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Central Asia Reconsidered: Old Problems, New Paradigms

IWASAKI Ichiro, UYAMA Tomohiko and KOMATSU Hisao, eds.,
*Contemporary Central Asia: In-Depth Analysis of Political and
Economic Transformation*

Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronsha, 2004, pp. xxi+301.

岩崎一郎・宇山智彦・小松久男(編)【現代中央アジア論】

Timur Dadabaev

This ambitious and timely volume by a group of eminent Japanese scholars of Central Asia distinguishes itself by its challenging agenda, the diverse yet complementary backgrounds of its contributing authors, its wealth of innovative ideas and exciting setting.

The editors, Ichiro Iwasaki, Tomohiko Uyama and Hisao Komatsu, undertake to depict, in a detailed and three-dimensional manner, the search for a prosperous and self-sufficient development in the newly independent post-Soviet Central Asian states (p. iii). The three core principles that this study attempts to follow throughout individual chapters are: to emphasize diversity and individual specificity of Central Asian states, to reflect the historical continuity and connectedness of their Soviet and post-Soviet histories, and to stress the close correlation of political and economic problems faced by these countries (pp. iii-v). Mainly due to these self-imposed principles, this volume does not consider political and economic transition in post-Soviet Central Asia through the prism of a country-by-country analysis, but zooms in on selected issues in the development of all Central Asian states. A comparative analysis of targeted countries is then applied while analyzing each issue.

This volume thus comprises essentially a collection of case studies on issues such as the transformation of political structures, systems, institutions, ethnic composition, resurgence of Islam, international standing, economy, ecological problems and the problems of integration into world economy, all of which are essential and the most discussed areas in contemporary Central Asian studies. These issues are divided into politics-related and economics-related sets of chapters.

The book is primarily intended for a wide audience of students and others interested in Central Asian studies and taking their first steps in the field. As such, it fulfils the very important role of introducing the region to new-comers into this field. Particularly superb in this context is the introductory chapter "Central Asian Overview: History and the Region" by Hisao Komatsu, who sets out an impressive survey of the centuries-old history of Central Asia in a direct yet richly detailed manner, and sketches in terms of this historical background the etiology of problems currently faced in the region. His chapter is also of the greatest importance for an understanding of the book as a whole: it conceptually binds together the collection of articles into the unified vision of the book. The main methodological tool of this chapter is to connect in a natural way historical developments and current problems, with the implication that these problems were historically predetermined by virtue of various regional developments. Structurally, Komatsu first takes the reader on a brief journey through the geography and history of medieval Central Asia by explaining how the population of this region was first split into nomadic and settled groups. Then he describes how these two groups were influenced by a range of events such as "Turkification" and "Islamization", Russian expansion, and the policy of border delimitation of Central Asia in 1924, all of which had long-term impact on the development of the region. These influences and eventual problems associated with them are considered to be among the most important for both historical and the contemporary Central Asia.

Komatsu summarizes his historical account with the view that Central Asian states constitute one region with a single history, similar traditions and shared problems and concerns. Accordingly, he concludes, these problems should be addressed in a concerted effort as opposed to the individualistic policies seen in the post-independence years.

After the comprehensive introductory chapter by Komatsu, the chapter "Republican Political Structure in the Soviet period: Communist Regime and Growth of National Elites" by Tetsuro Chida opens the part of the book dedicated to politics-related issues in Central Asia. This chapter is one of two dealing with the broad theme of political transformation and change. Elegantly compiled, it explains the basics of the political system of the Soviet Union, including facts on the formation of the federal structure and national elites of the Soviet Union after the revolution in Russia, and on the role of the Communist party in this process.

It also offers an overview of how national elites grew in parallel with the establishment of republican structure in these republics. Chida aims to convey that the political elites formed under the Soviet system eventually became the backbones of the independence of their republics.

The chapter firstly describes the pre-Soviet period, before proceeding through a brief analysis of the policy of "korenizatsiya" (localization of governance) and examining the features of political mobilization during the consecutive eras of Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Perestroika.

