

歐亞的故事：轉化的模式

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Eurasian Stories: models for transformations

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歐亞橫跨歐洲與亞洲，其地理與地緣政治空間跨越歐洲與亞洲的界線，不以歐洲為單一中心，呈現人類移動、貿易、戰爭、文化交流與其他交集。歐亞地區大片的陸地面積延伸超乎人類的想像，從古希臘時期即以超乎歐洲或亞洲等概念性實體的姿態存在。歐洲和亞洲在地理上幾乎無法分割。儘管從烏拉爾到高加索山脈間有多重分界，但如果略過這些劃定的界線又會剩下什麼呢？描述歐亞地區的歷史事件往往與疆土的拓展有關，例如十三、十四世紀蒙古帝國的大汗們，公元前五世紀斯基泰人的西遷，或公元前四世紀時亞歷山大大帝的東移。現在則有中國的一帶一路，又稱新絲路計畫。同時也有在後蘇聯時代自稱位居歐亞大陸中心的哈薩克這樣的國家。當然，俄羅斯也透過各種不同版本的「歐亞主義」聲稱自己是歐亞的中心。換句話說，歐亞是新興的模式，綜合多中心的世界觀，各有各的理想抱負，也各有不同的新興洲際連結。

在此同時，同樣重要或更重要的是，歐亞大陸已經超越了這些「世界」觀，激發前領土與後領土的地理與地緣詩意想像，跨越性的連結與土地的故事，一同踏上永不停歇的時間旅程，往前行或往後行的同時，貶損限制我們思考的規範和標準，不採宏偉的敘事手法，不以歐亞為研究的主題而已，也作為研究的道德標準，實踐法國無政府主義者兼地理學者埃利塞·雷克呂斯(Élisée Reclus)所謂的「在地球內部形成一體」。我們應如何思考甚至體驗超越個人、國籍與時間上的特殊性？如何感受與思索地球的元素與地理移動，瞭解自我？

以下是一段由神話故事、考古研究結果與個人經驗交織而成的結果，有些橫越時間與空間，世代傳承，有些則是偶然間發生的地理上的虛構故事，多年來歷經後人的詮釋與傳頌。在蒐集這些故事的過程中，套句荷蘭藝術中心學生的話，有種「歐亞不存在於何處，現卻存在於此處」的感覺。這是他們修完由我和崔賓娜(Binna Choi)共同指導的一年期研究課程「解構歐亞」之後的感想¹。

鯨魚

拜訪海參崴時參觀了現代藝術館(Artetage)。這是一座私人博物館。現代藝術館收藏了來自俄羅斯東北部馬加丹的現代主義畫家伊格·東尼(Igor Dony)的〈岩石壁畫〉(1993)，一幅風格類似史前岩石壁畫，描繪鯨魚和鹿的現代繪畫。鹿是許多草原游牧部落常見的創作主題，遠在兩千五百年前就有鹿的金屬造型作品。麋鹿則因鹿角的造型，被視為是人類與上天(蒙古語稱為「騰格里」)的溝通媒介。鯨魚的圖案則常見於東北亞沿海部落。鯨魚身為哺乳動物，能夠適應陸地上的生活，卻毅然決然的返回海洋，因此也可以被視為反現代的象徵。

東尼的作品最鮮明的特色在於同時呈現鯨魚與鹿。據說西伯利亞的巫醫會喝下吃過毒菇的麋鹿所排出的尿液，藉此進入出神的狀態²。這是不是如媒體理論學者金南洙(Namsoo Kim)主張的，麋鹿跳入海裡成了鯨魚？或是如人類學家愛德華多·卡斯特羅(Eduardo Viveiros de Castro)提出的多重視角論，人類與非人類的媒介的世界觀是一致的，只是雙方看到的世界不同，所呈現主要是彼此與世界的關連性

1 如需更多關於本課程與團隊的詳細資料，請至：<https://dutchartinstitute.eu/page/11986/2018-2019-coop-study-group-unmapping-eurasia.-tutor-team-binna-choi>

