10 The Perils of Dichotomous Thinking: A Case of Ebb and Flow Rather Than East and West

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The brief of this paper – which was originally given as a keynote address in a conference that called for 'cultural encounters in the various humanistic disciplines' – is to be provocative. But it is not intended to be flippant. Although I do not have clear answers to the dilemmas I pose, I think they need to be addressed sooner rather than later if we are to make headway in understanding world history. So I will start by asking, 'What are we doing still talking in terms of East and West?' In our post-orientalist times, should we not be moving beyond the dichotomy 'East and West'?[1] This is even more pressing today when, as I will argue, Central Asia is again beginning to be acknowledged and studied. Where does Central or Inner Asia[2] fit into the dichotomous model of East and West? In the West and the East – that is, Europe and China – the peoples of Central Asia have often been dismissed as barbarians or nomads, in a display of still more oversimplifying, dichotomous models (barbarians versus civilized; nomads versus sedentary). They were neither West nor East but occupied what, for some of these same historians, has been easiest to classify as a void, only definable in terms of the space or cultures around it. But if we move beyond comfortable, familiar dichotomies, how do we categorize the world? How do we define Central Asia, unfamiliar to most, if not in contrast to a familiar category and using familiar terminology? This paper examines these dichotomies and their limitations and argues that we need to move beyond the comfortable certainties they offer to new, more flexible models for exploring and understanding world history.

The arguments of those who defined Orientalism have been strongly challenged and are now rejected by many. Yet the Orientalist debate has changed the way we look at the world, while its terminology has

permeated our language and continues to define many of our debates. It cannot be ignored. Several of the papers in this collection are concerned with the post-medieval world – when Europe, for the first time in world history, became dominant. This is where the attack on Orientalism was targeted; that is, on post-medieval Europe and its narratives of Islam. And this gave rise to one of its most ubiquitous dichotomies, Self and Other. Marshall Hodgson was the first to offer a sustained attack on the western narratives of Islamic history in his three-volume *The Venture of Islam*. Others followed, notably scholars like Tibawi, but it was Edward Said's attack, making use of Foucault's theories, which sparked the greatest debate.

In recent years, some scholars have started to spread the Orientalism debate wider to include attacks on western narratives of China, India, and East Asia, not traditionally Islamic countries.[3] Several Chinese scholars have further broadened its scope, notably Zhang Longxi. In his excellent study of the Orientalist debate, *Mighty Opposites*, he shows how modern China subverted the Orientalist argument by adopting with alacrity the role of the Other in relation to the West as it served the anti-imperialist, nationalist political agenda of those in power. Instead of denouncing the characteristics of the 'Other' as a fabrication of corrupt western Orientalists, they instead turned the argument on its head, accepting China's passivity and backwardness as a sign of the unavoidable harm that western imperialism had wrought upon modern China. This served the very useful purpose of blaming outside forces for internal problems.

What Said's attack on Orientalism succeeded in achieving, at least to some extent, was to make what had previously been seen as good in the European narrative be seen as bad, and this included, among other things, ethnocentricity, racial pride, service to the state, and national pride. In this interesting subversion of the original argument, China adopted its attack on Orientalism to promote these very same values. And, of course, by accepting the attacks on Orientalism, China also tacitly accepted its theoretical foundations, which, as Macfie pointed out, 'were either based on, or assumed the existence of, a European philosophy or thought system, derived from the most part from the work of ... Hegel ... and Nietzsche' (6–7). But then modern Chinese historiography is also based on a European thought system – Marxism – which is yet another theory riddled with dichotomies. China's reaction to the Orientalist debate is thus replete with ironies, as Zhang points out in an insightful chapter in his book.[4]

Zhang is concerned with modern Chinese historiography, but if, as Said postulates, the capitalist West from its position of perceived superiority in both might and culture could not study the Other dispassionately, then might not his argument be applicable to other cultures in similar situations at other times in history? Specifically, what about China when it was a major world power in the Han (206 BC–AD 220) and Tang periods (618–907) before Islam, Marco Polo, and the rise of Europe? How did the Han- and Tang-period historians characterize the world outside the remit of the Chinese culture which was, in a very real sense, their 'Other'?

