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## Mongol Commonwealth?

### Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space

STEPHEN KOTKIN

Suddenly, “Eurasia” is everywhere. Just a few short decades ago, even at the University of Washington—which back then stood out starkly for its atypical efforts to integrate the histories of Slavs and of Asia—the term “Eurasia” was hardly heard.<sup>1</sup> Today, we have the Eurasia Group ([www.eurasiagroup.net](http://www.eurasiagroup.net)), a money-making consultancy in New York, and the Eurasia Foundation ([www.eurasia.org](http://www.eurasia.org)), a money-awarding agency in Washington, with branch offices in Moscow, Kiev, Tblisi, Almaty, and elsewhere, funded mostly by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In academia, the old Soviet Studies centers are now called “Eurasia”: Columbia (Harriman Institute: Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies), Harvard (Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies), Berkeley (Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies), Stanford (Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies), Illinois Champaign-Urbana (Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center), Toronto (Centre for European, Russian,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Allsen (who studied there), personal communication.

and Eurasian Studies), and on and on.<sup>2</sup> The “Central Committee” apparat on Old Square is now the “Presidential” apparat on Old Square. Of course, along with nameplates, substance can change, too. But maybe, as Karl Kraus quipped of psychoanalysis, Eurasia is the disease masquerading as the cure?

A confession: I’m a perpetrator. In 2005, Princeton University’s Russian Studies Program became Russian and Eurasian Studies, after a process in which some faculty objected that the addition of Eurasia would dilute the “Russia.” Indeed, not everyone is going “Eurasia.” Miami University of Ohio still has its Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies (which, however, organized a 2006 conference on “Performance in Eurasia”). More pointedly, consider the joint Kennan Institute–University of Washington 2004 symposium on the future of “Russian Studies.”<sup>3</sup> The well-intentioned organizers at U. Washington—whose own program is now called “Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies”—informed me that “handling Russia is challenge enough.” And look at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS)—no “Eurasia” added to that long-standing name (after considerable discussion and the inability to find consensus on a new designation).

The 1990s membership drop off in the AAASS has been paralleled by the upsurge in membership in a new Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS), which has ballooned to more than a 1,000 members and in 2006 held its seventh annual meeting. CESS “define[s] the Central Eurasian region to include Turkic, Mongolian, Iranian, Caucasian, Tibetan, and other peoples. Geographically, Central Eurasia extends from the Black Sea region, the Crimea, and the Caucasus in the west, through the Middle Volga region, Central Asia, and Afghanistan, and on to Siberia, Mongolia, and Tibet in the east.”<sup>4</sup> CESS does not mention Russia. Indiana University’s Department

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<sup>2</sup> St. Antony’s College at Oxford has a Russian and Eurasian Centre, while the Business School at Cambridge University has a Eurasia Centre. But the names are unchanged of the programs at the University of London (SSEES: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, dating to 1915) and at Birmingham University (CREES: Centre for Russian and East European Studies, dating to 1963). The larger U.K. community still convenes as the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies. In Sweden after 1991, the Department of Soviet and East European Studies at Uppsala University (which dates from the late 1960s) first became the Department of East European Studies, and then with European Union (EU) accession the Department of Eurasian Studies, which encompasses (the website notes) Central Asia and China, too.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen E. Hanson and Blair Ruble, “Indispensable Knowledge: Rebuilding Russian Studies for the 21st Century,” Findings from the Russian Studies Symposium: Opening Doors in the Decades Ahead (2004), at [www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/indispensableknowledge.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/indispensableknowledge.pdf). One big problem with Soviet Studies, of course, was reduction of the entire entity to Russia (not to say, to Moscow).

<sup>4</sup> See [cess.fas.harvard.edu/CESS\\_Conference.html](http://cess.fas.harvard.edu/CESS_Conference.html). Since 2003, the University of Utah has held an annual conference on the Middle East and Central Asia Politics, Economics, and

of Central Eurasia Studies—formerly Uralic-Altaic—deems Central Eurasia “the home of some of the world’s greatest art, epic literature, and empires,” from “the vast heartland of Europe and Asia extending from Central Europe to East Asia and from Siberia to the Himalayas.” Indiana, too, omits explicit mention of Russia or the Soviet Union as well as of China or East Asia.

So, there are at least a few holdouts sticking to Russia (or Slavs), and some invoking an expansive yet seemingly self-contained *Central* Eurasia that conspicuously does not mention Russia.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the seemingly innocuous character of the term “Eurasia”—the choice “to Eurasia” or “not to Eurasia”—is not so innocent?<sup>6</sup>

Consider the peer-reviewed journals. The American *Kritika*, founded (or re-established) in 2000, subtitled itself “Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History.” (A second confession: the *Kritika* editors substituted “Eurasian,” instead of “European,” largely at my insistence.) *Kritika* admirably pays close attention to Russian-, German-, and French-language scholarship, but its team of editors has been able to invoke “Eurasia” and mean little by it, other than a vague appeal to “empire, borderlands, and non-Russians.”<sup>7</sup> But then, again, their Anglophone journal is not based *in* what they are calling Eurasia. By contrast, consider the journal *Ab Imperio*, begun the same year as *Kritika*, but in Kazan. *Ab Imperio*, now subtitled “Studies of the New

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Society. In 2006, the Utah-based chair of the organizing committee was a visiting professor from Ankara Technical University. See [www.utah.edu/meca](http://www.utah.edu/meca).

<sup>5</sup> The Social Science Research Council has a program for “Eurasia” that covers Russia without mentioning the latter name. There is also a Russia-less (in the name) National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER) that sponsors research on Russia.

<sup>6</sup> The old “Japan-Soviet Society,” an advocacy group, became the “Japan-Eurasia Society,” whose members sometimes pursue “Silk Road Studies,” but Japan has a strong tradition of tying its ethnogenesis to Inner Asia, based upon myths of race within the Altaic group—which served as a way to undercut both Chinese centrality and European imperialism in Asia. (An “Altaic school” of Chinese Studies also flourished in China during the 1930s, but it was discredited for association with Japanese aggression.) On Japan’s Inner Asia scholarly tradition, which at times has intersected with imperialism and geopolitics, see the *Bibliography of Central Asian Studies in Japan: 1879–March 1987* (Tokyo: Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1988). Today, Japan has an avowedly fascist party, the National Socialist Workers and Welfare Party, which celebrates the wartime link to the Nazis and subscribes to so-called Turanism or “unity” among the “Turanid” race (Japanese, Koreans, Mongols, Turkic peoples, Hungarians, Finns, Estonians, etc.). In South Korea, some analysts imply inclusion of “Tungusic peoples” in the Altaic family on the basis of race to buttress Korean claims to Manchuria, via an “Altaic civilization” (with fanciful linguistic connections). See Si-in Pak, *Alt’ai munhwasa yŏn’gu* (Seoul: T’amgudang, 1973)—i.e., a Study of Altaic Civilization, with English abstract.

<sup>7</sup> Mistakenly, the editors wrote that “Eurasia” is primarily a pursuit of North American academia (“Eurasian Studies?” *Kritika* 1, 2 [2002]: 233–35). Inevitably, the editors have been induced by the subject matter to take their own rubric (Eurasian) more seriously over time, as have I.

Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space,” avoids the term “Eurasia.” How long can the *Ab Imperio* editors continue using the euphemism “post-Soviet”? Do we speak of the “post-Russian empire” space? So, will the journal *Ab Imperio* eventually relinquish “post-Soviet” and succumb to “Eurasia,” precisely because the journal is based in Kazan? Or will *Ab Imperio* continue to resist use of “Eurasia,” precisely because the journal is based in Kazan?<sup>8</sup>

Here’s the point: we have never had an easy time defining our area—Slav, Russia, Soviet, communist—and today we struggle still.<sup>9</sup> But the new favorite omnibus designation, “Eurasia,” rings differently *over there*. Over here, “Eurasia” was supposed to be (or to seem) more ecumenical, as in the U.S. State Department’s early move to a “European and Eurasian” bureau for the former Soviet republics.<sup>10</sup> But in Eurasia itself—that is, in the territories roughly between Germany and Japan—the term “Eurasia” presents problems, both political and practical.<sup>11</sup>

This essay seeks to demonstrate the not always acknowledged problems of the category “Eurasia,” and then, because such challenges cannot readily be surmounted by a different category (alas, “Eurasia” is not easily replaced), to shift discussion to research agendas. Against what might be deemed a collective fixation on identities and nationalisms, this essay advocates for greater

<sup>8</sup> *Ab Imperio*’s editors have inveighed against the Eurasianist-program sympathies of the journal *Vestnik Evrazii*, which was founded in 1995 and is based in Moscow at the Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Studies. Note that *Soviet Studies* (the journal) became *Europe-Asia Studies*—a neat trick, perhaps, but not a name whose content is immediately decipherable except to those already in the know. *Soviet Geography* (founded 1961) became *Post-Soviet Geography* (1991–96), then *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* (1996–2002), and finally *Eurasian Geography and Economics*. *Slavic Review* and *Russian Review* retain their names. The British-based *Central Asian Studies* (which also covers the Caucasus) dates from 1982; the U.S. *Journal of Central Asian Studies* was founded in 1996.

<sup>9</sup> One newly ambiguous point is where to put the Caucasus and Central Asia—in Russian Studies or Middle Eastern Studies? Neither? Often, the Caucasus and Central Asia are subsumed under the heading “Eurasia” when paired with Russia—as in the newly designated U.S. National Security Council Directorate for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasian Affairs.

<sup>10</sup> The State Department later moved the five Central Asian states into the Bureau for South Asian Affairs, which was renamed South and Central Asian (and which includes Afghanistan). “Our goal,” the assistant secretary of state for the region, Richard Boucher, told a Congressional committee hearing on 26 April 2006, “is to revive ancient ties between South and Central Asia and to create new links in the areas of trade, transport, democracy, energy, and communications,” emphasis on energy. Boucher denied U.S. moves were meant to counter Russian and Chinese influence in the region, while stressing Afghanistan’s supposed newfound possibilities as a bridge ([www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav042806.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav042806.shtml)).

<sup>11</sup> For an upbeat view on the emancipation of scholars by the designation “Eurasia,” see Mark von Hagen, “Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasianism as an Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era,” *American Historical Review* 109, 2 (2004): 445–68.

attention to the study of institutions in the past. Insufficient attention to governance and misgovernance historically may be partly responsible for today's apparent unconcern over the problematic category "Eurasia." At the same time, preoccupation in the present with often nonexistent democratization has blunted the work of researchers who *have* been attuned to institutions (a point that is worthy of its own, separate essay). To encompass the often missing dimension of governance historically, a key point of departure is a return to the formative framework of empire.

Already, amid understandable frustration over the disappointments of the nation-state, including the new ones after 1991, greater and greater attention has been bestowed upon empire. Not all this attention has been through rose-colored glasses.<sup>12</sup> But in a return to empire, there is a danger that empire's toxicities and failures could be overlooked or downplayed. Paradoxically, empire's achievements, so to speak, may also be downplayed. The long-standing study of the formation of national polities (often taken in isolation from one another) has generally heightened a sense of difference among places that arose out of a common empire, but new work on empire has also frequently highlighted empire's ability to manage difference. But just as the field of Russian–Eurasian Studies has been overwhelmingly preoccupied with democratic transition and democracy in the present (which mostly does not exist) and with identity in the past (which simply cannot explain today's ongoing authoritarianism), so the field has also allowed the presumption or pursuit of difference to obscure the attainment within empire of commonality (which can survive imperial downfall).

"Empire" here is understood as both formal political entity (polities governed by emperors and called empires) and as often loose association over sprawling territories. Thus tsarist Russia and China qualify as empires (ruled by emperors) and so do Great Britain (even though it was technically a kingdom) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (a multinational union). Definitional exactitude can have its appeal, but historical experience shows that empire is not a fixed category.<sup>13</sup> Specialists on Indonesia have generally

<sup>12</sup> For an important work that has helped lead the way to taking empire seriously again and done so, unusually, with a focus on governance, while showing sympathy for imperial polities that were authoritarian but benefited their subjects and earned some legitimacy, see Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> The controversy over whether the Soviet Union was an empire amounts to something of a distraction. Peter Blitstein rightly observes that in Soviet parlance, officially the "Union" was not an empire. It was also, officially, the freest country in the world. Blitstein further argues that the Soviet Union pursued an impossible combination of fostering a national community and ethnic diversity. But India's state policy has been a possible version of "unity in diversity." India lacks Soviet-style ethnoterritorialism, but no less important, sovereign India is a democracy. In sum, the critical variable may not be whether a state is an "empire" *per se*—often a political assessment, wielded as a cudgel of resistance—but the nature of

been preoccupied with tracing how the archipelago was made into a nation, by which they tend to mean the mechanisms (Islam, steamships, ports, state service) through which systematic exchange relationships formed among the many and varied islands, including under Dutch (and briefly Japanese) imperial masters.<sup>14</sup> Should sovereign Indonesia fall apart, it, too, would likely be regarded as an empire. In that event, though, Indonesia's "shards" would retain much in common. That is the principal theme under consideration in this essay, which takes up networks and the often coercive exchange within and across empires. Such a perspective does not rule out consideration of non-imperial networks and exchange, including those arising from so-called globalization.<sup>15</sup> But the focus here is on an imperial dynamic—a baggily defined empire of institutions and negotiations, dealmakers and market operators, clerics and others on the move (slaves, runaways), within a capacious geographic space where, historically, empire has been almost synonymous with polity.<sup>16</sup>

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rule (Peter A. Blitstein, "Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917–1953," *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 [2006]: 197–219). In a different essay, Blitstein makes a persuasive, contrarian case for the tempered nature of Russification under Stalin: "Nation-Building or Russification? Obligatory Russian Instruction in the Soviet Non-Russian School, 1938–1953," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 253–74.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Robert Cribb, ed., *The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies 1880–1942* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994); and Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). On Indonesia's claims to be "Eurasian," see, among many works, Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). Indonesia's influence on the social sciences has been uncanny, spurring, for better or worse, cultural anthropology (thanks to Clifford Geertz) and constructed nationalism studies (Benedict Anderson). Whereas Geertz's reformulation of ideology as a "cultural system" has generally had scant impact on Soviet and post-Soviet Studies, even allowing for a long lag, Anderson's work soon came to have the impact of a named storm (Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter [London: Glencoe, 1964], 47–76; Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [London: Verso, 1983; 2nd ed. 1991; rev. ed. 2006]). See below.

<sup>15</sup> On the contrast between the globalism of the colonized and the globalization of the colonial empires, see T. N. Harper, "Empire, Diaspora, and the Languages of Globalism, 1850–1914," in *Globalization in World History*, ed. A. G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), 141–66.

<sup>16</sup> For an argument that imperial politics constituted "a system" in which any serious political competitor *had* to think and act like an empire, see Frederick Cooper, "States, Empires, and Political Imagination," *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 153–203. Cooper's deep appreciation of empire evinces no nostalgia, concluding that "the most important fact about empires is that they are gone" (203).



