

Beyond Oil and Radical Islam: From Classifications to Links of Economy and Religion in Central Asia

Tuesday, November 1st, 2011, 5 pm

What Counts as Religion in Kyrgyz Social Life?

Lecture by Nathan Light

Kyrgyz religious practices have been extensively researched in recent decades. In this presentation I draw upon my own ethnographic work in northwestern Kyrgyzstan to examine the spiritual dimensions of sociality and social rituals. I suggest that social ideologies are an integral part of Kyrgyz spirituality and that understanding social events demands following interacting processes of social and spiritual exchange. The broad spectrum of Kyrgyz sacralizing practices are important to ideologies and moralities of social engagement within communal events, but this includes ways of showing respect, presenting good speech, and making material gifts. Such practices are performances with social effects. Normative understandings of Islam and the desire to label practices as either Islamic and non-Islamic still impede the understanding of spirituality in social terms. Rather than simply adding a voice to debates about labels, I hope to make some suggestive comments about the local ways of integrating religion and sociality.

Nathan Light is an anthropologist and folklorist doing historical and contemporary cultural analysis in Central Asia. He has published numerous analyses of Central Asian written materials and their relations to social practices, including the book *Intimate Heritage: Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang*. He is currently a Senior Research Fellow in the project group Economy and Ritual in the Department of Post-Social at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.

This lecture series is a cooperation between the Zentrum Moderner Orient (www.zmo.de), the Querschnittsbereich Islam in den Gesellschaften Asiens und Afrikas, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (iaaw.hu-berlin.de/islam) and the Competence Network Crossroads Asia (www.crossroads-asia.de).

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung