a smart city is typically defined through considerations of both regulation and innovation, though there is no singular framework or governing body appraising the performance of such cities. This also means that the core elements of what can be considered a smart city (like: economic development and civil engagement; sustainable urban planning; data-driven public safety; resilient infrastructure; and intelligent transportation) may be developed at diverse speeds, with some being prioritised over others.

Indeed, in a 2017 study, Farrukh Irnazarov and Marina Kayumova attempted to assess the degree of smartness in smart cities in Central Asia, looking at Almaty, Nur-Sultan, Ashgabat, Bishkek,

Box 22.7 Kazakhstan’s Move toward ‘Smart’ Cities

The trend toward ‘smart city’ urbanization in Central Asia is being led by Kazakhstan, which in January 2019 announced its nation-wide ‘Digital Kazakhstan’ program. The program is defined by five key components:

1. Digitalization of economic sectors
2. Transition to a digital state
3. Implementation of the digital Silk Road
4. Human level development
5. Creation of an innovative ecosystem

The small city of Aqkol, Kazakhstan located just north of Nur-Sultan was the first in the country to receive government designation as a ‘smart city’ under the program. Cities included in the *Digital Kazakhstan Initiative* are: Aktobe, Almaty, Nur-Sultan, Aqkol, Karaganda, Ontystuk, Ural'sk.

Source:

Digital Kazakhstan. <https://digitalkz.kz/en/>

*Irnazarov and Kayumova 2017

Dushanbe, and Tashkent.* Using three key pillars (infrastructure; affordability; legal and regulatory framework) and seven categories (transport, human capital and innovation, ICT, electricity, environment, housing and construction, waste management), they made a *Smart City Development Index*. Although the Kazakh cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan had the highest smart city index ratings, these cities have also been criticized for their ambiguous boundary between technologies that are “smart” and those that are for state control. This critical view of emerging technology in cities is, of course, not limited to Kazakhstan. The concept has faced broader criticism for its over-emphasis on technocratic measures of city performance and for its potential to violate civilian privacy.*

*Hollands 2008; Kitchin 2014;
Vanolo 2014

*Yau Tsz Yan 2019

Linked to such concerns, the technology used to develop over 500 ‘safe cities’ (as they were initially labelled) in China has since been imported into Uzbekistan through a one billion US dollar contract with technology company Huawei. This was only the latest of the corporation’s efforts after the modernization of the Uzbek national telecommunication network in 2008 and the more recent incorporation of 5G technology with national mobile companies.* In a similar fashion, Huawei will install over 2,000 cameras in Nur-Sultan and is a main provider for similar technologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This is especially concerning for human rights advocates since laws and national regulations on the use of personal data remain obsolete in Kazakhstan. Despite the creation of the 2018 ‘General Data Protection Regulation’ (GDPR) in the EU, similar regulations in Central Asia have become obsolete (last enacted in Kazakhstan in 2013; in Kyrgyzstan in 2008; and Uzbekistan in 2003). In Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, they date from 2017 and 2018, but their application remains highly limited.

Intimately tied to experiments in smart city urban development has been government pursuits of environmental sustainability. With the ongoing depletion of energy reserves and natural resources in several Central Asian countries, as well as the increased risks of climate-induced natural disasters, there is a need to pay attention to new sustainable development models and renewable energy sources. In line with this, Central Asian countries have committed to address 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) put forward by the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Governmental action, however, has not necessarily followed stated intents. Despite growing regional interest in renewable energy, the prioritization of environmentally sustainable construction practices has been slow. With the exception of the few showcase architectural projects of Astana’s EXPO 2017, not

much new construction in Central Asia has taken place with sustainable design and resource reduction in mind, or even with the basic principles of comprehensive urban planning.

5. Conclusion

Patterns of urbanization in Central Asia have shifted dramatically over the past century, steeply increasing during the Soviet era then greatly fluctuating following independence, ultimately resulting in a net increase in both the overall and share of urban population. This chapter has demonstrated the myriad factors at play in shaping these patterns. One of the most significant factors has been industrialization. During the Soviet era, industry-led urban planning policies resulted in a new paradigm of urban development, the 'Sotsgorod,' settlements that were highly organized with industrial efficiency, yet often possessed little economic diversity. Although these settlements may have had structured internal planning, they were incredibly spread out at the regional scale to be adjacent to natural resources. The result was a settlement pattern that, following the collapse of the USSR, has been hard to stabilize and protect from market fluctuations and the diminishing availability of raw materials. In line with this, there is a continued need to come to terms with the lingering impacts of Soviet-era policies and their deep historical legacies. How might urban planners learn from earlier models of development to design more resilient cities moving forward? Looking to the future, patterns of urbanization that can cater to a diverse range of inhabitants and anticipate the inevitable need to adapt to changes in climate and the economy will fare much better than those that continue to rely on mono-industries.

Some answers for managing future urbanization may lie in policies promoting environmental sustainability and smart city technologies. However, these bring privacy concerns and are unlikely to benefit most citizens in the short term, especially in rural areas. In the decades ahead, demographic fluctuations will persist with indications of a strong trend toward increased urbanization. This is not to say that large-scale migration to cities is always inevitable, but that migration to urban cores will continue, remaining a significant stressor on both the region's largest cities and smaller de-populating communities. In considering the urban growth of cities, there is a need to be aware of the severe human and cultural impacts that can come from large-scale urban renewal through mega-projects, mega events, and the wholesale razing of neighbourhoods. Rather than bold solutions to increasing rates of urbanization, such

actions can exacerbate the issue, resulting in mass displacement, the loss of community ties, and the erasure of material culture.

These topics open several important areas of future research on Central Asian urbanization. In line with the themes explored in this chapter, identity, politics, socio-economic development, and sustainability have the potential to become major topics with effects on the region. First, these topics offer space for multidisciplinary collaborations, mixing behavioural and life sciences. Second, they point at possible areas for debate between scientists and decision-makers. The latter should be increasingly interested in the advice of the former who can develop cross-disciplinary collaborations to suggest possible ways for a more sustainable and inclusive urban environment.

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7. Recommended Literature

Urbanization and rural urban dynamics in Central Asia are covered by a wide range of scholars coming from different disciplinary backgrounds, including political science, history, urban studies, anthropology, and geography. Throughout this chapter, the authors have taken care to identify key references and areas of further reading tied to this topic's diverse range of scholarship. Broadly speaking, additional reading on this subject falls under two categories: (1) works that provide general overviews of issues across the five Central Asian countries; and (2) works that offer a more in-depth assessment of specific countries and/or themes. Regarding the former, the works of E.A. Allworth (ed.) and M.S. Asimov are good starting points that foreground the incredible impacts of Russian and Soviet dominance on urbanization in the region. M. Laruelle then considers these dynamics as they have shifted since the 1990s. Readers curious to learn more about the broader historical forces that have shaped urbanization patterns from the imperial conquests to the present will find A. Khalid's book further of interest. Regarding more specific works, several of the referenced and recommended readings cover more in-depth assessments of this chapter's key topics. For instance, readers most interested in delving into the histories of urban and regional planning can consider J. Bater and A. French, which are foundational texts due to their descriptions of the lasting legacies of Soviet-era planning policies. Along similar lines, P. Stronski presents an in-depth look at these planning processes in Tashkent. By contrast, a deeper understanding of the everyday dimensions of urbanization and their specific on-the-ground impacts can be found in works like C. Alexander et al., Beyer and M. Reeves (especially chapters 5, 6 and 10), A. Cieřlewska, P. Schröder, and R. Spector. Other sources of further reading can be found listed in the boxes and final references in this chapter.

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Edward A. Allworth (ed.), *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

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- Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: forging a Soviet city, 1930–1966*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).
- Rustam Urinboyev; Abel Polese; Mans Svensson; Laura Adams; Tanel Kerikmäe, "Political vs Everyday Forms of Governance in Uzbekistan: the Illegal, Immoral and Illegitimate Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *Studies of Transition States and Societies*; 10, no. 1, (2018).

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TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**TOPIC 1**

Describe the possible future trajectory for a Central Asian city of your choosing, taking into account its evolving social, political, and economic history. What opportunities exist moving forward? What challenges introduce possible complications?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**ACTIVITY 1**

This classroom activity is a group-based case study that asks students to compare the histories of urbanization for one or more Central Asian locality. Depending on the seniority of students and the degree of detail desired by the teacher, these might be quite different locations in separate countries or two rather similar locations in the same country. It could be two urban locations, or one urban and one rural location. Students will be divided into pairs or small groups to research one specific aspect of urbanization, including such things as: geographic context, historical timeline, population size, primary industries, infrastructural connections, political structure, and demographic composition.

Contingent on the size of the class, students may research their assigned aspect of urbanization for one or more of the cases. In larger classes, for example, there could be one group researching their aspect of urbanization for only one case. They would then compare their findings to those for other cases when the class re-convenes. By contrast, in smaller classes, student groups may research multiple cases relative to the same aspect of urbanization, just delving less into specific details. In the latter example, when the class reconvenes, students will learn from their classmates about various other aspects of urbanization for all the cases.

As a part of their case study research, students may collect maps, photographs, policy documents, news/media reports, and scholarly sources. Students are encouraged to analyze and synthesize this content, rather than simply representing it. They should distill down key findings and important areas for comparison that will then be presented to the entire class. After students present to one another, the teacher can lead a broader class-wide discussion comparing the histories of urbanization for the chosen localities. To prepare for this session, teachers should select at least two case study locations for the students and decide which research categories would be most useful for comparison.

Магаз. Азизбаева въ ст. Ташкентѣ.—Tachkent Mag. Asisbaef. № 82.

Azizbay's shop in the old city.

PART VI

**CASE STUDIES &
OVERVIEW OF LEARNING OUTCOMES**

CASE STUDY 1

The Imprint of the Khazars

by

BRUNO J. DE CORDIER

- ▶ Chapter 4 (Bruno J. De Cordier)
- ▶ Chapter 5 (Vincent Fourniau)

Case Study Assignment

Were (the adoption of) world religions and their institutions by definition a crucial engine for the coming into being of the (proto-) statehood of nomadic polities? If yes, why and how? Examine on the bases of two or three different examples of Eurasian nomadic polities and empires. Or, alternatively, on the bases of a case-based comparison between a Central Asian nomadic polity and the medieval nomadic Magyars. Answer the question, based on the following Case Study together with handbook chapters 4 and 5.

You can also use these materials for inspiration:

- Anatoly Khazanov, “The spread of world religions in medieval nomadic societies of the Eurasian steppes,” *in*: Michael Gervers, Wayne Schlepp (eds.), *Nomadic Diplomacy, Destruction and Religion from the Pacific to the Adriatic*. Papers prepared for the Central and Inner Asian Seminar, University of Toronto, 1992-1993 (Toronto: Joint Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies, Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia series, no. 1, 1994): 11-33.
- Sergey Vasyutin, “Political complexity in nomadic empires of Inner Asia,” *Social Evolution & History*, 18, no. 2, (2019).

Case Study: The Imprint of the Khazars

In different Turkic languages and in Farsi, the Caspian Sea is called ‘the Khazar Sea.’ This name refers to a medieval Turkic empire that originated in the north of present-day Dagestan and, at its zenith around the year 850, controlled an area stretching from the Crimea and the Sea of Azov to the northern Caspian. Although a medieval and not early-modern nomadic polity, the Khazar empire’s existence reflect how various ways of interaction with sedentary civilizations were crucial in its evolution and in shaping its indi-

viduality. A semi-nomadic Turkic tribal confederation presumably descending from Hunnic tribes, the Khazars moved from present-day Kazakhstan into the northern Caspian region in the early seventh century. What sets the Khazars apart from other nomadic pastoralist societies in the region is that its ruling family, military aristocracy and a section of its clan leaders and grassroots reportedly converted to Judaism from steppe animism.

How did Caspian Turkic semi-nomads without any genealogical connections to the tribes of Israel start to identify with Judaism, at least among certain sections of their society? In the areas they dominated, the Khazars came into contact with Jews in the Byzantine maritime towns on the Black Sea coast, as well as with members of Iraqi Jewish merchant guilds whose trade networks extended as far as the Volga. As often happened with Eurasian nomadic kingdoms, its rulers, besides ruling over their own (semi-)nomadic groups, governed large regions with sedentary populations and vassal entities sociologically and culturally very different from their own. They did so with the assistance of counselors, treasurers, scribes and envoys from these cultures and civilizations. Because of their literacy, connections and skills, these often happened to be clergy and traders.

Cultural Defence and Trade Systems

It was likely through Jewish counsellors and traders that the Khazar royalty and nobility became interested in the Judaist faith. Khazaria was targeted by both Christian and Islamic missionaries, respectively operating from the Byzantine Black Sea dioceses and from the Arab-Muslim frontier colony in Derbent. An eventual Christianization of its rulers would make Khazaria an appendage to the Byzantine empire, while the Islamization would have made the Khazar royalty by definition subjects of the caliphs. So their conversion to what they called the 'first faith' was a way to maintain an individuality and independence *vis-à-vis* the large sedentary civilizations of that time, especially as tribal steppe animism became inadequate to serve as a binding agent for their empire. A common date for the start of this gradual conversion process is the year 740. Some historians put it considerably later, around 860, when a consecutive line of Khazar rulers with Hebrew first names emerged.

It is not known how large the actual Jewish Khazar population really was. Sources considerably differ on whether Jews were a dominant minority even among the Khazar tribes proper, or whether Judaism was the majority faith among the latter. Khazars,

especially non-aristocratic converts, probably professed a Judaism mixed with elements from ancient steppe animism. The presence of a Judaized elite also made Khazaria a destination for Jewish immigration. Nevertheless, it remained ethnically and religiously diverse. The majority of its population – a patchwork of Khazar and other Turkic tribes and of Slavic, Pontic Greek, Crimean Gothic, Finno-Ugric and Caucasian populations – adhered to steppe animism, Oriental Christianity, or Sunni Islam. The Khazar empire, which from 750 until 996 had its capital in Itil at the mouth of the Volga, ran economically on pastoral livestock farming, agriculture, and fishing. The kingdom was a crucial centre in the lucrative medieval trade in furs, hides, timber, cattle, wax and honey, between the Volga basin, the Black Sea, and Central Asia (especially with the Urgench region south of the Aral Sea).

It was also an important supplier of slaves for the slave markets in the wider Islamic world. With its strong cavalry force, it was able to levy tribute among neighbouring Slavic and Caucasian peoples. Not that those practices were unique to the Jewish Khazars. Numerous nomadic kingdoms in Eurasia before and after them functioned in a similar way. It did, however, caused more and more resistance from the Russian principalities and Slavic tribes along the Dnieper and Don, whose territories and populations had long been affected by the Khazar slave raids and by the levying of frontier tributes. The Khazar kingdom, too, did not escape gradual internal decline after its peak, and eventually collapsed by 970. For some time, members of its royal tribe tried to maintain a smaller Khazar entity along the Don River. But the fragments of the culturally quite peculiar empire were eventually absorbed in the Kipchak and the Cuman, the Turkic nomadic confederations that succeeded it.

Current Ideological Stake

The Khazar episode remains central in a modern controversy on the origins of the Jewish people and on the legitimacy of the Zionist ideology and Israel. The so-called 'Khazar thesis' has it that Central and Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews – the majority of the world's Jews – do not descend from ancient Hebrews tribes from Judea, but from the Jewish Khazars and Slavic and Germanic populations they and their descendants mixed with in medieval and early modern times. One major implication of this thesis is that if the Ashkenazi Jews – among whom the modern Zionist movement came into being in the late 19th century – do descend from converted Caspian Turks and other converted eastern European populations rather

than from the ancient Israelites, the core idea of Zionism, a natural-historical right to return to the land of Israel, loses its validity. The 'Khazar thesis' emerged in the 18th century, but was brought into the mainstream by Arthur Koestler in his 1976 book *'The Thirteenth Tribe'* and, thirty years later, by Schlomo Sand in his best-seller *'The Invention of the Jewish People.'* While Koestler wanted to remove the racist foundations of antisemitism, Sand revived the conversion thesis to criticize exclusively Jewish Israeli nationalism.

Some opponents of the 'Khazar thesis' dispute that the Khazars were Jewish at all, pointing to inconsistencies in travel journals and chronicles, the dubious credibility of some sources, and the rather limited archaeological evidence. Others argue that while there were definitely Judaized Khazars, they were simply not numerous enough to serve as a critical mass and a genealogical base for Eastern and Central Europe's at one time very large Ashkenazi Jewish population.

