

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Pauline Jones Luong, ed.** *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. xii + 332 pp. Bibliography, index. \$52.50 (cloth), ISBN 0-8014-8842-7; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 0-8014-4151-X;

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Published by H-Gender-MidEast (November, 2004)

This edited volume by Pauline Jones Luong provides an excellent introduction to different aspects of state consolidation and state-society relations in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia. The pieces included in the book are all based on empirical research in one or more Central Asian countries and do not shy from dealing with the complex societal forces involved in the process of state building. The book's greatest achievement is that it moves us beyond clichéd representations of politics in Central Asia by carefully examining the role of actors within and outside the state apparatus in affecting state formation. Its only weakness is that the editor claims broader theoretical relevance for the findings than the included chapters could support. This one weakness, however, should not take away from the volume's many strengths. It deserves to be considered for any course on the politics in Central Asia in the coming few years.

Besides Jones Luong's introduction and conclusion, the book is divided into four parts of two chapters each. The introduction presents established perspectives for the study of post-Soviet states in Central Asia. The two chapters of Part One discuss how the evolution of post-Soviet states in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan affect the lot of women in society. Marianne Kamp argues that the creation of centrally controlled local government in Uzbekistan puts women without means at the mercy of local leaders and diminishes women's welfare in general. Cynthia Werner ascribes the resurgence of bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan to the retreat of the state from society and economic motives.

Part Two includes a chapter by Laura Adams that highlights the process through which the intelligentsia in Uzbekistan helps create and perpetuate a new national myth to consolidate Karimov's rule and create a nation-state. This chapter is particularly notable for unraveling the complex motivations behind the participation of

members of the cultural elite in this often unsavory venture. The other chapter of Part Two (by Bhavna Dave) deals with language policy in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Part Three highlights intra-state dynamics in Central Asian Republics, particularly the role of the periphery in weakening the center. A chapter by Alisher Ilkhamov argues that regional elites still play a substantial role in Uzbek politics in spite of the power concentrated in Karimov's hands. Jones Luong's chapter argues that regional leaders in Kazakhstan influence economic policies and implementation in their areas in spite of the perception of the country as being highly centralized.

Part Four focuses on the influence of NGOs on state-building and the development of state capacity. The findings of the two contributors are not consistent, which highlights the pitfalls of generalization from findings gleaned from too few case studies. While Kelly McMann finds that Kyrgyz NGOs seek state support and increase state capacity, Erika Weinthal finds in a broader study that NGOs weaken state capacity in Central Asia, particularly on environmental issues.

This is a wonderful volume on state-society dynamics in some Central Asian countries today that the editor sometimes tries to transform into a treatise on state and nation-building in general (inter alia p. 185 and conclusion). It might have been reasonable to generalize the findings gleaned from studying two or three Central Asian Republics in each part of the book to the remaining republics, but extending findings to state building in general is excessive. The countries of the region do have a lot in common that sets them apart from the rest of the world. This unsupported ambition, however, should not distract from the book's merits.

This is a very well-integrated volume with contributions that speak to each other and

collectively encourage us to revisit our perceptions of Central Asian politics. It also benefits from a unity of style and methodology. All contributors conducted extensive field research in the countries they cover, including the collection of relevant statistical data and extensive interviews. This volume also has an implicit political economy thread that runs through all of its chapters-even the resurgence of bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan is given an economic explanation. Unlike many similar edited volumes on Central Asia, this book succeeds in being much larger than the sum of its parts.

**Citation:** Abdulkader Sinno. "Review of Pauline Jones Luong, ed, *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, H-Gender-MidEast, H-Net Reviews, November, 2004.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=310311100894351>.

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