

# Conferences and Lecture Series

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## The Ninth Annual Central Eurasian Studies Conference

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, April 13, 2002

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The Association of Central Eurasian Students (ACES) at Indiana University hosted the Ninth Annual Central Eurasian Studies Conference. Through the years this event has served as a forum for scholars to introduce new research and for students to gain experience in presenting academic papers. Participants came from all across the United States and abroad for the full-day event, giving presentations on topical subjects as diverse as political Islam in Central Asia and the Mongolian *Estrada* as a part of national identity. The organizers of the conference attempted to accommodate the diversity of topics in nine panels split into morning, afternoon and evening sessions. Presentations by noted scholars Dr. Thomas Allsen from Trenton State College and Dr. David Sneath from the University of Cambridge separated each of the sessions. Allsen presented the lecture "Skilled Hands in Motion: Technician Transfers in the Mongol Empire" and Sneath spoke on "Reciprocity, Corruption and the State in Contemporary Mongolia."

Allsen discussed the dynamics of the massive mobilization of artisans under Pax Mongolica. According to Allsen, the Mongolian period of Eurasian history witnessed systematic and large-scale transfers of scientists, ritual experts, merchants, administrators, technologists and artists across the empire. From Chinese artisans to Muslim engineers and architects, significant numbers of technicians were relocated and employed by Mongolian rulers for military, cultural and economic reasons. These long-distance cultural transactions challenge widely-held assumptions that the nomads were passive recipients in their dealings with neighboring sedentary peoples. In contrast, Allsen argued that they were active and selective appropriators of sedentary culture.

Sneath examined Mongolian perceptions of corruption in the past and present and related this to the political and economic transformations in what he termed "the age of market." He demonstrated that throughout the pre-communist, state socialist and post-communist periods the common perception of officials' rights and duties went through serious transformations. The boundary between gift giving and bribery changed along with this perception, contributing to the notion that corruption has become more rampant in recent years. Thus he suggests that Mongolian notions of legitimate and illegitimate gifts and payments can only be understood through the changes in the networks of obligation and mutual aid.

The conference sessions accompanying Allsen and Sneath's lectures were organized in thematic panels. The three morning panels covered "Post-Mongol Central Eurasian History," "Politics" and "Finance and Economic Transformations." In the discussion on politics, Cengiz Surucu (Indiana University), in his paper "Modernity, Nationalism and Resistance: Identity Politics in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan," discussed contemporary Kazakh "ethnonationalist" and "cosmopolitan" political perspectives. He argued that nationalism and cosmopolitanism can be understood as idioms that elites utilize in their struggles for political and cultural power. These idioms help intellectuals organize diverse political positions in two broad alliances. Blending Eurasianist political thought and the Soviet version of modernization, the cosmopolitan perspective perceives modernization and nationalism as opposing categories of practice. Thus cosmopolitanism crosscuts interethnic boundaries and provides a common stance against the ethnonationalist policies of the government.

The afternoon panels were devoted to discussions on "Political Behavior," "Pre-Mongol

Central Eurasian History” and “Geopolitics.” The panel on political behavior held a number of lively discussions — among them Islamism in Tajikistan, neopatrimonialism in Central Asia and national identity in Uzbekistan. Shah Ahmad Mutalov (Institute of Averaged Languages and Language Ortaturk in Uzbekistan), presenting his lecture “Two Ways of Developing National Identity in Uzbekistan,” brought out the problem of defining the Uzbek nation. Dr. Mutalov focused on the development of a campaign begun on April 6, 2000 in the meeting of President Karimov with representatives from Uzbekistan’s intelligentsia. The purpose of the gathering, Mutalov explained, was to discuss the president’s book on the “national ideology,” and the meaning of that term. The crux of Mutalov’s argument rested on the lack of a clear definition of the Uzbek word *milliy* (national), which can imply a relation to an ethnic group or citizenship. Consequently, he explained that the terms nation and national tend to become muddled in Uzbek speeches and writings. In the end, he offered two possible reasons why this confusion might have come about: 1) the terms are deliberately mixed in order to conduct “ethnic cleansing;” or 2) the terms are used inaccurately and are in need of clarification for Uzbek and international audiences.