To conclude, there are clear indications that the Khazar empire did indeed have active cultural-political ties with Judaism and the Jewish world. Most Turkic peoples in history exchanged the steppe religions for Islam or for a mixture of Islam and steppe animism. That some chose Judaism is atypical, but possible in the circumstances described earlier in this case study. After the Khazar kingdom's disintegration and demise, loose groups Jewish Khazars may have moved westward to join existing Jewish populations in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, rather than being the founders of European Jewry.

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Toponymy of Central Asia: Proper Names or Forged Concepts?

by

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- ▶ Chapter 2 (Bruno J. De Cordier and Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch)
- ▶ Chapter 15 (Slavomír Horák)
- ▶ Chapter 16 (Sébastien Peyrouse)

Case Study Assignment

Several definitions (geographical, ethnological, political, mythological or historical) are used with regard to the region: Central Asia, post-Soviet space, Turkestan, Silk Road, Central Eurasia, etc. The question is the following: do all these nomenclatures constitute 'proper names' (therefore, without meaning, whether positive or denigrating) or 'common names' (with specified content) based on concepts constructed in relation to specific epistemological and political situations? And how, according to what criteria, were these names chosen / invented? Are these names the result of a magic trick where the right word comes out of nowhere? Or is it a decoding of hidden things (i.e. the 'discovery' in itself of a pre-existing reality similar to the discovery of a diamond)? Or should one speak of a pure invention and seek to reconstruct the contexts in which these concepts were forged, then debated and commonly accepted?

If this is the case, another question arises: how, in a 'real' space with no particular landmarks or limits, have certain representations been established at the political, scientific or iconographical level? And how has this space, with no visible 'centre' or 'periphery,' been shared, named, constructed as a territory defined and limited either by the visible and the material, or by the invisible and the immaterial?

Our starting point is that in the process of creating meta-discursive objects, two acts remain primordial: (a) the cutting up of a geographical and cultural continuum and (b) the naming of the resulting parts. Students should therefore seek to reconstitute the particular context and understand how it was possible to suc-

¹ Translated by Fiona Kidd.

ceed in creating the verbal or graphic notions of Central Asia, and according to which criteria, justifications and arguments. In your answer, try to group the approaches along your identified criteria.

Answer these questions, based on the following Case Study together with handbook chapters 2, 15 and 16. You can also make use of these publications:

- Etienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: a History*, (Handbuch der Orientalistik, VIII- 10), (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
- Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Felix de Montety, 'La 'Route de la soie,' imaginaires géographiques,' *in*: Michel Espagne; Svetlana Gorshenina; Frantz Grenet; Shahin Mustafayev; Claude Rapin (eds.), *Asie Centrale: transferts culturels le long de la Route de la soie*, (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2016).

Case Study: Toponymy of Central Asia: Proper Names or Forged Concepts?

Multiple Terminologies: The Reasons for Their Appearance

Like other meta-geographical spaces, Central Asia is a construct.² Its contours change according to discipline and approach, ranging from the relatively compact unit of the four Central Asian republics without Kazakhstan, to much larger areas, which, depending on the context, form various configurations with parts of Russia, Siberia, China, India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran and the Caucasus. The names of these areas differ not only from one language to another, but also within the same language, according to whether one places the accent on the 'Middle,' the 'Centre,' or the 'Interior,' or whether one associates other concepts ('Eurasia,' 'Turan,' 'Silk Road,' etc.) or state structures. Today it is difficult to compare the terms used in the various languages³ and to decide whether in one language similar terms such as, for example, 'Inner Asia' and 'Central Asia,' are synonymous or not.

² For a detailed history of the concept of Central Asia see: Gorshenina 2012; 2014.

³ In English, the following names are used variously: Middle Asia, Central Asia, Inner Asia; in French: *Asie centrale*, *Asie moyenne*, *Asie médiane*, *Asie intérieure*, *Haute-Asie*; in German: *Mittelasien*, *Zentralasien*, *Centralasien*; in Russian: *Srednyaya Aziya*, *Tsentrall'naya Aziya*, *Vnutrennyaya Aziya*, *Nagornaya Aziya*; in Uzbek: *Urta Ocië*, *Markazy Ocië*, etc.

This terminological confusion is not the result of a peculiarity of this geo-cultural area. It stems in part from the complex history of its 'rediscovery' – in the sense that Central Asia constitutes one of the more 'refractory' regions in cartographic progress. This confusion reflects also the geo-political projects of European powers – mainly British and Russian – which have strongly influenced the process of knowledge construction in this area. 'Indigenous' definitions, despite the presence of some elements such as 'Turan' or 'Turkestan' are absent from the development of these concepts, while names that have been applied almost exclusively are 'imported' and formulated through the eyes and minds of outsiders. Finally, this confused situation owes much to the restructuring of Central Asia launched by the Bolsheviks during the national delimitation of 1924-1936 that led to the emergence of the Soviet republics – see also Map 8.1 to 8.4.

Historical Traditions, Modern 'Rediscovery,' and Invented concepts

Although historical names of regions in western Central Asia (such as Bactria or Chorasmia) are mentioned as early as the *Avesta*, the Achaemenid inscriptions (sixth century BC-330 BC) and Herodotus, it is the topographic vocabulary of the Greco-Roman authors (fourth century BC to the second century CE) that has influenced European constructions until the 19th century, resulting from the idolization of the classical heritage. These historical names were preserved and enriched by Arab-Persian geographers (9th to 15th centuries). Benefiting from a different and chronologically closer vantage point, they disseminated the term '*Mā warā' al-nahr*,' ('what is beyond the river'), which originated from the time of the Arab conquest of Central Asia (in the seventh and eighth centuries).

At the same time, medieval scholars constructed another image of Central Asia through the development of *mappae mundi* that relied on the Bible, the classics and the encyclopaedic works of the time, such as the *Speculum maius* of Vincent de Beauvais (1190-1264). Difficult to access, the area was amalgamated with European prejudices about simultaneously earthly Paradise, the Prester (presbyter) John, the people of Gog and Magog (symbolizing the Antichrist), and Alexander the Great. At the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries the visual representation of Central Asia witnessed the return of Ptolemy's *Geography* (second century CE), which prevented for a long time the emancipation of a more realistic image of the region, despite information gathered by the first travellers

from the West, beginning with Benjamin of Tudela (1130?-1173), between the 12th and 16th centuries. New toponyms that emerged in Europe added to the confusion: thus the terms *Asya Media* and *Imperium Medium* that Marco Polo (1254-1324) used to designate the Chagatai ulus were misunderstood as an allusion to the ancient Medes.* The Central Asian area was also considered one of the three 'Indias,' or could bear the name *Turkia* or *Turkestan*. The name, however, which prevails in this fog is the denominational *Tartary*, apparently invented by Louis IX (1214-1270).* The content of this pejorative term remains vague and is subject to a multitude of possible interpretations, including ethnographic, regional and political.

*Pelliot 1959-1973, part. I, 1959, s.v.
"Asya Media:" 55, s.v. "Ciagatai:" 254

*Paris 1840: 146-147

In the 17th century, the first wave of European orientalists, Jesuits, and Russian explorers tried in vain to redefine the space in question based on new geographical and ethnological knowledge. Thanks to modern measuring tools new facts flowed unimpeded, yet the image of Central Asia was still very unclear in the 18th century. Borders were only defined when they separated powers of equal strength, such as the Sino-Russian border, or later, the Russian-British contact zone. With respect to peripheries such as the 'steppes,' or the 'western regions' (now Xinjiang) and the 'roof of the world' (the Pamir and Hindukush mountain chains), the Russian, Chinese and British elites preferred the blurring of maps to a clear boundary line, while imposing their configurations and names on these peripheral areas. The invention of the term 'Transoxiane' by Barthélemy Herbelot (1625-1695) is one example of the Eurocentric efforts to redefine the space.

Birth and Advent of the Term "Central Asia"

Towards the end of the 18th century scholars became increasingly aware of the geographical position of these lands in the very centre of the Asian continent. At the same time emerged the first critiques of the name of *Tartary*, whose nature was incompatible with the idea of emerging nation states. The concept of 'Central Asia' began to arise everywhere. However, it only took shape in the years between 1810 and 1830, when travellers in Russian services, starting with Philip Nazarov (1813-1814) and Georg von Meyendorff (1820), began to use this term to designate the mid-point (*posredine*) on the route leading from Russia to countries further south or east, such as Persia, India and China. Thus, the term referred to the transitory character of this space, rather than to any 'central' role in world history.

This notion of Central Asia as a 'mid-way' place gradually gave way to the concept of centrality. This term entered western scientific language through works published in 1823-1826 by the German orientalist Julius Klaproth (1783-1835), working in Paris, on the basis of his reflections on linguistic and ethnological data, predominantly of Russian origin.

The decisive change in perception came in the 1840s when German geographers began to revise descriptions of the region from the view-point of environmental determinism. Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) is generally regarded – incorrectly – as the single 'inventor' of the term 'Central Asia' thanks to the eponymous book he published in 1843. The book is, however, a foundation to the extent that, as we will see later with Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905), it attempts to bring together ideas of 'purely scientific' criteria. These include the geological genesis of the region, soil stratification, hydrography (including the direction of the flow of water), climate, vegetation, etc.

Humboldt does not cling to the unity of the terminology since, in regards to Central Asia, he also uses the terms 'Inner Asia' (*Asie intérieure*) and 'High Asia' (*Haute-Asie*). Central Asia is the subject of several definitions. One of these comprises a 10° wide band of *high- and lowlands*, centred on the 44.5 N parallel, while another is centred on Xinjiang.* Starting from the triad 'centre-periphery-transition,' Richthofen proposed the term '*Mittel-Asien*' for the Turanian basin, and positions '*Central-Asien*' in the arid high-plateau of Hangai (approximately Xinjiang), where the water evaporates without flowing.*

*Humboldt 1843, t. I: XXVII, XXVIII

*von Richthofen 1877: 3, 7-8

In the Russian speaking world Humboldt's work resulted in the duplication of the term: initially the synonyms 'Central Asia' (*Tsentral'naya Aziya* – *Центральная Азия*) and 'Middle Asia' (*Srednyaya Aziya* – *Средняя Азия*) designated given spaces in a rather random way, whereas the perimeter of the territory covered by these two terms was generally more important than proposed by Humboldt. For Western geographers this approach was too lax regarding to the traditional 'tartaresque' view and 'incompatible' with cartographic innovations. They rejected it in favour of the rigid German scheme opposing the *highlands* to the *lowlands*, and in which 'Central Asia' refers only to the *high plateaus*, excluding the *Turanian basin*. Barely started in 1843, this discussion led to a break twenty years later, when, in a polemical context, Nikolaj Khanykov (1822-1878) proposed to define Central Asia as an ensemble of "inland basins", comprising "lakes Van, Urmia, the Caspian Sea, the Aral Sea, etc."* Subsequently, Ivan Mushketov (1850-1902)

*Khanikoff 1861: 205-206

and Lev Berg (1876-1950) presented other geological arguments to include the *lowlands of Russian Turkestan* within the limits of the *High Central Asia*.

It was not until the 1920s that this interpretation – fixed on the organization of mountain ranges, or the description of large depressions and closed basins – gave way to the concept of continental drift, cf. Alfred Wegener (1880-1930) and Emile Argand (1879-1940),* itself later reinforced by the theories of plate tectonics (*ca.* 1970s).

*Wegener 1920; Argand 1924

Meanwhile, in the context of the ‘Great Game,’ the centrality of Central Asia gained prominence through constructions of political geography and geo-politics. Élisée Reclus (1830-1905) and J. Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) developed a political and strategic vision that transformed the area defined as the ‘Heart of Asia’ into a *Pivot Area*, the possession of which was considered as a *conditio sine qua non* for world domination.

These speculations added a pejorative connotation to the term ‘Turan,’ pushing Russian intellectuals to elaborate a terminology based on their identity and geo-political projects. Reflecting theories of the ‘World of the Middle’ (*Sredinnyy mir – Срединный мир*) and ‘Eurasia-Russia’ established by Nikolay Danilevskiy (1822-1885) and Vladimir Lamanskiy (1833-1914), they shifted Richthofen’s *Central-Asien* westward and placed the centre of Asia within the borders of Russia – into the Asia they considered their own (Russian Turkestan) and as inseparable from the Tsarist empire. This Asia continued to bear the randomly applied names ‘Inner Asia,’ ‘Middle Asia,’ or ‘Central Asia.’ Implicitly, this operation later introduced a distinction between ‘homeland’ (Russian Turkestan = Middle Asia) and ‘lands yet to be conquered’ (Central Asia).

Given that the southern borders, fixed legally in several stages by the 1910s, remained as yet porous, such fluid terminology made it possible to modify the extension of colonial Russia: Inner/Middle Asian ‘homeland’ could always still easily encroach on Inner/Central Asian Non-Russian lands.

Seen by the Russians from the north, halfway between east and west, ‘Central Asia’ did not crystallize into a fixed scheme until the second half of the 1910s. In political and philosophical speeches, by making the allusion to the similar sounding of the used terms, ‘Middle Asia’ (*Srednyaya Aziya*) was finally considered a ‘logical’ extension and inseparable from the *World of the Middle* (*Sredinnyy Mir*)/*Eurasia/Russia/Tsarist Empire*. This ‘Middle Asia’ became largely synonym with the term ‘Russian Turkestan.’

If one tries to represent the existing schemas in a graphical form,

one also gets some pretty muddy pictures. On first reading, one can have this image: the quasi circular shaped 'Asia of the Middle' (*Srednyaya Aziya*) = ca. 'Russian Turkestan' is bordered from the south-west to south-east by the 'Asia of the Centre' (*Tsentral'naya Aziya*). This 'Asia of the Centre' (*Tsentral'naya Aziya*) (here regarding its graphical form) is shaped like a kind of comma leaning horizontally with its main point of weight situated to the east of the Russian Empire, stretching ribbon-like to the southwest along the Indo-Afghan border to northern Iran, without that section always being mentioned in the definition of this area. This spatial construction is a kind of outer buffer zone that should be included in the 'World of the Middle' (*Sredinnyy Mir*) / Russia, which should be protected from the non-Russian Asia. The 'Asia of the Middle' (*Srednyaya Aziya*) continues nevertheless to be a buffer zone inside the Russian empire.

A second reading allows for the enclosure of the 'Asia of the Middle' (*Srednyaya Aziya*), smaller, in the limits of the 'Asia of the Centre' (*Tsentral'naya Aziya*), a larger one with the contours mentioned above. The shape of this set takes an oval graphic form and may bear the name of either 'Asia of the Centre' or 'Asia of the Middle'.

The importance of the geo-political context is also evident in the fact that, after an initial refusal, the Russian elite accepted that *Russian Central Asia* took the name of *Turan*. This happened thanks to the speech of the *vostochniki* who managed to give a positive connotation to this term while positively presenting Russia as a half-Asian-half-European country. Similarly, debates about the name *Turkestan* reveal another, purely aggressive aspect of the foreign policy of the empire. The Russian elites wanted to preserve for its settlements the denomination of the 'Russian Turkestan' as opposed to 'Afghan' and 'Chinese Turkestan' and hopefully one day to bring together under its power these three Turkestan units.

Definitely, the duplication of terms for the region – 'Middle Asia' (*Srednyaya Aziya*), part of the 'homeland' already, and 'Central Asia' (*Tsentral'naya Aziya*), still outside – as well as the adoption of the term 'Russian Turkestan,' allowed for the distinguishing of the Russian possessions in Asia from those neighbouring regions ('Chinese Turkestan' and 'Afghan Turkestan'), that were destined for future conquest.

Soviet Interpretations of Boundaries and Area Studies

Soviet publications conserved this terminological pair ('Middle Asia' and 'Central Asia') and to a certain extent it still reflected

*Gorshenina 2012: 189–300

the opposition between ‘homeland’ and ‘foreign territories.’ However, the reading of the first term – ‘Middle Asia’ (*Srednyaya Aziya*) – had fundamentally changed. Adapted to the Soviet reality and especially to the consequences of the national delimitation of 1924–1936,^{*} the meaning of the term stabilized in the early 1940s. In a broad sense, ‘Middle Asia’ (*Srednyaya Aziya*) corresponded to the four Soviet republics (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) and to the southern regions of Kazakhstan. In a narrower sense, this ‘Middle Asia’ is limited to the four republics mentioned above (excluding Kazakhstan), which formed the ‘Middle Asian economic region’ (*Sredne-aziatskiy ekonomicheskii region*) – one of twenty-one of the former USSR.

