

The Place of Altaic Studies within ‘Silk Road’ and Eurasian Continentalism

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Abstract: Altaic Studies is being pursued by researchers who are living in the midst of a broad integrative trend to look beyond national boundaries and even geographical regions to trans-continental analysis. Since the geographical home of Altaic Studies is Eurasia, this movement is often labeled by Asians as ‘Silk Road’ Studies or by U.S. political scientists as Eurasian ‘continentalism’. The rise of China economically and the renewed interest of Russia to develop its eastern provinces’ gas, oil, and mineral deposits have propelled Eurasian policymakers to embrace the new terminology as a useful economic and political concept. The region is home to two superpowers and energy mineral-rich Central Asian Republic and Mongolian states. Yet this remains a dangerous neighborhood that includes the divided Korean peninsula in the east and Iran in the West, which is why it perpetually attracts the attention of the United States and Europe.

The Altaic world today is experiencing two juxtaposed phenomena: 1) the establishing of Eurasia-limited institutional frameworks which include China and Russia, but not the U.S. and western democracies. 2) An inclusive mesh or network of continental organizations and institutions—bilateral and multilateral—that work collectively for prosperity, peace, and stability with major non-Eurasian economic powers in what has been called noodle bowl institution building or a multi-layered, multi-textured hybrid regionalism. This paper will explore the proliferation of non-state actors, including multinational corporations, NGOs, media, artists, athletes, religious institutions, and educators, that can be the key spinners of the bowl’s cooperative web or be the irritants that sustain political and cultural barriers. The main questions analyzed will be if Eurasian economic dynamism will inspire integration or if the traditional

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historical challenges will continue to block the new ‘Silk Road’ and continentalism initiatives, and what the impact will be on Altaic Studies of these scenarios?

Keywords: Altaic Studies, non-state actors, integration, new “Silk Road”, Eurasian continentalism

Özet: Altay çalışmaları, ulusal sınırların, hatta coğrafi alanların ötesine, kıtalar ötesi bütüncül bir bakış açısı ile bakma eğiliminin ortasında yaşayan araştırmacılar tarafından sürdürülmektedir. Altay çalışmalarının incelediği saha Avrasya olduğundan, bu hareket genelde Asyalılar tarafından “İpek Yolu” çalışmaları, Amerikalı araştırmacılar tarafından ise Avrasya “kıtacılığı” olarak adlandırılmıştır. Çin’in ekonomik olarak güçlenişi ile Rusya’nın Doğu vilayetlerinin doğal gaz, petrol ve maden kaynaklarını geliştirmeye yeniden ilgilenmeye başlaması, Avrasyalı politikacıları ekonomik ve siyasi bakış açısı ile yeni bir terminoloji benimsemeye sevk etmiştir. Bölge iki büyük güce ve enerji-maden zengini Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri ile Moğol devletlerine ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Ancak bu durum, doğuda ikiye bölünmüş Kore yarım adası, batıda da İran olmak üzere, Avrupa ve Amerika’nın da sürekli olarak ilgisini çekmekte olan tehlikeli bir komşuluğu da beraberinde getirmektedir.

Altay dünyası günümüzde yan yana duran iki seçenek ile karşı karşıyadır: 1) Amerika’nın ve Batı demokrasilerinin dâhil olmadığı, Çin ve Rusya’yı kapsayan ve Avrasya ile sınırlandırılmış bir kurumsal çerçevenin belirlenmesi. 2) “Erişte kâsesi” kurum inşası ya da çok katmanlı, çok dokulu melez bölgecilik olarak adlandırılan, önde gelen Avrasya dışı ekonomik güçlerle refah, barış ve istikrar için birlikte çalışan kıta kurum ve kuruluşlarının -iki taraflı ve çok taraflı-kapsayıcı ağı. Bu makalede, “kâse”nin işbirliği ağının örücüsü ya da tam tersi siyasi ve kültürel sınırları devam ettiren iş bozucuları olabilecek, uluslararası kurumlar, sivil toplum örgütleri, medya, sanatçılar, sporcular, dinî kurumlar ve eğitimciler gibi çeşitli devlet dışı aktörlerin çoğalması ele alınacaktır. Çalışmadaki esas sorular şunlar olacaktır: Avrasya ekonomi devinimi bir bütünleşmeyi beraberinde getirebilecek midir? Yoksa tarihten gelen zorluklar yeni “İpek Yolu”nu ve kıtacılık girişimlerini engellemeye devam mı edecektir? Her iki senaryonun da Altay çalışmalarına etkisi ne olacaktır?

