

Lectures on Political Economy in Central Asia

September 10, 2019, Room A416, Science Building
Zhongbei Campus, East China Normal University

Lecture 1 (10-11am)

Neoliberalism and the rise of the rentier class in Central Asia

Abstract

This talk offers a moral economy critique of the transition to a market economy in Central Asia. In a reversal of the classical ideal of a 'free market', neoliberalism has promoted and celebrated rent extraction, sometimes over wealth creation. In freeing markets from government regulation, neoliberalism has enabled powerful economic actors (in particular banks and property owners) to exploit and indebt others. Neoliberalism has established, regularized and legitimized 'unearned income'. Post-Soviet market reforms have produced shifts in the balance of power in relations between lenders and borrowers, landowners and tenants, utility companies and clients, and so on. Assets have become 'improperty', in that they are owned and controlled for exchange-value rather than use-value. While rentier activities are morally justified and normalized, they are harmful to the economic and social well-being of the population. Not surprisingly, some post-Soviet economies seek to extricate themselves from neoliberalism through alternative economic imaginaries.

Speaker's Bio

Dr. Balihar Sanghera is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at University of Kent's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research. His main interest is the political and moral economy of Eurasia, exploring how economic institutions and relationships relate to moral values and norms. His current research examines how global powers and associated international financial institutions shape and contest Central Asia. His papers have appeared in *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *Theory and Society*, *International Sociology*, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *The Sociological Review*, and *Sociological Research Online*. He has been a visiting lecturer at Novosibirsk State University, American University - Central Asia and Boston University. He has also been a visiting scholar at Harvard and Boston Universities. Last year, he was the George F. Kennan scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington D.C. He received his PhD Sociology at University of Lancaster, MSc Agricultural Economics at University of Oxford and BA Economics at University of Lancaster.

Lecture 2 (11am-12pm)

Gender, debt and dispossession in Central Asia: the Kyrgyz women's struggle against financial elites

Abstract:

This talk examines how women mobilized against banking and microfinance industry in Kyrgyzstan, a gendered process of capitalist accumulation hidden under the guise of empowerment. The women's political activism is crucial for understanding state-society relations in the current neoliberalizing context. Drawing on in-depth interviews with female borrowers, the paper examines their strategies to counter indebtedness and dispossession by the financial sector. The paper challenges the dominant clientelist paradigm of Central Asian politics and points to a more complex dynamics at play.

Speaker's Bio:

Dr. Elmira Satybaldieva is a scholar in Eurasian politics and development, currently based at Conflict Analysis Research Centre, University of Kent. Previously she was a research fellow at the Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland and a visiting fellow at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University. Her main area of research interest is political and economic development in the post-Soviet space, with a particular focus on economic strategies, political agency, and state institutions in Central Asia. In addition, she has examined the role international donors in pursuing development and conflict prevention in Central Asia. Her research has resulted in publications in several journals, including the *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Central Asian Survey* and *International Journal of Politics and Culture and Society*. She has advised a range of diplomats and development actors on strategies of engagement in Central Asia.