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Review of Chen, H. (2021) A history of the Second Türk Empire (ca. 682-745 AD)

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Despite this minor limitation, Chen's portrayal of the Maritime Silk Road as a cosmopolitan frontier is of great importance at a time when China has weaponized a nationalistic perception of its maritime legacy, viewing control over the sea lanes and the possession of a blue-ocean navy as essential symbols of a rising power, confronting neighbors over disputed waterways, and cutting off rival states' access to the ocean. The escalation of maritime sovereignty disputes in recent years has prompted a reimagining, in both academic and political circles, of Asia as an oceanic space with greater humanistic connections and partnerships, not regional competitions and conflicts.

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Hao Chen. *A History of the Second Türk Empire (ca. 682–745 AD)*. Brill's Inner Asian Library, Volume: 40. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021. 316 pp. €27.50. (ISBN 978 90 04 46432 2). doi:10.22679/avs.2023.8.1.011

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The story of the Second Turkic Empire or the Second Turkic Khaganate is intriguing because it is one of our most well-known nomadic empires and rose from the ashes twice in history. This is a story of an empire filled with intrigue, romance, family drama, and outside influence. Despite this interesting story, The Second Turkic Empire is a part of history that we do not discuss in the West as it is often seen as a side note to the grand histories of Rome, Persia, and China. The Empire's place in history is somewhat ironic given the fact that in the two centuries that the First Turkic Empire (552–603 AD) and Second Turkic Empire (682–744 AD) were the dominant power in Central Asia, historians see for the first time in recorded history a nomadic empire which bordered and posed a threat to three major empires at the same time (China, Iran, and the Byzantine Empire), something that was unprecedented. An additional aspect of the Second Turkic Empire that will be discussed more later is the fact that they are not only one of the first Altaic people to leave behind physical archaeological remains but also the first to leave behind a language that we can understand and translate, that being what we commonly call Turkic.

This historic empire has a fascinating history that is truly worthy of more in-depth research. In the book *A History of the Second Türk Empire (ca. 682–745 AD)* by Hao Chen, the author goes through this history not just as a historian, but as a linguist and an archaeologist. The book is intended as a historical sourcebook, guiding the readers, both laymen and experts, through the history of the Empire.

The book is split into four chapters, not including the introduction and conclusion, as well as the appendices at the end. The four chapters, lay out the history of the empire, in chronological order, giving each period a unique title, namely Chapter 1 "Revival of Power,"

Chapter 2 “Years of Warfare,” Chapter 3 “Compromise and Negotiation,” and Chapter 4 “Empire in Decay.” This way of splitting the chapters allows us to understand the chronology of the Turkish empire, which is one of the main points of the author’s research. The author does a good job of bringing the reader through the history of the empire and can be read with limited knowledge going in. The book, then, does a sufficient job of highlighting the delicate, although necessary, relationship that the Turkic Empire had with the Tang Dynasty. This allows the reader to understand where the story takes place in the greater scheme of Central Asia in the period discussed.

Beyond being a historical text, the author flexes his skills as a linguist with his use of Chinese sources in the original usage and by his use of a new translation of some of the Old Turkic inscriptions making the text a great linguistic reference work. The inclusion in the appendices of a translation of the Old Turkish rune texts, such as the Orkhon inscriptions, with a detailed breakdown and glossary of Old Turkish words that can be found in the inscriptions along with Chinese characters used throughout the text truly shows the author does not intend this book to be a purely academic slog, but also a text for new readers to the topic to learn. The author provides new views on the dating and authorship of the inscriptions, which is a truly remarkable achievement.

Hao Chen has worked extensively on this topic and is an example of a newer generation of academics who have shown an interest in Central Asia and nomadic empires. This is something critical to note as to progress further in this field we will need more scholars to take up these difficult topics. Chen is not boastful in his opinions, though he expresses when there are some things he wasn’t sure about or where he struggled. This is refreshing, as it shows that this is not the final step in his research, but one that will be continued further. One key example is how he presents his new chronology of the Second Turkic Empire, which the author refers to as one of the biggest breakthroughs in his research. At the beginning of his conclusion, Chen writes “In the process of preparing an accurate chronology of the Second Türk Empire, I failed many times. No matter how I adjusted it, the chronology based on the Chinese sources never matched perfectly with the chronology provided in the Old Turkic inscriptions. Later I realized that I had failed because I didn’t consider two crucial factors” (p. 143). This sort of commentary on his work would have, for a long time, been considered a bad thing as it showed a form of “lack of knowledge” but as the author writes, it seems more like a way of highlighting the issues with the field as a whole. In this way the author avoids the older style of “proving” his central thesis, but more so leaves his thoughts as something to be considered and taken up at a later point.

In conclusion, as someone coming to this book with limited knowledge of the topic, mainly due to its inclusion as a footnote in the histories of Byzantium, Persia, and China, I felt it was a great step forward for the field of Central Asian studies. The author built the topic up in such a way that someone could come into the subject with no knowledge and learn, but also someone with extensive knowledge could approach this book and still gain something from it. The author’s inclusion of the original Old Turkic inscriptions and his use of the glossary at the end made me think I was not being lectured about the subject but

invited to learn more. Hao Chen, with this text, has hopefully opened up another avenue of research that will allow himself and many others to continue exploring Central Asia's history.

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Luca Anceschi. *Analysing Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Regime Neo-Eurasianism in the Nazarbaev Era*. London & New York, NY: Routledge, 2020. xi + 196 pp. (ISBN 9780415711432). doi:10.22679/avs.2023.8.1.012

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Luca Anceschi's book, *Analysing Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Regime Neo-Eurasianism in the Nazarbaev Era*, offers a detailed analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign policy under Nazarbaev, with a particular focus on the influence of regime *neo-Eurasianism*. The theoretical framework of the book draws on the concept of regime *neo-Eurasianism*, which has received limited attention in previous academic literature. The author highlights the significant role played by ideology, identity, power, and the domestic political context in shaping Kazakhstan's foreign policy decisions. This approach offers a valuable and insightful understanding of the complex dynamics of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, especially the influence of domestic factors on its approach. The central argument of the book is that the concept of *Eurasianism*, as applied to Kazakhstan's foreign policy under Nazarbaev's presidency, served to enhance Nazarbaev's legitimacy, leadership, and legacy rather than being driven by a genuine emphasis on Eurasian integration.

The book is divided into five chapters, with an introduction and a conclusion, each examining different aspects of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. In the introduction, Anceschi provides a brief historical overview of Kazakhstan and its foreign policy as well as an explanation of the book's central theme. Chapter one examines Kazakhstan's foreign policy in the pre-Eurasianist era, between December 1991 and November 1993, when the country gained independence. Anceschi argues that during this period, Kazakhstan pursued a multi-vector foreign policy, seeking to establish relations with all major powers and regional organizations.

Chapter two focuses on the emergence of neo-Eurasianist rhetoric in Kazakhstan in the mid-1990s and its evolution into a dominant ideology in the Nazarbaev era, with a focus on Nazarbaev's 1994 speech at Moscow State University as a significant turning point. Anceschi examines the key tenets of *neo-Eurasianism* and its impact on Kazakhstan's foreign policy, including the promotion of regional integration, the establishment of a multi-polar world order, and the cultivation of a Eurasian identity. The chapter also examines various Russian and Kazakh interpretations of this concept and draws comparisons between them.

Chapter three examines the relationship between regime *neo-Eurasianism* and intra-Central