

HEARTLAND AND RIMLAND IN EURASIAN HISTORY

DONALD W. MEINIG

University of Utah

"Every century has had its own geographical perspective."

HALFORD J. MACKINDER.

THE PROBLEM of how to view the world in meaningful perspective is a fundamental challenge constantly confronting the geographer. All too little is it realized, however, that this problem is not merely of academic interest, but is one of subtle and profound significance for the statesman and for every student concerned with the practical impact of the dynamic political realities of the moment. Apparently it is an all too common assumption that "geography" and "human nature" remain the two persistent factors within the fluid complex of human affairs. Few illusions could be more dangerous. The anthropologist, cultural historian, and philosopher can provide us with an effective corrective for the latter; it is the task of the less known and less understood field of cultural geography to produce the antidote for the idea that "geography" is an inherently stable foundation for the assessment of the problems of mankind. It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt any comprehensive answer, but focus upon a particular matter of political significance may well provide an effective illustration.

As a corollary of Mackinder's observation one might well add that "every century has tended to have its own geographical stereotype." We may smile at the medieval mapmaker who "logically" centers his world upon Jerusalem, but every age, and most certainly our own, is the victim of rigidly conventional ways of looking at the patterns of the world about them. The dangers of distorted space concepts arising from the "Mercator world," the north-centered map, and the seven-continent globe have received considerable attention, and these conventional perspectives are being gradually replaced by more realistic ones.¹ But these are largely matters pertaining to gross physical patterns; there remains the problem of gaining the most meaningful perspective upon the geopolitical context of any particular time. It is with regard to this problem that the great British geographer made his famous and provocative contribution. Fifty-two years ago, Mackinder issued his first challenge to the conventional perspectives of his countrymen in his paper, "The Geographical Pivot of

¹There is a considerable body of geographical articles pertaining to such problems; as a single source one could do no better than to consult Richard Edes Harrison, *Look at the World: The Fortune Atlas for World Strategy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944).

History," delivered before the Royal Geographical Society.² Fifteen years later, in 1919, as the victor nations were embarking upon the stormy seas of negotiation over the postwar settlements, he elaborated his original ideas in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.³ As is well known, neither statement was accorded much attention at the time, but the strategic patterns of World War II coupled with the belated discovery of the deep German interest in it gave the Mackinder thesis considerable notoriety. Indeed, it has received sufficient fame as to make unnecessary any full restatement. Suffice to note that Mackinder's thesis, like that of his contemporary American geopolitician Admiral Mahan, was a theory of positional supremacy. But whereas Mahan looked upon the one, interconnected "World Ocean" as the key area requisite for world domination, Mackinder saw the "Heartland," a carefully defined portion of the Eurasian interior, as the vital position which, with the technical instruments of the twentieth century, could be developed and integrated into a resource and manpower base for the potential superpower of the globe.⁴

This thesis did not, of course, go unchallenged; Mackinder himself made several changes in a wartime reassessment.⁵ In many ways, the most important critique came from an American, Professor Nicholas J. Spykman of Yale. Spykman had already established himself as one of the few American geopolitical experts with his *America's Strategy in World Politics*,⁶ and in 1944 some of his notes were assembled and published posthumously as *The Geography of the Peace*.⁷ It was a clear and concise scrutiny, which concluded with a new interpretation. Spykman accepted Mackinder's perspective as a valuable analytical framework but concluded that both recent history and the prospective strategic patterns of the postwar world would indicate that Mackinder's "Inner or Marginal Crescent," the continental periphery of Eurasia, rather than the heartland was the critical zone. Spykman renamed this periphery the "Rimland," thereby contributing a euphonious corollary to the famous Mackinder term.

It is not the purpose here to elaborate upon these two geopolitical interpretations. They are important views and the student of international

² Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, XXIII (1904), pp. 421-44.

³ Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1942).

⁴ Although Mahan died in 1914 whereas Mackinder lived until 1947, the two were contemporary in that Mahan was at the peak of his fame and vigorously promoting his views at the time Mackinder first advanced his theory.

⁵ Halford J. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, XXI (1943), pp. 595-605.

⁶ Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942).

⁷ Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, ed. Helen R. Nicholl (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1944).

affairs ought to be familiar with them. Indeed, the American postwar foreign policy of "containment" and the existent pattern of alliances is in general an implementation, whether conscious or not I cannot say, of Spykman's theory of the critical nature of the rimland. The concern here is with terminology and with the basic geographical framework upon which these theories rest. Mackinder and Spykman have given us fresh ideas as to how to view the world in meaningful perspective; their concepts of heartland and rimland are useful and important. Yet it is becoming increasingly apparent that there are certain problems associated with them. In the first place, despite the fact that both men drew liberally upon historical situations in their analyses, each primarily focused upon the particular geopolitical context of his time. The inevitable result has been a certain rigidity in the concepts and their full meaning becomes increasingly historical and less applicable in detail to the dynamic patterns of current times. If people continue to employ these terms and mold their thinking upon these concepts there is the ironic danger that they will lead to but another stereotyped view of the world which does not reflect reality. On the other hand, "heartland" and "rimland" are exceedingly handy and attractive terms and they have worked their way into the common vocabulary of both academic and journalistic circles. Inevitably popularization has loosened them from their original context and they are often glibly employed without careful reference to the theories of their originators. There remains yet another danger: that they will become mere tools of the propagandist who seeks to delude the public. We have only to recall the history of German geopolitics to remind ourselves of how such terms can become the "cabalistic catchwords" of a pseudo-science.⁸ It is of real importance, therefore, that "heartland" and "rimland" be rescued from any of these possibilities and given firm anchor in definition. If they are to become of maximum value, applicable beyond any momentary context of strategic patterns, those definitions must become specific in concept yet flexible in historical-spatial use. Or, to put it another way, they must relate to types of positions.

