

## New approaches to Asian Studies

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ASIAN STUDIES in Mongolia

### Abstract

Asia plays a key role in recent world with its notable demonstration of rapid economic development. Asian Studies is a major discipline of Area Studies today. The formal study of Asia began in the West. The West created the study of Oriental Studies from centuries ago and served to shape the political policy of the Western monarchies. In today's world, the Oriental Studies is evolving into Asian Studies and becoming one field of Area Studies. Asian Studies dominated not only by Westerners, but also by Easterners themselves. Asian Studies in Mongolia with half century history has developed in line with the development trends of Asian Studies in the world. The new approach to Asian Studies is introduced on the renowned university platforms in recent years and the report offers our suggestions on Asian Studies with main objectives of how to focus the research and how it can be developed.

### Keywords

Asia, Asian Studies, Oriental Studies, East West

## 1. Introduction to Asian Studies

Asia is one of the largest continents in terms of geography, covering an area of 44 million square kilometers, which is the 30% of land area of the world. The study of many phenomena and patterns of ethnic, state and society are the study of the continent. 60% of the world's population<sup>1</sup> (4.7 billion people) belong to this continent. It can also be summarized that the study of this continent determines the socio-cultural characteristics, differences and phenomena of ethnic groups with more than half of the world's population. Since Asia is larger than any other continent in any respect, it tends to be divided into many different regions.

## 2. Western Asian Studies

Westerners first called the Study of Asia as a Study of the Oriental learning. The name describes the implication of who studied whom. With the development of Western society and several industrial revolutions over the past 500 years, the inevitable need for manpower, new natural resources have led to the study of the eastern lands and ethnos. Westerners have studied the languages, cultures, histories, states and societies of many Asian nations over time in connection with sociology, history and cultural anthropology. With the development of Regional Studies in the West, the Asian Studies was combined with the African Studies. It also indicates that the Asian Studies was instrumental in the development of colonial policy.

Russia officially began The Oriental Studies in 1818 (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences)<sup>2</sup>, but even in the XVII century, as part of the Russian Empire's policy of the Far East and Asia, the field of Oriental Studies was formed already. It was also in line with its policy of expanding its territory to the East. In England, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) was founded in 1916 at the University of London. There are several examples in the history of sciences in many Western countries that lied the foundations for such Asian Studies. Today, there are several major centres of Asian Studies around the world. *The Association for Asian Studies* was founded in 1941 as the Far East Quarterly, and in 1956 it was expanded to include the Journal of Asian Studies<sup>3</sup> (JAS). Now the Journal covers areas of the continent below as:

- Inner Asia

<sup>1</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/asia-population>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ivran.ru/about-institute/history>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-asian-studies>

- Northeast Asia
- South Asia
- Southeast Asia

The Journal of Asian Studies is affiliated to the Cambridge University Press and has a clear review and review process in accordance with the requirements of the Open Access and Cambridge Core<sup>1</sup>.

Routledge Handbook Online<sup>2</sup>: Develops and disseminates a handbook public in many areas of Asian research. It is supported by publishing house "Taylor & Francis" on contemporary issues such as gender issues, social media, the environment, public health, religion, refugee issues. These are differed from Traditional Asian Studies.

The Harvard-Yenching Institute<sup>3</sup> at Harvard University is a major platform for Asian Studies. In 1928, a Joint School of Harvard University and Yanjing (Yincheng) University in Beijing was established in Cambridge, Massachusetts and USA. Today, the school conducts a number of major research activities that have become a platform for Asian Studies. The school's recent "Invited Professors Roundtable" was held on "Asian Studies in Asia" and the researchers introduced the concept of "New Asian Studies".

The issue is relevant to the topic of this article. Asian Studies in Western used to focus on one side only in contrast now, as the world has become more global, pluralism has become more diverse and research methods have become more various. At present, there is a tendency to study the interrelationships between these systems.

