



UNISCI Discussion Papers

BOOK REVIEW:

Abazov, Rafis (2004): *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan*.
Asian/Oceanian Historical Dictionaries Series, No. 49.
Maryland and London, Lanham. ISBN 0-8108-4868-6. 416 pp.

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Since the beginning of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan all Central Asian republics, even such small as Kyrgyzstan, have been frequently mentioned in the international media and regularly visited by the heads of the world powers. The questions arise: why are they so important? What makes them so different from other former Soviet republics or from the Middle East? Will they be politically stable in the future or will they be the next countries with collapsing state institutions that will come under control of radical religious regimes? The *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan* is designed to give answer to these and many other questions and to serve as an introduction to domestic and international politics Kyrgyzstan and broader Central Asia. In a single volume the author presents a contemporary history of Kyrgyzstan in a concise form within context of Central Asian history. The book also provides useful reference materials, statistical data and extensive bibliography thus taking this book beyond a simple reference source and making it helpful in understanding most important regional issues in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

The an extended introduction on the modern history of Kyrgyz land provides a useful framework for understanding debates about Kyrgyz history and political and economic development. The author highlights that there are different approaches in interpreting the Kyrgyz history and origin of Kyrgyz people. Unfortunately, he does not mention and does not discuss controversy over celebration of 2200 years of the Kyrgyz Statehood in 2003. The claims that Chinese chronicles mentioned Kyrgyz state north of Chinese borders surfaced in Kyrgyzstan official documents and historical literature in 2001-2002, and that fact is worth mentioning, as it instigated a series of debates among the Kyrgyzstani and international academic community on the Kyrgyz identity and Kyrgyz origin. He puts in a historical perspective the establishment of the political and social institutions of modern Kyrgyzstan and illustrates how traditional political institutions of the tribal society and Soviet style one-party political institution of the totalitarian state interacted during the Soviet era. Various examples

¹ Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores. Estos artículos no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.

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also provide a clear picture of how the Kyrgyz leaders learned to deal with Kremlin's pressure and to compete for power and influence. The outcome of this process was a complex interplay between various actors and players, which facilitated creation of the relatively liberal environment in the early 1990s. The author also displays how competition between various political groups and clans brought to power Dr. Askar Akayev, who at that time was considered as the most liberal leader in the region. He implicitly argues that the IMF and World Bank shock therapy approach negatively affected not only economic development of the republic in short term, but also undermined the long-term economic and political prospects for development in this small Central Asian country. The readers can find a discussion on how combination of different factors and interaction of different forces affected the domestic and foreign policy of President Askar Akayev's administration.

The Dictionary, which is the main body of the book, consists of approximately 350 entries on most important issues, personalities, geographic locations, institutions, political parties as well as most important international partners in the region and critical regional issues. Up to dated information and statistical data makes this section of the book a valuable and useful resource on a wide range of topics. The readers would find particularly useful that the author managed not only to describe the political topics, but also to discuss implications of actions by such actors, as clans, tribes, NGOs and political parties on the political development in the country. Interestingly, we can find very concise and valuable information on relations between Kyrgyzstan and various individual states in Central Asia and major international powers who play important role in the region's affairs, including China, Russia, the United States. As an expert on inter-ethnic relations and conflict prevention in Kyrgyzstan, I found that this work might be useful and reliable source for checking various data, chronology and other materials for scholarly works on Kyrgyzstan.

The book concludes with a concise review of the historical literature on Kyrgyzstan and an extended bibliography. This part of the work is divided into smaller subsections making it easy to navigate through hundreds of titles of most important works in various fields, including economy, politics, international relations, demography and many others.

In sum, this extensively researched and intelligently written reference book represents a valuable and most updated supplement to the existing literature on Central Asia. Although it does not make a significant contribution to the theoretical literature on the post-Soviet political and economic development, it is a must on a desk of researchers and policy makers or even travellers and general public who have interest to this country.