2 Nichol, Charles, "Getting high." *London Review of Books* 9, no.6 (1987).



〈岩石壁畫〉(1993) 伊格·東尼，現代藝術館。
圖片來源：由宓

而非實質性³。或許麋鹿與鯨魚為同一種轉換過程的不同觀點，巫醫們在出神的狀態下略窺其境，而我們只能透過巫醫的口頭敘述去理解。

這種轉化變身的傳說並不僅限於鯨魚。公元前四世紀時，中國道家典籍《莊子》就曾提到，「北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。化而為鳥，其名為鵬鵬之背，不知其幾千里也；怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲」。根據《莊子》的記載，海波動起風時，鵬鳥飛至南冥，亦即天池⁴。據一般理解，鯤化身為鵬鳥是一種虛構的形體轉變。神話學者袁珂認為鯤就是鯨魚，因為鯨魚的原身是鱷，也就是禹疆，傳說中人面鳥身的海神和風神。另一方面，學者楊儒賓則推測鵬鳥是鳳凰，因為風與鳳兩個字的字音相似，原本的字形可交替使用⁵。這麼一來就完全說得通：鯤魚與鵬鳥同一種本質的不同形體。更有進一步的研究顯示這個「本質」其實是轉化後的「氣」（或能量）。或者可以進一步推斷鯤為水的能量（陰），鵬為火與風的能量（陽）。因此，兩種形體都是氣而非形體的轉換⁶。

從這兩個對鯨魚圖案的觀點來看，不管是以多重觀點或以「氣」的延伸解讀，有一點是確定的：一定都是把事物視為轉換過程的一部份。鯨魚圖案存在於各種不同的文化這一點，意味著這不只是假想。同樣的，地理和空間是否也可以視為宏觀轉換的一部份？人類初始時曾敘說的故事與傳說對這個世界抱持著敬畏，隨著時間過去才逐漸轉換為以人世和倫理道德為重心。而巫醫正是保留人與土地和

3 Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies." *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004): 463-484.

4 Watson, Burton, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York and London: Columbia University Press 1968), 29.

5 袁珂，《中國古代神話》（北京：華夏出版，2006），頁 58。

6 楊儒賓，《儒門內的莊子》（台北：聯經出版，2016），頁 107。

大地連結的傳統習俗之一，譬如西伯利亞和大中亞地區各種不同派別的巫醫們都尊崇土地之靈，除對地理的感知外，也對祖傳下來的守護者抱持崇敬。在現實與神話之間，這些空間與變化只是其一，亦即若掌管時間空間維度的法則可以違背，那麼所有的一切都不停的在變化。美國奇幻作家姜峯楠的中篇小說《商人與煉金術士之門》以阿拉伯民間故事《一千零一夜》的風格敘說一個過去與未來相同的故事。現下的作為可能在另一個時間裡撤銷了另一個作為。歐亞史上許多時間旅行的故事經常將我們置入時空的漩渦。

因此，對歐亞的敘述可能論及一個複雜的超級智能網路，一個無法個人化，無法將一整個大陸化為一個有感覺的生命體，只能是許多永久變換的集合體。絲路就是一個象徵，因為絲路是一個去集中化的貿易網路，在歷史上沒有一個絕對的中心。然而，其去中心化不只是受到空間配置的影響。1960年代工程師保羅·巴蘭（Paul Baran）為蘭德公司建立的軍事聯絡網，成為現代去中心化的網路原型。因此，把絲路視為現代世界出現前的去中心化網路還不夠，畢竟深入探索歷史的目的，並不是為了尋找當前既有的網路與架構曾經存在的證據。絲路與歐亞是時空前後移動的場景，交互相疊，創造出神秘的轉換，從某個角度看似乎很奇幻，換個角度觀察卻又顯得完全合乎邏輯。

這些故事後來不只是故事。回到絲路的目的不是為了尋找一直都在那裡的東西，而是為了尋找靈感，從移動、遊牧的主體性、分散代理與責任相關的實務與模型中提取未來社會轉化的潛能。這些故事當中充滿寓意與推測思索，發揮想像力，帶來重塑與重新編排社會形態的工具。

烏德穆爾特的家族符號

從烏拉爾山脈搭慢車要十二個小時才會抵達烏德穆爾特共和國的首都伊熱夫斯克。烏德穆爾特屬於芬蘭烏戈爾語族。當地博物館展出的烏戈爾語族文物中，也包含一系列烏德穆爾特的家族符號。

有考古學家告訴我，家族符號是財產與所有物的象徵。如果有人在某棵樹上找到一窩野蜂，他可以在樹上留下家族符號，這窩野蜂就成為他的財產。家族符號用來標記土地和動物、傳統布料、地毯或門。蘇聯政府在建伊熱夫斯克的工廠時，也用這些符號標記工程的執行。家族符號可以作為正式文件上的署名，也可以作為財產的一部份一起出售，賣出家族符號等於賣出所有物。



