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INTRODUCTION TO SURVEY RESEARCH IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA:
Tasks, Challenges, and Frontiers

INTRODUCTION

Central Asian (CA) culture, history, art, politics, and economics are the predominant fields that attract scholars from the international community to this unique region. This interest is enhanced by CA's rich heritage at the heart of which lies the Silk Road—a hive of cultural exchange and a melting pot of various peoples and civilizations. The demise of the Soviet Union and the advent of independence for the CA states further opened up the region to foreign scholars. Moreover, this motivated regional scholars to intensify their research, thereby putting modern CA on the global academic map. Nevertheless, the challenges faced by these states are reflected in the relatively restricted conditions and limited opportunities available to local scholars to interact with their counterparts abroad. The complex economic situation does not leave much latitude for increased public financing to enhance research resources for local scholars, compelling them to seek funding opportunities from abroad. On the other hand, foreign scholars face problems in obtaining firsthand information about their respective CA countries; these difficulties are often due to the unavailability of or limited access to various documents in these countries. This is particularly true of sta-

tistical and social research data on the societies in question. These obstacles naturally result in an imbalance of research, favoring areas that do not require statistical and social data; thus, research work which is methodologically easier to conduct in the conditions of CA. The damage is most acutely felt in sociological research where data on incomes, lifestyles, views, and concerns of the local population are often difficult to obtain due to logistic and other reasons. Consequently, conclusions with respect to the views of the population on lifestyles, regional development, and future perspectives of the CA states are either made prematurely, without the required data, or based on individual impressions gained in the course of fieldwork. While the importance and implications of such findings are unquestionable, there is no methodological guarantee as to whether, for example, they are merely typical of some particular locality of the country concerned or can be generalized about the whole society as such. In addition, regional generalizations are almost impossible to make due to the high levels of diversity within and between CA countries and their societies. Above all, although such findings may adequately model a general structure of societal life, they are not conducive to the comparative analysis of CA societies with societies from other countries. Furthermore, they only allow scholars, both local and foreign, to make hypothetical conclusions on the similarities and differences between particular cultures and their paths of development.

Thus, there is an urgent and ongoing need to collect verifiable statistical, public opinion and other types of data in CA for the compilation of open databases that will enhance both regional capacity-building processes and international knowledge about CA societies. What are the most popular topics for such social polling? What are the ongoing efforts to build such databases of public opinion in CA or Japan? What are the challenges that scholars face in this process and how can they attempt to overcome them? These are the questions that this article will address in order to define the important areas that require the attention of the international community in order to properly reflect the real situation in the region, formulate adequate policy options, and shape international public opinion toward CA societies.

STRUCTURE

For this article to achieve these tasks, I will deal with the abovementioned questions in three main parts. In the first part, I will introduce the types of social polling conducted in CA, classifying polls into the var-

ious areas they target and the aims of the studies conducted. In the second part, I will provide an account of the social polling efforts in Japan, citing several projects conducted and outlining their differences when compared with social polling conducted in CA. This part will analyze not only ongoing or completed projects like AsiaBarometer but also the ones in which the CA direction is in the initial stage of exploration exemplified by the Special Project for the Study of Civil Society. This will not only serve as a source of information but will also offer some particular examples of challenges faced by foreign-based scholars involved in this type of research. The third part will highlight the challenges that scholars are normally faced with when attempting to poll CA societies. An outline of these challenges is divided into the following two groups: conceptual and logistical. After providing an account of these challenges, the final part of this article will conclude by summarizing the main ideas and offering some potential areas for further social polling in CA societies.

1. SOCIAL SURVEYS CONDUCTED IN CENTRAL ASIA: FEATURES AND PECULIARITIES

While serious studies have been conducted in the Soviet Union using the methodology of survey research, many of their findings have been interpreted and used in a manner that supports the ideological fundamentals of the Soviet state [see for instance survey research used in Saidbaev 1978]. In many cases, these were used to emphasize the importance of socialist or communist ideology, with very few of these outcomes considered as an important asset for understanding CA societies. For many Soviet scholars, the survey outcomes were used to enhance their ideas that these societies should be reshaped in a "new" Soviet manner [for instance, on language selection in mixed marriages and the consequent importance of the Russian language, see Abdullaev 1989; Klychyov 1989]. Certainly, such usage was predetermined by the domination of this ideology over the freedom of research and the related pressures. This serves as a reason that Soviet scholars lacked well-developed surveying tools and used the outcomes of surveys for political convenience rather than solving social problems.

Social polling in post-Soviet CA can be analyzed from the following two main perspectives: countries where survey research is conducted and the purpose of the survey research.