Despite all attempts at unification, the make-up of the second term – ‘Central Asia’ (*Tsentrāl'naya Aziya*) – was never fully standardized: for geologists it was largely synonymous with Richthofen's *Central-Asien*, while in the eyes of historians and archaeologists, ‘Central Asia’ often included the areas of Soviet ‘Middle Asia’ together with all or parts of Kazakhstan, northern Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, as well as Mongolia and western China (Xinjiang).

An important change, however, marked reflections on this area: after the national delimitation of 1924–1936, the republics began to be seen as a ‘natural’ reality and these state territories began – and continue nowadays – to be routinely used for establishing spatial boundaries of events in a historical perspective.

The advent in the 1960s of *Area Studies*, operating with terms like ‘Turkic,’ ‘Iranian,’ or ‘Indian world,’ blew apart the conceptual unity of Central Asia. Now peripheral areas, shifted and blurred, partially overlapped each other. The requirement to exclude these ‘inappropriate’ areas outside the field of research has led to the entrenchment of a negative definition of Central Asia which excludes the outlying areas, to obtain the desired object of study (e.g., specialists in Islam reject Buddhist Central Asia and *vice-versa*). Moreover, the simplest principle to describe a space is to actually describe its envelope (e.g. scholars often define Turkestan as space limited by Russia, China, India, and Iran, so by the areas that envelope it).

Questioning the Concept

The fall of the Soviet Union was followed by a reciprocal transfer of epistemological concepts and by increased academic exchange of researchers between ‘East’ and ‘West.’ A fresh look at the estab-

lished terminologies often brought the operational value of the term 'Central Asia' into question. Rejecting linear positivism and environmental determinism, researchers debated other defining criteria.

After more than twenty years, the debate still continues today. However, despite the diversity of indices put on the table (stemming from physical geography, language settings, religions, life-ways – nomadic or sedentary – or the common Soviet past) many of the proposed definitions are, it seems, still infected with the myth of nation-states, geographical determinism and the myth of centrality.

A noticeable exception is presented by the approach of Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen.* It is primarily based on cultural considerations and proposes to designate Central Asia as an area, which, in the past, was represented mainly by Turko-Mongol, and – in its southwestern part – by Iranian culture. In this area the way of life has been shaped by the integration of pastoralism and agriculture in oases, as well as transcontinental routes that ensured a sustained level of trade. Ideological and cultural integration is manifest in several religious systems, dominated by Islam and Buddhism. Finally, following complex historical developments, Central Asia may be designated roughly as the sum of two cultural and religious areas: a Buddhist area in the east, under strong pressure to be assimilated by the Russian and Chinese regimes (with overall, Tibet, Mongolia and the Russian autonomous regions of Buryatia, Tuva and Kalmykia) and a Muslim area in the west, marked by the Soviet legacy and the world of Islam (for the ex-Soviet republics) in which Xinjiang enjoys a special status (the place of Afghanistan remains unclear).

*Lewis and Wigen 1997: 179, 180-181, 186

However, attempts to dispel the myth of 19th century Central Asia might easily run the danger of creating new ones. The solution to these conceptual and terminological issues cannot lie in the invention of new terms, or in the development of more sophisticated definitions, based on an historiography that is extremely incomplete. Instead, one should start to understand Central Asia as an operational concept, a system of interpretation that might help us to better understand the individual elements involved. For such a perspective, the choice of a name is no longer crucial: it is first of all a label, with no necessity to multiply its synonyms.

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- Gorshenina 2012 Svetlana Gorshenina, *Asie centrale. L'invention des frontières et l'héritage russo-soviétique*, (Paris: Espaces et milieux, CNRS-Éditions, 2012).
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Media and Personality Cult in Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Turkmenistan

by

OGULJAMAL YAZLIYEVA

- ▶ Chapter 11 (Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch)
- ▶ Chapter 12 (Baktybek Kainazarov)

Case Study Assignment

How is the use of media distinguished in authoritarian regimes? What role does the modelling of a personality cult play in the media, and how is it shaped? What moves media workers and the general population to contribute to a cult of personality of the state leader? Choose Turkmenistan as a case and examine the state powers' self-legitimation strategies. Select from one of these two options:

A - Compare Turkmenistan with another model of personality cult from a different country. Identify the regime level of control on media and try to assess how the different narratives and symbolism serve the same purpose (from a regime perspective).

B – Compare the use of media state propaganda under the regime of President Saparmurat Niyazov and his successor Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. See how Berdymukhamedov has to make up for the fact that he is not the First or Founding president and is dependent on the legitimacy from the late Saparmurat Niyazov's personality cult. Link this observation to the theoretical part on hereditary Charisma (Weber) described in the Handbook chapter by Jeroen Van den Bosch, Political Regimes in Central Asia: Tracing Personalist Rule from the Khanates to the Present and particularly Box 11.6. Look at North Korea for inspiration and contrast. (There the Kim family had several sons succeeding their fathers, but Charisma remained within the family.)

Answer the questions using the following case study and the formerly indicated Handbook Chapters 11 and 12. Additionally, you may use the following reading materials:

- Luca Anceschi, 'Reinforcing Authoritarianism through Media Control: The Case of Post-Soviet Turkmenistan,' *in*: Eric Freed-

man (ed.), *After the Czars and Commissars: Journalism in Authoritarian Post-Soviet Central Asia*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2011).

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- Slavomír Horák, 'Turkmenistan at the Last Stage of Perestroika. Determinants of an Authoritarian Path,' *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, (2016).
- Abel Polese; Slavomír Horák, "A Tale of Two Presidents: Personality Cult and Symbolic Nation-Building in Turkmenistan," *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 43, (2015): 457-478.
- Alexey Tikhomirov, 'Father of the People, Face of the Nation: The Premodern and Modern Foundations of Ruler Personality cults' in: Kirill Postoutenko; Darin Stephanov (eds.), *Ruler Personality Cults from Empires to Nation-States and Beyond: Symbolic Patterns and Interactional Dynamics*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2020).
- Oguljamal Yazliyeva, "Dynamics of the Media System in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan," *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics*, 14, no. 1, (2020).

Consult the recommended works for technical details on state control on the media in Turkmenistan (Luca Anceschi 2011) and extra content on media workers' role in authoritarian post-Soviet Central Asian states (Eric Freedman 2011). To understand the use of and ideas behind personality cults from a global perspective, Alexey Tikhomirov's chapter is recommended. The article by Slavomír Horák helps to understand the authoritarian path and the transformation of the political elite under Saparmurat Niyazov. Several aspects and the workings of leader cults in Turkmenistan are discussed in the work by Abel Polese and Slavomír Horák. The authors differentiate between Turkmen power relations under Saparmurat Niyazov and Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. The evolution of the media system based on the political culture established under these two state leaders is examined in the recommended article by Oguljamal Yazliyeva. There she argues media's primary role in building a cult of personality of the presidents. Finally, this handbook chapter by Jeroen Van den Bosch will help you to identify personalist behaviour.

Case Study: Media and Personality Cult in Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Turkmenistan

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asian countries consolidated their authoritarian systems. Although all five post-Soviet republics in the region declared themselves secular democratic and presidential systems at the time of independence, in reality, all of them have gone the opposite direction to different degrees. These independent states, taking their roots from Soviet power, established national development models recycling old Soviet systems of authoritarian control. In this process, the role of the media has a central position. In democratic systems, society enjoys freedom of expression, and the media acts as a watchdog over the ruling power. In authoritarian regimes, media is primarily used for propaganda purposes and to reinforce the power of the ruling elites. The media lose their vital role of providing a platform for open discussions on civil society issues.

To understand the role of media in authoritarian regimes, the case of Turkmenistan may illustrate a perfect example of a suppressed media environment. Contemporary Turkmenistan is known as the most isolated country among the five states in the region. In terms of its media freedom, Turkmenistan is rated among 'the worst of the worst' in the world. The Paris-based *Reporters without Borders*, a NGO dedicated to promoting and defending the freedom of information, in its *World Press Freedom Index* of 2019, has listed Turkmenistan as the very last out of 180 countries, thus ranking it as the most severe offender against press freedom, together with North Korea.

Saparmurat Niyazov

The first president of independent Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, who proclaimed himself 'Turkmenbashi' (*Türkmenbaşy* – Head/Father of the Turkmens) established total control over the media, banning independent and analytical reporting, and reinforcing surveillance over journalists and their relatives. He was declared a President-for-life and ruled the country for 21 years. Being a communist party *apparatchik* with a lot of expertise in government affairs, he used mass media as a powerful repressive machine to intimidate Turkmen society and create a fear factor among the mass population. President Niyazov's media control strategy has been compared with the 'Stalinist' propaganda used during the show trials of the 1930s in the Soviet Union, as observed by Duve Freimut, an OSCE Representative on Freedom of

the Media (OSCE 2003; see also: Freimut 2004). Some examples for this argument have been TV broadcasts of the ‘criminal’ processes of several political opposition members (show trials with (coerced) confessions of the opposition leader and its members in November 2002), or images of the execution of the leaders of other opposing groups, from the so-called ‘thieves-in-law’ (*воры в законе* – ‘criminal dignitaries’) in the early 1990s, who operate in the sphere of organized crime in Turkmen society outside the reach of secret security services. Furthermore, the expression of critical thoughts on government policies and mass gatherings was not allowed in the country.

What is worth underlining here is that Niyazov’s personality (often described in terms of paranoia, narcissism or compulsive need for control) played a crucial role in the evolution of the authoritarian political culture with the dominant ‘personalist’ dictator’s rule in Turkmenistan. His bizarre measures may illustrate the operating style of his dictatorship as well as the propaganda of his personality – broadcasting images of his subordinates kissing his hands or banning newscasters from wearing make-up and ordering female anchors to wear headscarves. Saparmurat Niyazov takes all power over the media into his own hands, declaring himself a founder of all print media. He commands the editorial board of all media outlets to report directly to the President. Media played a crucial role in imposing the *Ruhnama* (the ‘Book of the Soul’), the ‘Holy Book’ of all Turkmen, authored by Saparmurat Niyazov, as mandatory reading for schoolchildren, students, and others. The passages of *Ruhnama*, published in two volumes in 2001 and 2004, were broadcast daily on Turkmen TV channels under Turkmenbashi’s rule. The media propaganda went as far as to underscore Turkmenbashi’s ‘divine abilities,’ and Turkmenbashi himself claimed that ‘those who read the book three times would go to heaven.’ Accordingly, *Ruhnama* may be regarded as the cornerstone of Saparmurat Niyazov’s personality cult.

During Niyazov’s reign, online communication was very limited with Internet only available to a very small segment of the population. Government officials, foreign diplomats, and businesses were the primary users. It was heavily regulated by the state and considered to be the least developed in the post-Soviet region. The first directives to more widely install Internet in the country were made in the early 1990s. The small number of private Internet service providers that had obtained access in 1997 were forced out of business in the early 2000s. Saparmurat Niyazov transferred their operations to the state-owned TurkmenTelecom monopoly. Control over

all data services in the country was increased, especially after the so-called “Sanjar” of 2002, an alleged assassination attempt on the president. Later the state monopoly was renamed ‘Altyn Asyr.’

Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov

After Niyazov died in 2006, his successor Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov started his rule by easing some restrictions imposed by his predecessor and former patron. He ordered the dismantling of the golden monuments in honour of Niyazov and his portraits. With these actions, Berdymukhamedov debunked Turkmenbashi’s personality cult. *Ruhnama* was removed from the study programs, and broadcasted reading of *Ruhnama* passages on TV stopped. As a new state leader, his first promise was to provide every individual resident access to the Internet, first authorized in 2008. In this regard, the President’s promises have been fulfilled to some extent: launching Internet cafes in the country or setting up mobile Internet in all regions. Since then, access to Internet services has relatively improved. However, despite the government’s positive efforts to make the Internet accessible to the public, the authoritarian regime limits its full functioning and closely monitors its content.

A resident in the West can hardly imagine that in an authoritarian regime like Turkmenistan people have their Internet content censored, and even lack elementary access to it due to state regulations. The average value of Internet penetration was 5.03 percent per year from 1991 to 2017, with a minimum of 0 percent in 1991 and a maximum of 21.25 percent in 2017 (*The Global Economy*). The ranking is based on 189 countries, where the world average in 2017 shows 54.32 percent. Thus, that year Turkmenistan’s position was less than half of the average of global Internet usage.

The country is listed among the worst in the world ratings in terms of Internet censorship and surveillance. Public access is widely controlled by a state-owned monopoly that constitutes significant hurdles. The growth in Internet penetration and access to mobile communication in the country has occurred despite its strict control of social media and web portals. The population widely uses VPN (Virtual Private Network) applications to bypass Internet censorship. However, it is reported that the authorities block websites with alternative content (www.azathabar.com, www.hronika.tm.com, www.turkmen.news) and social media channels (YouTube, Facebook) without any explanation or legal base.

The first national *Law on Mass Media* was adopted only two decades after gaining independence. This new law endorsed in late

December 2012 replaced the Soviet media law of 1990, the *Act of Turkmen SSR on Press and Other Mass Media*. This new law bans media censorship and prohibits obstruction of the legitimate, professional activities of journalists by officials of state bodies and public organizations. In reality, there is an assumption that Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov approved this law to appear to the broader world as a country open for democratic reforms.

Modelling the cult of personality of Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov – who has been given the name ‘Arkadag,’ or ‘Father Protector,’ by his ideological spin-doctors – is a predominant feature of all official media channels in Turkmenistan. The propaganda of his personality is intermingled with the image of the president singing, playing guitar, shooting guns, riding horses, authoring books on Akhal-Teke horses, Central Asian Alabay shepherd dogs or herbal treatments, as well as exhibiting many more skills, presented on all TV/radio channels, Internet and print media. Adorning his name with epithets like *Hormatly* (Dear) and *Gahryman* (Hero) is compulsory for every reporter and participant of broadcasts. President Berdymukhamedov’s personality cult constructed by his ideology-makers and supported by media workers looks staged and may be characterized as ‘theatricalism.’ The study of this style demonstrates that the features of theatricalism have been cultivated to ever increasing sycophantic levels. Moreover, this theatricalism is orchestrated by a centralized unit of ideology-makers. They include poets, singers who perform the praising stages for their ‘National Hero’ and Arkadag. Empirically this top-down process can be observed by tracking the staged news stories and the use of specific language clichés that have become normal on local TV broadcasting. For instance, they broadcast news reports on a ceremony dedicated to celebrating the state leader’s birthday. Government officials are obliged to present a bouquet bending before their Arkadag or kiss the President’s hand. Traditionally this kind of behaviour is not accepted in Turkmen society. Participants of the ceremony must do rehearsals before broadcasting. This organized sycophancy has become more elaborate among the political elite under the leadership of Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. Media workers and producers of the official state TV channels compete to present extraordinary productions of this leader cult.

New Media and Future Perspectives

Meanwhile, the emergence of a new generation of journalists, including citizen journalists/bloggers in contradiction to the journalists and media workers who are constructors of the state leader’s

personality cult, may challenge the authoritarian regime. The role of the Internet in such conditions is crucial. The growing number of Internet users inside and outside of Turkmenistan creates the possibilities for the new generation of young people to exercise their rights for freedom of speech, which is suppressed in Turkmenistan. According to the World Bank (2017) data, the number of mobile phone subscriptions in Turkmenistan has grown up to 163 per 100 people. It was 0.057 per 100 people in 1997.

The use of more than one mobile phone subscription per person is often applied as a strategy to avoid possible conflict situations with the authorities based on censorship. As the use of YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and some websites with critical content about the government policy is blocked in the country, people usually connect their second phone to the Internet and use VPN (Virtual Private Network) applications to bypass Internet censorship. Mobile communication with Internet connection plays important role in the exchange of alternative news and information. The dynamics of Internet penetration growth are seen with the emergence of social media among Turkmenistan mobile subscribers. Over the past few years (2017-2021), civic activism has grown among the students studying abroad and migrants from Turkmenistan. Notably, the young Turkmenistani studying or working in Turkey, Cyprus, Europe, and the US can make their voices heard through social media outlets. Access to new media technologies has led them to undertake political action and enjoy fundamental democratic values such as freedom of speech and press. They manage blogs and profiles on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and other social networks, strongly criticizing the political, socio-economic policies of the Turkmen authorities and calling for the Turkmen government to resign. They do not weaken their civic activity despite the security forces' brutal repression targeting their parents or family members back in Turkmenistan. They form political groups and movements abroad, demanding changes in their home country. Covert, underground resistance to the authoritarian regime inside Turkmenistan exists. Still, such groups remain very cautious due to the fear factor established by the ruling powers. Definitely, new media technologies may bring some light to the Turkmen people struggling under this closed authoritarian regime.

