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## **Asian Phonocentrism: Between History and Method**

Phonocentrism is many things: a set of assumptions about natural languages; an anthropological ideology; a theory of subjectivity; a basis for world literary history –to name just a few. But for scholars of early modern and modern East Asia, phonocentrism is often understood to be a Western concept whose intrusion into Asian grammatical discourse is a microcosm of the East–West encounters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paper begins, by contrast, with a key moment in the history of phonocentrism in transregional Asia, namely the cosmo – semiotic discourses of Esoteric Buddhism (circa 9<sup>th</sup> century) that string together diverse actors and networks in Central Asia, the High Tang Empire, and Heian Japan. Beyond its factual inaccuracy, the scholarly neglect of such moments is itself symptomatic of erasures and biases at work in the study of Asia today: modernity, as a concept, functions not only as temporal differentiation of textual and material sources but also as the ground for deep methodological and epistemological divisions within the field. What does it mean that the usual story of modernity not only assumes but requires that Asian phonocentrism do not count toward an understanding of modernity itself? And how might thinking Asia as Method counteract this repression carried out in the name of historiography? Moving beyond the East–West paradigm and other world – historical binary analytics that share in its logic requires a radical historicism, a historicism that begins with multiplicities and differences in premodern, transregional Asia. Cautioning against nationalistic antiquarianism and the replacing of one superficial center (e.g. “the West”) with another (e.g. Yao – to – Mao conception of “China”), I advocate for attention to ground – level de – and re – territorialization of ideas and practices instead of the traditions bestowed by sages.