

# Conferences and Lecture Series

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## The Tenth Annual Central and Inner Asian Seminar

University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, April 16-17, 2004

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The University of Toronto's Tenth Annual Central and Inner Asian Seminar, titled *The Domestic Environment of Central and Inner Asia*, attracted an impressive array of delegates who used the theme of domestic environment as a jumping off point from which to discuss a wide range of political, economic, historical, cultural and social topics stemming from, or impacting, Central and Inner Asia. After opening remarks and words of welcome from Robert Bourgeneau (President of the University of Toronto), Prof. Michael Donnelly (University of Toronto Professor, and Director of the Asian Institute at the Munk Centre for International Studies) and Prof. Michael Gervers (University of Toronto Professor, and Director of the Central and Inner Asian Seminar), participants and audience members settled in for what proved to be two days of stimulating presentations and discussions.

While attracting many Western scholars, the Seminar also boasted an impressive showing of Central Eurasian academics, with Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Xinjiang and Uzbekistan all well represented. The topics covered a broad range of issues and resulted in lively dialogue between presenters and audience. Though the post-presentation questions were generally limited to fifteen minutes, social events in the evening proved to be an excellent opportunity for the continuation of discussions in a more relaxed environment. On the first evening a traditional Uyghur dinner, which included Uyghur dancing and entertainment, was hosted by Nicholas Corbett (University of Manitoba, presenter and assistant organizer) and Bahargul Abliz (independent scholar from Toronto and presenter). Then on the following evening Dr. Gillian Long (University of Toronto, organizer) opened her home to speakers and audience members alike for a dinner to wrap up the weekend's events.

In its ten years, the Central and Inner Asian Seminar has established a tradition of geographic

diversity and interdisciplinary discourse. While there are many examples from this year's event that demonstrate this trend, the three selections outlined below exemplify both the breadth of topics and the level of scholarship of the 2004 proceedings.

Dr. Najam Abbas (Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK) presented his paper entitled "Tajikistan's Civil Society Environment: Endogenous Preferences and Exogenous Perceptions," which documents the current methods used by the international community and the Tajik government to stimulate the growth of civil society in that country. Dr. Abbas specifically focused on some of the shortfalls in the current system, particularly in the difficulties that NGOs encounter in identifying the local needs and conditions of a community and then communicating those needs and conditions to the administrators and sponsors who are supporting community-building initiatives. Dr. Abbas' analysis succinctly demonstrates the major factors, both at a local and national level, that are shaping the evolution of civil society in Tajikistan.

Dr. Craig Benjamin (Grand Valley State University, USA) presented "A Nation of Nomads? The Lifeway of the Yuezhi in the Gansu and Bactria." In his research, Dr. Benjamin seeks to reconcile the historical Chinese references to the Yuezhi as nomadic pastoralists with the archaeological evidence of their highly evolved system of commerce and society, indicative of a sedentary/agrarian tradition. Dr. Benjamin questioned some of the assumptions that have been made concerning this group and suggested alternative interpretations of the available archaeological and textual evidence, both in tracing the migration of the Yuezhi and in understanding their societal structure.

Another presentation of note was made by Duishan Shamatov (PhD Student, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto),

titled "Teaching History in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: Challenges and Possibilities." Mr. Shamatov gave an in-depth account of the current Kyrgyz public school history curriculum and outlined some of the significant challenges that instructors of this subject are facing. In the post-Soviet states, history has been one of the first areas of the school curriculum to be restructured. However, according to Mr. Shamatov, the transition process has not been completely free from obstructions. In particular he emphasized some of the economic, social and political obstacles that are facing today's generation of history teachers. Mr. Shamatov illustrated his research using examples drawn from his interviews with teachers working in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. He gave a compelling account of the political transition in that country as seen through the education system.

While the Seminar was set up such that only one speaker was presenting at a time, it was generally agreed by participants that this arrangement was good, as it allowed participants to attend all the presentations instead of having to

choose between concurrent panels. As one participant pointed out, when speakers had traveled from as far away as Samarqand and Leeds to present their research, it was only fitting that they should have the opportunity to speak before as large an audience as could be accommodated. One unfortunate consequence of this arrangement was that time constraints limited the number of papers that could be included. As a result there was a waiting list of would-be-presenters who attended the conference with presentations in hand, hoping for an opening in the schedule.

The papers presented at the 2004 Central and Inner Asian Seminar will be published in Volume Seven of *Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia*. Should CESR readers wish to find out more about either this annual event or the Seminar's publications, they may consult the CIAS website at <http://www.utoronto.ca/deeds/cias/cias.html>, or contact Dr. Gillian Long at [gillian.long@utoronto.ca](mailto:gillian.long@utoronto.ca).