Obviously, the first matter is the kind of criteria upon which such terms should be grounded. Although a geographer might be expected to find his criteria in the physical geography of Eurasia, such expectation could hardly spring from an understanding of the theoretical nature of the field. Contrary to an all too common opinion, geographers do not uncritically search

⁸ This particular characterization is by Edmund A. Walsh, "Geopolitics and International Morals," in Hans W. Weigert and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Compass of the World* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 25. On the nature of German geopolitics see Weigert's *Generals and Geographers: The Twilight of Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), and Derwent Whittlesey, *German Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942).

for ways in which the physical earth governs the destinies of man. Rather they insist that one cannot spin any web of meaning between "earth" and "man" as abstractions, but only between specific earth and specific man at a specific time. One cannot study the physical patterns of Eurasia and assess their human significance unless one deals with particular culture groups. Our definitions of heartland and rimland must therefore be rooted in cultural, or, I should like to term them, functional criteria. There has been a noticeable tendency, although neither Mackinder nor Spykman evidenced it, to equate heartland and rimland with land power and sea power. Such thinking shows the need for careful definition. For while the heartland, being wholly interior or at least blocked from the open sea, inevitably suggests land power, rimland by no means implies sea power, and furthermore neither does insular position imply maritime orientation. Island peoples are by no means necessarily seafaring folk. Our criteria, therefore, must rest primarily upon the actual functional orientation of the people or state, not upon simple position in relation to land and sea. Implied in this suggested focus is the translation of these terms onto a broader plane of significance, beyond a purely military context. By so doing, we may expand their usefulness and yet allow them to carry ample geopolitical connotations.

Both Mackinder and Spykman divided Eurasia into three strategic realms: (1) Heartland; (2) Inner Crescent (Mackinder) or Rimland (Spykman); and (3) Outer Crescent (Mackinder) or Marginal Seas (Spykman).⁹ On the basis of the functional criteria and the broadened relevance suggested, a fivefold division is proposed: (1) Heartland; (2) Continental Rimland; (3) Maritime Rimland; (4) Extrainsular; and (5) Intrainsular. Each of these concepts will be discussed in turn.

Mackinder defined his heartland hydrographically, as including the Eurasian area in which the rivers drain either to the interior or to the seasonally frozen Arctic. He reasoned that such an area would be invulnerable to the direct access of surface sea power, as it certainly is, although it would perhaps have been better to define it directly in terms of sea power capabilities than to search for some physical pattern which approximated the need. Actually, in each of his three statements Mackinder made some revision in the definition of his heartland to adjust it more closely to the strategic picture, illustrating the instability inherent in the concept as long as its relevance rests solely within a purely military-strategic con-

⁹ Both men were concerned with global patterns, although each focused primarily upon Eurasia. Mackinder's Outer Crescent included not only the British Isles and Japan off the Eurasian margin, but also trans-Saharan Africa, Australasia, and the Americas. Spykman's Marginal Seas were limited to those of the Eurasian margins: the North Sea, Mediterranean, Red Sea, South China Sea and Indonesian waters, and the Sea of Japan.

text.¹⁰ A more stable yet functional heartland may be defined as that portion of the great Eurasian steppe and desert belt bounded on the west by the Volga basin and the Caspian Sea, on the north by the southern margin of the great northern forest, on the east by the highlands forming the inner margin of the historic Chinese culture arena, and on the south by the nearly continuous mountainous zone from Sikang, through the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, and Kopet Dagħ to the southern end of the Caspian.

What are the qualities of a heartland so defined? Three may be emphasized:

1. With the exception of the Tibetan plateau, it has broadly similar physical conditions which have allowed, though certainly not required, basically similar cultures to become established throughout the region. A high degree of cultural mobility and contact, of migration, interpenetration, and replacement have been outstanding characteristics. The pastoral-oasis economic and settlement complex, similar (though not uniform) in animals, crops, and techniques, is deeply rooted throughout. Only in language (Turkic and Mongolian) and religion (Islamic and Buddhist) are really significant cultural differences apparent, and these do not impair the functional unity of the area.

