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# Introduction

The primary purpose of this source book is to assist college and university professors in acquainting students with the basic political, social, and economic evolution of Central Asian civilization in its colonial (1731–1991) and postcolonial (1991–present) periods, as well as gaining a mature understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness and dignity of Central Asian history. Among other aspects of Central Asian history, the documents included in this reader shed light on such topics as the issue of resistance and accommodation of native societies to the policies of the imperial center, the transformation of Central Asian societies under Tsarist and Soviet rule, and the history of Islam in Central Asia and its role in nation- and state-building processes. This primary source book is instrumental for familiarizing students with the nationality policies of imperial Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet governments, and the effects produced by these policies on the natives of the region.

The documents collected in this reader challenge the traditional approach, which has viewed Central Asians as passive recipients of the policies imposed on them by central authorities. The documents demonstrate the active participation of the indigenous peoples in contact with other peoples by examining the natives' ways of organizing societies, their precolonial experience of contact with outsiders, and the structure of their subsistence systems. This source book also helps students to place the major events and activities of Central Asia within a global context. In addition to the importance of the documents for the study of Central Asian history, many of them foster comparative analysis and a cross-disciplinary approach to enlighten crucial historical and contemporary problems pertinent to many parts of the world.

For many decades, Central Asia was both the frontier of the Russian Empire and its only colony. The comparison of Russian imperial policies in Central Asia with those of European powers in the Americas, Asia, and

Africa elucidates the nature of modern imperialism. For example, the primary documents enable students to conduct a comparative analysis of the factors that determined the character of interactions between colonizers and indigenous people in Central Asia and North America. This reader also demonstrates the factors responsible for the dual function of the frontier as the contact zone, or the barrier separating colonizers and indigenous peoples. Additionally, it explains the study of cross-cultural encounters, not only as a history of resistance and confrontation in some regions but also as one of collaboration which led to the deliberate construction of alliances between the natives and newcomers.

The Central Asian source book also assists students in the study of the rise of ethnonationalism and religious fundamentalism in postcolonial settings. This phenomenon is quite typical in contemporary postcolonial societies, and Central Asia is by no means the only region in the world which experiences these developments. Religious fundamentalism and ethnonationalism are among the most significant factors which threaten the world's stability and security at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Central Asia provides a very good case for the study of the religious and ethnic radicalization of societies.

In short, this source book is not only useful for the study of Central Asian history in its colonial and postcolonial periods but also provides a primary source foundation for research aimed at comparative studies of frontier, imperialism, interethnic and interreligious relations, nationalism, and the rise of religious fundamentalism in different settings.

The documents included in this reader center on the history of the region that extends westward from the border of China to the Caspian Sea and the lower Volga, and southward from Siberia to Iran and Afghanistan. Central Asia covers an enormous territory of more than 1,500,000 square miles, which is about half the size of the United States and more than seven times the size of France, with a population of over 70 million.

Today Central Asia comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Its rich resources of oil and natural gas and its important strategic position have made the region the new battleground for influence between China, the United States, and the Russian Federation. Yet, despite its strategic and economic significance, the region remains largely a mystery to outsiders.

The documents included in the reader focus on the colonial period of Central Asian history, which lasted for 260 years from 1731 to 1991. The reader also includes one chapter on the precolonial history of Central Asia to accentuate the effects produced by imperial rule on the peoples of the region, and one chapter on postcolonial Central Asia to establish connections between the past and the present.

A colonial page in the history of the Central Asia was opened in 1731 when Abu'l Khayr, the Khan of the Kazakh Younger Horde, petitioned to become the subject of Russian Empress Anna Ioannovna. In the following 140 years, the Russian Empire slowly, but steadily, incorporated the territories of Central Asia, turning them into its colony. By 1870, the entire territory of Central Asia was included into the Russian Empire and, over the course of the following 120 years, the natives of Central Asia were considered subjects of the Russian Empire and its successor, the Soviet Union.

According to renowned writer, commentator, and journalist Dilip Hiro, of the many non-Slav regions of the Tsarist Empire, Central Asia experienced the most turbulent experiences after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.<sup>1</sup> These radical changes included the following: the delineation of Central Asia along the ethnic lines, which resulted in the emergence of five republics on its territory; the conversion of several spoken vernaculars into written languages; a drastic transformation of property rights and economic organization of the Central Asian natives; a severe attack on Islam which led to almost complete abrogation of places of worship; development of the system of education unprecedented in the history of Central Asia; a change of the position of women in society; and criminalization of those Central Asian traditions which defined and reflected their place in earlier times. The ultimate purpose of these reforms was the creation of a new society. According to the policy-makers in Moscow, this society had to be thoroughly different from the traditional Central Asian one. The documents collected in the reader demonstrate the strategies used by the Soviet government to introduce these changes, the reaction of the native population to the Soviet policies, and the results of these reforms. Though the aims and the policies of the Soviet government were considerably different from those of the tsars, one may see a very important similarity between them: The plans of imperial policy-makers were noticeably corrected by Central Asian realities.

Then, in 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union heralded the independence of Central Asia. The colonial past, however, has left an indelible impression on all aspects of Central Asian life, and continues to define the social and political structures in all newly independent Central Asian countries: The very division of Central Asia into five republics is a Soviet creation, the vast majority of members of native elites made their careers in the Soviet administrative and party apparatus, and the present economies of these countries were formed for the most part during the colonial period of its history. This is why I consider the colonial period of Central Asian history as the most significant one for the understanding of present-day political, social, and economic situations in Central Asian countries.

This book is aimed at undergraduate and graduate students, and scholars specializing in Central Asian and Russian/Soviet history. I originally

prepared the reader for my class on the history of modern Central Asia, which I am currently teaching. The documents collected in this source book will allow students to write research papers on any one of the following topics.

1. Compare and contrast Tsarist and Soviet imperial policies toward the peoples of Central Asia. What were the interests of imperial officials in these areas during different time periods, and how did these interests define colonial policies? Your answer should include the political, social, legal, cultural, and religious policies of the imperial center toward the aboriginal societies of Central Asia.
2. Discuss the transformation of the social, political, economic, and gender structures of Central Asian societies under Russian and Soviet rule. Consider both nomadic and sedentary Central Asian peoples. Were these transformations planned by the imperial center? How would you evaluate these transformations?
3. Discuss the issue of resistance and accommodation of native societies to the policies of the imperial center. Trace the development of the attitudes of different groups of the native population to Tsarist and Soviet rule. What factors permitted the Russian state to establish and maintain its control over Central Asia? What were the most important challenges to Russian rule in the time period studied in this class?
4. Compare and contrast the causes, developments, and consequences of revolts against central authorities and their representatives, which took place in Central Asia during Tsarist and Soviet periods. What were the rebels' motives in both instances? How did the central authorities react to these rebellions? What do the grievances of the insurgents tell us about the imperial policies of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes?
5. Discuss the emergence of Central Asian nationalism and its relation to the Islamic identity. How did nationalistic ideology manifest itself? What were the aims of Central Asian nationalists of the different time periods studied in this class? What were their strategies to gain popular support?

Scholars and students in other fields, such as nationalism, imperialism, colonialism and postcolonialism, Islam, interethnic and interreligious relations, and frontier studies also would be interested in this book.

Andre Gunder Frank justly compares Central Asia to a “black hole in the middle of the world,” and argues that Central Asia is both the most important and the most neglected part of the world and its history.<sup>2</sup> There are no published English-language primary source readers on the history of modern Central Asia yet, which makes the work of professors teaching the history of Central Asia at both undergraduate and graduate levels very problematic.

This reader includes primary documents which have never been published in English-language sources.

In terms of chronology, this reader is a logical continuation of *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, edited by Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela published by Indiana University Press in November 2009. Their anthology, rightly advertised as “the first English-language anthology of primary documents for the study of Central Asian history,” covers the period from the Arab conquests of the seventh century to the Russian conquest. My source book differs from Levi and Sela’s anthology in two major aspects: First, it concentrates on a later period of Central Asian history and, second, it is primarily concerned with the interplay between imperial policies and the natives’ reaction to them. More than anything else, it is a study of colonialism, anti-colonialism, and postcolonialism within a Central Asian setting. Another difference is Levi and Sela’s concentration on the southern part of Central Asia. I believe that Kazakhstan, being the largest and most economically productive Central Asian country, also deserves careful study.

## NOTES

1. Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), 391.

2. Andre Gunder Frank, *The Centrality of Central Asia* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1992), 45.