### 3. Asian Studies in Asia

Historically, it has been perceived that only the West has studied the East, and this perception can clearly indicate that their scientific study can not be accounted for a true or accurate understanding of historical research state. The so-called Oriental people also studied themselves as well, and even in an ancient time Asians knew or taught each other of where and how they lived in their own homeland. They have recorded a tremendous number of studies about themselves throughout their long history. Researchers of civilizations wrote that Steppe Nomads were the most mobile people, especially in the Northern part of Eurasia<sup>4</sup> (Jeong Su-il, 2019:7-11).

The rapid migration and nature of the nomads allowed them to collect, process, and apply a research information and best practices of modern terms. In the Middle Ages, the Mongols in order to bring their remotely isolated settlers into one administration and allow multinational cultures to mix and blend, had an advanced policy of such that they wouldn't dare to approve or issue any type of decrees and/or distribute conventions without any conduct of research and studies. All scientific research has evolved to this day based on empirical research methods from the West, that is, because it has been playing by Western rules, which was purposely disregarded by Eastern civilization.

There is a reason to believe that collecting information on how Mongolians have historically interacted with Asian or Oriental nations in terms of political and cultural relations is one of important area of Asian Studies. If we look for evidence of this, we can find written documents from Chinese sources from the Xiongnu (匈奴) period and earlier documents from archeological findings, inscriptions and paintings. Many conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of ancient history as evidence of artifacts found in Mongolia.

1. The Mongols themselves have been studying neighboring ethnoses and tribes, and other ethnic groups and the study of the Mongols, and espionage has always been an important state function of the State. More than 2,300 years ago, during the Chinese Zhao Dynasty, it was said that the Chinese "learned to dress and shoot like foreigners"<sup>5</sup> (Delgerjargal P, Batsaikhan Z, 2017: 79)

That time China ethnoses studied the adversary of "Hu" ethnoses and it proved many nomad tribe advantages and thus settlers started their journey of studying and adopting the nomadic way of fighting.

Marco Polo was a servant to Kublai Khan for 17 years<sup>6</sup> (Marco Polo,1987:2). Great Khan first examined Marco Polo's homeland and the nation of Italy, and with his long-time observation

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.harvard-yenching.org>

<sup>4</sup> Jeong Su-il (2019), Steppe Road, the heart of Northern Eurasian Nomadic civilization, Гадаад хэл соёл судлал, No. 507, (23) 7-11 pp.

<sup>5</sup> П.Дэлгэржаргал, З.Батсайхан (2017), Хүннү, Монголын эртний түүх, тэргүүн боть Улаанбаатар: Соёмбо принтинг, 79 p.

<sup>6</sup> Марко Поло, Өмнөх үг, Орчлонгийн элдэв сонин, Улаанбаатар, Улсын хэвлэлийн газар, 1987

he appointed Marco Polo as a Messenger to study many provinces of Yuan Dynasty. The side of observation of Kublai Khaan can be assumed that the situation of other nations was analyzed through the eyes of others. Now it leads to the assumption that the use of field research and anthropological interview research techniques of modern scientific terms were practiced that time.

Judging by the current trend of 'Asian Studies in Asia', Western scholars are once again inclined to learn from Asian Scholars. A 2017 roundtable discussion by the visiting researchers at Harvard-Yenching Institute for this specific topic summarized the presentations of the main focus of Asian researchers and the extent of research papers.

Chinese and Korean scholars<sup>1</sup>, in their assessment of the current and past state of Asian Studies as below:

- Overly attached to the departmental system (this refers to the sector structure of universities and research institutes)
- Nationalist approach to research, preferring only one-sided positions
- International relations and understandings are limited. In this roundtable discussion, a number of scholars raised the possibility of a "New Asian Studies" and described the situation as follows:
- Research conductance in the form of cross-sectoral and international participatory collaboration
- Experiment with Western models to determine whether they are possible or not, and use many theories and methods to understand Asia without being overly attached to a single model.
- English is considered to be the main tool for international dialogue to conduct research in a new way, and researchers express their views in English.

Research-funded countries with developed economies, such as East Asia, fund social and humanitarian projects, and Japan's JICA, the Korea Foundation, and China's "Regions and Roads" initiative are implementing a number of projects and programs for multi regional integration. "The Belt and Road initiative" (BRI) has been increasing its funding in recent years to an average of 3 billion yuan. It supports the translation of Chinese classics and modern literature into foreign languages, the promotion of Chinese culture abroad, the teaching and promotion of the Chinese language.

