



Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: The Mountain Communities of Pamir. Edited by Dagikhudo Dagiev and Carole Faucher

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Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: The Mountain Communities of Pamir.
Edited by Dagíkhudo Dagiev and Carole Faucher

London, United Kingdom and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. xvi + 299 pp. Hardback: US\$ 140.00, ISBN 978-0-8153-5755-1. E-book: US\$ 54.95, ISBN 978-1-35-112426-3.

To focus on identity and transnationality in central Asian mountain societies located in a transition zone, with a host of borders demarcated during the age of imperialism, is definitely a major challenge. In addition, Tajikistan's migration history has created households with multilocal income-generation strategies reaching to Russia and Kazakhstan. This contributes to a further challenge in grasping the subject of the book, which is centered on perceived Pamirian mountain communities. Whoever they might be—as a speech community, region, village, or religious denomination—these inhabitants of the Pamirs have been confronted with many outsiders' appellations in tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet times. Leaving self-ascriptions aside, they have been denominated by outsiders as “Ghalcha,” mountain or Pamir Tajiks, “Pamirsku Narody” (Pamir people), and “Gornyje Tadjiki” (mountain Tajik) in contrast to “Dolinnye Tadjiki” (Tajik of the plains), and many more (Kreutzmann 2015: 141–146). The usage of the term “Pamiri” is neither less complex nor more straightforward, and the majority of inhabitants do not necessarily agree on its origin.

The editors claim that their volume of 15 papers is the “first collection of scholarly articles in English language entirely focusing on

the Pamiri people” (p 1). The question as to whether this is a sound description or an exceptional achievement is of secondary importance; they have brought together an interesting set of papers devoted to 3 broad themes.

The 4 papers in the first section are assembled under the heading “Identity formation, borders and political transformations.” These papers are devoted to fathoming the idiographic value and uniqueness of what is perceived as Pamirian. The editors would have done well to state their perspective from the outset, which includes only communities with an eastern Iranian language background and an Ismaili affiliation to Islam. The book neglects Pamirian dwellers who speak Turkic vernaculars and speakers of western Iranian languages. Any method of selection for a collection of individual chapters is justifiable, and in this case it is probably linked to the fact that the majority of authors have some affiliation to the Aga Khan Development Network or its academic branches—and it is laudable that scholarship from the central Asian region is assembled here. The 4 papers draw our attention to an area that is the focus of the book: Badakhshan. In a narrow sense, this is perceived as the non-Kyrgyz Gorno-Badakhshan; in a wider sense, it includes the transfrontier Afghan Badakhshan as well as the adjacent areas with speakers of eastern Iranian vernaculars in Pakistan and China (see Kreutzmann and Watanabe 2016; Mostowlansky 2017, 2019). This region is sometimes described as the “Pamirian Crossroads” to highlight the regional aspects of connection, separation, and transition. This first group of papers draws on scholarship rooted in Soviet ethnography and excellent language studies. From this point of departure, the authors connect with contemporary academic challenges and debates, such as endangerment, marginalization, transformation, or post-Soviet identity formation—thus

contributing to updates of long-standing questions.

The second group, consisting of 5 papers, is devoted to “Archaeology, myths, intellectual and cultural heritage.” Embedded in intellectual roots that made for fruitful academic investigations, such as those related to Zoroaster and the dawn of Ismailism in Badakhshan—seeded by the 11th-century missionary Pir Nasir-i Khusraw—the majority of these papers bring scholarship up to the present. Their themes reflect on Ismaili institutional organization and forgotten members of the religious elite of the 20th century, showing transnational connections and the exchange of ideas and missionary zeal across borders. It is laudable that attention is drawn to developments in the past century that need further research, which should be based on local sources and collective memories.

The final 5 papers are assembled under the heading of “Social cohesion, interactions and globalisation” and give special attention to the challenges of our time in the age of the Internet, networking, new forms of everyday communication, and formal and religious education. This section of the book is most prominent in addressing issues so far grossly neglected and proposes directions for future research.

Variations in the quality of individual scholarship and the resulting papers are common to most edited volumes, including this one. Any reader will find both excellent contributions and more shallow ones on both appealing topics and well-known issues. Some authors obviously had difficulties accessing proper libraries or academic repositories for their work and relied on outdated sources or Wikipedia-style repositories. However, the majority of the papers are well informed and offer a host of new insights into the 3 broad themes. While the somewhat misleading book title and the ambiguity about what is Pamirian is

irritating, this book might stimulate further debates and challenge those who are less ethnicity focused and interested in regional issues. Regarding the book's appearance, the negligent publisher would do well to improve the layout in such expensive books so that the minuscule illustrations and black-and-white reprints from colorful and larger historical maps could be read and fulfil their function of augmenting the text and enhancing understanding of the setting. As it is, almost none of the illustrations are properly readable or up to common layout standards (see legible reprints of historical maps and illustrations of the region eg in Kreutzmann 2017a and 2017b.)

The editors should be praised for their efforts to feed necessary and timely academic discussions of salient

issues that have taken new turns after the independence of central Asian republics and are constitutive for internal societal relations. The opportunity of transboundary academic cooperation will create further momentum if common issues are identified and addressed from various regional and disciplinary perspectives.

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