

Kyrgyzstan beyond “Democracy Island” and “Failing State”

Contemporary Central Asia: Societies, Politics, and Cultures

Series Editor: Marlene Laruelle, George Washington University

At the crossroads of Russia, China, and the Islamic world, Central Asia remains one of the world's least-understood regions, despite being a significant theater for muscle-flexing by the great powers and regional players. This series, in conjunction with George Washington University's Central Asia Program, offers insight into Central Asia by providing readers unique access to state-of-the-art knowledge on the region. Going beyond the media clichés, the series inscribes the study of Central Asia into the social sciences and hopes to fill the dearth of works on the region for both scholarly knowledge and undergraduate and graduate student education.

Titles in Series

Kyrgyzstan beyond "Democracy Island" and "Failing State," edited by Marlene Laruelle and Johan Engvall

Kyrgyzstan beyond “Democracy Island” and “Failing State”

Social and Political Changes
in a Post-Soviet Society

Edited by
Marlene Laruelle
and Johan Engvall

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Lexington Books
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB

Copyright © 2015 by Lexington Books

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Laruelle, Marlene, editor of compilation. | Engvall, Johan, editor of compilation.

Title: Kyrgyzstan beyond “democracy island” and “failing state” : social and political changes in a post-soviet society / edited by Marlene Laruelle and Johan Engvall.

Description: Lanham, Md. : Lexington Books, 2015. | Series: Contemporary central Asia : societies, politics, and cultures | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015033438 | ISBN 9781498515160 (cloth : alk. paper) |

ISBN 9781498515177 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Kyrgyzstan—Politics and government—1991- | Political culture—Kyrgyzstan. | Post-communism—Kyrgyzstan. | Social change—Kyrgyzstan. | Geopolitics—Asia, Central.

Classification: LCC JQ1092.A91 K87 2015 | DDC 320.95843—dc23 LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015033438>

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
<i>Johan Engvall and Marlene Laruelle</i>	
1 Kyrgyzstan and the Trials of Independence	1
<i>Johan Engvall</i>	
2 The Evolving Role of Political Parties in Kyrgyz Politics	21
<i>Shairbek Juraev</i>	
3 Why Are Public Offices Sold in Kyrgyzstan?	39
<i>Johan Engvall</i>	
4 Peripheral Protests as an Opportunity: “Brokers” in Action	59
<i>Asel Doolotkeldieva</i>	
5 In Search of <i>Tolerantnost’</i> : Preventive Development and Its Limits at the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan Border	79
<i>Madeleine Reeves</i>	
6 Why Class Matters in Kyrgyzstan: Everyday Experiences, Moral Sentiments, and the Politics of the Poor	99
<i>Elmira Satybaldieva</i>	
7 Sewing to Satisfaction: Craft-based Entrepreneurs in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan	123
<i>Aisalkyn Botoeva and Regine A. Spector</i>	
8 Myths and Realities of Bishkek’s Novostroikas	143
<i>Emil Nasritdinov, Bermet Zhumakadyr kyzy, and Diana Asanalieva</i>	

9	Kyrgyzstan's Nationhood: From a Monopoly of Production to a Plural Market <i>Marlene Laruelle</i>	165
10	The Affective Politics of Sovereignty: Reflecting on the 2010 Conflict in Kyrgyzstan <i>David Gullette and John Heathershaw</i>	185
11	"We Disputed Every Word": The Plight of Moderates in Post-Violence Kyrgyzstan <i>Erica Marat</i>	211
12	Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan <i>David W. Montgomery</i>	229
	Bibliography	243
	Index	265
	About the Contributors	271

Acknowledgments

This volume is based on papers presented at the international conference *Kyrgyzstan beyond 'Democracy Island' and 'Failing State': Factoring Social and Political Changes in a Post-Soviet Society*. The conference was jointly organized by the Central Asia Program (CAP) of George Washington University and the Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies (UCRS) at Uppsala University. The event, held in Uppsala in December 2012, was made possible by generous financial support from UCRS as well as the Uppsala Forum on Democracy, Peace and Justice. We are grateful to Li Bennich-Björkman and Nazgul Engvall for their efforts in bringing about the conference.

Introduction

Johan Engvall and Marlene Laruelle

Kyrgyzstan—a small, mountainous country bordering China in Central Asia—stands out, and not just because of its beguiling beauty. Kyrgyzstan has been through many trials and tribulations since it emerged as an independent state following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and no other Central Asian country has been the subject of as much academic and policy-oriented research as Kyrgyzstan.

