



*CASI Second Annual Conference*

*“Formal” and “Informal” Central Asia:  
Institutions, Identities and Discourses*

## ***ABSTRACTS***

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## **Bechtold Louise, University of Tuebingen, Germany**

*Generosity, reputation, community and happiness in toi and ash: the Kyrgyz ritual economy as an informal institution*

Autumn in Kyrgyzstan is known as the *toy* (a happy celebration like a wedding) and *ash* (a memorial feast) season, when most people are busy with organizing, preparing, finding money and shopping for these important feasts and celebrations. Although Kyrgyzstan only has a gross domestic product of about \$ 4.6 billion and 34 percent of the population living below the poverty line, about \$ 2 billion are spent each year on weddings, funerals and other ceremonies (Namatbaeva 2012). Kyrgyz lawmakers are currently debating a draft bill, which is meant to curb excessive spending on weddings, funerals and other ceremonies.

This draft bill leads us to several questions:

Why are the celebrations and feasts so important that so much is spent on them? What is achieved at these feasts and celebrations? What is the moral, social and economic force behind it? Can the ritual economy surrounding the feasts and celebrations be described as informal? Why does the government try to cut the spending of its citizens? What does this tell us about “formal and informal Central Asia”?

These questions call our attention to the relation between practices in and discourses about the “informal” sphere of life, i.e. everyday life and ritual practices, and in the “formal” sphere of state institutions. Based on my field research in the Jalal-Abad province in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2011-2012 I will describe the rules, values, relations and obligations surrounding Kyrgyz ritual economy. In a second step I will consider how the terms “formal” and “informal” can be applied to the Kyrgyz ritual economy and the attempt of the government to confine its influence.

Namatbaeva, Tolkun (2012): Kyrgyzstan eyes law to curb extravagance. In *The Washington Times*, 12/08/2012.

## **Boboyorov Hafiz, Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

*Stabilization of kinship and patron-client networks in the rural communities of Southern Tajikistan. The case of mahalla*

Network theory tries to understand how a society works beyond social differentiation based on clear-cut boundaries of communities, groups and classes. The personal ties of kinsmen, neighbors, peers, patrons and clients, members of descent groups, ethnic groups or religious communities shape crosscutting networks of interactions at different levels.

These networks are not reduced to primordial ties, such as ethnicity and caste, they can also confuse class relations (Michie 1981: 23; Blackwood 1997: 278). According to some scholars, patron-client networks comprise any type of relationship based on reciprocity. For other scholars, patron-clientism implies economically and politically valuable and calculated relations. From this angle, a patron-client formation consists of “networks of dyadic relations centered on power figures, the patrons, who control resources essential to the survival and well-being of dependent groups, the clients (Scott 1972:91-92; Wolf 1966a)” (Michie 1981: 23). Here patronage, clientalism, tenancy and loyalty are emphasized as the central elements of political economy which shape the local patterns of power relations and resource distribution.

In addition to class stratification, reciprocity and the elements of political economy as necessary characteristics of a network society, I also mention other important aspects of the dynamics of local networks in Tajikistan. According to my field observation, the framing of protests and riots against inequality and hierarchy by stigmas (like ‘stranger’, ‘enemy’, ‘polluted’ and ‘newcomer’), rather than by ranks and classes is important for the maintenance of a network society. Collective identities, which strengthen the sense of ‘us’ vs. ‘others’ are frequently reinvented due to the change in power constellations and in alliances through marriage and adoption into the elite lineage.

I also analyse the reinvention of collective identities in the case of *mahalla*. As an informal political institution at the level of rural settlement, in the subsistence-based mountainous communities *mahalla* is dominated by the elites while in the cotton-growing lowland communities it integrates all groups and networks. In the latter case *mahalla* strengthens the cotton-growing farms which are based on distinct extended families, neighborhoods and sometimes descent or ethnic groups. Even when the boundaries between extended families, neighborhoods, descent or ethnic groups are not easily observable, the local and state notables work

together to highlight the relevant collective identities. This logic serves as immaterial incentive to shape the political economy of the cotton sector.