According to Said, European scholars characterized the Orient in their narratives as 'irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine and sexually corrupt' (Macfie 8). We only have to read a few accounts of China's neighbours from the chapters on the 'Western Regions' in the early histories to come across very similar characterizations, as Zhang shows in his paper in this volume. Foreigners were certainly often described as 'feminine,' being 'yin' as opposed to 'yang,' and also inferior, backward, and crude. Deviant sexual practices are also often ascribed to them. But does this language imply acceptance of models of the Self and the Other as in Said's definition of Orientalism (that is, absolute dichotomies), or does it reflect something closer to the Chinese concept of yin and yang, expressing two ends of a continuum?

From early times the Chinese emperor was expected to set a moral example as a civilizing influence, both for his own people (and several early Chinese philosophers made clear that the 'ordinary' people of China were in need of such influences) and for peoples beyond the boundaries of China. Once China started to expand and colonize the west and south, this remit extended to foreign peoples within its boundaries as well. Foreigners could come to China and be transformed or 'laihua.' Once they had accepted the Chinese way and had, in effect, been transformed, they were considered to be Chinese, now civilized or 'hua.' This was not an empty concept; although it is open to doubt whether Marco Polo ever became an official in China, there are many instances of foreigners being accepted into the inner sanctum of the civil service and not solely in lowly positions. Thus we see the paucity of this dichotomous framework, Self and Other, when applied to narratives of pre-modern China and, indeed, to those of the pre-modern world in general. Clearly, there was no absolute dichotomy in medieval times between the Self and the Other in either China or Europe.

The framework also fails when applied to modern China, as Zhang recognizes:

> It is indeed the image of the Self that appears through the mirror that we call the Other, and this is no less true of the Chinese than of the Europeans or Americans. But there is perhaps this essential difference: while the Westerners tend to see the Chinese as fundamentally Other, sometimes the Chinese would think the Westerners eager to become like the Chinese themselves. In the minds of Chinese rulers and officials, China was the sole centre of civilisation where all foreigners were barbarians. What we find in this inadequate picture of the Other is of course nothing but the incredible ignorance and arrogance of the Chinese ruling elites. (40–1)

Should we therefore reject entirely the dichotomy of Self and Other, or may it still have some function in helping us to interpret pre-modern Chinese historiography? Is it a viable conceptual tool for some narratives? If we accept that there are always 'Others' by which we define ourselves, and if the dominating 'Other' for the post-capitalist Christian West has been Islam, China's dominant other in pre-modern history is the 'nomad,' the 'barbarian' from the West.

This raises another problem, however, with the dichotomy as applied to pre-modern times. The Orientalist argument was predicated on both the West and the 'Orient' as having essences, essences that were displayed in their Great Books: their texts. Said criticized specifically the essentialist approach rather than the study of the languages, societies, and peoples themselves. As Burke says: 'The textualist position foreshortens history, annihilates changes, and levels difference the better to represent an image of the past in dramatic form' (xv). China's own past is certainly presented in this form, one that suits political leaders – and not only those of the modern era. The Tang emperors, whose ancestors came from the steppes, sought to link their genealogy with the father of Daoism, Laozi, claiming to be descended from the same clan. But most of China's 'Others' were, for much of the first millennium, cultures without books. How, then, are their essences to be defined? Without essence, moreover, can there be anything approaching 'Orientalism' as Said defined it or, for that matter, 'Occidentalism,' as it should probably be termed from a Chinese viewpoint? For these and the other reasons argued above, the dichotomous model of the Self and the Other as defined by Said is redundant for interpreting pre-modern Chinese historiography.

