Order at the Bazaar: Power and Trade in Central Asia. By Regine A. Spector. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017. ix, 254 pp. Appendix. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Tables. Photographs. Figures. $49.95, hard bound.
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Bazaar trade is often perceived as a primitive form of economic exchange holding little promise of developing the kind of long-term cooperation that constitutes the backbone of modern entrepreneurship and strong economic development. Since the transaction, typically, is characterized by a one-shot deal between buyer and seller, bazaar activities do not generate the kind of third party enforcement—associated with formal institutions and organizations—considered crucial for more complex market transactions.

In her excellent book, *Order at the Bazaar*, Regine A. Spector presents a powerful corrective to the conventional notion of the backwardness of bazaars. In fact, what emerges in her detailed analysis of the evolution of the major bazaars in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is a dynamic marketplace circumscribed by a host of formal and informal institutional arrangements. All of these institutional developments have fulfilled a specific role in promoting dynamism, order, and predictability at bazaars. The key message of the study is that these collective solutions emerged bottom-up as a response to traders' demand for order and predictability at the market.

As point of departure, the book takes stock of the common perception of Central Asian bazaars as places marred by disorder, corruption and crime. While acknowledging the 1990s as a chaotic period for the burgeoning bazaar trade in Kyrgyzstan, Spector demonstrates how market activities at the biggest wholesale bazaar in Central Asia—Dordoi outside of the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek—became embedded in an increasingly orderly institutional environment. As key facilitators, she identifies trade unions created in the 1990s. Dordoi's trade unions invoked features of Soviet-style trade unions, but were adapted to the particular needs of the new market context.

At Dordoi bazaar, trade unionists gradually took on a host of responsibilities. They cooperated with owners to restrict extortion from tax officials and to improve infrastructure at the bazaar, but they also functioned as a vehicle to resolve conflicts at the bazaar, both among traders and between traders and owners. In this sense, trade unionists became important for building trust and cooperation inside the bazaar complex.

Spector contrasts the relatively stable and centralized wholesale Dordoi bazaar with the more chaotic evolution of the Osh retail bazaar—Bishkek's central marketplace. Rather than characterized by one major owner, as in the case of Dordoi, the opaque privatization of Osh bazaar in the 1990s resulted in multiple owners. Equally dispersed were the attempts of traders to organize collectively. Eventually, however, the major form of collective organization at the bazaar sprung up around the notion of *aksakal*—a traditional form of authority associated with respected elders primarily in rural Kyrgyzstan. In the context of the Osh bazaar, *aksakals*, representing experienced traders, took on the role of mediators of various aspects of bazaar life. While arbitration at Osh bazaar was markedly different from the trade unions at Dordoi, the two forms of authority shared the common feature of drawing on established institutions and filling these with a new content corresponding to the marketplace.

While *Order at the Bazaar* is mainly about tracing the spontaneous emergence of collective action from below, the book is nonetheless full of fascinating insights into high-level Kyrgyz politics. In a detailed life biography of the Dordoi bazaar's founder and owner, Askar Salymbekov, Spector reveals the bazaar magnate's trajectory into politics as well as the diplomatic skills he mustered to navigate the complex and rapidly changing Kyrgyz political arena to secure his business interests. Particularly illustrative is the discussion on how the legislature takes on a specific role for protecting property in the country. In addition to the conventional legislative role, a parliamentary mandate provides "a series of possibilities and opportunities—including information and access to important individuals—to negotiate and resolve problems" (109).

What are the broader theoretical and empirical implications of this important study? Spector demonstrates briefly that similar islands of order seem to exist at bazaars in other contemporary countries, both inside and outside the post-Soviet region. I wonder whether it might have been theoretically informative, however, to also bring in a historical dimension. In historical perspective, the most prominent examples of islands of order, to use Spector's terminology, with far-reaching implications for the long process of securing contracts and property in the western world, were the annual Champagne fairs in medieval France. In the late twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries, these fairs, recurring in cycles every year, were the center of western commercial activity. Their ability to maintain their dominance for a long period of time rested on several innovations. For example, at a time when the state had yet to assume the role of enforcer of contracts, merchants developed their own private code of laws—the Law Merchant—with disputes handled by a private judge. This innovation represented an important step on the path towards the state becoming the guarantor of legal order. In other words, could corresponding innovations developed at the bazaars in contemporary Central Asia provide clues for how to curb corruption and stimulate economic dynamism in other sectors?

Another question relates to the role of the state vis-à-vis the bazaars. While Spector acknowledges that the state was a serious nuisance at the bazaars in the 1990s, the early 2000s saw significantly declining interference from tax and law enforcement, not least because of improved collective organization at the marketplace. Despite this, the omnipresent state is still lurking in the background. For example, Salymbekov's entrepreneurial strategy rested in no small part on his influence network securing strategic positions inside the state. It would therefore be misleading to perceive the order and stability at Dordoi bazaar as unrelated to the broader political context. It may be an island of order, but it is not governed autonomously from the state.

Indeed, the strategy deployed by Salymbekov to secure his assets shows striking similarities to the general post-Soviet evolution of state-market interaction. At first, the phenomenon was approached in terms of the state as a grabbing hand, an obstacle to market activity, through inspections, extortions

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and bribe-seeking. Powerful private businesses responded by trying to influence the state by various means from outside to guarantee favorable treatment. Yet, since the early 2000s, the preferred method for big business holders has been to seek access to the state directly through holding influential political positions of power. Holding public office per se does not guarantee success, as Spector shows, for it is dependent on continuing negotiations and networking. Nonetheless, evidence from the post-Soviet experience suggests that this strategy is more likely to succeed if pursued from within the state rather than by attempting to influence state policies from outside.

A final question that inevitably comes to mind relates to the long-term sustainability of the bazaar economy. What can be seen in recent years, especially following Kyrgyzstan's joining the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, is a significant decline in trade at the Dordoi bazaar. In early 2017, the Kyrgyz government announced that 6,000 out of total 18,000 shipping containers at Dordoi had decommissioned as a result of declining trade. This decline in trade does not overly concern Spector, however. Invoking a parallel communicated via interviewee that Dordoi is like "a spring that feeds and gives life to an entire river" (18), she sees this as a process of adaptation to changing tariff regimes and new supply and demand dynamics. Many of the traders have shifted to new businesses, primarily the textile industry, thus making the bazaar a source of new businesses. That said, it would be interesting to understand whether the specific experiences in collective organization derived from the bazaars could be transferred to the emerging textile industry.

In conclusion, *Order at the Bazaar* is a rich causal story of the bottom-up processes enabling collective action even in challenging environments. It holds relevance for multiple disciplines, including political science, development economics, sociology, and anthropology. The study also represents a welcome contribution to understanding how Soviet legacies mattered in forming new political, economic, and social institutions. In the process, it lends intriguing insights into how certain institutions and organizations—for example trade unions and the legislature—combine formal and informal responsibilities. Rather than assuming particular functions of various institutions, Spector's work reveals how they are constituted in the first place, thereby giving them real-life meaning that extends considerably from what was formally stipulated.

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In 1932, 1934, and again in 1938, the Wilno-based *Yidisher visnshaftlikher institut* (which at the time rendered its name in English, somewhat problematically, as the Yiddish Scientific Institute) issued calls to young Jews, aged