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From Industrialization to Extraction

Visions and Practices of Development in Soviet Central Asia: Introduction to the Forum

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**FROM INDUSTRIALIZATION TO EXTRACTION:
VISIONS AND PRACTICES OF DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL ASIA
INTRODUCTION TO THE FORUM**

In November 2017, the recently elected president of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, signed a decree creating a new Ministry of Innovative Development, the goal of which would be to harness the “achievements of world science and innovation” for “the dynamic and sustainable development of all spheres of life of society and the state.”¹ Although Uzbekistan’s new president has been eager to signal a new era in many fields of the country’s political, economic, and social life, the new ministry basically absorbed several preexisting agencies charged with the same task. Still, the move was revealing: Mirziyoyev has clearly felt the need to signal to Uzbekistan’s population as well as to foreigners that the new regime has a vision for the future, that it is willing to take the steps necessary to march in step with the world’s advanced economies. But if “innovation” and “sustainability” are the current buzzwords in development, the notion that the state is responsible for economic development – broadly conceived – is hardly new. Rather, it became central to how states in the twentieth century defined

¹ President Signs Decree on Establishment of Ministry of Innovative Development // UzDaily. 2017. November 30. <https://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-41805.htm>.

their role and how superpowers shaped their foreign policy. As the editors of a recent volume point out, “development has long been the rage in the global arena.”²

“Development” and “modernization” are, of course, loaded terms in the historiography of Russia, as they are in histories of empire and postcolonial studies. Both terms imply an end-state toward which societies or nations are striving, and their use has political as well as historiographical implications. In studies of Russia, the notion of development came up in discussions of Russia’s essential difference from European and other “western nations.” It thus took on particular salience among western historians during the Cold War, especially those who combined scholarly inquiry with punditry. The late Richard Pipes, one of the most famous representatives of this school, located the origins of Russia’s path to socialist revolution and totalitarianism in its failure to embrace private property.³ Not surprisingly, questions about development and modernization also preoccupied historians of the 1990s and 2000s. At the core of these debates was the nature of the Stalinist system: was it a form of European modernity, as Stephen Kotkin argued? Or was it instead full of archaizing forms with a modern veneer?⁴ But while their predecessors were happy to employ the concepts to compare Russia’s path to an idealized western one, the younger generation used the term more critically to reflect on earlier historiography or to study the *self-conscious* attempts at development and modernization undertaken by Russia’s elites.⁵

For historians of empire and colonialism, development and modernization are associated with the legitimizing claims of the power discrepancies they study. Although the “civilizing mission” of European empires was at first limited to the spread of Christianity, it eventually came to encompass issues as divergent as public health, technical knowledge, and economic activity.

² Erez Manela and Stephen Macekura (Eds.). *The Development Century: A Global History*. Cambridge, 2018. P. 2.

³ Richard Pipes. *Russia under the Old Regime*. New York, 1974.

⁴ Stephen Kotkin. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization*. Berkeley, 1995; Stephen Kotkin. *Modern Times: the Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjunction* // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2001. Vol. 2. No. 1. Pp. 111–164.

⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick (Ed.). *Stalinism: New Directions*. London, 1999; Michael David-Fox. *Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History* // *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 2006. Vol. 54. No. 4. Pp. 535–555. The present journal, of course, has devoted many pages to the concept and its application in the historiography of Russia and the Soviet Union, for example, the thematic issue “Russia’s ‘Special Path’ and Varieties of Imperial and National Experiences of Modernization” (*Ab Imperio*. 2002. Vol. 3. No. 1).

A “modern” European civilization was contrasted with the “backward” or “primitive” one that needed the former’s tutelage. As anticolonial movements gained strength in the twentieth century, these legitimizing claims gained importance.

The problem for historians was that the end of imperial development did not mean the end of development and modernization as paradigms in historical research. On the contrary, these terms had their heyday in the decades of decolonization. Western scholars sympathetic to the postcolonial state, advocates of aid to postcolonial states within western countries, and in many cases postcolonial elites themselves adopted the language of development and modernization. Works like Daniel Lerner’s *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1958) combined a scholarly apparatus with policy prescriptions.⁶ They shared more than a title with historical works like Vartan Gregorian’s *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Political Reform and Modernization* (1969).⁷ It was precisely in this period that modernization and development went from terms describing historical processes to activities that a state or a donor could undertake to help a society reach that stage of historical development. It is not that one meaning supplanted the other, but rather that the two existed side by side.

