

Chapter 10

Eurasia

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The notion of a geographical entity called “Eurasia” was first articulated in the nineteenth century. Lexically, the term is a combination of “Europe” and “Asia,” and it was originally formulated to refer to the greater territorial landmass that contained these latter two entities. Yet despite the fact that, from a strictly scientific standpoint, Eurasia had a better-founded claim to the status of continent than either Europe or Asia proper, the latter two proved to be far too loaded with cultural-historical, political, and ideological significations to be overcome or replaced very easily. The result was that Eurasia as a continental concept remained on the perceptual margins, not widely used, and relevant only in certain specialized usages. Although these usages have substantially broadened and multiplied since the 1980s, “Eurasia” still remains an exotic and vague term. Nevertheless, the present chapter will argue that the various articulations and deployments of “Eurasia” have played a significant role in shaping the perceptual metageographies through which we conceptualize global spaces and imbue them with subjective meaning and purpose (Lewis and Wigen 1997; Korhonen 2011).

The Origins of Eurasia

The idea of the continents was first formulated by ancient Greek geographers, who understood them as major landmasses set apart by bodies of water. They identified the continents of Africa, Europe, and Asia, and believed that the latter two were separated by a river, Tanais, which was supposed to flow southwards from headwaters in the Arctic to empty into the Sea of Azov (Parker 1960, 278; Tozer 1964, 67–69; Bassin 1991b, 2). The fact that there was no river Tanais as the Greeks imagined it and that Europe and Asia were

in fact territorially contiguous became increasingly apparent from the early modern period. By the nineteenth century, the point could no longer be ignored, and it became increasingly common for natural scientists to point out that physiographically Europe represented not a continent but “merely” an extrusion or peninsula at the westernmost extremity of the Asiatic landmass (e.g., Krause 1819, 251–62; Humboldt 1845–47, I: 308, 350–51; Hahn 1881, 83–84;). Indeed, the geomorphologist Oskar Peschel remarked that he could tolerate the continued designation of Europe as a continent not as scientific fact but only as a “courtesy” (Peschel 1870, 153, 167).

This skepticism culminated in the 1880s, when the Austrian geologist Eduard Suess declared that the landmass shared by Europe and Asia properly represented a single unified geographical continent, which he christened *Eur-asien*, or Eurasia. Suess’s scientific arguments were based on historical reconstructions of the geological evolution and tectonic movement of the earth’s crust (Suess 1908–09, vol. 1, 768–74; Greene 1982, 144–91). This discovery of a new continental landmass did not undermine the metageographical legitimacy and significance of Europe and Asia, as already noted. It did however allow questions about their continental status to be raised, questions which took on a direct relevance for certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses. It was in these discourses that the ideological potential of the novel concept of Eurasia first became apparent.

The Discovery of a Middle World

Since the Petrine revolution of the early eighteenth century, the identity of Russia as a European empire enjoyed the status of an official dogma (Groh 1961; Neumann 1996; Bassin 2006). It was one of the chief ideologues of this revolution, Vasilii Tatishchev, who in the 1730s was the first to propose the Ural mountain range to replace the apocryphal Tanais as the genuine Europe–Asia boundary. This new perspective provided a vital natural-geographical justification for Russia’s new Eurocentric perspective—and established a cardinal metageographical landmark that endures to the present day. The core historical territories of the Russian nation west of the Urals were thus located securely in Europe, while the Russian “colony” of Siberia to the east was consigned to Asia (Tatishchev 1950; 1979; Ditmar 1958; Bassin 1991a). With the emergence of a nationalist movement in the course of the nineteenth century, however, these assumptions about Russia’s natural European identity came under increasing scrutiny. As the new ideas about a single Euro-Asian landmass began to circulate in Russia, they quickly attracted the nationalists’ attention (*Russkii Entsiklopedicheski Slovar* 1874, 599; A[nuchin] 1894; “*Evraziia*” 1905).