Anahtar Sözcükler: Altay çalışmaları, devlet dışı aktörler, bütünleşme, yeni “İpek Yolu,” Avrasya kıtacılığı

Altaic Studies, whose geographical home is Eurasia, is being pursued by researchers who are living in the midst of a broad integrative trend to look beyond national boundaries and even geographical regions to trans-conti-

mental analysis. This modern movement is often labeled by Asians as 'Silk Road' Studies or by U.S. political scientists as Eurasian 'continentalism'.¹ The rise of China economically and the renewed interest of Russia to develop its eastern provinces' gas, oil, and mineral deposits have propelled Eurasian policymakers to embrace the new terminology as a useful economic and political concept. The region is home to two superpowers and energy mineral-rich Central Asian Republic and Mongolian states. Yet this remains a dangerous neighborhood that includes the divided Korean peninsula in the east and Iran in the West, which is why it perpetually attracts the attention of the United States and Europe.

The Altaic world today is experiencing two juxtaposed phenomena which seemingly make Altaic Studies per se an irrelevant concept: 1) the establishing of Asia-limited institutional frameworks which include China and Russia, but not the U.S., western democracies, and often not the Altaic-related countries the Koreas and Japan. 2) An inclusive mesh or network of continental organizations and institutions—bilateral and multilateral—from varied linguistic groupings that work collectively for prosperity, peace, and stability with major non-Eurasian economic powers in what has been called noodle bowl institution building or a multi-layered, multi-textured hybrid regionalism.

This paper will explore the proliferation of state and non-state actors that are the key spinners of the bowl's cooperative web, or are the irritants that sustain political and cultural barriers in the Altaic world. The main questions analyzed will be if Eurasian economic dynamism will inspire integration or if the traditional historical challenges will continue to block the new 'Silk Road' and continentalism initiatives, and what the impact of this all will be on Altaic Studies?

¹ Kent E. Calder, *The New Continentalism* (New Haven: Yale University, 2012).

Geographic versus Linguistic Definitions

One way to proceed is to look at the geographical versus linguistic definitions in Eurasia and admit that they are not static, but often change according to time periods as well as the context of discussion and research. This is both a problem and an opportunity for researchers in Altaic Studies. In dictionaries, the term ‘Altaic’ often has a linguistic definition as its first meaning, such as: “the Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungusic language families collectively, spoken over a broad expanse of Eurasia, from southeastern Europe to the Pacific: variously considered to be a single, genetically related family, with Japanese and Korean sometimes also included, or a group of languages with shared typologies and histories, but not genetically akin.”² We all know that in the 19th and the early 20th centuries, the theory of a common Uralic–Altaic family was widespread, based on such shared features as vowel harmony and agglutination; however, in the mid-20th century Gerard Clauson³ and Gerhard Doerfer⁴ led the movement to generally abandon the linguistic Altaic theory which Sergei Starostin in 2003 called “an idea now completely discarded.”⁵

But, if we look at the dictionary definition of ‘Altaic’ from a geographic viewpoint, such as “related to the Altai Mountains,” and expand this to the Ural–Altaic territory between the Ural and Altai mountains, then we enter into a concept much more accepted in today’s world. We are talking about Asian and Central Asian ‘continentalism’ or the New

² dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/altaic>.

³ Gerard Clauson, 1956. "The case against the Altaic theory." *Central Asiatic Journal* 2, 181–187.

⁴ Gerhard Doerfer, 1963. "Bemerkungen zur Verwandtschaft der sog. altaischen Sprachen", 'Remarks on the relationship of the so-called Altaic languages'. In Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen, Bd. I: Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, 1963, 51–105. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.

