

Where is East Asia?

Central Asian and Inner Asian Perspectives on Regionalism

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Attempting to observe Central and Inner Asia from North America or Europe is like looking through a glass that is badly refracted, or even like trying to view the invisible. I propose a new approach toward the understanding of Central and Inner Asia that actively takes stock of East Asian countries' activities, interests, perspectives, and scholarship in the region, and that interrogates dominant definitions of Asian regionalism.¹

The refraction or absence of East Asia in Central and Inner Asian studies may in part be a product of the social scientific imagination filtered through meta-geographical categories, such as East Asia or Western Europe.² While helpful in transcending artificial constructs associated with national boundaries, these meta-geographical constructs can also become bounded, with visible or invisible borders that restrict knowledge and even curiosity within particular zones, thus blinding the observer to the interpenetration of goods, ideas and power that cut across zonal boundaries. In Europe and the Americas, Central Asia (which usually includes Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan) conjures little connection with East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), despite their long, deep and multi-faceted interactions. Instead, it is customary to view the region from Islamic, Russian, Turkish, and now increasingly American angles. Similarly Inner Asia (Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, Xinjiang and Tibet) is generally conceptualized as the "frontier" of China and figures significantly largely in the imagination of historians who study the Qing Empire (1644-1911), while connections with Russia, Europe and beyond tend to be ignored, as is its salience for post-Qing China and the contemporary world.³

1 I am grateful to Mark Selden, Peter Perdue and Kären E. Wigen for their vigorous comments on an earlier draft of this essay. This is an exploratory essay intended to provoke fresh thinking about how to strengthen understanding of Central/Inner Asia or Central Eurasia in North America and Europe. As such, it cannot cover everything and it may have left out some important contributions made by Euroamerican scholars.

2 Cf. Martin W. Lewis & Kären E. Wigen. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

3 Some important exceptions are: Peter Perdue. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005; Fred W. Bergholz. *The Partition of the Steppe: The Struggle of the Russians, Manchus, and the Zunghar Mongols for Empire in Central Asia, 1619-1758*. New York NY: Peter Lang, 1993; S. Frederick Starr (ed.). *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004; Dru C. Gladney.

More than at any other period in modern times, there now is a real opportunity for Central/Inner Asia to become once again “Central”, as famously discussed by the late world systems theorist Andre Gunder Frank.⁴ He argued that twice in history strong energy outbursts from Central/Inner Asia powerfully reshaped the world. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, of course, there is no military power indigenous to the region that the rest of the world needs to reckon with, but Central/Inner Asia has become a zone of great significance and profound upheaval, not only because of its strategic location in the US-led war in Afghanistan and Iraq, but equally importantly, because of the enormous natural resources found in and near the region. This significance is reflected in the establishment of many new posts and academic programs in higher education institutions in North America and Europe, as well as numerous conferences and seminars. These new teaching and research activities coalesce around a new meta-geographical identity: Eurasia or sometimes the more circumscribed “Central” Eurasia.

As with any other meta-geographical construct, Eurasia or Central Eurasia does not have a fixed, universally accepted boundary. The concept of Eurasia came into being in the 1920s among Russian émigré ethnographers, geographers and linguists in Western Europe. In placing the Mongol empire and its heritage at the heart of Russian culture and history, early Russian Eurasianists tried to create a different identity for Russia as occupying a “third continent” between Europe and Asia.⁵ Reappearing in the late 1980s, the concept became immensely popular in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, it has attained new ideological overtones in various countries: For Russia, it is as much a new imperial ideology as a strategic effort to come to terms with its Asian heritage. Kazak president Nazarbayev has embraced Eurasianism to present Kazakhstan as a bridge between Europe and Asia.⁶ In the United States, Eurasia may be conceptualized as a zone to be liberated from influences from China, the Islamic world, and Russia. The US-based Central Eurasian Studies Society, for instance, “define[[^]s] the Central Eurasian region broadly 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.” The

Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and London: C. Hurst Publishers, 2004; Christopher P. Atwood. *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931*. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002; Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath. *The End of Nomadism?: Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

4 Andre Gunder Frank. *The Centrality of Central Asia*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1992.

5 Cf. Orlando Figes. *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002.

6 Sally N. Cummings. “Eurasian Bridge or Murky Waters between East and West? Ideas, Identity and Output in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy.” *Journal of Communist Studies & Transition Politics*, September 2003, Vol. 19 Issue 3, pp.139-155.

