

# ***HISTORY MAKING IN CENTRAL AND INNER ASIA***

## **ABSTRACTS**

### **Panel 1: The Mythic and the Global in History Making**

*Hieromancers of History: Transacting Politics and Values through Popular Historical Narratives in Central Asia*

Nathan Light, ZIRS, Halle, Germany

Historical discourses in Central Asia are important modes of making popular and quasi-academic claims to symbolic capital in the present through connections to the past. This paper will consider several Kyrgyz and Uyghur examples of popular historical discursive practices—written and oral—within their contexts of use, and show how they are related to evolving global historical models and value systems. My analysis attends to the concepts that structure historical, ethnic, national and political fields to create continuous identities and claim rights and characteristics based on relations to past actors, actions and groups. Present identities and intergroup relations are based on historical events and groups through complex logics that are rarely carefully interrogated. I propose that historical fields are a projective domain through which social and political representations can be invented by relatively free manipulation little hindered by constraints of realism and evidence. Historical discourses are open for invention and connection to symbolic constructions accomplished through artistic performance, monuments, displays of artifacts, political and religious ritual, and shared ideology. Modern global histories have become an important field for making claims about national and identity group histories, and for the rooting of values and moralities. Documents and artifacts are valued for their rhetorical authority but interpreted freely to extract useful essences and items of historical “truth”, while the cumbersome details of historical reality are dropped.

*Landlocked Arabia*

Saulesh Yessenova, University of Calgary, Canada

A great deal of work has been done in anthropology on identity and the ways individuals and communities from a family or kin group to the nation construct and reinvent their social worlds and their boundaries through various projects that anchor their identities to particular localities. But, as Henrietta Moore argues in *Global Anxieties* (2004), “individual and collective identities can no longer be understood as produced within defined locations” in the light of global/local relations, and, therefore “their study can no longer be confined to observable activities and ideas within one locale.” In this paper, I intend to expand on this argument by looking at the social and cultural worlds of local communities in the Caspian Basin that now host large multinational oil projects and the way their locale and its identity, have been construed in the global press, corporate media, and scholarly analysis. What can we learn from this juxtaposition of local/global images and representations of past and present realities in the Caspian as well as hopes and anxieties that those depictions convey? I will argue that the study of local histories and identities within the context of “global” ideas about them offers a critical opportunity to make sense of local identity politics and reflect on global hierarchies of identities they purport.

## **Panel 2: New Ventures in History Making**

*The Words of Akhyns and the Voice of the Ancestors: Sovereignty and Social Responsibility in Independent Kazakhstan*

Eva-Marie Dubuisson, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey

Turkic-Mongol oral traditions in Central Asia are dynamic and changing expressive fields, which are creatively invoked by modern practitioners in response to contemporary social and political issues. In the improvisatory verbal art form *aitys*, poets see it as their duty in performance to ‘voice the truth of the people,’ to share news, to represent a cultural ideal, and to call government leaders accountable to those they purport to govern. They accomplish this by transforming the discursive space of performance: poets’ ‘words’ become a vehicle for the imagination and invocation of a shared ancestry, as well as a unified historical ‘voice’ in the present political and cultural sphere.

In this presentation I examine framing in *aitys* poetry, the way in which poets create shared models of participation and interpretation in performance. Drawing on idealized models of kinship and belonging, poets invoke historical cultural figures as a shared and generalized ancestry, from within which they gain legitimacy to speak. Poets also often invoke a romanticized history of the Central Asian khanates in the 15th-18th centuries, in order to exemplify a successful model of ethnic sovereignty. Contemporary leaders are then berated for their failure to live up to these examples, while audiences are reminded of the rich cultural heritage they share. Pride in a shared Kazakh identity becomes a ground for the demand for good governance.

*From “Authentic” to “True” History: Negotiations of Value and Authority in Post-Independence Kyrgyzstan*

Svetlana Jacquesson, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

This presentation focuses on recently produced “true” Kyrgyz histories. One of the reasons for attempting to make sense of these narratives resides in their growing production and consumption. In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan such narratives started appearing on the pages of the news media or as books and booklets in the early 2000 and ever since they have kept growing both in number and in volume.

I start by analysing the public debate on genealogy and history making and the subsequent shift of value and authority from “authentic” genealogies based on oral transmission to “true” histories based on written sources. I relate this shift to the complex relations between metadiscursive practices, discursive authority, discursive sites or cultural tools and social actors. I use two case studies in order to investigate the ascription of value to narratives on “true” history and of authority to their producers. I argue that the successful production and consumption of “intricate” narratives of “true” history in nowadays Kyrgyzstan rely as much on the skills of its producers as on a set of cultural tools made available only recently. These cultural tools came to be valued, or considered as authoritative, because of their externality and textuality. I also argue that the change in mediational means representing the past and the ways in which their value is assessed or reassessed is closely related to a particular post-independence and post-Soviet sociocultural setting.