Dr. Kamoludin Abdullaev, a visiting scholar at Yale University, discussed post-civil war reconstruction in Tajikistan in his paper, “Including

Islamists in Legal Politics: Assessment of the Tajik Model.” He summarized the painful yet promising process of integrating the Islamic Tajik opposition into mainstream politics. According to Abdullaev, the entire peace process has been marked by lack of trust and determined efforts to overcome it through various institutional channels.

The last three panels of the day featured presentations on “Mongolia and Buriatia: Then and Now,” “Language and Linguistics” and “Representations of Identity.” One of the most interesting presentations in the panel on “Representations of Identity” came from two Indiana University students, Peter Marsh and Tristra Newyear. The pair offered a multi-media presentation “Beyond Estrada: Why Do We Need a National Sound?” As the title of the presentation would suggest, Marsh and Newyear looked at the new pop-rock music in Mongolia and Buriatia to examine the relationship of music and national political parties. They argued that a close relationship exists between popular music and the powerful economic and political institutions in the nations, which, Marsh and Newyear believe, raise questions about both Buriatia and Mongolia’s contemporary nationalisms.

The conference schedule and other ACES events can be viewed online at: <http://php.indiana.edu/~aces/>

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## Middle East Studies Association 2001 Annual Meeting

San Francisco, USA, November 17-20, 2001

Reported by: **Marianne Kamp**, Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyo., USA, [mkamp@uwyo.edu](mailto:mkamp@uwyo.edu)

The Middle East Studies Association annual meeting, which was held in San Francisco November 17-20, 2001, featured much that was of interest to Central Eurasian Studies Society members, including a number of papers on Central Asia and the Caucasus, a roundtable on Afghanistan, and many panels on Iran and Turkey.

Perhaps most significantly, the Social Sciences Research Council arranged a thematic conversation entitled, “Imagining Central Asia and the Caucasus at the Nexus of World History and Area Studies.” Seteney Shami of SSRC moderated a

discussion among panelists Adeb Khalid (Carleton College), Nayereh Tohidi (California State University, Northridge), Sean Pollock (Harvard University), Roberta Micallef (University of Utah), and Dru Gladney (East-West Center). This thematic conversation was well attended and generated thoughtful discussion of the state of our field and its future. Should Middle East studies try to integrate Central Asian/Caucasus studies more fully? What can be done to create more support for the field? How can or should Central Asia and the Caucasus become part of university curricula? Vernon Schubel pointed out that many scholars in these areas of

study find employment at liberal arts colleges, and that this is a potential area of growth.

Participation in the MESA conference by scholars of Central Eurasia varies; in 2001, overall attendance at the conference fell, following the September 11 events. In response to those events, MESA organized a round-table on Afghanistan, with Eden Naby, M Siddieq Noorzoy, Nazif Shahrani, and other scholars. A panel devoted to Azerbaijani politics and society was sponsored by the International Society of Azerbaijani Studies. Another panel featured comparisons of shock modernization in Uzbekistan and Turkey. However, at MESA, full panels on Central Eurasia often

guarantee that panelists are speaking only to an audience of scholars of Central Eurasia. Thematic panels where Central Eurasia scholars and Middle East scholars present papers may be more effective for reaching a broad audience (in MESA terms) and in making our field relevant to Middle Eastern studies. Papers concerning Central Asia and the Caucasus appeared in panels on migration and refugees, Persian and Turkish cultural elites, diplomatic relations, and architecture. For a full list of panels and available papers, see the Middle East Studies Association website at: <http://www.mesa.arizona.edu>

### **“Abseits der Seidenstrasse”: The Silk Road and Beyond — Art & Culture from Central Asia in Berlin**

Berlin, Germany, March & April, 2002

Reported by **Beate Eschment**, Senior Researcher, Institut für Orientalistik, Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle, Germany, [beschment@aol.com](mailto:beschment@aol.com); translated by **Ildikó Bellér-Hann**, Senior Researcher, Orientwissenschaftliches Zentrum, Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle, Germany, [beller-hann@owz.uni-halle.de](mailto:beller-hann@owz.uni-halle.de)

The “Haus der Kulturen der Welt” (The House of World Cultures) in Berlin was founded in 1989 as a center for the contemporary cultures of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It organizes exhibitions, concerts, cinema and theatrical performances, lectures and small scholarly events. The aim of these activities is to establish a dialogue between the people of Berlin and the visitors, artists and performers: the participants learn about other cultures, and the foreign artists may be inspired in their work by their visit to Berlin. All this is realized through identifying two or three central themes annually, around which the events are organized.