2. This region is indisputably "interior," in the areal "heart" of the continent, and thus has centrality with respect to all the remaining mainland. This nodal position has functional significance, for it allows a true heartland power the potentiality of exerting direct pressure upon the entire continental circumference. In this sense Mackinder's original term "pivot area" was a meaningful description. As he vividly pointed out, the Mongol era of the thirteenth century provides the outstanding functional illustration of this quality of the core of Eurasia, when the horsemen based upon the fertile valleys of Mongolia thrust outward in nearly every direction, pushing deep into Muscovy nearly to Novgorod; into Silesia, Moravia, and Hungary, southwestward to the Turkish Mediterranean, Syria, and the Persian Gulf; over the ranges into the Punjab and Upper Ganges; and finally overrunning the whole of China to the southern seas. Never before or since has the positional advantage of this nuclear area been utilized so

¹⁰ Mackinder's original "pivot area" or "Heartland" was entirely hydrographically defined. To his 1919 heartland he added the uppermost almost inaccessible valleys of the Chinese and Indian rivers in Tibet. In 1943 he withdrew "Lenaland," the eastern plateau and mountain sector of Siberia, from the heartland. In 1919 he also suggested that "East Europe," the area of Black Sea and Baltic drainage excepting the upper valley of the Danube, could be made under certain circumstances to function as part of the heartland. These alterations of the heartland are but minor indications of his more radical revisions of the thesis as a whole.

sharply and comprehensively, but other peoples have given it partial expression and theoretically the potential has persisted from the time of continent-wide settlement.

3. This heartland, like Mackinder's, includes the nexus of all the historic land routes interconnecting the several rimland areas of China, India, the Levant, and Europe. The patterns of physical features and human settlement cause these routes to converge in Afghanistan and the adjacent valleys of southern Turkestan. Again, this feature has had functional historical meaning, best represented by the reign of the Kushans in the second century A.D. who sat astraddle the Afghan highlands in control of both Bactria and the Punjab, thereby gathering in tribute from every important strand of overland trade among the marginal realms.

Thus a heartland so defined has historical relevance and moreover, as will be seen, retains ample significance in our own time.

We may now turn to the rimland—the whole of the remaining area upon the continent peripheral to the heartland. Both Mackinder and Spykman suggested that this entire area is the natural realm either of sea powers or of "amphibious states," those looking both to land and to sea. But in terms of actual state orientations this is an oversimplification. Rather, we more commonly find divergent orientations depending upon the political and economic configurations of any particular group during a particular era.

China will serve as an example. Although lying on the eastern rim of the continent, with a very lengthy coastline, China certainly cannot be passed off as a sea state nor even an amphibious one. In her early history only a very shallow fringe of the southern coast was of maritime orientation. The basic cultural pattern developed in the northern interior near the contact zone with the heartland. Land-based northerners have dominated Chinese culture throughout most of her history and whenever they have been in political control, as under the Han, T'ang, Mongol, and Manchu dynasties, China has been oriented primarily inwardly as a landed, peasant society with her strategic frontier resting upon the steppe zone of the heartland margin. On the other hand, when control was exercised by South China groups, as under the Southern Sung, the Mings, and the recent Nationalist government, a strong maritime outlook was emphasized. The coastlands from the Yangtze southward carried on a flourishing trade encompassing the Malaysian Archipelago and reaching deep into the Indian Ocean. Large navies were in being, the great coastal ports grew, and the national government was centered in the south rather than upon

the interior margins of the North China plain.¹¹ Thus no single categorization will do. In the former instances, China functioned as a continental rimland state, in the latter as a maritime rimland state.

Turning to India, the jutting of this gigantic peninsula deep into the northern Indian Ocean may tempt one to infer that it is "logically" a maritime rimland state. But there is nothing natural or inherent in this at all. Actually, the Indian peninsula was never united into a single state until the mature phase of British occupation in the early twentieth century. The historic split has always been between north and south, between the Indo-Gangetic plain and the southern peninsula. Until the British conquest the northern area was always an inwardly oriented, agricultural state. The Aryans, who provided one of the basic ingredients in the historic Indian culture pattern, were a wholly nonmaritime people who migrated into the Gangetic arena from the heartland. Each of the succeeding empires, such as the Mauryan, Gupta, and Muslim, set their capitals upon the great interior plain somewhere between Delhi and Patna and ruled over a landed society. Such states were continental rimland powers. On the other hand, in the old Dravidian south a maritime tradition and orientation flourished for millennia, most completely represented, perhaps, by the Chola of the eleventh century and Vijayanagar of the fourteenth. This southern peninsula was clearly functioning as part of the maritime rimland. The European penetration was, of course, a sea power penetration, led by the Portuguese and followed by the French and British. For two centuries it had a shallow impact upon the peninsula coastline from Surat to the Ganges Delta. Only gradually did the British move inland, but ultimately the railroad allowed deep penetration and the re-orientation of the entire Indian economy to overseas trade. Thus the three great port cities, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, are all of British origin, and for many years the British capital was in the latter port rather than inland at some historic Indian center.¹² British India therefore represented the transformation of the entire Indian subcontinent into a maritime rimland state.