Department of Central Eurasia at Indiana University – Bloomington gives a more romantic definition: “Central Eurasia, the home of some of the world’s greatest art, epic literature, and empires, is the vast heartland of Europe and Asia extending from Central Europe to East Asia and from Siberia to the Himalayas.”⁷ In this new meta-geographical imagination, there is little sign of a rigorous analysis of the region’s relationship with East Asia. East Asia has largely dropped out of sight, a separate domain of inquiry and understanding.

The exclusion of East Asia from Central Eurasia may be geopolitically strategic, but the lack of interest in the region’s connection with East Asia on the part of Western analysts, journalists and social scientists is surely symptomatic of a meta-geographical blind spot that is at odds with the clear and well-founded concern and interaction with Central/Inner Asia over long historical time on the part of, for example, Chinese strategists.

East Asia specialists are partly responsible for this situation. Meta-geographically constrained in their imagination, most tend to ignore or downplay the relationship between East Asia and Central/Inner Asia in the contemporary world while emphasizing tensions with and bonds to EuroAmerica. To be sure, Inner Asia looms large in the minds of historians and historical anthropologists of the Xiongnu and the Mongol empire, whose writings contribute to a better understanding of the world formation, especially East Asia.⁸ Similarly, Inner Asia has been extensively studied by historians of the Qing,⁹ not only because the Manchu rulers were ethnically non-Chinese, but because the Mongols, Tibetans and Turkic Muslims who had previously been outside of China were integrated by conquest into China. This was largely the work of the Manchu rulers who, with Mongol support, formed what Owen Lattimore¹⁰ called “the Inner Asian frontiers of China.” However, there remains strong resistance on the part of “mainstream” East Asianists or China specialists to incorporating studies by “Inner Asianists” into their understanding of East Asia.¹¹

7 <http://cess.fas.harvard.edu/> and <http://www.indiana.edu/~ceus/>

8 Cf. Nicola Di Cosma. *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Thomas Barfield. *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757*. Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

9 Cf. Piper Rae Gaubatz. *Beyond the Great Wall: Urban Form and Transformation on the Chinese Frontiers*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996; Hodong Kim. *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004; James A. Millward. *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998; Mark C. Elliott. *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; Pamela K. Crossley. *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

10 Owen Lattimore. *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*. New York: American Geographical Society, 1940.

While welcoming recent historical research seeking to conceptualize a new multicultural conception of China that challenges conventional misconceptions about China being exclusively Chinese, we also need to rescue Inner Asia from the conceptual monopoly imposed by China studies. Toward this end, it is essential to grasp not only the historic Mongol, Tibetan, or East Turkistani formation in their own rights, but also the fact that other states in East Asia have equal if not greater stakes in Inner Asia and even Central Asia.

To better understand the dynamics of the region, we need to complement Russian, Euroamerican, Turkic, and Islamic perspectives with analyses of Chinese activities in the region. And, insofar as the region is a hotbed of multilateral and multicultural contention, we also need to bring in Japanese and Korean interests and perspectives on the region. I propose, therefore, an approach towards Central/Inner Asian studies that not only actively takes stock of the political, economic and cultural activities of East Asian countries in Central/Inner Asia, but also engages their voluminous scholarly and lay writings about, and understandings of, the region.