⁵ Sergei A. Starostin, Anna V. Dybo, and Oleg A. Mudrak. 2003. *Etymological Dictionary of the Altaic Languages*, 3 volumes. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Silk Road as envisioned under China's 'One Belt One Road.'⁶ In biogeography, this territory includes the Anatolian peninsula, Iran, Central Asia, Central Eurasia, Mongolia, and most of Northeast Asia, even spanning Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Northeast China, and much of Russia including East and West Siberia, and Lake Baikal all the way to the Pacific Ocean. There are a number of multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, which accept an even broader definition which encompasses Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Although there still is no single definition of Eurasia or the New Silk Road, it appears that recent momentum has shifted from a very narrow interpretation to a wider geographical view in the hopes of assisting transportation and communication networking.

1) Asia Only Groupings

We are now experiencing an exploding phenomenon in the greater Asian region of establishing Asia-limited institutional frameworks in which the U.S. is not a participant, but two of the world's major powers—China and Russia—are included. China has been taking the lead to develop architectural structures with broader Asian participation, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Russia too has introduced mechanisms such as the Eurasian Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)⁷ to foster closer economic cooperation among former Soviet states that could expand eastward over Eurasia to include NEA countries such as Mongolia and beyond to the Pacific. "The EEC [Eurasia Economic Commission] holds the status of supranational regulatory body and the keystone of its activity are the interests of the Eurasian community as an integrative initiative where no national interests prevail over those of the community."⁸ In 2015 Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan joined the EEU to

⁶ "China plans legal research centres to boost 'One Belt, One Road' project," *South China Morning Post*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1848059/china-plans-legal-research-centres-boost-one-belt-one>.

⁷ Established in 2012. <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#info>.

⁸ <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/Pages/about.aspx>.

in hopes of ensuring the free movement of goods, services, capital and workforce.⁹ Many other Asian countries have expressed interest in setting up a free trade zone with the EEU. Vietnam has already signed an agreement, while India, Thailand, and even Syria are considering ties.

There are indications of pushback against Russian and Chinese-originated continental organizations by Altaic nations such as Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Japan, and the Koreas, which feel they are not included or not given their rightful position. An early example was in 2002 when Kazakhstan initiated the first summit of an Eurasia-based organization called the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA). Its aim is to promote peace, security and stability in Asia and seeks regional cooperation particularly on anti-terrorism. The members affirm their commitment to the UN Charter and seek a commitment by all states to co-exist peacefully through dialogue and cooperation.¹⁰ Most CICA member states are actually western Asian countries, such as the Central Asian countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan; Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Bahrain, and Turkey; Western and Southern Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, and Pakistan; and the East Asian and Southeast Asian countries of China, South Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. In addition, Russia and Egypt also are members, while there are nine CICA observer states, including five from South and Southeast Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka). Japan and the U.S. also are observers. It has been said that “outside of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), CICA is the second most important platform for international cooperation that does not include the United States and its

⁹ “Kyrgyzstan becomes 5th member of Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union,” August 5, 2015, <http://www.rt.com/business/311639-kyrgyzstan-joins-eeu-kazakhstan/>.

¹⁰ http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=7&lang=1.

important Asian ally, Japan, as members.”¹¹ It is undeniably true that the CICA seeks to act as a security mechanism in western Asia by relying upon both China and Russia. Such new concepts have a political bent which seemingly de-emphasize democratic Asian nations, especially Japan, which are allies of the U.S., in favor of promoting the leadership of the traditional Eurasian continental powers of China and Russia.

Another example of a non-super power organized Eurasian entity is South Korea's Eurasia Initiative announced by President Park Geunhye in October 2013. The Eurasian Initiative is a proposal to link rail and road networks, energy, and logistics infrastructure from Korea's Busan across the Eurasian continent to Europe in a modern

“Silk Road Express.” She announced this in front of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Seoul with the explanation that “to combine South Korea's policy of strengthening Eurasian cooperation and Russia's policy of highly regarding the Asia-Pacific region to realize our mutual potential at the maximum level and move relations between the two countries forward. . . South Korea and Russia will join hands to build a new Eurasian era for the future.”¹²

The most recent initiative is Mongolia's proposal for a new Mongolian continental dialogue platform, the Forum of Asia, to build mutual trust and boost regional integration. Mongolian President Tsalkia Elbegdorj introduced the concept in Tokyo on May 21, 2015 at the 21st International Conference on the Future of Asia, and then again three weeks later on June 8th in a speech he made to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. He suggested that this new platform should promote equal representation of interests of all sovereign nations in Asia, small or big, to guarantee the independence, integrity and development models of all members. He likened it to a small United Nations in Asia, but with equal

¹¹ Mu Chunshan, “What is CICA (and Why Does China Care About It)?,” *The Diplomat*, May 17, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/what-is-cica-and-why-does-china-care-about-it/>.