1.1 Country-specific features of surveys

Social surveys in each country of the CA region have their own peculiarities, which are reflected in the type of surveys conducted and groups targeted. In general, CA governments are rather unenthusiastic about encouraging their research institutions and individual researchers to conduct independent academically motivated social surveys. When they do so, they attempt to retain the outcomes of the surveys for internal usage, justifying this as an attempt to maintain social stability and manage certain problems locally rather than spreading them. Many government-run or -administered institutes have entire departments dealing with the outcomes of social surveys that they then compile into reports and submit to their respective governments for further policy-making. Access to this data is limited, leaving many questions regarding the verification and reliability of such data unanswered. However, this approach by itself underlines the degree of importance attributed to social surveys by respective governments. Some outcomes of such polling are occasionally being made available. The data offered to the public is at times questionable, both in terms of outcomes and analysis.

Although the general observations made above about the environment for survey research are valid for all of the CA countries, there are still differences among regional governments in their attitudes to surveys and the conditions prevailing in each country. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan each represent a separate case exemplifying these differences.

In terms of the political environment and the attitude of the government toward social surveys, Uzbekistan is a country where the government is one of the most cautious and selective about allowing only certain surveys to be conducted in the country. Very few polling agencies exist in the country, and their activities are normally coordinated with and sometimes administered by state-run organizations working in similar areas. Social polling in the country is conducted by agencies that are specifically licensed for this purpose, and one of the most widely known agencies is the Izhtimoij Fikr (Public Opinion) Polling Agency [for example, see the quarterly journal *Izhtimoij Fikr* 2002]. While any type of data (statistical or social research outcomes) has always been a closely controlled matter in the Soviet Union, the legacy of treating social polling and any outcomes related to them in the same manner as in the past is still largely adhered to in Uzbekistan. This can be explained by the following three main reasons: cautious attitude to how data might be used, perception that social polling outcomes can be used (or "misused")

against the political leadership of the country, and due to the general mentality of the population of Uzbekistan. The case of the first two reasons is straightforward and largely connected to the political pressures to which respondents are exposed. At the same time, the third reason might be connected to the mentality of the population of Uzbekistan, where the belief that "garbage should not be taken out of the house for public display" is very strong. Combined with political pressures and concern about repercussions for cooperating with social surveys, such mentality largely results in self-restraint and lack of willingness to cooperate on the part of respondents. At the same time, one should acknowledge that with deepening economic problems in recent years, the attitudes of people toward social surveys are changing slightly, and people are increasingly open to them. Therefore, on par with the problems of imposed (mainly by authorities and the community) limitations, self-restraint (socially and morally motivated) remains an acute problem. This implies that even if the political environment changes and external pressures acting on an individual are removed, the issue of how people regard the matter of providing information related to their private views on certain aspects of their society will still remain and would need to be addressed separately. This might also require the adjustment of methodology and a larger degree of cultural flexibility, which are discussed in the section of this article on the challenges of survey research in CA.

In contrast to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan represents a case where the environment for survey research is free from pressure to a large extent, with many opportunities available for measuring societal life. Government controls are weaker over various spheres of public life, thus providing greater scope for social surveying. Government controls do not extend to the field of social surveys mainly because the government either lacks the willingness to do so or simply lacks adequate (human, economic, and administrative) resources to enforce such controls. Whatever the case may be, such relatively large freedoms result in a large number of surveys being conducted both at the national and local levels. Nevertheless, in many cases, these surveys are not conducted systematically and very few of them are conducted on a regular basis using the same questionnaire over a period of several years.

The conditions of survey research in Kazakhstan represent a case that lies between the two cases detailed above. On the one hand, survey research in Kazakhstan is being conducted by many agencies and institutions on many issues related to political, social, and private life. These data are being made available through the Internet, published in the form of research reports, and distributed freely among those interested

in these outcomes. On the other hand, as in Uzbekistan, there is an unwritten rule in the press and among the public in general not to touch upon sensitive issues that might cause problems for those expressing "politically incorrect" or "untimely" views.

In addition, Kazakhstan faces logistical challenges of the same type observed in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Due to the large size of the country and difficulties associated with the surveys of all regions, very few polls covering the entire country are representative. A great number of polls cover Almaty and Astana, which is hypothetically explained by the fact that these two cities are economic, political, and administrative centers of the country and exercise a decisive influence on its future.

1.2 The purpose and themes of the surveys

Despite the limitations of survey research, the themes being dealt with as part of the survey research conducted in and around the CA region are very diverse. They vary from the socioeconomic conditions of each society to issues of governance and the future visions of society by the respective populations. Of course, as outlined in the previous section, a majority of the themes covered by these surveys depend on how they are regarded by the respective governments.