¹¹ The maritime facilities and trade of Nationalist China were of course primarily in non-Chinese hands. The capital of the Southern Sung was at Nanking and later at Hangchow. Of the Mings, Kirby notes: "From the economic point of view the early Ming was soundly based on the Yangtse area, with Nanking as capital. It seems to have been merely through a dynastic dispute, originally, that the Yung Lo Emperor (1403-24) transferred the capital to Peking. But the move was a victory for the military party; for strategic reasons the capital remained at Peking, at heavy cost to the economic interests of the regime and the country." Stuart Kirby, *Introduction to the Economic History of China* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 174. Nanking remained a center of unusual importance throughout the Ming period, and was the seat of the Nationalist government until the Japanese conquest.

¹² Madras and Calcutta were founded by the East India Company. Bombay was a minor settlement in the pre-European period, and did not become an important port until after it came under the Company's control in 1668.

Glancing quickly at Southwest Asia, we again may note divergent orientations, areally and historically. Despite the often used description of "the land of the five seas," the maritime orientation has been confined to shallow margins such as Phoenicia, Aden, and Muscat. Egyptian, Babylonian, Hittite, Assyrian, Persian, and Turkish military power was primarily land power and the societies themselves have been pastoral and agricultural with a considerable overland trade but only a minor active participation in sea trade.¹³ This continental orientation lasted until the breaching of a seaway through Suez brought about conquest by European sea powers.

As for mainland Europe, there is not space to trace in any detail, but in general the maritime rimland was likewise a very narrow fringe until the nineteenth century. Venice, Genoa, Catalonia, Seville, Portugal, Holland, and the German Hanse towns represented localities primarily or at least importantly oriented into maritime patterns. But despite the dense network of transalpine and other overland trade routes, technological limitations on transport kept the whole interior largely inwardly and locally focused. Spykman speaks of the "thousand-year struggle between Teuton and Slav" as representative of the struggle between rimland and heartland,¹⁴ but certainly until the nineteenth century this struggle had no fundamental importance to the power configurations of Eurasia as a whole — it was rather a local struggle between two peoples of the continental rimland, little different from the preceding struggle between Teuton and Celt.

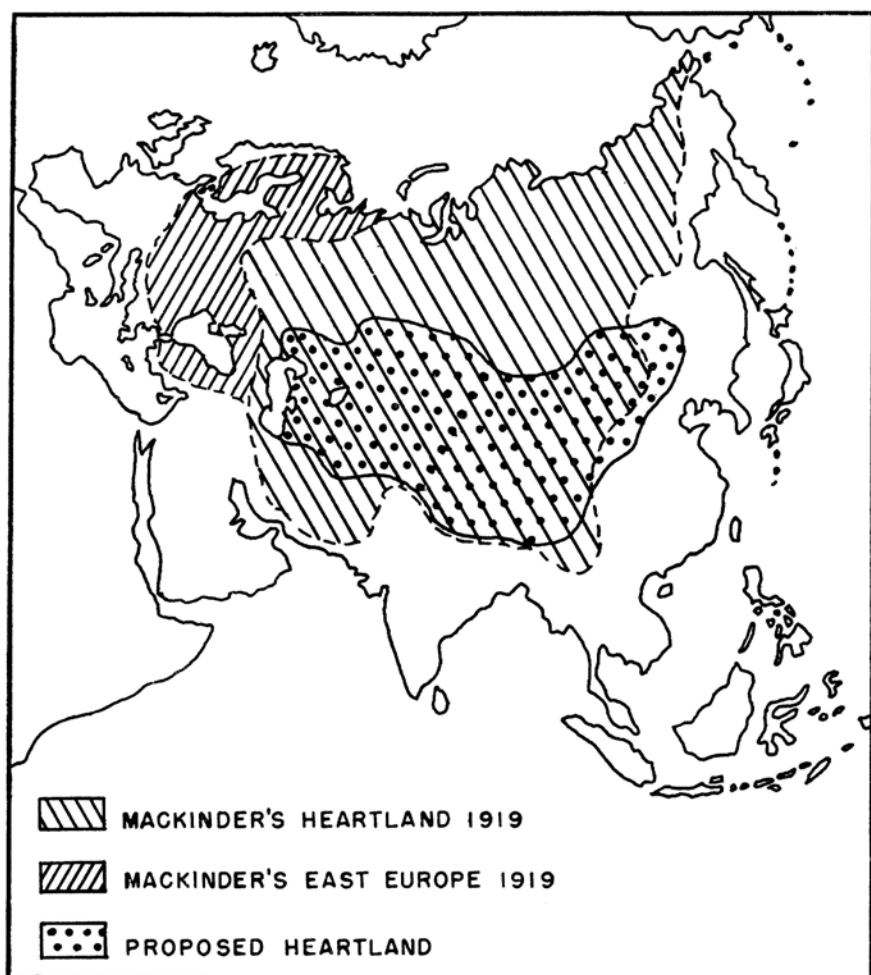
The nineteenth century with its canals and railroads again marked the change. Here we do not have an alien conqueror pushing inland from the coasts but the gradual reorientation of nearly the whole of Central Europe to the vast network of maritime trade. Such remote areas as Bohemia and Silesia, Bavaria and Austria were caught up in this oceanic complex, and despite the persistence of peasant agriculture it would be possible to maintain that the whole of Europe up to the borders of the Ottoman and Russian empires, and including even the Baltic fringe of the latter, was functionally a maritime rimland realm by the close of the last century.