## Demotic Politics—Eurasianism Past and Present

“Eurasia” as a term in German, English, and Russian arose in the late 19th century to denote Europe plus Asia, but in the early 20th century its meaning shifted to something separate from either.<sup>17</sup> In the 1920s, as is well known, a tiny group of inventive intellectuals who were cast abroad by revolution in the Russian empire suddenly announced that the motley geographic and ethnic composition of the dissolved Russian empire had fused Eastern Christianity and steppe influences into a transcendent new synthesis. “Russians and those who belong to the peoples of the ‘Russian world’ are neither Europeans nor Asiatics,” the exiles who had fled westward wrote in their manifesto, *Iskhod k vostoku* (Exodus to the East [1921]). “Merging with the native element of culture and life which surrounds us, we are not ashamed to declare ourselves *Eurasians*.”<sup>18</sup>

Paul Miliukov (1859–1943), who spent his exile in Paris, was ashamed. He could not abide such Eurasianism among some of his fellow émigrés any more than he could abide the dismissal of Russia as Asiatic. Miliukov, a professional historian, founder of Russia’s party of Constitutional Democrats (Kadets), and briefly foreign minister (in the first Provisional Government), was an avowed *European*.<sup>19</sup> For Miliukov, Europe or Eurasia was not a semantic issue: he took the side of Peter the Great, while the Eurasianists took the anti-Westernizer side—and they did so not defensively but offensively. In 1930, after the chief Eurasianism newspaper had folded and the Eurasianists rent themselves in a schism—evidently with secret police help—Miliukov crowed.<sup>20</sup> “Nowadays,” he wrote, “one does not hear much of Eurasianism.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *L'idéologie eurasiste russe, ou Comment penser l'empire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); Stefan Wiederkkehr, “Forging a Concept: ‘Eurasia’ in Classical Eurasianism,” paper presented at the 2007 Annual Soyuz Symposium, Princeton University, April 2007. (For more on “Soyuz”—“Union,” as in Soviet Union—research network for Post-Socialist Studies established in 1993, see [www.abdn.ac.uk/soyuz](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/soyuz).)

<sup>18</sup> *Iskhod k vostoku* (Sofia: Rossiisko-Bolgarsko knigo, 1921), vii.

<sup>19</sup> Miliukov’s views helped inspire the émigré Russian liberalism that was transplanted to American and European universities via such people as Michael Karpovich of Harvard. Karpovich, in turn, taught one of my thesis advisers, Martin Malia, who long insisted on Russia’s European path (Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999]).

<sup>20</sup> Dmitry Shlapentokh examined the archives of the Prague emigration, held in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) (*fond* 5783), to detail the grandiosity, intrigues, and recriminations for “deviation” rampant among Eurasianists, while hinting at the involvement of the Soviet political police in provoking the Eurasianists’ schism (“Eurasianism: Past and Present,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30, 2 [1997]: 129–51).

<sup>21</sup> Paul Miliukov, “Eurasianism and Europeanism in Russian History,” *Festschrift für Th. G. Masaryk zum 80. Geburtstag* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1930), 225–36, repr. in *Readings in Russian History*, ed. Sidney Harcave (New York: Crowell, 1966), 1: 65–79. See also T. A. Riha, *Russian European: Paul Miliukov in Russian Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre



But Miliukov spoke too soon. Nowadays, that is, 70-odd years hence, we are still hearing very much of Eurasianism. Why?

Of the original Eurasianism, perhaps the most incisive analysis remains that of Nicholas Riasanovsky, a Berkeley professor emeritus and the son of a Harbin Russian émigré who specialized in Mongol law. For the Eurasianists, Riasanovsky explained, Eurasia constituted a world unto itself, economically self-sufficient, and ruled from Moscow. (This from four intellectuals who happened to be Ukrainian–Polish–Lithuanian in heritage, and were preoccupied with the phantom of pan-Turkism.) Though set apart, their Eurasia, Riasanovsky further explained, was also predestined to redeem humanity—a redemptive mission derived from the supposedly special qualities of Orthodoxy, which Eurasianists cast as a beacon for humanity, and from Russia being an antidote to Europe. Russia, too, may have looked like a European-style empire complicit in colonialism, but, as Riasanovsky wrote, in the Eurasianists’ rendering Russia became “a symphonic unity of peoples—no “empire at all but one organic Eurasia.”<sup>22</sup> To a degree, the politics of the self-proclaimed Eurasianists varied—from national Bolshevism (Petr Savitskii) to Trotskyism (Petr Suvchinskii) to anti-Sovietism (Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi).<sup>23</sup> But in the illiberal soup of the interwar period, all the Eurasianists shared the belief that the politics most suited to their former

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Dame Press, 1969). Miliukov concentrated on refuting Petr Savitskii’s notion of a unified Eurasian geography and noted that the steppe connects Russia with the rest of Asia, while the forest connects Russia with the rest of Europe. See also the searching critique by the apostate Eurasianist G. V. Florovskii (1893–1979), “Evraziiskii soblazn’,” *Sovremennye zapiski* (Paris), 34 (1928): 312–46. Ironically, Savitskii (1895–1968) was sent to a labor camp in Kazakhstan after 1945 (N. Iu. Stepanov, “Ideologiia evraziiztva: P. N. Savitskii,” *Istoricheskie vzgliady russkikh emigrantov* [Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Institut vseobshchei istorii, 1992], 156–63).

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, “The Emergence of Eurasianism,” *California Slavic Studies* 4 (1967): 39–72, at 57. Riasanovsky (another Karpovich student and follower of Miliukov) further noted that the Eurasianists’ inspiration could be found in the German invention of geopolitical thinking; the Russian empire’s Finno-Ugric, Altaic, and Orientalist scholarship; and futurism in poetry and the arts. On the latter point, see Serguei Glebov, “The Challenge of the Modern: The Eurasianist Ideology and Movement, 1920–1929” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2004). The Eurasianist emphasis on indivisibility ought to be read within the context of the post-1905 and especially post-1917 proposals for a federalist model in Russia.

<sup>23</sup> Riasanovsky deemed this an apologia for empire, but he found its particular expression new. Sure, there had been Slavophiles, but “while particular ties between Eurasian ideas and earlier doctrines can be readily established,” Riasanovsky wrote, “the total Eurasian outlook, including the very concept of Eurasia, strikes a reader conversant with Russian intellectual history as something radically new” (“The Emergence of Eurasianism,” 52). Of course, there remains the question, what precisely was a “Russian” intellectual? Riasanovsky himself observed that three of the originators of Eurasianism were from Ukraine (Savitskii, Florovskii, Suvchinskii), while a fourth (Trubetskoi) was of Lithuanian heritage. Russia’s was an imperial culture. Still, Eurasianism did shift the name of this imperial culture to “Eurasia,” and not in a pejorative sense—that was the innovation.

land was demotic government—somehow of and for the people, but not democracy.<sup>24</sup>

So there you have it: autarkic, messianic, apologetic (for empire), and demotic (illiberally “democratic”). No wonder Eurasianism is more popular than ever.

For today’s Eurasianism, the patron saint is Lev Gumilev (1912–92), offspring of the poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, a Gulag survivor, and a writer of great popular appeal during the post-Stalin era and beyond. Gumilev’s anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Catholic, antisemitic theories delivered Eurasianism into the space age—he attributed the waves of nomadic migration that jolted the steppes to vacillations in solar radiation. He also attributed the genesis and development of ethnoses to “passionarity” (their level of vital energy). For Gumilev, Russia was a super-ethnos, making him popular in Moscow, but Gumilev also celebrated the Mongol and Turkic ethnoses, making him popular in Inner Asia. Kazakhstan’s brand-new capital, Astana, has a Lev Gumilev University (a branch of Moscow State University). At Gumilev U. in June 2004, Russian President Vladimir Putin asserted that “Russia is the very center of Eurasia.” Putin also asserted that Gumilev’s ideas—which Putin presented as a united Eurasia in opposition to the transatlantic West—were “beginning to move the masses.”

Putin’s host, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev, has been even more fond of invoking Eurasianism but with a different center—Kazakhstan—and without the anti-Westernism. Kazakhstani Eurasianism drapes Kazakhstan’s anti-liberal order in multiculturalism, while seeking to make the country a lucrative link between Asia and Europe. Nazarbaev enthuses about Kazakhstan’s “profitable transit potential” in speeches posted on the websites of Kazakhstan embassies in, say, India or Japan.<sup>25</sup> Emulating

<sup>24</sup> In this they recalled Dostoevskii, among others. Vadim Tsymburskii, a Moscow-based philosopher who writes for *Vestnik Evrazii*, has concluded that the 1920s émigré Eurasianists essentially returned to a 16th- or 17th-century pre-Petrine, Muscovite view of Russia as distinct from Europe and from Asia. But in fact, he shows that the émigrés simultaneously developed two Eurasianisms: (1) *neither* Europe nor Asia; and (2) *both* Europe and Asia. Tsymburskii also notes that in Russia, a proto-Eurasian orientation emerged following the Crimean War debacle when Russia lost its dominant position in European politics—a turnabout that helped bring to the fore a “Slav–Turanian” angle of vision (“Dve Evrazii: Omonimiia kak kliuch k ideologii rannego evraziistva,” repr. in *Evraziia: Liudi i mify*, ed. Sergei Panarin [Moscow: Natalis, 2003], 22–49).

<sup>25</sup> To wit: “Neighbouring markets embracing about 2,000,000,000 people are capable of absorbing—with a rare exception—any Kazakhstan’s product, provided, naturally, that it is compatible and there is a network of related transport routes. These neighbours, more particularly Russia, China, a group of Islamic and Central Asian states, countries of the Near and Middle East, historically represent important world centres. Establishing peace and good-neighbourly relations of confidence on the whole of the Eurasian continent is an indispensable prerequisite for successful development” ([www.embkazjp.org/kazakhstan2030.htm](http://www.embkazjp.org/kazakhstan2030.htm)), and so on. See also Sally N. Cummings, “Eurasian Bridge or Murky Waters

Kazakhstan, Tatarstan also simultaneously seeks to dress up its autocracy by invoking Eurasianism and to grab a middleman cut.<sup>26</sup> But we could well ask, is Kazakhstani or Tatarstani anti-liberalism clothed in multiculturalism and commercial pro-Westernism any more agreeable than Russian anti-liberalism that is openly anti-Western?<sup>27</sup>

Turkey offers a reinforcing example. Turks experienced a 1990s boom-and-bust interest in Central Asia; today, Russians make up the largest share of tourists in Turkey and bilateral trade has blossomed. Attila İlhan (1925–2005), an enormously popular romantic poet, had long imagined a common future for Russia and Turkey, even with Turkey in NATO during the Cold War. İlhan played down five centuries of enmity and resurrected from obscurity representatives of a Turkish–Russian nexus, from Ismail Gasprinskii to Sultan Galiev. He rooted his Eurasianism, like Russia's, in a supposedly unique dual civilization and in geopolitics (anti-Westernism). İlhan's October 2005 funeral was a major event in Turkey—uniting thousands of socialists,

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between East and West? Ideas, Identity, and Output in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, 3 (2003): 139–55; Wanda Dressler, "Kazakh Eurasianism: An Identity for the Future of Kazakhstan?" paper presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, 2002; and Ilya Vinkovetsky, "Eurasia and Its Uses: The History of an Idea in the Mental Geography of Post-Soviet Space," paper presented at the 2007 Annual Soyuz Symposium, Princeton University, April 2007. Those who similarly hope to see Russia become a bridge between Europe and Asia must contend with the fact that elites in today's Russia are not inclined to be a bridge. On the contrary, one Russia-based analyst worried that Russia formed a kind of "limitrophe" removed from the great civilizations of Europe and Asia, an island surrounded by a sea of diverse countries (Vadim L. Tsymburskii, "Ostrov Rossii: Perspektivy Rossiiskoi geopolitiki," *Polis*, no. 5 [1993]: 11–17).

<sup>26</sup> For example, one of Tatarstan's chief ideologues, Rafail Khakim (son of the Soviet-era Tatar national poet), has invoked the linked imperial legacies of the Golden Horde and Muscovy. This legitimizes a Russian–Tatar partnership for today—provided Moscow leaves Kazan alone ("federalism") to pursue centralized rule within the ethnic republic (Rafail Khakim, "Russia and Tatarstan: At a Crossroads of History," *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia* 37, 1 [1998]: 30–71).

<sup>27</sup> We might also mention the rhetorical Eurasianism among provincial elites in ethnically mixed Russian regions bordering Kazakhstan. For example, consider the predominantly (75 percent) ethnic Russian province of Orenburg, lying amid Kazakhstan, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan. Orenburg's leaders boast of their region's historic role not in terms of Russian imperialism but as "a gateway between Europe and Asia." Concretely, Orenburg's Eurasianism manifests itself in modest state financial support for some 34 ethnic "cultural associations," from Bashkir and Mordvin to German and Polish, but a Moscow-based researcher found few local media outlets or schools in Turkic languages (Grigorii Kosach, "Regional'noe 'grazhdanskoe politnicheskoe soobshchestvo': Variant Orenburgskoi oblasti," in *Real'nost' etnicheskikh mifov* [Moscow: Gendal'f for the Carnegie Moscow Center, 2000], 53–76). Note that central Russia *per se* often disappears in the preoccupation with "Eurasia."

Islamists, pan-Turkists, and military generals in Western antipathy.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, two Eurasian journals in Turkey—*Avrasya Dosyası* (Eurasian File) and *Avrasya Etüddleri* (Eurasian Studies), the latter put out by a group under the Foreign Ministry—seek to marry Turkey's Asian culture with a European orientation and EU accession.<sup>29</sup>

To recap: in Russia, Eurasia generally means anti-Western, while in Kazakhstan and Tatarstan, Eurasia generally means Western-friendly, and in Turkey Eurasia can mean either anti-Western or Western-friendly. Thus Eurasianism is no longer *always* explicitly anti-Western. But Eurasianism still mostly entails an alternative to a liberal or constitutional order.<sup>30</sup>

Even if we could somehow completely dissociate "Eurasia" from Eurasianism and its nasty political associations, the category presents yet another problem—outright rejection. Central Asians and Tatars embrace the term, but Georgians or Azerbaijanis? Lithuanians or Estonians? Ukrainians? Most people on the Black or Baltic seas insist they're "European" (often without acknowledging that today Europe is not a cultural but a political project: constitutionalism, rule of law, democracy). Yaroslav Hrytsak's celebrated 1996 survey history of Ukraine shows that the facts are too broad for a nationalist frame, but Hrytsak's broadening does not lead him to Eurasia. In L'viv or Kiev, "Eurasia" means Moscow, that is, the supposed *opposite* of the West.<sup>31</sup> Most Russian nationalists agree: Russian nationalists have impeccable anti-liberal-order and pro-imperialist credentials, although they prefer to call this not Eurasia, just "Russia."<sup>32</sup> "Eurasia" is a designation that much of the territory it covers does not want.

<sup>28</sup> Sener Akturk, "Counter-Hegemonic Visions and Reconciliation through the Past: The Case of Turkish Eurasianism," *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2004): 207–37; and personal communication.

<sup>29</sup> See the Turkish-language journal of the Eurasia Strategic Center ([www.asam.org.tr/tr/index.asp](http://www.asam.org.tr/tr/index.asp)) whose spring 2005 issue was on Turkey and the European Union, and of the Turkish Cooperation and Development Center ([www.tika.gov.tr](http://www.tika.gov.tr)).

<sup>30</sup> Characteristically, the Italian journal *Eurasia* is unabashedly neo-fascist ([www.eurasia-revista.org](http://www.eurasia-revista.org)).

