Dealing with Socio-Genetic Marginalization in Asia

D uring our ICAS meeting we explored the ways in which govern- ment/state policies affect the fate of the socio-genetically marginal, and the role that researchers play in the process of developing and applying the fruits of genomics. According to TSAI Dujian (National Yang Ming University, Tai- wan), consensus building can have a mediating role in Taiwanese genomic policy. So-called ‘organic intellectuals’ (Gramsci) ought to play a role in this one-dimensional logic of techni- cal progress by developing narratives and group ethics at various levels of soci- ety, especially among the socio-ge- netically marginal. Mediation of new social and ethical views, argues Tsai, might be possible if researchers can speak to the voice of the socio- genetically marginal, and articulate the needs of those populations for socio- economic improvement for the weak.

Margarit Sleeboom discussed this issue regarding genetic sampling in Mainland China. The ICAS panel, in a comparison of political and socio-eco- nomic interest groups involved in pub- lic discussion on genetic sampling and the definition of targeted groups, both states showed that their different cultural and political composition leads to different research regulation and practices. In China, the practice is based on the clearly distinguishable ways in which scientists in these two states define their research population, collect their samples, and conduct their research. Thus, different political and cultural views on the ‘ethnic’ nature of the Chinese and Taiwanese populations may explain the difference in the way genetic research is managed. Ni’s research in the People’s Republic of China shows that the concept of ‘marginalized group’ is not a fixed entity, but rather identifies the people in different life levels in the Chinese society. Furthermore, the social and cultural background of the research, such as the universality or particularity of the research goals, the political environment, and the economic situation, also affect the research process. In order to understand and solve the socio- genetic problems in China, a closer look at the political and social context is needed. The research results from the other side of the Pacific Ocean may not be directly applicable to the situation in China.

 foolish to debate that new genetic technologies will become very useful in the prediction of disease and diagnoses. Nonetheless, the health and position of some social groups and individuals may be adversely affected when genetic information is applied in any social context of socio-genetic marginalization. The question of who is responsible for relating the social to the (genetic) gene make-up of people and brings out its consequences. Certain groups and individuals may find themselves isolated as a consequence of discrimination on the basis of genetic information, and suffer the psychological burden of the knowledge, feelings of social inaptitude, and a sense of financial uncertainty.

Margaret Sleeboom

Rethinking Geopolitics in Central Eurasia

Geopolitics in Central Eurasia (CEA) is today a more contentious issue than ever. Organized crime, ethno-religious conflict, environmental degradation, civil wars, and border disputes reflect the region’s instability. At the same time, Central Eurasia has huge energy and gas resources – the production and export of which is crucial to the region’s economic and political development. The following key questions were addressed at the ICAS panel: (1) How should we conceptualize geopolitics as an approach to studying international relations in the post-Cold War period? (2) What is the nature of geopolitics as practiced by both state and non-state actors in the region? (3) What are the possibilities for and impediments to political stability and sustainable economic development in the countries of Central Eurasia?

By Margaret Sleeboom

The need to apply neo-geopolitics to CEA stems from the radically changed distribution of control over ter- ritory and resources on the Eurasian landmass. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of newly inde- pendent states out of former Soviet ter- ritory has unleashed a contest among state and non-state actors to penetrate states and societies in this part of the world. Faced with grave economic, financial, social, and political chal- lenges, the internal sovereignty of the region’s eight newly independent states remain weak while their societies remain marginalized, lacking the capacity to benefit from ongoing processes of globalization. As a result, a “fourth world” of impoverished peo- ple is now living in incompletely formed states, characterized by con- tested identities and uncertain loyalties. Traditional geopolitics studies the international order by making a spatial map of the earth’s productive resources and of the territorial actors that com- pete for control over resource-bearing locations. This approach to studying inter-state relations had its heyday at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, with Alfred T. Mahan and Halford J. Mackinder as its main proponents. A new approach, neo-geopolitics, aims to synthesize traditional geopolitics and geo-economic analyses. It looks not only at states but also at a variety of actors that operate across borders: national and transnational govern- mental and non-governmental institu- tions, organizations, firms, armed forces, terrorist groups, peace move- ments, human rights activists, and environmental organizations. The neo- geopolitics approach should help us to better understand the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape of the region. Its geo-economic position and resource wealth is turning CEA into an arena where the major powers wrestle for control.

