

# Convergence before Divergence? Eurocentrism and Alternate Patterns of Historical Change

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Over the last quarter century, historical scholarship has rudely disrupted widely accepted differences between Europe and the 'non-Europes.' On the one hand, rather than seeing the 'industrial revolution' as marking a bifurcation point in an hitherto glacial pace of change in Europe, it is increasingly recognized that—with the exception of the dislocations caused by the Black Death—there had been long developmental continuities since the twelfth century with the growth of inter-city networks in Europe, market-oriented craft production, and by the sixteenth century, the creation of stable political frameworks that facilitated the accumulation of capital. On the other, these tendencies—steady improvements in technology leading to a growth in total output and expansive regional and global networks of circulation—were also seen to operate in the 'non-Europes': especially in China, India, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire. Observing the temporal contemporaneity of the evolution of exchange networks in many different parts of Africa, Asia, and Europe, James Blaut (1992: 355) argued that these should be seen "as nodes in a hemisphere-wide network or process of evolving capitalism." Once Africa, Asia, and Europe are seen as 'landscapes of even development,' it is alleged that the very association of modernity with Europe is untenable—and hence, as Jack Goldstone (2002: 330) notes, several scholars speak of 'early modernities' and even 'multiple modernities.'

In de-centering the European narrative of long-term, large-scale social change from its position as the normative pattern against which all other historical transformations are cast as deviations, R. Bin Wong and Kenneth Pomeranz have advocated a method of reciprocal comparisons. In the first instance, rather than comparing individual nation-states, they suggest a comparison of 'core regions' with roughly comparable populations and levels of economic development—the Yangzi Delta, the Kantō plain, Britain and the

Netherlands, Gujarat—which were more similar to each other than to "the continent or subcontinent around them (e.g., relatively *free* markets, extensive handicraft industries, highly commercialized agriculture)" (Pomeranz 2000: 8, emphasis added; see also Wong 1997: 6-7).<sup>1</sup> To make comparisons between these units 'truly reciprocal' they suggest looking for "absences, accidents, and obstacles that diverted England from a path that might have made it more like the Yangzi Delta or Gujarat along with the more usual exercise of looking for blockages that kept non-European areas from reproducing implicitly normalized European paths" (Pomeranz 2000: 8). By changing their units of comparison, Wong and Pomeranz have marshaled an impressive array of evidence to show that many of the crucial 'advantages' said to have propelled Western Europe to high-speed growth—private property in land, technological competencies, capital stock, market networks, demographic patterns, mobility of labor, decline of arbitrary taxation—were also prevalent in China, Japan, and possibly India. Indeed, Pomeranz (2000: 70) even argues "that eighteenth-century China (and perhaps Japan as well) actually came closer to resembling the neoclassical ideal of a market economy than did western Europe." From this perspective, it was the presence of conveniently located supplies of coal, and the conquest of the Americas that thrust Europe above the other 'core regions' of the Eastern Hemisphere. Apart from its natural resources, the conquest of the Americas allowed Europeans to create 'a new kind of periphery'—plantation economies based on slave labor that enabled European states to solve their land shortage with capital and labor (Pomeranz 2000: 20-21).

Yet, if the method of 'reciprocal' comparisons enable Wong and Pomeranz to decisively disrupt facile assumptions of European economic, organizational, and technological superiority before the nineteenth-century,

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their argument that there was a 'world of surprising resemblances' between western Europe and Asia presumes a teleological progression towards capitalism—hastened in Europe's case by the Iberian conquest of the Americas. Once it is granted that the seeds of capitalism were sprouting in several locales in the Eastern Hemisphere—'landscapes of even development'—capitalism is endowed with an aura of inevitability; it is cast as a product of the 'natural' progression of humanity.<sup>2</sup> In the first instance, as Prasanna Parthasarathi (2002: 279) notes, by treating the 'core regions' of Eurasia in isolation, the method of reciprocal comparisons abstracts them from the webs of exchange networks in which they were embedded and which provide "an important context for economic activities in both Europe and Asia and, because of this trade [in manufactured goods], the economic pressures and opportunities that actors faced in various parts of Eurasia were radically different." After all, the Yangzi Delta, Britain and the Netherlands, or Gujarat were constituted as major centers of manufacture and trade only by their location in relational networks through which their artisans procured raw materials and food supplies and which enabled them to market their wares! Just as modernization theorists isolated economies from the wider global networks in which they were located—and pretended that the industrial revolution in England could be understood without colonialism and the creation of plantation complexes—methods of 'reciprocal comparison' isolate these regions from the wider networks that constituted them as 'core regions' in the first place.