<sup>31</sup> Yaroslav Hrytsak, *Narys istorii Ukrainy: Formuvannia modernoi ukrains'koi natsii XIX–XX stolittia* (Kiev: Heneza, 1996). Nonetheless, there *are* some people in Ukraine, including those grouped around former President Kuchma, who style themselves Eurasianist. See Dmytro Vydrin and Dmytro Tabachnyk, *Ukraina na porozzi XXI stolittia: Politychnyi aspekt* (Kiev: Lybid, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> The significance of "Eurasianism" in today's Russian foreign policy is vastly overblown, deriving from an obsession with the pundit Aleksandr Dugin, who is relatively uninfluential at home—viz. John B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasian' Textbook and Dmitrii Trenin's Ambivalent Response," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 25, 1/2 (2001): 91–121. Dugin is undercut by the circumstance that almost all likeminded people (Russian chauvinists) prefer the term "Russia" to "Eurasia." It is also unclear how Russia might realize Dugin's proposed three anti-U.S. axes—Moscow–Berlin, Moscow–Tokyo, and Moscow–Tehran—given the nature of the American alliance system and the global economy. In sum, anti-

A further consideration: in today's China, one would be hard pressed to hear the term "Eurasia." Perhaps that's because China is blissfully unconcerned whether it is included in or excluded from Europe. Nor is China much preoccupied with escaping from a notion of universal—that is, Eurocentric—history the way that the Eurasianists were.<sup>33</sup> China has its own Sinocentric story. Japan's challenge to Sinocentrism and to the Europeans simultaneously, pan-Asianism, a late 19th-century notion that was given added impetus by Tokyo's victory in the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War, gained popularity for a time outside Japan, including in China as well as Korea. Pan-Asianists generally held that Asian countries and peoples shared particular values and history that provided a basis for political "unity."<sup>34</sup> "Asia for Asians" was one slogan, which crashed and burned. (The category "Asia" was widely adopted in Asia only in the 20th century.) But these days there are lingering pan-Asianist echoes, like "Asian values" (or the "Singapore model")—essentially a brief for market economies without full democracy. Perhaps Eurasianism, too, will persist as a platform for adherents of an anti-democratic political order, even as some continue to try to recast it in a multi-cult mold—or to separate off its substrate, Eurasia, as a mere mega-region. Or maybe, as Asia continues to grow in weight (and in our imaginations), the premise and impulse that gave rise to the ideology of Eurasianism and to the early 20th century reinvention of the category of Eurasia—Europe as norm and prototype—will diminish in potency.<sup>35</sup> Either way, an unlikely outcome for "Eurasia" would appear to be what happened with "Central Europe" (*Mitteleuropa*)—namely, going from a term much associated with German domination to becoming a marker of inclusion in Western civilization that has been much embraced by the applicable populations themselves.

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Westernism, however emotionally powerful in Russia, is a platform for imperial delusion and minor mischief, not a viable foreign policy strategy. Dmitri Trenin nicely captured the binary choice for Russia between Eurasia or the West, but he presented Russia's incapacity to "integrate" Eurasia as leading to pro-Westernism (it did not); nor will the China "threat," which Trenin emphasizes, push Russia to the West (*The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization* [Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002]).

<sup>33</sup> Sergei Glebov, "In Search of Non-Eurocentric History: Russia, Eurasia, and the Mongol-Bolshevik Revolution," paper presented at the 2007 Annual Soyuz Symposium, Princeton University, April 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism, and Borders* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Some time ago, Michael Geyer eloquently called for redrawing Europe "from a universal state of mind to a regional condition of power" ("Historical Fictions of Autonomy and the Europeanization of National History," *Central European History* 22, 1 [1989]: 16–43). Nowadays, "overcoming" Europe—"decentering," "breaking down the category," and so on—is a full-fledged industry. At the same time, the invocation of "Eurasia" remains inextricably linked to Europe's centrality (via denial of Europe's supposed superiority).

## Romance—Homelands and Heartlands

“Central Eurasia” presents a special case: an epic of movement, grasses, horses, chariots, compound bows, shaman-assisted trips to other worlds. Central Eurasia is a romance, a silk road.<sup>36</sup> But Central Eurasia (formerly Inner Asia) can also be a quest for human origins, unity, and supposed deep structure.

Some interpreters claim multi-millennial coherence for Central Eurasia based upon ecology. In this view, a certain ecology begets a certain civilization—or the absence of civilization.<sup>37</sup> But nomads roam through dissimilar environments (which change), while some peoples imagined to have been nomadic apparently never roamed (such as the Buriats). In any case, the landmass is more than steppe. Its ecology varies spectacularly, from tundra to monsoon-soaked lowlands, from boggy forests to different varieties of desert. Sure, the continentality of the climate constitutes something of a shared space, but the landmass is rent by a water gulf: super-abundant to the north, scarce in the middle, abundant again in the south. (Water issues likely will grow.) Ecology divides rather than unites Eurasia. Nor has ecology been uniquely salient here, as opposed to elsewhere.

Another deep connecting tissue is said to be religion (or cosmology).<sup>38</sup> Of course, the landmass knows many religions—Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and so on. Compared to Islam, Buddhism tends to get less attention, and so does the Buddhist–Islam confrontation, one of history’s most dramatic and consequential.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, each of the most prevalent

<sup>36</sup> Exceptions can be found to the embrace of “Central Eurasia.” In the United Kingdom, the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, founded by Caroline Humphrey at Cambridge University, publishes a biannual (since 1999) entitled *Inner Asia*.

<sup>37</sup> This is exemplified by the work of Denis Sinor, who headed Indiana University’s Uralic-Altaic Department and its related national resource center for an extended period—for example, Denis Sinor, ed., *Orientalism in History* (Cambridge, MA: Heffner and Sons, 1954), esp. 82–103; and Sinor, *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), in which Robert Taafe wrote, “In many ways, the elongated steppe zones, the isolated oases, and the major mountain passes and corridors of Inner Asia have been the overland equivalents of ocean routes, ports-of-call, and canals” (Taafe, “The Geographic Setting,” 19–40, at 20). Jared Diamond attributes the “dominance” of Eurasia in world history to environment—its east–west expanse, climate zones, and abundance of plants and animals for domestication (*Guns, Germs, Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1997]).

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the great works by Uno Harva, *Die Religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker* (Helsinki: n.p., 1938); or Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Bollingen, 1964; French orig. 1951).

<sup>39</sup> For Inner Asia, Svat Soucek’s very professional textbook, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), covers Islam in great depth, with a bare mention of Buddhism. In preparations for a second edition, Soucek told me he has abandoned the term “Inner Asia,” which implies treatment of Tibet and Mongolia, for the term “Central Asia,” in which he intends to include Afghanistan. In Yuri Bregel, *An Historical*



religions—Islam, Buddhism, Christianity—influenced the others. Each took root within societies that retained what we call shamanism, thereby leading to degrees of syncretism (the Bon in Tibet famously influenced lamaist Buddhism, which in turn took on a certain coloring among Mongol-speaking practitioners of shamanism).<sup>40</sup> But religion or cosmology—even rituals involving the horse—do not unite or set apart a Central Eurasia.

Linguistics is a third area of supposed coherence. In the invention of the Ural-Altaic family, few protagonists stand out more than Matthias Alexander Castrén (1813–52), born in Finland not long after Russia annexed it,<sup>41</sup> as well as Wilhelm Radloff (1837–1918), born in Berlin but subsequently a Russian state functionary.<sup>42</sup> Others are less well known, such as Archpriest Vasilii Ivanovich Verbitskii (1827–1890), son of a sexton, graduate of the Nizhnii Novgorod Seminary, and longest-serving member of the Altai Mission in Ulala. Verbitskii's ethnographic essays, published posthumously in 1893,

*Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), the maps simply terminate where one would see Buddhist–Islam overlap or confrontation. In Outer Asia—the great trading arc from the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea—Buddhism was supplanted by Islam, particularly in the 12th and 13th centuries in the interstitial kingdoms of Sumatra, and one wonders about a Mongol catalyst.

<sup>40</sup> On syncretism, see, for example, Christopher P. Atwood, "Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion: A Reexamination of the Fire Cult," *History of Religions* 36, 2 (1996): 124–30; and Samten G. Karmay, "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* (Tokyo) 33 (1975): 171–218. The term "shaman" appears to be a Russian adaptation of a "Tungusic" word (in Turkish, the historical term is *qam*), while the Mongol *böge* is said to derive from the Turkish *böğü* (sorcerer) (Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1972], 324).

<sup>41</sup> K. Tiander, "Matias Kastren—osnovatel' finnologii," *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia*, no. 5 (May 1904): 1–68; Anton Schiefner [1817–79], ed., *Alexander Castrén's Nordische Reisen und Forschungen*, 12 vols. (St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1853–58). To perpetuate Castrén's work, a Société finno-ougrienne was founded in 1883. Its journal began appearing three years later, and vol. 30 (1913) was dedicated to the centenary of Castrén's birth. See also Sirkka Saarinen, "The Myth of a Finno-Ugric Community in Practice," *Nationalities Papers* 29, 1 (2001): 41–52; and, more widely, *Bibliographie der obugriscchen sowie anderer europäischer Völker von 1538–1988* (Munich: Verlag Dr. Erhard Schiefer, Congregatio Ob-Ugrica, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, "Vorwort zum Nachdruck," in *Versuch eines Wörterbuch der Türk-Dialekte*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1893–1911; repr. Gravenhage: Mouton, 1960), 1: iii–xx–viii; Pritsak, "Leben und Schaffen von Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff (1837–1918)," in *Oriens* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 8, 1: 51–93; A. N. Samoilovich, *V. V. Radlov, kak turkolog* (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografiia, 1914), orig. in *Trudy Troitskosavsko-Kiakhtinskogo otdeleniia Priamurskogo otdela IRGO* 15, 1 (1912); Samoilovich, "Radlov, kak turkolog," *Novyi Vostok*, no. 2 (1922): 707–12. See also A. N. Kononov, *Istoriia izucheniiia tiurkskikh iazykov v Rossii*, 2nd ed. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1982). Petr Simon Pallas (1741–1811), who arrived in Russia in 1767, had gone on expedition to the Altai in 1771, studying "Chud" gravesites near Zmeinogorsk. See also Johann Peter Falk (1725–74), "Zapiski puteshestviia akademika Fal'ka," *Polnoe sobranie uchenykh puteshestvii po Rossii* (1824), 6: 1–10, 435–511.



won the Silver Medal of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society—only fitting, considering how much of the raw material for minting such medals was mined in the Altai.<sup>43</sup> The work of such individuals, well known or obscure, influenced the Russian empire's 1897 census, which employed the designation "Ural-Altaiic."<sup>44</sup> Nowadays, however, few scholars defend an "organic" link between the Uralic and the Altaic families. Whether just the Altaic languages are genetically related or are a "family" formed by prolonged contact and exchange is also in dispute. There is even strong disagreement over whether the Altaic connections exist.<sup>45</sup>

For lands farther south, the Indo-European conjecture, first formulated in the 1780s by the chief justice for the British East India Company, came to preoccupy not Hungarian, Finnish, or Russian but German Romantics, who made linguistic Indo-Europeanness a racial project (later, in a much

<sup>43</sup> *Altaiskie inorodtsy: Sbornik etnograficheskikh statei i issledovaniĭ altaiskogo missionera* (Moscow: A. A. Levenson, 1893; repr. Gorno-Altaiisk: Gorno-Altaiiskaia tipografiia, 1993). In *Tomskie gubernskie vedomosti* in 1858, a 23-year-old Grigorii Potanin criticized Verbitskii for overpowering the voice of the natives in his retelling of their tales. Potanin had spent a half-year conducting forays in the Altai from a base at the Charysh Cossack Station in 1855; and he saw links and parallels among Hebrew, early Christian, medieval Europe, and epic legends of Mongolia and southern Siberia. Potanin put forth his "Oriental hypothesis," tracing the origin of the Judaeo-Christian spiritual heritage to Inner Asia ("Polgoda na Altae," *Russkoe slovo*, no. 9 [1859]: 61–134; no. 12: 245–302). See also A. M. Sagalaev and V. M. Kriukov, *G. N. Potanin: Opyt osmysleniia lichnosti* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1991), 29.

<sup>44</sup> Some non-Russians had been so Russified they knew no language other than Russian. Inter-marriage also complicated the categories, as did acquisition of a different, non-Russian language as a *lingua franca* (i.e., Yakut). What stands out is the strong desire on the part of ethnographically minded statistical officials to establish "true nationality" (S. Patkanov, *Statisticheskie dannye, pokazyvaiushchie plemennoi sostav naselenii Sibiri, iazyk i rody inorodtsev: Na osnovanii spetsial'noi razrabotki materiala perepisi 1897 g.*, 3 vols. [St. Petersburg: Sh. Bussel, 1912]). Patkanov took part in the 1897 census; the preface is dated 1907. N. M. Iadrintsev, too, had placed Turkic, Mongol, Finnic, and Tungus tribes under the heading "Altaic," on a linguistic and ethnographic basis, though his classification also derived from racial notions (and he noted that the details were in dispute) (*Sibirskie inorodtsy: Ikh byt i sovremennoe polozhenie* [St. Petersburg, 1891], 9–21, 67). For drawings of "Mongol types" versus "Finnish types," see Iadrintsev, "Altai i ego inorodcheskoe tsarstvo (oчерki puteshestviia po Altaiu)," *Istoricheskii vestnik* 20, 6 (1885): 606–44. For a version of this science intended for a wide audience, see Ivan S. Poliakov, *Pis'ma i otchety o puteshestvii v dolinu r. Obi* (St. Petersburg, 1877), which juxtaposes flora and fauna alongside primitive peoples thought to be close to the ancient roots of man.

<sup>45</sup> Angela Marcantonio, *The Uralic Language Family: Facts, Myths, and Statistics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). Many Finnish scholars came to argue for their people's "origins" in the northern forests above the steppes, while some Hungarian scholars suggested "origins" farther east, on or near the Ob. See Toivo Vuorela, *The Finno-Ugric Peoples* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 9–11; and Péter Hajdú, *Finno-Ugric Languages and Peoples*, trans. from the Hungarian by G. F. Cushing (London: Deutsch, 1975). See also Rein Taagepera, *The Finno-Ugric Republics and the Russian State* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

different context the “Aryans” became the object of SS-sponsored archaeology). Trying to distance linguistics from race, David Anthony contends that similarities in Indo-European languages could not have been produced by creolization or convergence but only by common descent. Domestication of the horse and invention of the wheel, Anthony asserts, transformed the steppe “from a hostile ecological barrier to a corridor of communications,” which connected the discrete cultural ponds on the Eurasian landmass into one interacting historical system. This supposedly took place 5,000 years ago, in what he identifies as the Eurasian “homeland”—the Pontic–Caspian steppes, whence speakers of the imagined mother of tongues, proto-Indo-European, spread to what became Europe and China.<sup>46</sup>

Equally inventive is the work of Elizabeth Wayland Barber, a textile scholar in Los Angeles. With a team she went to investigate 4,000-year-old mummies wrapped in well-preserved, vivid woolen cloths in the capital of China’s Uyghur Autonomous Region, located within the salt deserts of the Tarim basin (a former inland lake encircled by the Celestial Mountains). The mummies are tall, large-nosed, fair-haired, and round-eyed—in other words, not “Mongoloid” but “Caucasian.” Barber, like Sven Hedin in the 19th century and others before that, has rediscovered the Silk Road, but she does more: she combines analysis of the basket weave versus twill, plant and animal domestication, language, geology, DNA—i.e., fragmentary, often indirect evidence—into an ingenious theory of everything. Her conjecture is that human civilization originated in the Caucasus, after which some headed west, some headed east, but they remained in contact.<sup>47</sup>

Now *that’s* Central Eurasia—Caucasian mummies preserved in Asian salts—ancient yet palpable, mystical yet tangible, spread colossally far but interconnected.

The scholarship of Matthias Castrén and Wilhelm Radloff, of David Anthony and Elizabeth Wayland Barber, dazzles.<sup>48</sup> To assess their linguistic and archaeological evidence, I am unqualified. But I wonder. Even if we could quarantine language trees from race, are 19th-century notions about “homelands” a good basis for a transnational enterprise? This applies especially to the Ural-Altaic quest for a “Turk” homeland and possibly combined

<sup>46</sup> David Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming), which supersedes J. P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *The Mummies of Ürümchi* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> For a wise, personal account of ethnomusicology, see Izaly Zemtsovsky, “Gábor Lükő and the Ethnomusicology of Eurasia,” in Gábor Lükő, *Zenei Anyanyelvünk: Válogatott zenei tanulmányok* (Budapest: Táton, 2003), 1: 477–88.

