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Building of “Nomadic Socialism”: State and Society in the Making of Soviet

Kyrgyzstan

（「遊牧民的社会主義」の建設：ソヴィエト・クルグズスタンの形成における国家と社会）

This dissertation aims to depict the process of building a socialist state and society in Kyrgyzstan during the early years of Soviet rule. It argues that the socialist state and society in the mountainous periphery of Central Asia resulted in a convergence of pre-existing Kyrgyz nomadic traditional norms and values with the soviet socialist principles and ideas.

It focuses on two main topics. First, the political processes that led to the formation of the Kyrgyz Soviet autonomy in the 1920s. Second, the Soviet state’s policies of sovietization, collectivization, and sedentarization in the Kyrgyz countryside. The dissertation’s central thesis is that the establishment of Kyrgyz Soviet autonomy and society under the Soviet auspices can be understood as the intersection of official state policies and pre-existing Kyrgyz local traditional practices. Notably, it argues that despite the state’s unmatched total control and domination, all official policies were interpreted and reconceptualized according to Kyrgyz’s traditional understandings of power and society. It invites readers to look more closely at the intersection of two worldviews, that is, on the one hand, Bolshevik, socialist, mobilizational, and modernizing state and, on the other, Kyrgyz traditional, cultural, and nomadic concepts of society and its organization.

This thesis employs the concept of "nomadic socialism." I borrow the phrase "nomadic socialism" from Pogorel'skii Pavel Vasilevich's observation of Kazakh collective farm activities during the 1930s. Pogorel'skii used this term to describe a transitional situation from nomadism

to settled life where the majority or even the whole collective farms would continue to roam with their livestock between seasonal pastures until they built enough agricultural capacity to switch to settled life entirely. I broaden the scope of his term to describe a situation aroused from the mix of the pre-existing Kyrgyz traditional practices with the Soviet state's proclaimed principles and ideals of the socialist society. By pre-existing Kyrgyz traditional practices, I mean the principles of societal organization, a system of power relations, tribal affiliation, and the organization of the pastoral economy. This dissertation argues that the Soviet Kyrgyzstan of the 1920s and 1930s represented a society where the Kyrgyz traditional nomadic society's structure and power organization intermingled and fused with the Soviet state's norms, rules, and principles. Through this convergence, Kyrgyz pastoralists could apply somewhat incompatible new rules of the Soviet regime to their daily lives. The resulting "nomadic socialism" is not only the story of the one-way adaptation of Kyrgyz nomads to the demands of the new socialist order. It is also the other way round: the state's adaptation to particularities of pre-existing norms of sociability and practices in the Kyrgyz society.

The history of Soviet Kyrgyzstan, like other Central Asian republics, has been under active reconsideration in recent years. First, beginning with the era of Perestroika and the subsequent demise of the Soviet Union, many Kyrgyz scholars started to write more openly about their immediate past. These scholars were raised and trained in the strict Soviet ideological atmosphere with its focus on class struggle, absolute righteousness of the Communist Party and Soviet governments' historical decisions, undoubtedly positive impact of the Soviet experience on the historical development of the Kyrgyz nation. However, the opening of public debate in the 1980s and 1990s allowed scholars to look more critically at the socialist experience. One of their achievements in reconsidering the Kyrgyz soviet experience had been their "discovery" of the Kyrgyz political elite, who played a crucial role in establishing the

Kyrgyz soviet autonomy in the 1920s.

However, the process of reconsideration of Kyrgyz soviet history could not go beyond the political history of the 1920s and 1930s with its excessive focus on the words and deeds of the Kyrgyz national elite of that period. This focus on national intelligentsia in academia and the general public was part of the nation-building process in the independent years. These works connected the current generation to its roots and helped to find national heroes to look up to for inspiration. Thus, the works by T. Ozhukeeva, Dzh. Dzhunushaliev, Z. Kurmanov, V. Ploskikh, and others were crucial in a reexamination of ideology dominated soviet historical narrative. However, at the same time, these works were also shaped by the political atmosphere of the nation-building processes of the 1990s and 2000s.