### **Panel 3: History Making and Social Practices**

*A Nation’s Glorious Heritage as a Spiritual Journey? History-making and the Sakha Shamanic Revival*

Eleanor Peers, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany

Sakha (Yakutia) is the titular homeland of the Turkic-speaking Sakha people, who form 49.9 per cent of its population. Its political establishment sits uneasily between the Sakha nationalist sentiments that came to fore during the 1990s, and the Moscow administration’s centralizing agenda. The upsurge of Sakha nationalism during the 1990s was accompanied by a renewed interest in the Sakha shamanic tradition, which continues to grow in intensity. As the presence of Sakha nationalist ideology has faded from the Republic’s political scene, a preoccupation with the Sakha cultural and spiritual heritage has become more evident in shamanic practice.

I examine history-making within the post-Soviet shamanic revival, comparing a range of historical narratives from academics, politicians, cultural workers and spiritual practitioners, and their incorporation into contemporary shamanic practice. These narratives may be articulated through large-scale public shamanic rituals, films, plays, novels, pop concerts, and television shows; they find their echoes in the warp and weft of personal motivation, self-perception and spiritual experience. The analysis of these

narratives, and their dissemination into contemporary practices of and responses to shamanism in Sakha (Yakutia), will reveal the ways a shifting political engagement with Sakha nationalism, and its concomitant shamanic revival, both shape and are constituted by local practices of communication, knowledge and value-perception.

*Practising Genealogies in Kyrgyzstan*

Amantur Japarov, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

In this presentation we focus on the relationship between “clan assemblies” as a recently established social and political practice in Kyrgyzstan, genealogical knowledge and the production of “true” and “complete” clan genealogies. Since 2005 clan assemblies have been regularly held in Kyrgyzstan. Their rise is largely due to inter-clan rivalries (*uruuchuluk*) and honour competitions (*namys*). The clan assemblies aim to bring together people belonging to a given genealogical line, and thus to a given clan, around the prominent representatives of this clan. The criteria for prominence are extremely varied and any person with a certain social or economic capital can be categorized as a prominent one. The more clan assemblies were being held, the more projects for producing the “true” and “complete” genealogies of clans were being made public. Such genealogy productions are represented as grass-root practices even if they are often funded by the prominent people of a given clan.

In this presentation we dwell on two questions: which kind of genealogical knowledge was used at first in order to initiate the clan assemblies since, after all, one needs to know the genealogy of a clan in order to attempt to bring together its members, whether prominent or common ones? What was “wrong” with the existing genealogical knowledge and how the social or political need of “true” and “complete” genealogies came into being? In attempting to answer these questions, we elaborate on the mutual dynamics of history production, or in our case genealogy production, and social practices.

*Oasis History in Eastern Xinjiang: a Contested Field?*

Ildikó Bellér-Hann, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Uyghur of Xinjiang have often been subjected to severe restrictions of freedom of speech. Censorship (accompanied by self-censorship) was frequently imposed during the warlord period and later on during various phases of the collectivized era. Following the initial liberal atmosphere in the early reform period, restrictions have been again stepped up in since the 1990s. Such conditions do not favour the free production of historical knowledge. In this paper I shall focus on articles written by local authors about the history of Eastern Xinjiang in journals published for internal consumption only (i.e. within China). Many of these articles focus on particular episodes of local history, with particular interest paid to the history of the local Muslim dynasty and to the series of peasant rebellions which shook the region in the first half of the 20th century. A closer look at such publications seeks to explore to what extent these publications offer a platform for local historians to put

forward their own interpretations of history, and whether these particular publications serve as sites where actualized history can be guardedly discussed.

#### **Panel 4: Memories and Collective Knowledge of the Past**

*Our Farm, Our Country: Motifs in Uzbek Rural Oral Histories*

Marianne Kamp, University of Wyoming, USA

This paper draws attention to the intersections of and contrasts between the local and the national in the ways that elderly Uzbek collective farmers remembered collectivization of agriculture. Individual memories of personal experience of collectivization, mediated knowledge that was shared in the family and local community, and national representations of collectivization merge in oral history narrations.