We may now turn to our last categories, which refer to the important offshore islands. These are deserving of special attention, for nowhere is there a greater need for emphasis upon the functional orientation of the

¹³ The great Turkish fleet at Lepanto might suggest otherwise; however, the whole context of Ottoman naval efforts confirms this point of view: "Their entire history impelled the Osmanlis to warfare on land, only the force of circumstances, not their own inclination, led them out to sea. . . . The Ottoman fleet really lacked the backbone [of] . . . a powerful merchant marine. . . . The direction of shipbuilding lay mostly in the hands of Venetians, the workers were usually Greeks . . . the crews usually consisted of Christians, Italians, and Greeks, generally runaways. . . ." Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, trans. Joel Carmichael and Mosche Perlmann (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), pp. 303-304.

¹⁴ Spykman, *Geography of the Peace*, p. 51.

nation as the proper criterion of classification. It is rather commonly implied in the literature that Britain and Japan are "natural" sea powers, that such was foreordained by "geography" and is simply logical and obvious. But there is no such logic in the nature of things. One need only examine British history to see the fallacy of such assumptions. In pre-Roman Britain the lowland peoples of the southeast were firmly rooted in an agricultural society. Roman Britain itself, while having certain essential cross-channel connections and even a small export grain traffic, could hardly be classified as a maritime realm, and Anglo-Saxon England was primarily an agricultural England. Not until the Anglo-Danish period do we find any really significant maritime orientation, reaching its culmina-



tion in Canute's North Sea thalassocracy which knit together England, Denmark, Norway, and the west coast of Sweden. Then following the Norman Conquest there is a reversion to an inward, agricultural orientation. Only gradually during the Tudor period with the Anglo-French wars and the growth of North Sea-Baltic trade is an outward shift evident, and not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly after the Anglo-Dutch wars, does England emerge as a full-fledged maritime state, with a formidable navy, merchant marine, and overseas empire.¹⁵ In the latter nineteenth century this is elaborated with the growth of a national economy uniquely and vitally dependent upon overseas connections.

Functionally, therefore, again a twofold classification is needed and "intra-insular" and "extra-insular" are suggested as possible terms to describe the inward and outward orientations of an island state.

If we turn our glance to the opposite side of Eurasia we find an even more dramatic expression of both orientations in the history of Japan. Sixteenth-century Japan was certainly extra-insular. Japanese pirates and traders infested the China seas and at the end of the century the island nation launched an audacious invasion of the mainland through Korea. Then in the mid-seventeenth century came a startling reversal when the Tokugawa regime closed its doors upon the world and purposely turned inward into a "cultural hibernation" for 230 years.¹⁶ A century ago began the dramatic reopening and development of the new Japan which became almost the archetype of the extra-insular state.

A third important insular area adjacent to Eurasia is the East Indies, including the functionally insular Malayan peninsula. This realm may be classified as extra-insular throughout the history of at least the last fifteen hundred years, with a succession of sea states from Sri Vijaya through the Javanese states culminating in Majapahit, the Moslem Malacca Sultanates, and the European sea power holdings, shifting in main base but all focused upon control of the key sea passageways of Malacca and Sunda Straits.¹⁷

¹⁵ For an excellent single reference on English orientations see H. C. Darby, *An Historical Geography of England before A.D. 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951).

¹⁶ The phrase is from Joseph E. Spencer, *Asia East by South: A Cultural Geography* (New York and London: John Wiley & Sons and Chapman & Hall, 1954), a volume which may be highly recommended for study of historic patterns of Monsoon Asia.

¹⁷ Brief mention may be made of two other areas which are technically peninsular but which have been so functionally severed from the mainland by the lack of overland communication through almost uninhabited wildernesses as to be "functionally insular": Scandinavia, connected with the continent only through the subarctic wastes of Lapland, and the tiny Arab sea states — Aden, Makalla, Muscat — clinging intermittently along the margin of the Arabian peninsula, insulated by the empty wastes of the interior desert. It was from these maritime enclaves that the Arabs made contact around the Indian Ocean periphery from Sofala to Malacca.