In March and April 2002 a series of events were organized focusing on Central Asia. Plans and preparations had started well before September 11th, and the aim was to capture the artistic expression of the contradictions and tensions inherent in the various developments in Central Asia: the Soviet heritage, the interest in Western modernity and attempts to return to local traditions.

A comprehensive exhibition was organized under the motto: “No-Mad’s Land” — the work of twenty-six artists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These works of art represented not the traditional motifs normally associated with Central Asia, but the forms and structures, videos and photos which give expression to disjuncture, lack of orientation, destruction and at the same time to new expressive modes inspired by Western arts. In the musical programs traditional and modern styles were introduced, which included, among others, the music of Bukharan Jews and Monajat Yulicheva (Uzbekistan), but also “shaman-rock” from Kazakhstan and the Central Asian pop queen Yulduz Usmanova. The films shown featured among others, the recent products of Kazakh studios. Modern Central Asian literature was introduced in the course of four sessions, during which Central Asian authors hitherto little known in the West (Uchqun Nazarov and Shamshad Abdullaev from Uzbekistan, Sherboto Tokombaev from Kyrgyzstan, Didar Amantay from Kazakhstan) read and discussed their works.

In addition to these artistic and literary events five workshops were also organized to provide information about the present situation in the five Central Asian republics. During these events guests

from Central Asia talked to German regional specialists.

The first of these events, held on March 8, 2002, focused on geopolitics. The discussion took place in two parts, concentrating first on the global level, and then on the level of the European Union. The initial lecture was given by Sultan Akimbekov (Editor of the newspaper *Kontinent*, Almatı), and it was then further discussed by Murad Esenov (*Central Asia and the Caucasus* journal and information center, Sweden), Uwe Halbach (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin), Alexander Rahr (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik, Berlin) Dodojon Atovullov (Editor of the Tajik exile journal *Charoghi röz* and head of the Forum of the Democratic Forces of Central Asia, now in Germany). Akimbekov questioned the "axiom" of the geopolitical significance of Central Asia and the role of the USA in the region. He considers all explanations usually given for the great geopolitical importance of the region to be insufficient. In his opinion these explanations are used as justification for the power struggle for influence over the region. September 11th has provided the USA with an excuse to establish a permanent presence in the region, with the long-term aim of promoting democracy and human rights, but also to ensure free access to Caspian oil and gas. This was followed by a talk by Cees Wittebrood (head of the Department for Relations with the Caucasus, Central Asia and Mongolia of the EU Commission, Brussels) focusing on relations between the European Union and Central Asia. He asserted that in spite of official meetings, financial help, etc., the interests of the EU in the region remain limited.

On the 16th of March a workshop entitled "Islamic Renewal and Religious Diversity — Religion and Nation Building in Central Asia" was held. The workshop opened with an introductory lecture by Anara Tabyshalieva (Institute for Regional Studies, Bishkek) on "Local Traditions and Modern Missionaries — on the Religious Diversity of Central Asia." The lecture gave a historical overview, reviewing the situation of religion during Soviet times when religious politics directed against public forms of worship enhanced the central importance of *mazar* [saintly tomb/shrine] worship. Tabyshalieva reported on the importance of tradition in post-Soviet society, and analyzed the emergence and changing character of various missionary movements, both Islamic and Christian. She pointed out the weakness of both pan-Islamic movements and of local religious organizations in the region,

also paying careful attention to the role played by external political forces. Annette Krämer (Orientalist, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, Samarqand) followed with a statement emphasizing the centrality of folk beliefs, the importance of indigenous channels in transmitting Islamic knowledge throughout the Soviet period, and women's role in this transmission. The roundtable discussion that followed was introduced by Arne Seifert (Center for OSCE Research, Botschafter a.D. Hamburg/Berlin), explaining what significance Islamic movements in Central Asia have for Europe. He was then joined by Uwe Halbach (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin), Udo Steinbach (Director, Deutsches Orient Institut, Hamburg). The discussion covered a number of important topics, including security issues, the role of Islam in shaping post-Soviet and post-colonial local identities, development and many others.