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Promoting and Protecting Women Rights in Kyrgyzstan

by

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Case Study Assignment

This case study presents two (fictitious) civil society projects aimed at promoting women rights in Kyrgyzstan between 2018-2020. Both of them are mirrored on various existing initiatives.

For this assignment the student will compare and analyse the projects from the point-of-view of a project evaluator and make recommendations on how to improve similar future projects (in a Central Asian context). Below are listed some analytical frames that provide relevant evaluation criteria for this task. The relation between them is visualized in the figure.

It is recommended to take some time to familiarize oneself with the assignment and these evaluation criteria before reading through both project descriptions. Chapters 12 and 13 contain cultural reference frames for Central Asia, with specific information on Kyrgyzstan as well. Consult these when evaluating the relevance, impacts and external factors that affect such projects.

Projects are usually evaluated according to five main criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact. Relevance and impact are the most important ones, while the others serve to improve workflow and quantify the needed costs and resources. The evaluation criteria below are based on these five elements:

1. **RELEVANCE** – did the **NEEDS** match the project **OBJECTIVES**? How was the need-analysis (**INPUT**) done?
2. **EFFECTIVENESS** – did the **OBJECTIVES** materialize into concrete **OUTPUTS**? How and at what times were they measured and evaluated? Did the **RESULTS** match the **OUTPUTS**?
3. **EFFICIENCY** – were the **RESOURCES** (available budget, human capital, etc.) used in proportion to the **OUTPUTS**?

- 4. **COHERENCE** – did the PROJECT fit the wider CONTEXT of related projects and the activities of stakeholders?
- 5. **IMPACT** – what were the added values of the RESULTS?

Additional question: What external factors played a role in the projects and affected impact? In particular, take into account the political and socio-cultural contexts.

When comparing both projects, assess which were the strong and weak elements in each one of them (using the above criteria as reference). One of the projects brought less satisfying results. Which one do you think it was and why? Please motivate your answers and formulate how improvements could be made to each undertaking. Optionally, if you had to cut \$8000 from each project budget, how would you redistribute resources without disrupting their efficiency too much, and without compromising their effectiveness (to unacceptable levels).

Figure A: Basic Schematic of Project Management and Evaluation

Case Study: Promoting and Protecting Women Rights in Kyrgyzstan

PROJECT 1

Project description based on several existing projects and adapted for the didactic purposes of this handbook. Some names and other data were changed or invented. Any identification with real organizations or projects is not intended.

- Project name: ‘Communities in Action’
- Year of implementation: 2019
- Place of implementation: Kyrgyzstan (countrywide)
- Topic: Active communities to protect women and children from domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan

Summary

The Kyrgyz Republic is witnessing a growing conservative environment. Given the crucial role that key stakeholders, such as religious and community leaders, can play, a local NGO Community Service in the frame of the project ‘Communities in Action’ forged alliances with local *faith-based organizations* (FBOs), community initiative groups, women-led NGOs and local authorities (including health professionals, social protection specialists) to strengthen community members’ participation in preventing violence against women and children. In building capacities of religious and community leaders and engaging them in public awareness-raising, Community Service contributed to the capacitation of religious institutions, *community-based organizations* (CBOs) and *civil society organizations* (CSOs) in the area of gender equality and the rights of the women and children. This project was also aimed at supporting the Kyrgyz government’s action plan on the implementation of its recent law on *Safeguarding and Protection Against Domestic Violence* (2017) by strengthening community members’ participation in preventing violence against women and children.

Problem and Context

The need for the project stems from the fact that Kyrgyzstan has one of the highest *gender-based violence* (GBV) rates in the region. According to National Statistical Committee, as for 2019, 25% of Kyrgyz women have suffered from physical and/or sexual violence caused by their intimate partner, while 17% of the respondents indicated that the violence took place in the last 12 months. Disaggre-

gated data on domestic and GBV show that the highest percentage of cases belong to rural communities. Gender stereotypes are rather strong in the country where around one-fourth of women experience physical violence at least once in their lifetime (NSC 2012: 15), about 8% marry before the age of 18 and one-fifth of all marriages occur through bride kidnapping (UNFPA 2021: 7). The project authors linked these problems with a gap existing in the area of comprehensive sexuality education in school curricula.

In addition, issues related to sexuality education are a very sensitive topic in community-based societies and parents in rural areas do not talk about topics like family planning, reproductive health or violence with their children. The overall conservative environment affects status of women in rural areas and has direct impact on the increased vulnerability of women and children to physical violence and GBV. Women and young people have a rather limited knowledge on their rights. At the same time, the protection of women and children from GBV is tightly dependent on raising the awareness of community members, religious institutions and local authorities.

The project is based upon the conviction that there is a tight interlinkage between GBV and the educational shortcomings or deficits. The lack of a comprehensive sexuality education, together with a low awareness of community members and religious leaders on domestic and gender-based violence can have a negative impact for the implementation of women rights laws, such as the previously mentioned *Safeguarding and Protection Against Domestic Violence* law.

Project Objectives

The “Communities in Action” project was aimed at supporting the Kyrgyz Government’s action plan on the implementation of *Safeguarding and Protection Against Domestic Violence* law, by strengthening community members’ participation in preventing violence against women and children. It aims at capacitating religious institutions, CBOs and CSOs on gender equality, tolerance and the rights of women and children.

In particular, this project planned to improve school curricula by working with stakeholders to introduce comprehensive sexuality education by working out new guidelines and improving the existing toolkit.

Objective 1 – Adapt the Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education to a community religious and cultural context, before introducing them to secondary school programs;

Objective 2 – Revise and adapt the Toolkit on Gender Equality and Gender Sensitivity Education, which was developed in 2018 by gender experts with the participation of Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan. The original toolkit was not accepted by community leaders and religious institutions. Hence, it was decided by the working group to invite their representatives to revise and adapt the toolkit (so that religious and cultural values can be taken into account).

Project Output Indicators

Indicator	Baseline in 2018	Target for 2019
Number of madrassa teachers, community leaders, leaders of CBOs and CSOs trained on gender sensitivity, gender equality and women and children rights.	0	200 madrassa teachers, community leaders and CSOs leaders
Number of secondary schools to run the <i>Guidelines</i> and <i>Toolkit</i> as a pilot program.	0	200 secondary schools from 20 districts.
Promote the new <i>Guidelines</i> and <i>Toolkit</i> organically, and raise awareness through Social Media.	0	20 media or public events by affiliated community leaders or celebrities. 200,000 views on social media.

Stakeholders Mapping and Focus for Project Intervention

Up until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state has been the sole provider of various social services in Kyrgyzstan. In the last 30 years, already there has been a deterioration in the provision of basic services related to protection of women and children from violence. Sexuality education was removed from the secondary education curriculum due to the increased religiosity and revival of traditional cultural norms, which resulted in the increase of harmful practices such as underage marriage, bride kidnapping and forced and arranged marriage. All of these had a direct implication for the increase of domestic and gender-based violence in a post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

Community Service began working with religious leaders, women-led NGOs and community leaders to strengthen linkages between the development of sexuality education and a potential decrease in gender-based and domestic violence. On the basis of

the stakeholders' mapping, Community Service identified the main stakeholders to be: traditional and religious institutions, madrassa teachers, community leaders, celebrities, and leaders of CSOs.

Choosing proper partners was paramount to achieving the set objectives of the project:

- Due to the powerful role of traditional and religious institutions, madrassa teachers, community leaders, celebrities, leaders of CSOs were actively engaged in all phases of the project activities, which allowed not only for the development of proper guidelines adapted to the needs of local communities but also led to the development of relevant implementation strategies.
- *Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Toolkit on Gender Equality and Gender Sensitivity Education* were revised and developed with the participation of community leaders and religious leaders.
- In addition, international organizations (UN Agencies, USAID, *Asian Development Bank* – ADB) and government institutions (Department of Religious Institutions, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Women's Caucus, State Agency on Local Self Government and interethnic relations), media institutions and academic institutions were involved in the partnership to achieve these common goals.

Project Preparations: a Survey

Right after the launch of the project, a survey was conducted and followed up by focus group discussions enabling the publication of evidence-based data on the perception of local community members and madrassa teachers regarding GBV, gender equality and sexuality education. With a total of 800 respondents, the share of respondents in the cities was 254 people (31,75%) and 546 people (68,25%) in rural areas. The largest number of the rural respondents were from the southern regions (Osh, Batken and Jalal-Abad provinces).

The survey and the focus group discussions revealed effective ways to educate young people on sexuality education and GBV areas. They were also aimed at identifying ways to interpret sexuality education and gender equality through the application of cultural norms and values, as well as religious teachings.

Based on the results of this survey and subsequent focus group discussions, two basic documents (*Guidelines on Comprehensive*

Sample distribution by type of area			
	Sample	Urban	Rural
Kyrgyz Republic	800	254	546
Batken province	68	15	53
Jalal-Abad province	161	34	127
Issyk-Kul province	61	15	46
Naryn province	37	5	32
Osh province	217	49	168
Talas province	33	5	28
Chui province	106	17	89
Bishkek	117	114	3

Sexuality Education and Toolkit on Gender Equality and Gender Sensitivity Education for madrassa teachers and community leaders) were drafted jointly with the representatives of the CSOs, CBOs, community leaders and the Ministry of Education. The role of the survey was pivotal to the exploration of the attitudes of the main target group (religious communities), and the development of relevant solutions.

Project Activities Overview

- **Capacity building:** 50 madrassa teachers, 50 CSOs leaders and 100 community leaders from 20 districts across the country were trained to improve gender equality, gender sensitivity and protect women and children rights. To fill the gap of sexuality education in religious schools and local communities, Community Service put a special focus on the involvement of religious leaders and madrassa teachers, to deliver adequate and evidence-based messages on gender equality, gender sensitivity and reproductive health for religious young people. The purpose was to create a direct implication for the reduction of domestic violence and GBV. A special training module was developed with references to Muslim religious texts in order to increase both the credibility of the information provided and the interest of participants. Alongside sexuality education (family planning, reproductive health, gender equality and sexually transmitted infections, etc.), religious leaders and community leaders also worked with other themes relevant to the communities, such as bride kidnapping, family values, marriage and upbringing of children, and human rights.

- **Revision** of the *Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education*: The existing guidelines on sexuality education were revised and adapted to the country's context with the participation of religious and community leaders as well as leaders of women-led NGOs. Participation of these actors in this process enabled the use of appropriate language for raising this sensitive issue. It was approved by the Ministry of Education and piloted to 200 secondary schools across the country.
- **Promotion** of the *Toolkit on Gender Equality and Gender Sensitivity Education*: The Toolkit was also adapted with the voice of community and religious leaders as well as CSOs representatives. Based on existing gender equality manuals for vocational schools, together with the *Guidelines*, the *Toolkit* was adjusted to cater for a religious audience and community-based societies by including references to traditional cultural and religious norms.
- **Awareness raising**: In the frame of the 'Communities in Action' project, religious and community leaders were engaged in local awareness-raising activities through participation in TV programmes, and by holding talks with target communities during marriage ceremonies and Friday prayers.

Visibility: Media, Communication Messages

A Coordination Platform was created where donor organizations, CSOs, CBOs, community leaders, media and academic institutions took part in forums and round tables. It allowed for the dissemination of information about the initiative and the deliverance of a coordinated message to the media (both social and traditional). A Digital Platform was actively used to share information sessions on gender equality organized by community leaders, CBOs, CSOs and madrasa teachers. The main messages and information reached over 100,000 users through the designated YouTube channel and Facebook page, and over 150,000 via Instagram.

Results

Through partnership-building at community level between religious leaders, community leaders, leaders of women-led NGOs and local authorities, Community Service could transcend the stereotypes and suspicion that often exist between secular and religious leaders and was able to forge alliances, which helped to identify and adequately respond to the problems of domestic violence and

GBV. By building the capacity of religious and community leaders and inviting them to participate in discussions at different levels, Community Service gained support from these partners as well as local authorities to further advocate towards the promotion of gender equality and respond to violence at local and national levels. As a result, religious and mostly conservative women, men and young people received information on gender equality, gender sensitivity and non-violence which was aimed at empowering them to counteract domestic and gender-based violence.

From this collaboration the following materials were revised and adapted for target audiences:

- Toolkit on Gender Equality and Sensitivity Education for teachers and community leaders.
- Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education: adapted and introduced to 200 secondary schools.

Throughout the course of the project, a significant number of community members and leaders of religious institutions participated in identifying issues of local concern and advocated for change in their local communities. The promotion target goals for 2019 were met, and even exceeded regarding online dissemination. In total, 870 community members participated actively in initiative groups and, in turn, they involved an additional 8500 members of their community in their advocacy efforts.

Sustainability

The project has made an important intervention, which has the potential to secure a lasting change in the way madrassa teachers ensure the gender sensitivity and awareness on domestic and gender-based violence. Initiative groups were created in all piloted communities (50) and they were provided with necessary toolkits and information campaign strategy to advocate for the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence.

Additional Information

Monitoring and evaluation of the project:

- A *Monitoring and Evaluation Plan* was developed before the launch of the project and a M&E focal point was appointed to track the progress.
- Monitoring trips were organized to madrassas, where necessary recommendations and feedback were provided.

- Project reports were submitted to donors and project results were shared with all stakeholders.
- Best practices and lessons learned report was published and disseminated for partnering agencies and CBOs.

Budget

- Financial resources: USD 50,000 (Global Fund)
- Co-funding: USD 70,000 (from ADB, UN Agencies and USAID)

#	Activity	No. of units	Cost per unit	Total
1	Survey: 2 local experts were engaged in conducting the survey and focus group discussions.	2	\$100 per day (20 working days per person)	\$4000
2	<i>Development of Toolkit on Gender Equality and Sensitivity Education</i> : Fee for experts: 4 local experts.	4	\$1200	\$4800
3	Focus group discussions, which allow for the engagement of community members and religious leaders to take part in strategy and action plan development. In total 10 focus groups (25 people in each group) were held.	10	\$700	\$7000
4	3 forums with the participation of decision makers, community and religious leaders, relevant stakeholders and media representatives were organized.	3	\$2600	\$7800
5	Revision and update of <i>Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education</i> : Fee for experts. (5 experts: psychology and gender; education; and theology.)	5	\$900	\$4500
6	Design of publications: <i>Toolkit on Gender Equality and Sensitivity Education</i> , and <i>Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education</i> .	2	\$2500	\$5000
7	Publication of <i>Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education</i> : \$5 per unit. 10 books were given to each school.	2000	\$5	\$10,000
8	Publication of toolkit for community leaders and madrasa teachers: \$5 per unit.	300	\$5	\$1500
9	4 capacity-building trainings for community leaders and religious community leaders: 3 days training was conducted for 200 participants who further organized information sessions for their respective community members.	4	\$2500	\$10,000
10	Capacity building training on comprehensive sexuality education organized for piloting 200 school teachers (divided into 4 groups).	4	\$2500	\$10,000
11	Information campaign: digital platform used to disseminate information on gender equality and gender sensitivity and on comprehensive sexuality education. In total 10 articles and 10 live interviews were disseminated through digital platforms and social media.	1	\$10000	\$10,000
12	Storytelling videos about the main messages. 3-minutes videos (two about sexuality education and two about gender equality and sensitivity) were developed and disseminated.	4	\$2000	\$8000
13	Project coordination cost: 4 staff members for 12 months were hired (project coordinator, communication specialist and financial specialist) with a salary of 500\$ monthly.	4	\$6000	\$24,000
Total project cost:				\$106,600
Total funding:				\$120,000
Remaining budget for sustainability activities:				\$13,400

PROJECT 2

Project description based on several existing projects and adapted for the didactic purposes of this handbook. Some names and other data were changed or invented. Any identification with real organizations or projects is not intended

- Project name: ‘Strengthening Female Political Participation’
- Year of implementation: 2019-2020
- Place of implementation: Kyrgyzstan
- Topic: Advocacy and Information Campaigns to Support Women’s Political Participation In Kyrgyzstan

Summary

In the frame of this project, Women Active Leaders (WAL) – a public association and a national network of women activists – aimed at attracting the attention of the progressive part of the population, representatives of state entities and civil society, the business community and the media, to work together in achieving a common goal of changing the public perception towards women’s political participation. WAL based the idea of the project on a belief that only through active collaboration with different stakeholders would it be possible to build female leadership and make the voice of women more powerful which in turn is instrumental to the process of the overall democratization of government institutions.