Briefly depicting each of these eras, it discusses Stalin's rule which was mainly characterized by the policies of nationalization in the pre-war years and the policy of deportation of various peoples from other Soviet territories (Chechens, Crimean Tatars, etc.) into Central Asia. Through the period of Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's rule, Moscow tried to strengthen its rule by implementing a system of total control over the national elites. According to this study, the promotion of political elites during Brezhnev's era should be considered both from the viewpoint of "regional belonging" (to include regionalism and "client-patron" relations as constituent elements) and with regard to the "ability" of the individual members of those elites.

In the next chapter "Political Regime and Political System: Presidential Form of Governance and Authoritarianism", Tomohiko Uyama focuses on the issues related to political systems and regimes in Central Asia, paying particular attention to the concepts of presidential governance and authoritarianism. In doing so, this chapter partly supplements the coverage of Chida's chapter, and partly develops new concepts.

This is clearly one of the book's most thought-provoking chapters. The greatest accomplishment of this chapter is that it conducts a comparative analysis of political systems and regimes of five Central Asian states and puts this empirical analysis into coherent theoretical perspective. It emphasizes that two issues – strengthening the political system to support independence, and rebuilding the economy – ranked the highest in the agenda of post-Soviet Central Asian states, while democratization was accorded only secondary importance. What could have been added to this part of the chapter is that, alongside these two top concerns mentioned by Uyama, the issue of preservation of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional peace and stability was given primary importance in most decisions taken by the Central Asian governments in the immediate aftermath of the demise of the USSR. In many instances, such "preservation of peace and stability" rhetoric has been exploited widely and quite effectively to neutralize the democratization demands of opposition movements and to limit the political and even personal freedoms of the population.

In terms of constitutional changes, Uyama depicts Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as countries which follow French-modeled constitutions, with slight amendments and additions, while Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are described as having hybrid constitutions of an American-French type. Especially provocative is the case of Turkmenistan, which is depicted as having unique constitutional structures, which Uyama calls *Sultanism*, heavily rely-

ing on the research of Linz and his colleagues. Uyama's provocative analysis provides a perspective that needs to be further elaborated. One feature in such further studies would be an exploration of how one draws the line between totalitarianism and *Sultanism*, and where exactly that line lies. In view of this, the use of such relatively new and not yet internationally tested concepts as *Sultanism* in a volume intended for a student readership is quite a risky but courageous step.

Another set of original ideas in this chapter includes the description of the transition process from state authoritarianism towards presidential authoritarianism, and a vision of relations between the state and the society, characterized by the unbalanced paradigm of strong state and weak society.

By way of augmentation of the previous chapter by Chida, this chapter by Uyama also briefly touches upon the phenomenon of localism, admirably paving the way for separate research in this area. In particular, how localism rates with respect to ethnic and other identities, an analysis of "patron-client" relations, and comparative analysis of case studies can be hailed as perspective directions for further research on the topic of localism.

The issues of Nationalism, with particular focus on (ethno-) Nationalizing States in Central Asia, emerge in the chapter "Ethnicity and Politics: Nationalization of the State and the Change in Inter-ethnic Relations" by Natsuko Oka. Oka's article is dense and oriented towards an audience well acquainted with both theoretical and empirical literature on this region. Oka provides a disarmingly technical comparative analysis of essentialist and constructivist approaches to nationalism, later applying their findings to Central Asia. In the context of post-Soviet Central Asia, Oka operates with the "(ethno-) nationalization" concept formulated by Brubaker. This chapter very professionally points out that this process is taking place in Central Asian states through a number of policy areas such as the reformulation of histories, language (changes in alphabets, etc), staffing, border delimitation and citizenship policies. In this sense, this chapter provides a well compiled and accurately documented overview of present developments in the region.

