

EURASIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL
ERJ, Vol. 8, No. 3, 347-350, Summer 2026

Eurasian
Research
Journal
Summer 2026
Vol. 8, No. 3

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2026.3-06>

IRSTI 39.15.19

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Book Review

ORTALYQ AZIYA MURATY (CENTRAL ASIAN DREAM)

Zhuldyz Tilebaldy QABYLDAQYZY¹

1Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, 050004, Kazakhstan

zhuldyz020481@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-8430-9915

Received: 10.07.2026

Accepted: 22.07.2026

For citation: Tilebaldy, Zh. Q. (2026). Review of the book *Ortalyq Aziya Muraty (Central Asian Dream)*, D. K. Zhekenov. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 8(3), 347-350. <https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2026.3-06>

With Central Asia's growing political and economic significance, scholarly and policy interest in the region has increased substantially over the past decade. Long regarded as a peripheral region in global affairs, Central Asia has acquired renewed strategic importance owing to intensifying geopolitical competition among major powers, the expansion of transcontinental connectivity initiatives, and the region's increasing role in energy security, transportation, and regional diplomacy. These developments have generated a growing body of scholarship seeking to reassess Central Asia's place in international politics and to reconsider the theoretical frameworks through which the region has traditionally been understood.

At the same time, this renewed attention has given rise to more fundamental questions concerning the region's identity and agency: Who are the Central Asians? What unites the peoples of Central Asia? How should the region be understood on its own terms? These questions have become increasingly important not only for international scholars but also for Central Asian researchers seeking to redefine the region's intellectual foundations.

Against this backdrop, Central Asian Dream offers a timely contribution to the evolving field of Central Asian Studies by advancing a distinctly regional perspective on Central Asia and seeking to answer these fundamental questions. At its core, the book argues that Central Asia should be understood through its own historical experience, intellectual heritage, and shared regional aspirations rather than predominantly through externally constructed analytical frameworks. The author examines both the intellectual foundations of the discipline and the contemporary challenges facing the region, while critically reassessing Central Asia's future trajectory.

Structurally, the book is divided into two main chapters. Chapter I, "Central Asian Studies and the Theoretical Foundations of Research," examines the evo-

lution of Central Asian Studies, the principal scholarly approaches to the region, and the theoretical debates surrounding its interpretation. Chapter II, “The Regional Agenda and Everyday Realities,” shifts the focus to contemporary political, geopolitical, and socio-economic issues, discussing both the region’s structural constraints and its strategic opportunities.

More specifically, the first chapter examines the evolution of Central Asian Studies as an academic discipline and establishes the theoretical framework for the remainder of the book. It begins by examining who studies Central Asia and how knowledge about the region has been produced. The author surveys major foreign research centres, think tanks, and academic journals specializing in Central Asian Studies, thereby mapping the contemporary institutional landscape of scholarship on the region. This overview is complemented by a discussion of the growing contribution of Central Asian and particularly Kazakhstani scholars, reflecting the gradual emergence of locally produced knowledge.

The chapter then turns to broader theoretical questions concerning the position of Central Asia within global academic discourse. The author critically reviews existing scholarship by asking whether Central Asia has traditionally been treated as an object of external observation or as an active subject capable of generating its own knowledge and theoretical perspectives. Particular attention is devoted to the problem of Central Asian self-identification and the need to develop indigenous conceptual approaches that move beyond externally imposed analytical frameworks.

The second part of the chapter constitutes one of the book’s principal intellectual contributions. Under the title “Classical Theories and the Central Asian Pattern (өрнек),” the author first reviews several influential theoretical paradigms, including global governance, geographical determinism, modernization narratives, the “end of history,” and metamodernism, while critically assessing their applicability to the Central Asian context. Rather than rejecting these theories outright, the author identifies their limitations in explaining the region’s historical and political development.

Building on its critique of dominant theoretical paradigms, the book proposes what the author describes as a Central Asian “pattern” (өрнек) an alternative interpretive framework grounded in the region’s own intellectual traditions. The framework is introduced through the concept of the “Quadro-region” (квардр-аймак), presented as an alternative to conventional civilizational approaches. The author conceptualizes the region as a community founded on the principles of equality, mutual recognition, and harmonious coexistence. Complementing this regional framework is the concept of the “Quadro-nation” (квардр-ұлт), which refers to an internal social model based on civic equality and mutual respect despite ethnic and cultural diversity. This theoretical framework is further developed in the following section, “Ontology: Korkyt and Asan Kaigy,” where the author locates the ontological foundations of a distinctly Central Asian school of international relations within the region’s own philosophical and intellectual traditions.