Over the past twenty years, historians across several subfields have turned their attention to development and “various schemes to improve the human condition.” Such studies initially gained prominence in the 1990s among historians of American foreign relations, who were interested in the origins and politics of American “modernization” campaigns in the developing world during the Cold War. The titles of their works were often superficially similar to those of historical and policy works of the period they studied, but their approach could not be more different.⁸ For these historians, the modernization paradigm and the foreign policy it engendered was an expression of mid-twentieth-century American optimism about the role of the state and the liberal order defended by Washington, DC. Inspired in part by the works

⁶ Daniel Lerner. *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. New York, 1958.

⁷ Vartan Gregorian. *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880–1946*. Stanford, 1969.

⁸ See, for example, the outstanding recent monograph by Nate Citino. *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S. – Arab Relations, 1945–1967*. Cambridge, 2016. Despite the similarities of this book’s title with the work of the 1950s and 1960s, Citino examines modernization as a policy goal and intellectual framework of U.S. and Arab elites in the postwar decades, as well as the meandering paths of ideas about modernization that sometimes led from the Arab world to the west and back again.

of social scientists like James Ferguson and James Scott,⁹ these historians have also examined critically how the United States became implicated in the worst abuses of state power in the name of development and anticommunism.¹⁰ Others have turned to the imperial origins of postwar development schemes, the role of knowledge production, and the place of international institutions in the global development landscape. And while the field began largely as a province of U.S. foreign policy history and focused primarily on the actions and thoughts of U.S. elites, more recent scholarship has begun to foreground the role of local political and intellectual elites, while still others have even tried to capture the voices of nonelite actors – a task that is of course even more difficult for historians than for anthropologists.¹¹

Yet while this literature has recognized the importance of the Cold War for histories of modernization and development, it is only comparatively recently that histories of the USSR as a developmental actor have begun to emerge.¹² Of course, the USSR never spoke of “development” in the sense

⁹ James Ferguson. *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge, 1990; James C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, 1999.

¹⁰ Thomas Field. *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era*. Ithaca, 2014.

¹¹ Priya Lal. *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World*. Cambridge, 2015; Alden Young. *Transforming Sudan: Decolonisation, Development, and State Formation*. Cambridge, 2017; Alden Young. *African Bureaucrats and the Exhaustion of the Developmental State: Lessons from the Pages of the Sudanese Economist // Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*. 2017. Vol. 8. No. 1. Pp. 49–75.

¹² The most up-to-date survey of the literature on European and U.S. efforts is the two-part article by Joseph Hodge. *Writing the History of Development (The First Wave) // Humanity*. 2015. Winter. Pp. 429–463 and *Writing the History of Development (Part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider) // Humanity*. 2016. Spring. Pp. 125–174. See also Frederick Cooper. *Writing the History of Development // Journal of Modern European History*. 2010. Vol. 8. No. 1. Pp. 5–23. On the Soviet and East European side, see David Engerman. *The Second World's Third World // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2011. Vol. 12. No. 1. Pp. 183–211. A number of monographs, articles, and theses have appeared since: Jeremy Friedman. *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*. Chapel Hill, 2015; Natalia Telepneva. *Our Sacred Duty: The Soviet Union, the Liberation Movements in the Portuguese Colonies, and the Cold War, 1961–1975 / PhD Thesis*; London School of Economics, 2014; Alessandro Iandolo. *Imbalance of Power: The Soviet Union and the Congo Crisis, 1960–1961 // The Journal of Cold War Studies*. 2014. Vol. 16. No. 2. Pp. 32–55; Iandolo. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Model of Development in West Africa, 1957–1964 // Cold War History*. 2012. Vol. 12. No. 4. Pp. 683–704.

used by contemporary western actors. Soviet agencies spoke of “aid” or “fraternal assistance.” At the same time, as historians of the USSR have long recognized, notions of development and modernization were central to the socialist ideology and the Soviet project. Society moved in stages, from feudalism to capitalism to socialism and ultimately to communism. If the role of the “vanguard party” as articulated by Vladimir Lenin was to hurry this process along, the role of the Soviet Union in the postwar decades was to help along this path countries that had declared themselves socialist as well as those who were “noncapitalist.” Soviet involvement created its own contradictions and unintended consequences. Soviet aid to China, which Odd Arne Westad called “history’s biggest foreign assistance program,”¹³ drew the USSR and the People’s Republic of China together in the 1950s; at the same time, as Austin Jersild demonstrated, the interaction between often imperious and insensitive Russian specialists and technicians and their Chinese counterparts led to resentment that laid the ground for the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s.¹⁴