So what about other dichotomies as interpretative tools, such as the nomad and the agriculturalist? Here is one example from a very eminent historian of Inner Asia, typifying attitudes widespread in western historiography only a few decades ago. He describes the nomads of Central Asia as little known and unpredictable peoples living in a land of 'immense wastes' surrounded by civilizations. These people, he continues, 'can only be defined by comparison: the Brother of the Civilised ... They are opposed but complimentary.' Once they have conquered the civilizations, they themselves become civilized and 'prefer to lose their identity rather than to return to their nomadic state.' 'Historical circumstance,' he says, 'may force a human group to remain or to return to barbarism, but it never does so of its own free will.' He ends with a rhetorical flourish: 'Who would like to leave the flesh pots and go forth into the wilderness? There are no volunteers for the Outer Darkness. To be a barbarian is a moral as well as an economic and political state. The history of Central Eurasia is a history of the barbarian' (Sinor I: 94–5). Surely this rhetoric exemplifies the pitfalls of dichotomous thinking, yet the narrative of this dichotomy between the nomad and the farmer in Central Asia continues today. For example, a book published as recently as 2001 states that 'the roots of a basic duality between the nomadic and sedentary ways of life exist[ed] here from the earliest times' (Knobloch 34). It must be acknowledged, however, that there has also been a sophisticated debate in recent years challenging the absolute distinction between the nomad and the agriculturalist, and more subtle analyses are starting to appear which show that the boundaries between the two are blurred. For example, *An End to Nomadism*, by Humphrey and Sneath, has gone some way toward rejecting the dichotomy.

The cases reviewed above show how readily historians slip into dichotomous models and how they continue to be used by both Chinese and western historians of China, especially when discussing China's relationships with her western neighbours. As soon as we characterize Central Asia in contrast to China, however, it becomes almost impossible to avoid thinking of it as opposite to how we think of China. Central Asia is viewed as an uncivilized, backward, and thus an uninfluential place, except perhaps militarily; even then, as Sinor suggests, its influence is also seen as entirely negative, destroying rather than building. It has been too easy to define this region in terms of the surrounding 'civilizations.' To quote Sinor again: 'The definition of Central Eurasia that can be given in space is negative. It is part of the

continent that lies beyond the borders of the great sedentary civilisations' (I: 95). The idea of Central Asia as a void, a place outside, is also implied by the dichotomy 'East and West.' Some scholars have challenged this negative definition; Andre Gunder Frank, for example, presents Central Asia and the steppe as central to the rise of world civilization and the source of many of the most important inventions of early world history, including the development of agriculture, domestication of animals, the chariot, horseback riding, stringed instruments, and more. All these had a profound impact on both China and Europe and their development. The preponderance of the negative view must be owing in large part to the absence of an 'essence' or large corpus, but, as Frank shows, the absence of a written history does not mean the absence of influence.

The influence of Central Asia continued to be pervasive throughout the first millennium, yet modern histories of China, whether in Chinese or English, hardly mention the region. Tang China is presented as unequalled and unchallenged, as virtually the only civilization in East Asia. In these narratives, China's neighbours may have posed a temporary military threat, but they could not threaten the power of Chinese civilization. In recent years, this has started to change. Books like the collection of papers *China among Equals*, edited by Morris Rossabi, Barfield's *The Perilous Frontier*, Valerie Hansen's *The Open Empire*, and Joanna Waley-Cohen's *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* challenge the view of China as unequalled. One hopes that this new outlook will seep into classrooms and university lecture halls and educate a new generation of scholars to be more sceptical of traditional historiography.

However, dichotomies are difficult to avoid. In *The Perilous Frontier*, Barfield explains Chinese foreign policy in terms of the Self and Other, the Agriculturalist versus the Nomad:

> It was no accident that the steppe and China tended to be mirror images of each other. Ultimately the state organisation of the steppe needed a stable China to exploit ... a weak T'ang dynasty was actually preserved by the nomads and protected from internal revolts and invasions because of the benefits it provided. A relationship that began as predatory became symbiotic. When the Uighurs fell in 840, the T'ang dynasty lost its protector and collapsed in internal revolt within a generation. (131)