Turk–Mongol homeland in the Altai.<sup>49</sup> Is there not something odd about approaches reminiscent of 19th-century nationalism (origins, homelands, unity) being used to imagine a primeval Uralic–Altai, Indo–Europe, or Central Eurasia?<sup>50</sup>

What about the late 19th-century speculations among Germanic and Anglophone geographers about the “Euroasiatic continent” (Edouard Süss) or “Eurasian heartland” (Sir Harold Mackinder)? This is where the term “Eurasia” (as Europe plus Asia) originated. In geology to this day Europe and much of the Asian mainland—with the exceptions of the Indian and Arabian subcontinents—belong to what scientists label a single “Eurasian Plate.” But geological–cum–geopolitical notions about a supposed pivot for world domination are scarcely an organizing framework for analysis today, however important such views have been historically.<sup>51</sup>

### **Mongol Commonwealth or *Ab Imperio*?**

Chinggis and the Great Mongol Ulus are fundamental to the shift I want to support in our understanding of our field, but not for the usual reasons. My interest in the Mongols derives from the circumstance that they developed a novel form of political organization—an empire built upon exchange. They and their vassals fostered not an ethnic culture but an imperial culture, really an imperial system.<sup>52</sup> Exchange for them was not a byproduct of interaction,

<sup>49</sup> “The question of the primordial habitat of the Turkic peoples remains problematic,” writes Peter Golden. “The general consensus is that it is to be found in Inner Asia in the southern Siberian (Altay)–Lake Baikal region, perhaps extending into Western Siberia” (*An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992], 124–26).

<sup>50</sup> Ethnogenesis became a particular preoccupation of imperial Russian and Soviet ethnography, which generated an avalanche of “origins” or “homelands” materials, which are often the key sources for Anglophone scholars. Even David Christian, who prefers the term “Inner Eurasia,” and who emphasizes exchange as well as ecology, does so in the chimeric pursuit of coherence: “If the history of the Eurasian landmass has any coherence, it arises because genes, commodities, ideas, and diseases have all traveled through the Inner Eurasian borderlands.” He concludes that Inner Eurasia lost its “coherence” in the 20th century (Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, 1 [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 182). See also Christian, “Inner Eurasia as a Unit of World History,” *Journal of World History* 5, 2 (1994): 173–211; and André Gunder Frank, *The Centrality of Central Asia* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> One can nonetheless still appreciate John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> Etymologies for the term “mongol” (moghol, mughal, mongul, manghol, etc.) have suffered from the condescension and anger directed at the nomads–conquerors. The derivation of the term remains a matter of controversy. Perhaps the most authoritative hypothesis, for what it’s worth, was offered by Isaac Schmidt (1779–1847), a Moravian missionary who learned the Mongol language. He suggested that “mongol” did not refer to a tribe but was an

not an occasional phenomenon, but the *raison d'être* of their empire: *empire as exchange*—essentially without barriers of religion, tribe, or language, thanks in large measure to *Realpolitik* (the inverse scale of the conquerors to their conquests). Thus did processes that were underway before Mongol-led advances of the 13th century receive added impetus from their campaigns of conquest.

Both disruptive and constitutive, the Mongol impact was colossal. Their empire-building further consolidated the conquered Turkic-speaking tribes, culminating an already long-standing process of agglomeration into “Turkic peoples” (later discovered by Radloff when he helped invent Turcology through investigations of the Ob basin). Turkic-speakers soon formed a majority in Mongol armies and among administrators, and Chagatai Turkic (Chagatai was the second son of Chinggis; his patrimony stretched from the Caspian to the Tarim basin) eventually replaced Mongol as the language of Mongol-born elites. (Language for the Mongols was communication, not identity.) Mongol-enhanced Turkification would become evident in the Ottoman conquests of Byzantium, as the House of Osman came back from the dead after the debacle of 1402 (when Tamerlane appointed the sultan). Later, enhanced Turkification was also evident in the Safavid conquests of Persia. All told, Mongol-influenced Turkification dealt a definitive blow to Arab dominance of the “House of Islam” or Muslim world. This break would have occurred anyway, but the way it happened—via the Mongols—had a profound effect on subsequent developments.

At the same time, the imperial Mongols helped spread Islam. Mongol rulers in Iran sped the adoption of Islam, as did Mongol rulers in the Qipchaq steppes (the so-called Golden Horde) and in the many important oasis towns on trade and pilgrimage routes. The flow of Muslim refugees (soldiers, artisans, administrators, clerics) from Mongol pressures supported the Delhi sultanate. Tribes that were smashed together into larger Turkic-speaking agglomerations brought Mughal (Muslim) rule to India. Later, different Mongols (Oyrat or Jungars) created the institution of the Dalai Lama in Tibetan Buddhism, adding another dimension to the strife among Muslim and Buddhist nomads, and influencing the course of developments in China. The imperial Mongols even had a substantial impact on lands they did not

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honorific (brave, fearless, excellent). It was bestowed upon the force of herders-warriors who were incorporated into military units deliberately comprising men of different tribal heritage and who, further, were prohibited from taking wives of the same tribe. See Isaac Jakob Schmidt, *Geschichte der Ostmongolen und ihres Fürstenhause, verfasst von Ssanang Ssetsen Chungtaidschi* (St. Petersburg and Leipzig: N. Gretsche, 1829; repr. The Hague: Europe Printing, 1961). This translation of the “Erdeni-yin tobchi” (Precious Summary), originally composed in 1662, became the first of a Mongolian text into a European language. For more on Schmidt and German-speaking Orientalists in the Russian empire, see Tuska Benes, “Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770–1830,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, 2 (2004): 117–32.

try to conquer—Roman Christendom. Muslims knew China's wealth, but Marco Polo, who served in the court of Qubilai (possibly as a member of Qubilai's bodyguard), returned to Venice in the 1290s after 16 years or so, and in a Genoese prison, dictated a sensational geography-travelogue.<sup>53</sup> Though the travelogue was partly secondhand, Polo's firsthand observations covering China as well as India were widely read and imitated—140 Polo knockoff manuscripts survive, in French, Spanish, Irish, German, and other languages. In the late 15th century, European quests for the fabled Eastern wealth Polo and others had described helped inspire the accidental "discovery" of the New World by Columbus.<sup>54</sup>

The breadth and the blending of the Great Mongol Uls continue to astonish. To their court in China, Mongol conquerors famously imported Persian mathematicians, engineers, physicians, and cooks; Uyghur scribes, merchants, and officials; Hungarian slaves; Syrian and Venetian traders; Byzantine craftsmen; and Tibetan lamas, appointing Chinese mostly to lower posts. Persian often served as the common tongue in higher circles in China. To their court in Persia, the Mongols brought Chinese physicians, astronomers, and agronomists as well as Christians. Mongol imperial chancelleries in both capitals and elsewhere received and issued documents according to every calendar known. Extensive geographical knowledge was exchanged about river crossings, mountain passes, and water supplies, transforming cartography. The Mongol court in China had a better sense of Africa than did the successor Ming dynasty. Released Christian slaves and merchants may have carried Chinese innovations such as gunpowder and wood-block printing westward.<sup>55</sup> Symbolically, a silver fountain at Qaraqorum, the Mongol imperial meeting ground, joined wine from Persia, rice beer from China, mead from the northern forests, and koumiss, the fermented Mongol drink.<sup>56</sup> Chefs of the enormous imperial kitchens came

<sup>53</sup> Polo's descriptions of Beijing's palaces match archaeological findings, and his descriptions of flora and fauna provide still more persuasive evidence of his residency in Yuan China. See Igor de Rachewiltz, "Marco Polo Went to China," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 27 (1997): 34–92; and Stephen G. Haw, *Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Khubilai Khan* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Heers, "De Marco Polo à Christophe Colomb: Comment lire le *Devisement du monde*?" *Journal of Medieval History* 10, 1 (1984): 125–43; Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Imagination of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 24–25, 52, 118–19.

<sup>55</sup> The migration of such technologies from China to Europe is disputed in Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 3 vols. in 9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965–93), 1, pt. 1: 82–83.

<sup>56</sup> The fountain was based upon West Asian prototypes and begun by Muslim artisans but finished by Christian ones.

from across the known world, and they were supplied by a dauntingly cosmopolitan assemblage of merchants.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, alongside the vast destruction, new caravansaries arose—secure stations for merchants on caravan routes, which relinked the two ends of the landmass, establishing partnerships that allowed orderly shipment of riches in far-flung, albeit narrow, networks.<sup>58</sup> Exchanges of silks and cottons, ceramics, and instruments transformed art and cultures. Again, such exchange was not invented by the imperial Mongols (who were nonetheless active agents of cultural transfer).<sup>59</sup> Despite very long distances and challenging communications, almost all seemingly separated cultures and societies have had far more contact than we tend to imagine. Still, the Mongols vigorously promoted commerce, generally imposing low duties and often affording physical protection. Risks remained considerable—particularly from intra-Mongol warfare—but merchants who assumed the risks often made stupefying returns, sometimes of 500 percent.<sup>60</sup>

Mongol society was inherently mobile, the herders' very way of life facilitating exchange, but the Mongols were in many ways not unique. South Asian traders, Portuguese mariners (and their indispensable Islamic guides), Bantu agriculturalists, and many others are celebrated for deepening processes of exchange. But whereas previously, nomads had mostly disappeared after plundering, the Mongols were the first steppe tribal confederation that expanded *after*

<sup>57</sup> "Roast Wolf Soup," deemed a "proper and essential" dish befitting the ruler of an empire, called for cooking the herds' nemesis in Islamic black pepper, turmeric, and saffron as well as Chinese soy sauce, onions, and vinegar, but in the traditional Mongol way (roasted on spits, then boiled in cauldrons). For making pilafs, an imperial recipe book incorporated Mongol ingredients (nettles, foraged acorns, crabapples, roasted grain flour for traveling, sheep stomach salted and dried in the wind), Chinese ingredients (orange peel, ginger, cabbage, bean paste noodles, glutinous rice powder), and West Asian traditions—spices (cinnamon, fenugreek seeds, saffron, turmeric, asafetida, attar of roses, black pepper, baked and steamed breads, non-Chinese noodles, jams and preserves, sweet fruit drinks and syrups, distilled liquors, and soups thickened with long-grain rice, chickpeas, or noodles) (Paul D. Buell et al., eds., *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Szu-Hui's Yin-shan Cheng-Yao. Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text* [London: Kegan Paul International, 2000]).

<sup>58</sup> Thomas T. Allsen, "Mongolian Princes and Their Merchant Partners, 1200–1260," and Elizabeth Endicott-West, "Merchant Associations in Yuan China: The Ortoy," in *Asia Major* 2, 2 (1989): 83–126 and 127–54. For an argument about a degree of Venetian and Genovese dependence on the Mongol empire, see Nicolò di Cosmo, "Mongols and Merchants on the Black Sea Frontier in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Convergences and Conflicts," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 391–421.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (London: Pearson, 2005)—reviewed in *Kritika* 8, 2 (2007): 431–41.



*the death of its founder.* How did nomad Mongol conquest become empire? First, by the charisma and memory of Chinggis. In very few cases did men not descended on the male line from one of Chinggis's four sons aspire to be khan, let alone succeed in becoming a recognized, legitimate khan. Astonishingly, non-Chingissids were constrained to hold titles inferior to khan even if they wielded top power *de facto*. Second, by non-tribalism. The imperial Mongols devised a system that often incorporated warriors from many different tribes into non-tribal (decimal) armies and discouraged these troops from marrying within their own tribes. Third, by recruitment or impressment of skilled non-nomads. To the Mongols, talent was a form of booty, to be diffused throughout Mongol-ruled territories. In a self-conceived universal empire, borrowings from the whole world were welcome. Fourth, by sex. "Conquest" meant not only mass butchering and destruction—there was plenty of that—but also intermarriage. Khans scrutinized newly conquered or surrendered peoples, marrying the other side's best warriors to Mongol women, creating relations of kinship and duty. Mongol men, meanwhile, took many conquered wives and sired children. Prospective wives were also presented as gifts to seal alliances. (Chinggis Khan is said to have taken or received more than 500 wives; today he has about 16 million male descendants—making Chinggis, if not the father of all peoples, a grand patriarch all the same.) Thus patrimony was king. But empire was sealed through exchanges of daughters.<sup>61</sup>

To be sure, the Mongol empire was *relatively* short-lived—one or two centuries in most places. But directly or indirectly, Mongol dominion helped originate or shaped longer-lasting dynasties and polities in Iran, India (Mughals), Anatolia and Arabia (Ottomans), Rus' (Muscovy), and China (Yuan).<sup>62</sup> Was there, then, something akin to a Mongol Commonwealth?

It is very tempting to answer yes, even if full demonstration of the proposition awaits its Dimitri Obolensky, author of the brilliant *Byzantine Commonwealth*.<sup>63</sup> But the idea of a Mongol Commonwealth presupposes or

<sup>61</sup> On this critical insight, which can be applied across much of Inner Asia, see Junko Miyawaki, "The Nomadic Kingship Based on Marital Alliances: The Case of the 17th–18th-Century Oyrat," in *Proceedings of the 35th Permanent International Altaic Conference*, ed. Chieh-Hsien Ch'en (Taipei: National Taiwan University and Center for Chinese Studies Materials, 1993), 361–69.

<sup>62</sup> The Mongols also had a significant impact on Egypt (Mamluks) and Java (Majapahit), which stood up to the Mongol-led armies but were in turn greatly affected by the confrontation, from which they drew legitimacy.

<sup>63</sup> Dimitri Obolensky argued, in an extraordinary book, that belief in a universal emperor, the spread of the Orthodox liturgy, and the formation of a Slavic literary tradition (based upon translations from Greek) forged a common civilization across many states, thanks also to rivers and land trade routes. This expansive Byzantine Commonwealth, Obolensky insisted, "was a real society, not a mere intellectual abstraction" (*The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* [New York: Praeger, 1971], 3). On the survival of Byzantine institutions and mentalities after the fall of 1453 into the 18th century (and among scholars, into



suggests legacy arguments that remain much in dispute and can probably never be settled. To put the case for caution another way, the Mongols are not the only empire that exerted great influence in what we call Eurasia. This, however, is a perfect point of departure: there have been many empires, before and after Chinggis Khan. Following the imperial Mongols, a few political entities—the Romanov, Qing, Ottoman, and Iranian empires—carved up a colossal territory, but let us also not forget the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, the Habsburg empire, or the British empire, on neighboring or overlapping territories. Any idea of a Turco-Mongol imperial fusion (even if seen as subject to contestation and ongoing transformation) would need to be placed alongside the other legacies and overlapping imperial frameworks.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, if we need an overarching term about what we study and what shaped the world, perhaps we might induce colleagues to subsume all this under the notion of “Ab imperio”—literally, “from empire.”

My purpose in further promoting the concept of “Ab imperio” (borrowed from the eponymous journal) is not to justify any one empire or to favor empire generally. I am not exaggerating any empire’s reach and power on a daily basis. Nor am I urging some deep structure or special civilization. This is not an argument about a Mongol-originated Eurasia or about a specific Eurasian matrix. This is not an attempt to substitute some sort of imperial coherence for alleged geographic, religious, linguistic, or geopolitical coherence. Eurasia may have its specificities—in the scale of the pastoral nomadism and of several states. But there is *no* underlying or overall coherence to Eurasia. Eurasia is not a system; it is an arena. Accordingly, mine is a relational argument about different agents and practices in interaction within that arena, an argument that seeks to acknowledge interregional or cross-regional phenomena that arose via the formative frame of empire. If we are stuck with “Eurasia” (rather than “post-Soviet”) as a descriptive category,

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the 20th), see Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, trans. Laura Teptow (Portland: Center for Romanian Studies, 2000; orig. 1935), written during the period of Greater Romania. On 19th-century imaginings about the endurance of a continuous Byzantine empire—with an Ottoman dynasty!—based not upon race or religion but on a common past, see Jack Fairey, “Failed Nations and Usable Pasts: The Case of the Byzantine Union, 1844–1860s,” paper presented at Princeton University, May 2006. As for the Ottoman afterlife, see L. Carl Brown, *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> Excellent recent works include Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan, eds., *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); and Peter C. Perdue, “The Qing Formation, the Mongol Legacy, and the ‘End of History’ in Early Modern Eurasia,” in *The Qing Formation in Historical Time*, ed. Lynn A. Struve (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004). Less controversy surrounds claims about a Turco-Mongol *referent* for legitimating rule. See, for example, Lisa Balabanlilar, “Lords of the Auspicious Conjunction: Turco-Mongol Imperial Identity on the Subcontinent,” *Journal of World History* 18, 1 (2007): 1–39.

