

Editorial Introduction: Inner Asian Perspectivisms

Following the publication of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's seminal article on 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism' in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (1998), there has been growing interest in his theory among anthropologists, and a number of cases of perspectivism have been described from both inside and outside the Amazon context (e.g. Ingold 2000; Pedersen 2001, 2007; Willerslev 2004, 2007; Londono Sulkin 2005; Descola 2006; Empson 2007; Fausto 2007; Kohn 2007). However, the impact of Viveiros de Castro's ideas go beyond the identification of similarities between animist ontologies. The influence of his writings also surfaces on a more theoretical level in recent writings by British anthropologists, notably those of Marilyn Strathern (1998: 249–61; 2006) and Martin Holbraad (2003, 2007). Indeed, according to Henare, Holbraad & Wastell, Viveiros de Castro is a leading figure in the 'quiet revolution' which has taken place in anthropology 'from questions of knowledge and epistemology toward those of ontology' (2007: 8–10).

In light of the fact that perspectivist ideas have already been identified in several places across the Northern Eurasian region (see above), the editors of this special issue of *Inner Asia* decided to invite a group of scholars associated with the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU) in Cambridge to engage critically and creatively with Viveiros de Castro's ideas in order to explore whether there may be such a thing as a distinct Inner Asian perspectivism. In more specific terms, the contributors were asked to address one or more of the following questions: If there is such a thing as an Inner Asian perspectivism, what counts as evidence of it and how does it differ from its Amerindian (and Siberian) counterparts? Given that narratives about origin are vital in Amerindian perspectivism, what is the perspectivist implication of the lack of origin myths in Mongolian culture? What ontological axes of difference does Inner Asian perspectivism turn on, and what are the implications of these differences for wider social, economical and political processes in the region? What, say, would a perspectivist account of Mongolia's current 'age of the market' (*zah zeeliin üid*) look like?

Our call for papers received an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response, and we are pleased to present eight regional chapters which all engage directly with Viveiros de Castro's work based on recent fieldwork in Inner Asia. While the majority of these involve different Mongolian speaking peoples, it is significant that the volume also contains analyses of Tibetan (Da Col) and Turkic speaking groups (Broz and Kristensen). In addition to these chapters, which together offer a fine illustration of the cosmological richness in the Inner Asian region, the volume comprises two articles authored by scholars working on perspectivism and related matters elsewhere in the world. First, we are extremely happy that Viveiros de Castro has accepted our invitation to publish a new article in this

volume; an important elaboration on his earlier writings, which most of the regional chapters directly refer to. Second, Martin Holbraad and Rane Willerslev, two long-standing members of MIASU working in Latin America and Northeast Siberia, have responded vigorously to the challenge of writing an afterword in a piece which not only engages with each of the chapters in this volume, but also represents an ambitious attempt at theorising Inner Asian perspectivism in its own right.

What follows in the rest of this Introduction falls into three parts. In the first section, we present a brief overview of Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism, just as we consider some of the wider implications of this theory outside the Amerindian context. The next section considers some of the most established work on Inner Asian cosmologies (in particular Humphrey 1996) in order to set the scene for some general reflections concerning the nature of Inner Asian perspectivism, or rather (as we shall argue) *perspectivisms*. Finally, in the last part of this Introduction, we identify a handful of overarching themes, which appear to be common for all the Inner Asian contributions, or at least for the large majority of them. In that sense, while the reader will not find any actual summary of each individual chapter in what follows below, each chapter will be mentioned just as it will be linked to others from the volume.

AMERINDIAN PERSPECTIVISM

In order to understand the general cosmological backdrop against which Inner Asia's perspectivism(s) revolves, it is useful to first summarise Viveiros de Castro's own argument. Amerindian animist cosmologies, he argues, turn the familiar (Western) concepts of multi-culturalism and uni-naturalism upside down, so that one is instead faced with 'uni-culturalism' and 'multi-naturalism' (1998: 478). Whereas multi-culturalism, which looms behind the literature on 'cultural construction', builds on the ontological premise of the 'unity of nature and the plurality of cultures', Amerindian cosmologies are based on 'spiritual unity and corporal diversity' (1998: 470). This is why we must do away with our 'constructivist epistemology' in our exploration of Amerindian cosmology: only by adopting an 'ontological perspectivism' can we understand this radically unfamiliar animist universe. For if our thinking 'supposes a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each striving to grasp an external and unified nature', then, argues Viveiros de Castro, 'Amerindian thought poses the opposite: a representational or phenomenological unity which is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity' (1998: 478, see also 2004a).