This project proposed to bring together active women leaders from different parts of the Kyrgyz Republic and increase their capacity to participate in upcoming parliamentary and local elections in 2020. 500 women took part in leadership courses, ten of whom took part in parliamentary elections, and 50 of whom took part in local and city council elections. As a result, two of them acquired seats in the national parliament and 15 were selected in local and city council elections.

Problem and Context

The process of democratization of a given society and the development of civil society is tightly dependent on full participation of women in political processes. In this light, it is significant to say that the dynamics of the last decade in Kyrgyzstan demonstrated a decline of women’s representation in state and municipal authorities.

Today, there is no legislative act that would discriminate against women’s political participation in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, promotion of gender equality is ensured by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as by special laws and national policies on gender equality that aim at guaranteeing equal rights, freedoms, and equal opportunities for women and men. Since 2007 gender quotas have been introduced for women in political parties. However, women’s leadership is quite a sensitive issue, especially with the increase of a patriarchal vision rationalized through religious movements and traditionalist values that have contributed to the decline of women’s political participation in Kyrgyzstan. In such an environment, it is easy for some to claim that gender equality and women’s participation in politics is alien to Kyrgyz society, and that gender equality comes from the West. There is also a general stereotype related to the status of women: a belief questioning whether women can combine their political activities with family life.

A popular belief exists in Kyrgyzstan that only single women can go to politics, because a women’s role is relegated to the family and defined by care giving. Therefore, from an early age girls and young women are advised by their environment to give priority to having a family and rearing children rather than going into politics. With regard to men, the public opinion does not consider a political career to be a barrier in their family life. Hence, while working on strengthening women’s political participation, it is crucial to analyse public perception towards women and their role in society.

It should also be said that in contemporary Kyrgyz society political parties try to attract women as members, due to legislation on quotas. Some positive changes are related to the image of the parties, which do not want to be at odds with the legislation or with modern criteria of political parties. Notwithstanding, the latest statistical data provided by National Statistical Agency (NSA) and corroborated by Central Election Committee sources show a low representation of women at the decision-making level (illustrated by the table below).

Women in Politics	Total Percentage (2018)
Women civil servants	40.9
Women in political and government positions	28.0
Women MPs at Jogorku Kenesh (Kyrgyz parliament)	16.7
Women local councilors	10
The participation of women in political and municipal positions of local self-government bodies	2.9
Share of women in decision-making positions in business entities	27.2
Proportion of female managers in the private sector	27.0

It also needs to be pointed out that the women who enter the political sphere do not always act in solidarity with women activists who stand for gender equality and women's rights. One can observe that there are women parliamentarians who generally do not raise any women-related issues or do not support legislative acts that would protect women from violence. In addition to social stereotypes, economic factors (meaning access to resources) are of great importance. Men often come to parliament from the business sector. Among women, there are also those who come from the business environment, but in terms of their financial resources, it is generally difficult for women to compete with men in elections.

The authors of the project started from a conviction that female participation in political processes is not just an issue of individual women. It is about levelling the playing field between men and women at all decision-making levels, which has a ripple effect to bring gender advancement and to develop inclusive and democratic governance. The issue of female political participation is an integral part of human rights, which is guaranteed in the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. It is inherently linked with good governance, sustainable development, and democratic governance, which is achievable through improving the status of women and mainstreaming the interests of women in government programs.

Given all this, the main goal of the project was to increase women's representation at the decision-making levels, by causing a change in the gender perception. This initiative involved cooperation of state structures, political parties, women NGOs, other public institutions, members of the forum of women deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* of the Kyrgyz Republic, local *keneshter* (councils), the media and the business community of Kyrgyzstan.

Project Objectives

The project aimed at changing the public perception of women's political leadership through the promotion of a gender-sensitive information campaign in traditional and new media.

This objective was to be reached through:

- improving the leadership potential of 500 women and increasing their role in conducting advocacy campaigns to encompass inclusive and gender-sensitive leadership
- shaping public perception through the application of traditional and new media

- strengthening partnerships with political parties and government agencies in promoting inclusive participation and women’s representation in the political life of the country
- increase the political participation of women in the parliament, local councils and city councils (with the representation of at least 25%)

Project Output Indicators

Indicator	Baseline in 2018	Target for 2019/2020
Number of women who increased their advocacy campaign skills	0	500
Number of political parties that signed the agreement on women’s participation in political party lists based on gender quota (30%)	0	10
Percentage of women in the national parliament, city councils, and local councils (based on gender quota)	16% in Parliament 10% in city and local councils	25% in Parliament in city and local councils

Stakeholder Mapping and Focus for Project Intervention

Women-focused NGOs are well aware of what constitute the main barriers in women’s political participation. Many years of debating this issue as well as new research results helped an understanding of what barriers exist and what tools and mechanisms can be applied to promote gender equality in political participation processes. For the authors of this project it was fundamental that women mobilize to make state structures and citizenship more inclusive. Currently, active participation in political processes and decision-making is a pressing task not only for individual women, but is also vital for the entire women’s movement in Kyrgyzstan. In the project application the authors referred to studies showing that increasing public demand for broader participation in the public and political life of society requires an active mobilization of all women. In other words, without women’s participation it is impossible to the change public opinion.

On the basis of the stakeholder mapping, WAL identified 4 main stakeholders: women-led NGOs, political parties, media, and business associations. Since the project aimed at increasing women’s political participation at decision-making level and changing the public perception on gender equality and women’s participation, it was decided to partner with:

- **Political parties** that were involved to ensure gender quota and build the capacity of women party members. Their role was crucial during the organization of trainings and sessions.
- **Media** (traditional and social): the role of media was identified as crucial in raising the awareness of general public on women's political participation. Therefore, trainings for journalists and bloggers were also organized and they took an active part in all phases of the project.
- The role of **business community** was also considered vital for getting support during elections. Election processes tend to be supported by the private sector. Therefore, it was pivotal to partner up with the business community during political campaigns. Mostly women-led business companies were actively engaged.
- **NGOs** involved in capacity-building training of women activists and leaders.

Project Preparations: a Desk Review

Before the launch of the project, a desk review was conducted to analyse the situation in the country based on existing laws, governmental and non-governmental programs and the existing research in the area of gender equality, women's participation and gender quota. The analysis indicated that women's participation tightly depends on the support of the business community, media and political parties. The experts identified a need to organize trainings for journalists on advocating for women at political participation. They also concluded that the awareness of journalists is still low on gender sensitivity and women's role on politics. It was stated that very often women are described as caregivers and, thus, criticized when they participate in elections. Political parties are still male dominated and not inclusive of women. Hence, the desk review also concluded in a recommendation to work with political parties in ensuring gender quota in their party lists.

The Project Activities Overview

- Agreements on 30% gender quota on the electoral candidate lists were signed with 10 political parties.
- Capacity-building training for active women leaders: 500 women activists were trained in political participation in the area of public speaking, leadership, law, budgeting and campaign strategy.

- 30 journalists and 20 bloggers were trained on the issues of gender sensitivity and women's participation, which allowed them to organize over 50 live broadcasts with women in politics and over 70 stories about women leaders.

Visibility: Media, Communication Messages

A dedicated website, 'kyrgyzwomenpolitics.org,' was launched to present the profiles of woman-candidates to parliament, local and city councils, to inform of the important aspects of their individual electoral campaigns and to post their results. As the project was aiming at attracting the attention of the progressive part of the population, social media were involved to inform about the project activities: a project Facebook page and a Twitter account. The Facebook outreach was over 80 000 users during the project lifespan. The journalists and bloggers involved in the training participated in the distribution of the project information and the main message.

Results

By 2019/2020, only two political parties (out of 10 signatories) were able to ensure representation of women in line with state gender quota. In general, the project gave an opportunity for 500 women activists to build their capacity in political participation and campaign strategy. However, little more than 10% of participants (women activists who were trained for election campaigns) took their chances during the elections (10 candidates in parliamentary and 50 in local and city council elections), whereas the rest (around 90%) made a decision not to run.

The latter group of women reported in most cases that their decision stemmed from confrontations with family members, their local communities, or even the political parties. They gave examples of how, in these contexts, their initial decisions to participate in elections were often undermined. This project showed that women face entry-barriers at family, at community and political party levels. Hence, it could be concluded that leadership development and the capacity-building of women is not enough to level the playing field between women and men in politics.

Lessons learned from the project were to ensure a stronger inclusion of community members and other stakeholders to identify the needs for supporting for women's representation. When taking similar actions, one should have in mind that changing gender perception in a patriarchal society also requires investment for

raising awareness of local community leaders and religious leaders who have powerful roles to influence communities. Therefore, one of the conclusions is to include additional research about gender perception in religious communities.

Sustainability

The results of the local, city council and parliamentary elections did not achieve set indicators and the elections in 2019/2020 showed that women's participation did not change because of their lack of support from religious communities and rural areas where gender perception remains patriarchal. In addition, political parties often did not ensure gender quotas in their parties after the election. The 30% gender quota was respected at the stage of creating the candidate lists, but after the votes were cast, women candidates were often forced out. (Another obstacle was the fact that the results of parliamentary elections were cancelled and resulted in protests). It showed that there is a need to develop communication channels with religious communities as well as political parties while raising advocacy campaigns.

Additional Information

Monitoring and evaluation of the project:

- Monitoring trips were held during the information sessions and seminars for participants to evaluate the work of trainers, as well as during the election process.
- A project report was submitted to donors and project results were shared with all stakeholders.
- A *Lessons Learned Report* was published and disseminated for political parties and partnering organizations.

Budget

Financial resources: USD 47,000 (funded by USAID)

#	Activity	No. of units	Cost per unit	Total
1	Desk review: 3 local researchers with the expertise of gender equality and election process were engaged.	3	\$100 per day (10 working days per person)	\$3000
2)	3-day capacity-building training on leadership development, public speaking, fundraising and campaign strategies for 500 women leaders (separated into 4 groups).	4	\$3000	\$12,000
3	2-day capacity-building training for journalists and bloggers (50 participants).	1	\$3000	\$3000
4	Workshop with the participation of business community, political parties and women-led NGOs to present the desk review results and share the project objectives.	1	\$2000	\$200
4	Live broadcasts, video interviews	3	\$1500	\$4500
5	Project coordination cost: 3 staff members for 10 months were hired (project coordinator, logistics specialist, administrative/finance assistant) with a salary 450\$ monthly	3	\$4500	\$13,500
6	Cost for publication and communication materials	1	\$2500	\$2500
7	Transportation cost for staff members during the training and monitoring: In total 5 travels for 2 staff members.	5	\$200	\$1000
Total project cost:				\$46,000
Total funding:				\$47,000
Remaining budget for sustainability activities:				\$1000

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Railway Geopolitics in Central Asia from the 19th to the 21st Century

by
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- ▶ Chapter 15 (Slavomír Horák)
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Case Study Assignment

Choose one infrastructural project and discuss its geopolitical significance (according to the instructions below). Apart from the four railroads proposed here, you can also discuss another project – constructed, planned to be constructed or conceptualized within the Belt and Road Initiative, or other frame.

1. China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway (planned, Uzbek section connecting Tashkent and Ferghana Valley was opened in 2016)
2. The Jingyihuo railway (精伊霍铁路; *Jīng yī huò tiělù*) or Jinghe-Yining-Khorgos railway (opened 2010), Altynkol-Zhetygen Railway (opened 2011) and Khorgos railway border crossing (2012).
3. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway (opened just partly from Turkmenistan to Andkhoy in 2021).
4. Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway (opened in 2014).

Analyse your chosen infrastructural project from these three perspectives discussed in the chapter:

- a) (Neo-)classical geopolitics: in order to assess to what degree this perspective still applies in contemporary infrastructural projects.
- b) Geostrategies: to describe the geostrategies of the actors involved in the construction of this railroad (China, Central Asian countries, other). Are their geostrategies complementary or competitive?

- c) Critical geopolitics: having in mind the degree to which this railroad will actually contribute to sustainable development in the certain region (focus on social, economic and human development).

Case Study: Railway Geopolitics in Central Asia from the 19th to the 21st Century

Transport is traditionally one of the essential tools of geopolitics together with military or soft power. The existence of transport infrastructure determines how fast a state can move its armies, deliver information, or how well it can control trade. The development of transport lines enabled the empires and other more developed states to conquer, colonize and stabilize other regions or create entirely new centres from the “greenfield” spaces based on transport lines. Mainly, the inland places inaccessible by sea or river transport required constructing contemporary transport connections. In this way, the geopolitics and transport systems became mutually connected and even interdependent. The very existence of transport routes were the principal determinants of geopolitical expansions, and geopolitical influence is inconceivable without the development of transport infrastructure.*

*Грудцын 2016: 137

On the contrary, the decrease of the transport between the centre and the periphery or transit through some particular region may lead to a unified geopolitical space's dissolution. The other way, a particular geopolitical unit's dissolution, is usually followed by decreased transport intensity and connections. In this regards, the maintenance of transport connections between the specific regions of once common geopolitical space, its usage and eventual replacement with the other direction, is an important way to measure the geopolitical weight of the power. For example, if one compares the railway or air timetables up to the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the geopolitical dominance of the Soviet Union over the Socialist Bloc was apparent. Its trains connected most of Eastern Europe with at least one train connection to Moscow, Leningrad or another Soviet city. Looking at the Soviet Aeroflot timetable and the intensity of links with different countries can also give us a picture of the Soviet Union and its allies. However, several flight connections also had a significant commercial component (Western Europe-Moscow-Japan routes, among others). Even today, the commercial or state-supported networks (airlines and trains) or the connections from some capital city, can tell us a lot about a

state's geopolitical and geo-economic position (airline routes from Chişinău in Moldova, to give one example). Such correlations need not be absolute, and sometimes the air route map and the intensity of flights can go even against the geopolitical orientation, for instance, the Airzena-Georgian Airways route network is a typical example in which the Tbilisi-Moscow route (before the Covid-19 crisis) had a much more intensive weekly capacity comparing to its EU direction (the declared geopolitical orientation of Georgia).

Railway Geopolitics

In the context of transport geopolitics, railways, soon after their invention, became an integral part of all historical, classical and critical geopolitics. The geopoliticians researched the transport logistics from both military/strategic/geopolitical and economic significance points of view.

This case study focuses on the railway geopolitics in Central Asia in the period of the Great Game and during the construction of the first railways in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, and the contemporary railway geopolitics in Central Asia today. The first part explains how to frame railway construction in the geopolitical game within 'classical geopolitics.' The second one tries to apply the general idea to the Central Asian region and looks at the reasons and consequences of the gradual expanding railway (and generally infrastructural) boom in the area and how railways construction is reflected in Central Asian geopolitics.

The second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was the peak of railway-building. The key corridors connected major cities in Europe, and the railway systems spread in the colonies. There were commonly two reasons to build the new rail connections: economic and strategic. If we simplify the matter, in those states and empires, where the extension of railways was in private hands (such as Great Britain and, in the initial period, in Prussia/Germany or Austro-Hungarian empire), the first railways preferred the economic component over the strategy and geopolitics. Nevertheless, new conflicts such as the Crimean (1853-1856) or Prussia-Austrian (1866) war, the US Civil War (1861-1865) or The Great Indian Rebellion (1857-1858) demonstrated the military and geopolitical component of railways. The launch of the Russian railway network development (except for the mainline from St. Petersburg to Moscow) resulted from military defeat in the Crimean War. Alexander I embrace the empire's reforms and supported such ministers as Mikhail Reutern and Samuel Witte, who planned to

develop railways in Imperial Russia with foreign loans and know-how. They considered strategic, geopolitical, as well as economic factors of railway expansion.

