



CASI Third Annual Conference

*Constructing Authority through
Custom and Tradition*

ABSTRACTS

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Military historiography, the legend of conquest and the construction of Russian colonial authority in Central Asia

Between 1839 and 1895, Imperial Russia annexed approximately 1,500,000 square miles of territory in Central Asia, an example of European expansion that in speed and scale is matched only by the ‘Scramble for Africa’ or the British annexation of India. Unlike the latter, however, it has generated a very meagre modern historiography, and the interaction of Russian motives, local dynamics and ideological and technological change which brought it about are still very imperfectly understood. The paucity of modern research is all the more surprising given the richness of the available sources – not only archival and published documents, but Islamic chronicles, officer memoirs, and military historiography, which together represent a diverse and now largely ignored written legacy. This material is under-used and long overdue a reappraisal, but it has to be handled with caution. In the Russian case it can be deceptive in at least two respects – firstly because although it involved very small bodies of troops, this was one of the few unequivocally successful military campaigns for Russian arms in the nineteenth century. The weight of published campaign memoirs (almost exclusively by officers) is thus disproportionate both to the numbers who took part and to the purely military (as opposed to logistical) dangers and difficulties they encountered in what was for the most part a classic case of unequal colonial warfare. The other reason is that well before the conquest came to an end it was being quite deliberately narrated and mythologised in official historical works, beginning with the ‘Historical Section’ of K. P. von Kaufman’s *Turkestanskii Al'bom* (1871-2)

and the campaign histories of the Khiva Expedition of 1873. During his tenure as War Minister the *Turkestanskii General* Alexei Kuropatkin commissioned both M. A. Terent'ev's *Istoriya Zavoevaniya Srednei Azii* (1906) and A. G. Serebrennikov's vast publication of documents related to the conquest (1908 – 1915). This process reached its peak in 1915, with the memorialisation and commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Tashkent. The last major article published by *Voennyi Sbornik*, running for the whole of 1916, even as Central Asia was convulsed by revolt, and still unfinished when the February Revolution broke out, was on the lessons which the Central Asian conquest supposedly held for Russia's immediate challenges on the Eastern Front.

This paper will argue that Russian writing on the conquest of Central Asia created a newly-minted set of traditions that played a crucial role in creating and sustaining the colonial regime in Turkestan. The paper will analyse both the process of composition and the purposes for which these works were used by the Russian military establishment, explore their particular tropes and ideological preoccupations, and also attempt to establish what, if any, impact they had on educated society in Russia.

**Christopher Baker, Central Asian Studies Institute,
AUCA, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

At play in the Soviet Library: history, texts and power in the late Soviet era

Containing 16 volumes and spanning over four thousand pages, *The Soviet Historical Encyclopedia* was a massive work, one that enfolded the entirety of human history in the ordered pages of a text and that perfectly

arranged all of the plural ethnic histories at play in the past of the Soviet State.² The regime had been in power for some five decades by the time of the *Encyclopedia's* publication and had amassed a seemingly endless body of books in order to contain its historical and ethnic complexity. Its libraries were overflowing with histories, vast, archaeological “reconstructions,” dictionaries in hundreds of languages, and with mammoth ethnographic studies like *The Peoples of Siberia*. The *Soviet Historical Encyclopedia* was a compendium of this experiment in “imaginative geography and history,” a term Said has used to describe how discrete historic entities are assembled from far less definite topographies and pasts.³ Together with these works it formed a dense and internally consistent library animated by the fantasy and desire of containing unruly histories and geographies within books. *The Soviet Historical Encyclopedia* was also an experiment in projecting and solidifying Soviet power through the construction of ethnic histories. It reinforced the ethnic order of the Soviet present by redrawing and redesigning a thousand ethnic pasts to reflect it and established an intricate ethnic hierarchy centered on Russian civilization, which served as a kind of locus in a shifting series of reflections that provided every other ethnic past with its “contrasting image, idea, personality experience.”⁴ It was the civilization that had redeemed once resplendent but fallen civilizations, saved others from extinction, and that had formed advanced “peoples” and “cultures” from what would have

² *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia entsiklopedia*, 16 vols., (1961-1976).

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 55.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 2.; my reading here is indebted to Lowell Tillett, who demonstrated the way in which Soviet historiography was altered after the war to reflect the beneficial impact of the Russian presence in the ethnic pasts of the Soviet state; see his *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities*, (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

otherwise remained a primal, vestigial “Siberia.” *The Soviet Historical Encyclopedia* embodies the interplay of history, texts, and power in the late Soviet state and also the limits of that power – a power always fragile and unstable because no historical construct can ever fully encompass the multiple traditions at play in any ethnic past. Published over the course of fifteen years, from 1961-1976, the *Encyclopedia* was one of the last, immense monuments of ethnic, historical scholarship the Soviet state would create before novelists in diverse contexts began to pull all of its carefully crafted pasts apart, a movement that unfolded in Central Asia in the form of a proliferation of historical novels that were heteroglot in the pasts they seized and creatively reassembled. It emerged at a moment in which minority literatures began to alter and multiply the ethnic pasts, identities, and heritages of the Soviet State and to shake its structures of historical power. An effective text for examining the projection of Soviet authority through history, the *Encyclopedia* also affords a window into a period in which this power began to falter.