Over time there appeared some excellent works written by Kyrgyz and foreign scholars. Benjamin Loring's doctoral dissertation focused on the political processes of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s came first in this line, published in 2008. Loring's dissertation can be regarded as the first academic work based exclusively on primary sources, which reevaluated Soviet Kyrgyzstan's history without a national ideological frame. The next came from Ali Iğmen with his groundbreaking book about the functioning of cultural houses. Iğmen showed how Kyrgyz culture and tradition were translated into the Soviet language through Kyrgyz actors' active involvement. Iğmen's work was followed by two more doctoral dissertations written by Kyrgyz scholars studying abroad. Among these, Jipar Duishembieva's dissertation presents a unique perspective of the Kyrgyz Soviet project as she connects the under-looked pre-revolutionary period with the soviet era. Duishembieva's work showed how the early Soviet period Kyrgyz intelligentsia had its roots in modernizing the cultural milieu of the late tsarist Muslim world of Central Asia and beyond. Contrary to the widespread assumption that Kyrgyz society became conscious of themselves only due to the Soviet

government's nationality policy, Duishembieva claimed that Kyrgyz national intelligentsia already possessed distinct national consciousness by the Soviet period. The following dissertation by Aminat Chokobaeva is focused on the Semirech'e oblast and how this oblast became part of the Soviet Union through the revolution, civil war, and repressive policies of collectivization years. Like Duishmembieva, Chokobaeva also looks in depth at the pre-revolutionary period and masterfully connects it with the Soviet context. The central part of her thesis is an era-forming event of the Central Asian revolt of 1916 and the state's attempts to control the territory and population in the distant part of the Soviet Union. Through detailed analysis of soviet state building projects based on a primary and close re-reading of secondary literature, Chokobaeva showed how the logics of empire, state, nation, violence, and modernization intermingled and contested each other through the tumultuous revolutionary and yearly Soviet years in Semirech'e.

As we can see, most of these works were centered around two topics of nation-building policies of Soviet central authorities and Kyrgyz national intelligentsia. This thesis, also building upon these previous accounts at the same time, offers a new look at the Soviet experience with its focus on the microhistory of sovietization policies and the experience of peripheral regions during the sedentarization and collectivization period. While looking at the major political events and the role of the national intelligentsia in the political processes, we somehow forgot to look at the content of Soviet policies on the ground. How were Soviet socialist ideas perceived and practiced in the depth of Kyrgyz society? What were the side-effects of the sovietisation and socialization attempts despite its positivist and modernist agenda? Through which canals did the soviet state penetrate the deeps of Kyrgyz social fabric and take hold there? Were collectivization and sedentarisation finalized, as is still argued today, by the end of the second five-year plan? In other words, how much was socialist the socialist

project in Kyrgyzstan in the 1920s and 1930s?

The first part of the dissertation deals with the pre-revolutionary period, the Russian revolutions of 1917, and the yearly years of Soviet rule. The second part is devoted to the sovietization and collectivization policies of the 1920s and 1930s. The central question this thesis tried to answer was to what extent the Kyrgyz society in the 1920s and 1930s was the quantitatively new soviet society and how it related to its pre-soviet past.

The first chapter examines pre-revolutionary Kyrgyz society during the period of the Russian invasion of Central Asia and how Kyrgyz lands were incorporated into the Russian realm. This chapter shows how the Kyrgyz tribal aristocracy went through distinct patterns of subordination with the Russian Empire. Most northern Kyrgyz tribes were positioned in precarious surroundings sandwiched by China, Kokand khanate, and other regional forces. Therefore, they submitted to the Russian Empire voluntarily, seeking political and economic security from them. However, other tribal chieftains, such as Ümötaalī Ormon uulu, resisted Russian forces until their last option was dried up. Overall, the Kyrgyz tribes' particular position toward Russia depended on their political and economic situation. The first Kyrgyz tribe who submitted to Russia, Bugu Kyrgyz, did so not because of their particular fondness for the Russians. They pledged to the Russian Tsar because they saw in Russian military forces a real defensive possibility against other Kyrgyz tribes' attacks and Kokand khanate's domination. In short, by inviting Russia to their side, they sought to maintain and, if possible, enhance their position vis-à-vis local and outside rivalries.