¹² Chang Jae-soon, “(3rd LD) S. Korea to participate in Russian-led rail, port development project in N. Korea,” *Yonhap* (Seoul: November 13, 2013), english.yonhapnews.co.kr.

rights.¹³ Elbegdorj emphasized his nation's commitment to meaningfully contribute to the political and economic integration processes in the Asia-Pacific region since there was no single mechanism of regional integration that included all 48 Asian states.

It is noteworthy that the term 'Altaic' nation states is not used by any of these Asian-oriented organizations to describe their continental geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, the importance of the inter-regional territory that is populated by the Altaic peoples cannot be underestimated, even if presently it is somewhat ignored. Nowadays international political scientists and foreign policy researchers are concerned with: A) What will be the United States' reaction to a key area of the world where it is excluded? Right now the United States is very invested and very engaged with APEC, ASEAN, and Turkey. It is discussing a Trans-Pacific Partnership bilaterally with several Asian countries (Singapore, Japan, Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan). However, it openly has been leery of supporting some of the new continental-wide organizations, such as SCO and AIIB, calling them vaguely defined as to standards, reduplicative and too politically motivated.

B) What will be the response of the Eurasian countries and of China and Russia to an Eurasian continental framework which does not include the U.S.? Japan, the ROK, and Turkey are U.S. allies by treaty in the region and have looked to the United States as their primary provider of security, so would a pan-Asian exclusive security vision satisfy them when we are in a period of increasing military periphery confrontations?

2) **Moving towards Inclusiveness and Intermeshing Networks**

As seen somewhat in the Mongolian proposal, simultaneously with the growth of the Asian-only paradigm is another one that stresses inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness in the region. This trend defines

¹³ Mariko Tai, "Mongolia's Elbegdorj proposes mini UN, Forum of Asia," *Nikkei Asian Review* (May 21, 2015), asia.nikkei.com/Features/The-Future-of-Asia-2015/Mongolia-s-Elbegdorj-proposes-mini-UN-Forum-of-Asia.

the region in a larger sense in hopes of moving the participating nations away from focusing on historical issues towards complementary thinking so that Asian countries are not forced into a position where they have to choose among the great powers inside and outside the region. This explains the past decade of tentative movements towards a new regional architecture that arises from the smaller powers/countries in the region. This type of expanded framework was called noodle bowl institution building by Paul Evan and Professor T. J. Pempel.¹⁴ It is not a single mechanism but a mesh or network of regional organizations, forums, and institutions—bilateral and multilateral—that work collectively for regional prosperity, peace, and stability. A proliferation of non-state actors, including multinational corporations, NGOs, private citizens engaged in Track-II activities, media, artists, and athletes are the key spinners of the bowl's web of cooperation.¹⁵ Another term for this type of framework is hybrid regionalism which is multi-layered and multi-textured.¹⁶ It is predicated on the belief that despite political barriers, economic dynamism in the region will drive integration while the concerned nations adopt multiple options for security partners. Furthermore, many Eurasian nations are promoting such 'soft power' initiatives to weave new and stronger inter-regional ties.

An example of hybrid regionalism from August 2011 was when Mongolia along with the Republic of Korea put forward a new concept—the **Asia Partnership Initiative for Democracy (APID)** that is aimed at developing a framework to advancing democratic values and norms across

¹⁴ Paul Evan, "Between regionalism and regionalization: policy networks and the nascent East Asian institutional identity," in T. J. Pempel, ed., *Remapping East Asia: The Construction of a Region* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 195-215.

¹⁵ T. J. Pempel, *Remapping East Asia*, 6-12.

