Summary and Keywords

The Pamirs have been a contested space in different periods of time. Access to fertile pastures characterized the local economic competition between nomads and mountain farmers. International attention reached its peak when the Pamirs became a pawn in the “Great Game”; during the second half of the 19th century, Great Britain and Russia disputed control over the mountainous area. Local and regional interests took on a subordinate role. The imperial contest resulted in dividing the Pamirs among four interested parties that are nowadays independent countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and China. Since the division, separate developments have emerged in all parts that are abodes of farmers and pastoralists who share a common heritage but have experienced quite different political and social developments. Thus the Pamirs represent a focal region of similar ecological properties in which political and socioeconomic developments that originated in the 19th century have changed development paths through the Cold War period until the early 21st century. From Tsarist Russia to post-independence Tajikistan, from the Afghan monarchy to the post-Taliban republic, from British India to Pakistan, and from the Middle Kingdom to contemporary China, political interventions such as nationality policies and regional autonomy, sociotechnical experiments such as collectivization and subsequent deregulation, and varying administrative systems provide insight into external domination that has shaped separate developments in the Pamirs. In the early 21st century, the Pamirs experienced a revaluation as a transit corridor for transcontinental traffic arteries.

Keywords: Great Game, boundary-making, pastoralism, collectivization, Pamirs, Badakhshan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Xinjiang, Pakistan, China

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