In the geopolitical sense, railways became one of the most important (albeit also one of the most expensive) tools of geopolitical significance in the colonial scramble in the 19th and partly in the 20th century. The geopolitical component and the great powers' rivalry became the initial reason for its construction far ahead of its economic viability and regardless of the costs. The erection of railways claimed the colonial parcellation of the world by different colonial powers and, later on, helped to manage the colonies in both military and economic senses, including the reshuffles of cadres and army. Railways were presented as both the symbol of colonialism and colonial exploitation* as well as of modernity and economic progress in the colonies and the embodiment of the 'mission civilisatrice' for the empires.^{1*}

*Hilaly 2016

*Heldring and Robinson 2012;
Aguilar 2012

*Scott 2018

As the world partition by great powers intensified, railway geopolitics reached its peak as well. The so-called 'transcontinentalism'* became the principal idea to confirm geopolitical achievements. This concept was based on creating long arteries across the continents connecting the empires' centres and their newly acquired peripheries and colonies (eventually, colonial settlements among themselves), and places of geopolitical and geoeconomically interesting areas. The former idea was raised with the First Transcontinental Railroad completed in the United States in 1869. Other projects followed with varying successes. The trans-Siberian railroad became the second entirely transcontinental railway, although built with many technical limitations and the construction itself exhausted the Russian financial system.* Other 'competitive' transcontinental projects mostly remained unfinished. In some cases, they lost their initial geopolitical significance before they could be finished (e.g. the Berlin-Istanbul-Baghdad railway under German auspices) or remained in the stub and far from completion (e.g. the Cape-Cairo transcontinental railway proposed by Cecil Rhodes). The economic element of railways comes back to the stage and prevails when the geopolitical rivalry and military disputes are settled, and it became essential to return enormous state investments.

*Otte and Neilson 2012: 5-7

The importance of railway geopolitics was reincarnated at the beginning of the 21st century. Coming from critical geopolitical viewpoints,* current railways represent the emerging geopolitical players (in the case of China, India, Iran, Turkey and others to stay

*Megoran and Sharapova 2013

¹ For a classical colonial approach, consult: Macpherson 1955.

within the scope of our region) plus the revival of old ones (such as Russia being transformed from the Soviet Union).

While the transcontinental idea was developed during the initial stage of geopolitics, the post-Soviet period can consider Central Asia and its transport infrastructure within the 'landlockedness' theory. The region can be treated as one of the most symptomatic examples of this theory. According to this concept, landlocked countries are determined to fulfil two principal conditions to successfully participate in the world global economy and trade: 1) their relations with neighbours and transit countries and 2) the existence of appropriate infrastructure connecting landlocked countries with the rest of the world.* Relations with neighbours can range from a fair political environment to, in the worst case, a conflict situation (either international/interstate or internal in the country or in one of the transit countries)*. The transit trade flow can be hampered by the absence of trade facilitation between a landlocked state and its neighbour. The latter are thus in a position to exert pressure on a landlocked country.

Central Asian states also often demonstrate their power and successes through the development of railway corridors. In a broader sense, such infrastructure projects (railways, pipelines, roads, electricity networks, dams, etc.) validate the effectivity of their authoritarian development, especially when determining themselves vis-à-vis the democratic world in Europe and the US or Canada. They argue that their political systems can manage such enormous projects in a more efficient way than their democratic counterparts as they are not limited – among other things – by election cycles, democratic discussions or public relations.

Besides, railway development cements the unity of the state and control over its remote regions. The railway to Tibet (Lhasa) became the demonstration of indisputable Chinese technological progress, serving ideological self-promotion and the tool for control over the remote province.* The railway network extension in Xinjiang, including the high-speed railway to the capital Urumqi, falls into the same category. In the latter case, the railway to and through Xinjiang is also the tool for extending geopolitical influence beyond that region. The plans to expand railways as a geopolitical instrument can be observed in the investments into new lines to the neighbouring countries – China-Laos (with eventual extension to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore), China-Myanmar or China-Vietnam-Cambodia.

As most of the railway infrastructure projects are too expensive to be profitable for private actors, most of the funds are covered by

*Raballand 2003; Faye et al. 2004; Grigoriou 2007; Lahiri and Masjidi 2012; Chowdhury and Erdenebileg 2006

*Gevorgyan 2003: 38

*Dreyer 2003: 422–423

the state or from loans from international banking and monetary institutions such as Asian Development Bank, Chinese Import/Export bank and others. Mainly foreign money opens the space for geopolitical thinking about the railways. In Europe, similar examples are the Channel Tunnel between France and Britain or the long-discussed Via Baltica from Poland to Finland through the Baltic states, including the tunnel under the Finnish Bay.*

*Kemmeter 2020

At the same time, China developed the most extensive High-Speed Railway (HSR) network globally, and the vast infrastructure projects such as a Moscow-Beijing HSR do not seem impossible for them regardless of its overpricing or construction difficulties. Its economic viability, when considering construction costs, is doubtful. However, once finished, the operational profit might be positive as it can attract a particular and growing niche of transport logistics between Europe and Eastern Asia.

Although the military and strategic reasons for using the trains almost disappeared, the war in Afghanistan showed that railway transport to supply the Alliance forces in the country is still not obsolete.* The discussion about the Northern Distribution Networks got its geopolitical component based on turbulent relations between Russia and the US and EU.

*Kuchins et al. 2010

Russian Empire and Soviet Railway-building and their Geopolitics

The Russian Empire started to develop its railways in the 1830s and 1840s when the mainline connecting two major cities – St. Petersburg and Moscow – was built. As mentioned earlier, the massive development of the railway network in Russia really started after the Crimean War (1853-1856), and Russia's defeat which was – among other reasons – tied to the empire's lack of infrastructure. Therefore, first and foremost the railway served military and geopolitical purposes, although once it was built its later significance for the commercial sector and migration became undeniable. They also served as the tool for the Russia's civilization mission.

In the words of F. Dostoyevsky: *"We were spongers and slaves in Europe, we are going to Asia as masters. We were Tatars in Europe, but we are also European in Asia. Mission, our civilization mission in Asia, will suborn our soul and bring us there to start the movement. Build just two railroads, start from this – one to Siberia and another one to Central Asia – and you will see the consequences."**

*Достоевский 1995: 509

Dostoyevsky wrote these words into its diary in 1881, at the time of the first Central Asian railway launch following exactly his idea.

The railway geopolitics of Central Asia were closely connected

with the Great Game and Russian advance to the region. The first projects were presented in 1854 by general Mal'tsev during the Crimean War. Later, another forty projects were presented on how to join the newly acquired Turkestan to the rest of the empire. The projects calculated first with military and strategic reasons but also considered the economic component of the matter as the development of the region was found impossible without a proper logistic tie to the rest of Russia.*

*Волков 2013: 92

Nevertheless, the first railway in the region – the Transcaspian (later also Central Asian) line from Krasnovodsk (today Türkmenbaşy) was dictated initially by the ongoing military conquest of the Ahkal Tekke region in today's Turkmenistan. Later on, it was extended through Ashgabat (Ashgabat) and the Merv oasis to Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent (opened in 1888 to Samarkand and entirely in 1899). Its construction and operation at its initial stage were managed by the General Staff of the Russian Empire. The railway symbolically claimed the geopolitical positions of Russia in Central Asia after the end of the military campaigns in the region.*

*Ахмеджанова 1984;

Якубжанов 2015;

Sahadeo 2007: 120-124

The side branches leading to the border areas (e.g. to Kushka, today Serhetabat on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border) confirmed this geopolitical value of the railway at the empire's new outer borders. Russian intellectuals and geographers (as demonstrated by Dostoyevsky above) usually welcomed its construction with pride. Simultaneously, some interpretations of this railway construction outside the Russian Empire were rather geopolitically exaggerated, which also shows the kind of passion or even obsession in the minds of the Western (especially British) politicians and geo-politicians.

Thus, the Merv-Kushka side branch was considered to be the next step towards the campaign to India within the mythological "Russian search for warm sea."* Halford Mackinder ** or politicians such as lord George N. Curzon * saw the Russian railway advance and the 'window to Asia' as a threat to the British geopolitical and commercial interests on the continent, although both were astonished by such a railway advance.

*Green 1993; Cepreev 2012: 180;

For period context see: Curzon 1889;

Dobson 1890

**Mackinder 1904: 434-436

*Curzon 1889

In other cases, the romantic vision also became part of the Western story: probably one of the most famous examples in the fiction is represented by Jules Verne's Claudius Bombarnac, with his train from the Caspian Sea to Beijing.* His vision – see Figure B – among others, corresponds with two railway corridors promoted in Central Asia today: the Tashkent-Ashgabat-Türkmenbaşy-Baku and Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China line (Tashkent-Osh-Kashgar).

*Verne 1892

From “Tbilisi to Kashgar” – first map (of two) depicting the imagined western part of the railroad created for Jules Verne’s fictional novel about adventurer, Claudius Bombarnac, also alternatively titled: The (Adventures of a) Special Correspondent (in Central Asia). The drawings were made by the famous French illustrator and painter, Léon Benett (1832-1916).

However, the economic importance of the railways became fully evident once the territories were conquered and the geopolitical struggle with Great Britain calmed down after the Herat crisis in 1885. Despite its slow speed and frequent interruptions due to natural conditions and technical problems, the Transcaspian railway became a success for commerce and passenger transport. It was precisely such economic reasons rather than geopolitics that would become the primary decisive factor for creating the Orenburg-Tashkent line.* The railway stimulated a real export boom (cotton, silk) from Central Asia and also encouraged the new wave of immigration to the region. Despite the initial sceptical approach of several Tsarist officers (the Turkestan Governor-general M.G. Chernyaev, Minister of War Dmitry A. Milyutin and others) about the high investments that would not be earned back, the railway was the critical step for Great Britain to acknowledge the Russian advance. In addition, it boosted commercial development and the exploitation of the region.* The further geopolitical rapprochement of Russia and Britain at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries prevented further railway advance towards the Afghan and Chinese territories. As a consequence, Afghanistan would remain without proper railway lines up into the 21st century.

*Волков 2013: 97

*Глущенко 2010: 411

The Soviet railway construction aimed to extend the railway connections of Central Asia with the Soviet centre and developed regions in Siberia. In this regard, the Turkestan-Siberia (also called “Turksib”) railway, built between 1926-1931, followed old Russian plans to connect the existing Orenburg-Tashkent line with the Semirechye region (Pishpek/Bishkek and Almaty) and Western Siberia on the Trans-Siberian artery.

Initially, this project was also intended to cement the Russian Empire’s geopolitical positioning along the Chinese borders at the beginning of the 20th century. The Soviet consolidation and its influence in Xinjiang during the 1930s (followed by the Soviet retreat after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949) temporarily erased the geopolitical component of that railway. The

Figure C – The Tsarist Road Network Map in Central Asia (1911)

This picture shows only a fragment of a larger map illustrating the roads and railroad connections in Tsarist Russia in the beginning of the 20th century.

Source: *Карта путей сообщения Азиатской России*, (С.-Петербург: Отдел статистики и картографии МПС, Картографическое заведение А. Ильина, 1911)

economy took over as the primary reason for railway-building. Its completion consolidated the Soviet achievements and control over Central Asia and connected, in the economic sense: Central Asian cotton production, Kazakhstani and Southwest Siberia grain with eastern parts of the Soviet Union.* The economy was also a driving factor for building the third line from Central Asia to Russia between Kazakh Gur'yev (Гурьев, currently Atyrau) through Beyneu (Бейнеу), Karakalpakstan and Khorezm up to Charjew (also: Çärjew, Charjui or Чарджоу – today Türkmenabat) on the old Transcaspiian line. Regular ferries between Krasnovodsk in the Turkmen SSR and Baku in Azerbaijan SSR also served as an alternative (albeit more tangential) connection to the central parts of the Soviet Union.

*Wheeler 1934; Payne 2001

Post-Soviet Railway Geopolitics in Central Asia

The dissolution of the USSR brought new specifics in the Central Asian railway network and railway development. Three main factors that impacted this sphere were: privileged transit traffic (*péage* or toll for passage), gradual globalization of transcontinental transport, and increasing interest in 'being mutually connected' throughout the Eurasian continent. All processes required substantial investments in the railway infrastructure. Central Asian countries put a significant effort into extending and upgrading their existing railway lines (see Table A).

Table A – The Extension of Railways in Central Asia

	Railway network 1988	Railway Network 2019	Extension (%)
Kazakhstan	14,550 km	16,061 km	10.3
Uzbekistan	3,500 km	4,735 km	35.2
Turkmenistan	2,120 km	3,840 km	81.1
Tajikistan	480 km	620 km	29.1
Kyrgyzstan	370 km	424 km	14.6

Sources: Istmat.info 1990: 111; ОСЖД 2019; Unece.org 2020.

The Soviet system of centrum-periphery railways with several side branches maintained its privileged position. The bulk of the railway transport (both freight and passenger) was directed in this way. However, the Soviet railway planners did not calculate for the emergence of real borders. In many cases, the railways crossed the borders several times, which created additional problems. In this situation, it is not surprising that the Newly Independent States (NIS) attempted to avoid the bottlenecks established on the new

frontiers. Therefore, Central Asian countries, more or less successfully, unified the internal connections at their first stage of independence. The construction of the bypasses aimed to shorten the distance between the cities, cut the travel time without additional, time-consuming, inconvenient border crossings and – last but not least – save a substantial amount of money in transit fees.

Kazakhstan's railway network covered most of the great cities even before the independence, but it was mostly oriented along the north-south direction (between Central Asia and Russia). The government set the priority to improve mainly the east-west corridor through the middle part of the country – Jezkazgan-Saksaul'skaya (517 km) and Shalkar-Beyneu lines (496 km) and also Arkalyk-Shubarkol' north-south connector (214 km). The new railway leading to the Chinese borders from Almaty to Khorgos contributed substantially to the extension of the existing network and provided the second (and more appropriate for national interests) entry/exit point to/from China. However, Kazakhstani investments into its railway infrastructure were also based on the refurbishment and modernization of the existing line. This massive inflow of money enabled the introduction of a new Talgo HSR train network connecting the main cities within a reasonable timespan. From a geopolitical point, it also made freight transport more effective and competitive.

Turkmenistan built the new railroads from Ashgabat to the east, linking the towns Kerki/Atamyrat and Kerkiçi on the right bank of Amu Darya. Also, the Trans-Kara Kum railway linked Ashgabat with the otherwise isolated northern part of the country. The construction also represented technological challenges due to the moving sand of the Kara Kum desert, and the Turkmenistan railway network more than doubled compared to the early Soviet period (cf. Table A).

Uzbekistan had the most complicated border/railway connection. The priority was given to four main problematic knots. The first one connected the most strategic and critical railway linking Tashkent with central parts of the country. The main line – Tashkent-Samarkand – led through the stretch of Kazakhstani territory between Yangiyo'l / Chinoz and to Jizzakh in Soviet times. The newly refurbished alternative route, lying entirely on the Uzbekistan territory, also meets requirements for a high-speed line, the first one of its kind in Central Asia that allows a substantial shortening of the travel time between Tashkent, Samarkand and – later on – also between Karshi and Bukhara, from what once was an overnight journey to a mere couple of hours.

The second project – to connect Central and Western Uzbekistan – used the Soviet Bukhara-Charjew-Urgench-Dashoguz-Kungrat line. This railway crossed the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan border several times, and the connection was much longer in both time and distance. As the Soviet railway ended up in the mining town Uchquduq in the middle of the Kyzyl Kum desert, the extension to Khorezm through the desert became a logical option for such an inland connector. It allowed for the almost total abandonment of the old cross-border railway, and this connection was left for occasional cargo trains with the longest waiting times in the region.* Recently, an even more efficient line was opened between Bukhara and Urgench, which is part of the high-speed line interconnecting both cities in about two hours and substantially reducing the travel time between Khorezm and Tashkent. The southern part of Uzbekistan, including the city of Termez and the strategically important border with Afghanistan, was also isolated from the core Uzbekistan railway network. Uzbek railways in particular became the constructor and operator on the first Afghanistan railway leading from Termez to Mazar-e Sharif (see later in the text). The construction of a railway crossing the mountainous landscape between Karshi and Termez was another challenge. As a result, the new line (opened in 2007 and being electrified in 2018) again substantially reduced travel time and distance to southern Uzbekistan provinces and Afghanistan and Tajikistan without an Uzbek-Turkmen detour with additional border hassles. Finally, the connection between Tashkent and Ferghana Valley was one of the most critical parts of Uzbekistan's railway infrastructure. The old line passed through Tajikistan's territory with which Uzbekistan had complicated relations under the first Uzbek President Islam Karimov. Anyhow, the new line, including the tunnel under the Kamchik pass (opened in 2016), enabled the bypassing of costly transit fees, distance and time. It also opened the way to the eventual extension of the railway through Kyrgyzstan to China.

*Grigoriou 2007: 38

As demonstrated in Table A, each Central Asian country had to adopt a different scale of its railway network extension and reconstruction. While Kazakhstan and partially Uzbekistan already had a relatively extensive railway network (regarding their territory), they needed to upgrade the lines and added several interconnectors between 'isolated' regions (now at their borders) or improve inadequately directed railways. Turkmenistan had to build fundamentally new tracks to complete the essential connection of significant regions and cities without privileged transit through Uzbekistan. The smaller countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) could not

expand their network systematically except for extensions to existing dead-ends (e.g. Kurgan-Tyube to Kulyob, or the extension to Yavan in Tajikistan as the most visible example).