The entirely different picture we see in the case of the southern Kyrgyz tribes, who historically had been under more intense management by the Kokand khanate. Here, the leading Kyrgyz tribes actively engaged in Kokandian politics, rebelled against khans, helped to erect a new khan on the throne, and, if needed, defended Khanate's interests militarily. Given this

entrenchment in political processes in the Khanate, it is not surprising that the southern Kyrgyz tribes (one could say not all of them) actively resisted Russia's incursion in 1875–1876.

The second chapter explored the political processes which led to the establishment of Kyrgyz Soviet autonomy in 1924. It argued that the Bolsheviks' insistence on the right of nations to self-determination was certainly the basic premise on which Soviet Kyrgyzstan was eventually built. At the same time, the sole fact of the existence of the policy that aimed at bolstering nationality rights was not in itself the guarantee of automatic acknowledgment of minorities' right to autonomy. Instead, to realize the principle of self-determination, one had to appeal for it and persuade Moscow that they were qualified to be considered a separate ethnicity. Kyrgyz elites insisted on their "legitimate aspiration prescribed in basic laws of the RSFSR constitution" to form their territorial unit during the KKMO.

Contrary to the existing literature, which sees anti-Kazakh sentiments in Kyrgyz elites' attitudes in the first half of the 1920s, this dissertation emphasized the nuances of Kazakh-Kyrgyz relations. Notably, it showed how Kyrgyz leaders raised the first Kyrgyz national project of Kara-Kyrgyz Mountainous Oblast in 1922 in conjunction with Kazakh political activists in Turkestan republic government structures.

This chapter showed that by setting out the broad rules of the game, Moscow was neither willing nor able to control and check every aspect of its policy rigorously. Instead, they depended on the local actors to implement their vision in the region, which opened a broad scope for native elites to interpret and articulate the local agenda. So, one can conclude that the emergence of Soviet Kyrgyzstan is the product of this mixture of central and local power balance and the dynamics of local politics in the early years of Soviet rule.

The main topic of the third chapter is the relationship between Soviet central authorities and the Kyrgyz national elite. It shows how the central authorities determined to put

the power apparatus under their control in Kyrgyzstan largely depended on a small number of native cadres. These small cohorts of national cadres were all part of the late imperial modernizing Muslim intelligentsia. By the time Bolsheviks took power, they were already exposed to the ideas of modernization, and nationalism and served in different imperial era state institutions. They also traveled and studied abroad. Most importantly, they could write and speak in Russian and interpret alien and abstractly sound ideological canons of Leninism and Marxism. They were opposed by another part of Kyrgyz cadres, who were more Bolshevik-inclined. They made their political careers only with the advent of the October revolution. As was perceived at that time and recorded in different historical sources, these two groups of national cadres are conditionally divided as “rightists” and “leftists”. This chapter shows how the central authorities, conscious of their unstable position within the Kyrgyz society, opted not to silence forcibly but tried to persuade both factions of the Kyrgyz elite. Thus, one can describe the period between 1925 and the first half of the 1930s as the period of “two-way adaptation” of the central power and local elites to each other. It was not only the native elites who had to subdue and adapt to the rules set by the new regime, but the regime also had to adjust itself to the various peculiarities of the localities. The chapter concludes by considering that Moscow’s plans not to use coercive powers except public show trials for a few individuals but to teach and take by influence the majority of native cadres was the basic structure of center-periphery relations of these years.

The fourth chapter attempts to showcase “nomadic socialism” in detail in this thesis. While the first three chapters dealt with the overall political process of Soviet Kyrgyzstan’s establishment, the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters deal directly with the notion of “nomadic socialism”. Particularly, the fourth chapter argues how the very interventionist nature of the Soviet Union, with its goal of actively remaking and remodeling native societies on the way to

