

Twenty Years of Eurasia

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I joined the Max Planck Society in June 1999 and spent the latter months of that year recruiting researchers for our first projects on property relations. Much has been accomplished in the last two decades. In response to the Advisory Board's request for information concerning the career patterns of our alumni, we have trawled back to the beginnings. The first Table below provides a comprehensive listing of our initiatives. Included in the figures are all researchers recruited with an initial appointment of two years or more and who went on to spend at least one year with us. The responsibility for each of these groups lay with me, except where indicated. The numbers in parentheses refer to associated projects (this is a flexible category, generally designating scholars with whom we cooperated more or less closely, often helping with research costs, but who were not formally recruited and remunerated as core members of a research group in Halle). Further information about all these initiatives is available at the homepage.

Group/School/Network	(Senior) Research Fellows	Doctoral Students
Property Relations (2000–2005)	13 (+2)	4 (+1)
Religion and Civil Society (2003–2006)	4 (+3)	5 (+2)
Religion and Morality (2006–2009)	8 (+2)	4
Kinship & Social Support in China and Vietnam (2006–2016)	10 (+2)	5 (+1)
Caucasian Boundaries and Citi- zenship from Below (MINERVA) <i>Lale Yalçın-Heckmann</i> (2004–2009)	1 (+1)	2 (+1)
Political, Economic and Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Poland and Bulgaria (Volkswagen Foun- dation project of Deema Kaneff and Frances Pine, 2003–2006)	2	2
The Catholic Church and Religi- ous Pluralism in Lithuania and Poland (Volkswagen Foundation project of Ingo Schroeder and Kinga Sekerdej, 2007–2010)	2	2

The Global Political Economy of Cultural Heritage <i>Christoph Brumann</i> (2011–2016)	0	2
Traders, Markets, and the State in Vietnam (MINERVA) <i>Kirsten Endres</i> (2011–2016)	1 (+1)	2
Historical Anthropology <i>Dittmar Schorkowitz and Mikolaj Szoltysek</i> (2009–2017)	2 (+2)	2
Economy and Ritual (with <i>Stephen Gudeman</i> , 2009–2012)	6	0
Industry and Inequality in Eurasia (with <i>Catherine Alexander and Jonathan Parry</i> , 2012–2015)	6 (+2)	0
International Max Planck Research School for the Anthropology, Archaeology and History of Eurasia (ANARCHIE) (2012–)	0	45
Realising Eurasia: Civilisation and Moral Economy in the 21 st Century (ERC Advanced Grant, 2014–2020)	4 (+1)	8
Financialization (with <i>Don Kalb</i> , 2015–2019)	6	0
Buddhist Temple Economies in Urban Asia <i>Christoph Brumann</i> (2014–2020)	2	2
Electric Statemaking in the Greater Mekong Subregion <i>Kirsten Endres</i> (2017–)	1	2
Max Planck – Cambridge Centre for Ethics, Economy and Social Change (MAX-CAM) (2017–)	2	0
Visegrád Anthropologists' Network (2017–)	7	2 (+ 14)
Total:	77¹ (+ 15)	89 (+ 19)

Table 1. Departmental overview, 1999–2019

With very few exceptions, all individual projects have been localized in Asia or Europe. The concept of Eurasia emphasizes long-term commonalities across the

¹ This is the arithmetical total of positions in this category. Several postdoctoral researchers have been re-employed to work on new projects. If the director and group leaders are added, together with non-remunerated co-leaders of the groups in economic anthropology, the total number of senior researchers over two decades would be 80.

landmass. It is intended to alert anthropologists to the dangers of Eurocentric distortion and is not to be seen as a parochial denial of globalization or lack of interest in wider comparisons. This perspective (derived from the late Jack Goody) has become even more timely with the growth of Chinese power in the last two decades.²

Table 1 shows how the balance of postdoctoral and doctoral researchers has varied between sub-groupings. Our successive groups in economic anthropology have recruited only postdocs, as has the recent MAX-CAM collaboration. The International Max Planck Research School ANARCHIE welcomes PhD students exclusively, only one third of whom are anthropologists. The thirty students recruited in archaeology and history do not participate regularly in our seminars. If these are subtracted from the total, it can be seen that our intellectual community has consistently been biased towards postdocs. This is certainly true for the department's core budget; the recent rise in the number of doctoral students is attributable not only to ANARCHIE but also to the *Realising Eurasia* project, which is funded by the European Research Council.

Positions in all of these groupings and networks were invariably advertised and filled through a competitive process, usually culminating in a formal interview in Halle. We seldom had difficulty in attracting strong fields of applicants, in most cases very international. The proportion of researchers working in their home countries (and/or) languages has increased slightly over the years, though most dissertations defended in anthropology are still predicated on the traditional model of immersion into an unfamiliar society.