A signal virtue of this chapter is the author's diligence in putting empirical data into the theoretical realm and thus contributing to the discussion of these issues at a higher level than that of simple empirical observation. This chapter does not answer all the questions it touches upon, but serves as the generator of a new analytical research agenda, the pursuit of which will greatly contribute to the understanding of how policies of these states have evolved over the first thirteen years of independence. How have national policies in respect to ethnicity evolved in these states over the independence years? What made these policies change from the initial overwhelming recognition of the importance of multi-ethnicity seen during the initial years of independence, towards extreme forms of ethno-

nationalism camouflaged under multi-ethnicity rhetoric? How one can classify the stages of such policy transition? The impressive analysis of Oka will help to develop answers to these additional questions in future studies on this topic, and provide new policy options and concrete suggestions going beyond the conclusion of this chapter, which restricts itself to the finding that pseudo-multi-ethnicity is not helpful in the creation and management of a healthy multi-ethnic society.

Chika Obiya's chapter "Religion and Politics: In Search of Balance between Islamic Revival and Secularism" provides an overview of the historical circumstances behind the change of the status of religion in this region. It also offers data on the multi-confessional nature of the region, and on the principle of secularism, which is certainly inherited from the policies of the Soviet Union. While such characterizations of Central Asian societies generally depict them as secular, this chapter registers the strong rooting of communal religious beliefs in the region. The chapter then offers a background of relations between the state and religious institutions, dividing the analysis into pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods, which is diagnostically a very successful tool for the examination of this issue. According to this chapter, the Soviet period was characterized by atheistic education, secularism and the exploitation of religion by the Soviet government as a foreign policy tool in its relations with other Muslim countries. For the post-Soviet period, the chapter stresses attempts by Central Asian governments to downplay the role of religion in the society, attributing to it an important but not the primary role in social life. Another feature of this period described in the chapter is the attempt to create politically "correct" forms of religion (Islam) and even indirectly control the process of religious thought formation and education through the creation of state-sponsored or -initiated Islamic educational institutions throughout post-Soviet Central Asia. The chapter goes on to provide an analysis of the Islamic revival and examples of various expressions of "political" Islam, as in the sections on Islam in the Tajik civil war and on the self-proclaimed extremist organization "Islamic Movement" of Uzbekistan. In general, this chapter is one of the most accurate, balanced, objective and empirically well substantiated parts of this book. At a stroke, Obiya manages to capture and convey to the reader both the details of particular events and an overall picture of the development of Islam in the region. This chapter provides reliable data and a valuable background for future studies, which will require further such data from first-hand sources and field research.

The final chapter in the Politics-related part of this book is "International Relations and Security: Formation of Regional System and Transnational Threats" by Takeshi Yuasa. This chapter analyzes foreign policies, international relations and security in Central Asia. Its focal point is the security of the region, which should be taken in a narrow, partly old-

fashioned, sense – that of military and territorial integrity. Yuasa's theoretical perspectives are formed from realists', liberalists' and constructivists' assumptions of international relations. The originality of this chapter consists of the approach by which it combines rather than counterposes the findings of these three schools of thought, and which is fully justified by the complexity of international relations in post-Soviet Central Asia. Further, this chapter adopts a three-layered analytical structure by looking at the international relations in the region from internal (country-based), regional (Central Asian) and trans-regional (Eurasian) perspectives. From an internal perspective, Yuasa restates the well known fact that Central Asians were slow in asserting their sovereignty and independence, which was also reflected in an ongoing adherence to the Russian-centered security system and line of military command in the Central Asian states. The change came in the late 1990s when these states realized the advantages and indeed the necessity of rebuilding their own forces in the face of the new threats and of increasingly complicated relations with Russia. Yet Russia remained in the region for the greater part of 1990s as the most significant force, despite the fact that many of the Russian officers returned to Russia and a number of strategic positions were retaken under the control of Central Asian armies. This chapter also successfully demonstrates how Russian policy towards Central Asia has changed from total neglect (exemplified by the Andrey Kozirev policies) towards engagement and the setting up of new structures for preserving Russian influence in the region.