More importantly, in their revisionist histories, Wong, Pomeranz, and others—while establishing the presence of expansive circuits of exchange in parts of China, Japan, and India—simply assume exchange networks automatically generate 'free markets' and 'perfect competition' in the absence of state intervention, and that these phenomena are necessary for the evolution of capitalist relations. Yet, more than fifty years ago, Karl Polanyi and his collaborators had demonstrated that price-making markets are not trans-historical phenomena and that markets are embedded in social institutions (Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson 1957). Similarly, as we shall see, despite dense webs of exchange integrating producers and consumers across the two wings of the Indian Ocean by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, contemporary historical accounts indicate goods were off-loaded from ships only after complex negotiations conducted by resident foreigners—the *shahbandar* of Melaka, for instance—and involved elements other than relative scarcities (Ma Huan 1970: 140-41; Pires 1967: II,

265; Chaudhuri 1985: 99). Mughal governors of Surat regulated grain prices, and in times of dearth, even seized grain stocks to provide food for the poor (Barendse 2002: 53). There is also ample evidence of state intervention to provide relief from high food prices during years of scarcity in China as late as the eighteenth century (see Davis 2001: 280-85).

Careful regulation of grain prices when necessary by Mughal and Qing imperial governments underscore Polanyi's contention that a market economy—far from being essential for capitalism—would result in the 'demolition of society' because the land, labor, and money that are essential for a market are 'fictitious commodities.' None of these elements, vital for the functioning of a self-regulating market economy, are produced for sale. To include these fictitious commodities in a market is to subordinate "the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power," to the laws of the market and no society could withstand the effects of this for more than the shortest period of time. Thus, the end of the nineteenth-century, he was to argue, was a history of a 'double movement': "the extension of the market organization in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction in respect to fictitious ones" (Polanyi 1944: 76).

Markets, indeed, took the center-stage as the defining feature of capitalism in social science theorizing in the early-to mid-twentieth century, to distinguish it from the feudalism that preceded it and the socialism that was widely expected to replace it. Yet, historical scholarship over the last three to four decades has clearly established that markets existed in feudal societies, that these were not enclosed 'natural' economies as had once been believed. Markets in feudal Europe, as elsewhere, were embedded in a web of social institutions that restricted the operation of its laws to land, labor, and purchasing power.

Not only were markets not the defining feature of capitalism, but Fernand Braudel even argued that capitalism is anti-market. Unlike Adam Smith and Karl Marx, who both considered competition to be the normal state of play in capitalist societies, Braudel demonstrated that monopolies were not aberrations in the history of capitalism. The Smithian market dynamic of an infinite number of buyers and sellers armed with perfect information of market conditions and with no constraints on the operation of the forces of supply and demand would imply that buyers would go from seller to seller to find the lowest possible price. Such a price could only be infinitesimally higher than the cost of production and

no real capital accumulation would be possible. Pomeranz (2000: 17) was perhaps right when he claimed that

western European land, labor, and product markets, even as late as 1789, were on the whole probably *further* from perfect competition—that is, less likely to be composed of multiple buyers and sellers with opportunities to choose freely among many trading partners—than those in most of China (emphasis in the original).

But that is precisely why capitalism originated in ‘western Europe’ and not in China.