**Dildorbekova Zamira, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK**

*The dynamics of Islam and modernity in Tajikistan: contemporary interpretations in Ismailism*

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a new configuration of nation-states and a plethora of new ideologies. At the same time, Islam, reduced to a concealed entity during the Soviet reign, has regained its presence among the ex-Soviet Muslim communities. However, the experience of the last decades shows that efforts to reconcile Islam with secular national projects in the states of Central Asia have not always been successful. The predominant body of recent, albeit generally scarce, scholarship produced on the region and the media address these developments through a discourse of ‘danger’ posed by international Islam and/or a discourse of ‘good’ (government-sponsored) vs. ‘bad’ Islam(s). The paradigms of ‘danger’ and ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ Islam(s), however, shape people’s and governments’ attitudes toward Islam, and provide not only an inadequate analysis but also an incomplete picture of the nature of Islam in Central Asia.

The present paper explores post-Soviet transformations in Ismailism in Tajikistan – that is, how the contemporary Shi‘a Imami Nizārī Ismā‘īli (hereinafter Ismaili) religious renewal and discourse on modernity in Tajikistan is being shaped by the merging and integration of local and transnational Ismailism(s) that followed seven-decades-long Soviet isolation. While this work does not claim the irrelevancy of the aforementioned securitisation discourses, it challenges their portrayals of both international Islam and Islam in Central Asia as monolithic entities – with the former being anti-Western, thus anti-modern, and the latter being a passive receiver. Notions of ‘multiple modernities’ (Eisenstadt, 2000) and ‘discursive tradition’ (Asad 1986) are employed to exalt a better understanding of the complex and constantly evolving nature of Islam in Central Asia and of its interactions with with modernity. This work argues that readings of modernity within Ismailism in Tajikistan are being informed, altered and recreated by various dynamics *within* the faith and *without*. These dynamics [*within* and *without*] create controversy and tension within the Ismaili community in Tajikistan, but at the same time they instigate indigenous approaches and answers that go beyond ‘traditional’ discourses on Islam and modernity even when they accentuate the continuity of the Ismaili tradition.

**Fehlings Susanne, University of Tübingen, Germany**

*The informal and formal manifestation of kinship and housing concepts in the urban context of the Armenian capital Yerevan*

The concepts of “formality” and “informality” are widely used and discussed in the field of economics and in the context of development discourses about promoting economical growth and reducing poverty. As in other parts of the world, this is also the case in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In my paper I suggest a more general approach to the concepts of formality and informality, which in some of my examples cannot be restricted to economy.

For Armenia the division between formality and informality could be defined as an ideally imagined cut, which separates the “official state sphere” from the “unofficial life of common people”. Almost all of my interlocutors stressed that this ideal cut does not reflect realities as both spheres are intermingled. They believed that this is the reason for many problems, injustice and inequality.

After a theoretical introduction to the local understanding of formality and informality I am going to describe the people-state antagonism, which can be observed in many post-Soviet countries. Then, I am going to discuss some major concepts linked to formality and informality, which shape Armenian culture, society and therefore everyday life. Two of these concepts are kinship and housing. I try to explain their importance as basic social values, which have an effect on all levels of social and cultural life. This is also mirrored in linguistic terms, which give an idea of the implications and scope of the concepts.

I will explain how kinship and housing transgress the ideal boundaries between formality and informality by simultaneously reinforcing the state-people, public-private and formal-informal antagonism.

By giving some examples from the housing and building sector, I try to show how formal and informal practices, moral codes, norms, and values are perceived in different contexts and how citizens of Yerevan judge them.

### **Frigerio Alessandro, Kassenova Nargis, KIMEP, Kazakhstan**

*Ordinary exceptions: Carl Schmitt in Kazakhstan*

The paper adopts the framework of exceptionalism, as expressed by Carl Schmitt (although some contemporary remodeling by Agamben, Butler and others will be taken into consideration) in order to analyze the relationship between formal and informal politics in Kazakhstan. In particular, the framework is used for assessing the exceptionality of Zhanozen events that started in 2011 and appraising them against ordinary politics. Because of the peculiar topological localization in the outskirts of the country, at the center of economic production, but far away from the political core, the answer to the uprising in Zhanozen required a surplus of action for signaling the old-fashioned reach of the sovereign and his power to inflict death. The revolt has been punished directly; then the reaffirmation of law has appeared with its partial suspension through the declaration of the emergency. Afterwards, the security forces, who acted beyond their remit, have been relocated to their proper position inside the boundaries of legality together with the rebels. Comparing this situation with ordinary politics in Kazakhstan, the analysis tries to show how and why emergencies end up to be more regulated and formal political episodes in the functioning of the country than ordinary politics where informal practices seem to prevail or to last longer.

