

Editor's Note

The June 2020 issue of *Acta Via Serica* contains articles from scholars renowned in the study of politics, history, social anthropology and linguistics of Central Asia. Published in the midst of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, this edition addresses the E.U.'s evolving foreign policy towards Central Asia (Andrey Makarychev), Russian foreign policy under the rule of Vladimir Putin (Dmitry Shlapentokh), and the apparent betrayal of Armenia's so-called 'Velvet Revolution' (Vahram Abadjian). Articles on Central Asian History address the flow along the Silk Road to Korea of important literature and myths related to dreams and political legitimacy (Maurizio Riotta) and the genetic and historical cultural legacy of the Sogdians (Joo-Yup Lee). Sophie Roche, Svetlana Torno, and Said Reza Kazemi examine the importance of family of in responding to traumatic political events in Tajikistan, while Alexander Vovin researches texts of Manchu shamanistic prayers.

Andrey Makarychev examines the development of a new E.U. strategy towards Central Asia in light of transformation from a liberal to a post-liberal international order. Dr. Makarychev argues that the E.U.'s approach towards Central Asia is changing from a post-Cold War liberal, value-based one centered on democracy and human rights to a more technical, good governance approach centered on public administration. Makarychev explores the challenges the E.U. faces as a geopolitical actor in Central Asia increasingly engaged with illiberal regimes and discusses the geopolitical dimensions of the E.U.'s foreign and security policies in the region.

Dmitry Shlapentokh places the study of Putin's Russia in a broad historiographical context, challenging more conventional views of Putin's foreign policy as a product of nationalist expansionary authoritarian rule. Dr. Shlapentokh instead finds a clue to the operational model of the regime through comparison with leaders in Renaissance and

early modern Europe. Similar to early modern European rulers, Putin has limited the direct use of force, instead preferring manipulation, corruption and the targeting killing of important enemies. In foreign policy Putin has sought to avoid wholesale conflict, instead relying on the broad use of mercenaries, while downplaying their relationship with the Kremlin. While the Renaissance led to the development of centralized states, however, Dr. Shlapentokh argues that Putin's "Renaissance" is just as likely to lead towards the country's disintegration.

Former Ambassador Vahram Abadjian critically examines unfolding political developments following Armenia's 'Velvet Revolution' of April-May 2018, which thrust broadly popular, new forces into power with hopes for radical reforms leading to profound political, social, and economic transformation. Dr. Abadjian finds that the new leadership of Prime Minister Pashinyan has in fact undermined Armenia's democracy and fallen far short of revolutionary aspirations. The ruling Civil Contract party has failed to uphold the separation of powers, reinforce judicial independence, instill good governance, realize transitional justice, honor democratic norms, or provide for the public good through effective foreign policy or coronavirus prevention. The regime has instead sought to concentrate executive, legislative and judicial power in the Prime Minister's hands and is increasingly resembling the populist rule of Hungary and Poland. Dr. Abadjian holds out hope, however, that the present political and socio-economic crisis may result in the emergence of programmatic parties able to lead Armenia towards real progress.

Maurizio Riotta analyzes the "Tale of Munhŭi Who Bought a Dream" which took place during the seventh century unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea under the Silla Dynasty. Taking a cultural-anthropological perspective Dr. Riotta analyzes the tale of a dream in which a urine flood forecasts kingship and royalty, proposing that the story of the dream had originated in the Ancient Middle East. In Dr. Riotta's interpretation, Princess Munhŭi proves her wisdom and worthiness of becoming Queen by purchasing the dream from her sister and becomes a "Holy Mother" able to renovate the kingdom of Silla, wiping out the old world in favor of a new political order during a transition in dynastic lineage from the "sacred bones" (sŏnggol 聖骨) to the "true bones" (chingol 眞骨).

Joo-Yup Lee examines the identity of the Sogdian descendants and their historical

role, exploring the Sogdian connection to the later Iranic-speaking Sarts and Tajiks of Central Asia. Dr. Lee discusses the symbiotic relationship between the Sogdian descendants and the Mongols and their descendants (Chaghatays and Uzbeks) and argues that the Sogdians did not perish after the Arab conquest of Central Asia in the eighth century CE but survived under new exonyms Sart and Tajik. Like the Sogdians in pre-Islamic Central Asia, the Tajiks or Sarts played important historical roles in the Mongol and post-Mongol states of Central Asia, maintaining a symbiotic relationship with the nomad elites.

Sophie Roche, Svetlana Torno, and Said Reza Kazemi examine the family as a social institution and find it to be resilient, able to survive through range of political periods, reconstituting itself even in the aftermath of destructive events including colonization and war. The authors employ ethnographic methods to study Tajiks in the cities of Kulob, Khujand in Tajikistan and Mazar-e Sharif in Afghanistan. Combining Grounded Theory with genealogical methods from Social Anthropology, Roche, Torno, and Kazemi generate demographic data and find that age at first marriage reveals the strategies that families pursue in times of internal conflict (e.g, civil wars), external interventions or peace, and that perceptions of insecurity lead to a decline in marital age.

Alexander Vovin examines texts of Manchu shamanistic prayers recorded in a manuscript by Sergei A. Polevoi, a Russian and an American Sinologist from the first part of the twentieth century. Dr. Vovin provides detailed linguistic analysis, translation, and commentary to Polevoi's variant of the original Manchu prayers in a work important to linguists specializing in the Manchu and Tungusic languages and philology, since the text likely reflects the Eighteenth Century Manchu preserved in romanization.

In addition to the thematic articles, Aditi Paul, Sharofat Arabova, Tamer Balci, and Christian Spahn provided their critiques of recent Silk Road Scholarship with book reviews on publications by David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, David J. Roxburgh, Barry Cunliffe, and Christopher I. Beckwith, respectively.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all of the contributors to this issue, the anonymous peer reviewers and the members of our editorial board without whom this issue would not have been possible. We wish to welcome three new board members. Dr. Dorothy Wong, Professor of Art History at the University of Virginia, USA, Dr. Richard Foltz,

Professor of Religious History at the Concordia University, Canada, and Dr. Noor O'Neill Borbieva, Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the Purdue University Fort Wayne, Canada, joined us from this issue.

We hope that our readers find this issue to be of value in their ongoing research as we ready ourselves for the publication of the next issue of *Acta Via Serica* in December of 2020.

Acta Via Serica Editorial Committee