

Editor's Note

The December 2020 issue of *Acta Via Serica* contains articles from leading scholars in the study of history, politics, and anthropology in Central Asia. As the second, and hopefully final issue to be published in the midst of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, this edition addresses the political, diplomatic, international and societal challenges facing Afghanistan (William Maley), the vital economic, social, and cultural legacies of the Mongols in Eurasia (Morris Rossabi), the experiences of migrants to the city of Sumqayit in Azerbaijan from the Soviet era to the present (Philipp Jäger), the international factors souring ties between China and India (Amitendu Palit), the economic, social and cultural factors influencing migration patterns from Uzbekistan to Japan and South Korea (Timur Dadabaev and Jasur Soipovand), and the economic and cultural factors determining the charismatic nature of rule in nomadic societies (Gulnar Kendirbai).

William Maley's important work sounds the alarm about current conditions in Afghanistan. He identifies struggle between patron client networks, the COVID 19 pandemic and what appears to be an imminent American military withdrawal as factors contributing to domestic instability and a resurgence of the Taliban. In Afghanistan, Maley describes a weakly institutionalized state and a winner take all struggle for spoils between rival networks and clans for the patronage flowing from the Presidency and its 28 ministries. The Afghan economy has been hobbled by the Coronavirus, which is underreported due to limited testing. The gravest danger, though, is the one sided concessions provided to the Taliban including direct meetings and prisoner releases by the U.S in its haste to leave the country. In Maley's assessment, the extremist, unpopular Taliban are unwilling to make concessions and biding their time until U.S. withdrawal.

Morris Rossabi evaluates the Mongols' influence on China, Russia and the Middle

East, arguing that the Mongols promoted vital economic, social, and cultural exchanges among civilizations. Chinggis Khan, Khubilai Khan, and other rulers supported trade and adopted policies of toleration toward foreign religion and served as patrons of the arts, architecture, and the theater. The Mongol era witnessed extraordinary developments in painting, ceramics, manuscript illustration, and textiles. The Ming dynasty adopted some principles of Mongol military organization and tactics and were exposed to Tibetan Buddhism and Persian astronomy and medicine. The Mongols also introduced agricultural techniques, porcelain, and artistic motifs to the Middle East, supported the writing of histories and promoted Sufism in the Islamic world. The Europeans became aware, via Marco Polo's travel through the Mongols' lands, of the technological, scientific, and philosophical innovations of the East.

Philipp Jäger uses participant observation and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with officials, internal migrants and IDPs (internally displaced people) to show shifts in migration to the Azerbaijan city of Sumqayıt over its short 80-year history. The city first became known in the USSR for its chemical plants, which supplied the whole country with plastics, detergents, and fertilizers and attracted young workers from remote Caucasian villages. After the collapse of the Soviet Union mobility increased as Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and IDPs from Karabakh fled to Sumqayıt, which grew into Azerbaijan's second-largest city. More than a generation after the ceasefire, IDPs still are separately administered. Jäger shows how, during the post-independence period, informal housing and labor markets have offered migrants a place to stay, and he portrays Sumqayıt as an arrival city, an established urban platform for migrants who prefer internal to transnational migration

Timur Dadabaev and Jasur Soipovand undertook face-to-face interviews with hundreds of Uzbek migrants to Japan and Korea in order to determine the key factors behind their movement to Japan and South Korea, which have become alternatives to the traditional migration destinations of Russia and Kazakhstan. Dadabaev and Soipovand identify the Uzbek government's provision of training and micro credit as important push factors, and view Japan and Korea as providing opportunities as part of people-oriented policy engagement of Uzbekistan. They find that Uzbek students have followed the pattern established by earlier East Asian migrants in abusing educational opportunities to focus on earning money on the side. The Uzbeks also viewed their stay

in both countries as temporary and didn't seek integration, but reported high satisfaction with the experience. The major difference appears to be that Korea runs a much more formalized, open labor migration system than Japan.

Amitendu Palit focuses on the structural competition between China and India, tracing recent patterns of economic and political interactions between the two countries, while simultaneously paying attention to the external impact of other great powers, notably the United States. The reasons Palit gives for deteriorating Chinese and Indian relations include rising tensions between the U.S. and China, the evolution of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the growth of the Indo-Pacific construct. He emphasizes India's vociferous opposition to the BRI stemming from Pakistan's close ties with the project and its threat to India's relationships with its neighbors. Palit notes the US use of India as a counterbalance to China's growing dominance in the Southeast and South Asian region and India's pushback against China's digital efforts to institute 5G technology. He argues that China and India will force Central Asian nations choose between them in the areas of trade engagement and technological development.

Gulnar Kendirbai argues that contrary to European depictions of the Mongol khans as despots, nomadic mobility impeded centralization of authority, control, resources, or information under a single ruler. To gain followers, therefore, charismatic nomadic rulers had to attract supporters by demonstrating adherence to established norms of social reciprocity, interacting with followers through personal, flexible, and non-binding partnerships. Leaders had to show respect, generosity, and provide collective benefits by preventing and settling conflicts. Kendirbai argues that nomads developed psychological and cultural expectations of leadership and shows how Chingis Khan's personal adherence to these norms facilitated his rise to become the supreme Mongol ruler. The charismatic leader's ability satisfy all parties enabled them to consolidate and protect their communities from precarious climatic and ecological conditions of the Eurasian steppes.

In addition to the thematic articles, Dmitry Shlapentokh, Farda Asadov, Tamer Balci, Paul Kubicek, and Gulnar Kendirbai provide their critiques of recent Silk Road Scholarship with book reviews on publications by Edith W. Clowes, Sergey Glebov, Hee Soo Lee & Mohammad Bagher, M. Hakan Yavuz, Fatma Kelkitli, and Shoshana Keller, 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 four new board members who joined us from this issue: Paul Tae-Woo Lee from Zhejiang University in China, Andrey Makarychev from the University of Tartu in Estonia, Morris Rossabi from Columbia University in the U.S., and Jeanne Wilson from Wheaton College in the U.S.

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 June of 2021.

Acta Via Serica Editorial Committee