It is because of this cosmological deixis¹ that these ontologies can be described as 'uni-culturalist'. For the 'phenomenological unity' mentioned above is nothing but the soul (or, in more formal terms) the subject: the deictic attribute of 'the I', which within the animist logic is extended to include all human and

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nonhuman persons who are imbued with a point of view. Crucially, however, such points of view do not belong to particular subjects (as in cultural relativism), but to the objects, or world(s), themselves. Thus, 'In Amerindian cosmology, the real world of the different species depends on their points of view since the "world in general" consists of the different species themselves; it is the abstract space of divergence between them as points of view: there are no points of view onto things – it is things and beings which are points of view (as Deleuze would say, 1988: 203)' (Viveiros de Castro 2004b). If a hunter says that the jaguar, from its own perspective, is a human, then this should be taken just as seriously as any other statement made by the hunter (about the age of his children, say), instead of being cast as a 'symbolic representation'.² Thus the jaguar is understood by the Amerindian hunter to see the world *as humans do*. *What* the jaguar sees, however, differs from what the hunters sees, for the particular constellation of affects through which jaguars see things differ from the particular constellation of affects through which humans see things. While these assemblages and effects are locally known as 'bodies', these are not naturalist bodies imbued with a fixed physiological form, but rather continually evolving assemblages of 'affects, dispositions or capacities which render the body of every different species unique' (Viveiros de Castro, 1998: 477–78).

One of the more noteworthy conclusions to have emerged from the recent use of Viveiros de Castro's theory in other contexts is that perspectivism is by no means confined to animist ontologies. As Strathern notes, in Melanesia it is thus not the divide between humans and animals which is 'the principal perspectival axis ... Rather, it is persons who offer perspectives on one another ... the significant lines are internal, between human beings, as distinctive social entities... [T]here are ontological consequences to being a son to these people and a sister's son to those, or to being a consanguine by contrast with an affine' (Strathern 1999: 252–53;). This brings to mind our own work on Daur, Darhad and Buryat perspectivism respectively (Humphrey 1996; Pedersen 2001; Empson 2007), which, as we shall now see, suggests that the same observation can be made regarding the Inner Asian context.

INNER ASIAN PERSPECTIVISMS

According to Humphrey, Daur Mongolian shamanism is all about collapsing the boundaries between otherwise domain-specific forms of knowledge (1996: 76–78; cf. Boyer 1994). This ontological de-naturalisation is locally understood to enable certain persons/beings (shamans, spirits) to assume the points of view of other persons/beings, thus circumventing the dominant social and cosmological hierarchy, which is otherwise highly rigid (1996: 60–62). Adopting the same framework in his comparative analysis of North Asian cosmologies, Pedersen surmises that 'perspectivism does exist in North Asia, but only in NNA [northern North Asia, Siberia]. The further south one moves towards the societies of SNA

[southern North Asia, Mongolia], the less one is likely to find examples of perspectivism in de Castro's sense of the word. However, another transformed version of perspectivism seems to thrive in SNA, namely an inter-human perspectivism (humans becoming other humans) as opposed to the extra-human perspectivism (humans becoming nonhumans, and vice versa) found both in NNA and the Amazon' (2001: 421; emphases omitted). It is interesting that while different perspectives among living people are recognised (Højer and Swancutt this volume), most concern in Inner Asia seems to be directed towards more radical ontological breaks – between humans in different 'states of existence' (ghosts, half-people, spirit owners, tiny people, multiple people counted as one, etc.). In this way, the ontological dimensions of what it is to be human are explored and extended in a way that is quite different from the Amerindian case.

