
Introductory remarks

by **Dmitriy Voyakin**, Director of IICAS

25 years of IICAS, 15 years of the journal *Bulletin of IICAS*



DEAR READERS, I am glad to welcome you to the pages of the updated journal of the International Institute for Central Asian Studies!

We bring to your attention the new issue of the IICAS journal. In fact, this is not an ordinary issue. For the anniversary of the Institute and the anniversary of the journal, together with Ruslan Muradov—the Editor-in-Chief, an intellectual and a renowned scholar—the IICAS Secretariat has done an impressive job of updating the *Bulletin* and giving it a drastically different style and content.

However, let us get back to the anniversaries. After all, 2020 is an anniversary year for our Institute. It is turning 25 years in 2020. This marks 25 years of joint work and active dialogue between scientists and research organizations within the framework of the IICAS activities for the benefit scientific and cultural development.

Over the past years, the Institute has proven its position as one of the leading research centers of Central Asia, while continuing to strengthen the cooperation between the scientific communities of the state parties to the Agreement. During these years, incredibly interesting and complex projects were implemented, which have become extremely important milestones in the study and popularization of the rich historical and cultural heritage of the entire region. All issued publications invariably enjoy well-deserved popularity in academic circles, largely due to the fruitful and deep collaboration of the authors' connection with the IICAS team.

Nevertheless, IICAS does not stand still, but rather continues to develop by opening up new research areas, establishing close ties with scientists, research organizations, and universities. Keeping pace with the times, the Institute is actively working in related disciplines and is mastering new technologies and approaches.

A brief historical overview is in order. The idea of the vital necessity of integrating the efforts of the international community, aimed at studying the history and culture of the Central Asian region, originated in the bosom

of UNESCO. The first UNESCO pilot project to study the civilization of Central Asia was designed for a four-year period (1967-1970) and was included in the UNESCO program following the 14th session of the its General Conference at the end of 1966. The program stated that the purpose of the new project was to create a “better understanding of the national civilizations of Central Asia by means of archaeological research and the study of its history, science, and literature” and explained that such studies would be related to the geographical region that included Afghanistan, Eastern Iran, India, West Pakistan, and the Asian republics of the Soviet Union, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (*Gafurov, Miroshnikov 1976*). Participants and witnesses of that project emphasized the beginning of a multi-faceted experimental process, the main challenge of which was the lack of experience in practical arrangements of international cooperation in order to implement an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the region’s cultures and nations. The hope was to include the involvement of scientists from many disciplines – historians and archaeologists, linguists and literary critics, art historians, ethnographers, sociologists, experts on numismatics and paleography, etc. (*Gafurov, Miroshnikov, 1976*).

An important milestone in the consolidation of scientific activity included the work of scientists from different countries, gathered under the auspices of UNESCO in the period since 1992 until 2005, on the preparation and publication of the scientific monograph *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*.

Concluding this brief historical overview, I shall allow myself, without wasting the reader’s time, to recall that the idea of creating a type of platform for cooperation of scientists from all over the world arose during one of the five scientific expeditions called *The Steppe Route in Central Asia*. The expedition took place in Central Asia from April 18, 1991 until June 17, 1991 within the framework of the UNESCO project *A Comprehensive Study of the Silk Road: Paths of Dialogue*, 1987-1997 (*The Silk Roads Project, 1988-1997*). That idea was maintained by the international community and brought to fruition upon the official visit to Uzbekistan by Federico Mayor Zaragoza the Director-General of UNESCO on August 27, 1995 when the opening ceremony of the International Institute for Central Asian Studies was held. The International Institute, created by the international community, has become an important platform for

dialogue and cooperation between scientists from all over the world. It was precisely in the bosom of IICAS that outstanding results were achieved in the study, preservation, and popularization of the history and culture of the vast Central Asian region. Over 25 years, such a significant volume of highly important work has been done that a simple listing of the results would take up many pages.

Constantly developing, IICAS strives to master new horizons. The “toolkit” used to achieve these set strategic goals is very diverse. These include all kinds of meetings, conferences, seminars, field trainings; both the preparation and publication of scientific papers in the form of various monographs and articles; also actively informing its stakeholders through social networks; participation in and moderation of new directions and social media; and, finally, the use of the latest techniques and equipment; as well as the creation and maintenance of the official website. Supporting young scholars through the provision of grants for advanced training by means of their participation in international schools and projects has definitely become another promising area in the activities of the Institute.

The journal of the Institute occupies a special place in the activities of IICAS. The *Bulletin of IICAS* has been published since 2005. Its 28 issues and one supplement – materials from the 2017 scientific conference – continues to see the light of day up to the present. Scholars from such countries as the USA, Kyrgyzstan, France, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Germany, Iran, Italy, Tajikistan, South Korea, Russia, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, the Netherlands, and many others actively publish their research materials on the pages of the Institute’s journal.

All issues of the *IICAS Bulletin* can be found at the following link: <http://www.unesco-iicas.org/ru/library/>.