¹⁶ Richard Weixing Hu, "Building Asia Pacific Regional Architecture: The Challenge of Hybrid Regionalism," (Hong Kong: Brookings Institution, July 2009), 4. http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2009/7/asia-pacific-hu/07_asia_pacific_hu.pdf.

the Asian region.¹⁷ However, political uncertainties in both countries slowed the momentum towards APID's realization, and some have questioned what it could do to avoid duplicating what is already being done in other regional organizations. Countries of continental Eurasia are expanding active collaboration with the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international financial, trade and economic institutions. Such cooperation has served as a significant engine and impetus for the social and economic development. Countries such as Mongolia now participate and contribute to United Nations' activities such as peacekeeping, as well as receive grants and assistance for social and economic projects. The Mongols in June 2014 in Nairobi successfully lobbied to have Dr. Oyun Sanjaasuren, Mongolia's Minister of Environment and Green Development, elected as the first president of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).¹⁸

Altaic countries, such as Mongolia, in the past three years also have created their own international organizations to focus on problems that are of concern to the Eurasian region. One proposal, labeled 'Karakorum', called for establishing a multilateral diplomacy platform wherein Mongolia would take new initiatives and propose new strategies so international organizations and foreign countries could conduct dialogues on pressing international issues.¹⁹ Spun off from this concept was Mongolia's recent "Forum of Asia" noted previously. Mongolia's most publicized new out-reach initiative is the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on NEA Security, which

¹⁷ See "Ambassador Bekhbat Khasbazar of Mongolia's Remarks at the U.S. Coordinating Committee Briefing on the CD, March 23, 2012 Council for a Community of Democracies", www.ccd21.org/news/; "Mongolia-The Republic of Korea Relations will expand and develop based on Common View," August 22, 2011, www.president.mn/; "Strengthening Democracy in Asia: New Strategies for Regional Partnerships," hosted in Seoul on 14 February 2012 by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in cooperation with the National Endowment for Democracy.

¹⁸ "Mongolia's Environment Minister Elected First President of United Nations Environment Assembly," June 24, 2014, www.unep.org/newscentre.

¹⁹ Byambakhand Luguusharav, "Mongolian Initiative to Become a Multilateral Diplomacy Platform," *Mongolia on the Regional Stage*, The Institute for Strategic Studies, No. 35, 25.

has the objective of defusing tension on the Korean peninsula, enhancing NEA security through open dialogue, and hopefully jump starting the frozen Six-Party Talks. There have been two annual meetings already in Ulaanbaatar at the Track 1.5 and Track 2 level.²⁰

Other activities by nations on the continent which interweave the region more tightly into the global environment are exemplified by Mongolia's hosting of the 7th Ministerial Conference of Community of Democracies April 27-29, 2013 which was attended on the ministerial level by 800 delegates from 103 nations.²¹ Mongolia utilized this opportunity to help create the Initiative Group on Education for Democracy and Asian Partnership Initiative for Democracy. In the same way Mongolia sponsored the World Economic Forum of Davos, Switzerland mini-conference on "Strategic Dialogue on Mongolian Development in mid-September 2013 and the Forum on Women Parliamentarians of NEA countries in Ulaanbaatar in November 2013 which primarily discussed education issues.²² Continuing in this globalizing tradition, it will host the annual Asian World Economic Forum on East Asia in the spring of 2016 as well as ASEM²³ 2016 in July 2016.

It should be emphasized that there are other forms of 'noodle bowl' institutional building in the region that are centered around 'soft power.'

²⁰ The Mongolian Government emphasized that the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue "is not a single action, but a mechanism of trilateral or multilateral dialogues depending on the agenda," and immediately announced that in the future the conference will be organized regularly. See "Nine countries participate in the 'Ulaanbaatar Dialogue,'" June 20, 2014, *The Mongol Messenger*; Alicia Campi, "Mongolia Starts a new initiative on Northeast Asia Security," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 11, Issue 126, July 11, 2014, The Jamestown Foundation, www.jamestown.org.

²¹ Founded in 2000 in Warsaw by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright and Professor Bronislaw Geremek, the Community strives to promote democratic rules and strengthening democratic norms and institutions around the world. "The VII Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies to take place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on April 27-29, 2013," February 7, 2013, www.infomongolia.com.