The type of survey research that focuses on the general socioeconomic picture of society in Kyrgyzstan is exemplified by studies such as those conducted by individual consulting companies like "Expert" [Zavtra budet luchshe... 2005], government-ordered studies [Kudabaev 2004], or international research institutes and companies [e.g.: IRI 2005]. These studies are conducted largely with the aim of presenting the socioeconomic picture of the standard of living or using this information for policy formulation. Another type of research is the study of the effect of political developments on the population and how these developments impact the views of the population. An example of such research is a study conducted by "M-Vektor" in 2005 mainly in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, in order to analyze how the change of power in the wake of the so-called Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 affected the living standards of the population [Urmanov and Khudaiberdyev 2005]. One of the aims of this study was to reveal whether the attitudes of businessmen and those involved in providing services to the population were affected by political changes influencing their businesses. Finally, there is a range of studies that are conducted as part of an academic inquiry into specific subjects or areas of knowledge. In these types of studies, survey research is being used as a methodologi-

cal tool to depict various aspects of a researched subject by employing a multiplicity of methods and with survey research forming one part of such research. Particular examples are the studies related to the condition of minorities in Kyrgyzstan [Kosmarskaia 2000, 2006] or the studies of interethnic relations within it [Elebaeva and Omuraliev 1998].

In Uzbekistan, the general content of the themes of survey research is approximately the same, while there are certain peculiarities related to the country. The types of survey research typical for Uzbekistan can be largely divided into the following groups, although the division into these groups is very relative and is only used here for the purpose of systematizing the large volume of material. The first group of surveys consists of survey research that attempts to depict the general socioeconomic situation in the country, in order to comprehensively measure the general social and economic conditions and standards of living. Among them, there are studies that focus on the general population [Ubaidullaeva, Ota-Mirzaev, and Ganieva 2002; Conditions... 2002] and those that focus on certain sections of the population [ex: Akhmedzhanova 2001]. The second group consists of those surveys that attempt to reflect the views of the population on specific issues related to the social and political life of society. For instance, this will include the views of the population on religion [*Implications of Islam...* 2003], on historical developments [Alimova and Golovanov 2002], and on interethnic relations within the country [Ganieva 2006]. A greater number of surveys were conducted in Uzbekistan as part of the academic studies on certain subjects, the most typical of which are the ones similar to the studies on the various aspects of the current forms and life cycles of local neighborhood communities in Uzbekistan [Arifkhanova 2005; Arifkhanova and Zununova 2006]. Conceptually similar are the studies that aim to redefine survey methodology in the conditions of Uzbekistan [Ubaidullaeva 2003; Ubaidullaeva and Sysina 2005; Ubaidullaeva, Ganieva, and Kayumov 2006; Ubaidullaeva and Ota-Mirzaev 2006 etc.]. Finally, another group of surveys is the one conducted with the purpose of revealing public attitudes toward certain international events or certain foreign countries [*Germaniia Uzbekistonliklar Nigohida* 2001].

Interestingly, surveys concerning political developments, people's trust in the government, or state institutions are relatively rare and the findings of those that exist ignore many issues. On the whole, surveys in Uzbekistan provide some type of survey-based data. However, their findings frequently mismatch the realities. As a result, the sampling methods and attitudes of those conducting the polls are questioned.

In terms of infrastructure for such studies in Kazakhstan, there are

a number of polling stations and companies explicitly specializing in survey research. Some of them are created on the basis of or within the premises of research institutes, while the others are established either as consulting firms or companies involved in marketing research. As mentioned earlier, the companies conducting survey research in Kazakhstan often do not target the country in general but mostly target the administrative and business centers of Almaty and Astana. This is due to the importance attributed to these cities and the logistical problems of covering the entire country [for instance, see Omarov 2006 etc.]. The limited number of nationwide surveys can be exemplified by several studies such as *Itogi monitoringa social'no-politicheskoi situacii v RK* (The outcomes of monitoring the social and political situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan) [2002] and *Materialy issledovatel'skoi deiatel'nosti* (Materials on research activity) [2002]. Both these studies reflect the general situation with regard to social surveying in modern Kazakhstan. Structurally, survey research in Kazakhstan does not differ greatly from similar studies in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan that are mentioned above. Similar to the previous two countries, (in addition to the general snapshot of the country) there are a number of studies that are conducted as a part of broader academic studies [on religion, Telebaev 2003; on media studies, Ibraeva, Peternko, and Buluktaev 2004; and on language, Arenov and Kalmykov 1995 etc.]. The main difference between the environment for social surveys in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan is the degree of government control (discussed in the previous section) and accordingly, the interpretation of outcomes. The case in Kazakhstan is that although independent surveys are conducted more frequently (than in neighboring Uzbekistan), they target socioeconomic or problems related to daily life, thereby leaving politics or corruption-related questions outside their scope. Their interpretation is also somewhat mediocre. Although they allowed critical interpretation, they limit their criticism to a very insignificant one where "delicate" issues are concerned.

