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Kathleen Collins

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Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia

This book is a study of the role of clan networks in Central Asia from the early twentieth century through 2004. Exploring the social, economic, and historical roots of clans, and their political role and political transformation during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, this study argues that clans are informal political actors that are critical to understanding politics in this region. The book demonstrates that the Soviet system was far less successful in transforming and controlling Central Asian society, and in its policy of eradicating clan identities, than has often been assumed. Clans increasingly influenced and constrained the regime's political trajectory during the later Soviet and post-Soviet periods, making liberalizing political and economic reforms very difficult. In order to understand Central Asian politics and the region's economies today, scholars and policy makers must take into account the powerful role of these informal groups, how they adapt and change over time, and how they may constrain or undermine democratization in this strategic region.

Kathleen Collins is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. She has been a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies and the Harvard Davis Center for Russian Research. She holds the Notre Dame Junior Chair in Comparative Politics. She has published articles in *World Politics*, *Comparative Politics*, the *Journal of Democracy*, and several edited volumes. She has received grants from the MacArthur Foundation, the United States Institute of Peace, the International Research and Exchange (IREX), and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, among others. Dr. Collins was named a Carnegie Scholar in 2003 for her research. She has been conducting research throughout Central Asia since 1994. Her dissertation won the S. M. Lipset Prize awarded by the Society for Comparative Research, for the best dissertation in comparative politics or sociology in 2000.

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0521839505 - Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia
Kathleen Collins
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

*To my mother, an advocate of justice, truth,
and human dignity.*

Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<i>Note on Transliteration</i>	xix
1 An Introduction to Political Development and Transition in Central Asia	1
2 Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia: A Framework for Understanding Politics in Clan-Based Societies	23
3 Colonialism to Stalinism: The Dynamic between Clans and the State	62
4 The Informal Politics of Central Asia: From Brezhnev through Gorbachev	102
5 Transition from Above or Below? (1990–1991)	135
6 Central Asia's Transition (1991–1995)	169
7 Central Asia's Regime Transformation (1995–2004): Part I	209
8 Central Asia's Regime Transformation (1995–2004): Part II	251
9 Positive and Negative Political Trajectories in Clan-Based Societies	298
10 Conclusions	331
Epilogue	345
<i>Appendix</i>	351
<i>Index</i>	365