The ability to accumulate large amounts of capital stemmed from monopolies—just as surely as it did for the English East India Company, as it does for Microsoft and Halliburton today! In his famous triptych of economic activities, the market economy was the world of “‘transparent’ visible realities, and [it was] on the easily observed processes that took place within them that the language of economic science was originally founded” (Braudel 1981: 23). If this was the ‘not unacceptable’ face of “micro-capitalism—barely distinguishable from ordinary work” (Braudel 1981: 562), it was very different from the ‘social hierarchies’ constructed above it. These were the ‘zones of turbulence’ where exceptional profits were to be reaped, and were safeguarded by monopolies: it was ‘exploitation than exchange’ as he says of the royal monopolies of trade:

The Manila galleon was an exceptionally good way of closing a circuit from a commercial point of view, but there is no doubt it represented a form of domination to the advantage of merchants of Mexico City. Making their hasty visits to the Acapulco fairs, they held the whip hand, from a distance of months and years, over the merchants of Manila (who took it out on the merchants of China), just as Dutch merchants for so long kept the whip hand over their commission agents in Leghorn. When there was a relationship of power of this kind, what exactly did the terms supply and demand mean? (Braudel 1982: 176)<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, in his analysis of European trading companies in the Indian Ocean, Niels Steensgaard (1974) argued that overseas voyages were possible only because European states granted monopolies to these companies—insulating them against competition at least from merchants from their own jurisdictions—and allowing them to internalize protection costs through the assumption of governmental and military functions in their operations overseas. Unlike prior ventures when partnerships were dissolved after a predetermined span of time and the assets divided among the partners, the internalization of protection costs made the Dutch East India Company, *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*

(VOC), a new form of enterprise as it was necessary to treat its capital stock as permanent and to allocate as much of its profits as possible as circulating capital. By spreading its fixed costs over as large a volume of trade as possible, it could increase returns to its investors over a long period of time. However, as some investors were not willing to wait for an indefinite period, it led to the separation of ownership and control thereby allowing investors to dispose of their shares in the market. Here again monopolies were crucial—and often times governments endowed company officials with ambassadorial status to ease their transactions with foreign princes (Pearson 1991: 89-92, 109-10, 113).

The sovereign status accorded to the Portuguese *Estado da India* and the northern European trading companies in the Indian Ocean world distinguished them from other mercantile communities. Just as modern states create specially designated juridical enclaves—export processing zones and international banking facilities to attract international business being cases in point (Palan 2003: 18-21)—rulers permitted resident communities of foreign merchants to administer their own, often incompatible, systems of law provided that in cases of conflict, or serious crimes such as homicides, royal jurisdiction overrode such privileges. Without the existence of such protocols, as Charles Henry Alexandrowicz (1967: 99) observed, Europeans would have been unable to conduct commercial operations in the Indian Ocean world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

What distinguished the participation of the Portuguese and the northern European East India Companies in this system of *nations* was that they were additionally endowed by their states with arms, warships, fortresses, and other attributes of sovereignty unlike the other *nations* (Barendse 2002: 87-88). If these attributes enabled them to exercise novel claims to sovereignty—notably over the deep seas—it also meant that subcontinental rulers could hold them to these claims and compel them to eradicate acts of piracy over the seas or face punishment on land. “The Indian Ocean was not a Mughal lake,” Lauren Benton (2005: 716) writes, “but it was not a European one, either.”

Issues of power and monopolies invoke the role of the state. In Europe, as the costs of providing protection increased substantially during the sixteenth century due to an expansion in the scale of warfare (McNeill 1984: 79-184; Parker 1988: 24, 62), the ability of rulers to borrow money from financiers became ever more crucial to their military success. While borrowing from financiers outside their domains may have enabled rulers to repudiate their debts with less adverse consequences for their local economies, it eventually made rulers less credit-worthy

and they were forced to make concessions to their creditors, including the authority to collect taxes. When Spain's Philip II tried to default on his loans to his Genoese creditors in 1575, they embargoed all currency transfers from the Spanish crown to his army fighting Dutch rebels in the Low Countries and thus forced him to resume payments. Domestic creditors may have been easier to fend off as they could be paid in debased currencies, or their assets could be seized as England's Henry VIII did to the monasteries, or they could be expelled as the Jews were from thirteenth-century England by Edward I (Thompson and Runciman 2006: 543-44).

