from the attitude of the simple consumer. I believe such an achievement was made possible due to his ability to maintain a clear and sufficient introspective distance from the point at issue.

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*Khronologiya Stran Vostochnoi i Tsentral'noi Azii* (Chronology of the countries of East and Central Asia) by Lev Rafailovich Kontsevich.  

This large-size reference book was originally planned as a collective enterprise in the beginning of the 1980s. A group of mostly Moscow-based Soviet Oriental scholars – Sinologists, Japanologists, experts in Vietnam and Mongolia, specialists in the non-Han cultures of China etc. – headed by a veteran Korean expert, Prof. L.R. Kontsevich, decided to compile a book of chronological references for all the political entities of East and Central Asia that were, at least to a certain degree, influenced by the traditional Chinese logographs-based culture. Eventually, Kontsevich ended up taking sole responsibility for the project, although some of the chronological tables on China, Japan, Mongolia and Vietnam were compiled by him with the assistance of his colleagues specializing in these areas. All of them – representing, in fact, the crème of the crop of the Soviet and post-Soviet Oriental studies – are carefully listed in the Preface (pp. 21-26). If a comprehensive work of such scope, attempting to systematize the chronological tables (based on the available information on the reign periods, birth and death dates for Eastern and Central Asian rulers throughout several millennia) for the whole region influenced by the Sinitic culture, would have been published in English by a major publisher in North America or Western Europe, it most likely would have become a key reference for a good number of experts in the related fields, especially those working in traditional history and culture. However, Russian is a language that only very few Western Asianists are fluent in, and therefore Prof. Kontsevich’s *opus magnum* will most likely not be widely used outside of the former Eastern bloc, despite all its scholarly advantages.

The first volume of the book opens with a very detailed outline of the Sinitic calendar traditions, the historical onomastics of China (including an extremely
informative introduction on the titles of the Chinese emperors) and different methods of periodizing history in China and in other East Asian countries (pp. 29-76). The outline is followed by the general chronological tables on China (pp. 77-385) covering literary everything – from all the information on the legendary “emperors” Huangdi, Yao and Shun we can glean from the Chinese traditional sources to the Japanese colonial government and the post-colonial governments of Taiwan. Kontsevich’s meticulousness is laudable – he takes great pains, for example, to crosscheck the data on the Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 BC) from the Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji, 109-91 BC) with the oracle bone inscriptions (pp. 92-98). He has to be also praised for including the short-lived Taiping state (1851-1864) into his chronology and giving an outline of its calendar system (pp. 351-352) – this rebel state is usually omitted in the reference works. Especially important for the reader are the chronological tables for the non-Han states on today’s Mongolian and PRC (People’s Republic of China) territory, including the Rouran Khaganate (402-552), its vassal state Gaochang (500-640), Nanzhao in today’s Yunnan Province (629-1253), the empires of Liao (916-1125) and Jin (1115-1234), the state of Xi Xia (982-1227) etc. (pp. 387-384). Among these tables, the ones for such relatively under-researched political entities as Gaochang or Nanzhao, are pioneering in the Russophone academic literature. The compilation of the chronological tables on Vietnam (pp. 433-531), Mongolia (pp. 531-593) and Japan (pp. 695-803, includes also Ryukyu’s traditional rulers) was greatly aided by the leading Soviet/Russian experts in these fields, thus making the book into a good summary of the existing Russophone scholarship on the topics in question.

The inclusion of “forty-seven generations of Tan’gun Dynasty” derived from presumably apocryphal works like Kyuwôn sahwa (ca. 1675) or Hwanidan kogi (1911) – which Kontsevich himself does not regard as historical (pp. 673-675) – into the book raises, however, eyebrows. In both current South Korean academia and in North Korean academia before the early 1990s, not to speak of scholars outside of Korea, these texts were almost always treated as apocryphal, although with some noteworthy exceptions.

The second volume of Kontsevich’s monumental reference work includes a very detailed index of East Asian rulers (pp. 113-458). While the indexes of the Chinese, Japanese and Korean rulers may be easily found elsewhere, the indexes of the rulers of non-Han dynasties – for example, the Yujiu dynasty monarchs of the Rouran Khaganate, or the Gaochang vassals of the Rouran Khagans – are not easy to encounter in the existing reference literature. While compiling these indexes for non-Han dynasties, Kontsevich used several hundreds of volumes, including both primary sources (mostly Chinese dynastic chronicles and epigraphic sources) and secondary literature in all major Western European languages, Russian, Chinese,
Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese (pp. 46-59). The index of the era names is distinguished by the inclusion of a very large and detailed table of the non-official era names – these used by the leaders of the peasant rebellions or nobles’ mutinies in China, for example, including also the era names known only from epigraphic sources and never mentioned in the dynastic chronicles. Kontsevich managed to collect more than 600 such era names from a variety of sources, and gave also detailed commentaries on the historical circumstances in which each such era name emerged (pp. 545-599). Such attention to non-official era names is rather unique in the existing Russian reference literature on East Asian history. However, the methodology Kontsevich uses for compiling his comprehensive index of East Asia’s historical capital cities (pp. 600-639), cannot but give grounds to doubts. As he acknowledges himself (pp. 618-619), some of the identifications of the historical capital cities are based on Wikipedia or the site of a Chinese tourist agency (www.soobb.com) – hardly the most reliable sources, to put it mildly. The bulk of the information Kontsevich uses seems, however, to be derived from primary historical sources and traditional Chinese dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Certain shortcomings notwithstanding, Kontsevich’s Khronologiya is definitely a major reference work, most likely to be used by several generations of Russophone scholars of China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan and Mongolia in the future. It is noteworthy that such a titanic, region-wide project was undertaken by a Korea expert – indeed, by the scholar who arguably deserves the title of the “dean” of Russia’s Korea experts. It shows the regional side of the Korean studies tradition in Soviet Union/Russia – the study of pre-modern Korea being in most cases done as a part and parcel of more general studies of the whole Sinitic cultural region, combining the respect for Korea’s particularity with deep interest in its connectedness to the rest of East Asia.

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When teaching classes about Korea, one is often confronted with the complete lack of background knowledge by students. I have often wished for a short