

Syllabus “Anthropology of Central Asia” (SINO 2016)

Course convenor

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Time & place

Tuesday 13:30-15:20, CPD-3.01

Abstract

This course seeks to introduce students to Central Asia – a region including the five former Soviet republics as well as parts of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan – through the lens of historical and social anthropology. By reading core texts in the study of Central Asia we will first go back in history, to a period when the region had not yet been dissected by the boundaries of modern nation-states. We will then work towards an analysis of societal processes that led from colonialism to socialist revolutions and different forms of nationalism. We will do so by looking at these processes as embedded in contexts of everyday life in which social practices linked to economy, gender, law, religion, ethnicity, politics, and local history intersect and entangle.

Course objectives & learning outcomes

The course aims to introduce students to central concepts and theories in the anthropology of Central Asia, including the five former Soviet republics Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as parts of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan. It also seeks to train students to critically evaluate and apply these concepts and theories using examples from Central Asian everyday life, past and present.

1. After completion of the course students will be able to describe and recognize major topics and concepts in the anthropology of Central Asia.
2. Students will also demonstrate the capability to illustrate these topics and concepts using empirical examples from Central Asian societies.
3. Students will furthermore be able to compare and evaluate central concepts and theories in the anthropology of Central Asia.

Assessment

The different parts of the course assessment are aligned with the course objectives and the expected learning outcomes. The assessment is split in two parts: 1) mid-term test (35%), 2) final essay (65%).

1) Mid-term test (35%):

The mid-term test will be conducted on 10 October. The test consists of short questions which require you to apply knowledge acquired in the course sessions “colonial encounters I & II” and “Soviet times I & II”. Attendance is essential. If you cannot attend please present a medical or other relevant certificate.

2) Final essay (65%):

Please pick one of the 5 course session topics from “Contemporary Central Asia I-V” (“place-making”, “borders in the Ferghana Valley”, “trade and globalization”, “migration”, “state law and customary practices”), summarize the central arguments made in the respective core readings **and** additional literature, and compare their arguments (examples will be provided in class and made available on slides). The essay should be 1500-2000 words in length (without references). Please make sure to include references at the end of your essay and submit your assessment as a word document by 12 December, 23.59 via Moodle. To ensure fairness to all your classmates, late assessments will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade each day. Assessments turned in on or after the 7th day from the date the assessment was originally due (including weekends and holidays) will receive a zero. Exceptions may be granted based on documented proof of emergencies (medical or other).

Attendance

In accordance with University and School guidelines attendance is mandatory. If you cannot participate I expect you to excuse yourself and to provide a medical or other relevant certificate.

Course program

The course program consists of *core readings* and *additional literature* which complements these readings. Students are expected to read all core texts. These texts will be essential to participation and assignments. I strongly encourage you to also read as many additional texts as possible. They will enable you to get a broader picture of the subject matter and to contribute to in-class discussions and assessment projects from innovative angles.

5 September Introduction

In the first lesson of the semester I provide you with an overview of the syllabus and a broader introduction to Central Asia as a region.

12 September No class!

19 September Colonial encounters I

We start our first empirical session of the semester with an introduction to Central Asia in colonial contexts marked by the Russian, Qing and British Empires. In particular, we focus on Xinjiang and the significance of Uyghur history beyond imperial boundaries.

Core reading:

Chapter “Introduction” in David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 1–21.

Additional literature:

Chapter “People and Place in Chinese Turkistan” in David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 22–52.

Chapter “Place and People” in Ildiko Beller-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang*, Brill, Leiden, 2008, pp. 35–53.

26 September Colonial encounters II

In this second class on colonial times we aim to broaden our scope by looking at notions of “the frontier” between different imperial spheres of influence. In this regard, we focus on the establishment of an Afghan-British-Chinese border area which continues to structure modes of connection and separation today.

Core reading:

Chapter “Introduction” in Magnus Marsden & Benjamin D. Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, pp. 1–16.

Chapter “Lifting the Veil” in Shafqat Hussain, *Remoteness and Modernity*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, pp. 21–42.

Additional reading:

Chapter “The Making of a Colonial Frontier” in David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 53–85.

3 October Soviet times I

The following two sessions are dedicated to the exploration of Central Asia under Soviet rule. In today’s lesson, we look at discourses and policies of gender, Islam and patriarchy in early Soviet Uzbekistan. The *additional literature* will provide you with details on how these Soviet processes still impact politics and social practices in today’s independent Central Asian republics.