Territorial rulers who were dependent on financiers and big merchants involved in long-distance trade also confronted actors who could not be entirely controlled by them as these financiers and merchants could escape to another ruler's domains if demands on them became intolerable. Hence the geographies of capital and coercion created a system of states, the rulers of each jurisdiction granting increasingly favorable terms to their merchant-financiers, to enable them to accumulate large profits more optimally (Lane 1979; Wallerstein 1974):

[W]hat we in blithe retrospect call "state formation" included the setting of ruthless tax farmers against poor peasants and artisans, the forced sale for taxes of animals that would have paid for dowries, the imprisoning of local leaders as hostages to the local community's payment of overdue taxes, the hanging of others who dared to protest, the loosing of brutal soldiers on a hapless civilian population, the conscription of young men who were their parents' main hope for comfort in old age, the forced purchase of tainted salt, the elevation of already arrogant local propertyholders into officers of the state, and the imposition of religious conformity in the name of public order and morality. (Tilly 1990: 98-99)

If successful European rulers, made concessions to their subject populations—no taxation without the consent of their representatives, freedom from the arbitrary exercise of power and the institution of laws—in their drive to subdue powerful lords, both in their efforts to create absolutist states and to finance their wars, they were increasingly dependent on merchant-financiers. This mutual dependence however came up against the interests of subject populations since laws favorable to the increasing commodification of property relations implied extinguishing long-established customary rights. In this regard the European conquest of the Americas was crucial. Apart from the ecological bounty of the Western Hemisphere, European *conquistadores* caused such widespread destruction of indigenous peoples—as they had no immunity to diseases of the Eastern Hemisphere [Crosby 1972: 29]—that European colonizers and settlers

could experiment with new forms of labor control since aboriginal populations and transplanted African slaves were less able to defend their 'customary' rights than well-established peasant communities in Europe. Additionally, the bounty from the Americas—bullion and commodities—could be used to subdue resistance by peasants in Europe itself while subordinating regional *grandees* to centralized monarchies (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992).

Compulsions of war-making and state-making did not however lead to a similar alliance—a series of *liaisons dangereuses*, Charles Tilly calls it—between governing and mercantile-financial elites in the large agrarian-commercial empires of Asia. Control over large populations, extensive territories, and an elaborate tax system meant that rulers and governing elites were not reliant on mercantile-financial elites for revenues for their protection-providing activities. The Mughals, as Michael Pearson (1991: 57) says simply, "had too much money to need to trade off revenue for rights as European rulers had to do." Instead of relying on loans or cash advances from urban patriciates to wage wars or to suppress local rebellions, commanders of Mughal imperial forces, for instance, merely drew cash from provincial treasuries to pay the troops under their command (Richards 1990: 628). When Akbar sent an expeditionary force to subdue rebellious Afghan chiefs in Bihar and Bengal in 1572, for instance, the salaries of artillerymen were paid directly to the commander for the duration of the campaign from the central treasury (Khan 2004: 92). Since agricultural production and taxes were more important, Chinese and Indian rulers focused more on extending cultivation and improving agricultural and artisanal production than on trade. While the Chinese government established state monopolies in salt and iron, these were not intended to reap extraordinary profits.<sup>4</sup> Though the several imperial dynasties of China or India recognized the importance of trade—especially to procure good quality horses for warfare and to acquire gold and silver in regions plagued by chronic shortages of bullion—they were not concerned with the profits of their merchant classes, unlike their contemporaries in Western Europe. Bahadur Shah, a sixteenth-century sultan of Gujarat is even reputed to have told a group of merchants seeking protection from the Portuguese: "Wars by sea are merchants' affairs and of no concern to the prestige of kings" (Boxer 1977: 50).<sup>5</sup> These differences in the relationships between governing and mercantile-financial elites in Europe and the agrarian-commercial empires of Asia were manifested in the European trading companies' demand for extensive privileges and treaties from the Mughal and Qing courts, demands that were incomprehensible to the rulers

(Pearson 1991: 109-14).