Part of a dissertation chapter that focuses broadly on the *Soviet Historical Encyclopedia*, my discussion at the AUCA conference will center on the Encyclopedia’s “reconstructions” of Central Asian ethnic pasts and the way in which these pasts were contested by Central Asian novelists in what one scholar termed “a belletristic search for cultural roots and the heritage of the past.”⁵

⁵ Daniel Matuszewski, “The Turkic Past in the Soviet Future,” *Problems of Communism*, 31, no. 4, p 77.

**Aksana Ismailbekova, Zentrum Moderner Orient,
Germany**

Spatial mobilities of women: age and authority of women in rural Kyrgyzstan

It is generally perceived that women in Kyrgyz society do not possess authority and power as men do. Usually men are described as the ones who have complete authority and power over women, and women are expected to obey men and incorporate patrilineages of their husbands upon the marriage. However, the close examination of the operation of domestic households reveals the complex picture of women's' roles in Kyrgyz society. I argue culturally legitimate authority of women comes by age; authority and power of women are enacted through their successive roles of bride (kelin), mother (apa), and mother-in-law (kainene). Here, mothers-in-laws are generally honored and respected. Women begin their careers as brides (kelin) at the lowest position when they are first brought into the husbands' households. A young bride accepts her submission to the authority of the mother-in-law. Hence, constructing authority through custom of women is the followings: First, women slowly make their position up by producing progeny. Second, women can fully gain respect and identification with the husbands family when their sons marry and bring new brides (kelin) to the families. Third, the women's' status also depends on how they can manipulate their kinsmen and extended kinship networks during the life cycle events. Only after that women can take over the management of the large households, enjoy making particular decisions, and command obedience. Thus, the cycle of women in Kyrgyz households is embodied in the successive roles of bride, mother, and mother-in-law. The ethnographic material will be based on my research in the village of Bulak from 2006-2007 and 2011-2012.

**Jeanne Feaux de la Croix, Zentrum Moderner Orient,
Germany**

Respect for elders? Overt obedience, back-door negotiations of age-inflected notions of authority by Kyrgyzstani development workers

Drawing on participant observation in training sessions, many informal conversations and over seventy formal interviews with Kyrgyzstani development workers and their intended beneficiaries between 2010 and 2012, this paper explores the effect of age-ideologies in the context of knowledge transfer efforts through training seminars. The dynamics and expectations of juniority and seniority, which play a very significant role in Central Asia, have only just begun to be explored (Beyer 2007, Roche 2010 and Stephan 2010). I have inserted my work at the points of conflict between such expectations and activities where young people are prominent teachers, namely development. This perspective allows me to contribute critically to the strong pull of the youth topic - not least in the wake of the Arab spring.

In the current Kyrgyzstani context, showing respect for elders is rhetorically accorded prime importance and is considered a positive distinguishing feature of Kyrgyz traditions and culture. This paper will outline these 'age ideologies' and the social effect of claiming such virtues, contrasting such effects with similar processes in China and India. I then examine in greater depth two important fields where these attitudes and practices of respect come into conflict with the personal desires and aims of younger people: family decision-making and collegial roles in the office work-place. I further investigate situations that highlight conflicting claims of authority even more, namely training seminars commonly funded by development and NGO organizations.

Such ‘treningi’ frequently employ young Kyrgyzstanis to teach a mixed or older audience new practices such as environmental risk management or conflict prevention. These young trainers do not fit audience expectations of what figures of authority, and authoritative teaching practices ought to look like. This paper explores the strategies these trainers have developed to assert their own authority and negotiate expectations. I argue that rather than challenging the legitimacy of established age ideologies head-on, they instead largely support them rhetorically, and rather attempt to channel such ideals to suit their own agenda. Although young Kyrgyzstani trainers do not explicitly challenge a model of respect based on age, they nevertheless model new forms and sources of authority. In the long-term, these new practices work against age-inflected notions of authority upheld as Kyrgyz tradition. I conclude by comparing and relating age-inflected hierarchies to other forms of status based on gender and wealth.

John Schoeberlein, Nazarbayev University, Astana

When Is Authority Granted?: The Nation and Islam as Credible or Implausible Bases for Claims of Authority in Post-Soviet Central Asia

Scholars of Central Asia have shown great interest in the way that those who have assumed or competed for leadership of post-Soviet states have claimed authority by reference to traditional bases of authority. Much less attention has been given to the question of why these claims are compelling for their target audiences - or not compelling. It is a relatively simple matter to construct a claim of authority, but such claims only very limited effect in actually building authority. In authoritarian contexts, counter assertions regarding authority are seldom really tested through political competition or even heard due to constraints on public discourse. Yet

authority is not simply claimed, but must also be granted. In previous work, I have looked at what prompts political actors to make these kinds of claim (with Murzakulova, 2009). In this paper, I will consider how publics respond to these claims - whether they consider the claimed connection with tradition to be a plausible basis for authority. I consider popular understandings of the importance of tradition for political authority, which are partially shared with political leaders, thus creating some framework for credibility of authority. I examine how political leaders are understood to be connected with or disconnected from such conceptual frameworks, thus determining the plausibility of particular claims to authority. And ultimately, I consider how this particular kind of authority actually works in Central Asian contexts - in partial contrast to how it is imagined to work by those who make claims to traditional authority, and often those who analyze those claims.

Tradition-based authority, I argue, operates within two general frameworks: moral and instrumental. A claim to traditional authority may hinge on the notion that the leader is able to secure the moral order of society. Alternatively, a claim to authority may depend on more pragmatic considerations: the traditional framework ensures that the interests of members of society are served. Islamic and national discourses of traditional authority provide a useful contrast in relation to these two frameworks. Both are depend on understandings of moral order - ensuring the moral rectitude of those in power, assuring the proper relationship between the population and the state, keeping society on a moral basis in general, and morally sanctioning the political order in particular. Meanwhile, national discourses depend more on instrumental frameworks - assuring political unity, promoting the nation against its competitors and detractors, and pursuing a prosperous

future. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, I consider a range of discursive contexts in which assessments of the “traditional” authority of political leadership are made, including contexts in which this is the explicit topic of discussion and ones in which either tradition is discussed and concerns related to political authority are raised or visa versa. My general conclusions include that references to Islam are almost exclusively confined to the framework of moral order, though a kind of secularist moral pragmatism is often evoked in relation to concerns that political authorities keep religion confined to moral domains. Instrumental frameworks are more widely evoked with national-tradition discourses, where pragmatic success, defined in a variety of ways (prosperity, unity, absence of conflict, etc.), is often the main measure of the legitimate authority.

Tohir Kalandarov, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russia

Халифа – центральная фигура на свадьбах памирских трудовых мигрантов Москвы

По официальным данным ФМС РФ, Таджикистан является второй крупнейшей страной-донором трудовых мигрантов в Россию, уступая лишь Узбекистану. По состоянию на декабрь 2012 года (прим. автора – декабрь является традиционным «мертвым сезоном» для трудовых мигрантов) – из 700 тыс. граждан Таджикистана, находящихся на территории РФ, чуть более четырехсот тысяч – это мужчины и женщины репродуктивного возраста - 17-35 лет, большую часть которых составляют трудовые мигранты.

В презентации речь пойдет о свадьбах среди трудовых мигрантов – выходцев из ГБАО Республики Таджикистан, которые в настоящий

момент проживают и работают в Москве. По данным Региональной общественной организации «НУР» с января 2013 года в Москве за шесть месяцев выходцами из ГБАО сыграно более 50 свадеб. Как правило, свадьбы проходят по субботам и воскресеньям в различных ресторанах и кафе столицы.

В отличие от традиционных свадеб на Памире, в условиях миграции свадебная церемония обретает иные этнокультурные черты, и главным образом, это касается состава ключевых авторитетных фигур. Во-первых, далеко не всегда даже родители брачующихся имеют возможность приехать в Москву. Причин может быть несколько - начиная от возраста родителей, незнания ими русского языка, и заканчивая боязнью перед «Большим городом». В лучшем случае, приезжает один из родителей, чаще всего мама молодоженов. Это очень интересный феномен современных свадеб среди трудовых мигрантов. Дело в том, что традиционно на свадьбах в Таджикистане мужчина – отец жениха или невесты является «главным дирижером» мероприятия, но в условиях миграции если даже приезжают отцы, они не чувствуют себя больше главными устроителями торжества. Сама обстановка проведения свадьбы, церемониал и т.д. заставляют их почувствовать себя скованными, «не в своей тарелке». Другие традиционные свадебные «авторитеты», такие как раиси махала (председатель квартала), муллои махала (мулла квартала), раиси хона (аналог председателя товарищества собственников жилья) или представители старшего поколения из соседей и вовсе отсутствуют на современных свадьбах. В таких случаях главным, а иногда и единственным авторитетом на свадьбе среди мигрантов становится халифа – исмаилитский служитель культа. В его обязанности входит

совершение религиозного обряда бракосочетания – никах. Сакральный характер церемонии придает халифе особый статус. На фоне религиозного возрождения среди трудовых мигрантов их работа с каждым годом становится значимее.

Обычно никах совершается в квартире, где проживает невеста. Халифа за совершение обряда никах сторона жениха выплачивает определенную сумму. В общей сложности в Москве действуют около 20 халифа, которые прошли официальную аттестацию со стороны Совета по исмаилитскому пути и религиозному обучению при исмаилитском центре в Душанбе. Многие из них уже несколько лет живут в Москве, имеют российское гражданство. После того, как халифа совершает обряд никах, процессия гуляет по городу, посещает достопримечательности Москвы, и обычно к 14.00 приходит в кафе, где остальные гости уже ожидают молодоженов. Халифа также приходит в кафе, где первым произносит поздравительную речь и напутствие в адрес жениха и невесты. После этого его приглашают за один стол с наиболее старшими по возрасту гостями. После окончания свадьбы ему дарят сладости со стола молодоженов и обязательно провожают домой на машине. Таким образом, на свадьбах мигрантов халифа становится единственным авторитетом мероприятия.

Dr Khurshid Sana Khan, Gender Consultant at the Ministry of Women Affairs, Afghanistan

Authority, Migration and Education: The Case of the Gilgit-Baltistan Ismailis in Karachi (Pakistan)

This paper discusses how the religious and cultural traditions and customs of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Ismailis construct authority; and how their individual and collective participation in these customs and traditions

support the construction of authority in their social system. In addressing these questions, this paper focuses on two-way relationship between traditional authority and its influence on the community and the community's support for the maintenance and continuation of the construction of traditional authority.

