From colonising thinking to more-than-human beings: archaeological and anthropological perspectives in Inner Asia



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/kəˈləʊnɪəlɪz(ə)m/

#### noun

the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

"the state apparatus that was dominant under colonialism"



HOW DID & DO THEY INFLUENCE THE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES OF ARCHAEOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY?

/im'pierieliz(e)m/

#### noun

a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means.

"the struggle against imperialism"

 HISTORICAL rule by an emperor.

"in Russia, imperialism had developed alongside a semi-feudal agrarian structure"

# INTRODUCTION to ARCH & ANTH

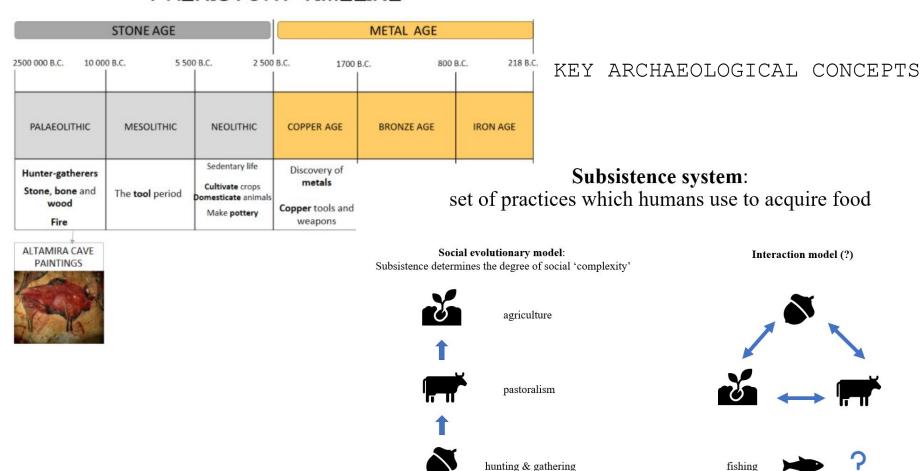
> archaeology: the study of the human past through material remains recovered through excavation (because dead people usually don't talk)

> cultural/biological/**social anthropology**: the study of living people and their behaviours through ethnography (basically talking and observing but it ain't that easy to do it well)

**eurocentrism**: Western-colonial origins of these disciplines: studying the 'Other'

> anthropocentrism: not just about people - animals, plants, landscapes and materials as study subjects

# PREHISTORY TIMELINE



# STADIAL THINKING in ANTHROPOLOGY

MORGAN	MARX AND ENGELS
CIVILISATION	TRUE COMMUNISM
	CAPITALISM
BARBARISM	FEUDALISM
	SLAVE-HOLDING SOCIETY
SAVAGERY	PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM

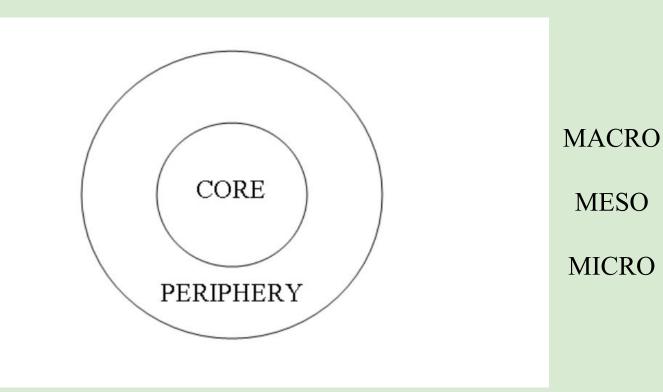
Table 1: Morgan's, and Marx and Engels' stadial histories (adapted from Engels 1913:vii and McGuire

1992:28-29)

# Theorising space?

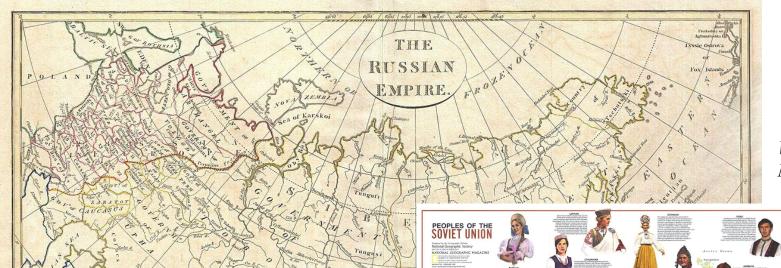
**BORDERS** 

**FRONTIERS** 



# Inner Asia = Central Eurasia according to the Sinor Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies





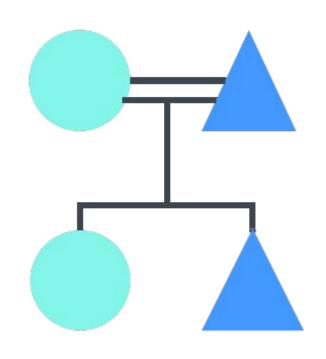
Wikimedia National Geographic

MAPPING SPACE\_ RESOURCES\_ PEOPLE

a RUSSO-SOVIET TRADITION

# THE PROBLEMATIC CHARACTERISATION OF NOMADS in ACADEMIA





## THE INVENTION OF THE:



# tribe

/trnib/

See definitions in:

All Anthropology

Roman History

Biology



suzani.tumblr.com - Tumbex tumbex.com



BUKHARA: THE LOST TRIBE -... melissacohen.weebly.com

#### noun

 a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, typically having a recognized leader.

"indigenous Indian tribes"

Similar: ethnic group

people

race

nation

family

dynasty

house



## 2. BIOLOGY

a taxonomic category that ranks above genus and below family or subfamily, usually ending in -ini (in zoology) or -eae (in botany).

# NOMADIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES?



Interior of the unrobbed main grave at Arzhan-2. © Eurasien-Abteilung, DAI.



# It's Time to De-Sovietize Our Perspective on **Central Asia**

The use of "former Soviet" to refer to Central Asia can be blinding, distracting from the realizing that the region isn't static.

By Ario Bimo Utomo

November 16, 2018









30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, how valid is the post-Soviet paradigm?

# POST-COLONIAL THINKERS

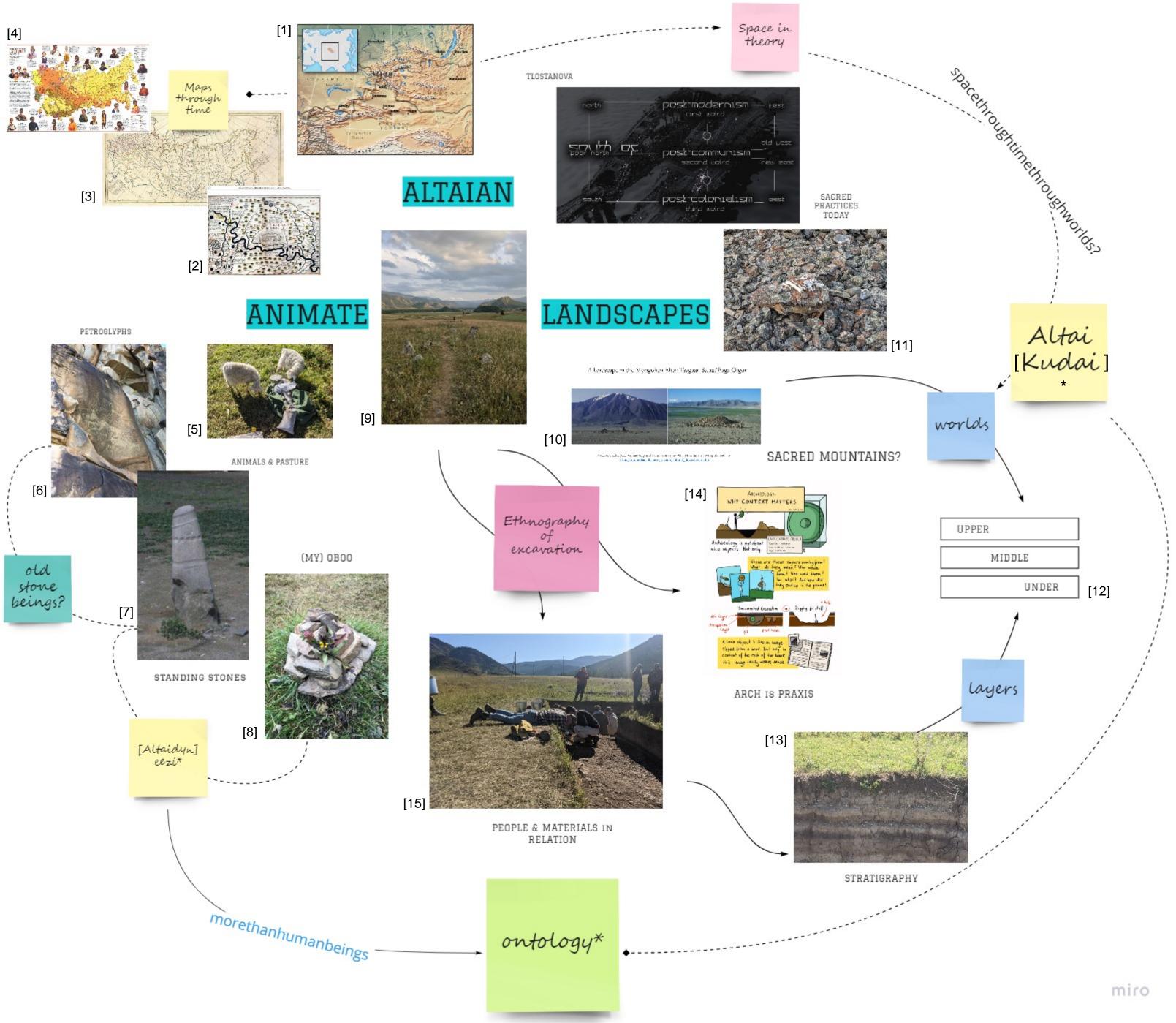
- > Spivak the subaltern
- > Bhabha hybridity