In terms of region-wide surveys, there are very few attempts to conduct them. One example of such a rare polling exercise is the study of Governance, Youth Values and Life Styles in Central Asian Countries [*UNESCO Most* 2001], which covers countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This survey was conducted to reveal the tendencies in the thinking of the youth in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and to compare their views. Although the outcomes of this study represent a significant contribution to our understanding of the changes in the values of not only adults but also the younger generations, these types of studies represent

a new frontier for those scholars interested in comparable survey data sets on CA. Without such region-wide efforts, the data of separate surveys, with no comparable questionnaire and data sets, are individual case studies that provide limited scope for comparison.

Based on these factors, there were few attempts to fill these gaps and conduct survey research in CA using comparable data sets and placing CA in a comparative perspective.

2. JAPANESE SURVEY RESEARCH ON CENTRAL ASIA

The two databases detailed below—"AsiaBarometer" and the Special Project for the Study of Civil Society—conducted from Japan and covering parts of CA (in addition to other Asian societies) are to some extent responses to this challenging academic agenda, and aim to address this shortfall of data collection in the region.

2.1 AsiaBarometer and its Central Asian Focus

The AsiaBarometer survey (AB) project has been conducted in over 20 countries in Asia jointly by the University of Tokyo and Chuo University [for the outcomes of this project see Inoguchi, Basanez, Tanaka, and Dadabaev 2005]. Although the focus of this project extends much beyond the CA region, by encompassing countries of South, Southeast, and East Asia, it attempts the rare analytical exercise of (1) examining the post-Soviet realities of CA states, initially assessed in 2003 [Inoguchi, Basanez, Tanaka, and Dadabaev 2005:207–234; Dadabaev 2004] and (2) following up on this effort by conducting polls throughout all the CA countries [Dadabaev 2005a, 2006, 2007a, 2007b]. In 2005, polling was conducted in all countries of CA, following a similar procedure and asking similar (40) questions to a limited group (800 people) of respondents [for an analysis of the methodology of this survey, see Manabe 2006].

Regarding the methodology of this poll, local subcontractors were employed to collect the information, while the questionnaires and requirements concerning the interviews were defined and formulated by a core team of around ten Japan-based AB scholars. This represents an attempt to measure and quantify the dramatic changes in the post-Soviet era. This set of empirical findings contributes to the current efforts to analyze post-socialist societies and processes of change within CA with their conclusions based on public opinion. While such public opinion

polling is periodically conducted in CA, as outlined above, findings, for various political and social reasons, often fail to accurately reflect the complexities and diversities of the views of ordinary people regarding the realities of everyday life [Ubaidullaeva 2003; Ubaidullaeva, Ota-Mirzaev, and Ganieva 2002; Ubaidullaeva and Sysina 2005]. Another advantage of the AB data set is that the same questionnaire was used in 2003 and 2005, offering the possibility of tracking the tendencies of change.

The age and regional composition of respondents is compiled covering the main cities of CA countries in the same manner (normally, 200 respondents in the capital and 100 respondents in each of the other cities, with few differences when found necessary). In terms of ethnic composition, an effort was made to cover all major ethnic groups in most of the case studies. The survey also has a fairly large group of "others," which includes other ethnic groups and respondents of mixed ethnic origin. In 2003, the pilot CA country to be "measured" on the AsiaBarometer was Uzbekistan. This was then followed by the comprehensive polling of CA, covering all five post-Soviet republics. Naturally, the project faced an unlimited number of problems and challenges, as outlined below.

The target group being polled was a group referred to as "ordinary citizens." The notion of "ordinary" is open to discussion, and this project mainly considered the people who constitute the majority of the population in terms of income, occupation, and self-identification. Nonetheless, as part of this group, the sampling in the course of this project has many points that need to be defined and determined more clearly. These challenges are partly detailed in the next section on conceptual challenges.