communism, put it closer to the local population. The Soviet state was way more effective in mobilizing natural and human resources and controlling the population than the Russian Empire. Acknowledging the general weakness of the state institutions in the 1920s at the same time, we should not disregard institutional pressure inflicted upon society. The state introduced various state performers, such as the party and its local cells, government ministries and organizations, the local assemblies of citizens (the soviets), peasant organizations, and unions. These institutional ramifications created a field where the Soviet system intermingled with pre-existing traditions, norms, and power structures. It resulted in two interconnected implications. First, the increased institutional pressure strained existing local power relations. People encountered more state performers in everyday life and consequently increased their legal and illegal duties before the state. Second, not the party and the state but local power holders decided the forms and content of the Soviet state on the ground. The election processes in the distant corners of Kyrgyzstan showed how the pre-existing local traditions and power relations were dressed up with the Soviet formality and incorporated into the realm of soviet legal institutions.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with collectivization and sedentarization policies. The fifth chapter depicts the general process of collectivization and sedentarization campaign in Kyrgyz nomadic countryside. The sixth chapter shows how ill-conducted and half-finished collectivization attempts gave way to the appearance of “nomadic socialism” in its most expressive form. The fifth chapter argues that half of the republic’s total nomadic and semi-nomadic population were still not touched by the collectivization by 1937. Out of covered 44.5 thousand households, around 34 thousand families had dwellings from the earth. By 1 January 1937, 35 thousand households remained without houses. The phenomenal destruction of the nomadic economy within the initial few years confirms that sedentarization as a mass campaign has never existed. The center was concerned with farming and, most of all, with pumping out

the wheat from the village, so the question of nomads and animal husbandry did not pose for them a particular problem. Dealing with nomads formally had been left to the republican level authorities. In practice, only raion-level administrators bore all the burden.

The sixth concluding chapter raises the question of how in these half-built and semi-collectivized situations, the Kyrgyz herders operated. This chapter answers this question by showing how the brutal shift from local, small, and closed forms of farming to industrialized agriculture could only bring destruction to the local economy. The result was formally collectivized socialist agriculture but filled with pre-existing Kyrgyz traditional norms and rules. It argues how the core features of the nomadic tradition, such as tribal and descent line identity, remained entrenched within the collective socialistic system. People continued to live in family groups and operate according to the interests of one's lineage, not on abstract class-based identity. They organized collective farm labor and formed working units according to lineage affiliation. Kyrgyz nomads adapted to and absorbed the socialist system through their pre-existing established practices. Their understanding of collective labor and socialist agriculture was that they worked in brigades that consisted only of their lineage members. Only through this form of interpretation could they comprehend and practice Soviet socialism.

The main question this dissertation tried to answer was how we know the border between the nomadic and traditional past and the sovietised, settled, and modernized society. Where is the line when Kyrgyz society becomes socialist and ceases to embody its former self? It argued that the line between, on the one hand, traditional "Kyrgyzness," pre-existing nomadic practices, social and economic preconditions, and sovietness, sedentarism, and socialism, on the other, was blurred. There was no discernible line that clearly delineated two systems into imaginative "before" and "after." People perceived and practiced the Soviet system as much as they could align it with their existing social and economic conditions.

Soviet regime's principles, norms, and ideas about socialist society were interpreted, negotiated, and implemented by native, local bureaucrats, traditional tribal leaders, and the local population. European leaders and party functionaries knew that what they witnessed in Soviet Kyrgyzstan was not the type of socialistic society they intended to build. However, they could not radically alter the situation and implement what they had imagined as proper socialism, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. As they possessed neither enough human and financial resources nor were familiar with their social surroundings, the party and state decision-makers were compelled to accommodate local power holders: modern educated political elites and traditional tribal chieftains. These local power holders took upon themselves the official authority and represented and performed in the state's name. They based their legitimacy on their understanding of power but not according to the abstract and distant principles of the Communist Party and the Soviet state. It resulted in the Soviet formality filled with Kyrgyz conventionalities. This dissertation, building on Pogorel'skii's insights from the 1934 article, proposed to see this interpenetrated condition as "nomadic socialism."

The "nomadic socialism" meant that the authorities, too, often had to compromise and implement more feasible policy options in Kyrgyzstan's conditions. Bearing in mind the authoritarian nature of power in the Soviet Union, it is natural to assume that local people were the first to align themselves along the line that the authorities drew for them. However, a careful analysis of these relations shows how the authorities, consciously or not, or maybe even unwittingly, often tried to adapt to the realities that they faced on the ground. This adaptation for the authorities was necessary to carry out the Sovietization of society, at least in a hybrid, more acceptable form to the native population.