

Oriental Globalization: Past and Present

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The critique of Eurocentrism has gone through several rounds. The first round was primarily a critique of Orientalism. Edward Said and Martin Bernal, among others, focused on cultural bias and racism in Eurocentric history. Others addressed Eurocentric biases in development thinking (Samir Amin, Paul Bairoch, Stavrianos) and historiography (Eric Wolf, James Blaut, Jack Goody).

In the second round, history from the viewpoint of the global South such as Subaltern Studies in India and revisionist history of Africa contributed different perspectives. In addition, global history generated critical historical studies that document the significance of in particular Asia and the Middle East in the making of the global economy and world society. Janet Abu-Lughod focused on the Middle East, Marshall Hodgson on the world of Islam, K. N. Chaudhuri on South Asia, Andre Gunder Frank on East and South Asia, Kenneth Pomeranz, Robert Temple and Bin Wong on China, Eric Jones on Japan, and Anthony Reid on Southeast Asia along with many other studies. This body of work not merely critiques but overturns conventional Eurocentric perspectives and implies a profound rethinking of world history that holds major implications for social science and development studies.

These studies break the mold of Eurocentric globalization that dominates the globalization literature. Eurocentric globalization is geographically centered on the West and preoccupied with recent history: post-war (in most economics, political science, international relations and cultural studies), post-1800 (most sociology), or post-1500 (Marxist political economy and world system theory).¹ In history curricula the latter periods figure as the 'modern' and 'early modern eras'. In this view, the radius of globalization is typically if not invariably from the West outward. The oriental globalization literature adopts a longer time frame and reverses this relationship: the radius is principally from the East outward. In this discussion I review the arguments of oriental globalization in the past and draw out some of their implications. In the second section I turn to contemporary oriental globalization and the 'rise of Asia' and discuss the continuities between oriental globalization past and present.

Oriental globalization past²

Arguably, the recent global history literature converges on a single major thesis: the Orient came first and the Occident was a latecomer. Andre Gunder Frank's *Re Orient* settles on 1400-1800 as the time of 'Asian hegemony': 'The two major regions that were most "central" to the world economy were India and China'

¹ On social science disciplines in relation to globalization studies and the periodization of globalization, see Nederveen Pieterse 2004a, chapters 1 and 4.

² An earlier version of this section appears in *Theory Culture and Society*, 2005.

(1998: 166). This centrality was based on 'greater absolute and relative productivity in industry, agriculture, (water) transport, and trade' and was reflected in their favorable balance of trade, particularly of China (127). Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* offers meticulous comparisons of developments in China and Britain that confirm this thesis and argues that the great divergence of Europe from the rest of the world is a myth. Geoffrey Gunn (2003) draws attention to exchanges between Southeast Asia and Europe from the sixteenth century onward as part of 'first globalization', while A. G. Hopkins (2002) and John Hobson (2004) synthesize this literature.

In general outline the Orient first thesis runs as follows. Global connections may go back to 3500 BCE or earlier still, but 500 CE may rank as the start of oriental globalization and 600 as the beginning of the big expansion of global trade. This timing is based on the revival of camel transport between 300 and 500. At the time the global economy was centered on the Middle East with Mecca as a global trade hub. For instance, in 875 Baghdad ranked as a 'water-front to the world' linked to China (Hobson 2004: 40). Other sources concur: 'Around 900 C.E. ibn Khordādbeh, postmaster of the Arab province of al-Jibāl in Persia, compiled his eight-volume *Book of the Roads and Countries* as a guide for the postal system. He described roads and sea routes as far as Korea, giving detailed directions, distances, weather conditions, and road security.' (Hoerder 2002: 31). The Middle East remained the 'Bridge of the World' through the second millennium, but by 1100 (or later, by some accounts)³ the leading edge of accumulation shifted to China, where it remained until well into the nineteenth century.

According to Hobson, in China's 'first industrial miracle', 'many of the characteristics that we associate with the eighteenth-century British industrial revolution had emerged by 1100' (50), with major advances in iron and steel production, agriculture, shipping and military capabilities. From Japan to the Middle East, the East was the early developer—far ahead of Europe in agriculture, industry, urbanization, trade networks, credit institutions and state institutions. Many historians concur that 'none of the major players in the world economy at any point before 1800 was European' (Hobson: 74).⁴

Europe was not only a late developer, but Eastern ideas and technologies enabled European feudalism, the financial revolution in medieval Italy and the Renaissance: 'oriental globalisation was the midwife, if not the mother, of the medieval and modern West' (Hobson: 36). This much had been established in studies of science and technology, as in the work of Needham (1956) and Goonatilake (1999). The profound influence of the Islamic world on the European Renaissance is on record as well. Many studies such as Donald Lach on the role of Asia in the making of Europe document the Asian influences on Europe and the Enlightenment (e.g. Marshall and Williams 1982; Nederveen Pieterse 1994).