The main conceptual drive in conducting this survey was to compensate as much as possible for the lack of detailed sociological data and the inaccessibility of ordinary perspectives. Thus, the survey could offer a clearer and more quantifiable picture of post-Soviet realities, needs, hopes, and aspirations and also of traditional social institutions and methods that may help to deal with new and global demands. The principle underlying AsiaBarometer's approach toward Uzbekistan, as with the other societies covered, is that both imagination and reliable data are required to perceive and understand the essence of the processes occurring in this region.

The types of questions addressed in the cases under consideration within the AsiaBarometer project are exemplified by the following ones concerning first, the state and the changes in the basic living conditions

of the residents of CA; their experience in this transitional period; and the level of their satisfactions, concerns, and hopes. In addition, the project attempts to reflect the views of people in CA about their families, societies, states, and the region as a whole. Due to the fact that the pilot country was surveyed both in 2003 and 2005, the data concerning the views of people in Uzbekistan can be compared and checked to ascertain whether their views are different from those held in the previous year and how they differ.

In more general and broader terms, the project attempted to compare Asian societies, including CA ones, and thereby draw a wider regional picture of contemporary Asian society. Another significant feature of the project is that the questioning and final analysis of the data set was conducted not by "outsiders" but by regionally based scholars in close collaboration with each other. In the process, the AsiaBarometer database has grown to become not just a compilation of vital data but also, more importantly, a data processing knowledge exchange in itself, eventually leading to capacity enrichment in all countries and institutions involved. As a result, an English language volume with a CD-ROM as an attachment has been published, which not only includes articles that interpret the data but also the raw data itself (in SPSS format)—a feature that will allow other scholars to compare their own perceptions of the data collected [Inoguchi, Basanez, Tanaka, and Dadabaev 2005]. This project also serves as a test study where the challenges of social survey research in the post-Soviet and particularly, in the CA environment revealed themselves, as outlined in the following section on the challenges of survey research in this region.

2.2 Special Project for the Study of Civil Society (SPSCS) and Central Asia regional survey research

Another original data set is being produced within the SPSCS at the University of Tsukuba. In contrast to AsiaBarometer, this project mainly focuses on the institutions of civil society. SPSCS primarily focuses on the voices of the non-state civil society institutions, indigenous local communities, and interest groups. This project compliments the data of the other types of surveys such as the AB survey explained earlier, and adds an important dimension to methods for studying various societies. In particular, this project surveys the leadership of these civil society organizations in order to understand the views of those involved as members or as supporters of various issues related to everyday life in their respective countries.

This extensive survey involved 36 questions and 260 sub-questions and utilized random sampling from the telephone directories similar to Town Pages. The surveys were mainly based on these telephone directories, which normally listed all groups that had a telephone connection, and did not request for unlisted numbers. The survey sampling based on telephone directories is mainly applicable in countries where telephone connections are in existence and are properly maintained. In countries where this is the case, the data are more comprehensive than government data and enable scholars to access many groups that would not be considered otherwise. In the case of Japan, this directory is the telephone book published by Nippon Telegraph And Telephone Corp. (NTT), which is a comprehensive listing of telephone numbers and includes a useful category termed as "unions and associations" in which most organizations that are not corporations list their numbers [Waley 2005; Shipper 2006; Chan-Tiberghien 2004; Hasegawa 2003; Schwartz and Pharr 2003; Pekkanen 2000, 2004, 2006; Alagappa 2004; Osborne 2003; Kingston 2004].

An alternative method used to distribute questionnaires was the postal service. Mailed questionnaires hold several advantages. The cost is relatively low compared to other forms of gathering data from organizations. In addition, using such a method provides the opportunity to broaden the sample size far beyond what could have been achieved with detailed case studies or even interviews. One major disadvantage of mailing survey questionnaires is that the rate of response can be so low that the results may be questioned. However, the survey enjoyed a very high return rate (40 % average) and a very high response rate (more than 70 %) in Japan and similar countries where the postal services function properly.

The head of the organization or the person in charge of administrative affairs usually answered the questionnaire. The survey included questions specifically designed to reveal the policy influence and interests of the target groups. Moreover, the survey analyzed the data along with a fairly detailed profile of the group, including the type of group, its legal status, and the size of the group. In terms of international outreach, during the period from 1997–2005, surveys similar to the one conducted in Japan have been conducted in several other countries, including Korea, the United States, Germany, China, Russia, Turkey, and the Philippines. For maximum comparability, the surveys are similar to the JIGS survey in terms of format and methodology. Naturally, where necessary, the surveys were tailored to local conditions, and the response rates and patterns varied across countries.