I would like to impart non-mystical and non-demotic substance to the space we subsume under it. Hence the recourse to the cross-regional notion of *ab imperio*, and to exchange and ultimately governance rather than identities.

As we collectively pay increasing attention to what emerges within and from empire, we ought to be careful not to suggest a longing for a reconfigured version of empire, which has never been democratic or federalist.<sup>65</sup> Nor should we overemphasize *de facto* “local autonomy” in imperial politics, since the arrival of empire often had the effect of locally reinforcing a singular authority that had been weak, or nonexistent, before imperial incorporation. In a word, we do not need imperial nostalgia. The Mongols were killers, just like most of those who followed them. Exchange was often coercive. That said, imperial exchange and networks are indispensable for understanding how the past worked, and where important elements of the present come from. Admittedly, such exchange over large territories is not reducible to empire—look at precolonial Africa. Vigorous exchange also took place outside of formal rule (direct or indirect) in the name of tribute, a stylized form of trade promotion, such as under the Chinese tributary system.<sup>66</sup> The effects of exchange can outlive any particular empire that may have boosted or given rise to the exchange. All the same, the imperial Mongol *practice* stands out, and even without affirming the intriguing proposition of a Mongol Commonwealth, Mongol practice can serve as a device for understanding much besides the Mongols

Just to be absolutely clear: I am not highlighting the Mongols because they begat Russia or Eurasia more generally. They did no such thing, despite their manifold influence. Mine is not an argument about origins—by beginning with the Mongols, I begin somewhere in the middle. Rather, I am proposing a way to analyze the past and the present. My approach is not via specific common Mongol or Turkic-Mongol legacies (à la ancient Rome)—which did exist—but via the practice of imperial exchange, which

<sup>65</sup> Robert Kann rightly attributed the downfall of the Habsburg monarchy to constitutional shortcomings, not nationalism (“The Dynasty and the Imperial Idea,” in his *Dynasty, Politics, and Culture: Selected Essays* [Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1991], 61). On the longevity of empires, see Rein Taagepera, “Size and Duration of Empires: Systematics of Size,” *Social Science Research* 7, 2 (1978): 108–27. Empires seem to be *de facto* federalist, because they ostensibly allow local elites to remain in place, but in fact empires tend to greatly empower local elites, not simply leave them in place—often at the expense of the local communities whose communal rights empires recognize. Federalism, particularly in the constitutional sense, was generally an idea of a political opposition within an imperial polity (Mark L. von Hagen, “Writing the History of Russia as Empire: Federalist,” in *Kazan’, Moskva, Peterburg: Rossiiskaia imperiia vzgliadom iz raznykh uglov*, ed. Boris Gasparov et al. [Moscow, OGI, 1997], 393–410).

<sup>66</sup> Takeshi Hamashita, *Kindai Chūgoku no kokusaiteki keiki: Chōkō bōeki shisutemu to kindai Ajia* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1990), a millennium-long interpretation of the Chinese “tributary” system.

can be used as a heuristic tool.<sup>67</sup> In other words, I am interested in Mongols because they bequeathed a model of empire as exchange, and that model suggests—it does not compel, but it suggests—an analytical approach to what can be called the post-Mongol space.

### Post-Mongol Space

After the Mongols—in roughly that same space—there were many subsequent imperial projects and processes of exchange. There also ensued the invention and diffusion of technologies that facilitated relatively increased formalization and centralization of rule. Still, even with the displacement of confederations and loose imperial polities by states and bureaucracies, and the transformation of many middle grounds and mixed frontiers into guarded borders, it is possible to retain the kind of cross-regional—rather than classical area studies—approach that is being advocated here. To that end, let us alight, briefly, on four subjects or applications: (1) despotism, (2) Tatarica-Islam, (3) borderlands in the center, and (4) European Union in reverse.

**Despotism.** The rediscovery of the Qing (1644–1911) as a Manchu or Manchu-centric multiethnic dynasty rather than a Sinicized one has been striking.<sup>68</sup> The Qing dynasty's conquest of the interior has also been brought vividly back to light. (This resonates in today's China, because even though the Chinese state refuses to admit conquest—the authorities prefer to assume all territories were *always* part of China—the Chinese state is pushing a new “great opening to the West” to spread development away from the coasts and to assert greater central control over remote regions.) As scholarship on the Qing has moved back to the frontier, it naturally butts up against scholarship

<sup>67</sup> Interesting parallels can be drawn between the Mongols and ancient Rome (whose patrimony was claimed by Byzantium, the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, the Habsburg empire, Germany, Britain, and France, among other entities, not to mention Russia). Each developed; and even more, each inspired a notion of universal empire (as had Alexander the Great). But whereas the Roman empire had two capitals or geographic centers (Rome and Constantinople), these were sequential; the Mongols had multiple centers simultaneously, and no real single “center” ever. Most claims to the Mongol legacy were based not on geography but on literal patrimony and, to a lesser extent, Buddhism.

<sup>68</sup> Struve, ed., *The Qing Formation*. For esoteric disagreements over the nature of Manchu identity, see, among others, Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997); Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). Cf. Ping-Ti Ho, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's ‘Reenvisioning the Qing,’” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, 1 (1998): 123–55. For (Inner) Mongol views of the Qing, see Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

on Russia. You would think a meeting would be easy: both Russia and China are in a sense successor states to the imperial Mongols, and the Russian empire and the Qing also “shared” conquest of the peoples in between. But scholars of the in-between have been divided into “Central Asia” Studies (Russian) and “Inner Asia” Studies (Chinese).

Overcoming these barriers by mastering Russian as well as Chinese, Peter Perdue urges us in his great book, *China Marches West*, to look at state formation from Asia out rather than from Europe out.<sup>69</sup> Perdue nicely highlights comparisons between Russia and China, tracing isomorphism (similar responses to similar challenges) as well as borrowing. Perdue’s comparative achievement is impressive. He also pays attention to contrasts, which I find even more illuminating. What became the Qing dynasty of 1644 originated among a military caste who were tribute-paying subjects of the Ming dynasty. On the periphery, this military caste grew in might, largely by adapting the old imperial Mongol military system, which they reshaped and renamed the banner system. The banners incorporated Mongols as warriors and commanders. This Manchu–Mongol confederation on the periphery marched on Beijing and conquered China! By contrast, in the Russian empire, many elites amassed fortunes on the periphery, like the Stroganovs in the salt and ore mines across the Urals, but their private armies never challenged the tsar.

Of course, there *were* rebellions on the imperial Russian periphery—Razin, Pugachev—as well as persistent resistance against imperial annexation. But none of the rebels managed to take over and hold the center. Even the Polish-led occupation of Muscovy in the early 17th century could scarcely be characterized as the conquest of the center by the periphery, and in any case it was brief: following the Time of Troubles (1598–1613), Russian autocracy was restored. The salient fact of Muscovite-Russian history is the rarity of *successful* challenges to the central autocracy—despite the continual expansion of the realm. Consideration of Russia alongside Qing China brings out Russia’s distinctiveness: whereas both Rus’ and China were invaded and conquered by the imperial Mongols, China was re-conquered by the tribes who came to be known as the Manchus, in alliance with Mongols. “Ab imperio” does not mean equivalence.

Here’s the larger point—the Manchus who conquered China kept the dynastic system. That is, the Manchus retained China’s despotism.

At this juncture, we come to a long-standing characteristic of much (not all) of the political organization encountered in the space subsumed under the term Eurasia—varying forms of autocratic rule. Non-despotic political models to a degree overlapped the space we are calling Eurasia—in

<sup>69</sup> Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005)—reviewed in *Kritika* 8, 1 (2007): 183–89. Perdue’s adoption of “Central Eurasia” is intended to overcome the division between Central Asia and Inner Asia.

Polish-Lithuanian, Novgorodian, Habsburg, South Asian (well before British rule), and Mongol lands (today, former communist Mongolia is largely democratic, a vivid contrast to its neighbors in Central Asia). In short, there is no single political or institutional model in Eurasia. But the persistence of or quick return to some form of despotism over a very long period in Russia and China, the two biggest and most powerful states between Germany and Japan, remains one of the key phenomena for us to explain.<sup>70</sup> Any explanation should account for both these cases, and for the exceptions, like post-Ottoman Turkey.

It is the imperial Mongols who are often blamed for what is frequently called “oriental despotism.” But oddly, the Mongols were by and large not despotic.<sup>71</sup> Instead of a single khan there were usually many khans, each with brothers, uncles, grown sons, and rivals from other tribes.<sup>72</sup> What is more, nomad tribes acclaimed their chiefs at assemblies, which were also convened for major decisions. (There is more evidence for assemblies in the scant extant historical record of Mongol history than in the plentiful historical record for Muscovy.) Furthermore, among Mongols, during the migrations, and especially in time of war, one chief might be vested with powers beyond those over his own tents, but once the specific task passed, such expanded authority usually lapsed. Even a chief’s authority over his own tents could lapse if he failed

<sup>70</sup> Weber singled out extreme forms of patrimonialism as “sultanistic,” on the supposed model of the Ottoman empire. Despite the empirical misfit of this concept with its original model—the sultan of the Ottoman empire—sultanism as a general form of rule was revived at a conference in 1990 for purely personalistic authoritarian regimes. See H. E. Chelabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)—probably the most important recent work on authoritarianism.

<sup>71</sup> On the Mongols’ consultative, deliberative administrative practice in China, see Elizabeth Endicott West, *Mongolian Rule in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> “Through the entire history of the Mongols,” one scholar has written dramatically, runs “a red thread of fatal individualism, which gives personal loyalty precedence over loyalty to politically or ideologically founded institutions” (Veronika Veit, *Die Vier Qane von Qalqa: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der politischen Bedeutung der nordmongolischen Aristokratie in den Regierungsperioden Kang-his bis Chien-ung [1661–1796] an hand des biographischen Handbuches Iledkel šastir aus dem Jahre 1795*, 2 vols. [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990], 1: 10). In a similar vein, another scholar noted that the Jungar (or Oyrat) Mongols—known in Russian sources as Kalmyks and in Chinese sources as Olod (Eleuths)—and the Qalqa Mongols “were irreconcilable foes. It is this last fact, and not the courage and discipline of the Manchu, the wealth of China, or the enervating influence of Lamaism, that decided the fate of Middle Asia” (John F. Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1919], 1: lxxiii). For a brilliant discussion of all Inner Asian polities in terms of the *comitatus* (a warband of friends), see Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming). Of course, nomadic political arrangements changed over time, and not only from contact with sedentary societies.

to provide opportunities for booty or trade. The notion that the Mongols imparted despotic rule to Russia or to anywhere else is exactly backwards.

Infamously, in the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth—in which the nobles had an assembly and each noble had a veto—was swallowed up by Muscovite despotism. But in the same 18th century, on the other side of the landmass, the last surviving independent Mongol confederation (that of the Oyrat) was also swallowed up by Chinese and Muscovite despotisms.

Sure, even leaving aside the problematic term “oriental,” Wittfogel was wrong: hydraulic systems, which he invoked to account for the despotism in China, have been invoked (in the form of polders) to explain the development of democracy in Holland. Sure, under the rubric “oriental despotism,” the sultan or tsar is supposed to have owned the realm as personal property—a simplified view that has been forcefully argued as well as forcefully challenged in the Russian case (where the *practices* of property ownership may be less well understood than thought).<sup>73</sup> At a minimum, there was private property in the post-Petrine period, while China long had well-developed private property (completely contrary to Max Weber).<sup>74</sup> Thus we can rightly

<sup>73</sup> On Russia, Richard Pipes, following Vasilii Kliuchevskii as much as Max Weber, labeled the Russian ruler's personal ownership of the kingdom “patrimonialism.” This view of Russia has also been called “oriental despotism” (Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* [New York: Scribner, 1974]; Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005], 1–3). See also Karl Wittfogel, “Russia and the East: A Comparison and Contrast,” with commentary by Nicholas Riasanovsky and Bertold Spuler as well as Wittfogel's reply, *Slavic Review* 22, 4 (1963): 627–62. George Weickhardt took Pipes to task on the issue of private property in Muscovy, but inconclusively. Weickhardt established that in Muscovy, title to hereditary estates (*votchiny*) was individual (like private property) according to legal writ, but he offered little evidence about actual practice (the law as applied or not). On practice, the jury is still out, at least for Muscovy, since even Pipes concedes the development of private property in the post-Petrine period (George Weickhardt, “Pre-Petrine Property Law,” *Slavic Review* 52, 4 [1993]: 663–79; Richard Pipes, “Response: Was There Private Property in Muscovite Russia?” and Weickhardt, “Was There Private Property in Muscovy?” *Slavic Review*, 53, 2 [1994]: 524–30, 531–38; Valerie Kivelson, personal communication). A sweeping work that evokes Pipes—Stefan Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence* (New York: Routledge, 2005)—lacks any comparative dimension in terms of Asia. Hedlund also makes no mention of patterns of private property ownership in today's Russia, where absence of the rule of law does not mean the absence of widespread property ownership.

<sup>74</sup> Bettine Birge, “Women and Property in Sung Dynasty China (960–1279): Neo-Confucianism and Social Change in Chien-chou, Fukien” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1992); Madeleine Zelin et al., eds., *Contract and Property in Early Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Christopher Mills Isett, *State, Peasant, and Merchant in Qing Manchuria, 1644–1862* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007). Among the Mongols livestock was held by each tent as personal possessions (subject to levies), while grazing grounds were not owned or even assigned by chiefs, until Mongol chieftains were subordinated to the Qing.



attack the thesis of “oriental despotism” as a failed conceptualization of and explanation for the *longue durée* despotisms in China and Russia. And we can introduce important nuances into the understanding of Chinese or Muscovite-Russian despotism (clans, honor codes). But the persistence of strong, and to an extent ideologically celebrated, despotism is (or should be) undeniable.<sup>75</sup> Despotism is no mere “response” to this circumstance or that, but something that needs to be achieved, and sustained.

