The Debate on Progress, Social Order and Economy and the Rise of New Inequalities in Central Asia, 1970–90s

Relevance

Despite its modernistic mission, the Communist ideology in Central Asia reaffirmed local cultures. Departing from this assumption, the project compares the market-oriented reforms and discussions on economy as progress in non-Western historical contexts and is relevant to the debate on inequalities in the neo-liberal age.

Research questions and sources

The project studies the concepts of economic progress and social order produced by intellectuals, research collectives and politicians, propagated in the media and discussed among the population in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia from the 1970s to the 1990s. The research, based on the processed archival and oral (interviews) sources in original languages, aims at seeing how the debate's development resulted from, paralleled to and preceded the political and economic reforms. Other questions concern the extent to which public discussion generated and framed the perception of the crisis. The project also questions how social actors at the local level adapted the reforms to their nested semiotic and semantic matrixes.

Hypotheses and results

The discourse about the unproductive socialist economy glorified free market idea. The early 1980s reforms aimed at re-energising the workers’ self-management in the Soviet Republics and Mongolia. However, from 1989 the republican elites in Soviet Central Asia pursued policies to redirect public discourse to ethnic conflict, while in Mongolia they emphasized national development in order to justify the immediately devastating economic effects of the transition to Capitalism.

Research data will be accessible also in the open-access online database "History of Perestroika in Central Asia": hpica.pz.nl

Publications and presentations