In his contribution to *China among Equals*, Tao Jingshen provides a more subtle challenge to one of the mainstays of the narratives of Chinese

foreign policy: 'The tribute system does not adequately describe these fluctuations in China's relations with foreigners.' He goes on to note that 'even the tribute system masked what were really relations between equal and independent states. The relationship between the Han and the Hsiung-nu, for example, was at first conducted on the basis of equality ... in the T'ang, Sino-Turkish and Sino-Tibetan relations were often marked by a sense of equality between the parties' (66). As Tao's argument suggests, the idea that China in its arrogance disregarded knowledge of the outside at this time is a myth. There were few Chinese who learned and studied the languages, literatures, and religions of their neighbours (with the notable exception of Buddhism from India, which became absorbed into Chinese culture), let alone who wrote books on the subject. It is calculated that sixty thousand books were written on the languages and culture of Islam by western scholars between 1800 and 1950, but this was a different time; one might say, a more literate time. There is no shortage of travel narratives, such as Faxian's and Xuanzang's travels to India. Nor were such accounts restricted to journeys to near neighbours: a prisoner of war captured in the 751 battle between the Arabs and Chinese was subsequently sent to Damascus, capital of the Arab caliphate. He returned twelve years later to Chang'an, where he wrote an account of the Arab lands and their customs. Though most of these accounts are no longer extant, traces remain in the official histories or other such works, and they were not uninfluential in their time. As Rossabi points out, 'Chinese envoys often returned to China with valuable accounts of their travels, which occasionally included useful military intelligence ... Using this information ... [the Chinese rulers] differentiated among the various "barbarians," treating each one according to its presumed power and wealth. Some rulers and envoys were addressed as equals, whereas others were clearly dealt with as subordinates' (*China among Equals* 9). In other words, their view of their neighbours was dictated by a political pragmatism: there was no single 'Other.'

It was not only politicians who studied foreigners and their customs. Monks, medical men, merchants, musicians, and others all studied foreign forms and customs and incorporated them into their body of knowledge. There is no need to attempt to summarize here the multifarious influences, for Schafer's study, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, gives details of all areas of Tang life affected by foreign ideas, goods, and technologies, while Kieschnick's recent study looks at the influences of Buddhism on Chinese material culture, from chairs to bridges. One can argue without much dissent that China is a richer and more interesting culture because of this openness. In *China Turning Inward*,

Liu has developed this argument further to suggest that the conservatism of the Song (960–1279) led to an ossification of Chinese culture which, ultimately, led to its downfall.

The roots of another stultifying dichotomy, that separating Chinese and non-Chinese, can be traced back to the period following the Song conservatism. To modern China, this dichotomy serves a political agenda which seeks to promote 'racial' and national pride by presenting a unified historical narrative. This dichotomy is expressed using the terms 'Han' (that is, the Chinese) versus everyone else, non-Han. This nomenclature is now widely used in all writings on China, whether journalistic or scholarly, or written by Chinese or others. What does the category 'Han' signify? It was the Mongol rulers who used 'Hanren' – 'Han' people – to name one of the four peoples they ruled in China. The Han were distinguished from the Mongols, the Central Asians, and the Southerners ('Nanren'), but they also included the Khitan and other groups living in northern China.

Dikotter argues that it is misleading to think of such a categorization as akin to a racial distinction and suggests that the dichotomy between race and culture is inappropriate when applied to pre-modern Chinese history: 'It introduces an opposition so far not supported by historical evidence, and tends to project a modern perception into a remote phase of history' (3). Recent studies have shown that the distinction between Han and non-Han certainly bears no clear and unequivocal relationship to genetic make-up. Northern Chinese are genetically closer to their northwestern 'barbarian' neighbours than to southern Chinese, who are closer to their southeastern Asian neighbours (Bowring). Dikotter further argues that it was only during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) that 'Han' became a racial categorization in China. It is arguable that it is still used this way in China, despite 'race' having been rejected as a meaningless concept by many. The adoption of the same nomenclature among western historians of China during the twentieth century would make an interesting study, but it is beyond the remit of this paper. It is, however, now firmly entrenched in their vocabulary, and while many scholars and journalists would defend their use of it in terms of ethnicity and culture (Saussy 21), very few challenge it. The dichotomy is therefore now ubiquitous in non-Chinese and Chinese narratives of both modern and pre-modern China, whether political, journalistic, or scholarly.