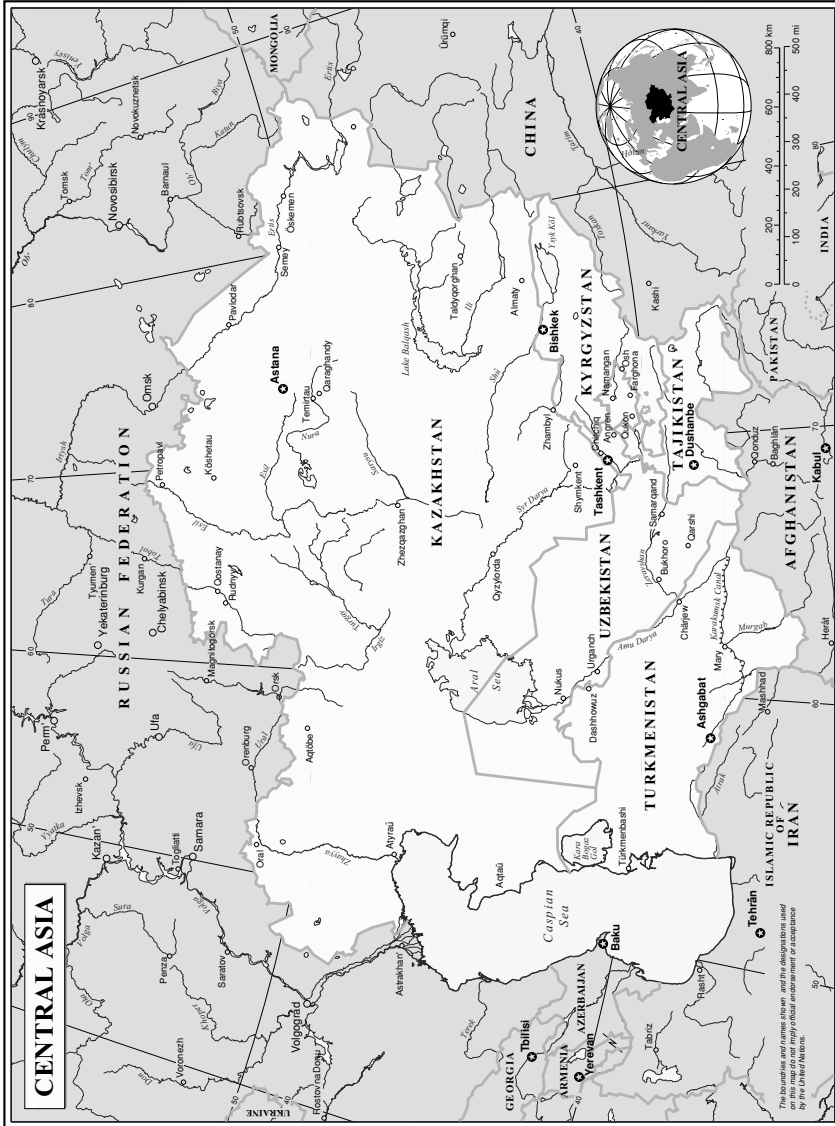
Tables and Figures

Tables

1.1. Political trajectories in the Post-Soviet Central Asian cases	<i>page 6</i>
4.1. First secretaries/presidents of the Central Asian republics	109
4.2. Explaining clan pacts and transitional regime durability/collapse in Central Asia	133
5.1. Budget transfers and inter-republic trade levels of the Central Asian republics	157
5.2. Results of the referendum on the Union Treaty (March 17, 1991)	158
6.1. Indicators of Kyrgyzstan's democratization	191
7.1. Results of the 1995 elections to the Jogorku Kenesh of Kyrgyzstan (February 5 and 19, 1995)	234
7.2. Results of the 1995 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan (December 25, 1995)	235
8.1. Results of the 1994 elections to the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan (December 25, 1994)	258
8.2. Results of the 1999 elections to the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan (December 5 and 19, 1999)	260
8.3. Results of the 1994 elections to the Majlisi Oli of Tajikistan	282
8.4. Results of 2000 elections to the Majlisi Oli of Tajikistan (single republican constituency, twenty-two seats, based on party list)	283
8.5. Results of 2000 elections to the Majlisi Oli of Tajikistan (single-mandate constituency, forty-one seats)	284
8.6. Changing patterns of power in Tajikistan	285
A.1. Ethno-national composition of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, 1989 (percent of total population)	356
A.2. Ethno-national composition of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, 1997 (percent of total population)	356

<i>Tables and Figures</i>	ix
A.3. Indicators of development level in the former Soviet republics at independence/beginning of transition	357
A.4. GDP (1992–2002): Central Asia and regional comparisons	358
A.5. Freedom House ratings: Central Asia and the post-Soviet region	359
A.6. Key economic and social indicators	360
A.7. Key governance and political stability indicators	361
Figures	
Map of Central Asia	x
2.1. The vicious cycle of clan politics	54
3.1. Variation in types of clan networks	76

Cambridge University Press
0521839505 - Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia
Kathleen Collins
Frontmatter
[More information](#)



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Preface

Trains in these parts went from East to West and from West to East. . . . On either side of the railway lines lay the great wide spaces of the desert – Sary-Ozeki, the Middle lands of the yellow steppes. In these parts any distance was measured in relation to the railway, as if from the Greenwich meridian. . . . And the trains went from East to West and from West to East.

Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (1980)

This is Central Asia, remote, exotic, and harsh. These are the words of Chingiz Aitmatov, a native Kyrgyz and father of the “Turkestani” movement in Soviet literature. Aitmatov seeks to capture the barrenness and isolation of Soviet Central Asia, its physical and metaphorical distance from Moscow, even at the close of the 1970s, after six decades of Soviet rule. In his surreal fantasy *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, Aitmatov vividly portrays a land and a people whose history, tradition, and identity were the victims of relentless Soviet purges but, paradoxically, the beneficiaries of Soviet development. From collectivization of the nomads’ lands to the elimination of the tribal *bai* (wealthy), to Stalin’s war on Islam and his 1937 slaughter of the Ferghana intelligentsia, to Khrushchev’s disastrous Virgin Lands program and cotton campaign, Central Asia incessantly felt the heavy and destructive hand of Soviet rule.

And yet by 1980, as the Soviet grip began to relax, Central Asia remained at best only haphazardly penetrated by the Soviet system. Everywhere, modernity clashed with tradition. On the Kazakh steppe, camels still roamed freely on the outskirts of nuclear weapons sites. In the Kyrgyz Republic, Communist Party officials still wore *kalpaks* (traditional felt hats) and drank *kumuz* (fermented mare’s milk). Throughout Central Asia, stalwart Soviet “atheists” still laid their dead to rest under the crescent moons of Islam, passed on knowledge of the *Qur’an*, and even observed the Muslim feast of *Ro’za*. And yet all the while, the ever-present steel railroad connected

Cambridge University Press

0521839505 - Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia

Kathleen Collins

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

this vast and persistent expanse of Asiatic steppe, desert, and mountain to modernization, to Soviet politics, industry, education, and culture.

If we leap forward two decades to the late 1990s, the so-called post-Soviet era, we find that presidents have replaced the Soviet first secretaries of each Central Asian republic. The Communist Party has been subsumed by various shades and stripes of “democratic” parties. New ideologies, from consumerism to Islamism, have replaced Marxism-Leninism. Capitalist economic theory is taught by those who once propounded only socialism. The Leninist Houses of Friendship now welcome not brother Soviets, but American, German, and Japanese investors. Changes along the scale of Stalinist industrialization are again under way. And yet Aitmatov’s portrayal of Soviet Central Asia is still remarkably fitting. Why is this so? How is this possible? How can so much change so quickly, and yet so much remain the same?

As a political scientist, in this book I look at the transformation of Central Asia in light of such changes and historical processes occurring around the globe. The breakdown of authoritarian regimes, and the democratization that sometimes follows, have been dynamic and ongoing movements for several centuries. In the twentieth century, these issues have often been at the heart of major United States foreign policy efforts. Not surprisingly, these processes are also the focus of much scholarship in the field of political science. Why? Because of the rise of international norms regarding basic human rights, which generally consider freedom from authoritarian rule and a liberal democratic form of government to be integral to human dignity. Although liberal democracy may not, indeed never does, meet the criteria of the classic Aristotelian “best” regime – a regime of participatory rule by the virtuous – liberal democracy has thus far proven to be the closest approximation to the post-Enlightenment Western ideal of a just government. In recent decades, these norms of legitimate government have diffused beyond the West. Thus we have witnessed the courageous deeds that have defined certain cataclysms in world history – East Germans tearing down the Berlin Wall, Hungarians flooding their barbed wire border and heading West, Poles marching behind Solidarity and rallying to the encouragement of their Pope, and Muscovites mounting tanks to defy the 1991 coup against Gorbachev – all this in the name of freedom and democracy.

