

The Successful Life of Qurbon Amirqulov: Memories of Leadership in the Southern Periphery of Uzbekistan

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Summary

Autobiographical stories, which are a favorite literary genre in Central Asia today, provide rich source material for a yet-to-be-written cultural history of the region in Soviet and post-Soviet times. “Destiny” is the extended life story of Qurbon Amirqulov, a manager and entrepreneur from the periphery of Uzbekistan who in synopsis rates his lifetime struggles and achievements as a thorough success. Investigating the author’s account and interpretation, this paper points out the societal and economic ideals of the man, many of which collided with Soviet and to a lesser extent post-Soviet ideals and realities, and his strategies — in real life and in life-writing — for coming to terms with problematic aspects of the past and for coping with the ever-changing challenges of the present.

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Introduction

The transition from Soviet to post-Soviet life consists “not only of success stories, but also of obituaries” (Khazanov 2011: 19). Indeed, depending on the disciplinary perspective they have and on the sources they use, researchers arrive at very different points of the continuum in their assessments of it, ranging from success to disaster, with ethnographers generally more inclined towards the brighter side and political scientists to the darker one. This paper aims to draw the reader’s attention to the voice of a man named Qurbon Amirqulov, a local long-term expert on the transition who has recently published materials of a kind not often tapped in scholarship on Central Asia: a combination of an extended autobiography and thematic reflections on his own professional and personal life. This work can be read as an absolute success story, but clearly tells us that his success — which the protagonist understands as being material prosperity-cum-peace of mind — was achieved at a high price. The expert is self-employed in the sense that neither historians nor ethnographers or political scientists invited him to share his knowledge and opinions; the initiative was his own. His writings are autobiographical, which makes the author liable to the “autobiographic pact” (Lejeune), and his writings legible as a