For both Humphrey and Pedersen, then, Inner Asian perspectivism essentially involves the shamanic exchange of disparate points of view across a human ontological axis, just as seems to be case in Melanesia.³ And, as Empson notes in her analysis of Buryat kinship depictions, referring not only to gender distinctions, 'if the body is a site of difference, then a difference is required in order to make bodies by means of other bodies' (2007: 132). Unlike in Melanesia, however, the 'ontological consequences' of this ongoing production of bodies in Inner Asia seems to be that social relations take an irreducibly hierarchical or 'vertical' form, no matter whether we are talking about relations between humans, between humans and nonhumans, or between nonhumans. Indeed, asymmetries of this kind are described by most of the contributors to the present volume. As Holbraad and Willerslev note in their Afterword, this is why Viveiros de Castro's model seems to require a good deal of modification to properly work in the Inner Asian context. For, if, in the Amazon, 'exchanges of perspectives between different kinds of beings are conceived in thoroughly "horizontal", or symmetrical, terms', then, in Inner Asia, 'changes of perspective frequently take place in ways that are best described as "vertical"' (Holbraad & Willerslev this volume). It is precisely this gap between a horizontal and a vertical cosmos that Holbraad and Willerslev attempt to bridge by constructing their theory of 'transcendental perspectivism'; a theory which is based on a synthesis of most of the regional chapters in the volume (in particular Swancutt, Da Col and Humphrey, but also Broz, Kristensen, and Delaplace & Empson).

While asymmetrical relationships constitute the sociological and ontological default-position across Inner Asia, one should not forget that this region encompasses a wealth of different groups and societies, some of which are significantly less 'vertical' than others. As Humphrey notes in her own chapter in this volume, 'with various diverse inputs into Mongolian culture, especially from Buddhism, a single system [like Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism] could hardly have existed'. As a quick comparative glance at (for instance) Da Col's and Pedersen's papers reveals, there is an enormous difference between the esoteric Buddhist doctrine disseminated by the Tibetan lamas and the animist ideas found among hunters in northern Mongolia (or, for that matter, among Ulaanbaatar's traders

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and middlemen, as described by Højer). In fact, Pedersen goes as far as to suggest that, among Darhad laymen, one finds a distinct kind of hunting perspectivism, which does not involve any sense of verticality (and therefore transcendence) whatsoever. Humphrey too emphasises that her own ethnographic material, which stems predominantly from northern Mongolia, should not be seen to reflect a single kind of Inner Asian perspectivism. Rather, her chapter offers an analysis of a particular 'shamanic perspectivism', which must be seen as 'co-existing with several others'.

These co-existing disparities exist in a world where there is no equivalent to scientific knowledge, in other words, no all-encompassing set of mutually coherent and exclusive explanations. We can relate this situation to the absence of origin myths that likewise might have provided an authoritative meta-narrative. But what do these 'absences' really imply? For Inner Asia has, of course, been exposed to persuasive Buddhist accounts that do explain the origin and relations between everything (from wind to waters and dust, the origins of life, humans, animals, society, emperors and religion...). But somehow, this story, found in Mongolian chronicles from the sixteenth century onwards, has failed to take full hold, even in the most Buddhist regions. And, as Broz's article in this volume describes, the same is true of the objectivist paradigm: people may know that scientific knowledge exists, but it continues to do no more than sit alongside other kinds of exegesis. It is as if general, abstract and exclusivist explanation is alien, not so much deliberately rejected as treated negligently, as just another among various discrete possibilities. Instead of proposing an idea like dark matter, the universally applicable explanation of gravitational force that is not directly detectable, when Inner Asians confront mysterious events they come up with particular and heterogeneous agencies, 'causes' tailored to specific cases. Indeed, for them the not-directly detectable causes tend to be 'enpeopled', in other words to be none other than strange, enigmatic human-like beings in different states of existence. Pedersen's paper in this volume explores the theoretical significance of this non-holistic cosmology. Perhaps in future research we shall see a connection between the intervallic leaping between one perspective and another which he refers to and the individuality of humans that is so emphasised in Mongolian culture.

COMMON THEMES IN THE CHAPTERS

In spite of the significant variations between different Inner Asian perspectivisms as described above, a number of overlapping perspectivist themes can be identified in the following chapters (see also Holbraad and Willerslev's Afterword, where some of these themes are developed in further detail). At least six points of intersection are worth bearing in mind when reading the following chapters. They concern: 1) the relationship between the visible and the invisible, 2) the temporal quality of perspectival traffic, 3) the danger of transcending

perspectival boundaries, 4) the tendency to see the invisible in anthropomorphic form, 5) concepts of difference and inflection; and, finally, a general asymmetry regarding the full exchange of perspectives that allow for other ways of seeing the world.