A further roundtable discussion was held in the evening of March 19, 2002, organized in cooperation with Deutsche Welle broadcasting and led by Miodrag Soric (head of the Central and Eastern European Department, DW). The discussion, entitled "Democratic Developments in Central Asia," was introduced by Erlan Karin (Central Asian Agency for Political Research, Almatı) who elaborated on the specific features of the democratization process in Central Asia. Among these were the difficult conditions of the transition period, the simultaneous transformation of the political and economic systems, and above all the force of local traditions and mentalities. These have given rise to novel forms of conflict, the confrontation of democracy and the state, and a weak legal system. The Central Asian states are said to have attempted to imitate only the external features of the Western democratic model, adopting democracy merely as an ideology rather than a political system, and the bearers of democratic ideals remain the ruling elites. Beate Eschment (Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle) emphasized the great differences within the region in the degree of democratization, and the presence of "democracy deficits" not only in Central Asia but also in the post-Soviet world in general. In the concluding discussion Marie-Carin von Gumpenberg (independent scholar) spoke critically about NGO activities, with special reference to Kyrgyzstan. Her talk was complemented by the critical but constructive remarks of the journalist Igor Grebenshchikov from Bishkek.

The general tone of the discussion tended to the view that the state of democratization processes in Central Asia is in need of and is worthy of improvement, while Western financial support provided so far was criticized. In a final remark it was pointed out that in spite of all criticism democratization in the region can be characterized as a series of positive developments and there are good reasons to be optimistic. This conclusion has since that time lost some of its force, after the organizers of the event heard that in mid-April the Kyrgyz guest Igor Grebenshchikov judged his position in his homeland untenable, and having left Kyrgyzstan has applied for political asylum in Germany.

A further roundtable discussion took place on April 13, 2002, devoted to the theme "Women in Central Asia." Three women from the region gave talks about the general position of women in their countries, and three women scholars from Berlin acted as discussants. Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva (Women's Resource Center, Tashkent) reported on the difficulties faced by Uzbek women in daily life, emphasizing the force of tradition in their lives. Her insider's report was complemented by Brigitte Heuer (Freie Universität, Berlin). Elvira Pak (representative of a women's NGO, Kazakhstan) reported on the work of NGOs active in her country, and demonstrated the work of women's NGOs with video-clips. Her talk was complemented by Andrea Berg (Ruhr-Universität, Bochum), who summed up her own research on women's NGOs in Uzbekistan and made some critical remarks on Western financial support for Central Asian NGOs. The third topic, introduced by Shatkul Kudabaeva, (head of the Women's Committee in the Kyrgyz Republic), concerned women in leading positions. As someone simultaneously holding a leading position in a

Kyrgyz bank, she herself provided a good example of the general topic. She explained that although a number of women in her country occupy leading positions, there remained many deficiencies, pointing out, for example, the underrepresentation of women in Parliament. Beate Eschment (Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle) added that although in Kyrgyzstan women are conspicuously represented in important positions in the public sphere, this is likely to change for the worse following consolidation and stabilization.

A final event took place on the April 19, 2002, again led by Miodrag Soric (Deutsche Welle), focusing this time on "Journalism and the Mass Media." Three Central Asian journalists, Galima Bukharbaeva, (IWPR, Tashkent), Kabai Karabekov, (MP and head of the Committee of Information Politics, Bishkek) and Dodojon Atovulloev (Editor of the Tajik exile journal *Charoghi röz*, Hamburg) gave a critical description of the present situation of the mass media and the politics regulating it in their countries. They reported on censorship, on the closing down of journals, TV and radio stations, on financial problems and on the bad working conditions of many of their colleagues. Since the event was also attended by both German and other Central Asian journalists, their contributions raised further important issues. Wolfgang Schreiber, representative of the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation (presently based in Tashkent), initiated a heated discussion when he reproached both the speakers and other participants for presenting the situation "far too critically."

Altogether, the program series proved to be successful in introducing the modern arts and cultures of Central Asia, although not all the events were as well attended as they could have been.