²² "The Northeast Asian Women Parliamentarians' Forum in Ulaanbaatar Ends Successfully," November 25, 2013, www.infomongolia.com

²³ Asia-Europe Meeting, <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/>

The five Central Asian republics have held Central Asian Games, affiliated with the Olympics, every two years since 1995. Mongolia particularly is promoting sports as a way to increase global connections. In 2015 it plans to host 14 international sports events ranging from judo, women's Grande Prix racing, and women's wrestling to deaf chess championships, marathons, and a Seniors sports festival.²⁴

Key Future Impacts on Regional Integration

Growing mineral exports from the Eurasian region are revitalizing the entire regional transport network. Russia is expanding coal and gas production in the Far East and Eastern Siberia, often with Chinese investment and construction of new pipe and rail infrastructure, while Mongolia, and to a lesser extent North Korea, also are developing their rich mining sectors through Eurasian partners. Japan, desperate to diversify its energy resource imports, desires to become a major customer for these various minerals, once continental transportation is further developed. This explains the Shinzo Abe administration's announcement just a few weeks ago that the Japanese Prime Minister would visit five Central Asian countries in October.

Japan has been paying more attention to Central Asia in recent years and Abe's trip aims to strengthen economic links with the energy-rich region. Japan is increasing its investment in Central Asian energy markets and wants to prevent China's One Belt, One Road strategy from monopolizing control over the region's warm water ports.²⁵ For Japan, development of an expanded new Silk Road would link economic growth in

²⁴ "Mongolia to Host 14 Sports Events in 2015," December 2, 2014, *infomongolia*, <http://www.infomongolia.com/ct/ci/8682>.

²⁵ The origins of Japan's enhanced cooperation with Central Asia can be traced back to August 28, 2004, when the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan held a multilateral summit with the then Japanese foreign minister at the 2004 Astana summit's "Central Asia plus Japan framework." See Kent Calder, "Eurasia: As China's rise reshapes continent, Japan has a strategic role to play," *Asahi Shinbum*, January 10, 2014, <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/globe/economy/AJ201401100025>.

Central Asia to Japanese (and Korean exports) and make the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway competitive compared to the longer maritime route. Abe's upcoming overture can be explained as a way to balance exploding Chinese influence in the region while indirectly assisting Russia to maintain its traditional Eurasian economic presence. Concurrently, Japan may be seeking to create a multipolar Central Asia to compete with the dominant Russia-China rivalry.

However, the Japanese, South Korean, and Turkish economic dreams of a modern intercontinental transport network invariably are connected to political stability, and the most unstable part of the Altaic community remains the Korean peninsula. Korean reunification can directly impact on continental transportation routes. Yet, if a trans-Korean railway route reopens, Korea then becomes a gateway for an Eurasian transport network. Such a plan is still very uncertain in the short term, but if Russia and other nations can assist in the modernization of North Korea's rail system, electricity distribution, transportation networks and ports, investments like these could stimulate the DPRK economy and allow it to more profitably exploit its own natural resources. The uncertain security situation on the Korean peninsula not only disconnects North Korea from the global economic system and endangers the security situation of all the countries of Northeast Asia, but also is a continuing drag on the dynamics of the entire Eurasian continent. However, the trends toward new and revived regional institutions and expanded trade partners hold out promise for movement on North-South issues in the near to midterm.

For North Korea, the increased activity and focus on Eurasia by the superpowers of the U. S., Russia, and China as well as Japan provide both a risk and an opportunity. The Korean peninsula is where Russia and China meet on land and where Japan and the United States meet the mainland. North Korean unpredictability has caused it to be a country that nobody wants responsibility for but also nobody wants others to dominate. This gives Pyongyang options to manipulate the competing interests around it to its own advantage. What the other Eurasian states and the U.S. must do is to clearly show the DPRK that being a part of the regional

institutional structure is more beneficial militarily, economically, and politically than if it remains outside.