At the same time, in addition to encouraging the study and learning of the world's most common languages and cultures, it also encourages the study of many languages of Chinese minorities and Asian and African nations. The Chinese government believes that this should be at the same level as the implementation of infrastructure projects along the "Belt and Road" international economic corridors.

Then, these questions arise a call for action of "Shouldn't we also assess the state of Asian Studies in Mongolia and how should we react if developed countries invest heavily in research and define new trends in Asian Studies?".

#### **4. Asian Studies in Mongolia**

The first scientific institution of modern Mongolia was the Institute of Scripture, established in 1921 by the initiatives of Prime Minister and other ministers in accordance to the order of the Bogd Khaan, which marked the beginning of the study of Mongolian history and culture by Mongolians.

Mongol Studies is part of Asian Studies and includes the study of the Mongol nation at the heart of Asia. Studying Mongolia from point of view of Western and Eastern scholars and as well as learning Mongolians and the Mongolian livelihood is somewhat different from the Mongolians themselves.

In modern research, research methods and techniques are developed to determine who is studying what and for what purpose, the results are different and somehow can bring to a method of directing them to the research target.

Scholars at the Institute of Scripture at the time set three goals in studying the History, Language and Culture of the Mongols: "to collect, store and process research materials"<sup>2</sup> (Tsevel Ya, 1971:11-16). Within the framework of this work, a large number of books and scriptures were purchased and our scholars' received books and scriptures in Asian and European languages through the Soviet Union, Germany and China. Thus, it led to the establishment of the current National Library of Mongolia. Initially, the Asian language books

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrnPIDQXsRE>

<sup>2</sup> Я.Цэвэл (1971), Нэхэн дурсах дуртгал, "Шинжлэх ухаан амьдрал", Улаанбаатар, No.3 11-16 pp.

were collected in the 'Asian Section'. Today, the Oriental Book Fund and the Tibetan Book Fund of the National Library of Mongolia are important funds for the Asian Studies.

The Institute of International Relations of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences is the first Independent Research Institution in Mongolia to conduct research in the field of Asian Studies. In 1968, the Asia and Africa Department in the Presidium of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences was established. The department had several renamed titles such as the Institute of Oriental Studies in 1976, the Institute of Oriental and International Studies in 1991, the Institute of International Studies in 1999 and the Institute of International Relations in 2015.

Thus, the original structure of the institute began from the study of Asia and Africa, was a direct application of the methodology of the West and it was considered to be in line with the world at that time. It can also be said that it was a witness to the fact that both Soviet and Western research directions were used.

The same system is still in place at the Peking University in China. The university's Mongolian language script and Mongol Studies belong to the Asia-African Language Department. Following the example of the rest of the world, China is studying and teaching the languages of the world's major political and economic players in an independent departmental structure. In parallel, they are integrating and developing the languages of many ethnic groups within the framework of Asian and African Studies. In the political sphere, the large-scale expansion of cooperation with the nations of Africa since the beginning of the century was based on research with the main aim to expand its sphere of influence in Africa.

However recently, Wang Hui<sup>1</sup>, a professor at the Tsinghua University, identified three areas that need to be reconsidered in his country's Asian Studies. First, to develop African, Central Asian, and Indian studies in addition to American, Japanese, and European studies, second, to intensify Chinese minorities language and culture studies in addition to Chinese studies, and third, would support to research key economic and political issues under the Think Tank Model, which first initialized in the United States and would focus on not weakening traditional basic science research.

The National University of Mongolia (NUM) began enrolling students in Chinese, Manchu and Tibetan in 1957. The 'Department of Foreign Languages' of the Faculty of Language and Scripts of the National University of Mongolia has a history of training a number of Asian and European language specialists. They were one of the manifestations of Mongolia's foreign policy at that time. In 1991, the 'School of International Relations' was established at the National University of Mongolia on the basis of this department and the 'Department of Oriental Studies' was established within its structure. Subsequently, a 'School of Foreign Languages and Cultures' was established from this school, with departments of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Turkish and Arabic. In 2014, the National University of Mongolia was restructured and the 'Department of Asian Studies' was established under the auspices of the School of Arts and Sciences.

