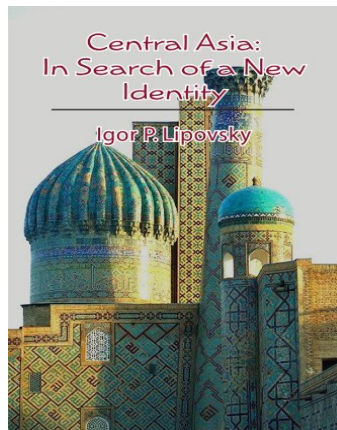


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The Western reader is not well acquainted with Central Asia. This vast region in the great depths of Asia is confined between two giants, Russia and China, while also sharing its boundaries with two worrisome neighbors, Iran and Afghanistan. Central Asia is the region of ancient, sui generis civilization, where two major ethnic groups, of Iran (Indo-Iranian peoples) and of Turan (Turkic peoples), continuously confronted each other for many centuries. After being colonized by Russia, Central Asia 'disappeared' from history for more than a century and only the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed the Central Asian peoples to return to the modern world and regain their sovereignty. But how is it possible to transition from the poverty-stricken, totalitarian socialism, ridden with the remains of medieval traditions, to democracy and economic progress? How can interethnic conflicts be prevented? And what can be done with the influential Russian minority that has remained in the region since the break-up of the USSR? Distinguished scholar of Near Eastern and Central Asian History, Igor P. Lipovsky, assesses the historical legacy, religion, ethnicity, politics and environmental problems of the Central Asian states.