### **Hardenberg Roland, University of Tubingen, Germany**

*Kinship and village administration in rural Kyrgyzstan*

In how far do kinship categories and practices provide an order for the bureaucratic allocation and use of land and water resources in rural Kyrgyzstan? This question is intimately related to the wider topic of this panel, i.e. the relationship between informal social categories, ideas and practices and formal institutions or rules of the state. The administration of a village as well as the allocation of its land and water fall into the responsibility of state institutions. People working for these institutions are expected to follow certain formal procedures and distinguish clearly between their roles as “public servants” and “private citizens” (see Fuller & Harriss 2000: 13). Similarly, state institutions are expected to work independent from local social groupings and should not be influenced by the limited interests of powerful individuals. Anthropological fieldwork, however, shows that this strict separation between state and society remains an ideal in many countries all over the world.

This general observation raises a number of concrete questions when applied to a specific context, for example: Which informal social categories and practices have the strongest impact on the working of bureaucratic institutions? How do they influence the formal procedures? How do people judge this conflation of local social and public state roles and institutions? Looking at rural Kyrgyzstan, anthropological studies (e.g. Yoshida 2005) suggest that during Soviet times as well as after independence local kinship categories and practices provide a formal order that may be used in the operation of bureaucratic institutions. To explore this hypothesis further, the paper first presents ethnographic data from a village in northern Kyrgyzstan which was studied by the author in 2007-8. It provides an overview of the most important local social categories which are activated and (re-) created in ritual activities which involve the whole village such as funerals or the celebration of the New Year festival (*noruz*). It then turns towards the allocation of land and water both before and after independence and considers the role of kinship categories in this process. Finally, the findings from one village will be compared with other studies on the relation between kinship and land or water administration in Kyrgyzstan (e.g. Dekker, Sehring, Yoshida).

Dekker, Henri A. L. *Property regimes in Transition. Land reform, Food Security and Development. A Case Study in the Kyrgyz Republic.*

Fuller, C. & J. Harriss 2000. For an anthropology of the modern Indian State. In: C. Fuller & V. Bénéï (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India.* New Delhi: Social Science Press, 1-30.

- Sehring J. 2007. Irrigation reform in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In: *Irrigation and Drainage Systems*, 21 (3-4): 277-290,
- Yoshida, Setsuko 2005. Ethnographic Study of Privatisation in a Kyrgyz Village. Patrilineal Kin and Independent Farmers. *Inner Asia*, 7 (2): 215-247.

**Hornidge Anna-Katharina, Lisa Oberkircher, Anisiya Kudryavtseva' Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, Germany**

*Boundary management and the discursive sphere: negotiating 'realities' in Khorezm, Uzbekistan*

With independence in 1991, Uzbekistan, as most of Central Asia, entered into a phase of socio-economic transformation. In agriculture, this state-driven restructuring of the former system concentrates on the 'formal' sphere of land and water governance.

This paper assesses water management in Khorezm, Uzbekistan taking a social constructivist and sustainability science-inspired perspective (Mollinga, 2008; 2010). We argue that several limitations to effective water management in Khorezm exist. To cope with these and assure water access, three types of practices are widely employed: formal, strategic, and discursive practices. The discrepancy between the formal water management institutions, manifested and regulated through formal practices and the informal, widely pursued through strategic practices and acts of deviation, is compensated through discursive practices, verbal references to formal institutions hampering the formalizing of informal practices. The institutionalized employment of all three types of practices fosters the production and re-production of boundaries demarcating two, largely separate and little interacting, spheres of reality in Khorezm's water management. Consequently a high degree of resistance to the integration of informal water management realities into the formal regulatory environment prevails, preventing mutual learning and thus the locally informed restructuring towards more efficient and more sustainable water management.