In his manifesto *Russia and Europe*—one of the most important nineteenth-century statements of Russian nationalism—Nikolai Danilevskii embraced the new geographical picture of Euro-Asiatic unity, taking particular delight in its explicit demotion of the status of Europe as an independent continent. These points were repeated three decades later by Vladimir Lamanskii, who began his own tract, *The Three Worlds of the Asiatic-European Continent*, with the following words: “Properly speaking, Europe is a peninsula of Asia.” Together, he asserted, the two comprise a single unified “Asian-European continent” (Lamanskii [1892] 1916, 1–2; Danilevskii [1871] 1895, 58–59). This new picture of geographical cohesion meant that Tatishchev’s identification of the Ural mountains as a natural boundary separating Europe and Asia was a patent fiction (Danilevskii [1871] 1895, 56–57). Beyond the point about the natural unity of the greater Eurasian continent, however, these nationalists were much more interested in the perceptual repartitioning of Eurasia’s interior space that this unity made possible, and they ultimately developed an entirely new geographical vision for Russia based on it (Ulunian 2000). In this vision, the notions of Europe and Asia were retained, but the traditional bipartite arrangement was replaced with a tripartite scheme, in which a third subcontinental region was inserted in between to create the “three worlds” referred to by Lamanskii. Like the geological concept of Eurasia itself, this middle zone was described as an objective natural-geographical region, formed by physical features in the natural environment. These were the vast lowland regions on either side of the Ural Mountains: the East European plain to the west and the West Siberian plain to the east. The nationalists maintained that these represented two adjacent sections of a single cohesive lowland space, running from the borderlands on the western reaches of the empire all the way to the Yenisei River and the Altai Mountains in Siberia. The essential natural unity of this landmass was not disrupted by the Ural Mountains or any other topographic feature (Danilevskii [1871] 1895, 21–22, 133, 531–32; Lamanskii [1892] 1916, 9, 17–20; Lamanskii 1871, 42).

In this way, the natural-geographical idea of Eurasia as a continent made it possible to begin to envision a new demarcation of Russian national space as a differentiated and autonomous geographical unit within it. The parameters of this new unit, however, remained highly imprecise. It was clearly less than the Russian empire in toto, large parts of which—in the Far East and Central Asia or Turkestan—continued to be seen as Asian colonial territories external to the genuine cultural-historical space of the Russian middle world (Danilevskii [1871] 1895, 133; Lamanskii [1892] 1916, 12, 15–17, 48, 50–51; Ulunian 2000, 66–67). The middle-world idea was reformulated during World War I by Veniamin Semenov-Tian-Shanskii (1915), a noted geographer and close associate of Lamanskii. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii followed his predecessors in

rejecting the “artificial” division of the country into European and Asiatic sections along the Ural Mountains, arguing that Russia needed to overcome this bifurcation through an ambitious program of integrated industrial and demographic development of what he called the “geographical center” of the country. Like Danilevskii, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii left the precise boundaries of his middle world unspecified; unlike his predecessor, however, he gave this region a name: *rusaskaia Evraziia*, or Russian Eurasia (Semenov-Tian-Shanskii [1917] 2008, 146–47; Wiederkehr 2007, 36n).

The Dialectics of Eurasian Space

Around the same time that Lamanskii and Semenov-Tian-Shanskii were busy re-envisioning Russia’s place a newly-conceived “Asian-European continent,” the notion of Eurasia made its fateful appearance in fin-de-siècle Anglo-American geopolitical discourses. The latter were stimulated by the contest between the imperial Great Powers, in particular the so-called “Great Game” competition for territorial advantage in Asia. In these discourses, the contending expansionist ambitions of the day were essentialized as expressions of age-old rivalries between land- and sea-based power, continental and maritime states (Mahan 1890; Schmitt [1942] 1981; Stevens 2009; Connery 2001; Iliopoulos 2009; Laak 2000). From the standpoint of maritime Western powers, continentality per se was a geostrategic menace, and insofar as the Russian empire was the most continental power of all, it correspondingly represented the greatest menace. Writing in 1900, the American admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan pointed out that the Russian empire’s unique territorial contiguity gifted it “a pre-eminence which approaches exclusiveness,” with immense strategic advantages for its further expansion across Asia (Mahan 1900, 24–26, 47; Spang 2013, 225).

