

Peer Review

Review of: "From Tsarist Rule to Independence: The Transformation of Ethnic Identities in Kyrgyzstan"

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Petr Kokaisl's article aims to examine how state intervention in what is today Kyrgyzstan has contributed to the formation of specific characteristics of ethnic groups. The time frame of the study extends from the Tsarist period in the 19th and early 20th centuries, through the period of the Soviet regime, to the post-socialist present. The hypothesis guiding the research is that state measures play a significant role in shaping ethnic groups and, in particular, influence their adaptation strategies and socio-economic development paths. The material used for the study includes historical demographic data and censuses, secondary academic literature, original transcripts of interviews with citizens of the country, as well as an extensive pool of social media posts that were automated and machine-analyzed using a specific algorithm. Petr's article offers a condensed compilation of important historical-political milestones and would gain further quality if some of the following aspects were taken into account. In the following, I mention aspects that seem particularly important to me:

- First and foremost, I recommend a critical examination of the concept of ethnicity. It is clear from the text that ethnicity is significantly shaped by state intervention. However, in my opinion, there is no explicit reference to the fact that ethnicity is not a given fact, but a product of socio-cultural constructions. One way of addressing this would be, for example, to speak consistently of ethnicized tensions, disparities, and conflicts and not of ethnic tensions, disparities, and conflicts. This avoids the trap of understanding ethnicity as an essentialist given.
- Chapter "Materials and Methods": More information should definitely be provided here, for example, how the analysis of the material from the social channels took place, how it was pre-structured, and how the algorithm worked.

- Chapter 3 “Results and Discussion”: I recommend that you cite more terms and original documents in which government measures are defined and described. I think, for example, of the Russian terms *tuzemcy*, *innorodcy*, *kochevniki* or *osedloe naselenie*, as well as administrative regulations such as: Decree on the administration of the Semireč’ie and Syr’Dar’ja provinces of 11.7.1867; Decree on the administration of the Turkestan region of 2.6.1886; Decree “On land use and spatial organization in the Turkestan Republic of the Russian Soviet Federation” of 17.11.1920, no. 353, etc.
- P. 6: Important dates should be mentioned, e.g., 1906 for the Stolypin reform.
- Chapters 3.2 and 3.4.1: When discussing the importance of Soviet language policy and nation-building, it would be helpful to cite Stalin’s understanding that a nation would be characterized by a stable community, a common language, a shared territory, common economic activities, and culture.
- P. 7: “limited education” suggests a general lack of education and should, in my opinion, be rephrased as “limited formal education” or something similar. The local people certainly had valuable knowledge that surpassed that of the colonizers in certain areas, e.g., the environment.
- Chapter 3.4, p. 14: The difficulties of the Central Asian states with independence are not only due to a weak tradition of statehood. Dependence on political centers in Moscow, economic crisis, etc., also contributed to this.

Apart from this, there are some other aspects that should be corrected or addressed:

- P. 3: The text states that the earliest data comes from the 1897 census and that this census has the greatest diversity in the Soviet censuses. The Soviet Union was founded in 1922, which is why the 1897 census cannot be described as Soviet. Endnote 4 after this sentence refers to a text dedicated to a different topic. Is the correct source cited here?
- P. 3-4: The terminology “productive” for 15- to 65-year-olds and “post-productive” for older people should be critically scrutinized. The terms are aimed exclusively at gainful employment and seemingly objective, but obscure the view of fields of activity such as unpaid reproductive work, creative activities, and much more in which people of retirement age are involved. These terms also suggest that older people are a burden.
- P. 21: After the comments on the violent riots in Osh, a source reference should be inserted. After comments on Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, Endnote 38 refers to James Scott’s seminal work “The Art of Not Being Governed.” This book refers to Southeast Asia and, as far as I know, says nothing about the Central Asian context. The reference should be revised here.

- P. 22: The same applies to Endnote 39 (Hofstede), which does not refer to Hofstede's 2001 book, but to a one-page article in which no mention is made of any of the aspects discussed in the paragraph. Here, too, I urgently recommend updating the reference.
- P. 24: In the paragraph "The Legacy of the Soviet Division," you write of "often unnatural administrative arrangements." It is in the nature of administrative measures that they are planned, codified, and implemented by people. Every administrative arrangement is therefore artificial and cannot be described as natural. In other words, there are no natural administrative arrangements.

There are also some aspects of the bibliography that should be addressed:

- All references should be checked for coherence. Sometimes the years appear after the names, sometimes at the end of the reference.
- In reference 10 (Kamp and Pianciola), the editor is missing.
- If possible, the URL where the documents can be viewed should be given, e.g., the Russian census of 2010 (reference 29).

It was a pleasure to read Petr's paper, and I look forward to seeing how the paper develops.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.