*Грудцын 2016

Such 'railway nationalism' confirmed the thesis about the decline of international transport after the dissolution of the common political and economic space.* The opening of new railways was often heralded as a partial success of the nation-building ideology in Central Asian states, with their leaders being at the centre of the attention during such an event. However, at the same time, this ideology led to the gradual unification of five separated railway systems. In this way, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were the most affected by the railway border cuts, and it is not surprising that they became the most advanced countries in building new inland connectors.

*Otorbayev 2020

In a broader Asian region, the direct land bridges between the different areas became the imperative of the period and many Asian countries pushed to revive and extend their rail networks and mutually connect so far isolated systems. The massive trend of railway constructions in Asia since the 2000s reminds us of a similar boom in Europe over a hundred years ago. The most ambitious revival of transcontinental transport became the so-called 'Eurasian Landbridge,' in which Chinese interests to deliver more products using land transport prevailed – see also Map 16.2. Although the rails and roads will not overturn the minor position of transcontinental trade (compared to maritime trade), nevertheless the share of the total China-EU transports have jumped from 0.5-1% up to 6-8% in the last decade,* with further potential to rise.

However, analysts usually point to several obstacles that limit the land railway transport compared to other modes of shipments (sea and air). The borders and border crossings are some of the most significant obstacles. In this regard, Kazakhstan possesses the trump cards: The country (as the only one in Central Asia) stretches from the Chinese to the Russian borders and the Caspian Sea. It allows freight to pass smoothly through the region. Moreover, the existence of open borders within the Eurasian Economic Union also stimulates uninterrupted transport flows from China to EU borders through Belarus or Russia. The rail transport extension to the other transcontinental corridors requires several border crossings and intermodal ways to reach the destination through the Caspian Sea and Lake Van (Turkey) ferries.

Both factors – borders and geography – are principal reasons for longer deliveries. To overcome this obstacle, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia (later joined by Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and

Poland) established the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (also known as the Middle Corridor) that should speed up maximally the border clearings as well as transshipment of the loads to and from ferries. Despite these efforts and the introduction of several regular freight trains (Lianyungang-Istanbul), the route captures only minor transcontinental shipments (China-Turkey) when compared to the main transit flow between Eastern Asia and Europe via Kazakhstan and Russia. The situation in other Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) is even worse, although several initiatives were raised to increase the significance of the East Asia-Middle East corridor.

In China-Central Asia-CIS-Europe/Iran/Turkey, the borders are also connected with the bogie changes² due to the different railway gauges.³ Despite this fact, several contact stations that allow the transformation of wheels were constructed in the Eurasian continent. In several cases, the newly built railways are based on a predominant investor railway gauge (the China-Laos railway). However, Iran made the railway connector to Pakistani railways, with wheels changed in Zahedan, close to the borders. In Central Asia, there are currently three points of such changes. The oldest one is on the Druzhba-Alashankou line, on the route from Kazakhstan to Urumqi in Xinjiang. This Soviet-Chinese project was supplemented on the other side of the region by the Turkmenistan-Iran contact border station in Seragt/Serachs, where the wheel change facilities were also constructed. Turkmenistan also has change facilities in Etrek, on the north-south corridor. Finally, the rail border crossing in Khorgos was opened in southeastern Kazakhstan (2012), shortening the distance and travel time and increasing profit by an enormous border terminal, transit point, and a shopping mall for Kazakhstani citizens. Additionally, the new connection was built on the Georgian-Turkey border close to the town of Akhal-kalaki. In some cases, the containers are simply reloaded from one carriage to another with appropriate gauges. Other border crossings (Georgia-Turkey, Ukraine-Poland and Kazakhstan-China) are equipped with automatic track gauge changeover systems, which significantly reduce the delay on border crossings.*

*Zasiadko 2020

² A bogie exchange is a system for overcoming the historical (and often purposeful) differences in standardization of railway track width and thus their corresponding wagon bogies (the chassis with the wheels and axles of the rail car). A bogie system was thus invented to lift trains and change its bogies with those of the right track gauge (the width between the tracks), and then lower the cars upon them once more, so a train can continue its itinerary.

³ For an overview of railroad gauge changes in Eurasia, consult: Rodrigue 2020.

*Pomfret 2019: 366–371, Pomfret 2020

Starting from the 2010s, China became the principal power determining railway construction in post-Soviet Central Asia. The idea of railway corridors linking China, Central Asia, Europe or the Middle East extended from ‘Eurasian Landbridge’ into ‘The Belt and Road Initiative.’* Such connectivity of the Chinese national rail system, including the most extensive high-speed lines network in the world with the outside world (in all directions), became a logical goal of its geopolitical expansion. Southeast Asia and Central Asia are considered the most promising regions for the extension of railway geopolitics. Ambitious projects such as the railway to Myanmar, Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore, Vietnam and Kazakhstan-Russia-Europe receive the highest priority.⁴

*Fallon 2015

The Trans-Asian Railway is considered one of the most ambitious projects, and has been compared with the Marshall Plan for Europe, financed by China.* The project represents the rail (and road) network stretching from the Eastern Chinese coast through China’s inland, Mongolia-Central Asia to Russia. The alternative (albeit somewhat secondary) corridor lies through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the Caucasus up to Turkey-Ukraine then Europe – see also Map 16.1. Within the former option, the most ambitious plans have been already announced. Chief among them is the idea of the high-speed railway from Moscow to Beijing that aims to cut the railway connection between the two capitals by up to two days. Looking at these initiatives, one can observe the revival of the ‘transcontinentalism’ idea from the end of the 19th century.

*Starr et al. 2015; Goble 2019

*Starr et al. 2015: 9

Some authors* argue that railway construction could diminish the Russian influence in the region at China’s expense. Railway construction bypassing Russia is also considered a solution for Central Asia to access the foreign markets.* Although China prefers the shortest option through Kazakhstan rather than Russia, backed by the Trans-Siberian artery, the figures show that alternative routes outside Russia are still far behind this main route. The number of shipments and freight has grown geometrically (see Table B), claiming the overwhelming part of rail transport between China and Europe. Alternative corridors are hardly able to attract such customer niche despite rapid growth as well. There are few regular services on these routes (e.g. the Lianyungang-Istanbul block train using Kazakhstan-Baku-Tbilisi-Kars or Yiwu-Tehran) compared to several thousands of trains on the main route, and the volumes of transport are still negligible.

⁴ China expands with its ‘railway diplomacy’ on a global scale. The construction, among others, of the new Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, Kenya railway, Turkey HSR, or other routes in Venezuela, are examples of such projects. These cases include the building of rail tracks and railcars, engines, and railway technologies.

From the figures mentioned above (rough and official but convincing enough), one can conclude that China, Russia, and – to some extent – Kazakhstan, have become major geopolitical winners in Central Asia's railway geopolitics. These states and their companies captured the advantage of transport geography, and the three countries (together with other partners) were able to launch a cooperative rather than competitive environment, with sea transport as their principal competitor. The trade facilitation progress is the highest in the region.* Massive governmental investments into the infrastructure and transport technologies (digitalization of accompanying documents) led to smooth cross-border traffic and legal mechanisms. All these factors resulted in a competitive decrease in time delivery. The transport costs became reasonably balanced between the least expensive ship and high-cost air freight. The gradual removal of current Chinese subsidies (they are planned to be removed by 2022) will force the transport companies to find even more effective ways to remain competitive.*

*UNTF 2019

*Huilin Shi 2021

The construction or reconstruction of railways itself is reminiscent, to some extent, of the geopolitical struggle of the 19th century, where strategic position stands above the economic cost of the reconstruction. Chinese credits, ADB loans and grants, and local resources, are allocated in many cases to allow the railway (re)construction for political and geopolitical reasons, regardless of economic viability.* However, in spite of these enormous amounts, the rationalization of operational costs, coordination by different partners, and the favourable geographical position between important customers (China, Germany and several other developed EU states) increased the demand on the main China-Kazakhstan-Russia-EU route.

*Peyrouse and Raballand 2015

Table B: Volume of Traffic on China-EU-China Container Trains (2015-2020)

	China-Russia-EU	Baku-Tbilisi-Kars	Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran
2015	46,000		
2016	104,500		1
2017	175,800	198	5
2018	280,500	1332	**15
2019	333,000	2774	**65
2020	546,900	*1260	

Amounts listed in 1000 TEU, referring to twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) containers.

* January-October 2020 figures

** Estimations

Sources: *The Eurasian Rail Alliance* (www.utlc.com) – (The company claims that it participates in about 91% of overall China-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus/Ukraine-EU rail traffic); for the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, see: Devadze 2019.

As the initiator, integrator (and part creditor) of the railway infrastructure, China gains a significant geopolitical advantage. Massive modernization of the Central Asian railway brought about the implementation of Chinese railway technologies that substituted the Soviet ones. Outdated Soviet or Czechoslovakian engines and carriages have often been replaced by Chinese ones, and partly – in Kazakhstan – by American or Russian ones. This aspect has already increased the dependence on China regarding the maintenance of the tracks and carriages. There is still much discussion about the debt-trap being introduced by China to less developed countries (Africa, Central Asia except Kazakhstan and partially Uzbekistan), although some authors challenge this threat.*

*Brautigam 2020; Lai et al. 2020

Conclusions

Railway geopolitics has substantially evolved since the 19th century from the very existence of railways that enabled a territory's control, to a form of cost effective, fast and competitive transport (*vis-à-vis* sea and air), to the continuously improved effectivity that allows decreased transportation costs (especially from inland to inland locations) compared to sea transport.*

*Jakóbowski et al. 2018; Pomfret 2020

Central Asian states and their railway systems are somewhat under the geopolitical threat of being captured politically by surrounding powers. The attempt to control the railways could appear in smaller and less developed states, but China has no application for the existing dead-end railways. The construction of the eventual transit routes (typically a China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway) might change that situation.

More likely, one will observe an increasing gap between Kazakhstan as the regional railway power and the rest of the region, whose share in the transcontinental railway transport will remain minor. Kazakhstan is a positive example for the 'landlockedness' theory that used favourable combinations of its geography, relative economic potential, Soviet infrastructural heritage (and post-Soviet reconstruction), legal culture, and ideological geographical imagination 'at the crossroads of the Eurasian continent.' On the contrary, the four other Central Asian countries remain 'landlocked inside a landlocked region.'

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CASE STUDY 6

The Story of Makhsudbek ('Misha'), a Labour Migrant from Uzbekistan

by

BHAVNA DAVÉ

- ▶ Chapter 21 (Bhavna Davé)
- ▶ Chapter 19 (Luca Anceschi and Julia Schwab)

Case Study Assignment

Read the following story of an Uzbek migrant in Russia and reflect on how his individual experience relates to the general phenomena described in the Chapter 21. Answer the following questions:

- How does Makhsud's life experience help us to understand the nature of 'illegality' of migrants? Do you see him as a victim of Russia's inconsistent migration policies?
- What do you think Makhsud could have done to acquire all the relevant papers to be able to work legally in Russia?
- What does this particular case tell us about the effectiveness of a state's migration laws and efforts to combat 'illegal' migration?
- Discuss how and why migrants such as Makhsud become targets of prejudice and ethno-racial profiling by the state security officials.

In what ways could Makhsud's experience have been different if he were a citizen of Kyrgyzstan (a member state of the EAEU)? Imagine an alternative story. Then perform a broader reflection on the links between each of the five Central Asian states' political economy (development paths, trade patterns, regional integration, labour market opportunities, etc.; see Chapter 19) and migration (its causes, patterns and obstacles for migrants).

Case study: The Story of Makhsudbek ('Misha'), a Labour Migrant from Uzbekistan

I first met Makhsudbek (Makhsud, who introduced himself to me as 'Misha') in late 2012 in Moscow. I continued to meet with him at

least once a year during my various visits to Moscow since. My last meeting with him was in August 2018.

Makhsud first came to Moscow in 2007 during summer as a 17 year old, accompanying his father, aged 51 then, who was working on a construction site near Moscow. He hails from a village near Andizhan – number three of four children – has two older sisters – one of whom is married – and has another younger sister, two years younger than him. The province of Andizhan is in the densely populated Ferghana valley that also includes parts of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A large proportion of migrants from Central Asia working in Russia come from the rural parts of the Ferghana valley, hailing from large families, lacking higher education and proficiency in Russian.

Makhsud did not have an interest in studying further, and despite his mother's initial reservations, he was able to join his father to spend the Summer 2007 in Moscow. He began doing tiling jobs with his father at a construction site. He was registered as 18 years of age at the site and no proof was requested. He went back to Uzbekistan after three months but returned to Moscow in early 2009, when he had turned 19. His father had decided to return to Andizhan in 2008 to look after the farm and family matters, and to take care of his health.

Makhsud used his father's contacts initially to do various construction jobs in Moscow. After working for over a year, he went back to Uzbekistan in 2010 for a couple of months, also carrying some \$800 in cash with him. The Uzbek border police took away most of the cash (except some \$200 that he had managed to hide elsewhere), accusing him of illegally bringing in the money. Pressured to make up for the lost money, and also to save for his own marriage and for his two unmarried sisters, he returned to Moscow within a month. He worked in Moscow for another two years without returning to Uzbekistan. He got good money, learnt new skills, improved his Russian and came to be widely known as 'Misha.'

Every three months – upon the expiry of the three month visa-free stay stamped on his migration card – Makhsud and three other Uzbek migrants would hire a car, cross the border into Ukraine to secure fresh migration cards which would allow them another 90 days' stay. (All of them were working without a legal permit as the *patent* introduced in 2010 only allowed a migrant to work for an individual household. Only from 2015, following amendments to Russia's migration laws, did the modified patent allow migrants to work in other sectors, i.e. commercial enterprises, construction). Typically, migrants crossing the border then would pay about 400

to 500 rubles (about \$10-15 then) each to the Ukrainian, and then Russia border guards upon entry to Ukraine and Russia respectively – it was a well-established, routinised practice in which everyone Russian knew the informal price of border crossing. No questions were asked and very few words were exchanged between them and the border guards.

From 2013 tighter border control laws came into effect in Russia with the new laws restricting the term of stay for visitors under the CIS visa-free regime to 90 days in a 180-day period (the 90/180 rule), thus putting an end to the 'pendulum' migration. At the same time, citizens of EAEU member states (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia) could stay for 6 months, and take up any employment without requiring a patent or work permit. They only needed to obtain the mandatory registration within 7 days of arrival and conclude a written agreement with the employer.

The outbreak of war with Ukraine following Russia's takeover of Crimea in early 2014 led to the closure of border. The economic conditions were also worsening due to the slump in oil and gas prices and the ensuing fall in the value of the Russian ruble. Makhsud and co-workers in the brigade had been waiting for four months to get paid for the jobs as the employer began haggling about the quality of their work and price. None of them had any legal contract or permit to work. Makhsud then came across a band of Chechens who specialised in 'resolving' petty financial and family disputes that could not be taken to courts. The leader of this band intimidated the employer to pay the wages to the Uzbek brigade, in turn keeping about a third of the money as a fee. Secure in his new connections and with his improved Russian and enhanced knowledge of the trade, Makhsud set up his own construction brigade, becoming a *brigadir* hiring other Uzbeks, most of whom were from his native Andizhan. He continued to rely on his Chechen contacts in case of any disputes or delays about payment of wages. He had saved enough money for his marriage. He went back to Uzbekistan in late 2015 for a month, got married, and returned to Moscow with his wife. She returned to Uzbekistan a few months later after becoming pregnant.

By this time Russia had introduced a new patent in 2015 that allowed migrants to work in commercial enterprises, including in construction. The patent was valid for one year and required the migrants to make a monthly payment of about \$30. The average cost for obtaining all the documentation for the patent (residence registration, medical insurance, various medical tests, Russian language proficiency test etc), including the money paid to the middle-

men or *posredniki* to obtain the relevant papers, was in the range of \$500-600. Makhsud decided not to obtain a patent due to the high costs, risking instead to work without any formal documentation. An estimated 60 percent of the Central Asian migrants at that time had been working without patent or legal permit.