Deep in the Soviet Union, however, the wave of democratization was slower in coming. Leninism and Stalinism had gripped the Soviet peoples much longer and much more harshly than most authoritarian dictators or ideologies throughout history had been able to do. Yet there was never a lack of dissidents demanding truth and justice. Pasternak’s poetry sought space for the personal life. Mandelstam and Akhmatova died in a quest for freedom of self-expression. Solzhenitsyn mocked Stalinism’s cowardly attempts to control the human mind and soul. Sakharov survived exile in Gorky and multiple hunger strikes in order to expose communism’s brutal disregard for human rights. Writing from Central Asia, Aitmatov and Suleimanov

Cambridge University Press
0521839505 - Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia
Kathleen Collins
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface

xiii

published fantastic tales to call their ethnic peoples to remember who they are, to value their cultural identity, and to keep sacred those very memories Soviet ideology had sought to destroy. By the late 1980s, atomized dissidence in the Soviet Union had surged into mass movements. What had begun with scientists and intellectuals in Leningrad and Moscow soon rippled outward to inspire the popular fronts and civil protests of the Balts and Ukrainians and, eventually, even of the Central Asians. The grip of repressive and corrupt regimes has been strong, but now, after a decade and a half of failed post-Soviet democratization, Kyrgyz and other Central Asians are again renewing the call for democracy.

The post-Soviet political transition of Central Asia is the main concern of this book. Not only theoretically, but normatively, the Central Asian transition is imbued with importance and meaning – for those analytically studying that transition, for those shouldering the responsibility of shaping and directing that transition, and most of all, for the many people who are living that transition. In this book, I hope to contribute to our understanding and remembering of that process.

Cambridge University Press

0521839505 - Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia

Kathleen Collins

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of finishing a book is finally to have the opportunity to thank all those who were involved in the process. It is with sincere and heartfelt gratitude that I acknowledge the support of so many teachers, colleagues, and friends who have been a part of this work and a part of my life.

My work in Central Asia would never have been possible without the dedication and assistance of many Central Asian scholars, students, and dear friends who gave of themselves so generously. Many hundreds of people, in many regions of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, patiently sat through interview sessions with me, and always offered such warm and overflowing hospitality that it was most difficult to leave. Unfortunately, because of political risks, I cannot recognize by name the countless individuals who made my travels to Central Asia so rich in friendships, conversations, and experiences, as well as a remarkable education. I shall forever be indebted to them, and I trust that if they read this, they will know that I remember them.

Many other friends, also interlopers in Central Asia, graciously gave of their time to assist in my research in multiple ways. I am indebted in particular to Sabri Ergan, Howard Ockman, Michael Wallace, Dick Rechiene, Sethurman Dinakar, Dmitry Trofimov, John Fox, Aftab Khoker, and Ambassador Ram Mukhija and Mrs. Mukhija, who were hospitable and kind and who never failed to spark interesting discussions during my long stays in Central Asia. Ambassador Stanley Escudero and Ambassador Joseph Pressel graciously shared their time and extensive knowledge of the region on multiple occasions. Ambassador M. K. Bhadrakumar's keen insight constantly provoked new ways of analyzing my findings and greatly expanded my appreciation of the history and culture of Asia. Ercan Murat thoughtfully provided much-needed technical assistance and his faithful drivers, and shared the practical advice that kept me from many a bad situation during my travels. Shrinivas, Basit, Waseem, and Mohammed kindly offered much-needed help. My loyal drivers/bodyguards – Sasha, Sergej,

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0521839505 - Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia

Kathleen Collins

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Alexei, Aziz, Sasha, Gulam, Kubanbek, and Alisher – ensured that I never had to worry when I was in their hands. Over the course of our friendship, from Stanford to Moscow, Valery Tishkov has offered a wealth of scholarly advice and wisdom. The Institute for Ethnography and Anthropology, which he directs, has been generous with its treasures of experience, knowledge, and resources.