The use of the term 'Han' suggests a unified, homogenized cultural tradition and confuses our perceptions and insights into pre-modern

China. This is shown by the reaction to the relatively recent archaeological finds from the Bronze Age Shu culture in the southwest of China with their gilt-covered metal masks with protruding eyes. Robert Thorp, in his catalogue from one of the several exhibitions showing these finds, expresses his disquiet: 'An exceptional archaeological context ... means that archaeologists have few rules of thumb to guide their interpretations. When a find is made within an archaeological culture only recently recognized, the challenges are greater still, "Common knowledge" does not exist, and each new report may alter even basic information' (in Yang, *The Golden Age* 206). The problem is not this material, however; it is our categorization of it. Despite the fact that this is clearly a new archaeological culture, it is only exceptional if considered as part of a five-thousand-year continuum of Chinese culture. Yet this is how it is packaged. For example, in the same catalogue, Zhang Wenbin, then Director General of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in China, states: 'Each work of art exhibited here will help the visitor along the path that leads towards understanding the profundity and grandeur of Chinese civilization ... The present China is the extension of the historical China, which is a country with a history of five thousand years of history and civilisation' (10). This exemplifies the problem. We have all, to some extent, been hoodwinked into accepting the concept of a homogenized 'Han' culture, that represented by oracle bones, restrained Shang bronzes, Confucian texts, beautiful ceramics, and a literati tradition with a clear link to the present. As Galambos puts it in his challenge to one such narrative, the standardization of Chinese characters, it is necessary to deny the 'ideologically motivated unilateral genealogy of traditional historiography which traced the mandate of Heaven from mythical emperors' (1). This is our narrative of China, one that has been presented to us by the rulers of China past and present. This narrative of a unified culture does not correspond to the complex reality as exemplified by these finds. It is not surprising that scholars struggle to contextualize them within this narrative. We should realize that the history of the geographical area now called China is far too complex to fit into a unified narrative.

If this modern dichotomy Han/non-Han has stunted our understanding of the diversity of the world encompassed by the 'Han,' then it has also forced us to think of the 'non-Han,' including the Central Asians, in terms of negative definitions – what the 'Han' are not. The rejection of this dichotomy would liberate our approach to both Chinese and Central Asian history. But any such progress would also

require greater concentration on Central Asia as a field of study. In 1979, Luc Kwanten suggested this was already happening: 'For a long time Central Asia remained a neglected field of study, the domain of a few brilliant, eccentric scholars and a host of unenlightened amateurs. It is a field where misinformation is still more readily available than accurate documentation. During the last three decades there has been a remarkable change ... and it now appears that the study of Central Asia in general, and of the Mongol empire in particular, is an important constituent element of integrative and comparative world history' (1). But the late twentieth-century scholars were not the first in this field. The importance of Central Asia was recognized by the archaeologists and scholars who followed in the wake of the Great Game in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Central Asian studies flourished for these few decades in western scholarship. A new society was founded, the Central Asian Society (now the Royal Society for Asian Affairs), and, far from neglecting this region, the major academic journals of the time carried articles in every issue on its geography, archaeology, history, and manuscript finds. Translations were made of all the major known travel accounts, the relevant chapters of the Chinese histories, and, where available, other historical sources.

Unfortunately this momentum was not maintained. Although the tradition continued in some centres, notably among German philologists and French sinologists, these became islands of excellence as knowledge, interest, and the skills needed for the study of this area waned.[5] The demands are considerable. Open any account of Central Asian history and one is bombarded with names of unknown peoples, regions, cultures, all moving across a vast landscape and living lives on which it is almost impossible to get a grip, speaking languages which are now understood by only a handful of people worldwide, practising any number of religions and in any number of social and political frameworks. The main sources for their history are through those of the cultures located on their peripheries. Although there are primary manuscript sources, these are in numerous different languages and scripts, while the growing body of archaeological and epigraphical data is still comparatively underexploited.

