

of how to attend to historical localization while simultaneously opening up productive rather than reductive possibilities of transnational comparisons within and beyond the ken of the different Chinas.

Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. By Stephen Aris.
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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has long been viewed as an emerging strategic rival to the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Central Asia. Aris's monograph *Eurasian Regionalism* points out that many Western analysts and policymakers perceive the SCO as a traditional regional security organization focusing on military cooperation. The member-states share the concerns with international and domestic security threats, including the risks associated with attacks from an external force. Contrary to this view, the author demonstrates that the SCO should be understood as a regional international organization that primarily focuses on member-states' domestic regime stability and regional cooperation. For example, the author points out that the Central Asian regimes perceive themselves as facing severe domestic challenges; both Russia and China are confronting secessionist groups in certain far-flung regions. The SCO was created in part to address those domestic as well as regional concerns. Using interviews with officials from the member-states, secondary sources such as analyses from regional experts, and the official documents of the SCO, this line of argument is supported, for example, by the narratives of combating the "three evil forces" as stressed by the SCO, that is, terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

As an expert of security studies on the post-Soviet space, Aris argues that the SCO represents a different approach to regional security governance, as opposed to the European Union (EU) approach favored by many scholars and policy analysts. The EU approach is understood as "legal-functional" (p. 15) that relies on supra-nationalism. For the author, the SCO represents a different multilateral response to non-traditional threats. An important difference between the SCO and the EU in their security governance is the strong reluctance of the SCO member-states to compromise their sovereignty. Aris attributes the difference to regional contexts and different understandings of security and multilateralism, among others. Moreover, the focus on "non-traditional security threats" (p. 102), that is, non-state threats coming from within the states or the region in the forms of terrorism, separatism, and extremism, enables the author to make the argument that the SCO represents "a new approach to regionally coordinated security in Eurasia" (p. 102).

While the monograph offers an understanding of the formation and development of the SCO from the member-states' perspective, it also suffers from considerable empirical and theoretical weaknesses. First, parts of the empirical analysis fall short of consistency. For example, when examining the perceived norms among the member-states, based on interviews with officials, the author identifies the key words "Shanghai spirit" and "Asian values" as the socialized norms within the SCO. The author argues that "the SCO is more similar to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and other Asian regional organizations than to the EU, because ASEAN is also primarily based on norms. As a result of the SCO's focus on promoting the Shanghai spirit, it has become a prominent part of the regional picture in Central Asia" (p. 53). However, earlier in the book the author argues otherwise that "at present, there remain some significant limitations to the SCO's ability to socialize its

members into a common group. . . . [The SCO] has not had sufficient time to successfully socialize its members into a common normative community” (p. 48). It might be that the shared preferences among the members, such as the priority of regime stability and state sovereignty, are not something created or socialized by the SCO, but rather the other way around. Because the members already shared these preferences, the SCO was able to define those preferences as common norms.

Second, not all inferences from Aris’s interviews with ruling elites and his reading of the official documents are convincing. For example, the author is hastily defensive of the SCO when it comes to the criticism that the SCO lacks internal democracy and is a Chinese-dominated organization in which other members play little role. The author tries to refute the criticism by arguing that “such interpretations of a Chinese-centric SCO are exaggerated and largely unfounded. A central part of the Chinese vision of multilateralism is equality” (p. 87). The author then uses the formal rules in the SCO Charter to indicate that “all members have equal voting rights and all decisions are taken unanimously” (p. 87). The gullible interpretation of “multilateralism” in Chinese officials’ words and the uncritical reading of the official documents fail to take into account the unequal relations between China and other member-states in such areas as economic development, military power, political power, and international status. These unequal relations cannot be left out of consideration when examining the dynamics among the member-states. The emphasis on equality from the officials and the documents should be understood along with the actual deeds of the member-states.

The author’s interpretation of officials’ interviews and regional experts’ analyses also lacks coherence with empirical examination. For example, when discussing the functional capacity of the SCO, the author concludes that: “In spite of these significant restrictions on its functional capacity, the SCO is held in relatively high esteem as a functional structure by regional officials and analysts” (p. 47). In other words, in terms of functional capacity, on the one hand, the SCO has significant restrictions in that respect based on empirical records, yet on the other hand, it is held in high esteem precisely because of its functional capacity by regional officials and analysts. This logically incoherent conclusion reveals the contradiction between empirical examination and the uncritical understanding of the officials and certain policy analysts.

Finally, theoretically many concepts are used without proper and precise definition. “Regionalism”, “multilateralism”, “norm” are a few examples. Without definitions, it is not only difficult for readers to understand which theoretical tradition this work comes from, but it is also difficult for the author to make coherent and forceful arguments. Moreover, it is unclear how this monograph fits into any theoretical tradition in the International Relations (IR) literature. As part of the series of “Critical Studies of the Asia-Pacific,” *Eurasian Regionalism* is critical of the view that the SCO is a rival to the “West”. Yet the critical perspective in this work has little in common with critical theory in the International Relations literature. The author does not refer to critical theorists or theories in either positivist or post-positivist traditions. The author claims that the monograph adopts “a loose social constructivist perspective” (p. 11), yet fails to specify which constructivist approach he adopts and how he applies that approach in his analysis. Although the author briefly mentions the neo-realist perspective and tries to criticize it, many parts of his analysis actually employ realist thinking, especially when analyzing each member-state’s strategic geo-political interests and potential material benefits from the SCO. While it may be difficult to situate the work in the IR literature, it is a good read for policy analysts as well as the general public, in that it provides rich factual information on the SCO.