The body of sources forming the basis for this enquiry is a collection of 120 oral history interviews carried out between 2001 and 2004 in seven provinces of Uzbekistan. My questions in analyzing these oral histories are about what individuals can tell us about their lived experiences of a dramatic economic and social change, and also how dominant political discourses about those changes shaped both the lived experience and the individual's interpretation of that experience. None of these elements is fixed or static: experience, the creation of memories, and their reshaping all are dynamic and interact dynamically. While post-Soviet accounts of most things Soviet are usually highly critical, or else deeply defensive, these oral history accounts of collectivization were extremely varied: some wounded and deeply critical, others proud of what they accomplished, and others mixing accounts of benefit with elements of oppression. This suggests a lack of a widely shared post-Soviet Uzbek national narrative about collectivization, and instead a balancing of narration of lived experience with elements selected from the multiple available interpretive frameworks for viewing collectivization.

*The Violence of History: Differential Social Memory and Political Violence in Mongolia*

Chris Kaplonski, University of Cambridge, UK

The political violence that ravaged Mongolia in the late 1930s left, by most accounts, at least 36,000 dead in a span of about eighteen months. About half of these were Buddhist lamas. The destruction also encompassed the monasteries themselves, and almost every one of over 700 monasteries would be destroyed. The collapse of socialism in 1990 allowed the political violence to be examined openly for the first time in Mongolia. Yet, while the lamas were not forgotten, their fate did not assume the prominence in discourses about the past that one might expect given the extent of the violence and destruction. Rather, political figures came to dominate the history books and social memory of post-socialist Mongolia, while the lamas faded into the relative background.

In this paper, I wish to explore this disjuncture between the lived experience and the differential social memories of the period. Why aren't the lamas more remembered? I suggest that an examination of the memory politics involved in this shift highlights a number of elements which include state-building, the disrupture in the memories about the lamas and the success of socialist-era propaganda.

Contemporary criticisms of Buddhism also play a role. These elements combined to effect the (re)politicization of the memory of the repressions charted here. In exploring the particularities of the Mongolian case, I also highlight the broader issues of agency, explanation and historical contingency and their impacts on memory and representation.

*Born for Misery and Woe: Ways of Remembering the 1916 Great Revolt in Kyrgyzstan*

Aminat Chokobaeva, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

This paper focuses on remembrance of the 1916 anti-colonial uprising in Tsarist Central Asia from the early Soviet period to the demise of the Soviet Union. Termed “the unknown genocide” by a contemporary Kyrgyz politician, the revolt claimed 100 – 120 000 victims out of an estimated Kyrgyz population of 780 000. Despite the human dimension of the catastrophe, the memories of the violence and suffering in the hands of Russian authorities and settlers have been suppressed by the Soviet government. Yet, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its censorship apparatus, the personal memories of loss and survival are rarely discussed.

This paper’s emphasis is on the prominence of trauma in the oral testimonies of the uprising, which is entirely absent from the official records. History writing was a dangerous occupation in the Soviet Union, which is one of the key reasons behind the highly selective nature of Soviet historiography. Nonetheless, the perseverance of alternative memories, whether in family histories or popular poetry or even cinema and novels, whose often eminent authors perished in Stalin’s terror campaigns, reveals the challenges peculiar to the Soviet attempts to reconcile the mutually exclusive Bolshevik projects of nation-building on the one hand and the friendship of nations on the other. The history of the 1916 revolt proved especially controversial for Soviet historians as the new Stalinist rhetoric of Russian patriotism gained currency during the World War II. The largest revolt ever to take place in Russian Central Asia, Urkun became a key site of the discursive struggles between the participants of the rebellion and the changing Bolshevik historiography. The disputes on events of the past gave the Soviet state that emerged victorious from the great Patriotic War a terrain on which to assert control over the nascent Kyrgyz national history.

The paper attempts to answer the question of why the personal memories were silenced and historical issues surrounding the uprising were never fully resolved. This study seeks to explore the tensions between the institutional memory and unofficial remembrance of the revolt. Ultimately, the central concern of the paper is not an analysis of the uprising itself but rather an investigation of what its use in Soviet and post-Soviet contexts reveals about the cultural hierarchies and ambiguities involved in nation-building in Kyrgyzstan.

*Making Sense of Kyrgyz Oral-Derived Historical Sources*

Dan Prior, Miami University, Oxford OH, USA

In this paper I examine the formal characteristics and dynamics of Kirghiz oral-derived historical sources from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, identify several basic conditions that constrain their study today, and propose practical approaches to analyzing them. The nature of oral-derived historical sources takes shape in three main dimensions of analysis. First, the oral and the written are but notional poles between which the texts themselves exist on a continuum; their creators were by definition literate, but not necessarily to the exclusion of profound knowledge of oral tradition. Second, the genres within and among which the texts' authors operated constituted a complex network of verbal art forms, some of which are little understood today; thus there is no direct path back to an original genre of "ethno"- "history" among the Kirghiz. Third, the existence of any particular text is always the result of a three-sided creative process involving the author, the audience, and the patron. The role of patronage in the origin of specific oral-derived sources is at the same time one of the most under-studied problems in the Kirghiz field and one of the most promising areas in which to improve our understanding of traditional historical knowledge. The corpus of sources upon which my observations are based is representative but not exhaustive. An early twentieth-century manuscript that I recently edited for publication supplies a number of examples.