**Isaacs Rico, Oxford Brookes University, UK**

*Re-assessing Weber and the formal and informal in Central Asian politics*

This paper seeks to reassess and critique what a Weberian approach brings to our understanding of Central Asian politics and in particular the notions of the formal and informal in the region. Scholarship which explores political, social and economic phenomena in Central Asia has often been examined through a theoretical lens predicated on Weberian notions of a formal-informal dichotomy. This paper addresses three key themes associated with Weberian notions of the formal and informal and their utility and applicability in the case of Central Asia. Firstly, the deployment of some Weberian concepts can often be misused. For example, neopatrimonialism is often evoked to explain patrimonial rather than neopatrimonial politics – thus underplaying the 'public' aspect to the dynamic between the two types of logic. Secondly, a Weberian approach is limited by the inherent normative and teleological assumptions it implies. Applying a conceptual framework such as neopatrimonialism implies understanding Central Asian political development as moving towards a Western-centric liberal-democratic model (the legal-rational) and this jars with the successful consolidation of authoritarian regimes in most of the region. Finally, the paper analyses the extent to which an understanding of Central Asian politics premised on a Weberian understanding of the formal-informal (legal-rational-charismatic / traditional) in Central Asia perhaps obscures more than it reveals given the overlapping and contested nature of such a division – how can we really know where the formal ends and the informal begins in Central Asia? The paper explores these three key themes by drawing on empirical research associated with party development in Kazakhstan. The paper contends that we perhaps need to move away from a Weberian lens of the formal and informal towards more discursive and deconstructionist methods to truly appreciate and understand the logic and dynamics of the political order in the Central Asian republics.

**Kachkynbaev Seytek, Waseda University, Japan**

*Informal politics and political regime in post-Soviet Central Asia: the case of the Kyrgyz Republic*

At the early stage of independence, the Kyrgyz Republic was the only state in Soviet Central Asia where the First Secretary of the Communist Party was replaced by a new president through election. The Republic introduced and established an electoral democracy according to Joseph Schumpeter's minimalist benchmark of free and fair elections. Further, it also fulfilled two other basic criteria of democracy comprised in the definition of polyarchy offered by Robert A. Dahl, in which the competition and participation are central to the concept of democracy.

However, the political trajectory after independence was not tied together with democracy. Why democracy in the Kyrgyz Republic was reversed rather than consolidated? The Kyrgyz case suggests important implications for the understanding of state institutions, the role of political elites in transitions, and the prominence of informal politics.

In this paper the Kyrgyz Republic is treated as a deviant case where democracy and autocracy come full circle twice, that is, none of political regimes is constant. One of the objectives of this paper is to seek the relevance of main theoretical arguments on informal politics and democratization for the understanding of regime transition in the Kyrgyz Republic. A comparative historical analysis of the two regimes under the presidents A. Akaev and K. Bakiev shows that standard theories on clan politics does not sufficiently addresses the type of transition that takes place in Kyrgyzstan.

**Karrar Hasan H., Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan**

*Bargains across borders: Central Asia, China and the discursive boundaries between formal and informal mercantilism*

The independence of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan ran parallel to the deepening of market reforms in the neighboring People's Republic of China (PRC). Beginning in January 1992, frontier markets in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) were established for shuttle traders from Central Asia. Itinerant merchants from the Central Asian republics were allowed easy access to the XUAR where they purchased Chinese-manufactured merchandise for export to their countries. For the Central Asian republics reeling from the adverse economic climate after independence, shuttle trading provided low-cost Chinese merchandise and income generation. Although the number of shuttle traders has declined since the 1990s, today permanent border markets, economic cooperation zones, and official border trading enterprises support a growing border trade between China and Central Asia much of which is informal in its bypassing of state regulatory mechanisms with goods frequently unreported or undervalued.

This paper defines informal trade as licit commercial activity occurring outside of state regulatory mechanisms (Sassen 2001). I argue that informal commerce between China and Central Asia occurs with state acquiescence. Furthermore, in the Sino-Central Asian border trade the boundaries between formal and informal, and informal and illicit are discursive. This argument is constructed in two-parts; first, I illustrate how border trade was encouraged by Chinese officials. This trade had a strong informal component, blurring boundaries between formal and informal commerce. In the second part of the paper, I explore the cross-border commerce from a Central Asian vista. Here, in addition to the masking of distinction between formal and informal, the distinction between the informal and illicit trade is blurred through rent seeking and the continuity of Soviet-era and clan ties that influence the commercial landscape.

**Mandler Andreas, Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, Germany**

*Post-Soviet Land Distribution in Kubistoni Mastchob, Tajikistan*

The dissolution of formerly collective farms during land reform in Tajikistan happened in consecutive steps, depending on central legislation and local implementation. Despite permanent reform steps since 1992, intended to individualize farm structures, arable land was distributed by the post-Soviet collective farm enterprises already before and also after the land reform. Taking the example of the Zarafshan Valley, in particular the mountainous Kuhistoni Mastchob district, this paper reviews how land distribution did not alone follow state legislation, instead it also depended on an autochthonous procedure called Bobogi.

