

in the examination of how these writers' works operated in practice, since analyzing a theater text is very different from analyzing the performance and reception of that text. But maybe this is another book . . .

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Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of an Ancestral Worldview. By Eva-Marie Dubuisson. Central Asia in Context. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. xxiii, 176 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$26.95, paper.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.327

Influence is often considered an affair of the present tense. Histories, ideologies, and persons from one's past matter, of course, but more in relation to how an actor incorporates these artifacts of the past into a guiding narrative for contemporary and future action. Influence thus finds itself marked by a distinction between the living and the dead, where the dead is relegated to a repository of ideas—tools—for present work. In Eva-Marie Dubuisson's *Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of an Ancestral Worldview*, however, we are given a more complicated portrayal of influence, one cognizant of transcendence and how, for many of her interlocutors, deceased ancestors remain active members of Kazakh society.

While transcendence is generally associated with religion, this is not Dubuisson's focus. Instead, and importantly, she shows that transcendence need not be limited to religion for it to be relevant to contemporary society. For her interlocutors, their ancestors are active participants in dialogues about what it means to be Kazakh. This influence "goes beyond the temporal and political constraints of a strictly national ideology" (xxiii) and emerges through dialogic engagement that makes the past an active part of the present. The "active" aspect of this is not merely rooted in thought and memory, but rather in *ongoing* conversations with ancestors over the *longue durée*. It is this nature of conversation-as-dialogue that forms the foundation for understanding the emergence of authority as linked to the performative qualities of language.

Dubuisson outlines this in her introduction, describing an ancestral worldview where the relationship of the living to their ancestors shapes the contemporary cultural context and its imagined future. What emerges is the existence of alternative forms of authority, with ancestors serving as a moral yardstick against which (authoritarian) political behavior is measured (4). The means for expressing this is through the reinforcement of relationships and dialogic performance, exemplified through *aitys*, verbal duels among poets who insert the views of ancestors into public commentaries.

The logic for the role of ancestors as active participants in creating authority emerges out of *bata*, understood as a "cultural wish, supported by God" (33), which gives roots to relationships across generations (Chapter 1). While common among contemporaries, *bata* involves cultural connections shared across time (25–26) that can give comfort in times of distress (34) and warning in face of uncertainty (40). As a person reflects on the role of family and ancestry, he/she encounters the path set forth by the ancestors vis-à-vis *bata*.

Alongside dreams, one way this encounter gets instantiated is at sacred sites where the wishful intentions of ancestors get mediated by caretakers of the sites (56; Chapter 2). Here, when *bata* is offered the ancestral world is connected as both moral guide and community-builder, transcending temporal boundaries while modeling behavioral boundaries. Sacred geography can exist anywhere, with guidance offered

across any time, where “different generations can actively ‘touch’ and care for one another, through words and prayer” (75).

Chapter 3 extends and places into context this living role of ancestors in aitys poetry, staged duals between two poets that use the “trope of ancestry to enact a public conversation about contemporary affairs” (84). These poets draw upon the resources of bata and the living environment of sacred sites to critique the likes of governance and social behavior by inserting the morality of ancestors into the judgement of contemporary acts. As commentary, the aitys performance may seem pedestrian until we take seriously that there exists a context—bata, dreams, sacred sites—in which ancestors do play living advisory roles in judging behavior. As such, the aitys are able to use ancestors to critique authority and contemporary politics in ways others cannot.

For Dubuisson, authority is dialogic (Chapter 4), with cultural legitimacy coming into conversation with ancestral leadership. It is because “ancestors are already present in so many contexts” (134) that their guidance comes to offer meaning in dynamic and at times unexpected ways. One might argue she overestimates the role of ancestors in contemporary (political) life, but if so it is an important corrective for those who see the past as merely deadwood. She gives an ethnographically rich, sensitive, compelling, and engaging story of the value of language in making the past alive and relevant. A welcome addition to Central Asian Studies, *Living Language in Kazakhstan* will be appreciated broadly for its ability to guide readers toward a more empathic analysis of time, influence, and authority.

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Iconic Places in Central Asia: The Moral Geography of Dams, Pastures, and Holy Sites. By Jeanne Féaux de la Croix. Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2016. 351 pp. Appendixes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Photographs. €39.99, paperback.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.328

In *Iconic Places*, Jeanne Féaux de la Croix (JF) presents a broad-ranging ethnography bringing together mountain pasture communities with local villages, large-scale infrastructural projects, and holy sites into a shared interpretive frame. In conversation with the anthropology of space and place, the author eschews traditional frameworks of religion, economy, or politics in her analysis, in favor of foregrounding the qualities and relationships of a lived environment in Kyrgyzstan. Her approach is deeply phenomenological: how are places experienced as qualities or resources, as connected or meaningful? In forms ranging from daily activities to poetry and song, how do people discuss place? Here the landscape is directly involved in broader themes of time, labor, and history-making across what JF calls a “moral geography,” and efforts to build or sustain a “good life” (39–40). Based on eighteen months of fieldwork in Toktogul, Kyrgyzstan from 2006–2008, and multiple visits over the last decade, the book is organized into three major sections: in the first we are introduced to three primary kinds of places—*jailoo* (pasture), dams, and *mazarlar* (burial grounds) and importantly, to the scales of meaning contained in each.

The mountain presents one kind of scale of transhumance, where herds embody a “secure investment” for extended families (63; Svetlana Jacquesson, 2010). JF details the transformations of state and private pasture administration over the last century, noting rightly that privatization is a process still ongoing. She calls attention as well to the forms of romantic attachment to the *jailoo* in popular imagination, and the symbolic