Conclusion

Factors driving the Eurasian nations towards integration are definitely increasing. These factors may be very individual for each country, and there are several Silk Road or Eurasian continentalism strategies under development. Central Asian and Middle Eastern customers can be excellent partners for East Asian manufacturing nations once the Eurasia Silk Road is revitalized and new Trans-Siberian Rail links can be integrated into a reliable and stable Korean peninsula transit system. Trends in 2015 have emerged to expand the definition of the old Altaic region, combine Asian-only organizations with global institutions, and utilize non-traditional security and economic-transit oriented projects as catalysts for growth. It seems logical and practical to encourage these various initiatives and explore avenues to increase trade volume and economy of scale by both the private and public sectors. Such trust-building measures will enhance confidence in building needed institutional mechanisms.

With all of this activity and interest in the Silk Road/Eurasian nations, particularly economically, where does this leave Altaic Studies? Can Altaic Studies benefit from this boon of interest or not? With no apparent agreement among scholars debating the origins of the "Altaic" languages and culture, we appear to be at a crossroads, uncertain of the future.²⁶ Concerning the continuing polarization of opinions, Roy Andrew Miller has asked: "Can anything be done to facilitate a breakthrough in Altaic historical-linguistic studies?"²⁷ Perhaps this question stumbles into

²⁶ Dr. Cynthia L. Hallen, "A Brief Exploration of the Altaic Hypothesis," Department of Linguistics, Brigham Young University, September 6, 1999, <http://linguistics.byu.edu/classes/ling450ch/reports/altaic.htm>

²⁷ Roy Andrew Miller, "Genetic Connections Among the Altaic Languages," *Sprung from Some Common Source: Investigations Into the Prehistory of Languages*, eds. Sydney M. Lamb and E. Douglass Mitchell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 319.

the crux of the problem facing us. Is Altaic Studies really just a historical field, if it continues at all? Is it relevant for today's new integrating world?

Academically in the United States, various institutions which have a history of Inner Asian (as PIAC's founder Denis Sinor would call it) or Altaic Studies, have rebooted their curricula to keep the essence of Altaic Studies even though the term is disappearing. For example, Harvard University's Graduate School entitles its degree program "Inner Asian and Altaic Studies" or IAAS, whereas 40 years ago when I was studying there, students of Mongolia and the Koreans were part of the East Asian Studies curriculum. Harvard's IAAS includes history, philology, linguistics, religion, and ethnology, has a small modern history component, but totally ignores economics—which is the instigator of the continent's revival. Indiana University continues the Altaic tradition with its Central Eurasian Studies (CEUS) extensive curriculum with its deep linguistic and historical bent. While it also divides the region from present-day Chinese and Russian developments—except for minority relations—and emphasizes Central Asian economics rather than growing Eurasian economic and transportation developments, it does not emphasize the new Silk Road terminology or China's 'One Belt One Road' theme.

The Silk Road terminology has been embraced by educational institutions with strong bases in Central Asian and Buddhist studies. One such program is the University of California Berkeley's The Center for Buddhist Studies Silk Road Initiative, which is interdisciplinary in nature but grants the Ph.D. only in Buddhist Studies. Although this year Berkeley will begin a Mongolian language course, it has no modern political or economic component yet, and Berkeley's curriculum does not embrace the term 'Altaic'. We have special programs or workshops on Silk Road Studies at SAIS/Johns Hopkins and Georgetown University which are much more economically oriented. They tend to be very western Asian in approach rather than Eurasian and again do not recognize "Altaic Studies" within their curricula. The most interested entities in new Silk Road peoples and cultures and the Chinese, Russian, and Altaic nations' development plans for the continent are The George Washington

University's Central Asian Program, which also embraces Mongolia but not other Northeast Asian nations, and particularly U.S. think tanks and research centers advising the U.S. government. The Council on Foreign Relations, for example, has stated: "For the United States, the New Silk Road refers to a suite of joint investment projects and regional trade blocs that have the potential to bring economic growth and stability to Central Asia."²⁸ Such research institutions accurately reflect the new economic dynamism of Eurasia, but do not emphasize the cultural, historical, and linguistic factors that influence its daily life and their policymakers' decision-making. While research institutes and government agencies want well-rounded, up-to-date New Silk Road/Eurasia researchers, U.S. academic centers are not producing these experts. This present situation is not conducive for comprehension of a key area of the world that is in such flux. The trends that are emerging are not positive for Altaic Studies per se, so its future is not bright.

²⁸ James McBride, "Building the New Silk Road," May 25, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/building-new-silk-road/p36573>.