

Monday, April 29th, 2013, 6 pm

The Changing Landscape of Central Asian Studies

Lecture by John Schoeberlein

Venue:

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin
Institut für Asien -
und Afrikawissenschaften

Raum 507

Invalidenstrasse 118
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This lecture is a cooperation between the Zentrum Moderner Orient (www.zmo.de), the Zentralasien - Seminar of the Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften der Humboldt - Universität zu Berlin (iaaw.huberlin.de) and the Competence Network Crossroads Asia (www.crossroads-asia.de).

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Two and a half decades ago, the study of Central Asia was sharply divided. Researchers based in the region had little access to the wider world of international scholarship and the general theoretical and region-specific research agendas that drove it. They were also highly constrained by Soviet ideology in the analytical frameworks they could employ and the assertions that they could make about their subject-matter. Meanwhile, scholars from outside the Soviet Bloc had very limited access to the region and their work was also often clearly guided by a Cold War agenda that sought to present the Soviet political system and its effects in a negative light. More than two decades have passed since this picture began to change in a dramatic way: the possibilities increased greatly for scholars in the region to engage with international scholarship and for Western scholars to have access to regional field and documentary research. Still, inertia in scholarly agendas has affected both sides of the divide, and only relatively recently can one see a more substantial bridging of the gap. This is most significantly reflected in the emergence of a generation of scholars who have extensive research experience on the ground in the region and who are strongly involved in an international milieu, either because they are trained in that context or because they have made strong efforts to build links between their own work and international, discipline-based scholarship. The dissolution of the parochial enclave that Sovietology once constituted, where an anti-Soviet political agenda motivated most research and where the political *raison d'être* overrode most discipline-based theoretical concerns, has been a great benefit. The emergence of new research institutions within the region has also been decisive - institutions which are not dominated by an older generation of scholars who are invested in old approaches or new agendas of promoting nation-building ideologies.

John Schoeberlein teaches cultural anthropology at the Nazarbayev University School of Humanities and Social Sciences and is also working to develop a research institute at NU for Eurasian regional studies. Before moving to NU, he served as Director of Harvard University's Program on Central Asia and the Caucasus, and at various times as Visiting Professor at the American University in Central Asia (Bishkek), Tbilisi State University and the Eurasian National University (Astana). His research in Central Asia and other parts of the former Soviet Union since 1984 has focused on identity processes, cultural dimensions of conflict, national ideologies, Islam, Soviet legacies and emerging cultural orientations. He has led major analytical projects on conflict prevention in Central Asia (the UN's Ferghana Valley Development Programme and the International Crisis Group's Central Asia Project), and he was instrumental in founding the Central Eurasian Studies Society.