Historians have begun to take note of the extent to which Russian and Soviet efforts in Central Asia – a colonial or quasi-colonial periphery – were focused on issues of economic and social development, and the extent to which these efforts were used to justify Russian and then Soviet rule.¹⁵ In recent years, some historians have revived terms like “development” and “modernization” in histories of Soviet Central Asia, but in the sense of policies pursued by political actors rather than as historical processes to be understood. That, in turn, has led to a new appreciation of how the very discourse of “modernization” and “development” (and its opposite, backwardness) helped shape Soviet history. Thus in his 2015 *Sovetskii Kishlak: Mezhdru kolonializmom i modernizatsiei*, Sergei Abashin draws our attention to the way that discourses of Central Asia’s “failed modernization” in the

¹³ Odd Arne Westad. *Restless Empire. China and the World Since 1750*. London, 2013. P. 304.

¹⁴ Austin Jersild. *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History*. Chapel Hill, 2014.

¹⁵ See, for example, Maya Peterson. *Technologies of Rule: Empire, Water and the Modernization of Central Asia, 1867–1941* / PhD Dissertation; Harvard University, 2011; Benjamin Loring. *Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-Making, Rural Development, and Social Change, 1921–1932* / PhD Dissertation; Brandeis University, 2008; Patryk Reid. *Managing Nature, Constructing the State: The Material Foundation of Soviet Empire in Tajikistan, 1917–1937* / PhD Dissertation; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016; Botakoz Kassymbekova. *Helpless Imperialists: European State Workers in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930* // *Central Asian Survey*. 2011. Vol. 30. No. 1. Pp. 21–37.

late perestroika era shaped understanding of the region just as the Soviet Union was coming apart. Yet Abashin also notes: “The paradox is that this proffered judgment – that modernization was unfortunate and its results were unsatisfactory – does not mean that there was no real transformation, and in and of itself already demonstrates a signifier of a different perception of historical values than existed before.”¹⁶

But the problems and contradictions that stalked Soviet development abroad also characterized Soviet efforts at home. Soviet aid to developing countries inevitably led to questions about the USSR’s own needs. The USSR, after all, was a relatively poor country still recovering from the devastation of World War II. Even as Soviet officials railed against Western trade, which locked poorer countries into the role of commodity producers, they often sought to replicate the same pattern with other socialist countries as well as developing ones. As David Engerman noted, “An outside observer might be forgiven for being unable to distinguish” between the “international capitalist division of labor” and “the international socialist division of labor.”¹⁷ A similar dynamic played out within the USSR, where the Central Asian republics were assigned the role of cotton and other agricultural production (and later, oil and gas extraction) but the processing industries were located in the European parts of the country. In the 1920s, and again in the post-Stalin era, local communists questioned this arrangement, pointing out obvious similarities in terms of trade within imperial systems. Of course, to the extent that Moscow did invest, industrialization set off its own unexpected and often unwanted consequences, which included, but were not limited to, environmental damage with little apparent benefit for the local population. The perceived failure of socialist development models contributed to the centrifugal forces that tore apart the USSR in the late 1980s.¹⁸

Indeed, Central Asia provides an ideal vantage point to compare Soviet and capitalist development. After 1991, the newly independent Central Asian states took welfare and growth as political goals and invited international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and individual countries like Germany, Japan, and the United States, to help achieve them. Most of these donors subscribed to the Washington Consensus that stressed fiscal discipline as well as minimum state intervention

¹⁶ Sergei Abashin. *Sovetskii kishlak: mezhdru kolonializmom i modernizatsiei*. Moscow, 2015. Pp. 20, 22, 27.

¹⁷ Engerman. *Price of Aid*. P. 297.

¹⁸ Artemy M. Kalinovsky. *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*. Ithaca, 2018.

and regulation – the opposite of what Soviet development presumed – and emphasized private initiative. International conglomerates and state-backed Chinese companies have taken on the work of resource extraction, infrastructure construction, and transport management formerly carried out by Soviet agencies.