Chinese relations with peoples of Central and Inner Mongolia, notably Xiongnu, Mongols, and Manchu, have been contested for more than two thousand years. Modern Chinese nationalism, emerging in the late Qing dynasty, initially targeted China against both western imperialism and Inner Asian “barbarians”, that is the ruling Manchus and their Mongol ally, but with one important difference. Inner Asian peoples, including the Mongols, Tibetans, and Uyghurs, all of whom had been conquered by the Manchus under the Qing, were seen not only as alien but also as assimilable. Ironically, it was the British, Japanese and Russian overtures in Inner Asia, threatening China’s territorial integrity and national security, that prompted China to take a proactive interest in the region, and to emphasize the affinity between these peoples and the Chinese, demarcated by a common boundary vis-à-vis Western and Japanese imperialists.

Japan has long had a distinctive perception of Central/Inner Asia rooted in its ambition to challenge both European and Chinese supremacy in Asia. From the late 19th century, Japan sought to undercut both Chinese cultural supremacy and European imperialism while expanding its own territorial and informal empire. Toward this end, Japan emphasized its affinity with the Altaic speaking peoples, primarily Manchus and Mongols, and sometimes even Islamic Turkic peoples in Central Asia. The Japanese conception of Central/Inner Asia was not limited to strategic calculations in its war effort; the region and its people constituted what may be called a third space to conceptualize the Japanese ethnogenesis, a space strategically located between Europe and China.¹² Japanese scholarship on Central/Inner Asia, dating back to the late 19th century, was to be sure strategic; but in

11 Cf. the debate between Evelyn S. Rawski and Ping-Ti Ho. Evelyn S. Rawski. “Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4. (Nov., 1996), pp. 829-850; Ping-Ti Ho. “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s “Reenvisioning the Qing.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Feb., 1998), pp. 123-155.

serving Japan's vision of its own place in world history and modernity, it also provided valuable insights into the society and culture of the region.¹³

The Japanese invasion in the 1930s resulted in Chinese and Japanese competition over Inner Asia. While Japan occupied Manchuria and parts of Inner Mongolia, the relocation of the nationalist Chinese capital from Nanjing to the Southwestern borderlands brought them into contact with neighboring Yi and Tibetans, while the communist settlement in northern Shaanxi was close to Hui Muslims and Mongols. This afforded ethnic Chinese an historic opportunity for military and demographic expansion into the Inner Asian frontiers.¹⁴ And like the Japanese, Chinese scholars conducted extensive surveys and other research in Inner Asia, gaining first-hand knowledge of the region and its peoples.¹⁵ The Manchus may well have opened up the Inner Asian frontiers to the Chinese in the 18th century, and some surveys were carried out in the 19th century,¹⁶ but Chinese expansion in the 1930s-40s was unprecedented in its demographic, economic and cultural impact.

Following World War II, new geopolitical formations emerged with Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet incorporated into China, while China recognized the independence of the Mongolian People's Republic. For some time, China enjoyed a free hand to consolidate its power in Inner Asia through territorial reorganization, land reform, and military conquests, but the region's transnational bonds with India, the Soviet Union, and Mongolia led China into conflicts with these neighbors. In its quarrels with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, for instance, China displayed rhetorical irredentism towards Mongolia, Siberia, and Central Asia. Japan, on the other hand, which was defeated, occupied, and driven out of the continent in 1945, quickly resumed research on Inner Asia, producing some of the best studies of Mongolian culture and society, underlining the fact that Japanese interest in the region remained strong. Moreover, former Japanese Central and Inner Asianists such as Egami Namio¹⁷ and Umesao Tadao¹⁸ integrated Central and Inner Asian research insights into new theories regarding Japanese origins and civilization. Similarly,

12 Cf. Stefan Tanaka. *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; Prasenjit Duara. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003; Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb (eds.). *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1949*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

13 See The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies. *Bibliography of Central Asian Studies in Japan: 1879 – March 1987*. Tokyo: The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1988.

14 Gray Tuttle. *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005; Xiaoyuan Liu. *Frontier Passages: Ethnopolitics and the Rise of Chinese Communism, 1921-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

15 Chinese publications on the "Northwest", i.e. the Inner Asian frontiers are numerous, and most of them have recently been reprinted in a number of series such as *Zhongguo xibei wenxian congshu*. Lanzhou: Lanzhou guji shudian, 1990.

16 Perdue (2005); Laura Newby. "The Chinese Literary Conquest of Xinjiang." *Modern China*, Oct 1999, Vol. 25 Issue 4, pp. 451-74.

nationalist pride and Marxist evolutionism notwithstanding, Chinese scholars began to embrace, if haltingly, Inner Asian cultures as integral to Chinese culture. Inner Asian peoples such as Mongols and Manchus are now acknowledged to have given China its very shape, the People's Republic of China having appropriated the Mongol conquest of Eurasia as a "Chinese" world conquest, and embraced the boundaries for China established by the Qing. However, the political status accorded these peoples has never been commensurate with their recently discovered "contributions" to China.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 precipitated a new burst of interest in Central and Inner Asia on the part both of Japan and China. Japanese interest in the region is nowadays subsumed under the canopy of "Silk Road studies" or "Eurasian studies". An energetic Chinese push into the region takes the form of a new millennium program called "Develop the West", prioritizing economic development while tacitly encouraging ethnic Chinese immigration into the Western regions with their large Mongol, Tibetan, Hui and Uyghur populations. The drive is also related to China's international policy. Since 1996 China has been leading a regional multilateral forum initially called the Shanghai Five (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), styled since 2001 as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In August 2004, Japan initiated its own Tokyo-centered regional dialogue called "Central Asia plus Japan".¹⁹

South Korea is the latest player in this new Great Game in Central and Inner Asia. The large Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan certainly helps explain the Korean interest in the region. Daewoo built a car plant in Uzbekistan and Kazakh president Nazarbayev brought in South Korean advisers. Korean interest in Mongolia is strengthened by the fact that it maintains friendly ties with both North and South Korea, but is also driven by its potential to offer rich food for re-imagining Korean ethnogenesis and historical formation. More than 20,000 Mongolian citizens work in South Korea, more than in any other country. And Ulaanbaatar is studded with Korean supermarkets and automobile repair shops. At the same time, China is the largest investor in Mongolia, and Japan is its biggest donor.

Race, culture, economic interest and regional security are not the only factors at play in the inter-regional interaction. Through their interactions with Central/Inner

17 Egami Namio. *Kiba minzoku kokka: Nihon kodaishi e no apurochi*. Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1967.

18 Tadao Umesao. *An Ecological View of History: Japanese Civilization in the World Context* (edited by Harumi Befu; translated by Beth Cary). Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2003.

19 The designations of these transnational organizations betray two contrasting understandings of Central Asia: China is strongly egoistic, seeing itself as "center" to Central Asian countries, whereas Japan is willing to "advance" into Central Asia. For a revisionist view on China's perspective on Asia, see Wang Hui, "Reclaiming Asia from the West: Rethinking Global History." *Japan Focus*, <http://www.japanfocus.org/products/details/1781>. See also Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002.

Asia and beyond, China, Japan, and Korea have discovered their own worth through being valued or admired by others. China now styles itself as a “large power” (daguo), and offers its political and economic model as an “alternative” to those of Russia and particularly the United States. One of the explicit aims of Japan’s overseas aid for Central Asia and Caucasia is support for democratization through “inviting members of both pro-and anti-government factions to Japan” to study “Japan’s experience in the creation of a modern state as a result of the Meiji Restoration as well as Japan’s modern democratic system.”²⁰ Japanese and South Korean advisors have played and continue to play significant roles in helping formulate legal concepts and economic and political policies in many Central/Inner Asian countries.

The above all too brief and broad characterization of East Asia’s relationship with Central/Inner Asia is meant simply to suggest a point of departure for reconceptualizing our understanding of Asian dynamics and interrelationships that crosscut the canonic division of East Asia, Central Asia and Inner Asia. As Russia has redefined itself as a “Eurasian” country, it now joins the three main East Asian countries, China, Japan and South Korea, in claiming Central/Inner Asian culture as an important part of their national and spiritual “heritage”. And as the United States and Iran compete to occupy the ideological space vacated by communism, so do East Asian nations aggressively sell their “values” to Central/Inner Asia. Appropriate to their political, economic, cultural, and military co-operation as well as their rivalry, China, Japan and Korea all boast large numbers of Central/Inner Asia specialists researching a wide range of subjects and exploring collaborative relationships with Central and Inner Asian colleagues.

Future study of Central/Inner Asia will have to take account both of the scholarship emerging from East Asia and the scholarly views of indigenous Central/Inner Asian specialists. After all, as native scholars, the latter have the responsibility to document, research, systematize, create and maintain their national cultures, and they set the agendas and guide developments in their own countries. Their scholarship informs and helps shape the changing economic, political, diplomatic and military shape of the region, and the relationships that extend beyond the region. Their scholarly results deserve the scrutiny of international scholars whatever ideological and methodological differences separate them. In the long run, the most productive scholarship is, no doubt, collaborative research, which requires Central/Inner Asian scholars’ direct participation in teaching and research activities in universities and research institutions outside of their home countries or regions. Here we encounter a realm in which Japanese, Chinese and Russian institutions and specialists have taken the lead over those in Europe and North America.

Japan, for instance, hosts hundreds of Mongolian students from both Inner Mongolia and Mongolia who pursue Master or Ph.D. degrees in humanities, social and natural sciences. Dozens of Inner Mongolian scholars hold tenured/tenure-track jobs or teach part time in Japan, and perhaps many more work in high-tech industries. In

20 <http://www.jica.go.jp/english/activities/regions/04asi.html>.

numerous collaborative projects, they play equal roles rather than serving as “assistants” or “informants”. Some have returned to assume important academic leadership positions in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. (In contrast, far fewer Tibetan or Uyghur students study in Japan, a contrast that can be partly explained by the lack of a former colonial relationship with Japan in contrast to Inner Mongolia’s incorporation within the Japanese empire.) As far as the Central Asian countries are concerned, Japan has been offering short-term training in a number of practical fields such as engineering technology, sustainable economic management, democratization, and so on.

In the last decade or so, Euroamerican interest in Central Eurasia has grown. The Central European University in Budapest, the University of Central Asia with three campuses in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz and Tajikistan, and the Kennan Institute in Washington DC, are among the landmark Euroamerican-financed institutions that are devoted to education and research in Central Eurasia. While we see significant increase in the numbers of academics specializing in Central/Inner Asia or Central Eurasia, the presence of Central/Inner Asian scholars pursuing postgraduate studies or teaching professionally in North America or Europe is far smaller. The difference between the numbers and presence of such scholars from East Asia is striking.

Take Inner Asia for example. Apart from a newly recruited Tibetan scholar at the University of British Columbia in Canada, despite the creation of more than a dozen jobs related to Tibet, I have yet to find any other Tibetan scholar at any tenure-stream rank in North America or Europe. As far as I know, there is no single scholar of Uyghur origin teaching in any Euroamerican university, an extraordinary situation given the enormous interest in Xinjiang and the creation of many academic posts that are a product of renewed interest in Islam. As for the Mongols, the situation is no better.²¹ This is not to deny the fact that thousands of Central/Inner Asian scholars have visited North American and European universities. But large gaps remain between Euroamerican and Central/Inner Asian scholars in terms of theoretical perspectives, which hampers effective dialogue or mutual learning. As a result, there is little “equality” to talk about, and the inequality is often tolerated under the dubious notion of avoiding cultural imperialism by respecting the “perspectives” of the native scholars. This is a huge contrast to the large presence and prominent positions held by scholars of East Asian origin in Euroamerican universities and the even larger numbers of two way exchanges, conferences and research collaborations.