In 1996, Japanese and English language courses were started at the Mongolian University of Science and Technology on the basis of Joint Research and Cooperation with Japan. The Mongolian University of Science and Technology (MUST) conducts training and research as a team of professors. In 2014, the Department of Asian Studies was established to unite the teams of Asian language professors. In 2019, the 'Department of Mongol Studies' joined the department.

The process of teaching Asian languages at the Mongolian State University of Education (MSUE) dates back to the 1990s, a period of social transition in Mongolia. In 1998, Professor L. Manaljav, an Honored Teacher of Mongolia, at the invitation of Ts. Batsuuri (former vice-director of the MSUE), established new "Department of Eastern Language and Literature". Today, the department is called as the 'Oriental Language and Methodology Department'.

One common feature in the structure of Asian Studies in universities is the predominance of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language training and research. In the case of the National University of Mongolia, in addition to these three countries studies, Mongolian, Turkish, Arabic, Manchu, Tibetan, and Altaic studies have developed significantly.

Now let's try to find the answer to the above question. As mentioned above, our Asian Studies has a departmental and a sectoral structure. Although researchers in departments are conducting research in many fields, it is not clear whether the research will be evaluated internationally or whether the researcher will evaluate the research paper and from what point of view it would be evaluated. Another problem is the lack of communication with other researchers and the international community, and the lack of access to information and scope. The main reason for this is that even if it is written only in the mother tongue or in a foreign language, it is not included in the international research circulation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nocyo2ZhQfl>

In the field of International Asian Studies, the trends of “New Asian Studies” and “Inner Asian Studies” have recently emerged. In this approach, we can implement as below:

- Establish inter-sectoral research in Asia, establish regional and international communication channels and develop research projects in the field of cross-sectoral research using political relations, domestic and foreign research support grants.
- Diversify research into multiple areas, eliminate gaps in research, and focus on areas that have been neglected or forgotten, especially at the management level.
- Work to present our research internationally, find new ways to communicate abroad, and prepare research reports and articles in English, which is recognized as the common language of research.

Asia is represented by a handful of countries that think and study in a way that seems to consist only of a few developed countries in East Asia and the research of ‘Asian Studies’ in our departments and other schools today is limited<sup>1</sup> (Ariyajav B, 2019:581-585).

It is doubtful that doing research on Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Inner Asia, the Gulf and the Oceans is conducted in Mongolia. We are only limited to research towards India, Vietnam and Thailand. Ethnic, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic research of any nation can open up new opportunities and new markets for us, as well as assess the potential risks. We need to combine Asian Studies with Mongol Studies, support Mongol Studies and develop number of joint research studies.

At the moment, it is important to discuss the direction of Asian Studies that can be implemented in Mongolia and to identify ways of how to conduct the study. We may not have as much financial support as developed countries, depending on our resources, but we can create our own opportunities to focus on Global Asian Studies. In this regard, the Department of Asian Studies of the National University of Mongolia intends to establish and develop a 'Mongolian Asian Studies Platform' ([www.sas.num.edu.mn/asian-studies](http://www.sas.num.edu.mn/asian-studies)). The platform will be used to open the results of our Asian Studies research to the international community, to improve the English language skills of researchers, to communicate with local researchers and to expand the contacts from abroad.

### **Conclusion**

Asian Studies is one of the world's leading areas of Regional Research. This study originated in the West and went through a phase of historical research called an 'Oriental Studies', in which Western scholars study the East. Later, in the middle of the last century, it expanded into 'Asian Studies' in the West and now this field of research is developing in Research Institutions and Universities throughout Mongolia. In our country, Asian Studies is a research field with a history of half century. During the time, we have been followed the world development trends of Asian Studies. At the time, when the new trends in Asian Studies are emerging, we have briefly discussed what fields of Asian Studies could be our focus and how it can be expanded and diversified for the further development.

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