烏德穆爾特的家族符號，伊熱夫斯克當地歷史博物館。
圖片來源：由宓

家族符號的起源可追溯至保護部落的女先知之母的名字，因此也可以視為護身符。家族符號可視為貨幣媒介的前身，除了交易媒介之外，也包含了更多其他的意涵，非單一標準化的價值衡量工具，而是蘊含了多種感受、歷史與家族故事的符號。家族符號也可以刻在樹上，將自然資源化為私人管理的財物而非公有物，但也不是由私人擁有，僅是保管而已。例如西伯利亞北方有大量的針葉林，有太多這種非貨幣型的「財產」，將樹劃為私人管理的資產，也是對大自然與整體社會負起責任。

傳說中從前每一個烏德穆爾特人都認得所有的家族符號，只是後來受到神明的懲罰，結果只記得自己家族的符號，其他都忘了。如果每個人都認識每一個家族符號，那會是什麼樣的社會形態？當時的交易是不是有不同的規則？又或者，這些可以被定義為交易嗎？參與這些類似交易活動的主體或許有與現今不同的組成。

從古代社會的禮品經濟的典籍研究中（如社會學家莫斯、阿帕杜拉、李等人）可發現，價值是以「個人」之間不可分割的事物循環開始，透過個體之間以貨幣為媒介所進行的獨立交易。

在不可分割的條件下所進行的家族符號交換，可能更類似儀式而非交易，透過其表演性質傳遞社群的多種角色與功能。參與者為相互關連的個體，而非彼此無關的個人，表述的是角色，不是既定的個人特性，而這些角色的組成正是長期維繫緊密的社會關係之關鍵。因此，贈禮的交換並不是一種交易的方式，而是社會性的指標。

如前文所述，這種指標去中心化且分散，每一個參與社會活動的人，不管取得了什麼或在其中扮演什麼樣臨時性的角色，都是這個指標的其中一環。有人稱這種社會形態為「現代化之前的區塊鏈」，因為當代區塊鏈的發展準確的記錄了世界各地的交易，交給每一個參與的節點，各個節點的帳務一致，卻又不至於創造出一個集中化的監督機構。這其實是一個自動化的計算過程，沒有社會或社群營造導向的效果與表現性，更像是一個每個人都能掌握所有消息的社會型態。在某種程度上，前現代社會中的家族符號交換是平民百姓間共有的儀式，不是建立在個人資源的共同所有權或管理權，而是在一個不斷轉化的社會中各種可交互替換角色的社會指標之增長。

青銅鍋斧

移動與轉化有實體與非實體兩種形式，通常以實體較引人注目。我在歐亞地區見過西伯利亞乾草原上半游牧與游牧民族製作的金屬首飾與裝飾物件，也在西伯利亞中部托木斯克當地的歷史博物館看過公元前五世紀至公元五世紀之間當地部落製作的銅器，兩者皆是以實體轉化為主。其中有一個鑄鐵的鍋斧特別值得關注（見圖），因為這個物件決定了所有其他銅器的製作。當地的游牧民族會在小型物件上附加骨頭、金銀片或首飾，除方便攜帶外，也是法國哲學家吉爾·德勒茲（Gilles Deleuze）和菲利克斯·伽塔利（Félix Guattari）在其合作出版的《千高原》（*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987）中提到的「在物件移動時與物件有關連性，展現出純粹的速度，放置在可移動可攜帶的物品上。」⁷

經常性的重鑄需求與持續性的移動，令物件超越藝術史上常見的形體與內容的界限。物件經常處於重新平衡與共同變化的過程中，形成一種物質與能量的經常性流通與協調，個體化的過程成為社會群體

7 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 401.



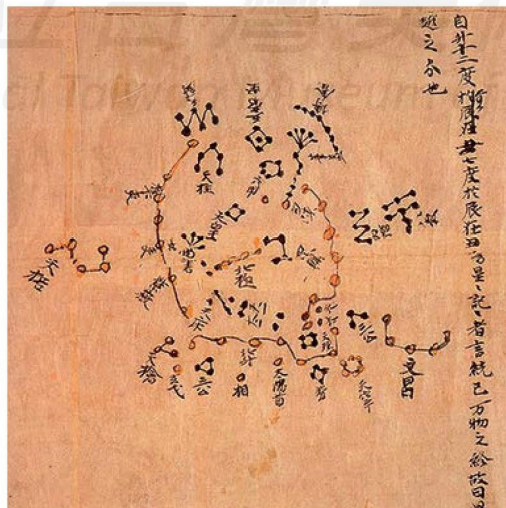
青銅文化文物，托木斯克當地歷史博物館。圖片來源：由宓

的比擬。如果我們不將個體視為分立的實體，而是所有社會力量中變化的複合物，結果又會是什麼樣呢？如何以群體一份子的角色參與其中，放下個人的利益得失，同時又不用擔心失去自我？為什麼我們在當前社會中如此孤獨，卻又擔心失去自我呢？