Léon Cogniet, The 1798 Egyptian
Expedition Under the Command of
Bonaparte (1835; Musée du Louvre).

> Said - Orientalism

- > Power?
- > Language?
- > Knowledge?
- > Academia?
- > Decolonize the Curriculum?
- > Subject position?
- > vary knowledge sources



## From colonising thinking to more-than-human beings:

## archaeological and anthropological perspectives in Inner Asia

SoSe2022 by Cecilia Conte

#### ALTAIAN ANIMATE LANDSCAPES

## \*Altai (place name, person name)

the Altai is commonly understood as the Altai mountain range, which spans southern Siberia (RF), western Mongolia and smaller parts of eastern Kazakhstan and Xinjiang (PRC). Two administrative divisions of the Russian Federation also bear the name of Altai: Altai Krai and the Republic of Altai (also called Gorno-Altaisk, the 'mountainous' Altai). The Altai has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic, and since at least 3000 BC was a key region for the dispersal of pastoralism in Inner Asia. Archaeologically, the Russian Altai is most known through the rich kurgan burial mounds located in Pazyryk and Arzhan. The Mongolian Altai is incredibly rich in petroglyphs (stone engravings) and standing stones. The Altai is home to the Altaic languages and Altaian people, although the respective categorisation of these differs greatly according to the source. While historically the Altai is known for the mobility of people, languages, and ideas, modern national borders now constrict this flow.

The name Altai denotes 'golden' in various Mongol, Turkic, and Chinese sources (Saparov, Chlachla, and Yeginbayeva 2018:44). Furthermore, Altai can mean many things: the region, the landscape, the nature, including its human and non-human inhabitants. Altai *Kudai* is also a place of worship or even a god. In this sense, Altai is both limitless and concrete, reachable and unreachable (Halemba 2008:289). Who, then, qualifies as an Altaian (altaitsy in Russian)? This is a point of contention for (post-)Soviet ethnographers, as well as groups of people who inhabit the Altai. Some definitions are more inclusive than others, and even count long-term Russian inhabitants as Altaian. The key, perhaps, is not to define Altaian by genealogical or ethnical means, but in relation through the land: anyone who lives in and respects the Altai can be Altaian.

## \*Eezi (spirits)

The notion of an animated landscape, or a landscape inhabited by spirits, is not specific to the Altai but to many parts of Inner and North Asia. Then, of course, the way in which the landscape is spirited and the social relationship between humans, spirits, and animals differs from one region and group to another. As opposed to *Kudai*, the personified Altai who is worshipped, the *eezi* denote a form of energy or spirits. This energy can emanate from the Altai as a whole, or specific places within it (Halemba 2008:289). Amongst the Buryats and the Dukha living in Mongolia, spirited places and objects are called *ezen* and *eeli* respectively, in Russian they are translated as *khosian* (Empson 2011:86; Küçüküstel 2021:32; Broz 2011:296). Across Inner Asia, *ee* is understood as master – the spiritual entity or 'spirit master' which governs specific parts of the landscape, particularly mountains and rivers, but also specific trees or forests. *Ee* needs to be viewed as a relational category, which connects spiritual energy and place or person – but is also innate to them. The *ee* lives in the mountain, and the mountain is with *ee* (Halemba 2006:63-4).

Spirits usually appear in a particular animal or human form, such as bear, elk, old man, young woman. In the Altai, the anthropomorphic form is more common (Broz 2011:302). In order to keep the spirits in good spirit, so to speak, humans need to honour them. For example: so that hunters will be given

animals to hunt by the master spirit of the forest, who owns the animals, hunters need to be respectful in their hunt and kill. Specific parts of the killed animal might be set apart for the master spirit, who ensures the animal will be reborn. Similarly, when crossing a mountain, in order to guarantee safe passage, one needs to acknowledge the spirit inhabiting the place by giving meat, milk, or alcohol offerings at the *ovoo* stone cairn (Broz 2011:297). Some spirits are particularly powerful and so as to not attract their attention, humans do not call them by their direct name (Pedersen 2009:142). An angered mountain spirit might manifest itself through an earthquake, while the forest spirit might choose to retain all animals from the hunters.

