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The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan (Central Eurasia in Context)

Judith Beyer

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Judith Beyer : The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan (Central Eurasia in Context) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan (Central Eurasia in Context):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. engages with historical material and theoretical debates in a

stimulating manner and works great as a course book for students
By customer
This is the first legal anthropological study of Central Asia. The book is very well written - full of in-depth and carefully researched ethnographic data. It is pleasant to read, engages with historical material and theoretical debates in a stimulating manner and works great as a course book for students, too. The conclusion is a suprisingly bold criticism of the concept of 'post-socialism'. Lots of food for thought. Oh, and the black and white photographs are stunning!

The Force of Custom presents a finely textured ethnographic study that sheds new light on the legal and moral ordering of everyday life in northwestern Kyrgyzstan. Through her extensive fieldwork and firsthand experience, Judith Beyer reveals how Kyrgyz in Talas province negotiate proper behavior and regulate disputes by invoking custom, known to the locals as salt. While salt is presented as age-old tradition, its invocation is shown to be a highly developed and flexible rhetorical strategy that people adapt in order to meet the challenges of contemporary political, legal, economic, and religious environments. Officially, codified state law should take precedence when it comes to dispute resolution, yet the unwritten laws of salt and the increasing importance of Islamic law provide the standards for ordering everyday life. As Beyer further demonstrates, interpretations of both Islamic and state law are also intrinsically linked to salt. By interweaving case studies on kinship, legal negotiations, festive events, mourning rituals, and political and business dealings, Beyer shows how salt is the binding element in rural Kyrgyz social life and how it is used to explain and negotiate moral behavior and to postulate communal identity. In this way, salt provides a time-tested, sustainable source of authentication that defies changes in government and the shifting tides of religious movements.

Judith Beyer has done a magnificent job of unfolding current notions of legalism among the Kyrgyz of Talas province. Her prose is crystal clear, her ethnography is rich, and her theoretical engagement is stimulating and accessible. This book deserves a place on readers shelves alongside the best works on the anthropology of post-socialist Eurasia. Paolo Sartori, Institute of Iranian Studies, Vienna