Core reading:

Northrop, Douglas. “The Limits of Liberation: Gender, Revolution, and the Veil in Everyday Life in Soviet Uzbekistan”, in Jeff Sahadeo & Russell Zanca, *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, pp. 89–102.

Additional literature:

Constantine, Elizabeth A. “Practical Consequences of Soviet Policy and Ideology for Gender in Central Asia and Contemporary Reversal” in Jeff Sahadeo & Russell Zanca, *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, pp. 115–126.

Mostowlansky, Till. “Gender and Political Regimes: Central Asia” in Suad Joseph (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*. Online:
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures/political-regimes-central-asia-COM_002054

10 October Soviet times II

This second session on Soviet Central Asia focusses on the past everyday life of Turkmen nomads and the processes of social change these societies underwent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We also discuss the role of Soviet nation-building and the concept of nationality/ethnicity which brought fundamental changes to the societies of Central Asia.

In the second part of today’s session you will write and submit the **mid-term test** (35%) which focusses on the course sessions “colonial encounters I & II” and “Soviet times I & II”.

Core reading:

Edgar, Adrienne. “Everyday Life among the Turkmen Nomads” in Jeff Sahadeo & Russell Zanca, *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, pp. 37–44.

Additional literature:

Slezkine, Yuri, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”, *Slavic Review* 53/2, 1994, pp. 414–452.

17 October Reading week – no class!

24 October Contemporary Central Asia I

The following five sessions are concerned with anthropological takes on contemporary Central Asia. Specifically, we discuss the role of place and identity, borders, trade, migration, law and customary practices. Today’s lesson starts with place-making along the Pamir Highway at the Tajik-Chinese-Afghan border.

Core reading:

Chapter “Prologue” in Till Mostowlansky, *Azan on the Moon*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2017, pp. xvii–xx.

Chapter “Making Murghab” in Till Mostowlansky, *Azan on the Moon*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2017, pp. 36–66.

Additional reading:

Liu, Morgan Y., “A Central Asian Tale of Two Cities: Locating Lives and Aspirations in a Shifting Post-Soviet Cityscape” in Jeff Sahadeo & Russell Zanca, *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, pp. 66–83.

31 October Contemporary Central Asia II

In today’s lesson, we investigate and discuss the role of borders in the everyday life of Central Asia. In this respect, we have a close look at the borders of the Ferghana Valley where Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan intersect.

Core reading:

Chapter “Introduction” in Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2014, pp. 1–37.

Additional literature:

Chapter “Delimitations” in Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2014, pp. 65–100.

7 November Contemporary Central Asia III

In this session, we discuss trade and globalization in Central Asia. Based on our core text we explore trade between China and Kyrgyzstan. The *additional literature* sheds light on the important role of Afghan traders in integrating Central Asia, China, South Asia and the Middle East.

Core reading:

Steenberg, Rune, “Embedded Rubber Sandals: Trade and Gifts across the Sino-Kyrgyz Border”, *Central Asian Survey* 35/3, 2016, pp. 405–420.

Additional literature:

Chapter “Introduction” in Magnus Marsden, *Trading Worlds*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, pp. 1–44.

14 November Contemporary Central Asia IV

In this session, we come back to Xinjiang and look at the region from the perspective of Han migrants. In this regard, we discuss ideas of civilization, mobility and the migrant city. The *additional literature* provides you with a comparative outlook on Central Asian migrants in Moscow.

Core reading:

Chapter “Introduction” in Tom Cliff, *Oil and Water*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016, pp. 1–26.

Chapter “Constructing the Civilized City” in Tom Cliff, *Oil and Water*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016, pp. 27–49.

Additional literature:

Reeves, Madeleine, “Clean Fake: Authenticating Documents and Persons in Migrant Moscow”, *American Ethnologist* 40/3, 2013, pp. 508–524.

21 November Contemporary Central Asia V

In our last empirical session of the semester we discuss the entanglement of state law and customary practices in Central Asia. Specifically, we look at local courts in the villages of Kyrgyzstan. The *additional text* focusses on the Hui Muslims of China who navigate between different scales of state and Islamic law in contemporary Gansu.

Core reading:

Chapter “Introduction” in Judith Beyer, *The Force of Custom*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2016, pp. 3–18.

Additional literature:

Chapter “History, the Chinese State, and Islamic Law” in Matthew S. Erie, *China and Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 43–85.

28 November Closing session

In the final session, we discuss open empirical and conceptual questions that might have arisen during the semester. We also attempt to come to general conclusions which aim to help you explore the historical and social anthropology of Central Asia beyond the classroom.

12 December Submission of your final essay by 23.59 via Moodle