Although debatable in some of its nuances, Yuasa's division of Uzbek foreign policy towards Russia into three stages – namely: multi-dimensional yet pro-Russian (1992 - 1995), tension-prod (1995 - 2000) and pro-Western (2000 to present) – presents a strong case in favor of the periodization of Uzbek foreign policy. This chapter tells the reader little, however, about the specific criteria behind this particular division. One inconsistency in Yuasa's division is exemplified by recent developments such as the Uzbekistan-initiated and actively pursued conclusion of a strategic partnership agreement with Russia, and Russia's entry into the Central Asian Cooperation Organization in 2004: such developments do not fit Yuasa's classification and leave many questions unanswered. ⁽¹⁾ On the other hand, such contradictory elements in foreign policy of Uzbekistan, are indeed partly addressed by what Yuasa refers to as the realist school of thought. According to it, Uzbekistan never had a long-term or clearly-defined foreign policy, leaving all options open and using available (sometimes contradictory) opportunities whenever it saw an advantage. This pattern of behavior is also attributed to the other Central Asian states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, a fact accurately registered in this chapter. From Eurasian perspectives, this chapter details the presence of various players such as NATO, OSCE, SCO who, especially after 9/11, have actively pursued their policies in the region as a

whole. In this chapter Yuasa also elaborates on Japanese Central Asian policy, which at the time of the publishing of this book was characterized as poorly defined, and the author advocates for Japan a new more engaged approach to this region. As if responding to this call, in August of 2004 the Japanese Central Asian foreign policy was redefined and a grouping of the "Japan + Central Asia Dialogue" scheme was established.

The next chapter, "Economical situation of Republics in the Soviet Era: Central Asian Economic Development under the Planned Economy" by Taizo Nakamura, serves as an introduction into the Economics-related part of this book. This chapter attempts to provide a background for the analysis of modern Central Asian economic development by firstly highlighting the essence of the system under Soviet rule and examining what was wrong with that system. It begins with the description of the concept of planned economy in the USSR by explicating the Marxist-Leninist concept of a revolutionary transition from Capitalism to Communism. It then analyzes the beginning of the planning system, the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the growth of the agricultural sector through implementation of 5-year plans. The strength of this chapter is that it not only describes economic policies of various periods but also provides an analysis of each period, detailing how and why one policy precipitated changes in another. This analysis includes coverage of the pre-Khrushchev, Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. It then explains the nature of product-specialization and concludes with suggestions of what went wrong with the planning system. This chapter identifies norm (quantity)-oriented production, an ineffective system of administration both at governmental and local level and the existence of an informal (second) economic structure as the main problems of the Soviet economic system. Even policies of reform under Andropov and Gorbachev, which included both stricter control over production and more freedom for entrepreneurs, did not work due to a number of circumstances.

Ichiro Iwasaki's chapter on "Transition to the Market Economy and Macro-economic Data: Polarization of the Economic Systems" in Central Asia further develops Nakamura's argument. This chapter suggests that the complexity of Central Asian economic transition is further complicated by the problem of modernization of production structures faced by all developing countries. The chapter supports this argument through firstly describing reasons for the necessity of transition. A feature of this chapter which distinguishes it from similar studies, is that it clearly defines and explains various stages and developments not only through Soviet but also in post-Soviet economic history in a very detailed and a professional manner. This is especially true for the parts of this chapter on regime transition, liberalization, enterprise and financial sector reform. Whether intentionally or not, this chapter did not touch on the "developmental state" policies, which

were favored in Central Asia in the mid-1990s and inspired by the models of East Asian and Japanese economic growth. Also, the central part of this chapter dealing with macro-economic analysis is very comprehensive yet somewhat less comprehensible for a non-economist readership than previous sections. And finally, this chapter offers an extremely detailed analysis of macro-economic data for two groupings of the Central Asian countries: free-market reform oriented Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and state-led reform oriented Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Iwasaki concludes fairly pessimistically regarding the economic development of both groups, warning about current and potential challenges for all these countries. While admitting that the rationale of slower economic reforms in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is mainly justified by the aim of protecting the population, Iwasaki still believes that a centralized economic system does not guarantee sustainable prosperity for the populations of these states. Therefore he suggests that economic problems should not be dealt with at the level of government but at that of enterprises and companies, for which the necessary conditions should be created. Iwasaki convincingly concludes that economic development based on the energy resource revenues has its limits. For Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which seem to embrace the free-market economic reforms, Iwasaki defines four main problems: close correlation between large enterprises and the survival of local communities, the problem of so called "oligarchs", corruption of governmental officials and the limits of decentralization reforms in meeting the challenges of globalization.