Bobogi literally means 'of Grandfather'. The term implies to resituate land tenures to its supposedly previous proprietors. Village descendants claim that certain land plots were allegedly owned or created by their

ancestors. The practise of Bobogi is said to have started already at the end of 1980s, during “perestroika” times.

Bobogi leans on some core principles of farmers towards their lands, as: *Land is the private good of the family; the one who created land, should use it* etc. that are widely shared within rural communities. However, due to lack of evidence, family name, personal reputation and the diligence of ancestors are usually the only proofs to request land. Claims for Bobogi land are publicly discussed through institutions as Mosques, local committees, boards and village meetings. Eventually requests are approved by the committee of elders, the chief of the local Dehkon Farm and the land committee (e.g. municipality and district government).

I assess Bobogi as an institution that facilitates the process of turning a subjective interpretation (of some families) into objective reality. Taking a social constructivist perspective of reality, I assess Bobogi land distribution as a publicly legitimized institution contributing to the construction reality. Thus, Bobogi is taken as an example to question the distinction of formal-informal structures. It is understood as an institution that exemplifies how inter-subjectively shared views impact on “factual” governance processes.

### **Mingisheva Nazgul, Karaganda Bolashak University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan**

#### *Formal and informal discourses of hijabs in Kazakhstan*

Presently there are two opposed discourses on hijabs in Kazakhstan. On one hand, there is an official power discourse that hijab is not a Kazakh Islamic tradition. It is suggested to take off hijabs from women in Kazakhstan. In addition, Muslim women who wear hijabs are discriminated in official and public discourses. On the other hand, not all men and women in Muslim communities of Kazakhstan share the official view and interpretation of hijabs. In my paper I analyze the hijab issue in some Islamic countries and communities in order to compare it to the current situation in Kazakhstan. I plan to conduct fieldwork on hijabs among young Muslims in Kazakhstan and to try to understand how formal and informal discourses about hijab interact and influence each other. My research questions for this paper are following: What are the meanings of hijab in Islam? What is hijab in different modern Islamic countries and communities? What is hijab for Muslims in present-days Kazakhstan? Is it possible to balance and align these formal and informal discourses about hijab in Kazakhstan?

### **Nasritdinov Emil, Anthropology Department, AUCA**

#### *Parallel city: Bishkek's 1-st of April competitions and alternative discourses*

In 1997, the architectural studio Museum organized the exhibition titled *Parallel City*. It was exploring ideas, forms and discourses, which develop along with official ideologies and informal everyday narratives. After a series of other exhibitions Ulan Japarov, by then a leader of the studio, came up with a new format – 1-st of April Competitions. Each year a unique theme was announced (Tea-pots, Kalpak, Standing Socks, etc.); participation was open to anybody (beyond the artists' and architects' circle) and any media was allowed. The uniqueness of the 1-st of April genre was that in this day of “fools” and jokes – ideas could be expressed with much greater freedom and traditional artistic/political/cultural limits could be significantly expanded. Eight competitions took place since then; people and ideas came from all over Central Asian region and from more distant places. This paper draws on the analysis of materials from these exhibitions and on interviews with key organizers and participants to portray this unique and well embedded into the local context artistic platform to see to what degree the Parallel City remains parallel and at what points it crosses the official and everyday discourses in Central Asia.

### **Provis Rene, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia**

#### *“Informal” institutions and the new institutional economics: a short history of the concept and its analytical relevance in post-Soviet Central Asia*

The conceptual categories of formal and informal institutions have a historically changing but important role in the social sciences. This paper will focus on this in the field of new institutional economics (NIE) in particular. I argue that while the conceptual categories of formal and informal are artificial vestiges of older

theoretical trends, they are less problematic once one moves beyond a more or less exclusive focus on any single category employed analytically in isolation from the other. Moreover, if the definition of informal institutions is expanded to encompass a range of social phenomena, it may be employed as a powerful mode of interdisciplinary analysis. It is on these grounds that I argue for the continued legitimacy of the simplistic dichotomy of formal and informal, at least insofar as its usefulness at the research frontier of NIE is concerned.

