



PROJECT MUSE®

Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia (review)

Marianne Kamp

Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Volume 38, Number 3, Winter 2008,
pp. 498-499 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press

The Journal
of
Interdisciplinary History



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jih/summary/v038/38.3kamp.html>

In short, Cochran's book points to the necessity of critically examining our assumptions, which could potentially determine the fate of our intellectual journey even before we embark on it. It is essential reading for scholars of consumer culture, globalization, as well as Chinese business history.

Morris L. Bian
Auburn University

Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia. By Kathleen Collins (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006) 376 pp. \$90.00

The content of this work justifies its ambitious title. Collins analyzes both clan politics and regime transition in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, asserting that clans have become significant political forces in these newly independent states. A "clan pact" provided initial legitimacy and stability in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan after independence (1991), and the absence of such a pact led to instability and civil war in Tajikistan. In detailing the political changes of the 1990s, Collins argues that multiple factors led to authoritarian regimes, rather than democratization. But due to clan activities, such as domination of sectors of the economy and asset stripping, none of these regimes is strongly consolidated. Collins situates her argument that clan politics can be empirically analyzed, and must be evaluated as causal elements in regime trajectories, within broader literature on democratization. The chapters discussing the post-1990 period should be welcomed by all scholars of contemporary Central Asia for their detailed and comparative description of the politics of independence in these three republics.

Research methods combine questions raised by political science with what Collins calls "ethnographic methods," meaning hundreds of interviews with people on the village and elite levels. She bases her approach to "clan" on a thorough reading of the Russian and Soviet ethnographic scholarship on Central Asia. Several historical chapters address the Soviet-period role of clans—providing access to scarce goods—and also the official suppression of clans.

Collins makes the case for the political significance of clan most convincingly regarding Kyrgyzstan, in part because the more open political climate there permitted much better access to information at all levels than in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. In addition, Kyrgyz clans are large networks that claim a particular shared ancestry in a long tradition of nomadism; they were settled under the Soviets. Collins can name Kyrgyz clans and describe their actions.

Collins' definition of "clan" in Uzbek and Tajik politics is less cohesive, ranging from regional network to village kinship network, though Collins argues, rather unpersuasively, that local lineage groups and regional power blocs can both be assumed under the word "clan."

The question arises whether a regional relationship of patronage and reciprocity might mobilize different resources and have different social consequences than relationships based on patronage tied to kinship—a point raised by Schatz in his study of clan politics in Kazakhstan.¹ In particular, Collins uses the term “trust” to describe network solidarity, but she does not interrogate what “trust” means in kinship networks as opposed to local or regional networks. However, for both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Collins makes clear that networks of patronage undermine institutional consolidation and create weak autocracy.

Avoiding Orientalist essentialism about clan-based societies, Collins presents the instability of clans, their tendencies to divide, and their changing roles vis-à-vis the state. Collins’ systematic comparisons among the three republics, with brief references to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and other states, demonstrate that although clans shape politics in Central Asia, analysis of clan roles allows no simple prediction of political trajectories.

Marianne Kamp
University of Wyoming

A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire. By Sugata Bose (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2006) 333 pp. \$27.95

This book of unusual breadth and ambition provides a panoramic view of a diverse range of connections (economic, political, and cultural) that tied together various societies around the Indian Ocean littoral, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bose correctly points out that much of the pre-existing scholarship about the Indian Ocean focused on the pre-nineteenth-century period, gave exclusive emphasis to networks of maritime trade, and suggested that the advent of European dominance spelled the ultimate termination of these connections. Bose convincingly dispels these notions by demonstrating that the networks connecting Indian Ocean societies were re-ordered and re-adjusted during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, flourishing both within and without the attention of the colonial empires entrenched in South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Africa, and the Middle East at the time.

The introductory chapter sets out the principal conceptual and historiographical parameters of the book, and Chapters 2 through 7 describe the kaleidoscope of activities that linked together various parts of the Indian Ocean world: the trading and banking activities of Indian entrepreneurs in Burma, Malaya, East Africa, and the Persian Gulf; flows of Indian indentured labor and Indian soldiers to various destinations across

1 Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of “Blood” in Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle, 2004).