#### **ABSTRACT**

I aim to explore what we can gain from taking an ethnographic approach to archaeological excavation, that is taking archaeological sites and knowledge not as absolute and objective, but as a practice conditioned by material and social relationships. As for most archaeology up until now, the field is heavily influenced by colonial practices, although they often go unrecognised. In the long term, I want to conduct doctoral research which argues that: archaeology is a discipline which arose out of and served colonialism; archaeology is a science which falsely claims objectivity and true knowledge over colonialised people's past; but also, that archaeology has the potential to deconstruct this problematic heritage. Crucially, this means working with, not on, indigenous people and learning to appreciate their ways of knowing. This also implies taking them 'ontologically seriously': here the Western-educated mind needs to deconstruct some binaries and accept that "the mountain is alive" is not a metaphor, but someone's reality.

This proposed project, ALTAIAN ANIMATE LANDSCAPES, begins with a deconstruction of colonial space in the Russianized Altai (see \*Altai in the glossary). Here maps are a crucial source: they represent supposedly abstract and neutral geographical and national borders – the Altai as a mountain range which spans four modern nation-states [1]. The historical map of Sary-Arka, which includes a part of the Kazakh Altai, dates to 1697 [2]: it looks more medieval than modern to a European eye, shows river systems and woods but as well as toponymical information. One can imagine a Russian 'explorer' eagerly writing down the location of resources, but also other types of knowledge (un)willingly imparted by a 'native informant'. One century later (1799), the map of the Russian Empire [3] is formalised, showing fixed administrative divisions and the peoples living within these borders. On the ground, the reality was probably far from unbounded imperial power: people – sneaky administrators of the Russian state, merchants, native elites and commoners - were negotiating these boundaries (Forsyth 1992). The map of the People of the Soviet Union [4], dating to 1976– although created in the U.S. – projects the perfect image of the 'friendship of the people', living within the bounds of the great mother USSR. As we can see, mapping is not only for resources and geographical features, but also for people, cultures, and languages, made into discrete, settled entities. Far from being a 'friendly, non-European' empire, the Russian Empire, and its successor the USSR were colonial powers which tried to absorb and own through classical means like maps. In this enterprise, archaeology was and remains a discipline which serves the state.

Opposing this colonial(ised) space I would like to highlight the notion of landscape. While Europeans might understand landscape as 'nature', for many others – humans and non-humans such as animals – the landscape is a social space [5]. While archaeological features [6-11] or 'ruins' might often be understood as remnants of the past, I think they are very much in the present and part of the landscape. The linearity of past/present/future, and the parcelling up of the past as archaeological periods, is far from universal, as indigenous conceptions of time around the world show. The landscape can be many things at once. It can contain different times and even worlds, it can be all-encompassing or localised.

The ancestors are dead, but they are also with us and influence our lives. And most importantly: parts of the landscape are alive and inhabited by spirits (see \*eezi). The most obvious and potent places in the Altai and other parts of Inner Asia are mountains [9, 10] – they are the connecting locus of the Middle World (mostly human) and Upper World (gods and/or spirits, deceased, ancestors) [12]. What of other features, or special rocks as we could call it? The mountains' little brother the *ovoo* (cairn) [8]. Carved standing stones [7]? Engraved rocks [6], stone mounds [10, 11]? They are connected by their materiality (stone) and by making, being places. Some of them are worshipped today [11], and by virtue of having been worshipped in the past, this makes them more worthy of worship in the present. Only that to the colonial eye, these are not places and not worthy of respect.

Where does the ethnography of archaeological excavation come into this? First of all, it's all about layers [13] – determining where a layer starts, where it ends, if they melt into each other... each layer, ideally, corresponds to a period of occupation or use of a certain place. If certain objects are found in a specific layer [14], this layer can be matched with a cultural period. In the rarest of cases, the layer is simply there, but often, it has to be negotiated: different people see different layers, untrained eyes do not see any [15]. Similarly, an untrained eye would not see the rock places outlined above, and even less their animacy. As I have experienced this over and over again, I am wondering in which way practicing archaeology might just be one way of getting to know the landscape, which works in parallel to other ways of knowing the landscape, its spirits, and specific places (some of the latter the archaeologists call 'features'). Being grounded in the landscape might enable a coming together of different ways of knowing and seeing the landscape, its layers, and the worthiness of its rocks.

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