Turning now to the functional relations among these zones in modern history we may note certain broad patterns of significance. The initial European expansions into non-European Eurasia outflanked the heartland. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British came by sea around the African promontory to capture offshore islands and coastal ports as strategic positions along the continental rim from the Strait of Bab el Mandeb to Formosa. The great trading companies concentrated upon gathering accessible, exotic products for shipment to European markets; control over the interiors extended, as one historian has well said, but a cannon-shot from the stockades. Initially, therefore, the European sea powers merely took over the functions of Arab, Dravidian, Malay, and South Chinese traders, capturing the existent shallow maritime rimland.¹⁸

Not until the nineteenth century did a comprehensive change take place, although some of the modern trends were apparent earlier in British India. The industrial age with its omnivorous demand for volume trade in basic raw materials and for extensive export markets, together with its own distinctive technical instruments, marked the shift. Now the penetration inland proceeded rapidly; through the railroad and the river gunboat the tide of sea power rolled inward until it lapped against the Himalayas and the eastern fastnesses of Tibet. The whole continental rimland was wrenched out of its landward patterns and turned outward toward the sea. Along the muddy banks of the coastline great Europeanized commercial centers arose: Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Rangoon, Saigon, Shanghai, Tsingtao, Tientsin — focal points of the new alien industrial European age. To avoid the long route around the Cape the Suez Canal was dug, and became so strategically vital as to demand the capture of the adjacent continental Moslem states. The whole of North Africa, the Levant, and margins of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf came under sea power domination and were converted into a maritime rimland.

In Europe itself the changes have already been mentioned, the whole realm west of Russia becoming knit ever more closely into the world commercial network. Germany's response to these new conditions was symptomatic of her internal and positional dichotomy. Out of the Rhineland, the Ruhr, and the world port of Hamburg extended the tentacles of a rapidly expanding international trade, augmented by a powerful navy and colonies in Africa and the Pacific. On the other hand, much of the interest of the continental Prussian capital was focused upon the Balkans,

¹⁸ A curious anomaly was the Spanish conversion of the Philippines into a rigidly intra-insular realm with a severely restricted trade, and, moreover, a trade reoriented from its Asian focus to transpacific America. It is common to deprecate Spanish colonial efforts because of their failures in the economic and political spheres, but it is worth noting that in the Philippines they left behind the only major Christianized colony in the Orient, a legacy which in the long view may well surpass in importance that of the more prosperous and progressive European colonial powers.

Turkey, and the East: "Berlin to Bagdad" represented a continental land power attempt to skirt the heartland and outflank the sea lanes to the Orient.

But attention must now be shifted to the north where the heartland was also outflanked by a new route. Pushing eastward through the great forest Russian adventurers and fur traders reached the Pacific in 1638. However, this advance was of little strategic consequence over the next two centuries, for power could not be applied effectively through the medium of boat, sled, and cart. But in the last century railroads were pushed eastward into Siberia, and even prior to railroad penetration the final assault upon the heartland was underway. Less than a century ago the independent Moslem states of Bokhara, Merv, Khiva, and Ferghana yielded to Russian conquest. The eastern heartland, Sinkiang and Mongolia, remained only temporarily a buffer.¹⁹ With this a whole new strategic configuration emerged. With the heartland the captive of a European continental rimland power and the continental rimland of Asia absorbed and converted into a deep maritime zone, land power and sea power met in the interior along an almost continuous frontier from central Persia to southern Manchuria. But the most significant aspect lay not in the military frontier but *behind* it on either side. The crucial difference in the ultimate quality of these positions is only becoming recognized in the shock of post-World War II changes. Indeed, until recently few but would have thought the capture of the rimland of far greater significance than that of the heartland. The wealth pouring back into the maritime European economies in contrast to the slowly developing backward zones of the Russian Empire was seemingly adequate testimony. Both captive zones were initially held by armies, supported by the overland space-conquering instrument, the railway. But the Russians had another weapon in their arsenal, the "space-filling" colonist — a tool the Western sea powers did not have. Only the outermost middle latitude promontories, South Africa and Australia-New Zealand, became zones of Western European colonization; in all the remainder the European position rested upon military occupation. But the Russian railroad-builder laying his steel strands into the heart of Central Asia and the Russian peasant shoving the settlement frontier along the Trans-Siberian and infiltrating into the heartland valleys represented a contiguous, permanent cultural expansion.²⁰

¹⁹ In the 1920's Tannu Tuva and Outer Mongolia were brought under effective Soviet control; the Russian position in Sinkiang has fluctuated, never being politically formalized, but this province has apparently been functionally under Soviet domination since the 1930's.

²⁰ The impending contact of the British and Russian imperial frontiers was a matter of world-wide attention sixty years ago, but the ensuing stability of that contact, the retarded imperial development of Russian Central Asia, and the rise of the German and Japanese threats caused a recession of general concern. It is of interest to note

Today the full meaning of these contrasting "imperial" positions has become apparent. Whereas the European colonial system in Asia has crumbled and nearly disappeared, Central Asia is being assimilated, "Russianized," and tightly incorporated into the body of the national state.²¹ With the withdrawal of Europe, the whole maritime rimland of Asia is rapidly shrinking back toward a pre-European shallow fringe. The new dynasty in China represents a firm reversal of the Nationalist maritime orientation, back to the patterns of the Manchus, Mongols, and Hans — in short, a north China landward domination. Indicative is the return of the national capital from the Yangtse seaport of Nanking back to northern, inland Peiping, while the shriveling of overseas traffic is counterbalanced by the building of new railroads along the old caravan routes toward Mongolia and Sinkiang, giving a modern medium for the old inward ties across the heartland. China has once more oscillated into a continental rimland state.