In the 21st century – the era of information technologies – new challenges and related needs are clearly emerging. That, in turn, forces us to look for new approaches and tactfully and competently enter areas with tough competition, yet, at the same time maintain a high level of topical relevance and demand.

First of all, the IICAS team has an extremely clear understanding that the updated journal is intended to become a highly intellectual platform for scientific debate and discussions as well as to gain attention through the publication of iconic, foundational articles and highly topical and relevant materials.

To achieve such an ambitious level, the IICAS Secretariat is implementing the following steps:

First, in terms of ensuring a proper assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of research organizations and scholarly activity, the *Bulletin of IICAS* is being brought into line with the requirements of global citation indices and related bibliometric indicators. Thus, starting in 2020, the journal has been indexed in the RSCI (Russian Science Citation Index). Negotiations are underway to include the *Bulletin* in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. All articles will receive a DOI (Digital Object Identifier). It is thanks to this specific development of the journal that scholars engaged in Central Asian studies will have the opportunity to quickly integrate their research results into the world scientific information space.

In addition, updating and expanding the composition of the editorial board will not only improve the quality of peer review and, accordingly, the quality of articles, but will also increase the number of materials accepted for publication. A section of each issue of the journal has now become a discussion platform where interesting scientific topics will be passionately and captivatingly discussed.

The schedule of the periodical publication around separate thematic issues has also been worked out. Each of these issues shall allow for a more detailed examination of a specific subject of scientific discourse.

Another step has involved establishing an honorarium fund for the preparation and publication of foundational articles on specific topics and areas. It is anticipated that anchor articles by leading experts in a particular field will become an additional vector for attracting the attention and interest of the broader scientific community.

The IICAS Secretariat has begun working to create a correspondent, partner network around the world. Such an undertaking will give an impetus for additional interest in the journal and the materials published in it. In this regard, I shall again emphasize the clear advantage of the *IICAS Bulletin* with its bilingualism, which makes it possible to achieve an incredibly broad geographical coverage.

It is also our desire to actively promote the journal by means of constant advertising through social networks and the IICAS website as one of the cornerstones of the dissemination of information about a newly published issue and each published article.

The publication the articles and related color illustrations with full English and Russian translation

in their own separate volumes issued biannually, enables the journal to maintain an active and dynamic interest both by potential authors and readers of the *Bulletin*.

Until recently, we have engaged in significant debate concerning the publication format of the *IICAS Bulletin* on whether to do a “hard-copy” printed version of the *Bulletin* or merely publish electronically. I have to state that in the age of digital technologies there is a persistent feeling that paper-based media is obsolete. During the coronavirus pandemic, people have learned to communicate and even hold large international conferences remotely online. Moreover, the combination of the most extensive databases of digitized literature and convenient gadgets with various software brings, without a doubt, a level of comfort in practically everything – from searching for the desired publication to copying the necessary text blocks and cross-references for any source of citation.

At the same time, there are those who maintain some significant objections to a merely electronic format, which usually are found in two groups: Those whose reaction is emotional and the other of a more practical nature. The first is the person whose soul feels how comfortable and enjoyable it is to hold a book in one’s hands, to turn its pages over, and to smell the pleasant aroma so familiar to all book lovers. In addition, there is the danger that comes with unlimited access to digital sources. We face unprecedented levels of plagiarism; cutting and pasting quotes is becoming a common practice. No one seems to completely read the scanned works. This creates an easy opportunity to find via automatic search only what is needed to solve a narrow problem. However, in order to understand the author, one needs to read the entire work, internally accept or discuss, and at the same time enjoy the process of cognition. But this is about the human soul and emotions....

The practical advisability of publishing literature on paper lies, in my opinion, primarily in the problem of data preservation that still exists. An alternative format of information is always important. In this context, digital as well as physical. If you lose one, there is a great chance to save the other. Finally, one must also consider the obvious importance of health. Reading without receiving radiation from a computer monitor or device screen, while preserving one’s vision, is much more useful!

Today, we— readers and book lovers—are the only immunity for print media against the massive

spread of the digital industry. An article in *The New York Times* in 2015 stated that at the time, “there were signs that some e-readers were returning to print media or were mixing paper and digital media. According to the Association of American Publishers, which receives data from approximately 1,200 publishers, e-book sales have fallen by 10% in the first five months of *this* year (2015 – DV). Last year digital books accounted for about 20% of the total market – about the same as a few years ago.” The author of the article, Alexandra Altersept, concluded that this undulation remains the main feature of the book world (*The Plot Twist*, 2015).

Taking into account these kinds of fluctuations and other factors briefly described above, in a kind of symbiosis of the cult vs. the pragmatic of popular demand and attractiveness; IICAS is going in two parallel directions – the journal will be available in digital form, as well as in a printed paper version.

Thus, dear readers, here at the conclusion of my opening remarks, my wish is that you enjoy the study of the 29th updated issue of the *IICAS Bulletin*!



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