**Tatarica-Islam.** The downfall of the imperial Mongols was once said to have led to a precipitous “decline” in contacts and in Eurasian trade, which supposedly shifted to the sea. These days, however, Eurasia is said to have experienced a persistent post-Mongol “flourishing.” This flourishing—a word open to interpretation—has been attributed partly to diaspora merchants from Mughal India. Speaking Persian and sometimes variations of Turkic, South Asian merchants used overland routes and inland river systems to exchange Indian cottons, tobacco, saffron, betel leaf, sugar, and indigo for Iranian melons, dried fruits, nuts, silks, carpets, and precious metals, or for Russian pelts, leathers, birchbark, walrus tusks, saddles, and chain-mail armor. South Asian merchant communities took hold in Bukhara and Astrakhan, Isfahan and Qandahar.<sup>76</sup> Thanks to these traders, South Asia was connected in all directions on land, not just by sea. No less important, however, were the strong Islamic scholarly links that overlapped the trade routes, connecting Bukhara and Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, and extending across the Muslim Qazaq steppe, all the way to Chawchak (i.e., Chuguchak, Tacheng) and beyond.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Marshall T. Poe, echoing his subjects, presents Russia’s despotism as an achievement, given Muscovy/Russia’s geopolitical circumstances (*The Russian Moment in World History* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003]). Cf. Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>76</sup> India’s Muslim and even Hindu merchants knew Persian, the main trading language, and some knew Turkic dialects, useful in Muscovy/Russia. Indian merchants developed some of the same techniques made famous in Renaissance Italy—palazzo-like trading houses (called *havelis*), kin networks, and credit—but they did *not* enjoy corresponding Italian-style political organization/strong states to support them (Scott C. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade 1550–1900* [Leiden: Brill, 2002], esp. 121–22). See also André Gunder Frank, “ReOrient: From the Centrality of Central Asia to China’s Middle Kingdom,” in *Rethinking Central Asia: Non-Eurocentric Studies in History, Social Structure, and Identity*, ed. Korkut A. Ertürk (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1999), 11–38. With the tsarist advance into the region, the strong links between Turkestan and South Asia appear to have suffered.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Kemper, *Sufis und Gelehrte in Tatarien und Baskkirien, 1789–1889: Der islamische Diskurs unter russischer Herrschaft* (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1998); Kemper et al., eds., *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Schwarz, 1996–2004). See also the biographical sketches of various mobile types who frequently mention Istanbul’s Islamic institutions and the Ottoman empire in Qurbān-‘Alī Khālidi, *An Islamic Dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe, 1770–1912*, ed. Allen J. Frank and Mirkasyim A. Usmanov (Leiden: Brill, 2004), esp. 30, 68–69. For a sense of the



It is well known that the rise of the historical field in post-Ottoman Turkey was dominated by Muslim intellectual Russian subjects who emigrated after 1917 to Istanbul.<sup>78</sup> But Mustafa Tuna, a Princeton Ph.D. student, has been tracing the earlier influence in the other direction: Ottoman intellectuals in the 19th century provided a major point of reference for Tatar and other Muslim intellectuals in Russia, who in turn played a prominent role in Russian Turkestan. Russian Muslims subscribed to various Ottoman periodicals, and issued their own in response, while pilgrims on hajj—for those who could afford it—brought back books not just from Medina or Cairo but from Istanbul (often via Dagestan, a way station to and from the Ottoman lands) as well from as the prestigious center of Bukhara before and after its Russian conquest.<sup>79</sup> (Orthodox pilgrims journeying from Kiev to Mount Athos and Jerusalem also inhabited a broad spiritual commonwealth whose unity has been obscured by the boundaries of the various states as well as of postwar academic area studies.)

To be sure, Ottoman empire–Russian empire comparisons and interactions are a new growth area, but Ottoman–*Tatar* ties are far less so. The latter were long eclipsed by the fog of alleged pan-Turkism, a great specter of the Russian police, while nowadays Ottoman–Tatar ties are obscured by the fog of “identity.” The alternative, in my view, is to appreciate the extensive far-flung networks, especially of Islamic traders and mullahs. These networks—typical for the “House of Islam” more generally—are vaster than

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world beyond these educated urban elites, see Nathan Light, “Kazakhs of the Tarbaghatai: Ethno-History through the Novel,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, 17, 2 (1993): 91–102, a discussion of *Songghy kosh* (The Last Migration) by Qabdesht Zhumadilov, a fictional account of rural nomadic life in the Tarbaghatai. See also Gul’mira Sultangalieva, “‘Tatarskaia’ diaspora v konfessional’nykh svyaziakh kazakhskoi stepi (XVIII v.–XIX v.),” *Vestnik Evrazii*, no. 4 (2000): 20–36. On Russian dismissals of Islam among the Qazaq, first aired by A. I. Levshin, who helped mislead generations of commentators and scholars, see Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780–1910* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 274–313; and Bruce G. Privatsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazakh Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> For example, Zeki Velidi Togan, Abdullah Battal Taymas, Akdes Nimet Kurat, Yusuf Akçura (although he came earlier), Sadri Maksudi Arsal, and so on, or even more recent historians like Halil İnalçık, Cemal Kafadar, İlber Ortaylı, and Hakan Kırımlı who are Crimean or Kazan Tatars. See, for example, R. B. Gainetdinov, *Tiurko-tatarskaia politicheskaiia emigratsiia, nachalo XX vek–30e gody* (Naberezhnye Chelny: Kamskii, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Mustafa Tuna, “Inroads of Modernity: Islam, Social Networks, and Administration in Imperial Russia” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, expected completion 2008). Tuna reports that Ottoman archives contain many documents bearing upon the Muslims of the Russian empire. Many were generated by Ottoman consulates, whose on-site officials followed affairs in places such as Kazan.

we imagine.<sup>80</sup> Tatar merchant communities blanketed the Russian *imperium*, from Helsinki to Irkutsk, and were also established in Qing Xinjiang.<sup>81</sup> Other Muslims got a “tour” of the *imperium* and of foreign lands thanks to the Russian military reforms of the 1870s. One could draw attention as well to the 19th-century Islamic state—under *shariah*—that formed in an eastern Turkestan region that broke away, briefly, from China, under the influence of adventurers from Qoqand, in western Turkestan, which had ties to Russia as well as Istanbul.<sup>82</sup>

Such were some of the consequences of the conquests of the Mongols and of their successors the Ottomans, which broke the Arab hegemony over Islam, leading to a new Muslim space, based on multiple languages (Turkic, Persian, and Urdu, as well as Arabic). The Tatars, often viewed as a kind of cold northern fringe of this supposedly east–west world, were better integrated in the Islamic space than usually understood. Indeed, there is a rich history of Siberia and of Inner Asia in the Tatar language, not only offering a different point of view but reconfirming the extent to which the Siberian chronicles are partly derived from Islamic source materials.<sup>83</sup> One does not

<sup>80</sup> John Voll, “Islam as a Special World System,” *Journal of World History* 5, 2 (1994): 213–26. On movement among networks of Muslim women, see Agnès Kefeli-Clay, “Krāshen Apostasy: Popular Religion, Education, and the Contest over Tatar Identity (1856–1917)” (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2001), 206–29. In parallel, see Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), which examines the Muslims in the Gansu/Ningxia/Shaanxi region of China following its penetration by various forms of Sufism during the late Ming and Qing periods. Lipman illuminates the persistence of ties between the China-ruled Muslims and the wider Islamic world, not least thanks to the hajj.

<sup>81</sup> Alfred J. Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 70–73; Mirkasym Usmanov, “Tatar Settlers in Western China (Second Half of the 19th Century to the First Half of the 20th Century),” in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, ed. Michael Kemper et al. (Berlin: Schwarz, 1998), 2: 243–48; and Usmanov, “Tatarskoe kupechestvo v torgovle Rossii s vostochnymi stranami cherez Astrakhan i Orenburg,” *Russian History/Histoire russe* 19, 1–4 (1992): 505–13.

<sup>82</sup> Ho-dong Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864–1877* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>83</sup> G. F. Miller, *Istoriia Sibiri*, 2 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1937), 1: 161. For one such text reviving an early 20th-century historiography, see the Russian translation from the Tatar of *Seber Tarikhi*: Khadi Atlasi, *Istoriia Sibiri* (Kazan: Tatarskoe, 2005; orig. 1911). Atlasi (1876–1938), typically, was born to an imam's family, studied at his father's mekteb then at a medrese near Orenburg, and became a teacher at his own medrese and an elected representative to the Duma in St. Petersburg. He was arrested in 1936 and died in confinement. See also V. V. Radlov, *Obraztsy narodnoi literatury tiurkskikh plemen*, 4 (St. Petersburg, 1872); Rafael Shaikhiev, *Tatarskaia narodno-kraevedcheskaia literatura XIX–XX vv.* (Kazan: Kazanskii universitet, 1990); and Allen J. Frank and Mirkasym A. Usmanov, eds., *Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk: Two Manuscripts by Ahmad-Wali al-Qazani and Qurban Ali Khalidi* (Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 2001).

have to be a contemporary Tatar nationalist to appreciate the ways in which Tatars imagined, and tried to realize, an imperial project before and then within the broad expanse provided by the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, as well as across those imperial borders.

Tatarica predates Yermak (who, of course, drowned, conquering nothing). After the eventual conquest of Siberia, Tatarica has acted like a great whispering echo accompanying *rossiiskii* (Russian in the imperial, not ethnic, sense). A converted Tatar prince's canonization in 1553—which predated the political and ideational integration of Kazan and Astrakhan' into Muscovy—offers an opening note in this reverberation.<sup>84</sup> If only Chingissids (like Gediminids, a Lithuanian family) could aspire to Muscovite princely titles, many Tatar families—their genealogies duly recorded in Brockhaus and Efron—nonetheless attained prominence in Russia, from the Meshcherskie to the Iusupovy (in whose St. Petersburg ballroom the aristocracy danced away the empire, and in whose cellars the assassination attempt was made on Rasputin).<sup>85</sup> Evocations of the air of superiority affected by some Tatar princes can be found in the family memoirs of Dimitri Obolensky (the Byzantinist).<sup>86</sup> To be sure, Tatarica was far from the only culture that was layered into what we know as Russia.<sup>87</sup> But when it came to establishing Muslim institutions of rule within the imperial structures (land empires, characteristically, institutionalized religion), the tsarist authorities usually focused on “Tatars.”<sup>88</sup> Islam in Russia is not reducible to

<sup>84</sup> Charles J. Halperin, “A Chingissid Saint of the Russian Orthodox Church: The Life of Peter Tsarevich of the Horde,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 9 (1975): 324–35.

<sup>85</sup> On the nobles in Russia who claimed descent from Muslims and traced a genealogy back to the caliph Abu Bakr and the saint Baba Tükles, see Devin A. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 396–407. See also N. A. Baskakov, *Russkie familii tiurkskogo proiskhozhdeniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979); and A. Kh. Khalikov, *500 russkikh familii bulgaro-tatarskogo proiskhozhdeniia* (Kazan: n.p., 1992).

<sup>86</sup> Obolensky, *Bread of Exile: A Russian Family* (London: Harvill, 1999). Prince Vasilii Vasil'evich Golitsyn (1643–1714), whose family was not descended from Tatars, owned caf-tans worth thousands of rubles, some made from the much prized, sable-trimmed silk twist known as *baiberek* (Richard Hellie, *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia, 1600–1725* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], 607).

<sup>87</sup> For a complex look into this layering question—examining Mikhail Tukhachevskii's innovative deep operations through space, which proved superior to German conceptions of space in battle, and which consciously or unconsciously incorporated nomadic notions—see Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 164–249. For a succinct discussion of Cossacks as a multilayered imperial symbiosis (and a way of life and juridical status, not an ethnicity), see Iurii Zuev and Aleksandr Kadyrbaev, “Pokhod Ermaka v Sibir': Tiurkskie motivy v russkoi teme,” *Vestnik Evrazii*, no. 3 (2000): 38–61.

<sup>88</sup> Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Crews demonstrates, among other things, that religion was the centerpiece not solely of identification but of governance in

Tatarica, but it is not comprehensible without Tatarica. (A minority of Tatars were Christians.)

In Kazan in January 2006, I came across a stupendous *Atlas Tatarica*—an entire world conjured into view on maps.<sup>89</sup> It is centered on today's Tatarstan, mostly ignoring the innumerable historical sources that present a less centralized, less unified, less identity-focused picture of Tatarica.<sup>90</sup> Politically, too, Tatarstan's efforts to "nationalize" Tatarica have proved unavailing, and not solely because even within today's Russia more Tatars live outside the borders of the "autonomous republic" of Tatarstan than inside it. Tatars historically identified themselves often not as Tatars (the Russian designation) but as Muslims—a potentially unifying designation, albeit one that was modified by place (in Siberia, for example: Baraba Muslims, Kachinsk Muslims, Sayan Muslims).<sup>91</sup> Thanks to Islam as well as trade, Tatarica has always been more about mobility and trans-imperial linkages than one or another place, even Kazan. Yet, whereas "Central Eurasia" is mostly a contemporary political project, and mostly in academia, the visions and imperial contradictions of Tatarica-Islam have been a fantasy in history, an everyday experience, within the Russian empire and the Soviet Union and in emigration, notably in Istanbul.

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the empire, and that the tsarist authorities understood their policies toward Islam within an international context of imperial comparison and competition.

<sup>89</sup> Vasilii Bartol'd provides a lucid overview of the term "Tatar" ("Tatary," in his *Sochineniia*, 5 [Moscow: Izdatel'stvi vostochnoi literatury, 1968]: 559–61). He writes that "Tatar," as a collective name, appears to date at least to the eighth century, referring to Mongol-speaking, not Turkic-speaking, tribes (inhabiting an area southwest of Baikal up to the Kerulen). See V. Thomsen, "Les inscriptions de l'Orkhon," *Mémoires de la Société finno-ougrienne* [Helsinki], no. 5 (1896): 140. In the time of the conquests of Chinggis and his sons, "Tatar" is identified with Turkic speakers. Rashid al-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1858), 1: 64. Russians popularized usage of the designation "Tatar" for all Turkic speakers, other than those in the Ottoman empire, while Chinese popularized usage of the term "Tatar" for all Mongols (as well as peoples of Manchuria). Among themselves, in the late 19th century, these peoples debated whether to call themselves "Turks" or "Tatars" (A. N. Samoilovich, "Musul'manskaia periodicheskaiia pechat'," in *Mir Islama*, 2 vols. [St. Petersburg: Kirshbaum, 1912], 1: 257–87 [at 270]). Some, however, called themselves "Nughay" or "Nughay-Tatars" (Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*, 70). A Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, centered in Kazan, was established in 1920, but the attempts to claim Kazan as the center and homeland for all Tatars began earlier.

<sup>90</sup> The atlas begins with the natural environment; claims as progenitors the Bulgars on the Volga as well as the Golden Horde; briefly encompasses the Crimean, Astrakhan, and Siberian khanates, the Nogai Horde and the Kazakh khanate as well as Tatar servitors throughout Russia; and culminates with today's Tatarstan and President Shaimiev (Rafail Khakimov, ed., *Atlas Tatarica* [Kazan, Moscow, and St. Petersburg: Feoriia, 2005]). For the current political context, see Allen J. Frank, *Islamic Historiography and "Bulghar" Identity among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>91</sup> P. A. Slovtsov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie Sibiri*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1886; orig. 1838), 1: 3.

**Borderlands in the Center.** Apply for a grant on “borderlands,” and you get the grant even before you hit the send button. On the issue of frontiers, much work has been of high quality—Michael Khodarkovsky, Willard Sunderland, Thomas Barfield, James Milward, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, and so on. But in the heightened attention to borderlands, sometimes the empires disappear.<sup>92</sup> In fact, zones of state overlap can reveal salient differences among empires. Locales such as Sakhalin (Ainu-Russia-Japan), Kulja (Mongol-Uyghur-Russia-China), Crimea (Tatar Khanate-Russia-Ukraine), and Chernivtsi (Ottoman-Habsburg-Russia-Romania-Ukraine) should be inescapably comparative, unique laboratories that illuminate the specificities of multiple empires. At the same time, however, some of what rival empires had in common can be partly attributable to the overlap zones—for example, the profound Caucasus influences on both the Ottoman and Russian empires.<sup>93</sup>

To find the Caucasus itself in the literature on the Caucasus turns out to be surprisingly difficult (at least so far). One can learn quite a bit about the Russian imperial officials, colonists, and missionaries who went to the Caucasus.<sup>94</sup> But we seem to have much less published insight (at least in languages other than the indigenous ones) into the local elite structures, networks, and commerce, which adapted and used the new Russian imperial institutions and personnel, and upon which autocratic Russian officials appointed to the region were dependent. We also seem to have little on the many segments of Caucasus society that the local Caucasus elites did not always command in practice either, even if they claimed to rule them. But the missing or muted dimensions of Caucasus society and politics in the literature on the Caucasus is not my chief concern here. Rather, what interests me here is the Caucasus outside the Caucasus.