Is Kwanten right to suggest that we are seeing a renaissance in Central Asian studies? There is no doubt a resurgence of interest in this area, only encouraged by events of the early twenty-first century which have refocused political attention on the region. There are any number of organizations, talks, symposia, and conferences on Central

Asia and even UNESCO Silk Road initiatives. Cataloguing of the primary sources has reached a momentum not seen since the early decades of the twentieth century, and historians worldwide are finally working together on researching some of the key areas of Central Asian history, such as that of the Sogdians. But to counter this, the use of the binary of East and West is still pervasive, used to name departments, universities, conferences, and books. The number of courses on Central Asian history and culture is still lamentably small, while history in Europe and China is still taught as if Central Asia is peripheral, not only in space but also importance. To change this we need to make Central Asian history more accessible.

Writing history often entails choosing what to leave out, determining which events show a larger picture. Historians, for example, talk of movements at a certain period of history of peoples from the northeast to the southwest Central Asian steppes, or of changes from Iranian to Turkic cultural influences in the region. To borrow a term from Buddhism, this is *upaya*: an expedient means to get an initial grasp of the subject. Of course, there will be exceptions, and once we have a general grasp we can move on to those. So is there perhaps a role for the old dichotomies in our expedient means? Might they offer a way in for scholars perplexed by Central Asian complexity? I would argue against this. As we have seen, dichotomies are dangerous. They offer too much simplification, as Knobloch suggests: 'The History of Afghanistan is so complex that every attempt at simplification must inevitably lead to superficiality and confusion' (187). He is arguing the case for just one area of this vast region, so how much more valid is his argument when we consider the region as a whole?

In a discussion of Orientalism, Tønnesson argues passionately for a more universal approach:

> East and West have so much in common, and both East and West differ so much internally that any attempt to understand the world from the standpoint of an East-West divide is bound to fail. We should thus reject Samuel Huntington and Hassan Hanafi's contention that humanism always serves as a smokescreen for Western domination. It must be possible to do what Liu Binyan suggests: to use 'the best of all civilizations, not emphasizing the differences between them' (49), to promote global civilization, create or build one world on the basis of shared human values, fight seclusiveness and protectionism without also promoting domination. Bridges can be built on the basis of drawings from architects on both

> sides, and bridges can be crossed by people from both sides. The basic idea behind the humanist approach is that in essence every human being is alike. The differences highlighted by cultural relativists should be seen as exceptions to the general rule, and should never be exaggerated.

However, thinking is not changed easily. Conservatism lies at the heart of scholarship, so to make a major change in thinking, it is necessary to offer a practical model which will reflect this new way of looking at the problem. One thing is clear: to reach an understanding of Central Asian history, we can no longer work in the old model of scholarship in the humanities, as isolated and independent scholars. There are too many data for individuals to collect and process, so we must work in collaboration. This is a new departure for historians, although one long followed by scientists and, indeed, by social scientists. Perhaps we can learn from science in their use of modelling as well as their working practices.

In his 1970 essay on Central Eurasia in *Orientalism and History*, Sinor used the analogy of a volcanic eruption to describe the region:

> Surrounded by this 'crust' of civilisation lie the immense wastes of Central Eurasia, little known, and unpredictable in their reactions – the Magma, the molten core around which most of world history has been built. When it comes to the surface, then it breaks through the shell within which the sedentary civilisations endeavour to contain it, man, horror-stricken, speaks of catastrophe ... And when the eruption calms down ... the molten lava is added to the crust and helps to contain the forces that brought it to the surface. The solid crust becomes thicker and thicker. The eruptions become less frequent. ... (I: 93)

