

discursively constructed, draws attention to the contested positions of particular places within discourses and imaginaries. A stronger focus on positionality, which would refer first of all to social situatedness, could add an important layer to the fixity-mobility nexus when tracing connections.

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MATTHIAS SCHMIDT, *Mensch und Umwelt in Kirgistan. Politische Ökologie im postkolonialen und postsozialistischen Kontext*. (Erdkundliches Wissen, 153). Stuttgart: Franz-Steiner-Verlag, 2013. 400 pages, 26 figures, 12 charts, 8 photographs, 12 maps, €52.00. ISBN 978-3-515-10478-4

The starting point of Matthias Schmidt's study on human-environmental interactions in Kyrgyzstan is his general observation that in many postmodern societies the perception is prevalent that people's immediate dependency on land and natural resources for one's own survival is an anachronism. However, for many people living in Central Asia in general, and in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan in particular, the end of the socialist project meant not only a turning point in terms of ideological beliefs and identity, but also a dramatic socio-economic marginalisation and pauperisation. Against the background of economic demise accompanied by the liquidation of numerous enterprises and the privatisation of the means of production, many employees lost their jobs and secure wages. Simultaneously, the state radically cut the provision of economic, social and legal services. The increased socio-economic uncertainty led to rising dependency on access to, and the utilisation of, natural resources for both the national economy and individual households, especially in the countryside.

In the first chapter the author postulates that the shifts and peculiarities of human-environment relations generally are determined by specific interdependencies between the respective political, social and economic system, effective management institutions and the actual usage of the natural resources. Referring mainly to Douglas North, Elinor Ostrom and Anthony Giddens, he introduces his understanding of the concepts "institution", "property regime" and "resource", and their application in his research. Based on the proposition that land and natural resources are objects of interest for different players acting within the context of enabling and restricting societal institutions, the author justifies the application of an analytical approach known as "political ecology" for his study, which focuses on institutions, interest-driven actors and their interactions at different spatial-administrative levels. Matthias Schmidt emphasises that the upheaval in the course of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 is only the latest of several radical societal breaks since the nineteenth century which have influenced the living conditions and resource appropriation practices in the walnut-fruit forest region in Jalalabad Province in the south-west of the country,

the chosen area of research for this study. Therefore, to understand the topic of investigation more thoroughly it is necessary to look at the post-socialist developments in natural resource management and utilisation on the one hand and, from a post-colonial perspective, at the historical processes of Russian colonisation after 1876, the Soviet regime established after the October Revolution of 1917, and their effects on recent developments on the other.

Whereas the first part of the extensive second chapter is dedicated to the presentation and the discussion of the historical development of geographical research on human-environment relations, and the political and ecological framework applied in the study, the second part critically deconstructs the common concept of post-socialist “transition” and “transformation”, respectively, and proposes, as an alternative research concept, a post-colonial approach to understand the peculiarities of the post-socialist societies in Central Asia. The chapter closes with an outline of the empirical social research methods applied in the study.

Using a diachronic approach, in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, respectively, Matthias Schmidt analyses the shifting land and natural resource management and utilisation regimes in the course of Russian colonisation, the establishment of Soviet power, and the post-Soviet upheaval. It should be mentioned that his statements are based on many otherwise unknown historical sources and on empirical information that he generated during extensive field research conducted over several years. Based on such a rich database, the author proves his hypothesis that the region’s development and autochthonous society have been strongly influenced by external interventions and a pervasive institutional presence since pre-colonial times. In conclusion, he points out that current arrangements and processes in post-socialist societies cannot be explained solely by uni-linear explanations and local factors, but rather by cross-linked and overlapping developments and processes at diverse spatial-administrative levels. Informative additions to the text include glossary with selected Russian and Kyrgyz terms used in the historical sources and the daily life of the people living in the walnut-fruit forest region as well as a collection of coloured maps and photographs.

Matthias Schmidt’s habilitation thesis delivers a detailed and sophisticated contribution to post-colonial, post-socialist, and geographical development studies and can be recommended to all students and scholars interested in these fields.

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