My book is the result of many influences on my education. My mother was perhaps the first to spark my fascination with Russia, through the history and literature she teaches so well. Father Fred Kelly, formerly a professor at the Jesuit University in Baghdad, long ago kindled in me an abiding curiosity about the Middle East and a profound respect for the Islamic faith and peoples. Although my academic studies originally directed me toward Russia, eventually I found myself in the heart of a fascinating *mélange* of Russian and Islamic culture and history. I cannot forget the inspiration of many wonderful faculty members at the University of Notre Dame, where I spent my undergraduate years of study. With warm gratitude I remember my Russian classes with Thomas Marullo and David Gasperetti. I owe a debt to T. R. Schwarz, Edward Goerner, Walter Pratt, and Marcia Weigle, who encouraged me to go to graduate school, and especially to George Brinkley, who left me a library of Soviet history books that I use to this day. Jim McAdams, my senior thesis advisor, was a constant source of support, not only at Notre Dame, but during the many ups and downs of graduate school as well. He gave me the best advice possible when I left for Kyrgyzstan in June 1994 – to begin field research. He told me to ask people what was important, and just to listen. I thank him for always having faith in me and my work, right through to this book's completion.

I returned to Notre Dame as a Kellogg Fellow, and later as a faculty member. Since then, I have benefited from being a member of a truly great cohort of colleagues and friends. Scott Mainwaring and the Kellogg Institute have provided a research home and exceptional support. Fran Hagopian and Tony Messina each read parts of the manuscript and gave generous advice and support in recent years. I truly thank them. Rodney Hero has been a wonderfully encouraging chairman. Michael Coppedge and Michael Zuckert offered sound advice. I have learned much from Eileen Botting, Al Tillery, and Lou Ayala. They have been great critics and even better friends. Cheri Gray solved many crises during my overseas travel. Many, many more people in the Notre Dame community have together created a wonderful environment for my teaching and research, and I can never thank them enough.

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xvii

mother, invariably made sure that I actually received my stipend in crisp American dollars as I traveled through a region where travelers' checks, much less ATMs, are still almost unknown. Jane Edsell was always cheerful, helpful, and kind. CISAC directors and administrators – Scott Sagan, Andy Kuchins, Analia Bond, Lisa Saad, and Helen Sutton – provided a stimulating working environment. CISAC Fellows Chip Blacker, Norman Naimark, Michael Oksenberg, Donald Rothchild, Elizabeth Sherwood Randall, Stephen Stedman, and especially Lynn Eden were always encouraging. I especially thank Gail Lapidus and Roza Otunbayeva, who are largely responsible for my plunge into Kyrgyzstan.

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It is hard to imagine being blessed with a more wonderful dissertation committee than mine. They genuinely care about scholarship, about their students, and about the real political problems of regime transitions and democratization. Philippe Schmitter was instrumental in framing my ideas about the study of democratization, and has continually given thought-provoking advice. Jean Oi always challenged me to sharpen and clarify my arguments, and to develop both the careful empirical detail and the broader comparative implications of my work. For years, when not saving democracy in Russia, Mike McFaul has always managed to offer insightful academic advice and an abundance of moral support. Most especially, I thank Larry Diamond and David Holloway. Larry probably lost many hours of sleep in so carefully reading and critiquing my lengthy chapters, and in provoking me to develop my arguments and analysis. Perhaps just as importantly, his perpetual encouragement has given me whatever confidence I have in myself, my ideas,

and my work. Larry's dedication continually fills me with awe. The world is a far better place because of his commitment to democratization. I can never adequately thank my graduate advisor, David Holloway, who unfailingly exemplifies the true nature of scholarship and the strength of personal integrity. I persevered through graduate school because of his support. He has been a constant inspiration. The Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi once wrote that "an *ustoz* is a more than a teacher; he is a mentor and a friend." David Holloway is a true *ustoz*. Because I had such a wonderful committee of advisors, I completed my dissertation, and now this book, with some sadness. I can only hope to bring such passion and dedication to my own teaching and research.

