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Fieldwork Meets Crisis

The Inevitability of Topic Change and Resilience Response of Research Crisis



Efendi restaurant and Christmas tree, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Photo by Yang Zhao, PhD candidate of University of Queensland, Australia.

The unexpected epidemic swept the world at the beginning of the year and directly interrupted my research plan. After waiting for several months, I finally decided to choose my plan B in September and change my research topic from “Youth Studies in Contemporary Uzbekistan – The case of Tashkent” to the current topic “The Case of Uzbeks in Contemporary Germany–Mobility, Bond, and Networks (Tentative topic)”.

Such a change was struggling and it is also a process of continuous modification. Before the outbreak of (new) coronavirus, I had done a relatively detailed field

design, contacted the receiving university and language school in Tashkent, and started to learn Uzbek, as well as preparing for an international academic conference in Tashkent in June. However, the sudden epidemic has wiped out many previous preparations, and the possibility to the field seems inaccessible. Secondly, choosing a new topic is a difficult adjustment process. There are very limited Uzbeks in Switzerland, and personally speaking, I don't want to completely change to a research that has nothing to do with Uzbekistan. It seems natural to transit the research horizon to the subject of immigration in Europe, since "*immigration is a broad process of development, and an intrinsic part of globalization and social transformation*"(Stephen Castles 2014:26). Afterwards, I also spent much time on how to choose the receiving country for Uzbek immigrants in Europe. Third, after I decided to do research on Uzbek immigration in Germany, I started a new round of preparations: reading relevant documents on European immigrants, strengthening German learning, contacting Uzbek immigrants in Germany, communicating with potential informants in advance via social network Apps(e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp), writing proposals, designing questionnaire, etc., and initially plan to conduct the first fieldtrip to Germany for 1-2 months from mid-November. One of my research questions about the bond is "how do the Uzbek immigrants in Germany interact (two-way) with their the community of home country from economic and social dimensions (such as remittances)", which also indeed lies on the field opportunities. When I learned of the good news that the Uzbekistan border was reopened to tourists on October 1, I became somehow optimistic about the field feasibility.

In the new proposal, I try to divide the fieldwork into two main parts, Germany for the first 6 months, and Uzbekistan for the next 5 months. This arrangement is also out of considerations of the requirements of research and the realistic factor of Epidemic development. First of all, immigration research is a relatively hot topic in European social science research. There are abundant relevant models and documents that can be used for reference, which is beneficial for me to quickly understand the current status of Uzbekistan immigration in the German context.

Simultaneously, "*the adoption of the EU's new and expanded Strategy on Central Asia in 2019 provides…an opportune moment to evaluate emerging policy issues related to migration and mobility given their increasing relevance for both the EU and Central Asian states*" (Yan Matusevich 2019:2). Although Uzbek immigrants in Germany are mainly educational immigrants, there is no lack of new flow trends, such as the mobility of immigrants to more developed regions (the flow of destinations from Russia to Germany as an example). Related case studies deserve to be observed. So I raise a question of what's the local integration of Uzbeks and the self-identity formation process due to the status quo of language difference(Russian speaking vs Uzbek speaking) in Germany?

As far as I am concerned, respond to the impact of the epidemic drives and motivates me the resilience response of the research crisis. The most significant for me is a reflection of traditional anthropological fieldwork research methods. The digitalization and learning of data collection and analysis methods are all further updating the traditional anthropological research paradigm. It has spawned active thinking and discussion meantime on how to conduct anthropological research in the digital/terminal age.

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References

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Yan Matusevich, 2019. *The EU Central Asia Strategy and Its Impact on Migration.* This publication was produced in the framework of the "Prague Process: Dialogue, Analyses and Training in Action" initiative, a component of the Mobility Partnership Facility II project, with the assistance of the European Union.