Regional state actors (Russia, Iran, Turkey, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan) meet the challenge of instability on all fronts as well as NGOs and radical-fundamen- tal Islamic and criminal groups operat- ing across borders. This mixture of actors and forces, and the regional society, suggests that today’s Great Game for the influ- ence and control of the region’s peoples and resources cannot be analysed through concepts invented during the nineteenth cen- tury, when the region was dominated by the British and Russian Empires. In her paper, Shirin Akiner (School of Oriental and African Studies) focused on the impact of the Soviet collapse on the level of social structure. She found that the relatively well-educated populations of the region are impoverished and have no hope to cope with deteriorating health care sys- tems. She argued that the states of CEA have low levels of both political aware- ness and capacity to respond. The Chinese and Russian populations are among the geo-economic assets of the region. Akiner observed that regional cooperation can be a step towards integrating CEA into the world economy. Henk Houweling (University of Amster- dam) argued that the post-Cold War interregnum was brought to an end with the 11 September attacks. In the post-Cold War period, American foreign policy now has to take into account its geopolitical implications from the nineteenth cen- tury, casting itself in the role of world redeemer. This self-concept fits in well with the notions of state and non-state actors in Central Eurasia, Households, enterprises, and state organization have adapted their inter- nal organization to uninterrupted access to fossil energy. The gradual exhaustion of domestic supply requires power projection beyond the borders of the US. Houweling, however, rejects the hypothesis that domestic energy needs are the direct cause of America’s military power projection into the oil- rich regions of western Asia and CEA. He argues that the creation of trade, investment, and transportation links between the industrial cores of Western Europe, Russia, and Northeast Asia is key to the development of a Western variant of the Islamic World. Houweling drew an integrated regional model to energy-rich western Eurasia and CEA and argued that the potential of the region might give America of its naval control over food and energy supplies to potential chal- lengers in Western Europe, Northeast Asia, and China. Eva Rakhel (Humboldt University Berlin and University of Amsterdam) discussed the major obstacles for Iran-

GDP growth in China and the US has slowed, oil prices have risen, and US military might has decreased. Houweling, therefore, argues for a more positive role in the government’s contraceptive policy, which often occupies weak socio-economic positions, but also the scientific outcome of genetic research. The relevance of the attitude of intel- lectuals towards the application of new genetic technologies, such as screening, was seconded by NIE Jing- dan (School of Life Sciences, University of Wales) argued that the post-Cold War interregnum was brought to an end with the 11 September attacks. In the post-Cold War period, American foreign policy now has to take into account geopolitical implications from the nineteenth century, casting itself in the role of world redeemer. This self-concept fits in well with the notions of state and non-state actors in Central Eurasia, Households, enterprises, and state organization have adapted their internal organization to uninterrupted access to fossil energy. The gradual exhaustion of domestic supply requires power projection beyond the borders of the US. Houweling, however, rejects the hypothesis that domestic energy needs are the direct cause of America’s military power projection into the oil-rich regions of western Asia and CEA. He argues that the creation of trade, investment, and transportation links between the industrial cores of Western Europe, Russia, and Northeast Asia is key to the development of a Western variant of the Islamic World. Houweling drew an integrated regional model to energy-rich western Eurasia and CEA and argued that the potential of the region might give America of its naval control over food and energy supplies to potential chal- lengers in Western Europe, Northeast Asia, and China. Eva Rakhel (Humboldt University Berlin and University of Amsterdam) discussed the major obstacles for Iran-