CA (and in particular, Uzbekistan as a pilot project) is a region that serves as a new frontier for the project's ambitious expansion in an effort to contribute to the understanding of the diverse societies of Asia. However, in the case of CA countries, one has to change the approach as very few telephone directories exist in the country and those that do, list only a limited number of telephone connections. The postal services are not completely reliable; thus, the fate of the project depends entirely on the circumstances. In addition, in Uzbekistan, there are certain political pressures acting on those conducting such interviews. These pressures that further complicate the situation are detailed in the section on the challenges of survey research.

In the case of Uzbekistan, the database of the civil society institutions maintained by the Institute for Study of Civil Society is being used. The database contains a list of around 5000 civil society institutions undertaking a large number of educational, humanitarian relief, and other projects. There are both conceptual and logistical limitations faced by such research. This project also recognizes problems relating to the limitations of access to politically active but governmentally disliked institutions. Nevertheless, even accessing data on those civil society institutions that are permitted by the government represents one of the first attempts to engage the academic community and begin systematic survey research in this region.

Both AsiaBarometer and the SPSCS as well as other similar social research initiatives in CA build on the tremendous data value of social demography by combining original polling with data collection from other regional sources.

3. CHALLENGES OF SURVEY RESEARCH IN THE POST-SOVIET ENVIRONMENT

Survey research in the post-Soviet environment of CA has its own peculiarities and specificities as outlined above. In addition, it is inevitable that as with any field of academic learning, it also has its own challenges that need to be considered when one attempts to analyze its potentials and future prospects. In this article, I focus on two main challenges that might hamper or compromise any attempt to collect and analyze the data. These would first include conceptual challenges that primarily include differences in understanding the manner in which data collection works and methodological challenges that refer to the misperception, intentional or not, of the most effective ways to collect data.

Secondly, they include logistical challenges that primarily highlight the difficulties of organizing the data collection appropriately in the existing conditions in CA.

3.1 Conceptual and methodological challenges

Among the many conceptual challenges of survey research in post-Soviet CA, one of the biggest is the issue of censorship, which can largely be regarded as a legacy of the Soviet past [for instance, see Swafford 1992]. In particular, the censorship of questionnaires and answer choices remains one of the biggest obstacles to the wider development of survey research in CA. In some countries like Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan, this censorship is less persuasive and all-encompassing than in the remaining parts of CA. A closely related problem inherited from the Soviet practices in survey research is that of the negative attitude of authorities toward independently conducted polls. Therefore, as in the Soviet era, many of the outcomes of various surveys are concealed from the international community of scholars in order to keep "confusing" information out of international attention. Even today, the same attitude toward surveys seems to prevail in a majority of the cases in post-Soviet CA. This often leads to a situation where respondents are under an imagined or real pressure to provide socially desirable answers in order to impress interviewers or to please the authorities. As a result, the problem of the views of people on various aspects of their lives and societies being inadequately reflected arises.

The most obvious example of how the abovementioned issues translate into the outcomes of the survey research can be found in the case study of Turkmenistan, surveyed during the AsiaBarometer project in 2005 [for details, see Dadabaev 2006, 2007b].

Turkmen respondents were asked a range of questions from their attitudes to trivial everyday situations to potentially sensitive issues of political participation and preferences. The respondents were influenced by a range of factors, including their personal experiences, social status, income, ethnic and religious attachments, and age. However, in the course of the poll, there was an obvious tendency among respondents to opt for "Do not know" replies in a large number of cases. The general trend in "Do not know" responses increased proportionally to the sensitivity of the issue. For instance, with respect to nonpolitical questions, such as the ones on access to utilities within the house (0 %), access to the Internet (0.5 %), water pollution (4.5 %), air pollution (5.1 %), travel abroad (6.4 %), and soil pollution (8.4 %), the fraction of those who

replied "Do not know" was less than one-tenth of the respondents. The "Do not know" responses increased when respondents were asked about happiness in life (8.9 %), satisfaction in marriage (11.6 %), satisfaction with the standard of living (19.1 %), satisfaction with their job (26 %), and household income (27 %). However, the most dramatic increase in "Do not know" responses was registered when respondents were asked politically sensitive questions related to satisfaction with the rights to gather and demonstrate (64.4 %), to be informed about the workings of the government (59.8 %), to participate in any type of organization (53.8 %), and to practice freedom of speech (55.1 %).

Respondents frequently chose the "Do not know" answer for questions on the sense of pride toward one's country (46.3 %), satisfaction with the democratic system in the country (43.8 %), and the quality of public services (41.3 %). Similarly, they often chose the "Do not know" response for questions that asked them to evaluate their sense of personal trust toward the central government (36.4 %), local government (28.8 %), army (28.9 %), legal system (30 %), parliament (30.5 %), and political party (89.4 %)—the last category receiving a very high degree of "Do not know" answers.