This paper argues that as an ethno-religious minority, the GB Ismailis follow the religious and cultural norms and customs of their social system. This means that when the GB Ismailis accept both the legitimacy of traditional authority of their religious leader and of those in higher social positions within their cultural tradition, they accept the legitimacy of traditional authorities vested in the social system. This paper also argues that traditional authority within the GB social system is strengthened by the cultural tradition of joint family system in the villages. Furthermore, cultural and religious norms construct authority through legitimizing certain collectively agreed upon norms and by rejecting those which do not conform to the approved norms.

The above arguments and the earlier mentioned objectives are explained and discussed in the following four parts of this paper. Part one presents a brief description of research methodology used in this study, which is based on the researcher's doctoral thesis (2012).

Part two discusses the influence of traditional authority on the community. It explores and explains how traditional authority informs the educational choices of the GB Ismailis in their home place in GB; influences their migration for education from the northern parts of Pakistan to the south, i.e., Karachi, and provides a network facility for their social integration and educational career in the city of destination.

Part three focuses on the role of the community (individual and collective) participation in religious and cultural traditions and customs. This part explores and analyses how the community plays its role in the construction and continuation of traditional authority within the Shia Ismaili milieu of the GB Ismailis of Pakistan.

The final part of this study presents the conclusion. This paper concludes that the combination of the two-way relationship between traditional authority and community support influence and direct (i) the out-migration decisions of a household and community; (ii) the migration pattern of the community; and (iii) the residential pattern and educational choices of the GB Ismaili migrants in Karachi. The paper further concludes that internal migration and resulting exposure to other religious and cultural customs and traditions in Karachi, pose challenges to customs and traditions of the GB Ismailis, however, by creating new ways of adherence to the un-codified but collectively agreed upon authorities of their social system from GB, they invent survival chances for their traditional customs and norms in their urban destination.

Dr Yahia Baiza, Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK

Religious Rituals and the Construction of Authority: A Study of the Shia Ismaili Tradition in Afghanistan

This paper discusses the concept and construction of authority in the Shia Ismaili tradition, with a specific focus on the local traditions and customs of the Shia Ismaili communities of Afghanistan. It shares the findings of an exploratory analysis of how the concept of authority originated in Shia Ismaili history; and discusses what signifies the characteristic feature of Shia Ismaili religious authority; how religious authority is constructed, manifested and expressed through Ismaili

religious rituals, practices and traditions; and in what ways religious rituals and traditions maintain and serve the construction of religious authority.

In addressing these questions, this paper pursues three main purposes. First, it brings to light a subject that has not yet been subject to sufficient research attention. Secondly, it analyses how religious authority expresses itself through religious rituals and traditions. Thirdly, this analysis will then lead to the final purpose of this paper that is to provide a baseline for discussing and analyzing how the concept of religious authority has been constructed and has been evolving over the course of Ismaili history.

The notion and existence of Shia Ismaili religious authority in this study is mainly treated through an in-depth and detailed analysis of dynamic and constantly evolving religious rituals, tradition and local customs. It is worth noting that ritual actions and traditions tend to be highly conservative. This view makes the topic of changes in religious ritual and tradition appear paradoxical at first glance as religious rituals derive much of their authority and power from presenting themselves as static, invariable and timeless. Therefore, change in religious rituals and traditions could be perceived as a negative element or even as a deviation from traditionally accepted principles and practices. However, this paper argues that religious rituals and traditions are subject to change and evolution. The arguments presented in this paper demonstrate that changes in Ismaili religious rituals, traditions and practices partly serve the constantly evolving construction and reconstruction of religious authority in accordance with the broader societal changes, and partly as a response to the Ismaili communities' needs and challenges at the local and global levels.

The paper starts with a description of the research method, followed by a concise discussion of the historical origin and evolution of authority in Shia Ismaili history. Then, it analyses the construction and reconstruction of authority through a number of religious rituals, traditions.

Steven Lee, University of California, Berkeley

The Construction and Reconstruction of Soviet Korean Traditions

This paper focuses on multiple artistic representations of the Korean population of Central Asia, the goal being to scrutinize the different uses of tradition in Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. It takes as a starting point the 2007 American documentary film *Koryo Saram: The Unreliable People*, which highlights how Kazakhstani Koreans have maintained their ethnic traditions despite considerable hardships—including their 1937 deportation to Central Asia by Stalin. I argue that the film presents tradition through the lens of contemporary Korean nationalism and American multiculturalism. However, the film also bears traces of a quite different, “anti-traditional” tradition, namely, that of the Soviet Avant-Garde. This is seen in its use of extensive footage from a 1946 documentary film entitled *Kolkhoz “Avant-Garde”*, produced by Soviet authorities to showcase a thriving Kazakhstani Korean collective farm. Here we see Korean tradition pressed into the service of Stalinist propaganda and the Soviet “friendship of peoples.” However, *Kolkhoz “Avant-Garde”* also reflects the documentary techniques of Dziga Vertov, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Sergei Tret’iakov, and the paper argues that this latent avant-gardeist tradition enables us to think beyond racial, ethnic, and national boundaries. Turning from the two films, the paper then illustrates this by discussing contemporary Korean artists and writers in Central Asia,

focusing on the ways in which they are reconstructing traditions in a transnational, post-ethnic context.