At this point, I need to offer a slight correction to the narrative above. In Russia, the imperial center *was* finally re-conquered (in the 20th century) by the borderlands, or at least by what Alfred Rieber has aptly called “a man of the borderlands”—Stalin. But Stalin (along with Beria, Mikoian, and many other less well-known Caucasus types) did not forge out of borderland peoples a new ruling nation like the Manchus of the Qing. On the contrary, Stalin and his entourage are said to have assimilated into Russian culture. Maybe, however, the Caucasus qualities of Stalin have not stood out because they were already part of Russia.<sup>95</sup> The interminable counter-insurgency as

<sup>92</sup> On the frontier's impact on the center, see David Howell, *Geographies of Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>93</sup> Alfred J. Rieber, “The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers,” in *Imperial Rule*, ed. Rieber and Alexei Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004).

<sup>94</sup> A celebrated example is Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>95</sup> After 1991, as the joke has it, two Georgians were flying from Tblisi to Moscow and one, looking out the window, shakes his head and says to the other, “Imagine, we lost all that.”

well as customs that could be associated with or ran through the Caucasus (the tamada, *mest'* or blood revenge, certain forms of hostage-taking in diplomacy) were affected and then absorbed by tsarist empire subjects, and fed into what we call "Russia."

Borderlands studies, in other words, are or should be also about the Center—and not just stereotypes ("representations") held in the Center about the borderlands, but the entire material and mental culture drawn from across the empire, mixed, and then dispersed all around.<sup>96</sup> This is well known in other historiographies, particularly the British one, under the phenomenon of "the empire in the metropole."<sup>97</sup> Empire is a highway outward, but it becomes a highway inward as well.

**European Union in Reverse.** Here is something we ridicule: the Soviet Union was one gigantic *tipovoi proekt*—a standardized, prefab civilization. But this is no laughing matter. The Soviet phenomenon created a deeply unified material culture. I am thinking not just of the cheap track suits worn by seemingly every male in Uzbekistan or Bulgaria, Ukraine or Mongolia.<sup>98</sup> Consider the children's playgrounds in those places, erected over the same cracked concrete panel surfaces and with the same twisted metal piping—all made at the same factories, to uniform codes.<sup>99</sup> This was also true of apartment buildings (outside and inside), schools, indeed entire cities, even villages. Despite some folk ornamentation here and there (Islamic flourishes on prefab concrete panels for a few apartment complexes in Kazan or Baku) a traveler encounters identical designs and materials. This means, for example, that studying the urban design and construction of tiny Albania can allow one to generalize about more than one-sixth of the earth's surface.<sup>100</sup>

Instead of taking for granted this shared material culture, we need to explain how it was possible. It did not arise automatically. Rather, it involved vast exchange (often coercive) of personnel, training, norms, and materials on a scale not seen since ... since the Mongol empire. It was carried out by a

<sup>96</sup> Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002). Charles King stresses that Russian conquest in the Caucasus was vertical: imperial forces took the lowlands quickly but spent the better part of a century pacifying the mountains (personal communication).

<sup>97</sup> Admittedly, much of the "empire in the metropole" literature still concerns imperial display in the capital and popular culture, rather than effects on central institutions. A seminal work is John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Popular Opinion 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>98</sup> Thanks to Elena Shulman for this reminder.

<sup>99</sup> This is the subject of Paul Josephson's current research, as presented at Princeton in the fall of 2005.

<sup>100</sup> Elidor Mehilli is working on such a Ph.D. dissertation at Princeton: "Cities, Architecture, Things: The Material Culture of Socialism on the Edge of the Second World."



variety of agents, many of whom, it must be said, valued the contacts, even if they disliked Soviet rule as a foreign imposition or a system of absurdities. There was a lot of push, but also some pull.

Soviet-era exchange was not—as in the imperial Mongol case—a conscious appropriation of others' cultures: the Soviets did not feel *Realpolitik* constraints to the degree that the Mongols did.<sup>101</sup> Still, Soviet-era exchange was multidirectional. For instance, an idea as central as Brezhnev's "developed socialism" arose in Eastern Europe. The concept was first espoused by party officials seeking a platform for *reformist* ideas, then it traveled to the Soviet Union and after a period of public debate became reigning orthodoxy, but in a conservative guise, as a way to reassert Soviet primacy within the socialist world! "Developed socialism" served the purpose of exorcizing Khrushchev's polycentrist intimations within the bloc, and of having something to answer Mao's pretensions.<sup>102</sup> Be that as it may, the very assumption that there should be an orthodoxy was itself a homogenizing influence (including of forms of resistance). Orthodoxy was possible because party cells and police were ubiquitous, and because the centralized education system mandated not only the same school textbooks for everyone, but also that every student had to be on the same page at the same time—the infamous *uchebnyi* [teaching] *plan*.<sup>103</sup>

Planning! The Soviet economy was overwhelmingly integrated; and it was guided by integrated systems of specifications, output quotas, accounting,

<sup>101</sup> See Roman Szporluk, ed., *The Influence of East Europe and the Soviet West on the USSR* (New York: Praeger, 1975), especially the essays by Zvi Gitelman and Stanley Vardys (on the intermediary role of the Baltic republics). See also K. Khallik [Karla Hallik], "Rol' kul'turnykh svyazei v ukreplenii druzhby sovetских narodov," *Kommunist Estonii*, no. 9 (1969).

<sup>102</sup> Sarah Meikeljohn Terry, "Theories of Socialist Development in Soviet–East European Relations," in *Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe*, ed. Terry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 221–53; Terry L. Thompson, "Developed Socialism: Brezhnev's Contribution to Soviet Ideology," in *Soviet Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Vera S. Dunham*, ed. Thompson and Richard Sheldon (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988), 206–35.

<sup>103</sup> Broadly, see Ken Jowitt, "Moscow Centre," in his *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 159–219. On Soviet institutional isomorphism in culture, see Viktor Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies," *Daedalus* 121, 2 (1992): 97–122, esp. 104. On profound resemblances in core state–worker relations, from China to the GDR, see Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928–1941* (London: Pluto, 1986); Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). On the "remarkably uniform set of experiences" throughout the party-states, see Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 21–30, at 28.



regulation, monetary system—a very different, non-market set of understandings, measurements, and instruments. (Those who continue to deny the role of ideology in the Soviet experience need look no further than this planned economy.) Such an astonishing degree of economic integration—a kind of globalization within an autarky—was possible because political and administrative structures were not just centralized but comprehensively standardized (personnel were also rotated all around, until late in the game).<sup>104</sup> Easiest to grasp in material culture and technique, Soviet exchange also afforded a common repertory of Soviet songs, films, radio, and TV programs across the 11 time zones.

This may all seem to be just the usual state-building, particularly in the 20th century with the formidable levers provided by a single language, universal education, universal conscription, television, and bureaucracy. But the Soviet degree of homogenization was generally greater, and the nature of the “homogene” was particular.<sup>105</sup> Inheriting the Romanov autocracy, the Soviet Union vastly expanded but also transformed the anti-liberal structures with the infamous party of a new type, and empowered it with a mammoth noncapitalist industrial economy.<sup>106</sup> Obviously, the Soviet Union never

<sup>104</sup> Not all codes were all-union. For instance, each republic had its own criminal code, although these were modeled on a common source, the 1926 Criminal Code of the RSFSR, and the Soviet legal machinery (police, procuracy, courts) was standardized throughout the realm.

<sup>105</sup> Compare the Netherlands Indies, or what became Indonesia. Imperial-era anthropology—such as Dutch “regional history” and the definition of “traditional law circles” by Cornelis van Vollenhoven (1874–1933)—established where one “island culture” supposedly ended and another began. These definitions are still visible today in the Indonesian National Museum’s dioramas. After the Dutch (and wartime Japanese), Sukarno and then Suharto constructed uniform “revolutionary” and “new order” urban architecture, respectively. This architecture—generally in concrete—made ubiquitous the same slogans, street names (from the pantheon of national heroes), and invocations of the 14th-century “empire” of Majapahit (which is noted in a single text discovered by the Dutch after their annexation of Lombok in 1894). Majapahit was also used to justify the geographical scope of their “tropical Netherlands”—today’s sprawling Indonesia (Michael Laffan, personal communication). For Soviet views on and involvement in Indonesia, see Ragna Boden, *Die Grenzen der Weltmacht: Sowjetische Indonesienpolitik von Stalin bis Brežnev* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2006); and Oleg Brykin, *Ispoved’ ofitsera razvedki* (Moscow: VEK, 1998). For one angle on American involvement in post–World War II Indonesia, see John Bresnan, *At Home Abroad: A Memoir of the Ford Foundation in Indonesia 1953–1973* (Jakarta: Equinox, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Those who continue to claim that ethnicity and nationalism came to trump class in Soviet ideology and governance frequently ignore how the Communist Party monopoly and the state-owned and state-run planned economy—the core interrelated institutions—embodied the class approach to politics and economics, which persisted right through de-Stalinization to 1991. Equally important, the existence of ethno-territorial units (the embodiment of the national principle) does not *ipso facto* prove the existence of nationalism. To take one notable example: as late as 1990, Rukh received around 25 percent of the ballots cast in parliamentary elections; Communists in Ukraine won that vote handily. See Andrew Wilson,

came close to achieving the totalizing physical and ideological uniformity its agents pursued—the Soviet state had a very hard time even controlling its own state agents.<sup>107</sup> But that joke about “a new community of Soviet peoples”—it was no joke.

The Soviet Union was like the European Union in reverse: first it “harmonized” institutions (coercively), and then it broke apart. Indeed, in some ways the institutions of today’s independent post-Soviet states are more alike than the institutions of the member states of the EU. (Not coincidentally perhaps, Estonia and Slovenia—the places that may have most resisted the full integrating pressures of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, respectively—may now be the most anti-EU of all members.)<sup>108</sup> Sovietism also extended, to lesser and varying degrees, around the bloc—to Outer Mongolia (the first Soviet satellite from the 1920s), Eastern Europe, China, North Korea.<sup>109</sup> (Throw in the Kalashnikov and the story becomes global.)<sup>110</sup> The classic

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*Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution for War, Revolution, and Peace, 2000).

<sup>107</sup> On the many conundrums of governance in the Soviet context (the state’s efforts to control the state), see Cynthia Hooper, “Terror from Within: Participation and Coercion in Soviet Power, 1924–1964” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003). For comparisons, see the powerful argument of Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involvement of the Chinese Communist Party* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>108</sup> Estonian elites (architects of EU accession) have been fighting to hold on to neo-liberal trade and economic policies, while Slovenian elites (also accession architects) have been fighting to hold on to social market protectionism. For derogatory Estonian comparisons of the EU to the Soviet Union (including an EU flag with a hammer and sickle), see [www.euro-skepsis.ee/index.htm](http://www.euro-skepsis.ee/index.htm). In 2007, efforts to promote “harmonization” of EU financial markets elicited dogged opposition in London.

<sup>109</sup> For the trial-and-error invention of what would later become known as the “revolution from abroad,” see George G. S. Murphy, *Soviet Mongolia: A Story of the Oldest Political Satellite* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), still useful although out of date. On the depth of exchange with China, see Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1945–1963* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Tat’iana G. Zazerskaia, *Sovetskie spetsialisty i formirovanie voenno-promyshlennogo kompleksa Kitaia (1949–1960 gody)* (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2000); and Deborah A. Kaple, *Dream of a Red Factory: The Legacy of High Stalinism in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also Charles Armstrong, Gilbert Rozman, Samuel Kim, and Stephen Kotkin, eds., *Korea at the Center: Dynamics of Regionalism in Northeast Asia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), chap. 7.

<sup>110</sup> In 1947, one of the prototype weapons of Mikhail Kalashnikov, a barely educated peasant’s son, won a Soviet competition and was selected for mass production. Its name—AK–47—signified “automatic by Kalashnikov,” and the year of its selection (mass production began in 1949). An updated 1959 model was manufactured (under licenses or illegally) in China, North Korea, East Germany, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and Iraq. Not only the Soviet Union and China spread the banana clip rifle but later so did the United States (to the Nicaraguan Contras and Afghan mujahedeen).

1975 Soviet film *Irony of Fate* captures the effort to standardize spaces in order to standardize behavior, while portraying the unruliness of private life. The New Year's drunk from Moscow in the film who is unknowingly put on a plane to Leningrad, disembarks and takes a taxi to his usual address, Third Builders' Street (Tret'ia ulitsa stroitelei), where an apartment building remarkably like his is standing.<sup>111</sup> (This being a movie, his key works—though in the Soviet case, maybe it would actually have worked.) Our drunk could just as well have gone to a similar flat on a Third Builders' Street had he gotten off in Pyongyang. There, the vernacular (as opposed to the imperial) language would have been different, although perhaps the drunk would have just concluded that there had been a sudden mass increase in North Korean *Gastarbeiter*. Anyway, much about the economy and the politics in Pyongyang, even the art curriculum (had he stopped in at the university), would have been recognizably “second world.”<sup>112</sup>

To be sure, one can still travel around former Habsburg lands and come upon the neo-classical administration buildings painted in Maria Theresa yellow, whether in Cluj or L'viv. Thanks to Romanov rule, places as disparate as Warsaw and Helsinki have many resemblances (providing locales for films set in St. Petersburg). Well before the 20th century, engineering and design curricula shared characteristics within empires and across imperial borders. But just as often, these old empires preferred not to harmonize their institutions and regulations but instead to tailor them to the various “millets” or “estates.” The Soviets deliberately drove for uniformity. Moreover, the phenomenal leveling of the world wars, especially that of World War II, compelled a colossal construction and reconstruction effort, which took place under the aegis of a Soviet civilization, and via the vastly increased state capacity wielded by the Soviet despotism.<sup>113</sup>

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Kalashnikovs appear in the flags of Hezbollah and of Mozambique. See Edward Clinton Ezell and R. Blake Stevens, *Kalashnikov: The Arms and the Man* (Ontario: Collector Grade Publications, 2001); Larry Kahaner, *AK-47: The Weapon That Changed the Face of War* (New York: Wiley, 2006); and C. J. Chivers, “Russia Salutes the Father of the Rifle Fired Round the World,” *New York Times* (11 November 2004). Chivers is writing a global history of the Kalashnikov.

<sup>111</sup> The street name could be a sly reference to the 1926 silent film classic *Bed and Sofa*, whose Russian title is *Tret'ia meshchanskaia* (Third Philistine Street).

<sup>112</sup> For an argument about the divergence from Socialist Realism of North Korean *belles lettres* (such as it was), see Brian Myers, *Han Sôrya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1994). For the struggles to de-Stalinize, ultimately lost, see Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

<sup>113</sup> Tarik Amar demonstrates that even something so touted as a separate West Ukrainian identity was not a pre-Soviet “survival” but a Soviet-era creation, in which the Nazi authorities, to be sure, but also the Soviet authorities, were deeply complicit. As is well known, L'viv—the capital of what became western Ukraine—lost its Jewish and Polish populace as

After Stalin's death in 1953, the adoption of mass standardization greatly accelerated, curtailing the parquet and, as it were, expanding the concrete. Sure, the suburbs of Paris and Seoul also swarm with prefabricated concrete-block apartment blocks, but Soviet serial reproduction in material culture and infrastructure also came with "standardized" Communist Party committees, state-owned economies, and the Gulag. This makes it more than a story of Robert Moses run amok, or of powerful global corporations like Bechtel and Siemens building to their brand-name standards in more than 100 countries. In the Soviet case, beyond the technical matter of inexpensive mass construction and economies of scale lay a comprehensive program and effects of "harmonized" institutions, practices, ways of thinking, and experiences (dissidence, Kremlinology, queuing, and even the odd individualized articles fabricated by hand in response to chronic shortages).