While AsiaBarometer faced problems that resembled those in other CA countries, the case study of Turkmenistan was exemplary in the sense that the reasons for the incredible number of "Do not know" answers could be inferred and easily attributed to the political and social realities of Turkmenistan. Indeed, some of the respondents might have a genuine lack of knowledge or lack of confidence to judge particular aspects of their lives or certain issues. However, a majority of these responses can be better explained by the closed social, economic, and largely political environment that places additional (and at times self-imposed) pressure on respondents to choose a safe "Do not know" answer in order to avoid complications with the authorities. To deal with these problems, respondents were provided the choice of not answering sensitive questions. Subcontracted polling companies were selected from among companies that are not normally involved in political polling. There were instances of self-censorship by respondents out of a concern for the real or perceived consequences of their responses.

Another issue pertains to sampling. The outcomes of any survey largely reflect the views of the sample group that is targeted. Therefore, the issue of sampling should also be regarded as no less important a problem than censorship. This is especially the case in the conditions of post-Soviet CA. As mentioned in many studies, the issue of proper sampling remains one of the most difficult issues when considering survey

research in CA. As the population of the region is very diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, and lifestyle, compiling a representative sample appears to be one of the greatest challenges. This is especially the case when the effort to assemble a sample is made under conditions where the census data, telephone directories, or listings of voters are either nonexistent or unavailable due to a lack of interest among local officials to cooperate with the surveying institutions or companies. In such a situation, the data sample is normally (and openly so) not representative from the very beginning. Very often, these surveys cover mostly urban and fewer rural areas; this is mainly due to the logistical problems discussed in the next section. The lifestyles and perspectives of rural and urban populations are likely to differ considerably. Urban populations are usually more modernized and integrated into global information flows and economics. Conversely, rural areas usually maintain more traditional and self-sufficient communities than those in the cities. Thus, ideally, comprehensive data on both urban and rural settings are required. However, due to various reasons, this is not always possible. In such societies, as in the majority of the CA countries, the sampling purpose is to first and foremost cover part of the population and later proceed to compensate for the lack of information from alternative (yet similar) surveys or information sources. Although these types of surveys are less effective in fulfilling their aim of reflecting the complexity and multiplicity of life in CA, cases of successful survey research are still very rare because of their limited focus and unavailability of similar information at large.

Finally, there is an urgent need for cultural fluency and flexibility in research approaches in order to convey the opinions of ordinary people with more accuracy. This implies, for example, that questions asked by interviewers should be adapted to the local context in order to avoid ambiguity in responses. As an instance of this necessity of cultural fluency and flexibility, one can examine problems faced by the AB survey mentioned above. For instance, the AB survey asked respondents a seemingly straightforward question about whether they had any relatives living abroad. This led to some confusion because in the post-Soviet context, the term "abroad" does not have any clear connotation. In the post-Soviet context, including CA, there are two notions, "near abroad" and "far abroad." Near abroad primarily refers to the countries of the former USSR and neighboring CA countries, which many people still do not consider to be abroad in the real sense of the word. Many have relatives who used to live in closely connected villages; however, after the collapse of the USSR, they were divided by borders into differ-

ent countries. Therefore, the responses of the people who claimed to have many relatives living abroad need to be carefully interpreted and clearly explained. It is even better to use a more appropriate differentiation between the terms "near" and "far" in relation to abroad. It is a regionally accepted practice to make such a differentiation.

A similar type of confusion arises from the careless usage of terms such as "nationality" and "ethnicity." For instance, respondents were asked whether they took pride in their nationality. However, in the post-Soviet geographic context, "nationality" implies one's "ethnic" group, while in the majority of other countries, this term implies "citizenship."

Another example of the lack of understanding of the local environment is when people face problems in understanding certain terms. In one of the surveys, the term "retirement allowance" was used, which initially meant a one-time lump sum payment that the employee receives from her/his company or institution when s/he reaches retirement age, in addition to the monthly pension. In many East Asian countries and in Japan, this arrangement is very common. However, in CA, such a concept is nonexistent and, in many cases, retirement payments are associated with the monthly payments of pension that one receives from the governmental pension fund.

Therefore, in the former Soviet Union and CA in particular, these and similar terms need to be clearly marked in order to avoid misunderstanding and misperceptions. Otherwise, unadjusted questionnaires will either lead to irresponsible answers that will not reflect the real situation or bitterness due to the misunderstanding of the local cultures, societies, and contexts.

3.2 Logistical challenges

Even if the conceptual challenges mentioned above are suitably dealt with, to a great extent, the outcome of survey research in the conditions of CA depends on logistical issues in the process of the research's implementation. Therefore, the logistical challenges in conducting survey research in the CA environment are not less important than those of a conceptual nature.

The first in the long list of logistical challenges is the absence of appropriate infrastructure to conduct and, more importantly, to verify the outcomes of social surveys. This is largely connected to the absence or poor performance of the telephone connections in both urban and rural environments as well as the unreliable services provided by

Internet providers. While the situation in urban settings is not so severe due to the fact that many of the cities have telephone services that function relatively well, in rural settings, this is a more acute problem. In addition, it is easier to conduct survey research in urban areas due to the fact that the number of interviewers and polling stations, if at all they exist in the country, are normally concentrated in these urban areas. In rural settings, in addition to the absence or poor performance of communication lines, survey research is further complicated by the fact that the access of interviewers to these areas is difficult. Further, in certain seasons, it is virtually impossible. The costs of such social surveying mounts mainly due to the costs associated with transportation and other logistical support for those traveling to these distant locations. Nonetheless, even if these costs can be covered, such an approach rarely produces the outcomes of the desired quality. This often raises the issue of whether the resources actually match the quality of research. This is perhaps true not only of CA. In addition, as mentioned by many scholars, such inadequate infrastructure results in inaccurate outcomes and, more importantly, the difficulty of institutionalizing the surveys in the region.

In many cases, subcontracting may be the solution to this problem. However, one has to be cautious about this option as well. The selection of subcontractors for such polling is not easy due to various reasons, which include pressure being applied on various research institutions to provide "politically correct" information to the international community. Contractors often lack the necessary coordination of subcontracted agents, and this eventually leads to poor handling of raw data and the final outcome of the survey.

As in the case of conceptual problems, one can refer to the AsiaBarometer Survey to demonstrate the abovementioned problems. Although the utmost efforts were made to survey the general views of the total population, there were instances where certain data pertaining to the rural population were not considered. This deficiency was then compensated to an extent with data from other sources, such as the data of surveys conducted in rural settings or the information obtained from the institutions involved in the collection of statistics.

The timing of the interviews was also significant. In particular, the selection of the time of the year for conducting the interviews was a very complicated task. Although the season when polling is conducted does not have a detrimental effect in urban settings, it makes a significant difference in rural settings. This is related to the logistical difficulties in winter, when most rural roads are in bad condition, thereby making it

very difficult and expensive for interviewers to reach certain locations. In contrast, summers are dry and temperatures easily rise above 50 degrees Celsius, making it very difficult to interview people both in rural and urban settings. Such climatic conditions place enormous physical pressures on interviewers and frequently result in interviewees hurriedly answering questions, without due deliberation, mainly caused by the climatic conditions (heat or cold) or a busy schedule. The fall season selected for the AsiaBarometer Survey also has certain limitations. In particular, this is the busiest time of the year in agriculture with a majority of the rural residents being involved in harvesting activities. Certain religious holidays also fall in this season. Therefore, although the poll was mainly conducted in urban areas, there were some instances when interviewers encountered difficulties in certain localities that fell in between the categories of urban and rural. In these places, some respondents were not present at home or were unwilling to cooperate with the interviewer due to harvesting activities or religious ceremonies and events.

CONCLUSIONS

Social survey research in CA is at the initial stage of development. It has been largely used for the political purpose of justifying the existing system of governance and values throughout the Soviet period. Moreover, the attitude toward it persists. After achieving independence, CA states are increasingly applying survey research methods for academic and policy-making purposes. Thus, survey research is increasingly being used as a method for measuring the standard of living and the values of the population. However, there are several problems of a logistical and conceptual nature in this process that need to be considered in order to conduct survey research appropriately. Among the logistical problems, the issues of proper sampling, infrastructure, and culturally flexible questionnaires are among the most important ones. The conceptual problems are largely associated with the issues of political pressures, self-restraint, the mentality of the targeted population, and many other issues.

In terms of the scope of survey research, a majority of available studies focus on surveys of individual countries. The next frontier for CA survey research is the further expansion of the existing individual country-focused studies to region-wide ones. In order to conduct these studies effectively, adjustment of the survey polling tools, questionnaires, and analyzing techniques will be required. If this is done suit-

ably, it will offer new perspectives in understanding CA societies and provide new opportunities to identify their similarities and differences.

* This article develops the ideas of the short academic essay: 2005b. Measuring Central Asian societies: The beginning of the process, *Asuno Tōyōgaku* 13:3–6. Tokyo: University of Tokyo, Institute of Oriental Culture.

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