The visible and the invisible

Let us begin by considering the recurrent theme, which concerns the relationship between the visible and the invisible, and the capacity of different entities to transcend and/or take on perspectival differences in this context. In the following chapters, the ability to see or take on the appearance of ‘Invisibles’/‘Others’ includes several kinds of beings that may, at first glance, seem quite different from each other. Deceased ancestors, trading partners, little humans, half people, opponents in games and spirits of places are all potential beings with whom the people described in this volume recognise difference. On the one hand, we learn that these ‘Invisibles’ point to varied concepts of spirits in Inner Asia. Unlike the qualities that define the Amazonian *xapiripë* spirits (Viveiros de Castro this volume), they are not necessarily images of a primordial mythical time (Pedersen this volume), nor are they attributed with any nonhuman essence (true interiority, vital principle, etc.). Rather, these Invisibles comprise a confusing variety of entities, which are sometimes said to have an origin as human souls, but may also be imagined as simply there, having an unknown origin. On the other hand, the regional chapters which follow also focus on different ‘kinds’ of people, such as trading partners, affines, and game opponents, who appear as ‘Others’ with whom people either avoid or engage in exchanges. Taken together, these observations show that relations with Invisibles/Others may be seen as producing different kinds of perspectival effects, which in turn points to some more general principles of Inner Asian perspectivism.

Temporality

Another common theme in many chapters is the ability to transcend perspectival boundaries only at certain moments, or certain periods, in a person’s life (cf. Broz, Da Col, Delaplace & Empson, Swancutt, and Højer). This temporal capacity is mentioned, by at least one of the contributors, as being dependent on the overall ‘fortune’ or ‘luck’ of an individual person. Because a person’s fortune or luck fluctuates and alters over time, the ability to switch or shift perspectives is frequently noted to be a temporal capacity, rather than something confined to ‘kinds’ of people that have mastered a particular skill. Da Col (this volume), coins the term ‘somewhen’ (over terms such as ‘some body’ or ‘somewhere’) to describe the temporal ability to see the world differently (see also the Afterword, where this theme is developed in more detail).

Broz provides an apt example of just this kind of temporary ability when he describes how an Altai hunter suddenly hears the voice of a woman shouting

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toward him in the taiga forest: 'it is him, he came to shoot my cows again'. When the hunter looked to see who could be shouting at him, he saw a small herd of Siberian deer running across his path. Broz explains that the voice is that of the local *eezi*, the master spirit of a particular area, for whom the deer are their cattle. Only in the mode of hunting does the hunter stumble into this world of the *eezi* (see also Pedersen's chapter). Similarly, Delaplace and Empson, in talking of 'kinds' of people and their ability to see the invisible in different ways, highlight that the daughter-in-law's ability to see 'little humans' as humans is due to her relational perspective. Relational perspectives are here conceived of as being temporary as people move between different relational encounters and may change them (i.e. children become adults, daughters-in-law become mothers-in-law and so on). Thus, we see in this volume a variety of ways in which perspectival exchanges in Inner Asia are by no means only confined to the shaman or other religious specialists, but are distributed among people, appearing at intermittent and sometimes unanticipated moments when someone suddenly apprehends the world in a different way.