At the same time, a number of anthropologists and sociologists have studied the effect of post-1991 international development on these post-Soviet states.¹⁹ While many of these studies have noted the tendency among international institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to devise development schemes as if the region had not already experienced more than a century of interventions, few of these studies have delved deeply into the legacy of Soviet schemes.²⁰

This thematic forum brings together a set of articles by historians, anthropologists, and political scientists, examining ways that the Soviet regime and some of its successors in Central Asia have linked the transformation of the natural environment with efforts to improve the human condition. From the tsarist period through the Soviet era and until the present day, various schemes to harness rivers for energy and irrigation, build road and rail through forbidding mountain passes, or extract valuable minerals, were portrayed as engines for development. These projects were also invariably conceived as radical breaks with what had come before. This forum investigates the intellectual sources and knowledge production behind such endeavors; the social mobilization and social costs of large infrastructure projects; their ultimate significance for local economies and the environment; and the social and political struggles these transformational projects engendered.

Focusing on a region that has seen similar projects carried out under very different political regimes, the four essays published here explore the making of grand projects in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Reading them together reveals a top-down Soviet period of economic and technological planning that offers some surprising continuities as well as contrasts with

¹⁹ Special Issue: Reflections on Post-Soviet Development in Central Asia: a Multi-Disciplinary Perspective / Ed. Gül Berna Özcan // *Central Asian Survey*. 2015. Vol. 34. No. 4; Sophie Hohmann et. al. (Eds.). *Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Migration, Democratisation and Inequality in the Post-Soviet Era*. London, 2014; Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal. *Oil Is Not a Curse: Ownership Structure and Institutions in Soviet Successor States*. Cambridge, 2010.

²⁰ Ruth Mandel. *Transition to Where? Developing Post-Soviet Space* // *Slavic Review*. 2012. Vol. 71. No. 2. Pp. 223–233.

post-Soviet concepts for development that draw on international “best practices.” Soviet and post-Soviet local actors reshaped grand schemes to meet their own needs and desires. Together, these articles explore the ways that policies for economic development, both socialist and postsocialist, have set processes of change in motion in Central Asia, some of which have produced widespread lasting improvements, but others, substantial destruction.

The articles presented here were originally prepared for a workshop on “Development in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Periphery,” convened at Leiden University in September 2015.²¹ That workshop brought together historians, anthropologists, and sociologists to discuss a range of questions related to urban development, human capital, natural resources, and knowledge production. The four articles that follow have a narrower focus, looking at struggles over natural resource extraction and the question of who gets to benefit from development schemes.²² All of them speak to wider concerns in the historiography and social science literature on development: How are development ideas formed? How are the (supposed) beneficiaries of development interventions defined? To what extent can these beneficiaries have a voice in the decisions being made about their lives and livelihoods? All four scholars also deal with methodological concerns common to all histories of development: how does one examine the intellectual origins of development schemes, and the politics of decision making, while also accessing the voices of those who were (are) most affected?

These articles offer contrasting visions of Soviet and post-Soviet development, with the studies by Niccolò Pianciola and by Amanda Wooden drawing attention to extraction, coercion, and the very unequal relations of power between those deciding and those affected. The articles by Flora Roberts and by Morgan Y. Liu examine interaction and negotiation among those who propose, debate, decide, and carry out plans for development. All the articles address development as process, fixing their gaze on decisions in-the-making, rather than on finished products, end points, or long-term effects.

²¹ The workshop was convened by Artemy Kalinovsky, Marianne Kamp, Marlene Laruelle, and Elena Paskaleva with support from the Dutch Royal Academy of Science (KNAW), the Dutch Research Organization (NWO), the Amsterdam School for Regional, Transnational, and European Studies (ARTES), and the Leiden University Asian Modernities and Traditions (AMT) program.

²² This topic has also begun to receive attention from historians of postcolonial development. Chris Dietrich tells the story of how postcolonial elites in countries with hydrocarbon resources used multilateral and international institutions to establish control over their natural resources using international law. Dietrich, *Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization*. Cambridge, 2017.

In this forum, we take development to mean deliberate change and investment of human and material resources with the goal of producing ongoing improvements to the general welfare. A development-oriented plan in the Kazakh Steppe should have focused on expanding herd size and meat production; but the process Pianciola describes caused herd sizes to plummet and left Kazakhs to starve. Interactions between a tyrannical Stalinist system and Kazakhs demonstrate an absolute disparity in power, wherein a Kazakh herder could flee; slaughter his own animals and then starve; concede to state coercion and join a collective farm, but potentially starve anyway; but in any case could not effectively oppose or even negotiate Moscow's catastrophic demands. In the context of the collectivization drives of the 1930s, there was little that an appeal to broader ideals could do to challenge decisions made in Moscow. Faith in the knowledge acquired about Kazakh herders, combined with a drive to nationalize their production led to disaster, and out of all the pieces presented here, Pianciola's reflects most closely the critique of development and state power laid out by James Scott, for whom Bolshevik collectivization was emblematic of the "High Modernist" approach to government that he criticized.²³