The geopolitical vision developed by the British political geographer and parliamentarian Halford Mackinder was to prove far more significant. As with the Russians, for Mackinder the prospect of a geographically cohesive Eurasian continent enabled a radical revisioning and repartitioning of its internal geographical space (Parker 1982; Blouet 1987; 2005; Kennedy 1983; Kearns 2009). Mackinder (1904: 429, 431; 1919, 95–96) accepted the traditional bifurcation of the “continuous land-mass of Euro-Asia” but argued that this bifurcation was not between Europe and Asia per se, but rather corresponded to the land-sea juxtaposition just described (see also Coones 2005, 68). On the one hand was Eurasia’s (continental) “central area” or “core,” and on the other its (maritime) “marginal lands.” The former represented “a great continuous patch in the north and center of the [Eurasian] continent,” comprising the basins of the Volga, Ural, Ob, Irtysh, Yenisei, Lena, Syr Darya,

and Amu Darya rivers. This massive zone was defined by two geographical characteristics. First, it was drained exclusively by rivers flowing either into closed inland seas (Caspian and Aral) or the ice-bound waters of the Arctic, a geographical configuration that provided a highly-effective natural shield rendering the region invulnerable to incursion from the world's oceans. Second, Mackinder (1943, 598) echoed the Russians in describing this region as the "widest lowland plain on the face of the globe," which in earlier historical periods had provided a natural arena for the emergence and flourishing of great armies of mounted nomad warriors. Mackinder (1904, 429; 1919: 96ff.) called this core region the "Heartland" or "pivot region." Arranged in a rough continuous arc around it, to the west, south, and east, were the so-called marginal lands of the Eurasian continent: Europe, Arabia, India, and China. Mackinder referred to these collectively as the "Inner Crescent." Together, the Heartland and Inner Crescent comprised the totality of the greater Eurasian continent, and formed what he called the "World-Island." The remaining regions of the globe—North and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and the insular states of Britain and Japan—represented a maritime "Outer Crescent" (Mackinder 1904, 433).

Over two millennia, Mackinder maintained, Eurasian history had been conditioned by the land-sea dialectic between its two component zones. The maritime civilizations of the Inner Crescent were repeatedly subjected to destructive incursions by land-based nomadic armies (Mackinder 1904, 423, 426–27), a struggle that came to an end only in the early modern period when the ascendant maritime powers of the West were finally able to establish the supremacy of the sea over "Euro-Asiatic landpower" (Mackinder 1904, 433) In the present day, however, Mackinder—contrary to Mahan and others—believed that this predominance was being challenged by the reassertion of land-based power from the Pivot Region. Eurasia's Heartland—richly endowed with natural and population resources—enjoyed the decisive geostrategic advantage of continentality, protecting it effectively from external maritime intervention. Mackinder reckoned that if a land-based power could organize these still-undeveloped spaces effectively by building a modern transport infrastructure and fostering settlement, agriculture, and industry, the Eurasian Heartland could become an invincible bastion which no combination of sea power could challenge.

It was even conceivable, he reasoned further, that the natural opposition between maritime and land-based power across greater Eurasia could in future be neutralized through some sort of combination of the Heartland and Inner Crescent to create a single trans-Eurasian power. Such an entity would not only enjoy the strategic advantages of continentality but could additionally deploy the resources of the Heartland for the massive development of

naval forces along Eurasia's maritime margins. In time, such a conglomerate power would become truly invulnerable to any external intervention from the powers of the Outer Crescent. In this case, he observed in 1904, "the empire of the world would then be in sight" (Mackinder 1904, 436; 1919, 91–92). Fifteen years later, he summarized the danger programmatically in a famous geopolitical dictum:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;
Who rules the World-Island controls the world. (Mackinder 1919, 194)

With all this, Mackinder had launched two radically new ideas. On the one hand was the notion that the continental landmass of greater Eurasia had the potential to operate as a consolidated strategic actor powered by an irrepressible geopolitical synergy between its two principal parts. On the other was the implication that such a Eurasian conglomerate would be no mere Great Power, but could combine its land- and sea-based resources to achieve world domination. At the turn of the century Mackinder—impressed by and apprehensive about Russia's completion of the Trans-Siberian railway in 1902—believed that the latter might emerge as the leading agent of such a strategic consolidation. At the end of World War I, however, he reassigned the role of geopolitical "organizer" of Eurasian space to Germany, which he believed capable of quickly reemerging after its defeat in 1918 (Mackinder 1919, 212). The imperative, therefore, was a postwar arrangement that would prevent a German-Russian amalgamation—a challenge met by the Treaty of Versailles with the establishment of a *cordon sanitaire* of independent states across Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Mediterranean (Mackinder 1919, 193–94, 204–8).

