

Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: Mountain Communities of Pamir. Carole Faucher and Dagikhudo Dagiev, eds. New York, NY: Routledge. 2018. 300 pp. (ISBN-13: 9780815357551)

The manuscript contains the first compilation of scholarly articles in the English language centering on the Pamiri people. The Pamiris are a small Iranian ethnic group occupying the mountainous region of Pamir-Hindi Kush. The Pamirs as a geographical entity are split among four countries at the core of Central Asia, namely the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in the eastern part of Tajikistan, the Badakhshan Province of northeastern Afghanistan, the Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County in the south-west corner of China's Xinjiang province, and the Chitral/Gilgit Baltistan regions of northern Pakistan. The editors of this volume acknowledge that they have not attempted to embrace all possible communities found in the Pamir region but rather to concentrate on factions calling themselves loosely Pamiri and that are associated with the Ismailism branch of Shi'a Islam. The Pamiris, located at the geographical and political fringes of the above-mentioned four countries, speak a diverse range of languages, all embodied in the eastern Iranian group of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European ethnolinguistic group.

The Great Game between Russian and British colonial rule in Central Asia from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century generated some substantial consequences in terms of cataclysmic territorial divisions of the Pamir. Against such a backdrop, Pamiris, although trapped in a Kafkaesque situation, still formed communities amalgamated by a number of common denominators such as culture, language, and religion across the porous borders of the two politically volatile and erratic countries in the region, namely Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The contributors to this edited volume investigate Pamiri uniqueness from a wide range of perspectives and disciplines in social sciences. Across all fifteen chapters, either religion and/or language constitute the central debates and rationale of all the authors. It would be reasonable to allege that the fundamental impulse behind this volume was to cultivate a renewed interest in and awareness of the identities of the remote and isolated communities of Pamir. Efforts to revitalize the ancient Silk Road at the core of Eurasia in the early decades of the 21st century explain the logic behind why academics, as well as policymakers, require a better knowledgebase vis-à-vis the region. The declared intent of the Chinese-masterminded Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to create more harmonious connectivity across Eurasia is a sign that this volume is very timely. It offers a much-needed fresh look at the robust cultures, languages and perplexing geopolitical history of the region. The book certainly provides a fertile intellectual environment in which to decipher the complexities of the area and sheds light on the bewilderment of these mountainous communities, which in turn are pivotal actors in terms of molding this strategic part of Eurasia. Moreover, all the chapters feature narratives focusing on various historical, cultural and social, and political aspects in order to point out the basis of the identity formation processes.

In *Identity, History, and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: Mountain Communities of Pamir*, Faucher and Dagiev, along with their colleagues, provide a full account of differing views on a range of issues concerning the role of religion, cultural legacies, the ever-changing social fabric of society, languages and political engineering in Central Eurasia. The 15 chapters of the volume are compiled into three sections.

Part I, “Identity Formation, Borders and Political Transformations,” centers on the evolution of political influences on Pamiri identity formation. Sunatollo Jonjoboev examines the political, linguistic, cultural and religious identities of the Tajiks of the Pamirs within the context of historical transformations and state policies. Dagikhudo Dagiev looks at the formation and consolidation of Pamiri ethnic identity in Soviet and post-Soviet Tajikistan. Sherali Gulomaliev shows how externally imposed borders in Central Asia by Russia and Britain during the Great Game negatively affected Wakhi as a Pamiri language in the region. Amier Saidula investigates the perplexities and puzzles surrounding the identity of Pamiri people in the Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous Province of China.

Part II, “Archaeology, Myths, Intellectual and Cultural Heritage,” screens fresh approaches from historians to the interplay taking place among religion, philosophy, and mythology in the determination of Pamiri identity. The first chapter by Yusufsho Yaqubov and Dagikhudo Dagiev reviews the striking recent archeological discovery of Karan City, the ancient center of Darvaz, and possible links to the Aryan prophet Zoroaster. Abdulmamad Illoliev illustrates the important implications of the historic trade route of the Wakhan in terms of trade and cultural exchanges as part of the Silk Road connecting different civilizations. Ghulam Abbas Hunzai investigates the worldview of the distinguished Persian poet, Muslim philosopher and Ismaili *da'i* (missionary) Nasir-i Khusraw and examines his concept of *lazẓat* (pleasure). Daniel Beben explores the juxtaposition of Ismaili and Pamiri identities in the Shughnan region and examines the evidence about the presence of Isma'ili *da'wa* in the Pamiri districts. The last chapter of this second part by Muzaffar Zoolshoev strives to assemble the biographies of Sayyid Munir al-Din Badakshani and Sayyid Haydar Shah Mubarakshahzada, two prominent religious and public figures of Badakshan active in the early decades of the 20th century.

Part III, “Social Cohesion, Interactions, and Globalization,” brings the reader to the present day and analyzes the patterns of continuity and change taking place among Pamiri communities. Stephanie Kicherer emphasizes the prevailing concept of *barakat* (blessing) in the Bartang Valley of Tajikistan by providing an insightful alternative narrative to outsider perspectives and attempts to develop a terminological framework for dealing with spiritual resources. In the following chapter, Mir Afzal Tajik and his colleagues look at the role played by non-governmental organizations and grass root organizations for the development of Pakistan's isolated Chitral district, which is home to a significant number of Ismaili. The

remaining three chapters center on the evolution of Pamiri identity among the young population of the region. To this end, Nazira Sodatsayrova scrutinizes the changing pattern of family relationships through the vantage point of mothers in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast since Tajikistan's independence and the impact of technology in the formation of those relationships. Aslisho Qurboniev explores developments in the formation of a communal identity of the Pamiri people within the context of religion, globalization and the Internet with the aim of revealing communal identity reconstruction and transformation. Carole Faucher highlights the dynamic interaction between the self-identification process and religious education throughout the period since the independence of Tajikistan.

This edited volume yields an exceptionally compelling account of Pamiri communities and is a remarkable addition vis-à-vis the study of the Pamir in Central Asia. It provides numerous insights into how history, geography and culture interact with the identity formation process in those isolated communities of the Pamir. By doing so, the volume in question deepens the reader's understanding of the issues at stake at the core of Central Asia. The volume has immeasurable value for Central Asian studies in general and Pamiri studies in particular. It is a must-read for specialists as well as graduate students focusing on Central Eurasia.

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