星座圖與岩石壁畫

不僅物件與游牧民族的移動有關，游牧民族的移動本身也受到自然環境的影響，例如植物、動物、地形與星象的觀察。這種不斷重塑周遭世界的行為，即是他們遷徙的原則。

就這個意義上來說，舊地圖不只涉及空間，也涉及遷徙的原則。敦煌洞窟留下大量中古時代的片段文紙，記錄了占卜術、星象圖與年鑑資料，也是人類與上天和星空之間的溝通與協調。最早的敦煌星象圖出現在公元 700 年前，是世界上現存最完整的星圖，其「宇宙技術」符合科學的定義，卻又充滿對占星術和宇宙正義的追求。



敦煌星座圖，西元 700 年。圖片來源：維基共享資源。

距離敦煌五千公里外，有位考古學家亞甲拉德（Al-Jallad）最近破解出中東黎凡特區南端沙漠挖出的閃族語文字符號。這是一種古老的阿拉伯文字母。原以為是地區名稱，後來發現是一組阿拉伯文星座座標，當年的游牧民族在遷徙時記錄下天空的方位。因此，星象圖的製作來自多種不同的移動，包括游牧民族的集體遷徙、行星本身的移動，以及人類與地球和天空之間的相對平衡與溝通制約。移動者處於一個與他們同時移動的宇宙中。空間並不是靜止的，不會留下等待探勘者再次回來。移動者與空間共同存在，垂直與水平空間因移動而產生而延伸。



俄羅斯阿爾泰山脈依朗戈西山谷的岩石壁畫。
圖片來源：由宓。

這是另一種岩石上的標記，橫跨不同年代的史前岩石雕刻，來自鐵器時代、銅器時代，還有後來的突厥時代的刻畫，可能經過多次塗寫覆蓋，註釋的文字可能來自同一套文字或語意系統，也可能不是。很難想像古代人會和我們現在一樣對考古圖像感到崇敬，或對不同歷史時代的物件有實質上的理解。試想，鐵器時代的人看到銅器時代的人類和動物圖像會有什麼感覺呢？結果可能是加以模仿，也可能是新的創作形式，當然也可能透過其他的媒介呈現部分類似的元素，例如巫醫的傳統儀式（最早在岩石壁畫上找到的巫醫圖與現在仍有的儀式十分相似）。前人留下的標記敘述了他們所存在的世界。

從網路系統組織層面來看，這讓我想到在網路上的文本遊戲，類似 MUD/MUSH/MOO 之類的多重線上使用者、互動式文本遊戲，在去中心化的空間裡，玩家可以為其他用戶設定一個特定的環境，調整遊戲的內容（例如，「請環顧四周」、「這裡有物品 X、Y、Z」、「請拿起物件 X」之類的用語，下一個進來的玩家就只會看到 Y 和 Z 物件。更重要的是，玩家可以設定條件，例如「改變某個定點的地心引力」，當其他玩家到達這個定點時都會受到調整後的重力影響。）歷經不同時代的岩石刻畫可說是現代有眾多玩家齊聚線上打遊戲的模式之前身（也可以說是沒有遊戲管理員的角色扮演遊戲的來生），憑藉著遊戲本身的自我設計，維持去中心化的運作模式，是一種對世界的集體思考與描述。打 MUSH 遊戲時的思考橫

跨各種空間同時發生。岩石壁畫則是橫跨時間與空間，是沒有遊戲管理員的全球化分散式塔羅牌遊戲，是分散各地的網路爆紅遊戲。

若以岩石壁畫視為一種價值與組織系統，不僅僅只看其藝術與歷史意義，或許會發現用這種方式解讀岩石壁畫，將其視為去中心化的遊戲（觀察其過程而不只是成果），凸顯其創作的本質：玩家所能帶給這個世界的貢獻，決定其在遊戲中的作為，具有主觀性和特殊性的價值和意義。如果有一種社會形式是以這樣的價值形式為基礎，我們可以開始重新編排交易的模式，營造多元豐沛的經濟體，不被資本主義單一文化綁住。去中心化的治理方式以自我調節、創造意義和價值、散播價值為原則，四處均可見到機會。