There is as yet little active communication between East Asia’s Central/Inner Asia specialists, including scholars, businessmen and strategic planners, and their Euroamerican counterparts.²² To be sure, some of the publications on Central/ Inner Asia written by Chinese, Japanese, or Korean scholars have found their way to Euroamerican research libraries, but they constitute a small part of what have been

21 The Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at Cambridge University, UK, is perhaps the only place that has made a serious effort to nurture scholars of Inner Asian origin through graduate training, collaborative researches, and publishing their articles in its peer-reviewed journal *Inner Asia*. <http://www.innerasiaresearch.org/index.html>

published in East Asia. Few have been translated. Where the writings are consulted by historians, for the most part, they provide historical and ethnographic data, while the views and theories of the authors are often left uninterrogated.²³ On the other hand, almost all of significant writings on Central/Inner Asia by western scholars are available in Japan both in European languages and many in translation. In China, admittedly, most of the contemporary western publications on Central/Inner Asia are unavailable, but many of the early writings have been translated into Chinese. Those writings constitute a significant part of the Chinese knowledge of Central/Inner Asia, but also a source for their critical academic discourse on the western “orientalist” bias against what the Chinese claim to be their territories and peoples. Inner Asian scholars, on the other hand, tend to be more sympathetic to those Western writings and they are hungry for new publications from the West. Theirs is a critically engaged reading.

To be sure, this asymmetrical state of affairs is caused not simply by orientalist condescension by Euroamerican scholars toward their Asian colleagues. Certainly, all major East Asian Studies departments at Euroamerican universities have been active in supporting scholarly exchanges, although this has happened not without efforts made by both sides. The lack of communication between Euroamerican Central/Inner Asianists (or Central Eurasianists) and their East Asian counterparts may be explained, as argued in this essay, in part by the meta-geographical imagination that has viewed Central/Inner Asia or Central Eurasia as a region beyond the pale of most thinking about/research on East Asia or vice versa, as a region divided into separate Russian and Chinese spheres, or as a region to be liberated from East Asia, the Middle East and Russia.

We have already discussed the importance of Central/Inner Asia (or Central Eurasia) to East Asia, and vice versa. And we can only expect this inter-regional relationship to deepen, as the US, for instance, has already shown deep concern about the “China Question” in the region. There has also emerged new scholarship in North America and Europe that documents this inter-regional relationship. Scholars in East Asia and Central/Inner Asia have been writing about their worlds, and they write theoretically, too. Moreover, there is no single voice that can easily be pinned down as expressing a national position. My central point is that the historical and contemporary engagement of East Asian states, themselves in rivalry, with Central/Inner Asian states and peoples, are undeniable. It is at our peril that we fail

22 There are indications that business is moving ahead of scholars in seeking access to the region. A case in point is that in March 2005 Canada’s Ivanhoe Mines Ltd. and Japan’s Mitsui & Co. Ltd. agreed to jointly develop copper, gold, coal and infrastructure projects at Oyu Tolgoi, Mongolia, reportedly the world’s largest green-fields copper and gold mining projects.

23 There are a few prominent exceptions to this observation: Prasenjit Duara (2003), Stefan Tanaka (1993), and perhaps Selçuk Esenbel. “Japan’s Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900-1945.” *American Historical Review*, October 2004, Vol. 109, Issue 4, pp. 1141-70. But these are largely historical studies. I have yet to find any work that critically engages contemporary East Asian scholars on studies of Central/Inner Asia.

to grasp these new dynamics both at the practical and the scholarly level. It is time we began to think about how to incorporate this into the ways we conduct research and teaching on both East and Central/Inner Asia in North America and Europe.

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