## **Panel 5: The Interplay of Personal and Collective Memories and Memoirs**

### *Surnames and Genealogies in Central Yakutia*

Mészáros Csaba, Institute of Ethnology, Budapest, Hungary

The inhabitants of Tobuluk consider agnatic descent-groups as groups of people having the same surname. However, surnames and genealogies do not necessarily correspond to each other because of the fairly common habit of changing surnames. There have been many ways of and reasons for surname change in the village in the last 100 years. Six surnames are considered as local, and there are sharp distinctions between those that belong to the pre-collectivisation local leaders (*tojons*) and those of their workers and slaves. As the surnames of *tojons* are more prestigious, in the overwhelming majority of cases, people take on these surnames.

Since personal character traits and competences are considered as handed down by ancestors, prestige and authority based on the mapping of forefathers plays a key role in structuring the local power-relations and networks of patron-client connections. Due to the incongruence between surnames and genealogies, individuals can be characterized, and assessed alternately either by their genealogy or by their surnames. In this paper I focus on the interrelations and tensions between genealogies and surnames. What histories are provided locally in order to legitimise and promote people having the same surname? In what way surnames legitimise actors, and how local history contributes to the prestige of surnames? Why are surnames more important than real genealogical ties?

*The Past in the Present: Modes of Remembering a History without Prospect*

Ines Stolpe, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, Germany

The era of socialism is increasingly heading towards the point of inflexion – turning from contemporary history into history. Since comprehensibility of collective knowledge depends to a large extent on the binding character of a commonly shared canon of semantic codes, prevalent key statements invite to be recreated both with regard to experiences of history as well as to histories of experience. Although more difficult to grasp, the latter demonstrate to what degree and in what ways the past is rooted in the present in the course of the recollection/memory process. In this paper, I wish to suggest that the acquirement of history-related storytelling happens via internalized genres and interpretative models with their own codes of conduct.

Contemporary Mongolian society is characterized by processes, which can be understood in terms of simultaneous nationalisation and regionalisation of historiography (briefly: *Chinggis Khaan* on the one hand and *manai nutag* “our homeland” on the other). However, the dispute about the past as a battle about the future appears to be primarily fought among intellectuals, at times guided by current political interests. With regard to anniversaries, their modes of remembering include an international level, which partly hints at post-socialist memory techniques, oscillating between reminiscences of socialist times and recently adopted anniversaries. Some anniversaries are commemorated as a mixture of different sets of remembrance, thus creating ritual coherence of a history without prospect.

*Communicative and Collective Memories: Two Examples of Local History Production from Kyrgyzstan*

Roland Hardenberg, Eberhard-Karls-Universität, Tübingen, Germany

In this presentation, two very different local histories written by Kyrgyz authors from the same village are analysed and compared. The first author is a former *kolkhoz* president who produced two books that basically cover the time from the end of the nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century. His work is strongly (auto-)biographical and focuses on individual achievements and personal experiences. The second author is a mathematician who wrote two books about the history of his own descent category (*uruu*). His work combines oral history (*sanjira*) with written sources. The two authors create very different images of “esteemed people” (*ardaktuu adamdar*), yet they exhibit a common interest in producing a narrative that links the deeds of one’s own people (family or descent group) with the history of particular places (pastures, villages or regions). Taking up these observations, the author argues that local histories relate to different types of memory and are far from uniform with regard to their composition, sources, methods and narrative strategies. Yet, despite their diversity, the newly developed genres of “written collective memory” provide the idea of social continuity by stressing connections between past and present, and between people, land and morality.



*Histories from Below, Above, and Offside: A Literary Genre from Uzbekistan*

Ingeborg Baldauf, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, Germany

Since the mid-1990s a literary genre has been flourishing in Uzbekistan: self-appointed history-writers from all layers of society lay out their memories and memoirs in front of the reading public, which, however, does not seem to take too much notice of them. The texts can be anything from slim leaflets printed on shabby paper to thick volumes in high-gloss printing. Their authors appear to share a deep concern for the completeness of historical knowledge, which leads them to fill major, and certainly also very minor, gaps in “official” and “professional” history-writing.