The Russian Middle World Becomes Eurasia

The dislocations of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 accelerated the engagement of Russian nationalist discourse with the Eurasia concept. This was apparent most significantly in a political and cultural movement developed by émigré Russian nationalists in the early 1920s. These nationalists shared the hostility to Europe of their nineteenth-century predecessors and similarly believed that the Petrine notion of Russia as a European country was based on bogus geographical assumptions. Indeed, they advertised the importance of the new ideas about Eurasian space in the very name they gave to their movement: *evraziistvo*, or Eurasianism (Böss 1961; Laruelle 2008; Wiederkehr 2007; Shlapentokh 2007; Bassin et. al. 2015). In the writings of Petr Savitskii—a brilliant economic geographer and one of Eurasianism's princi-

pal exponents—the geographical arguments of the Pan-Slavs were repeated virtually point by point. Because Europe was not a physical-geographical continent distinct from Asia, there was no geographical or natural division that divided Russia into European and Asian parts, at the Urals or indeed anywhere else (Savitskii 1927, 27). Rather, Russia represented a cohesive and self-contained continental zone between Europe and Asia, a “special and integral geographical world” (Savitskii 1927, 25–26).

Yet where the nationalists of the nineteenth century had viewed the Russian middle world as a component part of a greater Eurasian landmass, the Eurasianists appropriated the term *Evraziia* for exclusive reference to Russia alone, and Semenov-Tian-Shanskii’s “Russian Eurasia” (*russkaia Evraziia*) was reformulated as “Russia-Eurasia” (*Rossia-Evraziia*) (*Evraziistvo* 1926; Tsymburskii 1998: 8–9). The geographical boundaries of this Russian-Eurasian middle world, moreover, were significantly expanded to become more-or-less congruent with the political boundaries of the late-imperial Russian and—from the mid-1920s—Soviet states. This was a substantial departure from Danilevskii and his contemporaries, and Savitskii and the Eurasianists supported it with an argument for the geographical unity of Russia-Eurasia which drew on the research into natural or ecological zones in Russia by the nineteenth-century soil scientist V. V. Dokuchaev (1899; 1904; see also Savitskii 1927, 52). This biogeographical approach meant, among other things, that Turkestan, which had been excluded from the nineteenth-century vision of middle-world Russia, was now explicitly included.

This new geographical picture of Russia as Eurasia provided the basis for a radical reinterpretation of Russian civilization *tout court*. The latter now represented an autonomous historical, political, and cultural complex, which had developed out of a protracted period of homogenization with the other peoples of the Eurasian “melting pot” (*assimiliatsionnyi kotel*) (Chkheidze 1931, 113). The Eurasianists identified a broad spectrum of affinities that marked the blending of these groups into a single entity, from a shared historical heritage—what Nikolai Trubetskoi called the “legacy of Genghis Khan”—to common patterns of folk culture, philological borrowings, and ethnographic affinities (Trubetskoi 1925; Chkheidze 1931, 113). The product was a new vision of Russia as a geohistorical, geopolitical, and geocultural entity, for which Savitskii invented an entirely new term: *mestorazvitie* or “topogenesis” (Savitskii 1927, 28–33).

To an extent, Russian Eurasianism was endorsed the same maritime-continental dialectic that animated the Anglo-American geopolitical imagination, in particular that of Mackinder (Savitskii 1921, 9; 1922, 355; Tsymburskii 1998, 10–11; Chinyeva 2001, 206–8; Bassin and Aksenov 2006; Wiederkehr 2007, 80–81, 83; Bassin 2010). Thus, Russia-Eurasia was seen

as a “state-continent” (*gosudarstvo-materik*) and a continental “world unto itself” (*mir-v-sebe*) that remained completely “closed” (*zamknutyi*) to maritime influences from without (Savitskii 1927, 33ff, 49–51, 53–57; Alekseev [1931] 1998, 408–13; *Evrasiistvo* 1926, 110). But the Eurasianists had no idea of geopolitical synergy across the greater continent, and lacked any Mackinderian appreciation of greater Eurasia’s world-hegemonic potential. Very much to the contrary, their Eurasianism was a doctrine of political and economic isolationism, and it remained manifestly uninterested in any Great-Power imperial advantage beyond Russia’s borders. Indeed, the thinking of the Eurasianists was more influenced by interwar *étatist* theories of self-sufficiency and state autarchy: German ideas about *Mitteleuropa*, but also the Stalinist doctrine of “socialism in a single country.” The imperative for Russia-Eurasia, consequently, was not further imperial expansion but rather national integration and retrenchment within Russia-Eurasia’s vast, but clearly delimited, continental space (Savitskii 1921; 1932).