上述歐亞地區的故事捕捉了多種不同的移動，有朝向神靈與土地的上下垂直移動，透過內部的轉化與變換，橫跨時間，將過去的作為融入現代甚至未來的社會形態，也在水平、垂直與暫時軸上形成深入時間與空間的連結。由於這些故事無法空間化，也沒有絕對的座標值，因此也無法以線性歷史或現代製圖方法呈現或繪製。然而，這些故事卻是超智慧網路的種子，匯聚而成神奇的故事，將物質、能量與時間空間轉化。如果我們透過這些動作來過濾篩選當前的世界，又會發生什麼情況？在這個變化的世界裡，我們佔據了什麼樣的位置？在這當中，我們學會被衍生自歐亞故事的模型引導，將世界移動的道理概念化，打造不同的社會模型，嘗試與這個世界及周遭的媒介共存。有了來自歐亞的靈感，下一步就一起跳吧！



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Eurasian Stories: models for transformations

YOU MI

Eurasia is a geographical and geopolitical space that transgresses the division of Europe and Asia, unfolding non-Eurocentric historical and contemporary narratives of human movements, trade, wars cultural transfers and other encounters. A geographical landmass whose size extends beyond popular imagination, Eurasia has existed as separate conceptual entities of Europe and Asia at least since the Greek Classical period. At the same time, dividing Europe and Asia geographically is an impossible task: various delineations between Europe and Asia have been marked at the Ural and Caucasus Mountains. Yet what lies after evading the division? The historical narratives that depict Eurasia in its entirety are often linked to territorial expansion, such as the great Khans of the Mongol empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the westward movements of the Scythians in the fifth century BCE, or the eastward one by Alexander the Great from the fourth century BCE. Within the contemporary context, the most prominent is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), dubbed the New Silk Roads, although the post-Soviet era presents a country like Kazakhstan which claims itself as the heart of Eurasia. And to be sure, Russia too has a strong stake in making such a claim through various versions of "Eurasianism". In other words, Eurasia is an emergent matrix for polycentric worldviews – each with its own ambitions – and new intercontinental connections.

Yet, equally or more significantly, Eurasia goes beyond these 'worldly' views as it provokes a geological and geopoetical imaginary of pre-territorial or post-territorial land, transgressive connections and earth stories, and invites you on a never-ending time journey – backwards and forwards, defacing and devaluing norms that condition our thinking today. This is an approach to Eurasia from below the grand narratives, and takes Eurasia not just as the subject of study, but also as the very ethics of studying it – that is, to come up with ways of practicing what French anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus puts as "forming one body with the planet itself". How do we think – and more importantly, experience – that which is beyond individuality, nationality and temporal specificity? How can we think and feel with earth elements and geological movements in understanding who and what we are?

What will follow is a tapestry of mythological stories, archaeological findings and personal encounters. Some of them exist across vast time spans and (extra-) territorial spaces, being transmitted generation by generation. Some of them are accidental geo-fictions that get interpreted by late comers over the years. In recollecting them, there is a sense of "Eurasia is nowhere but now-here", to borrow what our students at Dutch Art Institute came to conclude at the end of a one-year study program called Unmapping Eurasia that Binna Choi and I co-taught.¹

The Whales

On an excursion in Vladivostok, we visited Artetage, a private museum in Vladivostok, where we found *Petroglyphs* (1993) : a modern painting depicting whales and deer in a style that recalls prehistorical petroglyphs by modernist painter Igor Dony, from Magadan in northeast Russia. The deer is a typical motif found in diverse nomadic tribes across the steppes found in metal figures as early as 2500 years ago, and the reindeer is believed to be a medium of communication between the human and the realm above "tengri", due to the shape of its antlers. The whale is a traditional motif among tribes along the northeast Asian coastline, and could be dubbed an anti-modern mammal since it resolutely returned to the ocean even though it was perfectly adapted to living on the land.

¹ For more information on the program and our team: <https://dutchartinstitute.eu/page/11986/2018-2019-coop-study-group-unmapping-eurasia.-tutor-team-binna-choi>



Petroglyphs (1993) by Igor Dony, Artetage Museum.
Credit: You Mi.

The striking feature of Dony's painting is how the deer and whale are depicted side by side. We know that the shamans of Siberia drank the urine of reindeer that had digested the mushroom fly agaric (*amanita muscaria*) to enter into a trance state.² Could it be, as media theorist Namsoo Kim claims, that the deer jumped back to the ocean and became the whale? Or, in multiperspectivism proposed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, non-human agents and humans both perceive the world in the same way; what varies is the world which they see, effectively redeeming relationality rather than substantiality as the primary way of relating to the world.³ Perhaps, the deer and the whale embody different perspectives of the same transformation process and the shamans may gain a glimpse into this process in trance, leaving us with their oral transmissions to ponder upon.

