


Chapter 9

Internationalization of Library and Information Science Education in Central Asia: The Case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

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ABSTRACT

In the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) with the total population over 50 million people, there are more than 25 thousand libraries. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are two of the countries that made strides in economic reforms along with other areas of development, including the libraries. This chapter, which emphasizes the development of Library and Information Science education, provides an overview of the current policies of the higher education internationalization and the current state of library development and library education. From the current initiatives, challenges and opportunities are drawn, and a summary on similar internationalization practices are presented.

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INTRODUCTION

Over recent centuries, much of Central Asia was part of the Russian Empire, and from 1922 part of the Soviet Union. In the 1920s and '30s the Soviet government created five Soviet socialist republics out of the region: the Kazakh S.S.R., the Uzbek S.S.R., the Kirgiz S.S.R., the Tajik S.S.R., and the Turkmen S.S.R.

At that time, the main information flows, normative and regulatory documentation were created and distributed in Russian. Libraries were rare in the Russian Empire, and most of the population was illiterate. Later, in the Soviet Union, the all-state centralized library system was developed under the influence of decisions made in Moscow, the capital of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), where the V.I. Lenin State Library of the USSR (V.I. Lenin State Library) (Russian State Library (RSL), 2017), the main scientific, methodological and coordination center of the All-Union Library Network, was located. The Soviet system of librarianship and library education was ideologized and seen as a competitor to the foreign imperialist system. Therefore, international contacts in library science education and access to foreign educational and professional literature were carried out mostly through specialists working at V.I. Lenin State Library. The main language of library science was the Russian language, and knowledge of foreign languages was mandatory only for specialists working with library collections in foreign languages.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, all 15 republics obtained their independence, becoming independent nations. Currently Central Asia is associated with the five independent countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Each country has maintained a strong national identity, and each country seeks to influence the continued development of the region. Yet the common historical and cultural heritage, the proximity of languages, and the names of prominent figures of culture and science unite these countries in the collections of their libraries. In these countries with a total population of over 50 million people, there are more than 25 thousand libraries. The economic difficulties of the post-1991 transition period destroyed important economic, cultural and information ties between the republics and negatively affected the libraries in each country. Yet at the same time, libraries and library education institutions gained the freedom to determine their own priorities and development directions, including international cooperation.

Since their independence, each of the Central Asian countries took a different paths towards transformation and globalization. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have aimed at market reforms, while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are seen as having not yet completed their transitions to market economies, with Tajikistan an intermediate case (Batsaikhan & Dabrowski, 2017). As state policies are reflected in the activities of libraries and library education institutions, there is a varying degree of openness

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