

with the startling title of “*chi* (to eat; eating)” may very well be his (un)conscious marketing strategy.

If the meat of this book is the Chinese texts the author analyzes, its bones are various Western theorists such as Paul de Man and Fredric Jameson. With theory and text properly balanced, this book is easy to read. The author’s style is excellent, flowing smoothly and affectionately persuasive. He is obviously very learned and has abundant enthusiasm for his topic; one can almost picture him talking just the way he writes. This book is a breakthrough in the field of literary and cultural criticism on modern China with a provocative approach. One not only gains knowledge from reading it, but can also enjoy reading it time and again.

One minor caution, though, is that the author might be somewhat careless when he eagerly introduces a few Chinese characters, which he calls the Chinese sign system, as his key concepts. These include *chi* (eating), *wei* (flavor), and *mu* (ox-herding). “Chi, the mouth that begs” is borrowed directly from Mo Yan (p. 17). Adding to Mo Yan’s interpretation of the character *chi*, the author further legitimizes this reading by treating it as a “signifier.” Again, breaking it down into two parts: *kou* (mouth) and *qi* (to beg), thus “the mouth that begs.” But clearly *chi* is a *xingsheng zi* (phonetic compound) which takes “mouth” to indicate the meaning and “beg” merely as a phonetic part which roughly indicates the pronunciation. The same applies to *wei*. Although remarkably appropriate for the content of this book—“the mouth that begs” cries out hunger, desire, and survival—one cannot help worrying that these Chinese characters (*chi* and *wei*) might lose their original meanings and thus, in the future, be limited to the narrow definitions suggested here.

SHIRLEY CHANG
University at Albany, SUNY

INNER ASIA

A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia. Vol. 1, Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire. By DAVID CHRISTIAN. London: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. 472 pp. \$62.95 (cloth); \$27.95 (paper).

Braudel’s notion of the *longue durée* is often invoked in principle but rarely applied in practice. This volume, the first of two covering a period of one hundred thousand years, certainly qualifies the author as one of the foremost practitioners of this approach to historical study. Christian takes as his unit of inquiry a region he calls “Inner Eurasia,” the drier and less densely populated heartland of the continent which includes the vast steppe lands as well as the forest lands to their north and the deserts and oases to their south. This he distinguishes from “Outer Eurasia,” the relatively well-watered “coastal subcontinents” such as India, China, and Western Europe.

Christian is particularly interested in the environmental forces within this inner zone that shaped its inhabitants’ “strategies of ecological, economic, political and military mobilization” and how these strategies differ from those used in Outer Eurasia. This is a formidable task he sets himself, one that would stretch any scholar’s reach in time and space but one that the author carries off with great success.

One of the reasons for this success is his skillful ordering of the data. He starts, appropriately, with matters of geography and ecology and then turns to the development of various adaptations to the environments of Inner Eurasia—hunting-gathering, agriculture, and pastoral nomadism. Once he reaches the historical era he looks not only at sequences of peoples—Scythians, Huns, Turks, and so on—but at long-term phases of interaction between Inner and Outer Eurasia and tries to explain the periodic shifts in power and dominance. Because of the wide and deep perspective he is always alive to patterns, cycles and, perhaps more importantly, departures. For Christian the emergence of the Rus in the ninth century is not just the beginning of East Slavic history, but of the political organization of the forest zone which in the long run resulted in the projection of sedentary military power all along the northern border of the steppe. This was unprecedented, and the new geopolitical situation changed fundamentally the equations of power within Inner Eurasia as well as its relationship to Outer Eurasia.

Such a perspective further serves to highlight the fact that histories of Inner Eurasia usually focus on the nomads triumphant, a history that ignores or minimizes those long phases when sedentaries have the upper hand. One is the period 1000 to 1200, from the fall of the Khazars and Uighurs to the rise of the Mongols, when the forests of Russia and Manchuria and the oases of East and West Turkestan produced the strongest states. That this interesting phenomenon has received little recognition and scant attention arises in large measure from current academic divisions of labor. Slavicists study the Rus principalities, Islamicists take care of Turkestan, and China specialists occasionally venture into Manchuria. And very rarely do they engage one another.