³ According to Kazim (2000) the Arab world remained dominant in world trade until 1500.

⁴ The East was also expansive; Hobson argues that the 'Afro-Asian age of discovery' preceded Columbus and Vasco da Gama by about a millennium (139). Dick-Read (2005) discusses ancient Indonesian settlement in Africa.

What the recent studies add to this picture is an emphasis on political economy and economic institutions.

In Marshall Hodgson's words, the Occident was 'the unconscious heir of the industrial revolution of Sung China' (in Hobson: 192). Hobson dates China's central role earlier, to about 1100, and extends it later than Andre Gunder Frank does. In shares of world manufacturing output, according to Hobson, China outstripped Britain until 1860 and 'the Indian share was higher than the whole of Europe's in 1750 and was 85 percent higher than Britain's as late as 1830' (77, 76). In terms of GNP the West only caught up with the East by 1870; in terms of per capita income, a less representative measure, the West caught up by 1800. I will discuss three specific critiques of Eurocentrism that the recent studies contribute and then give an assessment of this literature.

One of the cornerstones of Eurocentrism is the idea that in the fifteenth century after the return of Zheng He's naval expeditions China turned away from maritime trade and that this caused its gradual decline and opened the way for the expansion of European trade in Asia. The revisionist literature argues that the closure of China (and also Japan) is a myth and the diagnosis of decline is likewise mistaken. It is true that China did not choose for the path of maritime expansion or empire, but western historians have mistaken the official Chinese imperial legitimation policy of upholding the Confucian ideal and condemning foreign trade with the actual trade relations, which continued and flourished. That China remained the world's leading trading power shows in the 'global silver recycling process', in which 'most of the world's silver was sucked into China' (Hobson: 66; Frank 1998: 117).

Another cornerstone of Eurocentrism is Oriental despotism (and variations such as Weber's patrimonialism). In contrast, the revisionist literature argues that states such as China and Japan had at an early stage achieved 'rational' institutions including a 'rational-legal' centralized bureaucracy, minimalist or laissez faire policies in relation to the economy and democratic propensities, while the European states during the 1500-1900 'breakthrough period' were far less rational, more interventionist and protectionist, and less democratic: 'eighteenth century China (and perhaps Japan as well) actually came closer to resembling the neoclassical ideal of a market economy than did Europe' (Pomeranz 2000: 70). Light taxation and laissez faire attitudes to enterprise were common in the East long before the West, and throughout the period of comparison trade tariffs were consistently far higher in the West than in the East, which shows that the Oriental despotism thesis is faulty.

A centrepiece of Eurocentrism is the judgement that other cultures lacked the European commitment to enterprise and accumulation. Weber highlighted the Protestant ethic and described Islam and Confucianism as obstacles to modern development. But many observers since then have noted the origins of Islam amid a trading culture and the penchant for commerce in the Islamic world (e.g. Turner 1994, Kazim 2000, Wolf 2001).

Viewing Confucianism as an obstacle to development involves historical ironies too: what ranked as an obstacle in the early twentieth century was recast in the late twentieth century as the Confucian ethic hypothesis to account for the

rise of the Asian Tigers. An additional irony is the influence of Confucianism on European thinking. That behind Adam Smith stood Francois Quesnay and the Physiocrats is a familiar point; but the Physiocrats' critique of mercantilism was inspired by Chinese policies and the philosophy of *wu-wei* or non-intervention, which goes back to well before the common era (Hobson: 196; Marshall and Williams 1982). Thus, Confucius (or rather, a European version of Confucius) ranks as a patron saint of the Enlightenment.

What is the significance and status of the oriental globalization literature at this stage? There are echoes of dependency theory in this body of work for if it wasn't European genius or other endogenous factors that turned the tide, the role played by colonialism and imperialism in changing the global equation must be larger than is acknowledged in Eurocentric perspectives. One thinks of Eric Williams's work on slavery, Walter Rodney on Africa and other studies. But recent global history generally interprets the nineteenth century advance of the West in terms of wider combinations of geography and history. Dependency theory was structuralist, while the recent revisionist history rejects a global structural approach (such as world system theory) and reckons with contingency and devotes attention to agency and identity formation: 'material power in general and great power in particular, are channeled in different directions depending on the specific identity of the agent' (Hobson: 309). Dependency thinking came out of the era of decolonization, while the allegiance of revisionist history is to global history rather than to history viewed through the lens of a particular region and time period. It looks past Fernand Braudel's 'Mediterranean world' and past world-system theory and its preoccupation with the Low Countries and the Baltic, to wider horizons in the tradition of Philip Curtin's work and William McNeill's global history. This literature is part of a wider literature that situates globalization in the *longue durée* (Nederveen Pieterse 1989, 2004a; Robertson 2004).

At times there is a rhetorical surcharge to this literature, which reflects its character as a polemical position. This comes across in a recurrent problem: though the portée of its findings is that the East-West divergence is a fiction and is really a continuum, at times the oriental globalization literature reverses the current of Eurocentrism by centring the East and marginalizing the West, thus replaying East-West binaries in reverse. Addressing this problem and taking global history beyond East-West binaries is the thrust of other studies (Lieberman, 1999, 2003; Pomeranz, 2002; Whitfield, 2003; Bayly, 2004).

The oriental globalization literature is uneven in that it represents a kind of retroactive Sinocentrism and Indocentrism. For various reasons China, India and the Middle East have been more extensively studied and are more salient than other areas. There is frequent mention of the 'Afro-Asian global economy', but the African part remains sketchier than the Asian side. Also Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Mongol Empire often fall between the cracks of the world's major zones. The oriental globalization thesis needs to integrate finer grained regional histories. Janet Abu-Lughod also suggests triangulation with local histories, but notes 'We can never stand at some Archimedean point *outside* our

cultures and outside our locations in space and time. No matter how *outré* we attempt to be, our vision is also distorted' (2000: 113).

It is interesting to note how the paradigms of the present are the lenses through which history is read and reread (cf. Zurndorfer 1997). Eighteenth century Europeans admired China for its 'enlightened despotism', while in twenty-first century accounts what matters is 'rational institutions' and laissez faire economic policies, thus echoing the current status of rational choice and neoclassical economics.

While the oriental globalization literature has grown rapidly and is increasingly substantial, it is by no means dominant. Mainstream thinking continues to view the West as the early developer and the East and the global South as laggards or upstarts. At the turn of the millennium—following the Soviet demise, the Asian crisis and neoconservative belligerence in Washington—American triumphalism, though increasingly hollow, sets the tone as part of an entrenched 'intellectual apartheid regime'.

The Washington consensus is as steeped in Orientalist stereotypes and historical myopia as the neoconservative mission to bring freedom and democracy to the world. Eurocentric economic history à la David Landes (*The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*) and Roberts (*Triumph of the West*) rhymes with Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations, Bernard Lewis's account of Islam (*What Went Wrong?*), Fukuyama's ideological history (*The End of History*) and Mandelbaum (*The Ideas that Conquered the World*). A general mindset of western triumphalism informs IMF and World Bank policies (economics without history, without anthropology) as well as American aspirations in the Middle East (politics without memory), as if development and democracy are virtues that the West chanced upon first and only.

Besides the usual ignorance and arrogance, there is something deceptive about Eurocentrism-as-policy, a trait that Ha-Joon Chang summed up as *Kicking Away the Ladder*. In the nineteenth century free trade was used as a means to deindustrialize colonial economies and now WTO statutes and free trade agreements that uphold the intellectual property rights of multinational corporations seek to short-circuit industrialization in the global South. In this regime of truth institutionalized amnesia and intellectual apartheid serve as instruments of power.

As the oriental globalization literature overtakes the indulgent west-centric view of globalization, perhaps the global realignments that are now gradually taking shape will also catch up with the material side and the political economy of American supremacism. This diagnosis of the 'global confluence' arrives on the scene at the time that China, India and East Asia are reemerging as major forces in the global economy; historiography catches up with the present just when the present is coming full circle with past trends in the world economy. But a synthesis that is yet to take shape is that of the historical oriental globalization thesis with the cutting edge of contemporary globalization in the making. On this point I will make some tentative notes.

Oriental globalization present

'We've had a couple of hundred bad years, but now we're back'
(Economist in Shanghai, quoted in Prestowitz 2005: 225)

Globalization isn't what it used to be. Paul Kennedy noted, 'we can no more stop the rise of Asia than we can stop the winter snows and the summer heat' (2001: 78). According to cautious IMF estimates, China's GDP is likely to pass that of Japan around 2016 and approach the size of the US by 2040, or earlier in terms of its domestic purchasing power (Prestowitz 2005: 74). The Indian economy is also moving ahead swiftly. In a structural fashion economic advantages are moving east and to newly industrializing societies. Asian demographics include young populations—unlike in Europe, the US and Japan—with great social densities and fast rising levels of education, growing technological capabilities and rising levels of development. Other variables in the rise of Asia are geographic proximities and what Abdel-Malek calls 'the depth of the historical field'. At times there is mention of the possibility of hegemonic rivalry and American military intervention; but let's note that these are generally not variables that are amenable to geopolitical intervention.