In newborn India the same trend, if less rapid, is nevertheless discernible in the national economic program of domestic industries and self-support. India, like all former colonies, is determined to withdraw from the exploitable realm and build her future internally upon domestic resources rather than remain heavily dependent upon vital overseas connections. The rulers of India today represent continuity with old Hindu Gangetic India, not maritime Dravidian South India.²²

The Mediterranean-Suez-Red Sea route, that narrow east-west waterway cutting through the Afro-Eurasian land mass which brought so many economic advantages in time and distance, has become a zone of political difficulty with the loss of European domination. The replacement of the British, French, and Italian colonial realm by the independent nations of the Arab League represents the reconversion of the maritime rimland into a continental zone, the former contracting until it is little wider than the

the following prescient statement from one of the great geographers of the last century: "At the very center of her power [India] she [England] has nothing to depend upon beyond her European troops and native mercenaries. . . . Slower in their movements . . . the Russians have, as a military power, advantages of another description over their English rivals. Their territory is not composed of scattered fragments, but forms from the shores of Lapland to the Pamir a perfect geographical unity. A large portion of the inhabitants are, moreover, of Russian stock, and this ethnical element is yearly increasing by colonization. . . . Hence national cohesion may be ultimately realized in Asiatic as easily as it has been in European Russia. The Russians will also, like the English, soon doubtless succeed in giving greater material cohesion to their Asiatic Empire by means of military routes, lines of wells, and even railways across the intervening wastes." Elisée Reclus, *The Earth and Its Inhabitants*, Asia, Vol. I, ed. by E. G. Ravenstein and A. H. Keane (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1884), pp. 30-31.

²¹ See Richard Pipes, "Muslims of Soviet Central Asia: Trends and Prospects," *Middle East Journal*, IX (1955), pp. 147-62, 295-308.

²² F. S. C. Northrop, *The Taming of the Nations: A Study of the Cultural Bases of International Policy* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953).

waters of Suez itself. The security of the sea lanes, once based upon a broad continuous belt of alien control, is now reduced to a scattering of points: Malta, Cyprus, Aden, and European Somalia.

In Europe a parallel trend is likewise apparent, though springing from a reversal of Asian conditions. Whereas the latter represent a resilient reorientation once the alien domination is withdrawn, the changes in central and east Europe represent the capture of the inner margin of the maritime rimland by a continental power. Today the Soviet satellites are politically shackled to the east; and despite a still important trade with the west, increasingly their national economies are being shaped to the needs of the continental Communist bloc. Thus from Manchuria to Poland a broad continental rimland has been re-created, reversing a century of seaward orientation.

How does the geopolitical position of the Soviet Union today fit into this fivefold scheme? Moreover, and this is the real test, will any such categorization contribute to our understanding of the unfolding patterns of geopolitical relationships? The Soviet Union may be described as a continental rimland power which has captured and is in the process of assimilating most of the heartland. Such a characterization is not a mere artifice, a warping of reality to fit an arbitrary framework, but carries valuable descriptive meaning. The U.S.S.R. may be labeled a continental rimland state because her main developments in agriculture and industry, and the bulk of her population, are still lodged west of the heartland. The Moscow-Urals-Ukraine triangle is still the functional center of gravity of the nation. Only when that nucleus has been expanded eastward in Siberia and Central Asia can the nation properly be labeled a true heartland state, within the framework of our definitions. Should this be done, the Soviet Union will be in a position to reap in full the advantage of those peculiar qualities inherent in the heartland position. Already by extending her political frontier over the interior zone she has placed herself in direct political contact with rimland realms from Norway to China. But that contact is yet greatly varied in its functional significance from area to area. The full political potential cannot be realized until the economic patterns are elaborated. Russia has had, of course, conscious economic designs in this direction for over half a century. Prior to the revolution little was achieved beyond the construction of the rail line from Orenburg to Tashkent, the colonization of a narrow strip along the Trans-Siberian, and the scattered infiltration by Russian settlers into the heartland valleys. Twenty-five years ago, however, these designs were greatly elaborated and the pace of change enormously accelerated. The building of the Kuznetz, Karaganda, and Baikal industrial complexes, the developments in agriculture and light industry in the Central Asia valleys, and

the expansion of the farming frontier into the virgin Kazak steppes represent a steadily progressive integration of the heartland into the functional structure of the nation. But to unlock the military and commercial potential of this nuclear region requires more than internal development. The logical extension of these designs would be the weaving of a rail, motorway, pipeline, and air network across the frontiers and the development of regional and national reciprocity between heartland and rimland. This kind of economic penetration has already given an underpinning to political domination of the eastern heartland in Sinkiang and Outer Mongolia, and similar designs upon Afghanistan are apparently underway. The effectiveness of such plans will of course vary greatly both economically and politically among the many bordering nations. However, it would be a grave mistake to center our concern only upon those areas where the economic and political penetrations are advancing concomitantly. Economic relations need not be overlaid with alien political control in order to assume geopolitical significance. They need only to reach a level wherein the economic stability of one of the nations rests upon the maintenance of those relations. It is quite conceivable that the heartland could become once more the nexus of vital trade routes with and among the rimland regions, and that the Soviet Union could gradually build a pattern of economic interdependence with all her bordering nations. In this manner, without the use of military force or political penetration, she could achieve a measure of domination over most of Eurasia. Such a development would obviously mark a fundamental shift in the geopolitical patterns of the Old World, with wide ramifications, economic, political, and strategic, upon the entire globe. It would mark, in short, the capture of the rimland and its completed reorientation from an outward maritime zone to an inward continental periphery.