Several factors contribute to this visibility: The country's first President Askar Akaev opened up to Western influence for developing civil society and reforming the economy, making the country the preferred partner for international financial institutions and Western governments alike. Following 9/11 and the subsequent U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan also became a strategic partner in the war against terrorism by granting the U.S. the right to set up a military base on its territory—the Manas airbase which remained open for more than a decade until it was closed in the summer of 2014. In March 2005, the wave of the so-called colored revolutions sweeping through Eurasia reached Kyrgyzstan, forcing President Akaev to flee the country in what became known as the Tulip Revolution. Little more than five years later—in April 2010—Akaev's successor Kurmanbek Bakiev was unseated in another revolution. In the wake of the second revolution, interethnic violence erupted in the south of the country, and developments in Kyrgyzstan once again reached an international audience.

Besides numerous scholarly efforts to come to terms with these intriguing events, research on the country has also benefited greatly from the fact that Kyrgyzstan has been the most open country in the region and therefore the preferred destination for Western, and in particular North-American, scholars focusing on this particular part of the world. Due to this greater degree of openness, Western scholars have been able to build fruitful research

collaborations with their local counterparts turning Kyrgyzstan into a leading spot for innovative contemporary social science research, not only on Central Asia but on the wider Eurasian region.

This was not always the case though. During Soviet times, Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular was the least known territory. Among scholars specializing on the Soviet Union, the few studies incorporating Central Asia mainly approached the region through the prism of Moscow, mapping its role in the Soviet system. The deficit of expertise on Kyrgyzstan in its own right lingered on in the first years of independence. The situation started to change at the turn of the millennium when a first generation of post-Soviet scholarship started publishing their documentations of Kyrgyzstan's political and social developments in the first decade of independence as well as presenting new interpretations of its Soviet past (Collins 2006; Jones Luong 2002). These groundbreaking attempts at coming to terms with Kyrgyzstan's past and present provided a much more nuanced picture on the realities on the ground than the old generation of Soviet scholars' (the so-called Kremlinologists'). In the past decade, a second wave of post-Soviet scholarship has followed suit, and representatives of a broad span of academic disciplines have incorporated an expanding range of problems and perspectives into the study of the processes taking place in the country.

Thematically, research on Kyrgyzstan can be divided into at least four major blocs. A first body of research has focused on political transformations in a broad sense, including how various officials and state agencies have responded to the transformation of the legal order and how the Kyrgyz state has coped with the challenge of securing contracts and property rights (Spector 2008). Other notable enquires into Kyrgyzstani politics include election studies (Huskey and Hill 2013), regime dynamics and democratization (McGlinchey 2011; Junisbai 2012), popular mobilization (Radnitz 2010; Wooden 2013) and informal politics and state functioning (Engvall 2011). A second sub-set of research has dealt with socio-economic processes. Research has been undertaken on external and internal migration processes (Fryer, Nasritdinov and Satybaldieva 2014; Isabaeva 2011; Ruget and Usmanalieva 2008), the evolution of crime (Kupatadze 2008; Marat 2006), social dynamics in border areas (Reeves 2014), to name just a few areas in which prominent research has been produced. A third body of research has delved into identity formation, that is, on the various processes which characterize Kyrgyzstan's new political, social, and cultural identity. In this context, research has been done on the continuity and change in traditional identities in contemporary Kyrgyz society (Gullette 2010), the place of Islam in the public and private sphere (Montgomery 2007; Khamidov 2013), nationalism and national ideology (Laruelle 2012; Marat 2008), and inter-ethnic dynamics (Liu 2012). A final major research theme is Kyrgyzstan's foreign- and security-policies. Attention has, for example, been paid to strategic military

alliances (Cooley 2008), security (Wilkinson 2007), and the relationship between foreign aid and domestic politics (Petric 2005).

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this book is to compile some of the most topical and innovative research in a single volume and make it available to a wider audience. The ambition is for the book to represent a counterweight to simplistic descriptions found in much of the reporting on the country, which presents Kyrgyzstan as a twin case: either as an “island of democracy” in an otherwise robustly authoritarian Central Asian region or as the archetypal example of a “failing state” marred by lawlessness, crime, and instability.