The transformation/transmogrification legend related to the whale is not a singular case. The first passage in the 4th-century-BCE Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* describes a northern darkness in which a fish called K'un measuring some thousand li becomes a bird called P'eng, whose back also measures many thousand li across, making his wings appear like clouds "when he rises up and flies off". According to the text, P'eng takes flight for the co-called southern darkness, identified as the Lake of Heaven, "When the sea begins to move".⁴ The common understanding is that the transformation from the K'un fish to the P'eng bird is taken literally as a fantastical transmogrification on a formal level. Mythology scholar Yuan Ke interprets the K'un fish as a whale (鯨, jing), since the original character for 鯨 was 鯨 (jing or qing), coinciding with 禺疆 (yujiang) —the god for sea and wind who is usually rendered as a human-headed bird. The P'eng bird, on the other hand, is speculated by scholar Yang Jubin to be a phoenix, since the original characters for wind (風, feng) and phoenix (鳳, feng) were used interchangeably (and are pronounced similarly).⁵ This renders the arch complete: the K'un fish and

2 Nichol, Charles, "Getting high" *London Review of Books* 9, no.6 (1987) .

3 Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies" *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004) :463-484.

4 Watson, Burton, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 29.

5 Ke Yuan 袁珂, *Mythologies in Ancient China* 《中國古代神話》 (Beijing: Huaxia Publishing 華夏出版社 2006), 58.

P'eng bird are different forms of the same being, with further studies revealing that this “being” is really Qi (energy, ether) in transformation. We may hence infer that K'un represents water energy (yin), and P'eng represents fire, wind (yang), thus placing the transformation both forms embody on the level of Qi rather than form.⁶

From these two takes on the motif of whale, whether the interpretation is based on multiperspectivism or the extension of Qi, one thing is for certain: things are always viewed as part of a transformative process. The fact that such motifs exist in diverse cultures seem to suggest there's something beyond mere make-believe. Similarly, can we view geography and space itself as pertaining to a grandiose transformation? In the dawn of our time, we used to tell earth stories – stories in which we the human observe the world in awe. With time, our storytelling tends to focus more on the human world and its moral realm. One tradition that has maintained the connection to earth and land is shamanism. The various shamanic traditions in Siberia and Greater Central Asia all focus on the spirits of land – a geographic consciousness, along ancestral protectors. Between real and mythical, these spaces and transmutations are – if I may speculate – one thing. That is, if the laws governing space-time dimensions can be transgressed, then all are but in continuous transformation. In the style of 1001 Nights, Ted Chiang's novelette *The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate* tells the story that the past and future are the same. But one's doing may be the undoing of oneself in another time period. The many time travel stories we inherit in Eurasia cast us constantly in a swirl of timespaces.

Hence, we may speak of a complex network of superintelligence in and of Eurasia. One that is not personifiable – not the entire continent being reducible to one sentient being – but an aggregate of many perpetual transformations. The Silk Roads are an emblem of it. It's a decentralized trade network – historically no absolute center could be identified in the network. Yet its decentralization is not merely due to its spatial distribution. We know all too well how decentralized networks of the modern era grew out of the military communication context with Paul Baran designing a survivable network for the Rand Corporation in the 60s. That's why it is not enough to see the Silk Roads as a pre-modern decentralized network, as if what motivates us to dive into the deep past is only to find evidence for structures and networks existing today. The Silk Roads and Eurasia provide a background where timespaces move forward and backward, fold into each other, creating mythical transformation stories that may seem fantastical from one perspective but appear entirely logical from another.

These stories do not remain just stories. We are not going back to the Silk Road to find what has always been there, but to be inspired by and to distill certain practices and models that concern movement, nomadic subjectivity, distributed agency and responsibility, which may harbor transformative potential for the future society. Speculative, allegorical as they are, with a stretch of imagination they will lend us tools for remodeling and reprogramming our social forms.

Udmurtian family tokens

In Izhevsk, the capital city of Udmurtia 12 hours on a slow train from the Ural mountains, the regional museum exhibits cultural artifacts of Udmurts, a community of Finno-Ugric language speakers. Among them is a series of tokens – Udmurtian family signs.

The archeologist told me, family sign is a sign of property and possession - if someone finds a tree with a hollow of wild bees, he could mark it by his family sign and this tree and this hollow become his property. It is used for land marking and marking of animals, on traditional fabrics, carpets, and even gates. During the

6 Yang, Rur-Bin 楊儒賓, *Zhuangzi in Confucian Light* 《儒門內的莊子》 (Taipei: Linking Books 聯經出版 2016), 107.

building of Izhevsk factory in the Soviet time, these signs was were also used to mark the execution of work. It was also used as signature on documents, and could be sold - as *part of property as it is*. You sell the sign; you sell the property.