This framework of functional definitions may likewise have value in serving as a corrective to that widespread and dangerous oversimplification: the famous Russian "urge to the sea." For years it has been commonly assumed that the "drive for warm-water ports" has been a mainspring of Russian foreign policy and her central territorial concern, some writers exaggerating it into an almost lemming-like instinct.²³ There have indeed been periods when the acquisition of certain coastal positions was important, most especially with regard to the Baltic in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but as Professor John A. Morrison has so effectively pointed out, this concern cannot be generalized into a basic motivation to

²³ The author of a recent volume on political geography states: "... the political life of Russia, more than of any other State, has been inspired by the 'quest for the Ocean,' for, as it were, that Grail which would free the State which possessed it from the limitations of its position." Y. M. Goblet, *Political Geography and the World Map* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 191.

cover expansion during all eras and in every direction.²⁴ Such an interpretation reveals the sea-oriented modern West trapped by its own stereotyped view of the world in which a landlocked interior position is seen as implicitly disadvantageous. But once an efficient overland transport system became available, Russia was in a position with enormous potential advantages, for she could place herself in direct functional contact with the entire rimland. And it is that rimland, reoriented to the interior, and not the seaports and ocean commerce that is the most significant aim and prize of the pressures outward, and the most significant danger to the Western world.

It is imperative that such casual and simple assumptions as to the "natural" orientations of peoples and nations be rooted out of our thinking. Interpretations must be grounded upon the functional conditions of past and present. This fivefold categorization of Eurasian positions is admittedly still a rather loose generalization, needing much more care in both definition and application. It is quite probable that the examples chosen in the illustration of the several categories are not the best, nor even perhaps correct. Nevertheless, it is offered as a conceptual framework which is of practical relevance, is of wider applicability than the heartland and rimland of Mackinder and Spykman, and will give greater meaning and stability to those useful terms. Purely military-strategic analyses are inherently ephemeral,²⁵ but strategy is a peacetime matter also, and sound geopolitical strategy must always rest upon peoples—upon culturo-national groups in their regional-global settings.²⁶ This is the justification for this attempt to transpose these positional concepts out of their military context and give them broader meaning. The basic geopolitical patterns of the world are inherently dynamic, changing day by day, often inscrutably, always complexly. It is essential that our image of the world reflect those changes and this demands generalized tools and concepts. Though our attention has been solely upon Eurasia, and thereby can reflect but a partial and distorted image of the real picture, there is relevance to this view. The recession of the maritime rimland, the inward reorientation of

²⁴ John A. Morrison, "Russia and Warm Water, A Fallacious Generalization and Its Consequences," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, LXXIII (1952), pp. 1169-79.

²⁵ For a useful and concise summary and interpretation of leading theories of global strategy see Stephen B. Jones, "Global Strategic Views," *Geographical Review*, XLV (1955), pp. 492-508; an excellent analysis of Mackinder's three statements of his theory in relation to the actual and ensuing political situations is in Arthur R. Hall, "Mackinder and the Course of Events," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, XLV (1955), pp. 109-26.

²⁶ The imperative need for foreign policies grounded upon a clear understanding of national cultures is effectively presented in Northrop, *op. cit.* An attempt to show the increasing correlation between the patterns of cultural and political geography is presented in Donald W. Meinig, "Culture Blocs and Political Blocs: Emergent Patterns in World Affairs," *Western Humanities Review*, X (1956).

a broad peripheral zone, and the gradual development of the Soviet Union into a true heartland power with all the advantages inherent in that central position, these are crucial trends of our times and must be recognized in the formulation of policy. The United States may be the repository of a prodigious retaliatory force, but this alone can hardly guarantee a desirable world position. Insofar as our effective peacetime position in Asia is concerned we are in the unenviable situation of being the successor alien power seeking to hold onto the steadily shrinking maritime rimland. Already we must rest principally upon the insular fringe — Japan, Okinawa, Formosa, the Philippines. Our position upon the Asian mainland is everywhere weak and unstable, and our position in Europe appears to be weakening. Recently, some of our high officials have hailed the apparent change in the foreign policies of the Soviet Union as evidence of the success of American actions. There is apparently less realization that that very change in policy by the Soviet Union will almost certainly accelerate the trends we have noted, and thereby almost certainly accelerate the deterioration of the American position on the rimland of Eurasia.