While the chapters proceed chronologically from the Paleolithic to the early Mongols, Christian regularly returns to certain issues that give his volume a thematic coherence as well. He depicts the interplay of nomads and sedentaries as a complicated, variable, and dynamic process, not simply one of opposition and conquest. Frontiers are places of exchange, negotiation, compromise and syncretism; they are permeable, not “hard” as the mythology of the Great Wall suggests.

The author is also to be commended for not homogenizing nomadism. Typically, books on Central Asia offer a generalized picture of the nomadic method of resource extraction, whereas Christian repeatedly and rightly emphasizes its many permutations. This leads to much more meaningful discussions of the lifeways of specific nomads who are adapting to ever-changing political, cultural, and ecological forces. Another welcome feature is his recognition of the importance of cities in Inner Eurasia. This includes those in the forest zone, the famed caravan cities of deserts and, more exceptionally, the recurrent urbanism in the steppe itself. Here winter camps became “capitals” and assumed important political, commercial, and ideological functions. While never as attractive or as large as their sedentary counterparts, these “sitting cities,” as the Mongols called them, had a special character, one that reveals much about steppe history and society.

Specialists, naturally, will find some of his data and interpretations debatable, or certain issues underplayed. I, for one, think his treatment of the nomads’ political ideology should have been drawn in sharper fashion and given greater prominence. This, however, is a secondary matter. The real question is his overall conceptualization of Inner Eurasian history. Does it cast new light on the historical development of the region, will it attract needed and sympathetic attention to the field, does it situate Inner Eurasia in wider historical contexts, and does it force specialists to reconsider the parameters of their specialties? I believe Christian scores all across the board. He

makes a compelling case for Inner Eurasia as a meaningful unit in world history. At the same time his work convincingly demonstrates that there is an interactive Eurasian history that goes beyond Silk Roads and barbarian invasions.

Big picture history requires energy, openness, and risk taking, a willingness to escape from the well-worn grooves of academe. By ignoring traditionalist spatial and temporal boundaries Christian has effected a great escape; hopefully this will encourage others to go over the wall and find out what is on the other side.

THOMAS T. ALLSEN
The College of New Jersey

The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia. By JOHN GLENN. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999 and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. xii, 198 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has emerged a large literature on the newly independent states of Central Asia. John Glenn's book is part of this literature. This reviewer is a historian with an interest in Central Asia, not a researcher into Central Asian affairs, nor a specialist in international relations, so I have tried to assess this book mainly as an introduction to some of the problems faced by Central Asian states today. And in many ways, this is a very impressive introduction indeed!

Glenn focuses on the problems posed for Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Tadzhikistan, and Turkmenistan by the many forms of ethnic and cultural divisions that persist within them. As Glenn puts it: "the objective of this book is to outline one of the main problems that confront the newly independent states of Central Asia: societal cohesiveness" (p. 7). The theme is explained clearly, though it is a shame that there is little discussion of the economic problems which very often provide the context and explanation for what appear to be cultural or ethnic divisions. The book's greatest strength lies in its theoretical discussions. The first two chapters explain with great clarity a model of "quasi-states," or ex-colonial states created less by internal forces than by international pressures. This model stresses the artificiality of the territorial boundaries of most former colonial states and the consequent difficulties they face in creating a sense of national unity that can override pre-existing tribal, clanic, ethnic, or cultural divisions. As a result, the main threats to the stability of such states are internal rather than external. Their internal divisions may be intraethnic (clanic or tribal divisions, for example), supraethnic (religious loyalties such as those to Islam or broader ethnic loyalties such as, in the case of Central Asia, to "Turkistan"), or ethnic. The problems caused by such divisions constitute the "insecurity dilemma," which is faced by most "Southern" states. The book sets up a contrasting ideal-type, that of the "Northern" state, which was normally built on an already emerging sense of national identity and cohesion. The theoretical discussion is handled with efficiency, clarity, and precision, and for those (like this reviewer) who are not familiar with contemporary International Relations theory, these chapters offer a very good introduction to recent debates about nationalism and state-building.

Chapters 3 to 6 use these models to explore some of the problems of state-building faced by Central Asian states. These chapters offer a clear and efficient overview of the pre-Soviet history of these states, their creation as states during the Soviet period, and the problems they face today. For those new to the field these chapters will provide a very good introduction, though scholars with more familiarity with Central Asia may sometimes feel that the treatment of ethnic differences is too cut and dried. As