Danger and Inversion

Unanticipated encounters such as these, when spirits suddenly reveal themselves to humans as humans, disrupt the normal order of things and may lead to potential irreversible shifts and changes. They are sometimes considered to be dangerous and something that people try to avoid. Swancutt notes that 'shifts in perspective tend to happen in response to hostility or as unwitting reactions such as when, say, a person is frightened at having come across a spirit in the wilderness and so fails to recognise which affects are properly his own' (Swancutt this volume). Højer also draws attention to the fact that people may want to avoid, at all costs, exchanging perspectives with the 'Other'. The Mongolian traders referred to as 'changers' are presented as a particular 'kind' of people who engage in solitary and invisible exchanges with various trading partners. The danger for these people is to expose themselves to the perspective of other traders. Instead, they try to avoid being consumed by 'an economy of responding', or engaging with uncertain socio-economic relations that would involve becoming another person's perspective. Striving instead to maintain 'indifferent differences', they maintain a pretext of invisibility and/or difference from their trading partners. Part of the danger of taking on the Other's perspective is the potential for inversion that this may engender. In many instances, the chapters describe how received ideas about hierarchy may be inverted (cf. Humphrey, Kristensen, Swancutt and Delaplace & Empson). In Swancutt's chapter we learn how the novice game player gradually takes on the virtuoso's perspective. Among the Duha shamans, studied by Kristensen, we learn how the shaman masters the dead through shamanic performance, and in Delaplace and Empson's chapter we see how elderly men are killed by younger women in daughter-in-law/little human relations. While these axes of difference all pivot around ideas concerning the

difference between the visible and invisible (as in the Amazon), they also connect and/or separate the living and the dead, males and females, and juniors and seniors in instances that challenge or broaden the order of everyday life.

Anthropomorphism

If perspectivism in Inner Asia occurs at temporally confined instances and involves inversions, then many of the chapters also stress the anthropomorphic form that subjects take when encountered in perspectival exchanges. That is, the things that people see when normal scopic regimes have been disturbed often take the form of humans (cf. Pedersen, Broz, Delaplace and Empson, Humphrey, Da Col, Højer, Pedersen, and Kristensen). Pedersen (2001) has stated that, in Inner Asia, cosmology privileges ‘*inter-human* perspectivism (humans becoming other humans) as opposed to the *extra-human* perspectivism (humans becoming other nonhumans and vice versa)’, which is prevalent in the Amazon (Pedersen 2001: 421, italics in original). Many of the chapters in this volume support this idea, where inter-human perspectivism is frequently characterised by the continuity of relationships between living and dead humans, or between living people and a variety of spirits that take the form of humans in certain encounters.

Of all the papers in the volume, Broz’s chapter is closest in some ways to Amazonian perspectivism. Here, the hunter sees, momentarily, the world of nature spirits who own wild game as equivalent to that of human people with domesticated animals. Broz uses this example to highlight the tendency of Altaians to conceive of visible things like mountains, rivers, animals and sometimes artefacts as belonging to someone. This ‘someone’, it is suggested, lives in its own anthropomorphic human realm with pastureland, domestic animals and a variety of social relations (cf. Broz, Kristensen, Swancutt, and Viveiros De Castro’s discussion of the ‘master of animals’).

Difference and reflection

If insight into the normally invisible world reveals a world analogous to humans, then many of the chapters in this volume also stress that these anthropomorphic beings are not simply replications of their human counterparts. Several chapters show that while spirits of various kinds may appear as derivative versions of humans, they are also strikingly different from them (see also the Afterword). For example, in Pedersen’s chapter the Darhads ‘half people’ are people who appear only as half of a normal person, as if they had been sliced length-ways in half. In Delaplace and Empson’s chapter the ‘little humans’ are whole people, but their size marks them out as different. What does the notion of subjects who resemble, yet are also strikingly different from humans, tell us about the insight that can be gained through perspectival exchange in Inner Asia? Because these are essentially mysterious situations, full visibility or knowledge (as in the full sense of

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knowing) of the invisible world is always going to be lacking. Thus, while beings such as ‘half people’, ‘little humans’, ‘master spirits’, or traders in Ulaanbaatar markets all may seem to be essentially the same as the human subjects who see them (by virtue of possessing the body, voice or domesticated animals of humans), they are also invariably different from them too. For example, in the ethnographic cases in this volume it is rarely elaborated if these ‘Invisibles’ or ‘Others’ (in the general sense of the range of beings discussed in the different chapters) have a shared originating essence with the humans who see them, and it is not clear if they live in worlds that mirror that of humans fully. This lack of knowledge means that knowledge regarding what Invisibles/Others see when they see humans is scanty. This may relate to the preference for targeted snippets of explanation rather than all-embracing cosmological scenarios mentioned earlier. Indeed, seeing the world of humans through the eyes of Invisibles/Others appears not to be of any great interest for the peoples discussed in this volume. What is more important is to know that these Invisibles/Others exist, and that their difference and similarity is sometimes visible to human perception.