A different global equation is in the making and Asia plays a central role in this along with the emerging BRIC countries, including Brazil and Russia, countries such as South Africa and the wider radius of oriental globalization. The question I want to ask is what is the relationship between oriental globalization past and present. To what extent and in which ways does oriental globalization in the past form the basis of, shape and inform oriental globalization in the present? To what extent and in what sense is the rise of Asia not just a rise but a come-back? This is a question of limited status for obviously the discontinuities are as interesting as the continuities. New patterns, combinations and hybridities arising from the interactions with western societies and the adoption of new technologies are as interesting as continuities with the past. Yet they are also enabled by continuities with the past, so there is merit to raising this question.

With respect to culture and civilization, continuities between oriental globalization past and present are commonly recognized. Confucianism in the circle of Sinic influence and the idea of a neo-Confucian ethic are part of this (Tu Weiming 2000). The Teen Murti school in New Delhi has been concerned with Indic civilization rather than just India (Kumar and Chandhoke 2000). Continuities with regard to nationhood and states are also widely recognized. China ranks among the 'continuous nations' with a national identity and state existence stretching back to well before the Common Era (Abdel-Malek 1981; Cohen 2000). Besides these fairly common points of reference, we can consider the role of trade routes and migrations and diasporas. These are brief notes, pending the patient revisiting of regional histories, focusing on Asia rather than on the wider radius of oriental globalization.

This kind of inquiry is not uncommon. In the Annales school and Braudel's work the *longue durée* refers to long-term structural and institutional changes. Evolutionary economics and institutional economics address institutional legacies as part of economic dynamics; a strong instance of this is path dependence.

Robert Putnam (1993) argues that the success of administrative decentralization in northern Italy and its failure in southern Italy since the 1970s was in large measure attributable to the history from medieval times onward of city states in the North in contrast to kingdoms in the south and other forms of governance that involved less civic allegiance. Thus, configurations going back to medieval and Renaissance times account for contemporary dynamics even though other political and economic configurations have intervened.

State capability and 'bureaucratically coordinated capitalism' is widely recognized as a crucial component in the rise of East Asia (Weiss 1996). Dedicated public service and skillful civil servants cannot be fully understood without the long legacy of political Confucianism.

In language, culture and arts, the civilizational interconnections persist.⁵ The Indo-European languages are a case in point (Mallory 1991). History is part of the cultural and institutional capital of nations. The theme of continuity is well on the map in Asia and overseas. References to the depth of civilization and the interspersion of the traditional and the modern, and the idea that the rise of Asia is a Renaissance (Ibrahim 1996) are common.

These continuities are symbolically acknowledged or intimated in the recurrent use of the Silk Routes metaphor, which is often more than a metaphor and also a memory and a future project (Abdel-Malek 1994; Wood 2003). 'From silk to oil' is a recurrent motif and both center on Eurasia and Central Asia. At the opening ceremony of the new oil pipe line from Baku at the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan at the Mediterranean in May 2005, the President of Turkey said 'This is the Silk Road of the 21st century' (Boland 2005). The Asia-Europe intergovernmental meetings have also been viewed as 'new Silk Routes' (Brennan et al 1997). The 'new Silk Roads' images that reinvoke historic continuities and geographic contiguities remind us that the links of past times ramified widely and that the ripples of past waves of globalization still linger.

Traces of old accumulation treasure and savvy persist in collective memory, circumstances and artifacts. In many places the remnants of old trade infrastructures and institutions still exist and at times the new trades reactivate ancient trade routes and old nodal points. From Kaifeng in China to Damascus and Istanbul, remnants of the Silk Roads still exist: the actual roads and ports (Broeze 1989), the caravanserais, the ruins or remains of forts, palaces and temples (Whitfield 2004). Through most of Asia and the Middle East, as in much of Europe, the physical traces of thousands years past, are just around the corner. The current industrial and commercial buzz in Asia has been foreshadowed in the great Asian bazaar of old times. The industriousness and savvy of Asian markets, abuzz with merchants and workshops, trade emporia and far flung trade networks, is part of a deep infrastructure of social densities that predates capitalism.

