
Mirja Juntunen and Birgit N. Schlyter (eds) *Return to the Silk Routes. Current Scandinavian Research on Central Asia*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1999. 189 pp. ISBN 0-7103-0608-3.

In Scandinavia, Central Asian Studies have had a long tradition that Sven Hedin and Folke Bergman developed during the first part of the twentieth century and that young and talented scholars are continuing today. *Return to the Silk Routes* gathers thematically 12 essays written by Scandinavian scholars who belong to different disciplines. Most of the contributors have benefited from the easier access to sources and better fieldwork opportunities that have resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their papers add new information on archaeological, religious, linguistic and political issues in Central Asia. The topics they explore are familiar to historians, anthropologists and philologists, while the methodologies they use are familiar to scholars in other area studies. All the papers were originally presentations given at the 'Nordic Central Asia Research: Language, Culture, Society' symposium that the Institute of Oriental Languages of Stockholm University organized in September 1996.

The contributions have been edited by a linguist and an Indologist, who both work at Stockholm University: Birgit N. Schlyter, who teaches Turkish and Uzbek, and Mirja Juntunen, who teaches Sanskrit and Hindi. While short, this book is remarkably informative, and its impressive scholarly quality would honour Professor Gunnar Jarring to whom it is dedicated.

In many respects the book's first section, 'Central Asia Research. A Background', is the most intriguing one since at the same time we are invited to admire three centuries of knowledge accumulation on Central Asia and given reasons to doubt that this field will ever be viable. Mirja Juntunen, Birgit N. Schlyter and John Schoeberlein survey the Scandinavian historiography of Central Asian Studies, debate the present status of this uniquely complex field, and comment on the conditions of a promising but uncertain period in the study of Central Asia. Advanced training in the humanities and social sciences will

largely draw on the potential of institutional collaboration, and new research networks will depend on strong international support. Articulating the centrality of Central Asia will require a greater degree of co-ordination for the optimal use of scarce resources. 'Nordic Research on Central Asia. Past, Present and Future' and 'Marginal Centrality: Central Asian Studies on the Eve of a New Millennium' remain fundamental to appreciate the significance of *Return to the Silk Routes*, because they are the more conceptually oriented.

In the 'Archaeology' section Susanne Juhl and Staffan Rosen describe the excavations and expeditions undertaken in very different circumstances in Turfan and Yar-tonguz. Later in the book, in the 'Language' section, Xinjiang is the focus of another chapter that merges the social and linguistic history of Eastern Turkestan. The chapters on Mongolia include 'Regional Aspects of the Turkic Influence on Mongolian', 'Remarks on the Mongolian Vowel System' and 'Superscribing the Hegemonic Image of Chinggis Khan in the *Erdeni Tunumal Sudur*'. Tibet is the topic of only one contribution, in the 'Religion' section, which examines Tibetan travel literature on the 'Other World'. The last section is entitled 'Political Aspects'. 'Russia and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Reintegration Ahead?' introduces the reader to the dramatic political changes of post-communist Central Asia. 'Democracy versus Stability in Kazakstan' and 'War and Change in Afghanistan' are both systematic surveys of the challenges faced in nation building. A conclusion that would have summarized the contributors' findings and their participation in the debate on policy orientations in Central Asian studies could have been useful, but is missing from the book.

A longer review of the activities of Central Asian scholars in the humanities and social sciences and a detailed description of the collaborative programmes that bring together the institutions of Scandinavia and Central Asia would have been welcome since they would have helped the reader to assess better the originality of Scandinavian research and its decisive contribution to the creation of Asian Studies. Three issues could have been discussed more in depth: what geographically con-

stitutes Central Asia for Central Asians, how distinct Scandinavian scholarship on Central Asia is from German or Russian scholarship, and what type of interaction Central Asian Studies have historically entertained with other area studies, especially Chinese Studies. One may deplore the absence of contributions on gender and environmental issues. Maps, index and bibliography are missing from the book, which is rather surprising, and the reader will have to use the abundant footnotes as references.

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Peter and Sanda Simms, *The Kingdoms of Laos. Six Hundred Years of History*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999. 240 pp. ISBN 0-7007-1125-2.

People in search of general histories of Laos in Western languages have long relied on the now classic studies *Historie du Laos Français* (Paris 1931) by French colonial administrator Paul Le Boulanger and *History of Laos* (New York 1964), written by Lao intellectual Sila Viravong. In recent years, however, a handful of books in Western languages have appeared presenting a general outline history of the Lao kingdoms and Laos. The book reviewed here belongs to this latter group.

The authors have, among others, a background in journalism, and between 1955 and 1973 they were frequently in Laos covering major events. During their postings to Laos, they seem to have developed a strong historical interest, particularly in the Lao monarchy, and for the many Lao who went into exile following the coming to power of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party in 1975. Thus, in the Preface the authors inform us that they have written the book as a 'tribute to a great nation' and as a book to the children of Lao in exile to help them understand the country that was their 'birthright' (p. xi). In doing so, the authors hope that their presentation of the history will serve as a 'mirror to the past into which the young and old may look