of the funders at face value and ascribes their lack of attainment to mistakes. But the "mistakes" seem to be systematic – involving far more countries than just Russia – and invite investigation that would bracket what is being said while focusing on what is being done. In other words, an attempt might have been made to explain not only how the actions of certain institutions affect a specified domain, but how it was that those institutions – for reasons peculiar to themselves, formulated consciously or unconsciously – took and have continued to take such action.

There are a few points in the narrative where Henderson’s extensive and rich experiences in the field find an ethnographic voice. For instance, she adds parenthetically to her discussion of donor misconceptions about Russia and about what a “civil society” might actually look like there the insight that the “concept of constituent-based groups, in general, does not really exist in Russia” (p. 100). At a stroke, the entire neo-Tocquevillian scheme on which “democracy building” in Russia has been predicated gets shattered. The alleged universal – voluntary civic associations are “natural” to any modern society, they need only be nourished and protected – has been revealed to be a culture-bound construct. Similarly, she employs the thoughts of a program officer dealing with women’s groups – the author’s own focus – to capture aspects of women’s vulnerability that can invert itself when an opportunity appears: because the opportunity represents a way out of vulnerability and for a woman is unlikely to appear again soon, it can become the site of vicious contention. This passage sheds much light on Henderson’s subject, helping to account for the un-Tocquevillian behavior of the women activists whom she has studied.

In sum, this book’s combination of research techniques – a broad survey plus numerous in-depth interviews – along with its author’s deep knowledge of her subject recommends it to any reader concerned with the actual impact of Western assistance on Russian politics and society.

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The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence. Edited by Pauline Jones Luong. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. xii, 332 pp. $49.95 (cloth); $22.95 (paper).

Material for this work derives from the Olin Critical Issues Lecture Series that was co-organized by author-editor Luong and John Schoeberlein in early 2001. The Olin Foundation and Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies provided financial and logistical support for the series.

A rising star in the field, Professor Luong already has left a positive mark in advancing our knowledge about contemporary states and societies in Central Asia. Here she has authored or edited a stellar miscellany of chapters written by many of the best scholars in her specialty. Reflecting Luong’s lucubration and dedication, The Transformation of Central Asia is extremely well organized into four distinct parts of two chapters each. Luong herself contributed the pithy introduction, chapter 6, and a thorough conclusion. In fact, her diligent editing is evident throughout the book in the
form of copious footnotes and commentary. Thus, the work is much more coherent than most anthologies.

The book’s rather simple purpose of aspiring to draw the study of Central Asian politics “out of the periphery – both empirically and theoretically” – is complexly realized from author to author. As Luong notes in her introduction, each contributor researched the incipient relationship between state and society in one or more of the Central Asian Regions (what Luong has called “CARs” both here and elsewhere) “through the prism of core political, economic, or social institutions.” Next, each author was asked to re-examine current understanding of “both Central Asia and the state-building process.” In this respect, they introduced the working interrelationships between and among the highest levels of authority, the regional governments (hokimats and akimats), the neighborhood authorities (mahallas) – all representing various elements of the state – and the masses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the societal end.

In her introduction, Luong sounds the leitmotif by repudiating three hackneyed misconceptions about Soviet influence upon Central Asia and calling for a more objective, deeper assessment of the post-Soviet region based on the findings of field research, which she and the contributors to the current volume have conducted since 1991. The first of these misconceptions was the idea that the USSR was a “strong and pervasive force” in Central Asian society, according to which view the CARs were more submissive than other republics. The second was that the CARs were more resistant to Soviet rule than other republics because Central Asians were capable of syncretizing their pre-Soviet traditions within the Soviet framework. The third misconception was that the CARs were mere colonies, or appendages, of the USSR. As Luong and her fellow contributors illustrate, if any of these cases were true, if and when the USSR collapsed, Central Asia would have recrudesced into tribal, clannish, if not fundamentally Islamic societies “profoundly” incapable of self-government and managing their independence.

The reality was that although the Soviet experience in Central Asia was “more complete and pervasive than many expected,” this did not inspire a repudiation of the Soviet model. In fact, the Soviet model is retained in all CARs and is reflected in state organization, the attitudes and behaviors of elites, and in the almost complete failure of Islamic fundamentalism. Predicted recrudescence of civil war, inter-tribal strife, and so on did not materialize except in Tajikistan where the conflict emerged from an abstruse political, rather than a tribal or religious, crisis.

The Soviet legacy also fostered political competition and regional patronage networks that live on in modern Central Asia. As Luong cogently proved in Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia (2002), regionalism is significant in the elite bargaining process, which represents the main way that scarce goods reach the masses. The same elites serve as an impediment to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism because they view the religion as “prone to instability and conflict.” In fact, all the contributors to the book contend that, since 1991, virtually all other social forces have had a greater influence on the CARs than Islam. The same is true of pre-Soviet traditions, which continue to be relatively weak among the Central Asian hoi polloi. One possible exception, however, is the rise of nonconsensual bride