Udmurtian family tokens, Izhevsk Local History Museum.
Credit: You Mi.

The origin of family signs is traced back to the names of the mothers of the female prophet who protects a clan. As such, it is also an amulet. While the family tokens still function as a precedent to money-intermediary, the exchange they facilitate also necessarily encompass something beyond what money-intermediary can capture: not the standardized unitary measurement of value, but sensations, histories and stories around families. Furthermore, family tokens can be carved onto trees, designating the natural resources as somewhere in between private custodianship – though not ownership – and the commons. The abundance of trees in the Siberian Taiga makes the non-monetary ‘wealth’ potentially endless, with it, the responsibilities toward nature and the community at large.

Curiously, I was told that legends have it that in the past, all the signs were known by every Udmurtian. But as a result of punishment of gods, they only remember the sign of their own family. What would the social form be at a time when everyone knew every family token? Were the exchanges then based on different principles, or can they even be characterized as exchanges? The subjects engaging in the exchange-like activities would have been constituted differently.

From anthological studies on the gift economy of traditional societies (Mauss, Appadurai and Lee), value can be traced as starting with the inalienable circulation of things among individuals through money-mediated, alienated transactions among individualized agents.

The exchange of family tokens under an unalienable condition would have probably looked more like rituals than exchange, and enabled the assuming and passing of various roles and functions in the community through its performativity. The parties involved were individuals, not mutually foreign individuals. The performative constitution of roles, rather than fixed individual identities, is the key in building intricate ties that hold a community together over time. In this sense, the gift exchanged is not a medium of exchange but indices of sociality.

Again, this index is decentralised, and more than that, it is distributed in that everyone engaging in the community activities keeps part of the same index – who gets what and by so-doing, taking on what temporary

roles. Some would call such a social form ‘premodern blockchain’, for the contemporary development of blockchain maintains the veracity of a log of transactions worldwide not by creating a centralized auditing authority but by distributing the log so that every participating node keeps a copy of the same ledger. Though analogous to the everyone-knows-everything social form, this is an automated computational process and hence without the affects and performativity oriented toward the socializing and community-making. In a way, the premodern exchange of family tokens performs ritualized commons – a commons not built on the common ownership and stewardship of resources from individuals, but a growing social index of exchangeable roles in an ever self-transforming society.

Kulay cauldron

Movements and transformations take place both physically and metaphysically. Often, the former overshadows the latter. Throughout Eurasia, I have encountered metallic jewelry and ornament produced by historical nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples on the Steppes. It was also the case when I saw bronze objects from the Kulay culture which populated the region between 500 BCE - 500 CE in the local history museum in Tomsk in central Siberia. However, one object was of special interest: a cauldron for casting metal. (FIG.) It is a meta-object that conditions the production of all the other bronze objects. The nomads attached fibulas, gold or silver plaques and pieces of jewelry to small movable objects. Not only were the resulting objects easy to transport, they also “pertain to the object only as object in motion,” write Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987) . “These plaques constitute traits of expression of pure speed, carried on objects that are themselves mobile and moving.”⁷



Artifacts from Kulay culture, Tomsk Local History Museum.
Credit: You Mi.

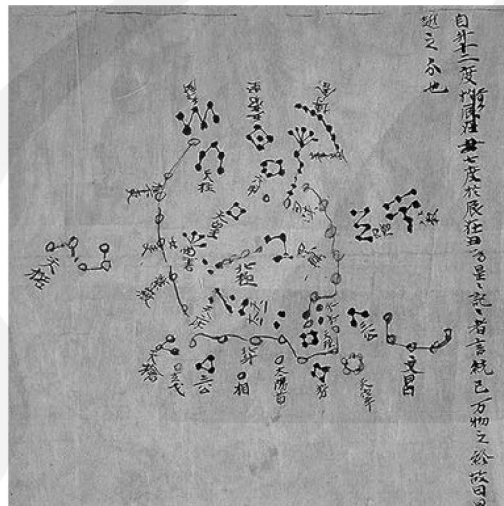
The continuous motion and constant necessity of recasting according to needs render the objects beyond the form and content demarcation as we often have it in art history. Rather, the objects are in the process of rebalancing and mutual mutation. Taking this negotiation between being part of a continuous

⁷ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 401.

flow of matters and energy and the individuation process works as a metaphor for the social, could we not ask, what if we do not observe the individual as discrete entities but as changing composites of all the social forces? How can we engage in meaningful ways as part of a larger community beyond individualist interests while not being struck by the fear of losing oneself? Why are we afraid of losing oneself, when we are so lonely in the contemporary society?