This is again following the old mode of seeing Central Asia, the land of nomads, as a blank or, even worse, as a negative which made its presence felt only through catastrophes. We hope we have moved beyond this. But perhaps there are more useful analogies from the natural world. In a previous work, I compared Central Asia to a great ocean, but I still made the mistake, as I see it now, of suggesting that the various, literate surrounding civilizations were like the great land masses on the shores of which the currents of the enclosed ocean brought influences from other shores, mixed along the way by the ebb and flow of ocean currents. But this distinction between the land and the water again inevitably establishes a hierarchy between the two, separating

sedentary civilization from nomadic barbarism. This model, once again, has a dichotomous model at its foundation. I now think it is more appropriate to think of a cultural world as being like a world only of water, a world where great currents ebb and flow, sometimes interacting and sometimes (like the Gulf Stream) retaining a distinct identity, but where there is no distinction. All is water, whether warm current, cold currents, deep or shallow; each supports its own distinctive natural life, its own culture, but there are constant interactions and exchanges, and blurred or permeable and constantly shifting boundaries. The interaction and effects of actual ocean currents are now described by oceanologists using complex computer animations. Perhaps we can make use of these dynamic geospatial models in the humanities.

Attempts to use computer models for mapping ocean circulations began in the 1960s, but it took three decades before the oceanologists had acquired sufficient data and before computers were powerful enough to process it quickly. Collecting data and building suitable models were essential to a new understanding of ocean currents, as Weart explains, but now oceanologists are able to predict future changes as well as to understand past ones. Similar although much cruder models are just starting to be used by some in the humanities, although this work is still in its infancy. The Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative (ECAI) has been trying to encourage such modelling among humanities scholars for a decade by providing some of the necessary tools and support, but as yet has made few inroads. ECAI's website shows various attempts at such models, including a relatively early and crude model showing an animation of the growth of the Mongol empire between 1100 and 1400 as well as a more sophisticated later model showing the growth and decline of the Mughal empire (ECAI). In the latter example, the empire is shown in red and one can see how it behaves in a curious way: it looks rather like a film of oil or ink on water that can only cover so much surface area before breaking up. Of course, we all know there is a logistic limit on empires, but this computer model displays it in a very immediate and compelling way. It also shows how the empire is constricted by geography, especially by the Himalayan Mountains to the north.

These two examples show single empires and are very crude compared to models used by oceanologists. The power of such systems is that they can show multiple layers and multiple interactions in space and time. Mapping the movements of peoples, languages, cultures, technologies,

and ideas, alongside the rise and fall of political and economic entities such as empires, cities, and trade routes, is all possible. The model both is genuinely cross-disciplinary and also, of course, shows no boundaries or distinctions between East and West. When we have more complex and animated models displaying layers of data over time, how much more will our understanding of the complexities of human history be changed? So, while we understand in some sense that a movement at one end of the steppes would, as Knobloch put it, 'bring about quite unexpected consequences, continuously subjecting this immense area to migratory movement' (15), can we really conceptualize this with our current models, which are merely written words and static maps?

This is just one model which we could use almost immediately in our teaching and research to start to present a more complex reality than one modelled using dichotomies. This approach will not be realized, however, until scholars and students are encouraged to collate data and develop computer models, activities not yet generally recognized as scholarship in the humanities. Computers are still used as scribes, but, as I hope I have indicated, words coined as shorthand to express complex ideas all too often end up suppressing the complexity and limiting our thinking. If we are to move beyond stultifying dichotomous thinking, we need to exploit the available technology to help us find better ways to conceptualize history's complexities and to move into a world no longer divided into East and West.

NOTES

1 See Said's definition of Orientalism: 'Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on ... the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient' (1–3, 5).

2 There is a lively debate on nomenclature and boundaries of this region, but since my paper is concerned with finding models that do not constrain us

to fixed boundaries, I simply use Central Asia here as a recognizable term for most readers. For further discussion and references, see my article 'Was There a Silk Road?'

3 For example, see Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse*, Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History*, and Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit*.

4 Other non-western countries are also using the precedent of Orientalism, but to argue that western civilization is unnatural and decadent – that is, inherently base and depraved. This 'Occidentalism' is discussed by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit in their recent book. They point out that Said himself dismissed such a scenario: 'Nobody is likely to imagine a field symmetrical to [Orientalism] called Occidentalism.'

5 The World Wars must have had a detrimental effect not only in interrupting the training of new scholars but also in shifting attention to a new world arena and new world powers.

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