Editorial

Central Asia

Unlike previous issues, the focus of this issue is not on a theme but on a geographical area. The reasoning behind this choice of topic is that since we are an anthropology journal, with culture being our primary concern, we aim to study the cultures of peoples regardless of political boundaries. Iran and Turkey have their own distinct histories and traditions, yet they share similarities and unity in culture, making it imperative for us to consider Central Asia. Although this special issue is dedicated to the region, topical articles about Central Asia will always be welcomed for future issues.

The present collection of articles poses a number of salient points: Is there a universal science of human being, society and culture? Is there more than one methodology of research for such a study? What was the difference between Soviet social science and Western social science and methodology? Did the Soviets simply avoid topics related to religion? What about the political framework within which all human studies took place? How did these affect methodology? Perhaps this is a good opportunity for Central Asian scholars to reconsider what they call Soviet methodology and to assess whether there existed a colonialist research policy towards Central Asia. These are matters that merit quite a bit of discussion and should be pursued in later issues as well.

Western researchers have been self-questioning on the politics of anthropology, its place and the use that has been made of it politically. Central Asia makes them reflect in another way upon their own anthropological enterprise: Has it been value-free and beyond politics?

An attempt has been made by the contributors to this volume to bridge certain gaps, reflecting the present-day endeavour to merge the merits of both Western and Soviet scholarship within the field of anthropology. The challenges, which are enormous, begin with mastering a number of languages in which the literature of both schools has been written, as well as the languages in which historical texts were written. Then there is the problem of scientific studies and research. In anthropology, a researcher is expected to conduct

research outside his or her cultural area. In this region, many anthropologists are working only within their own circumscribed areas.

We all know that such expertise is not easily gained. It requires long periods of fieldwork and naturally demands great intellectual commitment and economic support. Our goal, within the limits of this journal, is to have made a contribution by publishing the results of this research, which will hopefully spur further interest in this tremendously rich area before it is lost in the oblivion of time. Attention will be paid to certain Western theories, such as that of 'national character', which might seem out of fashion but appear to be promising in setting a framework for certain research. Oral history, particularly poetry, might offer a rich source of information. The theoretical apparatus for this type of research might be enhanced and elaborated, should this become a more established area of study.

Joint scientific projects will play a major role in bringing about well thought-out research projects and methodologies which would fit the different circumstances that exist. It would be the anthropologists' task to find their way through the mass of new theories and research methods, drawing on their own experiences to formulate their framework and their most pertinent methodology for work. At a later point in time we would then see if anthropology could have one methodology worldwide. Its merits could be open to question, given the variety of life experiences that exist.

– *Aftandil Erkinov and Soheila Shahshahani, co-editors*