The same kind of division between two groups as used by Iwasaki can be seen in the analysis of agricultural policy in the following chapter by Kouji Nishikimi entitled "Agricultural Reform: Reality of Market-based System Formation". This chapter focuses on the analysis of reform in the agricultural sector, which accounts for a large proportion of the labor force, investment and GDP in post-Soviet Central Asia. The overall situation in the agricultural sector is characterized by a slowing down in agricultural production in all Central Asian countries. In the post-independence period, these states pursued self-sufficiency goals which led to some diversification of agricultural production. This chapter details these trends and offers a close analysis of the cultivation of various products.

Regarding liberalization of the agricultural sector, this chapter again draws a line between the group of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are perceived by the author as free-reform oriented liberalized countries, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as a group of slowly liberalizing countries. The first group of countries initially encountered problems in connection with radical reforms and a lack of producers' capacity to produce without state sponsorship. However, this trend seems to have been overcome and their agricultural sectors appear slowly but certainly to be recouping the losses of the early post-

Soviet years. This chapter also details the financing mechanisms of newly created private enterprises in the countries that pursue liberalization of their agricultural sectors. The conclusion of this chapter is that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the countries which are most active in their attempts to reform their agricultural sectors. The message that this chapter develops through all its parts is that private initiative and private agricultural enterprises are a far better option than any governmentally-run or supervised creations.

This chapter however is lacking in sufficient data and analysis to inform the reader about the processes of reform in the countries with the two biggest agricultural sectors in the region – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Indeed, little is known about agricultural reform in Turkmenistan. Yet Uzbekistan's efforts to reform its agricultural sector are widely studied and publicized. ⁽²⁾ To mention a few: these efforts include the adoption of the Shirkat (a large agricultural cooperative, with the "Pudrat" system of team and family contribution), Farmer (medium-size producers) and Dehqon (small-size producers) Laws of 1998, the amendments to these laws, the introduction of the concept of Development of Farmer Enterprises of 2003 and the eventual development of the concept of Water Consumers' Associations. In addition, the general trend in Uzbekistan's agricultural sector aimed at decreasing the number of bigger producers and increasing the number of smaller production units (farmers and dehqons), and experiments with creation of agricultural companies, are not covered in this chapter.

The issues of water policy and environmental aspects of Central Asian agricultural development are partly outlined in the following chapter on "Environmental Problems: Between an Inherited 'Loosing Lot' and Market Economy" by Hirobumi Katayama. This chapter suggests that the environmental problems, lack of water, and land and water pollution faced by all Central Asian states are further complicated by the problems associated with the political and economic transition of these states. From an institutional point of view, this chapter defines two issues of primary importance for Central Asian states: the provision of a legislative basis to protect the environment, and the establishment of a system which will charge environmental costs to those who actually produce environmental waste. This is further connected to the issue of "environmental financing" and the norms sought by the United Nations Environmental Commission for Europe (UNECE). The final part of the chapter focuses on the problem of the Aral Sea and perspectives of cooperation between the states in the region. All in all, this chapter is informative and introduces some new perspectives and worthwhile concepts.

However, this chapter also includes a number of confusing or inadequately explained elements. Firstly, the rationale behind the concept of environmental financing is

difficult to follow. Secondly, the chapter falls short of basic empirical findings on water issues in Central Asia. Among its technical mistakes is the incorrect Russian-language expansion of BVO as “бассейнновое водноеотъединение” (literally meaning “basin-based water division”). BVO stands for “Бассейновое водохозяйственное объединение” (“basin-based water-management association”).⁽³⁾ Conceptually, Katayama’s analysis of the empirical data relating to inter-state relations on the water issue stops at the status of 1998. This chapter would have gained considerably from the analysis of the post-1998 case studies of water-related disputes and controversies such as that over the Toktokul (Kyrgyz) and Rogun (Tajik) Dams, the construction of the Golden Lake in Turkmenistan, water commercialization rhetoric in Kyrgyzstan, and the latest water crisis of winter (January-February) 2004.⁽⁴⁾ While these case studies provide an invaluable basis for theoretical consideration of the linkage between environment and economic development, unfortunately none of these are detailed or listed in this chapter. Accordingly, one of the conclusions in this chapter, that negotiations on water-related issues in Central Asia are conducted only around the division of water – leaving aside two other issues (water for energy swaps and water-energy-agriculture scheme) – is made without full information on the nature and the essence of regional negotiations held on water-related issues.

The final chapter by Miki Wajima deals with the internationalization of regional economic activity and Central Asian “Integration into World Economy: Caspian Reserves as the Key to the Door”. The first section of the chapter elaborates on the trade paradigm of the regional countries. In doing so, this chapter analyzes the trend according to which the former Soviet republics tend to trade with foreign partners because of the high prices for natural resources on the international market. And secondly, this chapter emphasizes that the nature of their trade has not changed much from the time when these republics were suppliers of raw materials within the structure of the Soviet Union. The second section of the chapter asserts that natural resources – oil and gas in particular – are key elements for attracting foreign investment into individual countries which possess these resources. In the final section, the chapter engages in geopolitical analysis of the situation surrounding Caspian oil.

This chapter’s argument is well defined and crucially proven by statistical data and facts. Especially attractive is its last part detailing the routes for transporting Caspian oil – the issue which has by now become one of the most disputed in the territory of the former Soviet Union. This part concisely explains the diversity of possible alternatives. However, what seems to be lacking is an analysis of the behavioral patterns of non-state, yet state-related multinational corporations like Gazprom of Russia. Such an analysis would have further enriched the perspectives on inter-state relations in this complicated region, and

would have added some fresh empirical data to those that already exist.

Concluding remarks

All in all, this book represents a well harmonized chorus of opinions on a number of vital issues for Central Asian development. It lays down clearly presented material on the current situation in the region and leaves certain niches to be developed in future research. The book has some minor deficiencies as well. Apart from the suggestions and comments made in the individual chapters, some of the graphs used in this volume do not necessarily make the task of following the exposition easier, but on the contrary complicate its presentation. Also, the three- and four-layered numbering system used in this book is unjustifiably complex and would need to be reconsidered in later editions. Despite these minor and non-conceptual imperfections, however, the book fully accomplishes its stated goals by successfully consolidating the background of the issues and by presenting the reader with a solid introduction into contemporary Central Asian studies.

Notes

- (1) The information that it was Uzbekistan and not Russia who initiated Russian entry into Central Asian Cooperation Organization was voiced by Uzbek Foreign Minister Sadiq Safayev in August 2004 during a meeting with foreign scholars.
- (2) For example, Survey on Agricultural and Rural Development based on Population Issues: Republic of Uzbekistan (Focus on Tashkent, Syrdarya, Djizak), March 2003, The Asian Population and Development Association, Tokyo (in English and Japanese languages).
- (3) For instance, cited on the website of the Inter-state Water Coordination Commission at <http://www.icwc-aral.uz/> or at http://www.ec-ivas.org/Russian_version/About_IFAS/structure/bvo_amu.htm.
- (4) 'Central Asia: Water and Conflict', *Asia Report*, 34, Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group, (ICG), 30 May 2002; Insarova, Karina, 2002, 'Tashkent "Threatened" by Turkmen Reservoir', *Reporting Central Asia*, No. 105, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 22 February 2002, <http://www.iwpr.net>.; 'Kazakhstan obviniaet v potope - Uzbekistan i Kirgiziiia razorvali Shymkentskii dogovor ot 04.01.2004', *Kazinform*, 10.02.2004, <http://www.centrasia.ru>; "Kyrgyzstan priznal svoi ozhibki v sbrose vody" - uvereny v Kazakhstane', *Kazakhstan Today*, 12 February 2004, etc.

Associate Professor, Institute of Oriental Culture, The University of Tokyo
東京大学東洋文化研究所助教授