By seeing beneath this bipolar veneer and take a closer look at the realities on the ground the present book brings together a group of leading researchers from Kyrgyzstan, Europe, and the United States, whose rigorous field studies—within fields such as political science, anthropology, and sociology—have contributed significantly to enhance our understanding of Kyrgyzstan’s post-Soviet transformations.

The volume is divided into three major sections. A first section deals with political developments and the role of the state. In a first chapter, Johan Engvall offers a general overview of the political trajectory of Kyrgyzstan, useful for the readers who need to familiarize themselves with post-Soviet conditions, and addresses the main issues facing the country, mainly governance and economic development. A second chapter, by Shairbek Juraev, delves with the role of parties in Kyrgyz political life. The country displays a large degree, for Central Asian conditions, of political pluralism and civic activism; but political parties are still façade entities. However, since the 2010 constitutional changes and the new parliamentary system, parties seem to progressively institutionalize, even if they remain mainly tools in the hands of powerful but divided elites. In the next chapter, Johan Engvall comes back on what is a typical feature of the state functioning in Kyrgyzstan and broadly in the Eurasian space, which is the fact that public positions are a—very competitive—market in which individuals are ready to invest important amounts, with the goal to access to a stream of income associated with an office. This analysis of Kyrgyz political life—in the broader sense—would be incomplete and misleading without a deep look at the critical role played by agents in it. In her chapter, Asel Doolotkeldieva explores the function of local entrepreneurs or brokers in connecting morph peripheral protests to central politics, combining workforce societal concerns, corporate party politics, and clientelistic networks. Last but not least, Madeleine Reeves enquires into the impact of foreign presence to Kyrgyzstan and its role as a “laboratory” of foreign assistance by looking at how local actors receive and interpret Western-funded initiatives at promoting interethnic tolerance and advancing an agenda “an openness to difference,” that posits that everyday conflicts and assessment of differences are negative for the society and dangerous for the country’s stability.

The second section of the volume focuses on the main aspect of social and socio-economic transformation of Kyrgyzstan. Elmira Satybaldieva argues that too much priority has been given to the elites and their agendas, while the non-elites remained largely out of the scope of research. In her chapter, she offers an analysis of the “politics of the poor” and looks at everyday class experiences and moral sentiments of the working class in southern Kyrgyzstan. In the following article, Aisalkyn Botoeva and Regine A. Spector investigate the revival of the craft manufacturing industry, here also shifting from the mainstream of research that looked at the disintegration of old production chains and the corrosion of large state-owned enterprises. Their analysis shed light on thousands of small- and medium-size entrepreneurs who have been able to re-employ local craft knowledge and compete in a new market environment by offering products with an ethnic or national flair. In the following chapter, Emil Nasritdinov, Bermet Zhumakadyr kyzy, and Diana Asanalieva examine the main result from the deep socio-economic changes of the last two decades, the transformation of the urban landscape and the massive construction of new suburbs around the capital city, Bishkek. They look at the social clichés that accompany this urban evolution and challenge them by showing how the *novostroiki* and their inhabitants are better integrated into the urban fabric than what seems at first glance.

The third section of the book is dedicated to identity formation, a dear topic to Western scholars who are still partly shaped by the Cold War’s perceptions of “nationalism studies” as a key component of the knowledge on the Eurasian space. Marlene Laruelle first hypothesizes that at stake for Kyrgyzstan is not the *choice* between two opposed policies of ethnic versus civic nationalism, but the *evolution* from a monopoly by the state and academia over the production of nationhood to an open and decentralized market shaped by a plurality of actors and narratives that is perceived as chaotic, directionless, and therefore endangering the nation. In the following chapter, John Heathershaw and David Gullette analyze what they call “the affective politics of sovereignty,” investigating the 2010 interethnic riots of Osh through the prism of sovereignty. They argue that Western views on sovereignty misrecognize affective politics, in particular anxieties and fears about the place of the Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan. Erica Marat pursues this study by focusing on the post-2010 situation and the consequences of the Osh events. She follows the debates between civic-minded nationalists and Kyrgyz nationalists and the place of these debates in shaping current Kyrgyzstan’s nationalities policy and its attempt to find the right balance between citizenship and “national identity.” Last but not least, David Montgomery invites us to reflect on the relationship between Islam and democracy and the way Muslims in Kyrgyzstan remind us that governance is also seen as a moral order, therefore one where the religious is authorized to participate to the public discussion.