A Eurasian Kontinentalblock

Mackinder’s speculations about land and sea power and the geopolitical dynamics of Eurasian space resonated in Germany as well, but they did so in an inverted manner. Where Mackinder feared the rise of a greater Eurasian conglomerate, the Germans were apprehensive of the danger of maritime encirclement and encroachment by their rivals Britain and the United States (Ratzel 1900). The sense of geostrategic vulnerability was kept very much alive in the interwar period, stimulated among others by the exhortations of the Bavarian geopolitician Karl Haushofer. Haushofer made no secret of his admiration for Mackinder’s analyses of Eurasian geopolitics (Jacobsen 1979), but the political conclusions he drew were precisely the opposite. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he vigorously advocated the adoption of an *Überkontinentalpolitik*, or “Eurasian supercontinental politics,” dedicated precisely to the consolidation of the greater Eurasian continent into the *Eurasienblock* or single power unit (Haushofer 1925, 87; 1979, 629; Spang 2013, 341, 352–53; Ostrovsky n.d., 14–15) that Mackinder had warned against. The core of this bloc would be formed by its two “spatially strongest (*raumstärksten*) peoples,” Germany and Russia (Haushofer [1940] 1979, 622; Rukavitsyn 2008, 115–16; Spang 1999). Such a combination would provide *Raumtiefe*, or “depth-in-space,” enabling Germany’s “liberation” from the “anaconda politics” of maritime encirclement by Britain and the United States (Haushofer [1940] 1979, 629–30; Schnitzer 1955, 414). After 1933, the vision of a continental Eurasian block was taken up by the Nazi leadership (Koch 1983, 894, 911–12), and was a key factor in the conclusion of both the nonaggression pact

with the USSR of August 1939 as well as the Tripartite alliance (Berlin Pact) with Italy and Japan the following September.

Haushofer and many others understandably viewed the German invasion of the USSR in the summer of 1941 as a fatal betrayal of an *Überkontinentalpolitik*. Historians have suggested, however, that Hitler's aggression was in fact aimed at the consolidation of the Eurasian continent in a different form: not as an alliance between partners but as a continental empire (*Kontinentalimperium*) dominated by Germany alone. Hitler not only accepted the geopolitical reasoning that Germany's maritime enemies could be resisted only through the creation of a Eurasian land empire (Michaelis 1972, 340), but effectively embraced Mackinder's conclusions regarding the potential for global domination that German control of the Heartland could provide. "The struggle for world hegemony," he declared in September 1941, would be decided in favor of a German-dominated Europe "by the possession of Russian space" (Michaelis 1972, 350–51; Hillgruber 1980, 345; Hauner 1991, 270). Hitler's disagreement with his diplomats and geopoliticians related not to the geopolitical dynamics of Eurasia but rather to the Führer's confidence that the racial superiority of the German people combined with the ideological superiority of National Socialism would enable German forces to challenge Russian domination over these spaces and impose their own control instead (Michaelis 1972, 340).

Eurasia in American Cold War Discourses

The Nazi drive to establish a continental Eurasian empire served to bring the prospect of Eurasia sharply to the attention of the Americans, who up to that point had showed very little interest. Mackinder's work itself was belatedly discovered (Mackinder 1942; 1943) and his ideas were further developed by Nicholas Spykman, a political scientist at Yale. Spykman repeated the essential contours of Mackinder's bifurcation of the geopolitical map of Eurasia, but he renamed Mackinder's "Inner Crescent" the Eurasian "Rimland" and argued that it represented at once Eurasia's most vulnerable and its most vital zone (Spykman 1944, 35–44). After the war, he maintained, the Rimland would be the arena for the coming struggle over control of the greater Eurasian continent, a struggle that would be waged between the powers of the Heartland and the Outer Crescent. His rephrasing of Mackinder—"Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia / Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world"—was intended to point the way clearly to the interventionist role that the United States would be called upon to play in this geopolitical contest. Like Mackinder, Spykman was preoccupied above all with the hegemonic power potential of a united and hostile Eurasian

continent, and the latter's recommendation echoed that of the former: the domination of a single power over the Eurasian continent must be prevented by reestablishing a balance of power across it (Spykman 1944, 60–61; 1942, 460–61).