Mukaram Toktogulova, AUCA, Kyrgyzstan

Translocal Tablighi Networks as channels for Reconstruction and Deconstruction of Custom and Tradition: the case of Tablighi Jama'at in Kyrgyzstan

The Translocal Tablighi Jamaat(TJ) Network that emerged in India and Pakistan in the early twentieth century began to expand its missionary activities in Central Asia in the 1990s. Its aim was to bring post-Soviet Muslim society back to Islam through a revival of religious practice by travelling lay missionary groups with a “dava” program, a local term for “daw'a” (Call, Invitation). Although the TablighiJama'at is currently banned in all Central Asian countries and Russia, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, the movement has gradually increased its impact on the region and significantly contributed to what is called “alternate globalities”.

The paper aims at examination of Translocal Tablighi Jamaat Network (TJ) as a channel for creation, deconstruction and reconstruction of both “old” and “new” customs as a source of authority. By traditions and customs we mean traditional cultural and religious practices of Kyrgyz Muslims that are contested and reconsidered in a new way in Tablighi practices and discourses. By “new customs” we refer to those customs that are introduced by “davatchys” (preachers) through such Tablighi practices as “Davat” (preaching tour), “Taalim”(teaching) and “Bayan” according to six point principles (6 syfat) of TJ.

The paper explores the dynamic process of Networking of TablighiJama'at and looks on how Tablighis follow preexisting kinship (social) ties in the first step, and later

extend its networking by the creation of new symbolic ties. Focusing mostly on two groups- young male preachers (“davatchy”) and female preachers (“masturat”) and analyzing their narratives and stories we will discuss customs related to behavior, clothing, communication style and gender relations. The field data collected by the author in different regions of Kyrgyzstan and New Dehli, at Nizamudin mosque suggests that the processes of recovering or rejecting previous customs and, inventing new ones as a source of authority in religious field are important for understanding Re-Islamisation context in Kyrgyzstan.

Gabriel McGuire, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan

With My Words I Poison Them': the ZarZaman Poets and the Critique of the Indigenous Elite

The poetic genre of *Zar Zaman* (time of sorrow) is comprised of works by such Kazakh *aqyns* (poets) as Dulat Babataiuly, Shortanbai Qanaiuly, and Murat Monkeuly. All lived on the Kazakh steppe in the 19th century, all drew on the oral poetic genre of *tolghau*, all's work addressed the eclipse of the Kazakhs' traditional social structures by an ascendant Tsarist colonial administration. Faced with increased regulation by the Tsarist state and by the encroachment of Russian settlers on their pasture lands, the poets of *Zar Zaman* created works bitter in tone and apocalyptic in imagery. Their critiques were, however, often focused less on Tsarist administrators or on Russian immigrants than on how the Kazakhs had allowed their own behaviour to be corrupted by the experience of colonialism. The *Zar Zaman* poets castigated their contemporaries as indifferent to the obligations of kinship and community and as perverted by the lure of material wealth. In these critiques, Babataiuly emphasized the power of poetic speech to expose and contest such corruption while

Qanaiuly turned to religion, suggesting both that colonialism was a precursor of the *Agyr Zaman* (end times) and that this world was itself only a misleading illusion. Yet Qanaiuly exempted pastoral wealth from this broad condemnation of the material world. The kinds of sociality implicit in the production and consumption of pastoral wealth and the forms of leadership it enabled made it, unlike gold or silver, constitutive and not corrosive of social ties. In this paper, I illuminate the contrasting logic of Babataiuly and Qanaiuly's rhetoric through close textual analysis of their poems coupled with scholarship on the forms of social relations associated with mobile pastoral production.

Eva Dubuisson, Bogazici University, Turkey

Ancestral authority in Contemporary Aitys Poetry: Culture and Critique in Kazakhstan

In the last decades, the form of oral improvisatory art called 'Aitys' in Kazakh has been through a conscious revival in Kazakhstan. An active national network of poets from all regions travel to meet each other in live competitions, which are then recorded and redistributed in both video and print. Aitys poets, who claim to voice 'the truth of the Kazakh people' (*xalykhtyng shyndyghy*) as they battle in pairs, perform a cultural, moral, and even political authority. Together with their ancestors, audiences, and sponsors (individuals who come from within the ranks of the political and business elite in the country), Kazakh aitys poets use their position of ancestral authority to provide critical commentary on current events, and governance. Speaking from a position within an idealized cultural history, poets criticize contemporary leaders for failing to live up to the standard of that mythic past. This presentation is based on three years of doctoral ethnographic research

with aitys poets, cultural organizers, and sponsors in Kazakhstan (2004-2006). Here I examine different strategies used by poets to create a performative platform from which to launch critique modern leaders - their stance is one broadly of 'Kazakh nationalism,' one which celebrates Kazakh cultural history over a Russian and Soviet past, and which articulates a position of shared common ancestry and civic responsibility. In the examples I present here, I demonstrate how poets can metaphorically comment on current events from within such frames, and how they advocate attention and accountability from local and national leaders. Attention to such forms of performative authority and critique are particularly relevant in a context of media censorship and government repression, as they embody a dialogic potential, a possible form of cultural and political participation for the 'people' represented and voiced by poets.