ANARCHIE has recruited four cohorts, each with a distinct thematic designation in order to facilitate focused interdisciplinary conversations. Some members of this school were simultaneously integrated into another sub-group led by the main supervisor. In numerous other initiatives we have sought to assemble regional sub-groups. For example, the successive groups that investigated postsocialist religion (2003–2010) had regional foci in Central Asia, East-Central Europe, East Asia, Eastern Germany and Russia (in addition to distinct thematic foci). We have on occasion turned down applicants who, although individually excellent, would have been difficult to integrate into the group. In our view the synergies of teamwork, often augmented through cooperation with associates, justify this policy. Most sub-groups have intensive interaction outside the department's weekly seminar.

The Advisory Board has recommended that data be provided concerning submission rates (for doctoral students), and also "post-MPI destinations and career trajectories" for all staff. For this to be done in a rigorous way it would be necessary to specify the time frames. The department's largest intake of doctoral students in

² I have developed the concept of Eurasia in numerous papers. I proposed it as the long-term designation of the department in 2005 (see the report for the years 2004–2005, pp. 194–206). Regrettably, though approved by the Advisory Board, this could not be implemented. I was later informed by an authoritative figure that this might have been the first time in the history of the Max Planck Society that a director was impeded by his colleagues from naming his department as he wished. The present name has been in use since 2011.

anthropology was in 2011–2012, when a total of twelve were recruited (including four who participated in the first cohort of ANARCHIE). They were distributed among five supervisors. By the end of 2019 all twelve had defended their dissertations, five had published monographs, and two more books were scheduled for publication in 2020. The funding for doctoral theses has become steadily more generous in the last decade. Members of the fourth (and last) cohort of ANARCHIE have received contracts of employment extending over a full four years (subject to satisfactory progress). With earlier cohorts, including that of 2011–2012, the norm was still three (though we were usually able to offer short extensions). When we started twenty years ago, students typically received a three-year scholarship that did not enable recourse to social security entitlements when they expired. Whether these changes have improved submission rates (or indeed the quality of the final product) is open to debate.

By the end of 2019, forty-nine dissertations had been successfully defended (including nineteen by members of ANARCHIE, eight of them anthropologists). Among those admitted in 2012 or earlier, numbering forty-two students in all, seven have not completed their dissertations.³ Of those admitted in 2014 and 2015, many have already defended successfully. The rest, together with the final ANARCHIE cohort of 2017, are still working on the data they have collected. We anticipate a spate of defences in 2020–2021. The great majority of dissertations have been presented to the Faculty of Philosophy (1) at the Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg. However, several defences have taken place at the University of Leipzig, and in ANARCHIE we have looked sympathetically on well-grounded requests for cotuelle arrangements and even transfer to another institution.

Tables 2 and 3 present basic data concerning the background and destinations of both doctoral students and postdocs. Table 3 indicates where individuals found themselves on 31st December 2019 (to the best of our knowledge). In these tables no account is taken of associated projects. Our alumni are mostly based in Asia and Europe, but they are also to be found on every other continent. Many have found posts in their country of origin, but a similar number have moved elsewhere. The latter include tenured professors in London and Paris, but also Budapest and Bogotá. In Table 2 we have opted to specify the region in which an individual received the most significant components of his/her education, rather than state of origin or nationality. Numerous postdoctoral researchers who originate in eastern Europe or Asia have been assigned to the west if this is where they obtained their doctor-

³ If 2012 is taken as a cut-off point, the long-term completion rate for anthropologists is just under ninety per cent. Three members of the first cohort of ANARCHIE withdrew to pursue careers outside the academy but none of these students was an anthropologist. Medical conditions have played a decisive role in several cases. The greatest misfortune in the history of the department occurred in March 2008 when Irene Hilgers passed away during a follow-up visit to the country where she had undertaken pioneering fieldwork. Her dissertation was close enough to completion for us to be able to publish it posthumously: *Why Do Uzbeks have to be Muslims? Exploring religiosity in the Fergana Valley* (LIT Verlag, 2009).

ates. Many individual biographies confound these categories, some of which are inherently fuzzy. For example, we have recruited numerous researchers from the Central European University, but this is hardly a typical East European institution. The main language of communication in the department has always been English (at no point have we had more than a handful of native Germans on the staff, though we have usually had at least one or two projects involving fieldwork in Germany). Those now classified as retired include several who continued a very active career in research and teaching after leaving the MPI, and who remain active in retirement.

	(Senior) Research Fellows	Doctoral Students
Western Europe	47	49
Eastern Europe	9	23
North America	17	2
Other	4	15

Table 2. Primary educational background of members and alumni

	(Senior) Research Fellows	Doctoral Students
Currently a member of the department	14	31
Employed outside the department		
Mainstream academic	46	28
Academic related	2	9
Non-academic	3	9
Other ⁴	6	10
In prison/re-education camp⁵		1
Retired	6	
Deceased		1

Table 3. Members and alumni at 31st December 2019

⁴ This residual category includes those seeking positions (of whatever kind), some of whom may be registered as unemployed; some may have part-time, precarious jobs (e.g. as visiting professors), or be receiving maternity entitlements, etc.

⁵ This refers to an alumnus whose university career in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China has been interrupted by the ongoing repression of Uyghur scholars. Several of our closest research partners have met the same fate; it is impossible to contact them.