In this way, the exotic concept of Eurasia had by war's end acquired a central operational significance for the Americans, and it was to figure fundamentally in their strategic thinking throughout the postwar period (Lefler 1984, 356n; Harper 1994, 40–42, 50). For the influential diplomat and scholar George Kennan, the greatest global threat to American security was precisely the geostrategic consolidation of the Eurasian continent described by Mackinder and Spykman. “[I]t is essential to us,” he maintained, “that no single Continental land power should come to dominate the entire Eurasian land mass.” Should “the powers of the [Eurasian] interior . . . conquer the seafaring fringes of the [entire] land mass [and] become a great sea power as well as land power,” the resulting entity would inevitably initiate a process of “overseas expansion hostile to ourselves” (Kennan 1952, 10–11). The only way to prevent this, Kennan famously insisted, was for the United States to resist the USSR on every front through a policy of “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant *containment* of Russian expansive tendencies” (Mr. X [Kennan] 1947, 575). Writing at the same time as Kennan, George Orwell gave this enemy Eurasia a demonic public face in his dystopic novel *1984*, behind which the Mackinderian inspiration was unmistakable. “Protected by its vast land spaces,” Orwell's Eurasia was home to hordes of unspeakably brutal soldiers, with “monstrous figures” and “expressionless Mongolian faces” (Orwell 2013, 131, 172, 216).

The policy of containment, organized around the specter of Eurasia as a hostile continent-hegemon dominated by the Soviet Union, provided the basic framework for American—and by extension Western—grand strategy for the ensuing four decades. The day-to-day practice of containment varied significantly over time, but the basic orientation remained essentially unchanged right down to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, the national security strategy statements prepared by the Reagan White House in the late 1980s repeatedly emphasized the centrality of Eurasia to American interests, and indeed in terms that were transparently Mackinderian (“National Security Strategy” 1987, 4, 27, 28, 30, 38; “National Security Strategy” 1988, 8, 19, 20; Walt 1989, 13, 33). Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981, declared that the “struggle for Eurasia” was the central priority in the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States, and that the primary challenge for the United States was to “prevent Eurasia's domination by one power.” The only way to avoid this, he admonished, was to block Soviet expansionism through a renewed program of con-

tainment (Brzezinski 1986, 30–31, 41–52, 215, 230, 146, 259; Kearns 2009, 225–29).

Eurasia after Communism

The end of the Cold War witnessed the abrupt collapse of the bipolar contest of superpowers. The profound geopolitical transformations which this engendered served to accelerate a fundamental epistemological shift that was already taking place in the way that the traditional concepts of Europe and Asia were understood. As we have pointed out, the reality of a geographically unified greater Eurasian continent had never really undermined older ideas about its component parts Europe and Asia. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, however, the traditional valorization of Europe and Asia began to be critically scrutinized, with Edward Said and others now rejecting it as a biased and even contrived metageographical discourse that needed to be deconstructed and rethought (Said 1978; Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997; Lewis and Wigen 1997). The emergence of former colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas as dynamic new arenas of development and modernity, moreover, provided a completely novel context for the revalorization of these regions and their patterns of interactions with other parts of the world. Taken together, these circumstances created what was effectively a perfect storm for the reconceptualization of the notion of Eurasia. The results have been striking, as a hitherto exotic but obscure designation quickly became a popular toponym of choice. “Suddenly,” one observer remarked with some astonishment, “Eurasia is everywhere” (Kotkin 2007, 487).