Mustafa Coskun, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany

Oral Traditions and Moral Citizens: Poets, Poetry and Politics in Transition

This paper will explore a prominent genre of oral tradition, that of *tökmöakynchylk* (solo and duet performances of oral poetry), among the Kyrgyz from a historically-informed anthropological perspective. Although epic traditions of the Kyrgyz have been extensively researched, oral poetry of the Kyrgyz has been denied a sustained attention in the study of oral traditions. Existing literature on *tökmöakynchylk* either deals with formal patterning of the poetic language or considers it folkloric resources isolated from its wider context. This paper calls for an anthropological study of Kyrgyz oral poetry performances, situating oral poetry in a wider perspective paying greater attention to the

interaction between performance and its sociocultural and political-economic context and explores its connection to a diversity of social settings.

When inquired, Kyrgyz reify in their descriptions the traditional quality of improvised oral poetry, the way they are proud of it as one of their unique traditions carrying messages from “time immemorial.” While such a continuity is impossible to claim historically, it is particularly telling when people claim continuity of a performance the central element of which is, ironically, improvised poetry. This renders *tökmöakynchylýk* felicitous metaphor to explore complexities of the postsocialist condition in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, for the Kyrgyz, their oral traditions are the encyclopedia of their cultural heritage: customs, traditions, morals, philosophy, beliefs, and representation of their collective identity. What these descriptions often miss is that moral teachings, beliefs and customs are not static and immutable, but are highly susceptible to social and political transformations. The modernization projects imposed in the 20th century more often than not had these discourses on proper personhood, ideal citizenship, and the construction of collective identities at the heart of their political agendas.

Drawing on a combination of literature on anthropology of oral traditions, anthropology of morality, and the postsocialist transition, I base my arguments on three main points in this paper: Firstly, *tökmöakynchylýk* has been an intimate and integrative element of the lives of the Kyrgyz and attention should be paid to the dialectic between the performance and its wider context. Secondly, *tökmöakynchylýk* has been one of the main avenues among the Kyrgyz where various moral vocabularies are created and moral values are circulated and moral subjects are produced and idealized. Lastly, *tökmöakynchylýk* has figured as an

important element of the moral landscape in postsocialist Kyrgyzstan which nurtures a sense of integration, order, and shared values, a moral community at a time when the secular moral order of the socialist era collapsed and the market has yet to offer anything substantial in its place.

My paper proposes the ways in which this seemingly insignificant folk performance could hint at different aspects of social life where the sense of community and collective identity is sought after in the postsocialist era. I argue that a study of Kyrgyz oral poetry performances should be an investigation of beliefs, values and everyday practices. I also argue that these performances promote a particular pattern of sociality and alternative forms of social relationship which are more conducive to social cohesion and order than dominant Western models of civil society flourishing across the country. I will conclude that oral poetry performances are improvising alternative visions of modernity which are more relevant to ethnographic realities of the Kyrgyz and these improvisations are a response to the rigidity of preconceived models of “transition.”

Alima Bissenova, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan

The Expectations of Paternalism: the Boom, the Bust, and the Mediating State in an Authoritarian Context

Much as in the US and in the leading democratic countries of Europe, the state in a so-called authoritarian country like Kazakhstan had first to manage the excesses of the boom period and later had a particular role to play in mitigating the financial crisis of 2008 – bailing out banks, companies, and individual home owners threatened by the prospect of bankruptcy and foreclosure. This paper investigates some peculiarities of post-crisis management in an authoritarian context in Kazakhstan and finds that state intervention and bailouts after the crisis were shaped by

the goal of supporting a “deserving” middle class – the authoritarian regime’s key constituency. The local character of the real estate and construction boom in Kazakhstan in 2000-2007 consisted of mass popular investment in “share-holding” participation agreements (*dolevoeuchastie*) in housing projects that had been designated for completion within a period of 1-2 years after initial investment. When the financial crisis hit Kazakhstan at the end of 2007, many of these investors/buyers were left with unfinished housing as construction companies went bankrupt. The state subsequently took upon itself the responsibility of completing and re-distributing these unfinished housing projects. However, the helping hand of the state was not extended to everybody to the same degree –some investors had to lose. Inevitably, the politics around the bail-outs has provoked debates about how much is enough, what is fair, and who deserves help in today’s Kazakhstani society. A new category of the middle class (young families with children) crystallized as the beneficiary of the state’s paternalist policies, while the state emerged as the ultimate guarantor of the order upon which middle class values – first and foremost stability and upward mobility – could be built. While state policy has clearly been directed at supporting this middle class, the design and subsequent funding of the institutional mechanisms for the bailouts took some time. Inevitably, this delayed delivery of promised housing to the deserving middle class turned out to be a disciplining method that inculcated the pattern of delayed gratification and dependence on the state.

Mateusz Laczszkowski, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Germany

Shrek Meets the President: magical authoritarianism in a fairy-tale city

Bayterek, a key monument in Kazakhstan's capital Astana, symbolizes development and the state. Visitors encounter there a simulacrum of president Nursultan Nazarbaev: his handprint in gold; they also get photographed with a statue of Shrek—the cartoon character. Placing that seemingly incongruous experience in the context of Astana's recent construction boom, local discourses about architecture, and official celebrations, I explore a form of domination I call 'magical authoritarianism'. In Astana, a space of fairy-tale is created where rule and development may be depoliticized as matters of 'beauty' and 'miracle'. Revisit Walter Benjamin's work on politics, aesthetics, and architecture, I argue that aesthetics—sensory perception—be analyzed as a factor in the reproduction of political order. I highlight how domination is reproduced through disparate actions by 'ordinary citizens', rather than a central strategy.

Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

Whose Authority, What Tradition? On the Legitimacy of Practitioners and Practices of Complementary Medicine in Bishkek

In this paper I deal with processes of constructing authority of practitioners of complementary medicine in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyz Republic. Medical pluralism that has begun to flourish here, as well as in other newly independent states of Central Asia since the 1990s, brought about proliferation of different kinds of therapies which coexist with the state system of

biomedicine and private biomedical practices, especially in an urban context. Their position may be described as complementary because they have gained an official acceptance, in spite of some fluctuations in the attitude to these methods. Governmental policy towards many complementary treatments is rather permissive, whereas some others, like acupuncture or manual therapies, are openly supported and have found their place in the system of biomedical education.

Among the factors that influence the popularity of complementary medicine in this setting, a common conviction of the weakness of biomedical system and, in particular, distrust in skills and moral qualifications of medical doctors are of great importance. It is evident that the diminishing authority of biomedical personnel contributes to an increase in the level of authority of 'unconventional' practitioners. However, other factors should be also taken into account, including the role of tradition in the process of building authority of healers and other complementary practitioners. I will discuss what 'tradition' or 'traditions' are approached as sources of their authority, how they use and manipulate them in order to achieve credibility and a good position in the market.

The concept of different types of legitimacy, grounded in Max Weber's typology, is useful in the analysis of these strategies. As I observed, traditional legitimacy, based on a common initiation pattern (the call of spirits, illness and recovering along with the acceptance of the gift) and attributes that confirm a practitioner's reputation, remains the most important for such healers as *biibii* or *tabyp*. Bureaucratic legitimacy has been usually treated by them as a burdensome requirement and not a source of authority. Such credentials are, in turn, significant for practitioners using the methods of traditional Chinese or Korean medicine, especially

acupuncture, who are medical doctors and attend special post-diploma courses at the Kyrgyz National Medical Academy in Bishkek. Nevertheless, they also appeal to tradition – in this case not the local tradition, but “the old wisdom of the East” which contributes greatly to their authority.

In addition to the analysis of these two types of actors, I will discuss some other activities visible in the landscape of medical pluralism in Bishkek, which, on the one hand, are based on local traditions and, on the other – draw on alien ‘traditional’ medicines, often combining them with new technical and scientific achievements. I argue that the concept of legitimacy can be reasonably applied to methods and medicines which currently undergo the process of commodification (e.g., products based on traditional Kyrgyz beverages). Consequently, the notion of authority should not be limited to human actors – it can describe a relation between patients and different elements of therapies as well. Respect and trust or contempt and distrust may refer not only to healers and doctors, but also to their medicines, tools and techniques.

Baktygul Tulebaeva, Eberhard-Karls-University of Tuebingen

Meaning behind transformed traditions: on the example of child related rituals among contemporary Kyrgyz families

This paper presents the recent fieldwork findings from my PhD research project, which is called “Between Development, Soviet Science and Traditional Healing: An Ethnography of Childhood and Child Health in Kyrgyzstan”. A special attention was paid to the rituals, life-cycle rituals, which, according to Kyrgyz people, are the main part of their customs and traditions. These rituals are believed to be important for the proper development of a child and ensure health and well-

being. The aim of the paper is to analyze the rituals and celebrations done for children in contemporary Kyrgyz families and discuss the meanings and values behind them.

Since independence Kyrgyz people's interest in "national values", such as Kyrgyz traditions, Kyrgyz language and identity has strengthened and special attention started to be paid to child related celebrations and rituals. Traditionally it is the true meaning of the rituals that mattered. However, today these celebrations are "modernized" and there appeared additional values behind these rituals. Certain celebrations, such as 'beshik toi' (cradle festivity), 'tushoo toi', (celebrated when a child starts to walk), or 'sunnot toi' (circumcision) have transformed to big parties. The word 'toi' means festivity. Some families started to send specially ordered invitation cards with a child's picture on it and organize the celebrations in cafes and restaurants. Now parents invest in their children and do spend a great deal of money and time to organize these events.

Even if the rituals are conducted for a child, they affect not only a child alone, but also its family and even the whole community. Usually it is the social pressure, be it positive or negative, that makes a person organize these celebrations on a high level. For Kyrgyz people 'namys' (dignity), respect is very important. Through these celebrations parents strengthen contact with relatives, neighbors, friends and they show their position in their society. Sometimes these social values become much more important than the true meaning of the ritual, which assures health, well-being and a "proper" development of a child, that those families who cannot afford big celebrations do not perform the ritual for their child either or postpone it until they collect enough money to organize these celebrations.

It should be noted that because of changing values today not all Kyrgyz people use these child related customs and traditions as a tool to gain respect and authority. During my fieldwork I came across with Kyrgyz families, who are “converting” to a new trend of Islam, and for them neither the celebrations nor the rituals themselves are important. Because of Islamic values they stopped performing traditional child related rituals, which have passed from generation to generation. They do also rely on customs and traditions, but they are related to Islamic values.

The analysis of the historical development of Kyrgyz child related celebrations is important, because it clearly reveals what values people hold in certain societies, how those values can change through time, what affects their change and how these changes affect the society.

