

**Tohoku University**  
**Center for Northeast Asian Studies**  
**Announcement of Anthropology Seminars**

We cordially invite you to the upcoming presentations of work in progress by our research fellows specializing in the study of Tyvan nomadic pastoralists and shamans respectively.

The venue will be: 430 Room, Center for Northeast Asian Studies (Kawakita godoto), Tohoku University (<http://www2.cneas.tohoku.ac.jp/english/access.html>). The lectures will be held in a hybrid format (including online streaming).

Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86983826648?pwd=Vs8brtc6ImuG0aUTFOriXMg5nNEGRy.1>

Meeting ID: 869 8382 6648

Passcord: 372328

**1<sup>st</sup> Lecture**, 22 October, 5pm-6pm

Konstantinos Zorbas (Visiting research fellow, Tohoku University; Associate Professor, Shandong University)

“Spirits and Spiritual Governmentality: Unraveling the State’s Shamanic Extensions in Northeast Asia”.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lecture**, 29 October, 5pm-6pm

Victoria Soyan Peemot (Tohoku University/University of Helsinki)

“Photographic Homecoming: Relationships and Senses Beyond the Camera Lens”.

Please address your questions to

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## Abstract and Bio

1<sup>st</sup> Lecture, 22 October, 5pm-6pm

Konstantinos Zorbas (Visiting research fellow, Tohoku University; Associate Professor, Shandong University)

“Spirits and Spiritual Governmentality: Unraveling the State’s Shamanic Extensions in Northeast Asia”.

### Abstract:

In this presentation, I will discuss revivalist religious practices associated with recently evolving contexts of state authority and illegitimacy. Drawing on a shamanic realm of “dark” rituals (allegedly) practiced for political elites in Tyva, Russia, I offer an unsettling picture of religious phenomena, related to the propagation of magic and occult threats, which diverges from (traditional) Tyvan ancestor cults and nature worship. The data will reveal how political and shamanic actors propagate a worship of “magical parasitism”, involving the extraction or recycling of “soul parts” (as vital constituents of Tyvan persons).

I will engage Ipppei Shimamura’s analysis of the Mongol Buryats’ shamanism as a “border-crossing” operation (The Root Seekers 2014), and argue that the extractive spiritual economies of shamans in Tyva (and, broadly, in Siberia) duplicate and extend the Russian state’s neo-colonial apparatus. As I further propose, the multiplication of state power through various “shamanic forms”, which currently develop in its (Russian) frontiers, bears an analogy with regimes of heightened militarization observed in post-colonial contexts. My discussion of religion and the state will turn to Northeast China, where we shall consider how an individual bearer of shamanic ancestry develops a sphere of (ethnic) self-determination through visiting museums and reviving the “unperformed rituals” of the past in contemporary Manchuria (Jilin Province).

### Bio:

Konstantinos Zorbas (PhD Cambridge, M.Litt, St. Andrews) is an anthropologist researching indigenous shamanism. His monograph (*Shamanic Dialogues with the Invisible Dark in Tuva, Siberia*, 2021) draws on a field study of healing practices by shamanic revivalists in Kyzyl, South Siberia. His current project involves fieldwork on ethnic Manchu museums in Jilin, Northeast China.



Painting of a Manchurian shamaness dancing next to a tiger,  
Museum of Yitong Manchu Autonomous County.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lecture**, 29 October, 5pm-6pm

Victoria Soyan Peemot (Tohoku University/University of Helsinki)

“Photographic Homecoming: Relationships and Senses Beyond the Camera Lens”.

**Abstract:**

This study examines the knowledge-producing capacities of historic photographs and photographs of museum objects when bringing them to the landscapes and communities of their origin. Agreeing with Frazer (2021: 285) that “there is never a case of ‘pure’ visual or photo-return” and, instead, there are always

“after-lives”, I discuss how the placing of photographs (Edwards 2012) in the context of related landscapes and communities leads to collaborative knowledge-producing. Initially attempting to engage in the act of “visual return” of the photographs and objects, during ethnographic fieldwork, I was soon overwhelmed by their astonishing ability to simultaneously become interwoven in and unfold the relationships. Employing my positionality as the native to (some) of these landscapes and communities, I approach this photographic homecoming and knowledge-producing process through Indigenous onto-epistemological relationality.

Bio:

Dr. Victoria Soyan Peemot is a JSPS visiting researcher at the CNEAS, Tohoku University. She is a cultural anthropologist who specialises in ethnography of mobile pastoralism in the cross-border Altai and Saian Mountainous region of Inner Asia. Victoria’s research interests include Indigenous research epistemologies, more-than-human sociality, museum anthropology, and sustainability science. In her recently published monograph “The Horse in My Blood: Multispecies Kinship in the Altai and Saian Mountains”, Victoria explores how the Tyva pastoralists, their horses and homelands experience injustices and develop resilience strategies as more-than-human unions. She has co-filmed and co-produced the two-part ethnographic film series which investigates the relationship between the landscapes, humans and the voice.



The photograph of the same peak in the Altai Mountains, western Mongolia, captured 115 years apart, reveals the impact of the climate change. On the photograph by the Finnish geographer Johannes Granö (1997: 15), taken in July 1909, the snow cover is larger, and the river is full. In the photograph, taken by the author in August 2024, the snow cap is barely visible, and the river is visually shallower. The local pastoralists observed that the disappearance of the snow cover on the mountains results in the poor quality of the pasturelands and draught and rises concerns about the clean water source.