Star atlas and petroglyphs

Not only do the objects pertain to the movements of the nomads, but the nomadic movement itself is subject to the natural environment and guided by observations of the terrain, flora and fauna and stars. This constant rewording with the world around oneself constitutes the ethics of moving.



Dunhuang star map of 700 AD. Credit: Wikicommons.

In this sense, old maps are not just about space, but this ethics of moving. There are rich collections of preserved medieval paper scraps from Dunhuang that document divination practices, star atlases, and almanacs—practices of negotiation with divine and astral forces. Dating to before 700 CE, the Dunhuang star atlas is the world's oldest complete preserved map of its kind, representing a “cosmotronics” that qualifies as a science while deeply imbued with the search for astrological omens and cosmological righteousness.

Five thousand kilometres away, archaeologist Al-Jallad recently deciphered glyphs found in the deserts of the southern Levant bearing Safaitic script, an ancient Arabic alphabet. What were thought to be place names turned out to be a set of Arabic zodiac coordinates – places in the sky recorded by the nomads onto stones as they moved along the landscape. Here, the star atlas is born of multiple movements: the collective movements of the nomads, the dancing movements of stars and a third movement that communicates in between and conditions the man-earth-heaven equilibrium. It situates the mover in a cosmos that moves with them instead of rendering the space static for the explorer to return to it – a commons shared between the mover and the space, enabled by movement and extending into the horizontal space and vertical space.



Petroglyphs along Elangash Valley, Altai Mountains, Russia Federation. Credit: You Mi.

Another consideration of markings on stones: the prehistorical petroglyphs span over different eras - iron age, bronze age, and later the Turkic period. They have been sometimes marked over, a prehistorical palimpsest wherein the annotations may or may not share the same semantical system. It's hard to imagine that the ancient men would have the consecrated image of archeology as we do today, or any functional understanding of periodization for that matter. So imagine the iron era men looking at the bronze era human and animal figures... What happens is a set of self-motivated activities, copying, imitating, inventing new forms and marking them down. Of course, certain elements may be passed on through other media, such as shamanic ritual traditions (shaman figure first found in petroglyphs, which exhibit ostensibly similar features as practices until today) . The existing markings from the forerunners provide a certain conditioning to their world.

On the network organizational level, this reminds me of - in a very speculative way - textual games of MUD/ MUSH/MOO culture (online multiuser, interactive textual game), where in a decentralized space, any player can modify the game by coding a certain environment, and that environment will be changed for the other users. ("Look around the room", "there are object XYZ...", "Take object X". And for the next gamer to enter this room there will be only object YZ. Most importantly, gamers can code things - "change gravity at a location", and all other players will be subjective to the new gravity condition there.) This kind of games was the pre-life to now massively multiplayer online games (and afterlife of RPG without the game master), but functions in a decentralized fashion that includes the self-sustained design/emergence of the game itself. A collective speculation of worlds and the wording of such worlds. In the MUSH games, the speculation is across space, more or less at the same time. In the petroglyphs, they are across space and time - a global, distributed tarot-card game without a game master, or distributed memes.

Taking the petroglyphs as an allegory for value and organizational systems instead of being fixated on its art historical meanings, we could see that this reading of the petroglyphs as a decentralized game (not just in

storage but in its process) highlights the inherently creative character of the situation: what you do in a game comes from what you could offer or contribute to the world, which has a subjective and idiosyncratic value, a value of its own. If we imagine a social form based on such value forms, we could start reprogramming exchange and create economies of abundance and diversity, not tied to the monoculture of capitalism. We see possibilities everywhere: decentralization in terms of governance – self-regulation, meaning-creation, value creation and distribution.

These Eurasian stories capture many different kinds of movements, vertically towards the spiritual realm and the earth, implosively through transformations and transmogrifications, and across time by way of folding ancient practices into contemporary and perhaps futuristic social forms. They form deep-time, deep-space connections with horizontal, vertical and temporary axes. They cannot be mapped or represented in linear history or modern cartography as they are not spatialized, absolute coordinates, but they bear seeds to a super-intelligent network, and at their convergence, we see mythical stories emerging, and also the transformations of matters, energies and timespaces. What happens if we filter our world through these movements? What is our position in the world of transformations? Trying to make sense while staying in the middle of it all, we learn to be guided by these models derived from the Eurasian stories in conceptualizing ethics of moving in the world, creating alternate social models, and trying to live in common with the world and other agents around us. Inspired by Eurasia, now let's jump.



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