To be sure, the Cold War specter of Eurasia as a geopolitical hegemon did not disappear immediately. Mackinder’s and Spykman’s works were reissued in fresh editions, and there was considerable interest in keeping their legacy alive (Mackinder 1996; Spykman 2007; Megoran 2004; Megoran et al. 2005; Hess 2004, 105; Sengupta 2009; Petersen 2010; 2011, 157; Kaplan 2012). But even Zbigniew Brzezinski was now constrained to concede that with the passing of the Cold War, the old Mackinderian prospect of Eurasia’s consolidation under a single power had become illusory. “[T]he new reality is that no one power can any longer seek—in Mackinder’s words—to ‘rule’ Eurasia and thus to ‘command’ the world.” In the world of today, he concluded, Eurasia is simply “too big to be politically one” (Brzezinski 2012, 130–31; see also Brzezinski 1997, 31; 2000; Kaplan 2009, 101; “Interview: Zbigniew Brzezinski” 2012).

While the potency of greater Eurasia as a hegemonic World-Island has waned, however, the dynamism of an inner-continental core region has been rediscovered, and it is for the most part in this latter sense that the term Eur-

asia found its new popularity after 1989. This process began in earnest in the former Soviet Union. Classical Eurasianism had been denounced as a “bourgeois nationalism” in the USSR, and “Eurasia” was used exclusively in reference to the greater continental entity comprising Europe and Asia (Vakhrameev and Meien 1970). While a very few disaffected Soviet intellectuals, most notably the historian and geographer Lev Gumilev, remained ideologically committed to the Eurasianist legacy (Gumilev 1993a; 1993b; Bassin 2007; 2009; 2016), it was only with the dislocation and turbulence of the 1990s that the interwar vision of Russia-Eurasia began to attract serious attention. Once again it appealed to nationalist tendencies, in this case those seeking a new vision of Russia no longer reliant on Marxist rationales but which retained a clear sense of the country’s greatness and geopolitical power. Like the classical Eurasianists, the “neo-Eurasianists” refused to accept the geopolitical fragmentation of the Soviet state and sought a legitimizing rationale for its reassembly (Kerr 1995; Bassin 2008). The original notion of Russia as Eurasia—a cohesive middle continent between Europe and Asia, whose member nations shared the same unique civilizational identity—seemed ideally suited for these purposes. From the outset, the most important prophet of neo-Eurasianism has been Aleksandr Dugin, a prolific writer and political commentator who came ideologically from the radical right. Dugin enthusiastically promoted the legacy of classical Eurasianism, and called for the reestablishment of the Russian imperial and Soviet states in the form of a mighty Eurasian empire (Dunlop 2001; Kipp 2002; Höllwerth 2007).

Eurasianism has also been taken up in various other parts of the former Soviet Union, most significantly in the newly-independent state of Kazakhstan. There, President Nursultan Nazarbaev shares the vision of Eurasia as a civilizational zone distinct from Europe and Asia, encompassing the territories and peoples of the former Soviet Union, and he also supports their recombination into some sort of common economic and political entity (Nazarbaev 1995; 1996; *Evraziistvo i Kazakhstan* 2003). As a result of his efforts over many years, an initial treaty for the establishment of a “Eurasian Economic Community” was signed between Kazakhstan, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in 2000, and ten years later a customs union was formed between the first three. Campaigning for a third presidential term in the autumn of 2011, Vladimir Putin declared that the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union would represent the major foreign-policy priority of his administration (Clover et al. 2011; Putin 2011). While the ultimate success of this complicated project remains highly uncertain, Putin’s endorsement served to normalize and officially legitimize the concept of Eurasia as a reference for the collective nations of the former Soviet Union (Ersen 2004; Markedonov 2012; Pryce 2013). Beyond the former Soviet Union, moreover, the

ideas of Eurasia and Eurasianism have been used in nationalist discourses in Turkey, as part of the perceptual repositioning of the country between the West, Russia, and Asia after the Cold War (Kotkin 2007, 495–96; Laruelle 2008, 188–201; Ersen 2013).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union also led to a sort of parallel discovery of Eurasia in the West, where the term is used most commonly in reference to the Eurasia of the Eurasianists: the vast middle zone comprising the traditional spaces of the Russian and Soviet empires. In contrast to Russia, however, the new Western—above all American—interest was sparked not by nationalist revanchism but by an entirely practical quandary. After 1991, the term “Soviet” could no longer be used in those myriad governmental and educational institutions that had divisions or programs organized on the basis of the Soviet structure but—unlike the peoples of the USSR itself—did not necessarily want to break into separate entities. For many, the most elegant solution was the untried and exotic toponym “Eurasia.” The general unfamiliarity of the term was not a problem—indeed, it was precisely the absence of any preconceptions on the part of Western audiences about where or what Eurasia actually was that made it so useful for this new purpose. The United States government adjusted its own use of the term accordingly, and from the early 1990s used “Eurasia” in specific reference to the former Soviet Union (“National Security Strategy” 1993 and 2006).