Olivier Ferrando, French Institute for Central Asian Studies, Kyrgyzstan

Central Asia's national minorities: From the 'ethnic civil society' to traditional networks

Central Asia's multicultural societies have experienced an ethnicization process under the Russian colonial regime and the Soviet rule, which has resulted in the creation of ethno-national identities. However mismatches between the geographic distribution of these *nacional'nosti* and the borders of Central Asia's republics led in 1991 to the stranding of millions of people outside their newly independent eponymous State. These minorities were often involved in so-called “interethnic clashes” in particular in the Ferghana valley (Batken in 1999-2001, Osh in 1990 & 2010).

This paper explores how ethnic mobilization developed in the region from two different perspectives:

- on one hand, how the international community and its rhetoric on minority rights has framed the ethnic issue in formal institutions that I label ‘ethnic civil society’ (associations, cultural centres, political parties all based on ethnic belonging)? And how the authorities have successfully moulded their governance tools into this new ideological pattern?
- on the other hand, how representatives of the local population (elders, individual activists, charismatic leaders) have engaged in a process of ethnic entrepreneurship through traditional networks, whether they be territorial, religious, social, or economic? And what is their role in the outbreaks of violence.

Based on the assumption that identity represents a powerful resource to mobilize masses, this comparative analysis of both the formal minority institutionalization process and the informal patron-client relationship established along ethnic cleavages aims at going beyond the mere observation of the form of interethnic clashes to understand its mechanisms and what lies behind it.

It is based on a range of interviews with activists, association leaders, members of Parliament and politicians, as well as in-depth analysis of their official discourse.

**Joldon Kutmanaliev, European University Institute,
Italy**

Traditional authority, social norms, and interethnic cooperation during the ethnic riots in Osh in 2010.

Informal institutions and practices have been the focus of recent studies on Central Asia. In many cases, the studies on informal practices are explained in negative terms and usually concentrate on the issues such as regime change, clan politics, and local governance. In contrast to the negative studies of informal structures, I

will assess the positive role of community leaders and informal institutions in preventing violence during the ethnic conflict in June, 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, when formal institutions such as the police, military, and state authorities failed to curb violence. The aim of this paper is to explain the question of how social norms and traditional mediation helped to prevent violence in some neighborhoods but failed in the others during a short episode of the ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in Osh city.

Empirical evidence from my fieldwork (interviews with informal leaders and spatial observations in Osh city) suggests that in the highly ethnically segregated city of Osh, ethnically mixed districts remained mostly peaceful or suffered less violence than segregated and ethnically homogenous districts. However, even among ethnically segregated districts there is variation in violence. Whether a district remained peaceful or suffered different levels of violence depends on several factors and conditions, such as: its geographical location within the city, the social composition of its population at the moment of the conflict, and the social ties between local informal leaders of two ethnic communities and their mediating influence on local population. I argue that informal authority is constructed through social norms. By reviving their previous or using their current informal intra- and intercommunal networks, community leaders successfully managed to avert violence in some neighborhoods but failed in the others. I will then indicate and discuss some limits of traditional community leaders in informal brokerage. The success and failure of informal mediation depends on traditional authority of community leaders which resulted from the strength of social norms in a given neighborhood. While the focus on traditional authority and social norms does not explain a whole story of ethnic violence and peace in Osh, yet it does explain a great variance of

the question. In addressing this question, this paper applies a theoretical model of in-group policing developed by Fearon and Laitin (1996) in their article “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation”.

Jennifer Murtazashvili, University of Pittsburgh, USA

There are no Arbabs Anymore: The Evolution of Customary Governance in Rural Afghanistan

This paper explores contrasting perceptions of the status of traditional governance in rural Afghanistan, which has been the topic of great contestation in recent years between both policy makers and scholars of the country. On the one hand, many scholars of Afghanistan have long noted the “fragmentation” of the social structure and traditional authority in the countryside that has resulted in “de-tribalization.” In this view, tribal structures have withered away due to year of conflict and chaos, resulting in challenges in establishing legitimate order in rural areas. On the other hand, many policymakers—especially those advocating contemporary counterinsurgency strategy—view “traditional” authority as an important source of support to help defeat anti-state insurgents, especially the Taliban. If traditional or tribal structures have withered away, how can they be one of the key factors to aid those wishing to fight the Taliban? This essay sorts through these contrasting views on the state of “traditional” authority in Afghanistan. Based on field research across more than thirty villages, it illustrates that traditional authority has evolved in the past thirty years, but it has not withered away. In many cases, the titles given to “traditional” leaders changed during the course of the conflict. These changing titles reveal that such authority has become more participatory and consensus-based than it had been in the past. Yet despite the change in titles, the roles bestowed upon

such leaders remain largely similar to those before the conflict. On the other hand, such authority has “fragmented” because it no longer traverses large strata in the country but instead is village based. In other words, “tribal” or “customary” authority in Afghanistan does not typically aggregate hierarchically. Thus, traditional authority in Afghanistan is best understood as village-based customary governance that provides public goods at the local level and mediates relations with the state that continues to play an important role in Afghan society, as there is no formal state government at the village level. In addition to the important role it plays in providing small-scale public goods, such authority has an important political function as it works to shield villages from transgressions and predatory on behalf of the state and other actors.