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### Nation-building in the Making: "Volga-Ural Studies" Workshop

Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, February 20-21, 2004

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A "Volga-Ural Studies" workshop, the first of its kind, was organized in Ankara on February 20-21, 2004 by Bilkent University's Seminars in Literature, Culture and Society. Interdisciplinary in nature, and international in participation, the workshop was open to discussion of all aspects of the history, literature, culture, and society of the region situated between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains. Located within what is today the Russian Federation, but inhabited largely by Turkic Chuvash, Tatar, and Bashkort peoples, and a much lesser population of Finno-Ugric Mari and Udmurt, the region is in a no-man's land as a field of study. The main goal of the workshop was therefore to foreground work that, either as papers at conferences or articles and monographs in publication, has tended to be occluded within a Central Asian studies paradigm, to which it appears not to belong by its geographical positioning. Thus, an equally important aim was to delineate and forge a specific field of scholarship.

The workshop was a follow-up to a one-day seminar entitled "Tatars and Tatarstan" organized in Istanbul in February 2003 at Marmara University. In her welcome address, Gönül Pultar, organizer of the workshop, paid tribute to Sadri Maksudi Arsal (who headed the short-lived "Turco-Tatar State of Inner Russia and Siberia" based in Ufa, 1917-1818) who died on February 20, 1957, and to his daughter, the late Adile Ayda who first established the tradition of commemorating him on that day. Pultar, Ali V. Turhan, and Gülnur Üçok, the three surviving grandchildren of Arsal, participated in the workshop, acting as chairs of sessions or paper presenters.

The keynote address was given by Halil İnalçık (Emeritus, University of Chicago and Bilkent University) who, in a talk entitled "How did Kazan Fall?", discussed the reasons for the downfall of the Kazan Khanate and its occupation in 1552 by the Muscovite principedom. According to İnalçık, the Ottomans could have helped Kazan withstand the Muscovite principedom, which had been one of the

vassals of the Golden Horde state and was at the time not much stronger than its victim. But fearing that giving such assistance might lead to the rebirth of a powerful Turkic state in the north, the Ottomans refrained, a behavior İnalçık described as "lack of vision." What the Ottomans did not realize was that by not interfering with Muscovy's maneuvers, they allowed Muscovy to embark on the path that would lead it to play a larger role on the world scene.

The second keynote speaker, Mirfatih Zekiev [Mirfatykh Zakiev] (Galimjan Ibrahimov Institute, Kazan), discussed the ethnic and linguistic roots of the inhabitants of the region. In a talk entitled "The Ethnic History of the Idil-Ural Turks," Zekiev spoke on "ethnonyms," affirming that proto-Bulgars and Volga Bulgars had spoken the Turkish of the time, thus refuting the widespread "Chuvash" theory. "How to Safeguard Tatar Identity" was the theme of a second presentation Zekiev made. Discussing the cultural revival that has been taking place in Tatarstan since perestroika and glasnost, Zekiev noted the increase in acquisition of the Tatar language, and of publications aiding in this acquisition. In response to a question, he also spoke about the current Russian government's ban of the Latin alphabet that the autonomous republic of Tatarstan had wished to put into use in the fall of 2002.

Azade-Ayşe Rorlich of the University of Southern California gave a plenary lecture entitled "Identity and Collective Memory: The Changing Image of Suyumbike, the Tatar Queen." Rorlich discussed Suyumbike, who did her utmost to defend her patria in 1552, as the national and cultural icon that she has become. Rorlich asserted that no other

personality in the history of the Tatar nation has acceded to such a position of historical prominence and symbolic representation.

The first session was devoted to a topic of heated controversy: the Tatar-Bashkort division. Two young scholars, Leysen Şahin (Marmara University), with a paper entitled "An Evaluation of Tatar-Bashkir Relations in the Context of 'Empire and the Issue of National Minorities,'" and Özkan Öztekten (Ege University, Izmir), with a paper entitled "The Bashkir Language as Outcome of the 'Tatar-Bashkir Question,'" tackled the issue head on. A lively debate on the sources of the conflict ensued. Most remarked during the session was the presence of the late former Bashkort president Zeki Velidi Toğan's children, İsenbike Toğan, who was to chair a session of the workshop, and Sübidey Toğan.

Other papers addressed topics as varied as naming, women in novels, Jadidism, ethnographic descriptions, identity, and history. As a whole, the workshop itself was an exercise in the current identity politics and nation-building process of the peoples of the region. Not only was it organized and attended by the offspring of former statesmen, evidently keeping a vigilant eye on the latest developments, but also present were the 86-year-old spiritual leader Akış, members of the diaspora living in Turkey, plus students from the region studying in various Turkish universities, who avidly followed the sessions and participated in the discussions. If nothing else, the workshop demonstrated that the peoples of the Volga-Ural region continue searching for and renegotiating an identity at home, and maintain hope that the 21st century will gratify their long pent-up national aspirations.

## Workshop on Iran and Regional Developments

Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, December 18-19, 2003

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Recent years have witnessed a flourishing cultural, economic and diplomatic interaction between Turkey and Iran. This developing regional interaction also involves cooperation between academic institutions in the two countries. Growing ties between the Ankara-based Middle East Technical University (METU) and the Tehran-based

Institute of Political and International Studies (IPIS), a research arm of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, attest to this trend. Since the signing of a March 2003 agreement between the two institutions, academics and researchers from both sides have convened three times via workshops. The last of these workshops was held in METU on December 18-19, 2003 with

the participation of Seyed Kazem Sajjadpour (IPIS), Saedeh Lotfian (Tehran University), Farhad Ataei (Imam Sadegh University), Saeed Khatibzadeh (IPIS) and numerous academic participants from METU.