Migration and diaspora routes serve as two-way carriers of knowledge and technology, language, skills, goods and investments. They also play a major role in Asia's resurgence. In China's rapid rise as an industrial exporter, investments

⁵ Yo-Yo Ma has turned from interpretations of Bach and Brahms, to a long-term Silk Road project with the cooperation of musicians from Turkey to China in the Silk Road Ensemble.

by the Chinese diaspora from the Pacific Rim back into the mainland play a significant part, notably from Taiwan (Chen 2005; Liu 1998; Seagrave 1996). In India, the role of the NRIs or non-resident Indians as investors and intellectual and social capital is also rapidly growing and actively courted. These relations reactivate old migration links that wire Asian countries with worldwide links. Scholars and entrepreneurs in India are rediscovering their many civilizational and economic links with the Arab world and with Persia and Central Asia (Shanker 2005). The trails of the Mughals and the Parsi traders were two-way routes then and may be so again (Nederveen Pieterse 2003). India now seeks to reestablish its links with Central Asia as an avenue of commerce and energy supplies.

In mapping the Southwest Silk Road, Bin Yang (2004) discusses the ancient confluence of China, India and Persia in trading and civilizational networks. The ancient trading links between Yunnan, Burma and India go back to 200 BCE. Routes of trade and migration between China and Southeast Asia also have great historical depth (Thapar 1992; Sugiyama 1992; Dobbin 1996) and carry over into present times (e.g. Yamashita and Eades 2003). Xiangming Chen (2005) focuses on the role of crossborder and regional social capital in Asian economies and maps processes of de-bordering and re-bordering over time. He traces trade and migration routes back to the seventeenth century and finds that some areas of high activity in the past such as the Pearl River delta are active also now. These inquiries show that cultural and economic efflorescence, past and present, has been typically a crossborder or regional phenomenon. Yet most history, particularly since the nineteenth century, is the history of nation states and statistics record data primarily in nation state units.

Arif Dirlik (2000) criticizes Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis and contends that the tensions refer instead to capitalist competition between different cultural centres. Dirlik's view is certainly more pertinent than that of Huntington; but it invites two qualifications. One is obvious; of course the relations are not just those of rivalry but also of collaboration. The second is that capitalism and capitalist rivalry themselves are categories with limited or contingent explanatory validity. Andre Gunder Frank's historical work eventually led him to look beyond capitalism as a central explanatory category:

Far from arguing that capitalism is five thousand years old, I suggest that we should dare to abandon our belief in capitalism as a distinct mode of production and separate system. Why? Because too many big patterns in world history appear to transcend or persist despite all apparent alterations in the mode of production. It therefore cannot be the mode of production that determines overall development patterns. ... World history since 1500 may be less adequately defined by capitalism than by shifts in trade routes, centers of accumulation, and the existence/ nonexistence and location of hegemonic power. (Frank 1996: 44)

Earlier I noted that 'This implies a profound challenge to critical political economy; it suggests that many explanations that are held to be fundamental are in fact conjunctural and reflect not just limitations of geography but also limitations of the time frame. Global political economy may overcome the

limitations of geography, but the limitations of time are of a different order; it makes a profound difference whether the time frame of explanation is from 1800 or from 1000 BCE or 500 CE' (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 386).

The study of oriental globalization past and present shows that in economics and technology just as in culture and civilization, the taken for granted units of analysis—such as nation states, capitalism—are but provisional approximations, conceptual conventions that in seeking to map the ebb and flow in time and space may lead us astray as much as guide us. It is not surprising that history of the *longue durée* should unsettle our analytical categories, such as the nation state and capitalism, for concepts are embedded in time. Decolonization involves epistemic decolonization ('emancipate yourself from mental slavery') and the decolonization of imagination. It is interesting that the road to epistemic emancipation runs as often via history as via theory.

The idea of regional technological independence (e.g. Chamarik and Goonatilake 1993), past or present, is probably a fiction. Silk production was exported from China to the Ottoman Empire and Europe, porcelain making traveled from China to Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (witness Delft, Wedgwood, Sèvres), Chinese agricultural technologies revolutionized English agriculture, and Indian textile crafts imbued British textile production (as in Paisley, Scotland). In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrial skills and technologies journeyed from West to East. In the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Asian technologies travel West again (such as Japanese Toyotism and Indian software). This back and forth motion of technologies and the overlaps between old and new routes of trade and migration in the *longue durée* suggest underlying affinities.

Between oriental globalization in the past and the present, oriental globalization has circled the globe. Eurasia was part of the terrain that was traversed (Moore 2003 traces the role of Eurasia from the eleventh century) and Eurasia makes a come-back in the present, in discussions of capitalisms and Asian-European dialogue (Nederveen Pieterse 2004b). Seen from the viewpoint of oriental globalization past and present, European development, Eurocentrism and occidental globalization appear as episodes and phases in a much wider multicentric global process.

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