Yet this story of development is particular to a place and time. Even Stalin-era development schemes were diverse in conception, discussion, and implementation. In other situations the promise of socialist development actually created the opportunity for limited political struggle. The debates around the Kairakkum Dam in the late 1940s and early 1950s displayed not a roughshod trampling of the people's welfare, but instead a contest among Tajikistan and Uzbekistan's leaders and Moscow's planning and economy ministries. As Roberts shows, development offered a field for battle. Learning from the experience of the Farhad Dam, which, though built on Tajikistan's territory, offered its ongoing improvements for production and welfare to Uzbekistan's industries and farmers, Tajikistan's party secretary Bobojon Ghafurov deployed arguments in favor of Khujand's agriculturists against development's advocates for transforming a watershed. Roberts shows that at the time, the interests of "Uzbekistan and All-Union institutions" trumped those of Tajikistan, despite Ghafurov's efforts to thwart or at least relocate the planned dam. A longer-term perspective might point out that the dam brought the Khujand region a lasting and productive investment. The article highlights a problem of evaluating the success of development projects: projects that seem uncontroversial sometimes end up causing discontent;

²³ Scott. *Seeing Like a State*.

and views articulated during the development process, whether critical or positive, may have no bearing on the later assessments of a completed scheme by those whose lives the project changes.

Development in independent Central Asia is a field with a much wider spectrum of participants than was found in the two Soviet-period studies, as both Wooden and Liu point out. Central to their articles are questions about the relationship between environment, enterprise, and local community; how one defines and fights for rights to resources; and the legacies of Soviet development and welfare for contemporary development politics. In Kyrgyzstan's Kumtor mine development, an international corporation, the World Bank, the government of Kyrgyzstan, NGOs, local residents, and activists all compete to shape processes and outcomes and to make their claim on whatever rewards a development project promises. Wooden stresses the ways that Soviet provision of social welfare in strategic mining towns continues to shape local expectations, in a period when global neoliberalism views corporate social responsibility as the best means for international business to atone for lasting environmental damage and to dampen local opposition. Wooden's article encompasses a wide range of actors and thus highlights that local opponents of Kumtor mine development have been able to make demands in ways that were impossible during the Soviet period. The benefits of development in this case are far more unequal than in the case of Tajikistan's Soviet period Kairakkum Dam, but those who feel the Kumtor mine's harms are not silent or entirely without power.

Liu directly focuses on development as "a field of power," challenging us to question whether states, corporations, and nongovernmental organizations that take part in hydrocarbon development and all its attendant effects can really be understood as separate, when their interests, personnel, and actions all overlap. The idea that development should enhance social welfare no longer means that the Socialist state should provide; instead corporations and NGOs collaborate with states to take on social service functions of their choosing. When studying Soviet-period development, the analyst rightly focuses on the state's leading actors because the field where decisions of significance were made was narrow. In the hydrocarbon states of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, Liu notes, the spectrum of actors is vastly more complex, and analysis of development and its consequences might best begin with recognizing that assemblage.

The editors of a recent volume on development in the twentieth century insist that development "should be viewed as a fully global project, exploring the far-flung and wide-ranging networks of actors, spaces, and institu-

tions that have been involved in it.”²⁴ The articles presented here do not, by themselves, fulfill this agenda. They nevertheless do point to a way forward, by showing how what happened (and is happening) in Central Asia can be understood in terms of that global history and also how the case of Central Asia could be used to write the global history of development.

SUMMARY

In the introduction to the forum on visions and practices of development in Central Asia, Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Marianne Kamp propose looking at the history of Central Asia of the past century as part of the global history of development. They introduce the four articles presented in the forum that, together, transcend the historical ruptures of World War II and 1991 and reestablish the historical agency of local actors in the projects of Soviet and post-Soviet development.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В своем введении к форуму, посвященному видению и практикам развития в Средней Азии, Артемий Калиновский и Мариан Кемп предлагают взглянуть на историю региона последнего столетия как часть глобальной истории развития. Авторы представляют четыре статьи, вошедшие в форум. Посвященные разным периодам, вместе эти тексты позволяют преодолеть разрывы исторического нарратива, связанные со Второй мировой войной или 1991 г., и восстановить историческую субъектность местных действующих лиц и групп в советских и постсоветских проектах развития.

²⁴ Manela and Macekura. *Development Century*. P. 10.