In sum, even as it continuously surveilled and borrowed from outside the socialist bloc, even as it was inescapably part of the wider world, the Soviet Union nonetheless realized an autarkic, messianic, imperialist, demotic Eurasia, under the category "Soviet."<sup>114</sup> Simultaneously, the Soviet Union implemented an anti-Eurasianist program, helping to construct nation-states within the union. Mistakenly, we have allowed the national building to eclipse the Soviet building—even to the point of sometimes failing to recognize that the nations were decidedly *Soviet* nations. The Soviets created standardized national infrastructure for the republics but also transnational infrastructure, as well as transnational political habits, transnational economic relations, and transnational ways of behaving, still visible in many of the successor national republics. In the ingenious film *Goodbye, Lenin!* (2003), about East Germany, an apparently dedicated socialist woman enters a coma before the 1989 German unification, awaking afterwards, ignorant of events. Her son, hoping to avoid shocking her frail system, recreates the GDR after its fall in their apartment—knowing exactly what it takes, materially and mentally, to do so.

East Germany was literally swallowed by the West, but that process made many easterners, perhaps a majority, more conscious than ever of their different habits of thinking and being, despite belonging to the same national community as their West German counterparts. For the post-Soviet Union, there was of course no Western Soviet Union to swallow it up (despite some visions of doing so in the Clinton administration), but since 1991 there have been many mutations and unexpected reconstitutions of Soviet shards. We

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well as its Galician qualities and suddenly acquired a mass of Ukrainian speakers, many from the eastern part of the republic; the Soviets eventually made an about-face and began to encourage among them a Soviet West Ukrainian identity (Tarik Amar, "The Making of Soviet Lviv" [Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2006]).

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika* 2, 1 (2001): 111–64.

might invoke the idea of recombinant DNA, keeping in mind that the flow of genetic material from the outside world increased. Still, what is striking is that amid all the talk about disintegration, a great deal just never disintegrated, from many state structures to management cultures within the state as well as at factories and universities (which I have studied in depth).<sup>115</sup> Such institutional stubbornness—in a place where formal institutions are thought to be frequently overshadowed by personal followings—is wondrous.

The economic boom in the wider region since the 1998 default and ruble devaluation—Russia's GDP, to take one case, jumped from around \$200 billion to \$1 trillion in less than a decade—has been transformational in many respects, especially in fostering particular kinds of middle classes. Despite this breakthrough to property-owning societies (without rule of law), despite the yielding of empire to quasi-nation states and statelets, and despite the loss, with long-term consequences, of a unified educational system and army service as well as of Russian-language television penetration (for now), Sovietism in politics, economics, and culture is not going away completely anytime soon.<sup>116</sup> This point should not be construed as an argument for radical continuity (a red herring). Rather, I am arguing that without thorough attention to imperial exchange as well as to despotism it becomes impossible to understand the present or the past in this deeply transregional region.

### Institutions—Governance and Misgovernance

More than 70 percent of the earth's surface is water, not land, and today more than half the world's population still lives within 50 miles of the sea. Of the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel famously wrote, "the sea is everything it is said to be: it provides unity, transport, the means of exchange and intercourse."<sup>117</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri offered a vision that was analogously

<sup>115</sup> On post-communist higher education, I have written the following limited-circulation reports: *Academic Innovation: Individuals, Networks, Patronage* (2006)—51,000 words, for the Ford Foundation; *European Humanities University (Minsk): Case Study of a New Private University* (2004)—61,000 words, for the U.S. State Department; *Civic Education Project: A Network Approach to Change* (2002)—85,000 words for the Open Society Institute (Soros); and *OSI-Soros Megaproject Russia: An Institutional Approach to Change* (2000)—18,000 words, for OSI. Thus far, only the Ford report has been made available to the public.

<sup>116</sup> On continuities in socialist societal commonalities after 1989–91, as examined in the seemingly disparate cases of former East Germany and Russia, see Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). To simplify, economic ties are coming back with a vengeance (via Russian capital, not communist planning), and the cultural ties are greatly loosening. But state institutions still share a general lack of effective limits on executive authority, while the nexus between state office and control over property remains strong (see below).

<sup>117</sup> Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Colin, 1949), trans. Siân Reynolds as *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philippe II*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972–73), 1: 276.

grand in his sweeping account of the far vaster Indian Ocean world. R. R. Palmer and others have suggested an “Atlantic World.”<sup>118</sup> There is also a lively scholarship built upon the notion of the “Pacific Rim.” Such valuable transoceanic perspectives can help us more clearly see the significance of exchange and networks, provided they do not occlude politics and power. A broadening of perspectives also forms part of the hope in a turn to the notion of “Eurasia.”

That hope is not altogether misplaced. Under the auspices of its Center for European Studies, New York University sponsored a year (2005–6) of “Eurasian Connections”—Islam, the steppe, the Black Sea—thereby demonstrating concretely, as at other places, that the rubric “Eurasia” facilitates land-based cross-regional conversations, in this case, among Russianists, Ottomanists, and Sinologists. Such discussions (continuing this academic year at NYU) open up not just parallelism but interconnections, and the ways that numerically small peoples (whether Mongols or Alans) can come to exert substantial historical influence. In North American academia, then, the designation “Eurasia” has demonstrated that it can be community-building.

But the term “Eurasia” is not limited to North America or to academia, and in most contexts Eurasia carries nasty political overtones—autarky, messianism, demotic rule, apologia for empire—as well as very basic obstacles of a refusal by many covered by the term to be any part of it. “Ab imperio” may be a way to encompass Eurasia (and beyond) without trucking with Eurasianism or “Eurasia.” At a minimum, “Ab imperio” is deliberately more expansive. Sure, there *is* a Russian Eurasia and a Soviet Eurasia, as well as an imagined Central Eurasia, but were I putting together a “center” today, I might try to constitute it via the post-Mongol space: China, Iran, India, Ottoman, Rus', Korea—CIIORK (pronounced “chork”).

Whatever the regional and cross-regional geography, of course, thematics are crucial. To that end, in emphasizing “ab imperio,” I have done so via networks and exchange—violent or peaceful—of products, people, ideas, genes. Who could argue with that? Well, at its 11th “world convention” (March 2006), the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)—which has cannibalized some of the activity of the AAASS—claimed to be featuring more than 100 panels, grouped according to Russia/Ukraine/Caucasus,

<sup>118</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); for the period 1850–1950, Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959–64); and Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). In a similar vein, there is Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).



Central Asia/Eurasia, Central Europe, Balkans, and Nationalism Studies.<sup>119</sup> More than 50 presentation titles explicitly mentioned “identity.” Only one presentation title at that year’s ASN mentioned “parliament,” none mentioned “judiciary,” almost none mentioned “economy.” Somewhat better has been the thematic coverage of the gatherings of the Central Eurasian Studies Society and of the rump AAASS itself. Still, for the most part, “nationalities” often appear not to have economies and political institutions, only “identities.”<sup>120</sup> The fixation on identities (national as well as other kinds) has been characteristic even of the important new journal *Ab Imperio*.<sup>121</sup> That’s because that journal, too, reflects what the field produces, notably in global fashion.

Overall, nationalism remains the dominant quaff in our identities-soaked literature. Vulgar Benedict Andersonism (a paint-by-numbers approach to studying the “construction” of nations)—like crude “Orientalism” in Middle East Studies—has colonized the Russia-Eurasia field.<sup>122</sup> One might even say that Anderson’s imagined community, and those who midwived it into the Russia-Eurasia field, opened a huge gap in the literature (intelligent people continue to fall in). Worse, our resulting “springtime of peoples” historiography—apologies to Marx in 1848—has sometimes led to unwitting or even witting identification on the part of the researcher with, say, the Turkmen nation, the Georgian nation, the Ukrainian nation, and so on. Each nation is often portrayed as entitled to its “national” (read: highly

<sup>119</sup> On the posted ASN program for 2006, the term “Eurasia” appeared in the title of just a single presentation (on Central Asia). Also, only 1 of the 600 panelists and participants appeared to cover China or India (a comparison of language politics in Xinjiang and Punjab): [www.nationalities.org/ASN\\_2006\\_Prelim\\_Program.pdf](http://www.nationalities.org/ASN_2006_Prelim_Program.pdf). The association’s journal, *Nationalities Papers*, dates from 1972.

<sup>120</sup> Martijn van Beek, “Beyond Identity Fetishism: ‘Communal’ Conflict in Ladakh and the Limits of Autonomy,” *Cultural Anthropology* 15, 4 (2000): 525–69. In *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)—and the 1988 dissertation upon which it is based—I sought to analyze a process of identification (or identity game), rather than attributes of identity.

<sup>121</sup> In a letter to *Kritika*, the five editors of *Ab Imperio* defend themselves against charges of having overemphasized nationalism by insisting that their journal has been preoccupied with many kinds of identity. It has. See “To the Editors,” *Kritika* 8, 1 (2007): 222–24.

<sup>122</sup> Among the exceptions to the tendency to reduce empire to either nationalism or identity are E. A. Pravilova, *Zakonnost’ i prava lichnosti: Administrativnaia iustitsiia v Rossii, vtoraiia polovina XIX v.—oktiabr’ 1917 g.* (St. Petersburg: SZAGS, 2000); Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Kazakh Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Curzon, 2001); V. O. Bobrovnikov, *Musul’mane Severnogo Kavkaza: Obychai, pravo, nasilie. Ocherki po istorii i etnografii prava Nagornogo Dagestana* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura RAN, 2002); Michael Kemper, *Herrschaft, Recht und Islam in Daghestan: Von den Khanaten und Gemeindebünden zum ġihād-Staat* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005); and Jane Burbank, *Russian Peasants Go to Court: Legal Culture in the Countryside, 1905–1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

Soviet) traditions, which in turn are usually tantamount to egregious governing structures—ask the people who live under them. How long has it been—a quarter-century?—since subaltern studies first exposed the sweeping claims of Indian nationalists to speak for “the people,” as well as the uncritical validation of those dubious claims by latter-day scholars?<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, how many times do we still hear invocation of the paradigm “peasants into Frenchmen,” when the story in France was peasants into *republican* Frenchmen?<sup>124</sup> “Peasants into Soviets” or even “peasants into (Soviet) Ukrainians” is far from analogous.

Among the “nations” of the former Soviet space, we have (without eliding their differences) mostly one illiberal regime after another—neither democracies nor dictatorships, and in transition to nothing.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, in looking at our scholarship on the past, I mostly see preoccupation not with institutions but with identities and, on the present, preoccupation not with authoritarianism but with democratic transition. Could these two tendencies be related? Why were so many of us as a profession quick to blame neo-liberal reforms that mostly did not, indeed could not, take place? Why were so many so quick to enthuse about orange or rose or tulip “revolutions” that, notwithstanding the inspirational street courage, did not, indeed could not, in themselves, produce strong judiciaries or real civil services?<sup>126</sup> Going forward, in the increasing disillusionment over these “revolutions” and over the newly independent states more generally, we need to watch out for a retrospectively rose-colored Soviet Union. Such a view is already evident on the ground in the former Soviet space, from Tajikistan to Chechnya, and its flowering in American academia may not be far behind. In fact, we already have something of a rose-colored tsarist empire (if you read our latest literature, the old prison house of nations was even good for the Jews). Needless to say, nationalism is of great consequence,

<sup>123</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also Shahid Amin, *Event, Memory, Metaphor: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). To put the matter another way, we tend to be quick to see the impositions involved in colonialism but not the impositions involved in nationalism.

<sup>124</sup> The key analytical approach derives not from Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), but from Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>125</sup> On the perverse role of international (democracy) aid in reinforcing these non-democratic outcomes, see Alexander Cooley, “International Aid to the Former Soviet States: Agent of Change or Guardian of the Status Quo?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, 4 (2000): 34–44; and Eric Max McGlinchey, “Paying for Patronage: Regime Change in Post-Soviet Central Asia” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003).

<sup>126</sup> See, among innumerable examples, the incisive commentary on governance challenges in Ukraine by Viktor Pynzenyk (finance minister) in *Zerkalo nedeli* [Kiev] (13 May 2006): 3. See also Stephen Kotkin, “Teenage Country,” *The New Republic* (14 March 2005): 27–33.

even if it is often conflated with everything and anything, from state-building to violence.<sup>127</sup> But nationalism, too, can be very much “*ab imperio*,” whether via tsarist-era “Russification” of the Baltic Germans, which meant promoting Estonians at the Germans’ expense, or Ottoman–Russian competition in the Caucasus, which meant devilishly promoting the nationalism of each other’s Kurds.<sup>128</sup> Empires, moreover, influence not just the emergence of nationalism but any given nationalism’s substance: from the 1860s, the “Azeris” (called Tatars through the 1930s by functionaries) who lived under Russian and especially Soviet rule diverged substantially from the Azeris who remained (and remain) under Iranian rule.<sup>129</sup> Some analysts expressly urge us to recog-

<sup>127</sup> For pushback, see Charles King, “The Myth of Ethnic Warfare: Understanding Conflict in the Post–Cold War World,” *Foreign Affairs* 80, 6 (2001): 165–70. In the award-winning, original book on social mobilization by Mark R. Beissinger, everything seems to be coded as nationalist—mobilization against arbitrary power, against construction of nuclear power stations; mobilization for sovereignty, women’s rights, and social justice (*Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002]). (Beissinger’s latest research is on empire.) For an award-winning book on nationalism as an instrument of *demobilization*—in, of all circumstances, the Yugoslav wars—see V. P. Gagnon, Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>128</sup> These are the subjects, respectively, of Ph.D. dissertations by Bradley Woodworth, “Civil Society and Nationality in the Multiethnic Russian Empire: Tallinn/Reval, 1860–1914” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2003); and Michael Reynolds, “The Ottoman–Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908–1918: Identity, Ideology, and the Geopolitics of World Order” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003). Alexei Miller points out that there could be no policy to Russify the Ukrainians *per se* because they were already Russian by definition (i.e., Little Russians) (*The Ukrainian Question: The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* [Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003]). We sometimes conflate Russification with administrative centralization and forget that peasants in the empire often welcomed Russian-language schools for the opportunities they offered (Edward Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981]).

<sup>129</sup> On the Iranian side of the post-1804 border, Azeri was written in the Persephone script and hardly used; on the Russian side, Azeri began to become a written language (Arabic script) after the 1870s. Elite landowners continued to have kin on either side of the border, but the predominantly rural entered separate trajectories. The Soviet transformation in some ways paralleled that of Atatürk, while the Iranian Azeris retained Persian and Arabic in their languages and cultures. Islamist rule after 1979 also contrasts with Soviet secularization. See Raoul Motika and Michael Ursinus, eds., *Caucasia between the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1555–1914* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002); Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Iran* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993); James D. Clark, *Provincial Concerns: A Political History of the Iranian Province of Azerbaijan, 1848–1906* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2006); Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Eva-Maria Auch, *Muslim-Untertan-Bürger: Identitätswandel in gesellschaftlichen Transformationsprozessen der muslimischen Ostprovinzen Südkaukasiens (Ende 18.–Anfang 20. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Nationalismusforschung* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004); Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich: Deutsche

nize nationalism's beneficial effects—viz. the upsurge that helped overcome communism in Poland.<sup>130</sup> Yet consolidating such outcomes entails establishing genuine private property systems, strong parliaments, judiciaries, civil services, independent and professional media, and civic values. That is why I am most interested in governance, and misgovernance. It is through institutions in the broadest sense, not ethnicities or nations, that we can best understand where locales have come from and where, if anywhere, they are going.

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Verlags-Anstalt, 2003); A. Holly Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); and Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

<sup>130</sup> Timothy Snyder goes still farther, crediting Polish nationalism with stabilizing all of post-communist Eastern Europe (as if Poland had the geopolitical wherewithal, if it had so chosen, to alter borders after 1989). Further, Snyder suggests for Belarus that there is hope because it might yet become a nation, rather than that Belarus could, say, at some point acquire decent governing institutions. Still, even if he almost completely leaves out any consideration of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth's governing institutions and their legacies, Snyder's idea of placing the history of the eastern marches within the broad sweep of the commonwealth is much appreciated (*The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003]). Rogers Brubaker, one of the notable analysts of nationalism's salience, has lately argued—on the basis of Cluj, Transylvania, no less—that nationalism may not be so significant in daily life (Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006]).