



**Oriental
Institute**

The Czech Academy
of Sciences



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
Department of East Asian Studies

International Uyghur Studies 2023

PRC Colonialism and the Uyghur Region

Organising Institutions

Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Geneva
European Uyghur Institute
Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences

Dates

Friday 24 and Saturday 25 of November 2023

Location

Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czechia

Organisers

Eleanor J. HART (IODE)
Ondřej KLIMEŠ (Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences - OI)
Léo MAILLET (SNSF - Unige/ESTAS - EHESS/CETOBaC)
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Deadline for submitting proposals

Friday 21 of April 2023

CV and abstract should be sent to: uyghur.studies@uyghur-institute.org

Notification of acceptance

Sunday 7 of May 2023

Presentation

As the dramatic situation in the Uyghur region continues to unfold, researchers have been adopting new paradigms to understand the relationship between the Uyghur people and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Many valuable insights have been gained through the lens of securitization theory, or the utilization of the concept of dispossession to understand the processes which culminated in the critical situation we have born witness to for the last ten years. Other terms employed include forced assimilation, acculturation, minoritization, desettlement, erasure, socialist creative destruction, civilisational dispossession, state terror and more recently crimes against humanity, cultural genocide and genocide. Moreover, developments in the Uyghur region have also been understood as a succession of policy cycles, with more or less aggressively assimilationist campaigns followed by a relaxing of cultural restrictions.

Over the last decade, Postcolonial and Subaltern studies, and more recently Native studies, have also left their mark on academic work focusing on the Uyghur region. In the last ten years we have witnessed increased discussion of coloniality, colonialism and settler colonialism in this field. Adopting a critical paradigm toward colonialism, and even more so toward settler colonialism, however, implies a different understanding of the above-mentioned cyclical movement. Indeed, the idea of an ongoing colonial project, directed and coordinated by the state, while still allowing for the ebb and flow of more or less repressive policies directed towards the colonised peoples, crystallises a novel appreciation of past and current events. It further makes the Chinese state claim to the territory in question less a static *fait accompli* than a dynamic work in progress. This in turn sheds new light on the violence that has accompanied these processes since the occupation of the region by the People's Liberation Army.

We would like to introduce the following set of questions: What could we gain by linking our analysis of the interplay between different groups and interests to notions of place and sovereignty? How do different solidarities between groups (such as between Han Chinese and Hui people, or between Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz or Uzbek people), emerge and affect the colonial policies implemented in the region? What can be said of the experiences of PRC colonialism of non-Turkic groups who rarely appear in the academic literature, and how are these experiences relevant to understanding the ongoing State colonising project? What roles do land theft and the mass incarceration campaign play in this project? How does an understanding of settler colonialism complement and nuance the argument that genocide is occurring in the region? How do policies in the Uyghur region fit into broader domestic political processes, such as the strengthening of the party-state rule in the Xi era? What insights can we gain from comparing developments in the Uyghur region to situations unfolding in other parts of the globe, and how could these be related? How does this help us address events in the Uyghur region as part of interconnected outcomes of global capitalism?

Understanding the Uyghur region through the lens of colonialism brings to the fore interesting questions for scholars in Uyghur studies, specifically for scholars who live and work in countries and institutions infused to varying degrees with imperial and colonial attitudes, as much in Europe as in the Anglo-settler countries of the United States of America, Canada and Australia. While researchers have increasingly centred local perspectives in their analyses and narratives, one of the questions we need to be asking ourselves is which 'insider' perspective have we been adopting, how, why, and what the consequences of this are. This conference seeks to encourage reflection on how the interplay of imperial and colonial presuppositions informs our understanding of the Uyghur region. Moreover, we call for such discussions to include a critical approach to the positionality of scholars working on these issues, and their embeddedness in dominant cultures and institutions. Decolonising Uyghur

studies further asks for reflection on the place of local researchers in this field, as well as on the power, or lack thereof, that these scholars have to define research methods, subjects of enquiry and framing, both within and outside the PRC from the 1950s to the present day.

Finally, engagement with the field of Native and Indigenous studies, specifically concerning sovereignty, importance of land, extractivism, labour exploitation, and for its work deconstructing settler colonial framings, is another important avenue we encourage scholars in Uyghur studies to explore.

Through these perspectives, we hope to propose a platform of collective reflection on the current debates that intersect the ever-increasing and widening field of Uyghur studies.

People interested in participating to this two-day conference should send their CV and a 500-word abstract of their communication before Friday 21 of April 2023. Participants will be notified if their paper has been accepted or not by Sunday 7 of May at the latest. Please address your correspondence to the organising team at uyghur.studies@uyghur-institute.org. In considering funding the participants' expenses, the organizing committee will prioritize scholars and colleagues without affiliation, project budget, and similar funding channels.