The workshop was held in two sessions and chaired by Hüseyin Bağcı (METU). Sajjadpour laid the ground by elaborating the relevance of studying Iranian foreign policy. He summarized Iran's importance through "three Ps": *Place* refers to the strategic location of Iran. Due to bordering often highly unstable regions which are geostrategically important to international players, Iran has an indispensable strategic role to play. Sajjadpour also emphasized the young and huge *population* of Iran, where as many as 50 percent of the nearly 70 million inhabitants are younger than 20 years of age. Furthermore, there is a place for *perception*, or the importance of the international image of Iran.

Sajjadpour also referred to the "three Cs" as a relevant theoretical framework to analyze Iranian foreign policy: *Continuity* indicates the cumulative influence of historical experiences that are closely linked to Iran's geostrategic location. Continuity alone, however, cannot help one understand Iranian foreign policy. The political *conditions* in the region and in Iran itself have been undergoing rapid transformations, all impacting on Iranian foreign policy. One also needs to take into account the *complex decision making process* in Iran. To illustrate this point, Sajjadpour referred to Iran's signing of the Additional Protocol to the Nonproliferation Treaty, which in his opinion "was very difficult domestically" to achieve due to the "many agencies, and bureaucratic units" involved, such as the Iranian Foreign Ministry, National Security Council, Revolutionary Guards, the military, and various propaganda organizations, each with their own agendas. He also referred to the differences between the "political elites [who] emerged before the revolution" and the "younger generation of elites," many of whom have no memory of the revolution. Drawing attention to changes in social structure such as urbanization, the rising middle class, and high literacy rates, Sajjadpour said that the ever-dynamic Iranian society is longing for openings to the outside world, but at the same time it wants to "restore international respect" for itself. Moreover, Sajjadpour maintained that "Iran has a big debating society," with public deliberations over "very fundamental issues, including those on security, which were previously unheard of." He mentioned the current discussions

on religion and secularism, identity, justice, economic development, political liberty, and the debate on the focus, aims and instruments of Iran's foreign policy.

Lotfian focused on Iran's policy toward the Middle East in the post-Saddam era. She underlined Iran's respect for the Iraqi people's choice and desire for seeing a democratic regime installed. Lotfian added that Iran is "neutral but not indifferent," saying, for example, that "Iran will not interfere with any decision taken by Iraqis," but will not be "content with the idea of the partitioning of Iraq." Talking about weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), Lotfian noted that "the Iranian government, while insisting to abide by the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT), emphasizes its right to peaceful nuclear technology." Referring to double standards on the issue, she underlined that the US and Russia have 90 percent of all nuclear arsenals worldwide. Furthermore, the United States is silent when it comes to Israeli nuclear activities and arsenals in the Middle East. On the other hand, she contended that Iranian policy toward the Palestine/Israel issue is determined by national interests rather than ideological considerations. Lotfian argued that Iranian "support for Palestinian groups [has been] justified on two grounds": morality — when dealing with a group of stateless Islamic people suffering from Israeli occupation, Iran has an obligation to support them; and realism — because Israel has been causing (unspecified) problems for Iran, Iran responds by creating further difficulties for Israel. Referring to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's statements on the issue, she argued that in the Iranian leadership's view, one legitimate solution is that Palestinian refugees should be allowed to return to Palestine and have the right of self-determination.

Ataei, in his address on Iranian policy towards Central Asia and the Caucasus, argued that Iran's position is strongly affected by political and cultural incentives rather than economic calculations. Regarding Afghanistan, he observed that "the question of Afghanistan is not resolved [and that] all groups within [Afghanistan] and states in the region are waiting for the US [presidential] election." Ataei argued that, in view of Afghan factions, irrespective of whether Bush or a Democratic candidate wins the November 2004 election, the US would not further engage itself in Afghanistan. Therefore, the ongoing uncertainty about the future of Afghanistan remains a major foreign policy concern for Iran.

Khatibzadeh talked about Turkey-Iran relations. Having briefly discussed Iran's new policy of détente, decontainment and engagement with neighboring countries, initiated after President Khatami's accession to power, Khatibzadeh proposed a three-level approach to examining Turkish-Iranian relations: bilateral, including security issues and commercial relations; regional, including issues relating to Afghanistan, Iraq, Persian Gulf security, etc.; and international,

referring to terrorism, globalization, etc. In particular, he elaborated on common security concerns, such as the potential disintegration of Iraq and the role of the Kurds in Iraq and the region. Khatibzadeh maintained that as neighboring states, Turkey and Iran should work closely with each other, but he cautioned that improving relations between the two is a "cognitive process" that needs to be seen as a long-term project with careful planning.