I presented the dissertation and book manuscript at APSA (the American Political Science Association), ASN (the Association for the Study of Nationalities), AAASS (the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies), the University of Wisconsin, Stanford, Cornell, Princeton, Duke, the University of Chicago, Dartmouth, the University of Illinois, Ohio State, King's College Cambridge, Berkeley, the Kellogg Institute, the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, the University of Minnesota, the Harvard Davis Center for Russian Research, and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, among other places. I greatly appreciate the helpful comments I received. An overview of the book was published as "The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories," *World Politics*, vol. 56, no. 2 (January 2004). Parts of Chapter 2 of my dissertation and Chapter 1 of this book were published as "Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 3 (July 2002). I am also indebted to two anonymous reviewers from Cambridge University Press, and especially to my Cambridge editor, Lew Bateman, for seeing the book to completion. I was fortunate to have superb editorial assistance from Stephanie Lewis Levy and Phil Costopoulos. There are many aspects of this study that are still incomplete, unknown, or in flux. Some things have necessarily been left unsaid. The many imperfections are solely my own. Yet I hope that in spite of them, those who inspired and guided this work will be proud to have done so.

Finally, I owe an irreparable debt to my family. My parents inspired in me a love of learning and sacrificed much to give me an education. Ryan, Megan, and Anne have patiently endured me and encouraged my endeavors for many years. No words will express what that means to me. Nor would I have survived "my great white whale," as he puts it, without my future husband, Tom, who always makes me laugh. Tom probably never planned to become an expert on Central Asia, but he has listened night after night with loving kindness and patience to the saga of this book, and he has been waiting too long for me to finish it. Most of all, I thank Jayne Collins, a great teacher, scholar, and mom. I dedicate this book to her – for her innumerable hours of worrying, and for her constant support and love.

Notre Dame, Indiana

Note on Transliteration

In this book, I use a modified Library of Congress system of transliteration from the Cyrillic, especially for Russian words and names. There is no standard system for the transliteration of the Central Asian languages. There is even further confusion in transliteration, given that some languages (especially Uzbek and Turkmen) have started to use a modified Latin alphabet in recent years. There is also disagreement among Central Asians themselves over the proper new Latin spelling of some words. Throughout the text, I adopt the Central Asian form based on the Cyrillic script, since the most comprehensive Central Asian dictionaries are still in Cyrillic. A few exceptions are included in the glossary.

I have adopted some changes for the ease of the reader who is not fluent in Russian or the Central Asian languages. I have typically not used accent marks above the letters, though I have retained the Russian soft sign (e.g., *oblast'*). For words commonly used, such as *glasnost*, I drop the sign.

For the ease of the reader as well as for the sake of consistency throughout the text, I use one form (the Uzbek form) of any Central Asian word that has very similar variants and the same meaning across the languages (for example, *qishloq*, *oqsoqol*, *mahalla*). See the Appendix for other forms of these words in Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Kazakh. When using a plural form of a Central Asian or Russian word (such as *qishloq*, *kolkhoz*), I simply add the English plural form, “s” (*qishloqs*, *kolkhozes*), rather than use the Central Asian plural, which might be confusing to the reader.

I attempt to use the most common and most readable spellings of Central Asian persons' names (such as Niyazov, not Niiazov). If they retain the Russian spelling, I adopt that. If they have changed to a more traditional Uzbek or Tajik spelling, I use that form. Some names are written in multiple ways in the local press, so it can be difficult to know which is the preferred form for each person. It is important to note that in some cases, individuals and/or families since independence and in some cases since perestroika have

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Kathleen Collins
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

opted to drop the Russian endings from their names (e.g., the Pulatov/Pulat brothers).

When using Central Asian place names, I generally adopt the transliteration from the Russian/Cyrillic spelling, except when a particular spelling is common in the Western literature, or when the Russian form is less readable than other forms. For example, I use the Uzbek spelling Jizzak (rather than the Russian Dzhizak) for the Uzbek province. I use Samarkand, the common English spelling, for the city and province of Samarkand. I use the common transliteration of the Russian form of Uzbekistan (not the Uzbek form, Ozbekistan). In discussing the post-1991 period, I use the common form, Kyrgyzstan, rather than the official form, the Kyrgyz Republic, throughout text for the sake of simplicity and to conserve space. Transliteration does not reflect any bias toward one of the many languages used in the region, but only my concern for some consistency and the ease of the general reader.