Asymmetry

The asymmetrical character of perspectival transformations in Inner Asia is something that is developed further in the Afterword, but it is worth mentioning here that even the game virtuoso (Swancutt) or the shaman (Humphrey) – both people who can shift perspective from one side to the other – have to shift between two ways of seeing Invisibles/Others. When wearing the mirror(s), Humphrey explains, the shaman takes on the perspective of the spirit, which possesses him/her, i.e. the perspective of the Dead. On the other hand, when gazing at the smooth surface of the mirror to divine, the shaman along with other participants, uses the mirror as an instrument by which the Living can ‘see’ into the world of the Dead. That laypeople can only gaze, momentarily, into the world of the Dead and that the shaman can only do so once they have transformed into them, means that actual accounts of what the world looks like from the perspective of the Dead is rarely available for scrutiny. Indeed, both Højer’s and Delaplace & Empson’s informants point to the indiscernible, and barely visible state of the Invisibles/Others when people perceive them, and at the general inability and often outright resistance to wanting to know or transcend completely into the Others’ point of view.

Nevertheless, awareness of the presence of the Invisibles/Others ‘augments’ people’s thoughts in various ways, not unlike the way in which Viveiros De Castro’s theory of perspectivism is here shown to augment the thought of anthropologists working in Inner Asia. Indeed, it is precisely against a background of indeterminate and fleeting sensations that the world is not as it appears that one must evaluate Pedersen’s radical contention (this volume) that the Inner Asian cosmological imagination is concerned not so much with becoming-other but with ‘trampolining’ between discrete states of being. Even those states of

existence brought about by the absence of souls, possession by spirits or rebirth with an ancestor's soul are a kind of state. And rather than being an endless process of becoming from primordial time onwards, these states are mostly separate from each other (see the chapter by Humphrey, this volume). All the distinct states are known to exist, but are never fully knowable at once. As Kristensen puts it in her chapter, 'to gain visibility is not only to see, but to see as the other does, and to gain its capacities'. Here, the ability to assume the capacity of all perspectives at once seems to mean that any future reversal would amount to a kind of death – indeed, this seems to be the lesson taught by Tibetan Buddhist philosophers (see Da Col this volume). Assuming all perspectives at once seems impossible given the lack of an all-embracing cosmology and the human bias of perspectivism in Inner Asia. Instead, the chapters in the volume highlight instances of movement and insight that do not accumulate in an endless becoming. Rather, they allow people to jump in and out of new positions that allow them to see the world from different axes. It is this ongoing 'leaping' from one state of being to another that is common, rather than the perspectives engendered through such leaping and their accumulation.

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NOTES

¹In pragmatic linguistics, the term 'deixis' refers to those situations in which the meaning of words and expressions rely absolutely on the context in which they are used. Personal pronouns like 'I' and 'you' are generally considered to be deictic, as are sometimes other proforms, such as 'here' and 'there'. Viveiros de Castro's point is that, in the animist context, terms like 'person' and 'human' are deictic too. For the same reason, 'Amerindian souls, be they human or animal, are ... indexical categories, cosmological deictics whose analysis calls not so much for an animist psychology or substantialist ontology as for a theory of the sign or a perspectival pragmatics' (1998: 476).

²Or, as Viveiros de Castro puts it in a much-cited passage, 'in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture – they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in the rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks, etc.) as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see their social system as organised in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, etc.)' (1998: 470).

³That perspectivist ideas exist in Inner Asia is not a new discovery; the only thing that is

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novel is the emphasis that is now been put on this fact. Apparently, the still popular Mongolian folk-tales thus 'tell many a story where the hero, ignorant of the fact that he is dreaming while his soul wanders around, sees the world in an enlarged way, mistaking the grass for the forest, saliva for the river. Such roaming can have serious consequences, as the soul may fail to come back, opening the way to the progressive degradation of the body. If the soul does not return to the owner, through ritual calling of the soul or curative scence by the shaman, it can lead to the death of the owner. Hence the interpretation of illness as the loss of one's soul, or its ill-treatment by some evil spirit; in fact, the shaman's interventions are mostly based on the manipulation of souls' (Even 1991: 186).

⁴The editors have all contributed equally to this Introduction.

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