Having established this conceptual foundation, the author proceeds to demonstrate how Central Asian intellectual traditions can engage with classical political thought through a series of comparative analyses. The chapter juxtaposes internationally recognized thinkers with Central Asian philosophers, rulers, and

political traditions, including Yusuf Balasagun and Niccolò Machiavelli (realism), al-Farabi and Thomas More (humanism), Qasym Khan and King Philip II of Spain (geopolitics), and Tauke Khan and John Locke (liberalism), while also discussing the ideas of United Turkestan and Alash within a liberal tradition. These comparisons are intended to demonstrate that Central Asian political thought developed concepts comparable to those found in the Western canon and therefore deserves recognition as an independent source of theoretical innovation. The discussion concludes with an examination of Central Asian soft power, arguing that the region possesses intellectual and cultural resources capable of contributing to contemporary debates in international relations. Consequently, the chapter moves beyond reviewing the existing literature on Central Asian Studies and instead seeks to reposition Central Asia as a producer of political ideas and theoretical concepts rather than merely an object of external analysis.

The second chapter shifts from theoretical debates to an examination of the contemporary realities shaping Central Asia's development. It is organized around two broad themes: the region's structural challenges and its strategic opportunities.

The first section analyzes the principal geographical and environmental constraints affecting Central Asia. These include the harsh continental climate, water scarcity and the management of transboundary rivers, and the economic and geopolitical implications of the region's landlocked position. These issues are presented as structural factors that continue to influence patterns of regional development and interstate cooperation.

The chapter then examines the external geopolitical environment, devoting separate sections to the influence of Russia, China, the United States, and Europe. Additional discussions address the roles of Türkiye, Afghanistan, Iran, and the South Caucasus, illustrating how Central Asia is situated within overlapping geopolitical spaces and competing strategic interests. The author argues that Central Asia should not be understood solely through the prism of great-power rivalry but also as a region that actively navigates external partnerships, which present both opportunities and constraints for regional development.

The analysis subsequently turns inward by considering the internal political dynamics of Central Asia. Individual sections discuss the particular circumstances of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, while a separate subsection explores the broader difficulties of regional integration, emphasizing differences in national priorities, historical experiences, and mutual perceptions among the Central Asian states.

Having outlined these challenges, the final part of the chapter adopts a more optimistic perspective by highlighting the region's comparative advantages. The author argues that Central Asia's central location in Eurasia, abundant natural resources, climatic diversity, multivector diplomacy, growing transit potential, and human capital collectively provide a strong foundation for regional development. These advantages, however, are presented as being fully realizable only through enhanced regional cooperation and a shared strategic vision among the Central Asian republics. It is worth noting that, the author consistently returns to one of the book's central normative arguments that regional unity constitutes the fundamental aspiration ("мыпар") of Central Asia and represents the most

effective means of strengthening the region's sovereignty, resilience, and international agency.

Methodologically, the book combines elements of area studies, international relations, political theory, history, and geopolitics. It deliberately avoids disciplinary boundaries in favour of an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to connect theoretical reflection with contemporary policy debates.

At the same time, the book's ambitious scope inevitably raises several questions. Many of the comparisons between classical Western thinkers and Central Asian historical figures are interpretative rather than systematically demonstrated, and readers may wish for a more explicit methodological discussion explaining the criteria for these intellectual pairings. Likewise, the normative emphasis on regional unity occasionally outweighs engagement with alternative perspectives or competing interpretations of Central Asian regionalism. Nevertheless, these observations do not diminish the originality of the work; rather, they point to fruitful avenues for further scholarly debate.

Overall, the Central Asian Dream represents a significant and thought-provoking contribution to the emerging body of scholarship produced from within Central Asia. By combining a comprehensive overview of Central Asian Studies with an ambitious effort to reinterpret global political thought through the region's own intellectual traditions, the book encourages readers to reconsider how Central Asia should be conceptualized in both academic scholarship and international politics. It will be of interest not only to scholars of Central Asia but also to researchers working in international relations, political theory, comparative political thought, and regional studies.

Dr. Zhekenov's principal contribution lies in his effort to move beyond descriptive area studies toward theory-building by introducing original concepts such as the "Quadro-region" and the "Quadro-nation," while demonstrating how Central Asian intellectual and philosophical traditions can engage with, enrich, and challenge established theories of international relations and political thought. Although many of the proposed concepts will undoubtedly invite further scholarly debate, the book succeeds in opening new avenues for theorizing Central Asia from within the region itself.