Russia also introduced the draconian law imposing 're-entry bans' on migrants with two or more 'administrative violations,' requiring payment of a fine. Depending on the nature of the violation, they were banned from re-entering for a period of two, three or five years. Makhsud found himself on this 'black list' (*chernyi spisok*) as he had already been fined for two violations of the migration law – the first violation occurred when he claimed that he was wrongly accused of being drunk by the police though he had only been drinking a cola out of a can – he thinks that his rather dishevelled appearance after a long day at work may have been a contributory factor – "besides, the police are only looking for someone to fine as they have to fulfil their allocated target of identifying violations". The second time, he spent 2 days in a detention cell for punching a drunk Russian youth who used some derogatory slur about Uzbeks and about his mother. "I will never tolerate anyone saying anything like this about my mother (...)," he said, fully convinced that he was right in beating up this person, adding that he would do it again if anyone else used such a slur against his mother. He was released after paying the fine. By this time Makhsud knew that not only did he already have two violations, having already overstayed his authorized term. He would thus be unable to re-enter Russia for a period of two to five years, so continuing to stay on in Russia without a legal status was the only option he had. "I cannot go back – it would be absolutely devastating. I have old parents, a wife and a daughter (the daughter was born with some congenital issue that required treatment) and a younger unwed sister. There simply are no decent jobs in Uzbekistan and I am not needed at home, I am useful only here" – he explained.

From time to time the police would check his documents, and he managed to pay a bribe and be let free. However, he had been living very precariously and knew that he was very susceptible to being put in detention camps for an indefinite period, and ultimately deported. Among other things, he also needed to send money regularly to pay for his daughter's treatment. He then opted to pay a Tajik broker – "a good man who had helped many fellow Tajiks and other migrants" – and got himself a Tajik passport under a different identity. He borrowed money from several other acquaintances in order to pay about \$600 for obtaining a new Tajik passport. The

last time I met him was in spring 2018. He had a Tajik passport, was in debt, and had been struggling to find work. His daughter's condition had not improved, and he needed to send as much money as he could for her treatment. He also had an Armenian companion (with Russian passport), and had been contemplating ways of marrying her in order to obtain a right to stay in Russia with his new Tajik passport identity.

Overview of Learning Outcomes

II. IDENTITIES AND HISTORICAL ROOTS

CH4 The Original Islamization of Central Asia: From the Arab Frontier Colonies to the 'Governate Dynasties' (650-1000) – Bruno J. De Cordier

- Understand the process of original Islamization of Central Asia and its relevance to the present confessional-cultural geography and identity of the region.
- Assess the processes and dynamics of social-cultural transformation at work during the different phases of Central Asia's original Islamization, and recognize these when they appear in other regions and episodes.
- Recognize the characteristics as well as formal and informal institutions of empires and other political greater spaces.
- Explain a number of basic concepts of Islamic political theology as well as (historical) Islamic political institutions.
- Describe the dynamics and patterns of religious conversion.

CH5 Early modern interactions between pastoral nomadic and sedentary societies in the Central Asian culture complex – Vincent Fourniau

- Discuss historical cycles in Central Asian history.
- Argue that the notion of Central Asia applies both to a cultural area and to a historical one.
- Understand the difficulties in the process of defining Central Asia as a historical space.
- Relate the geographic distribution of the irrigated agriculture in Central Asia with the political limits of its dynastic-political entities.
- Explain why the Chinggisid legitimacy is an integrating force in Central Asian history.
- Relate some major moments of the nomadic-sedentary interactions with political events of Central Asian history.
- Name the main components of the nomadic-sedentary interactions in Central Asian history in political, cultural or religious, and linguistic terms.
- Relate the process of Turkization among the Central Asian populations with the notions of interaction, acculturation and circulation.

CH6 Orientalism, Postcolonial and Decolonial Frames on Central Asia: Theoretical Relevance and Applicability – Svetlana Gorshenina

- Recognize the characteristics of orientalist discourse.
- Understand a number of basic concepts of Orientalism.
- Present the main ideas of postcolonial theory in the context of the post-Soviet space (both in Russia and Central Asia).
- Understand the dynamics of postcolonial discourse between anti-colonial arguments, nationalism and self-orientalization.

- Describe a variety of historiographic interpretations of Tsarist and Soviet colonialism among Russian and Central Asian scholars, before and after 1991.
- Compare Tsarist and Soviet situations as colonial or non-colonial.

CH7 Central Asia's Contemporary (Post-Soviet) Religious Landscape: A 'De-Secularization' in the Making? – Sébastien Peyrouse

- Introduce the diversity of religions, as well as the multitude of internal trends and denominations in each religion present in Central Asia.
- Demonstrate the impact of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes on the current religious situation in Central Asia.
- Describe the phenomenon of increasing religiosity in CA.
- Understand the true causes of the so-called religious revival in today's Central Asia.
- Argue that the post-Soviet Central Asian authoritarian regimes have instrumentalized the alleged religious renewal to gain political legitimacy.
- Highlight the impact of globalization on religions in Central Asia.
- Give examples of politization of Islam in Central Asia.

CH8 The Historical Conditioning of Languages and Ethnicities in Central Asia - Gian Marco Moisé & Abel Polese

- Understand why the linguistic landscape of Central Asia is so complex.
- Present the linguistic landscape of Central Asia under the Tsarist Empire.
- Argue how the Soviet influence altered and shaped those cultures.
- Relate the languages with the nation-building processes after 1991.
- Relate the languages with the political agendas of the leaders of the countries.
- Give examples to illustrate that language policies are instruments of identity-building.

III. SOCIETAL-POLITICAL DYNAMICS

CH9 Clans, Class, Ethnicity and Politics in post-Soviet Central Asia – Jeremy Smith

- Describe the organization of clans and assess their role in Central Asia.
- Explain the limited presence of the class category in political rhetoric in post-Soviet Central Asia.
- Appreciate the role ethnicity plays in Central Asian politics.
- Distinguish between mythological or rhetorical uses of these terms, and reality.
- Recognize stereotypical characterizations of Central Asian societies.
- Compare Central Asian societies with each other and with other countries, based on the categories of clans, class and ethnicity.

CH10 Presidential Elections and Ruling Parties in Central Asia – Adrien Fauve

- Conceptualize party politics in authoritarian context.
- Apply the '4+1 pattern' to discuss parties and elections in Central Asia.
- Relate elections and referendums with the legitimization of power.
- Address continuity and change in Central Asian politics.
- Question the availability, nature and quality of election data in the region.

CH11 Political Regimes in Central Asia: Tracing Personalist Rule from the Khanates to the Present – Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch

- Understand the impact of personalization and the behaviour of such a regime.
- Classify Central Asia's political regimes.
- Trace different forms of rulership in Central Asia over time.
- Identify general historical junctures in the history of Central Asian state formation.
- Compare Central Asian regimes to their (post-colonial) counterparts from different regions.
- Explain how contemporary personalist regimes in Central Asia survive and thrive.
- Understand how these regimes came into existence (personalization of power).

CH12 Civil Society in Central Asia – Baktybek Kainazarov

- Explain the nature of civil society and its main actors in Central Asia.
- Describe the challenges faced by civil society in the region.
- Understand the links between civil society and democracy promotion.
- Present both the traditional and Soviet legacy in contemporary civil society in Central Asia.
- Explain the context for the challenges faced by women and other vulnerable groups in their bid for active participation in civil society.
- Differentiate among Central Asian countries regarding their state-society-media relations.

CH13 Women in Central Asia: Decolonizing Gender Studies – Rano Turaeva

- Mention important topics within the field of gender studies in Central Asia such as unveiling, polygamy and Zhensovet.
- Explain important historical developments concerning gender in Central Asia.
- Discuss the Hujum period, the Soviet unveiling campaign, and their implications for gender roles.
- Define concepts such as gender, polygamy, Zhensovet, zhenskiy vopros, hujum, kelin, and mahalla.
- Discuss selected methodological issues related to gender studies in Central Asia.

CH14 Contemporary Central Asian Legal Systems in Developmental Context: Genealogy, Political Economy, State Architecture – Scott Newton

- Understand the complex nature of the Soviet legal system and how it shaped and configured the Central Asian republics.
- Relate legal norms and institutions to political, social and economic factors and dynamics.
- Analyse the role of informal norms and processes in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia and their relation to formal legal norms and processes.
- Describe the relation of Central Asian legal systems to post-independence development.
- Distinguish the way civil and constitutional rules and procedures are applied and enforced in Central Asia from the way they are framed and formulated (law in practice vs. law on the books).
- Account for selective constitutional similarities and differences among the five Central Asian states.

IV. EXTERNAL INTERACTIONS

CH15 History and Evolution of Geopolitics toward Central Asia – Slavomír Horák

- Understand the importance and diversity of geopolitics in relation to Central Asia.
- Explain the geopolitics of Central Asia on a wide historical scale, long before geopolitics was defined as a scientific discipline.
- Be aware of changes in the geopolitical map of Central Asia in different historical periods.
- Give examples of the role of outside powers in the geopolitical construction of the region.
- Apply different geopolitical concepts to Central Asia to both geographical and historical perspectives.

CH16 Between Myth and Reality – The Restoration of the Silk Roads in Central Asia – Sébastien Peyrouse

- Contrast the historical Silk Roads with the context, stakes and goals of the contemporary Silk Roads projects.
- Understand the multiplicity of the contemporary silk roads projects and of their geographic, economic, political and social components.
- Assess the Silk Road Economic Belt's (SREB) potential positive impacts and threats on the economy and societies of Central Asia.
- Debate the current and future sustainability of the SREB in Central Asia.
- Elaborate on the geopolitical questions, including alliances and rivalries, that the SREB raises among the main foreign actors in the region (Russia), and beyond (South Asia, Japan, Western countries etc.).

CH17 International Relations in Central Asia: A Focus on Foreign Policies (1991-2020) – Catherine Poujol

- Describe the key elements of the Foreign Policies (FPs) of the five Central Asian states.
- Give arguments to explain specific choices of the five Central Asian states in their FPs, keeping in mind global, regional and domestic factors.
- Assess the impact of 9/11 on Central Asian FPs.
- List the main organizations and relevant issues on the regional level in Central Asia.
- Point out both reasons and difficulties for the regional integration of the Central Asian states.
- Discuss the impact of geographical isolation on the choice of FPs of the Central Asian states.
- Explain the role of the presidents in each Central Asian state since their independence.

CH18 Terrorism and Security in Central Asia – Maria Raquel Freire & Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro

- Understand the meaning of terrorism and its goals.
- Compare the concept of terrorism to other types of political violence.
- Assess the impact of the global 'War on Terror' in Central Asia.
- Give examples of events that have been labelled as terrorist incidents in the region.
- Explain how terrorism can be and has been appropriated in the region.
- Comprehend the consequences of presenting terrorism as a major threat in Central Asia.
- Critically interpret texts on terrorist events in Central Asia.

V. ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

CH19 Facing the Soviet Legacy: Political Economy and Development Patterns in Central Asia – Luca Anceschi & Julia Schwab

- Assess the continuous impact of Soviet legacies on the political economy of Central Asian states.
- Present the changes in the political economies of Central Asian states after 1991 and their development strategies.
- Describe the principal components of the political economies of the Central Asian states and assess their strengths and weaknesses.
- Discuss Central Asia's rentierism and compare it with forms of petrostates emerged in other regions of the world.
- Evaluate critically the nexus between the region's political economy and the consolidation of Central Asian rentierism.
- Describe the engagement of international actors in the Central Asian economies.
- Evaluate the Central Asian states' development strategies in terms of their sustainability.

CH20 Environmental Geopolitics in Central Asia – Natalie Koch

- Understand the historical and political roots of environmental issues in Central Asia.
- Explain how environmental geopolitics can be used to analyse environmental issues across scales.
- Present and explain how environmental issues relate to human security.
- Identify and explain key environmental issues in Central Asia.
- Assess and compare the different policy responses to environmental issues in the region.

CH21 Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Laws, Policies and Effects on Sending States – Bhavna Davé

- Understand the historical context and economic, demographic and political factors leading to labour migration from Central Asia to Russia.
- Analyse the laws and measures enacted by the Russian state to regulate migration and their effects.
- Identify the connections between Russia's migration laws and practices and migrants' legalization, their ethnoracial profiling by the officials, media and society, and corruption.
- Assess the impact of migration on sending states' policies, on their family and social structures.
- Examine the socio-economic effects of migrants' remittances on the sending states.
- Develop a critical perspective on the prevalent myths about migration including those about 'threats' to security and order.

CH22 Between Sotsgorod and Bazaar: Urbanization Dynamics in Central Asia – Suzanne Harris-Brandts & Abel Polese

- Describe urbanization processes in Central Asia during and after the Soviet era.
- Compare historical and contemporary urbanization patterns across Central Asia.
- Explain the links between the environment and urbanization.
- Explain the concept of mega-projects with examples from the region.
- Understand the challenges and future prospects of urbanization in the region.
- Assess urbanization dynamics and their underlying social, political, and economic forces.
- Understand different models of spatial development and urban growth in Central Asia.

Making of a chariot wheel.

INDICES

THIS INDEX is divided into four categories. Each index is not exhaustive, but only includes entries that yield relevant information.

- **Names** – names of languages, individuals, groups, peoples or (their) organizations. The latter are listed under their abbreviation (e.g. EAEU, SCO, BRI). Political regimes and their corresponding policies can be found under the name of their ruler; not by country.
- **Concepts** – theoretical and analytical conceptions applied by the authors, but also notions specific to the region (like parandji or clans) or entries like: mining, cotton, etc.
- **Events** – specific historical or political events and transformations that may be relevant for readers.
- **Places** – historical and contemporary names of relevant cities, (sub-)regions or other zones of interest (Steppe, mountains, deserts).

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560 Виды Туркестана.

Обработка полей и посевъ хлопка.

(олмы)

Preparing the field to sow cotton.

About the EISCAS project

Eurasian Insights: Strengthening Central Asian Studies in Europe (EISCAS) is an Erasmus+ Strategic partnership for higher education, which is co-funded by the European Union.

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Partners of the EISCAS Consortium (*alphabetically*)

- Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań – Poland (*Coordinating institution*)
- Charles University in Prague – Czech Republic
- Dublin City University – Republic of Ireland
- French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC) – Kyrgyzstan/France
- George Washington University – USA
- Ghent University – Belgium
- SOAS (University of London) – Great Britain
- University of Coimbra – Portugal
- University of Eastern Finland – Finland
- University of Glasgow – Great Britain
- University of Paris-Saclay – France

Mission

The main goal of EISCAS is to integrate the fragmented field of Central Asian Studies by strengthening its educational dimension through the development of teaching materials and curriculum design recommendations. All in open access format.

Publishing this book has been the most ambitious task of the project – to create a teaching material that does not exist yet in Europe and will be crucial for developing

and strengthening education on Central Asia. This handbook is designed to transfer the latest research findings into education and directly prepare these materials for the classroom with activities, assignments, e-learning materials, tips for future study, etc. In addition, the EISCAS team recorded a series of online lectures presenting core handbook topics in an accessible way for learners and teachers. Also, the project provides its content with a tailor-made user-guide (Chapter 3 in this book) on how to use this handbook for teaching or self-study.

Furthermore, the EISCAS developed *Curriculum Design Recommendations* (in a separate report) in the form of strategies for institutions to make Central Asian studies more relevant to the contemporary labour market and career advice for students, by mapping and showing students the multiple professional pathways after graduating Central Asian Studies.

Finally, EISCAS offered various initiatives to scholars and students. It organized two Master Classes (with one eventually cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic), a large international conference in Ghent (September 2021) and a Seminar in Bishkek (Fall 2021), in addition to some smaller events (e.g. special panels at the ESCAS and CESS conferences).

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THIS HANDBOOK is the first comprehensive teaching material for teachers and students of Central Asian Studies with an actual strong pedagogic dimension. It presents 22 chapters, clustered around five themes, with contributions from more than twenty scholars, all leading experts in the field of Central Eurasian Studies. The book doubles as a reference work for scholars. The book is framed to address post-colonial frameworks and, where possible, untangle topics from their 'Soviet' reference frame and point out pitfalls, myths and new insights. Chapters aim to de-exoticize the region and draw parallels to European or to historical European-occupied territories.

The goal is to provide solid background knowledge about Central Asia to readers, and intertwine this with an advanced level of insight to leave readers equipped with a strong foundation to approach more specialized sources either in classroom setting or through self-study. Authors (together with didactic experts and editors) took great care to explain concepts and provide (working) definitions.

In addition, the handbook offers a comprehensive glossary, concise atlas, didactic sections, info boxes, overviews of intended learning outcomes, and a smart index (distinguishing between: names, concepts, events and places). Online lectures (YouTube), recorded by the authors themselves, accompany the handbook either as instruction materials for teachers or as visual aids for students.

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