NIE has long since included a theoretical role for ‘informal institutions’ (North 1981, 1990). Despite this, their role was more stated than operational and analyses tended to bias formal institutional elements such as political or legal institutions (Hadfield 2008; Carey 2008). However, an important shift in attitude toward the relative explanatory weight afforded to informal institutions has been apparent since the early 1990s, observable in particular in the writings of the hugely influential author and Nobel recipient, Douglass North. The shift that is identifiable in North’s writings over time is a consequence of his experiences advising on economic and political reform across the former Soviet Union during the early 1990s (North 1993; Nee 2005). This shift has been an early, though perhaps not yet fully investigated reaction against *End of History* (Fukuyama 1989) thinking, and the *transitology* literature similarly influenced.

I argue that increasing attention given to informal institutions in NIE enhances the capacity for further interdisciplinary integration than has occurred previously. This trend is visible, for example, in interest among NIE scholars in the co-evolution of political systems (formal institutions) in conjunction with, and reaction to, informal social institutions (Donahoe 2004; Nee 2005; Opper 2008). I argue that interdisciplinary integration occurring within a single theoretical framework, or *paradigm*, can lend a degree of theoretical rigor to such interdisciplinary experimentation that may be absent elsewhere.

I demonstrate this argument through a case study drawing on my own research. This begins with the shift outlined above and augments the working definition of informal institutions in a way informed by understandings of informal institutions among the Kryrgyz. This avenue of inquiry firstly investigates understandings of norms of reciprocity and of kinship relations, such as those manifesting in the Kryrgyz concept of “tooganchilik” (Temirkulov 2008), then asks how these aspects might be integrated into the operational definition of informal institutions utilized by institutional scholars. Secondly, this augmented and contextualized definition is then analyzed in terms of symbiotic interdependencies with the formal institutional legal and political structures of the Kryrgyz state. Such an approach is not altogether original (see Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Guillette 2010; Temirkulov 2008, 2004), however, existing studies have tended to focus on patronage among political elites. Such focus I argue has been at the expense of the more grassroots manifestations and origins of norms of kinship relations and especially norms of reciprocity vis-à-vis informal institutions, which is the focus of my research.

## **Qurboniev Aslisho, Oxford University, UK**

### *Project identity: the discursive formation of Pamiri-Isma‘ili identity in cyberspace*

This paper explores the role of social networking websites in the construction and transforming of communal identity by the Isma‘ili Muslims of Tajikistan. The data comes from my field research on online and offline activities of Isma‘ili Muslim users of social networking websites in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. The analysis of the qualitative interviews and observation suggests that historical memory, social and political conditions have contributed to the formation of a *resistance identity* with clearly defined boundaries, for the Pamiri minority, the adherents of Isma‘ilism.

The paper demonstrates that internet, and particularly the Social Networking Websites, not only play an important role in transforming historical memories and historical identities into a new space, but also result in constructing new forms of identity, i.e. a *project identity*, which is characterised by the conscious activities of individuals and communities in order to redefine their position in the society.

The findings reveal that since the fall of the Soviet Union, religious affiliation has become an important factor in defining the boundaries of individual and community identities for a minority group like Pamiri



Isma'ilis. In the space provided by social media every individual gains an equal opportunity to represent and formulate his individual and communal identity.

**Rustemova Assel, KIMEP, Kazakhstan**

*Foucault in Central Asia: bureaucratic dissidence and governmentality of industrialization*

The purpose of this paper is to identify issue-areas where Foucault's notion of 'dissidence' (2003) can be applicable and illuminating. Dissidence refers to the practices of alternative knowledge that challenges liberal governing rationales (governmentality) of some authoritarian regimes in Central Asia. Dissidence takes forms of hypocritical statements and clandestine practices. Foucault compares it to participation in secret sects with the restricted, hidden internal truth, which 'only members of the sect knew and shared' (Foucault, 2003). Contrary to open resistance, it takes an indirect and subversive mode of existence.

This paper argues that the concept can be fruitful to the analysis of bureaucratic resistance of liberal industrialization practices in Kazakhstan. If we assume that Kazakhstani industrialization plan is based on economic liberalism that promotes self-limiting governing, then three instruments of state regulation can be identified: a) state must regulate 'deviant' (unexpected and threatening) outcomes of economic development; b) state must choose intervention strategies with minimal impact on overall economy; c) state must always uphold superiority of market mechanisms. Bureaucrats subvert implementation of liberalism by depoliticizing problems and framing 'deviant' outcomes as 'normal'. They engage in developing the ruler's personality cult by framing industrialization as a personal success of the ruler and thereby shifting responsibilities for industrialization away from their institutions. Lastly, they engage in fostering empires of the affiliated companies instead of upholding superiority of market mechanisms. As a result, these practices undermine implementation of industrialization. This resistance is difficult to trace because it operates in the informal sphere and relies on knowledge of how to avoid formal regulations and punishment.