“Eurasia” has also been taken up by Western academics who believe that this unconventional toponym can help transcend restricting metageographical categorizations: not only Europe and Asia, but even more general associations of East and West, North and South. Heralded by some as a bright new “paradigm,” by others as an equally promising “anti-paradigm,” the transnational concept of Eurasia appears to some to enable a better integrated and more evenly balanced perspective with which to frame the historical or contemporary study of the peoples and regions of the former Soviet Union, or even of the entire postcommunist second world (Von Hagen 2004; Spivak et al. 2006; Suchland 2011). The awkward circumstance that in Russia itself the same term has clear revanchist and neo-imperial undertones is recognized, but for many this does not disqualify “Eurasia” for their own purposes of a liberal, inclusive, and forward-looking revisionism (Sinor 1997, 81–87; Von Hagen 2004, 455–56; Bassin 2004; Onyshkevych et al. 2007; Starr 2008; Vinokurov and Libman 2012).

The inherent specificity of this sense of “Eurasia” resonates with yet another contemporary deployment of the term, which uses “Eurasia” in reference to some sort of central zone of the greater Eurasian continent that is not congruent with Russia. Often called “Central Eurasia” or “Inner Eurasia,” this particular metageography is broadly appealing, among others for the

tradition of “Inner Asia” studies that developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Stein 1928; Lattimore 1940). There are echoes of Mackinder’s Heartland–Inner Crescent juxtaposition in the geographical contrast between “Central Eurasia” as an innercontinental region of vast lowlands on the one hand, opposed to an outlying “crust of civilization” or “Outer Eurasia” on the other (Christian 1994, 176–83; Sinor 1997, 2, 5). Central Eurasia’s historical experience is seen in Mackinderian terms as a record of historical interactions of the sedentary agrarian societies of the margins with the pastoral nomads at its center (Christian 1998; Perdue 2005; Kotkin 2007, 503n, 511n; Beckwith 2009). Beyond this, “Central Eurasia” is also widely used in reference to the contemporary world. The abundant energy and other mineral resources of the Caucasus and Central Asia serve to attract global attention to this geostrategic but politically highly unstable region (Starr 2008, 5; Pantucci and Petersen 2011;). In what is frequently called a “new Great Game,” a burgeoning literature explores the rivalries developing among powers large and small, far and near, for access and influence to this “Eurasia” (Rubinstein and Smolansky 1995; Fairbanks et al. 2001; Weisbrode 2001; Edwards 2003; Aminih and Houweling 2005; Freire and Kanet 2010; Hermann and Linn 2011).

Finally, in what is perhaps Eurasia’s most genuinely radical resignification, the term is now used analytically in literal reference to the entire continent of Asia plus Europe. Practitioners of “world” or “global” or “big” history have promoted the need to view greater Eurasia in this way as a single physical entity. In particular, this geospatial shift of focus has an instrumental function within the epistemology of the world history project, by helping to transcend the limitations of national or imperial boundaries and recognize *longue durée* patterns of social and commercial interaction across global spaces (Kalivas and Martin 2008). In some cases, this perspective treats Eurasia essentially as a network or system of linkages (Dale 1994; Bentley 1998; Abu-Lughod 1998; Lieberman 1999; Gann 2003), while elsewhere greater Eurasia is considered as a cohesive historical–geographical entity—a “Eurasian ecumenical whole,” as William McNeill (1964; 1987; 1995) puts it—characterized by an enduring historical distinctiveness and a special role in global history. The importance of environmental conditions continues to be emphasized, but rather than bifurcating the continent as before these are now seen as unifying factors (Diamond 1997; Landes 1998). This notion of greater Eurasian unity is then projected onto the present and future in a body of literature dealing with the twenty-first-century economic integration of the “Eurasian ‘supercontinent,’” stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean (Stokhof et al. 2004; Linn and Tiomkin 2005; Linn and Tiomkin 2006; Cho 2007; Roessler 2009; Vinokurov and Libman 2012).

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