
Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security

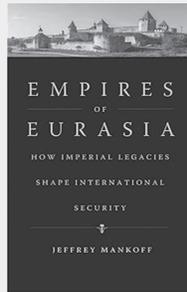
By Jeffrey Mankoff

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022, 384 pages, \$40, ISBN: 9780300248258

Reviewed by Arif Behiç Özcan, Selçuk University

This book on the four important states in the Eurasian region (Russia, Türkiye, Iran and China) relates their geopolitical objectives to their imperial pasts. Jeffrey Mankoff argues that these states inherited the legacy of their previous empires for historical and geographical reasons and this legacy is effective in their current policies. Mankoff's main argument is that due to the indelible effects of their imperial past, these states are not nation-states with a common ethnic and linguistic identity in a specific country, and therefore they have a different understanding of politics from the Westphalian national-state model. The author preferred to explain the position of these four post-imperial states in global relations in terms of the civilization argument, although there are those who explain it with political/ideological and structural approaches.

This book, written by the author with a neo-liberal perspective, analyzes each state separately in terms of civilization, imperial heritage, politics, history and geography, and uses these states as a new context that he thinks can be explanatory in terms of current security policies. The book also explains how the post-imperial visions of these states were built historically, and in which periods there were breaks from this vision, with justifications. The most basic conclusion reached by Mankoff is that these states do not conform to the Westphalian national-state model or act



with a “non-normal” perspective, as the author puts it. The post-imperial context includes advantages for these states that increase their influence within and outside their borders, as well as disadvantageous dynamics that limit this influence.

In order to support his argument, the author examines the imperial past of the states individually in separate chapters, within the framework of their effects on their own current post-imperial approach. While discussing the imperial past in the context of the history of cities in the near (and sometimes distant) geography of these states, the impact of political transformations and (if any) revolutions, it refers to the discourses of important intellectuals and political leaders who were influential in the political history of each state and contributed to the imperial vision.

Although the four states are examined in separate chapters in the book, Mankoff emphasizes the aspects in which the examined state resembles and differs from other states. Another feature that adds originality to the book is that it clearly indicates that the spheres of influence of the four post-imperial states are often intertwined. This intertwining is due not only to the overlapping of the four states' geopolitical ambitions, but also to the interplay of the identities they have built over the past century.

Although this book includes a reading through the leaders of the states concerned since it was published in 2022, the main emphasis of the book is that these states were influenced by their imperial pasts beyond the current political leaders. It is claimed that even if these states transform into “more democratic” systems in the future, they will continue this vision. The author also emphasizes that the civilizational identities of these states, which incorporate different civilizations as a result of the imperial legacy they inherited, can be mobilized against the perceived hegemony of the West.

The book primarily defines the concepts of “empire,” “Eurasia,” “heritage,” “borderlands,” “identity,” and “near abroads.” Following this the important developments that make up the imperial vision in Russia, Türkiye, Iran and China are analyzed historically. It is evident in these chapters that the author has mastered the specific conceptualizations in the history of each state, which is one of the strengths of the book. As can be understood from this conceptual richness, this book covers the identity construction process of each state and the imperial heritage it has accumulated in a broad way. In addition, the author clearly expresses how the identity construction processes in the history of these states show flexibility according to conditions, that is, how they are often imagined in a “more inclusive” way instead of a fixed definition of identity. This is considered as an approach in line with the codes of the post-imperial visions of those states. In order to better understand this flexibility, a roadmap has been created for future research.

Another strength of the book is that although it envisions the four states outside of the Westphalian national-state mold, it does not try to squeeze all four into one new mold. Ex-

plaining the similarities between states in the context of imperial heritage, the book relates the differences to their “geobiology.” Russia’s Eurasianism, Türkiye’s experience of democracy, Iran’s relatively narrow geobiology, and China’s One Belt One Road Initiative (BRI) draw attention to the features that distinguish states from each other. Thus, the author displays a more flexible stance academically and avoids strict expressions that cover all states as much as possible.

It is determined that the post-imperial visions of these states are also subject to different acceptances and objections by “others” within their sphere of influence. In addition, the relations of these states with the U.S. and the Western world in general are mentioned, albeit partially. In this respect, the book has a direction that encourages new academic discussions for researchers who will examine the relations of these states with other actors more comprehensively.

The book enables us to get to know more closely the internal and external political dynamics that shaped the distant and recent past of all four states. Furthermore, the author explains the subjects in general terms to the extent that the volume of the book allows. For this reason, it is a resource that can raise many questions for graduate and doctoral students, as well as researchers working on these states.

However, there are some criticisms, which should be considered, about the book. The most important shortcoming is about the imperial legacy that Türkiye has inherited. Mankoff took the date of 1453 as a starting point for this legacy. However, the aspects of this heritage based on both the Central Asian Turkish empires and the Seljuk Empire have been neglected. This neglect leads

to the overlook of an important dynamic that is effective in Türkiye's relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus. Another criticism is related to the section in which Türkiye is analyzed. In this section, it is noteworthy that the author makes a one-sided reading with respect to any discussions about the Armenian Question. Had Türkiye's theses on the Armenian Question been included, the academic flexibility of the author would have

been strengthened. A final criticism comes to the fore regarding the author's approach. The fact that he puts neo-liberal values in the center and evaluates the four states here as abnormal actors deviating from these values naturally leaves out questions that different theoretical approaches can answer. For this reason, the discussions initiated by the author in this book should be evaluated with other theoretical approaches.

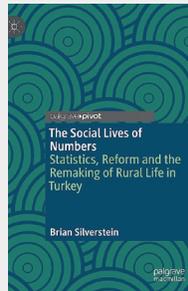
The Social Lives of Numbers: Statistics, Reform and the Remaking of Rural Life in Turkey

By Brian Silverstein

Palgrave Macmillan: Springer Nature Singapore, 2020, 125 pages, €49.99, ISBN: 9789811591952

Reviewed by Bengü Çelenk, Kırşehir Ahi Evran University

Ensuring food security is essential in terms of strategic significance for a nation as well as protecting the public's health throughout the entire food production and consumption process. Due to reasons like the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years, Russia's occupation of Ukraine, the "breadbasket" of many nations, mainly Europe, and climate change, it is imperative to painstakingly collect data on agricultural productivity and formulate strategic strategies in accordance with that data. By considering statistics and data analysis-based agricultural reforms implemented in the agricultural sector, based on Türkiye's EU accession process within a framework of the relationship between techno-politics and society, Brian Silverstein, in his brief piece, has sought to demonstrate the power of numbers to transform societies and politics. The central claim of this book, which describes how agricultural and rural lifestyles have changed par-



ticularly in recent years, as a result of statistical reforms, is that even if the political integration phase of Türkiye's EU accession process has stopped, infrastructure and technical harmonization initiatives are still ongoing and reshaping society. In this context, he asserts that statistical changes affect people's behavior, ideas, and even emotions. In this regard, he describes as "performative" the act of creating links between agricultural statistics and social and political dynamics. However, Silverstein did not use the term "performative" in his study in a theatrical sense. He defines performativity as "to emphasize that an act of description can have effects that rearrange the relationship between the description and the phenomena the description is purportedly about" (p. 3).

In particular, Silverstein, a scholar in anthropology with research interests in Türkiye,