This paper will introduce key pillars of liberal industrialization in Kazakhstan and the oversight mechanisms and then it will show how bureaucrats subvert industrialization in practice.

**Schenk Caress, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan**

*Caught between formality and informality: coping strategies of Central Asian migrants in the Russian Federation*

Migrants arriving to Russia from former Soviet republics in Central Asia find it difficult to gain and maintain legal working status. Often landlords, employers and migration officials are reluctant to help migrants gain fully legal status and some even benefit from migrants' illegal status. In fact, laws and policies are at times created in a way as to make strategic use of migrant informality. However it is possible to argue that both migrants and authorities can benefit from "informal" practices. The key distinguishing factor for whether migrants are exploited or not, then, becomes not the informal/formal distinction, but rather knowledge of the ways both informal and formal processes work and the savvy to navigate these processes.

**Schoeberlein John, Eurasian Regional Studies Institute, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan**

*Living out the Central Asian state: the collapsing boundaries around formal culture concepts*

One key Soviet legacy in Central Asia is that it is considered to be the state's business to define culture. The state defines norms not only for general cultural orientations ("modern", "national") and the content that makes up these categories (music, dress, *dukhovnost'*), but also the moral values ascribed to them (progressive, backward, loyal, abnormal).

In Soviet times, the formal normative framework was rooted in a particular form of modernization, endorsing modernist culture ("sovetskii chelovek, sovetskaia nravstvennost'") and national forms often referencing "tradition", while excluding other orientations.

State-promoted normative cultural frameworks are not unique to Central Asia, but what is striking here is the way the population shares much of the state's normative frameworks, wants to see the state actively enforcing them, and is itself involved in social control with the same aim. This paper examines the alignment

between the state and the “mainstream” population regarding particular areas of normative culture, derived from my ethnographic fieldwork in Central Asia. I look at cultural norms associated with “national” music, Western-style clothing, Japanese culture, and “New Muslim” culture. Central Asians take many of their cues from the state, they view the state as the proper proponent and enforcer of cultural normativity, and they are often concerned that the state could recede too far from the maintenance of cultural norms contrary to the expectation in the West that post-Soviet citizens would be overwhelmingly concerned with gaining freedom from state controls.

Since Soviet times, there has been a diversification of social processes around cultural concepts, leading to greater cultural debate, but often those holding diverse positions still look to the state as arbiter of cultural norms. Just as in other times, people expected the religious order or kinship to underlie cultural norms, today Central Asians also live out the state as a moral basis for culture.

### **Tulebaeva Baktygul, University of Tübingen, Germany**

#### *Interdependence and discrepancy of formal and informal institutions: on the example of child health development projects in Kyrgyzstan*

The ideas Kyrgyz people hold about child health are highly diverse, hybrid and even contradictory. Enormous cultural, political and economic changes occurred within the last one and half centuries that have affected people's understanding of child development and child health. These are local health beliefs mixed with popular Islam, Soviet medical science, demodernization and the revival of traditional healing practices and the introduction of western biomedicine in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

Cultural values and traditional practices play a key role when raising a child and it is impossible to ignore such values when implementing child health development projects. When it comes to health the role of informal institutions becomes even more important if the capability of the state and other formal institutions is limited. An understanding of local conceptions and practices of health in relation to children would allow for much more effective interventions by the state, aid agencies or NGOs in improving children's health. It would also show what consequences intervention might have on children and the communities.

I will consider the theoretical concepts of formal and informal by analyzing the health sector in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. I concentrate on two main sets of “rituals” practiced for raising a healthy child: the first one is Kyrgyz traditional child related rituals, such as life-cycle rituals and health related rituals and the second one is the “ritual” of immunization, which is administered by Soviet and western biomedicine.

This paper will challenge the formal/informal “binary” division by considering the controlling power of the state, the emerging power of international organizations, the role of space in defining formal and informal, the “formality” of informals and the effects of informal sectors in formal state institutions.