Since about the year 1000, as we shall see, political economies in much of Asia had been determined by the peculiar characteristics of wet-rice agriculture. The ability of lands under irrigated riziculture to support much larger densities of population had both allowed rulers to extract a greater portion of the surplus and for a large part of the population to engage in non-food producing activities on a full-time basis. If this promoted an expansion of trade circuits even to ecological zones not suitable for rice cultivation, the propensity of wet-rice agriculture to respond positively to additional inputs of labor placed a premium on skill rather than capital. Indeed, since floods were as much of a threat to rice as drought, in the absence of mechanical equipment to level the fields, plots of land had to be small to ensure adequate control over drainage (Geertz 1963: 31; Bray 1983: 9, 12). Along with the marginal significance of inputs other than skilled labor in wet-rice cultivation, this implied that there was no advantage to accumulation. Thus, even though there may be a few wealthy individuals like Virji Vora of Surat, said to possess an 'estate' of some eight million rupees in the 1660s (Habib 1990: 398), there was no concerted move to consolidate an alliance between governing and mercantile-financial elites in the large agrarian-commercial empires of Asia. What is at issue here is *not* whether there were wealthy individuals, even capitalists, in India, China, and elsewhere in the 'non-Europes,' but whether capitalism could become the motor force dominating the dynamics of these social systems. For capitalism to become dominant at the macro-level—to become a system where "a man exists for his business, instead of the reverse," in Max Weber's (2002: 32) words—it had to become embedded within the political system.

Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, *when it is the state*. In its first great phase, that of the Italian city-states of Venice, Genoa, and Florence, power lay in the hands of the moneyed elite. In seventeenth-century Holland, the aristocracy of Regents governed for the benefit and even according to the directives of the businessmen, merchants, and moneylenders. Likewise in England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 marked the accession of business similar to that in Holland. (Braudel 1977: 64-65, emphasis added)

It was this identification of capitalists' interests with the interests of ruling elites that was missing in societies based on wet-rice agriculture.

From this perspective, revisionist historians' emphasis on the expansion of exchange networks across Eurasia and their portrayal of 'a world of surprising resemblances' obscures the significance of the alliance between governing and mercantile-financial elites in

Europe. Their studies on the extensive commercial networks in Asia compellingly refute earlier portrayals of the absence of property rights in 'despotic' oriental states but do not address the importance of a mutually-beneficial alliance between governing and mercantile-financial elites in the subordination of direct producers to the emergence of capitalist relations in Europe. In comparing state-making in Europe and China, Wong (1997: 94-104) notes that China did not experience the same dynamic of war-making and fiscal extraction that drove state-making in Europe but he does not examine the implications of this for the transformation of social relations in the two areas. While Pomeranz (2000: 196) recognizes the link between war-making and the creation of monopolies in Europe, his association of capitalism with free markets leads him to view monopoly as a restriction on output rather than as key to the subordination of direct producers.

By universalizing a model of socio-historical transformation derived from the particular experience of northwestern European societies the revisionists obliterate the distinctiveness of other historical social systems and deny the possibility of alternate patterns of social evolution. Rather than investigating the specific socio-historical dynamics of the several distinct social systems in the Eastern Hemisphere, they assume that an expansion of exchange networks produce identical patterns of change everywhere. In effect, the revisionists attempt to transcend Eurocentrism by ruling out of court all the distinctiveness of non-European societies. Sharply put, in the name of overcoming Eurocentrism, they smuggle in Eurocentrism through the front door.

On the contrary, a review of the patterns of historical evolution in societies based on wet-rice agriculture suggests that despite the temporal contemporaneity of an expansion of relational networks in early modern Europe and Asia, the two processes were fundamentally dissimilar. Central to this argument are the fundamental differences in agricultural practices dictated by the dominant crops and the specific conditions of production in each area. Whereas the substitution of labor-power by animal and mechanical power, represented technological progress in societies with low densities of population, the technical conditions of wet-rice cultivation dictated the substitution of simple tools for more complex instruments (Bray 1983: 4-5). This implies that rather than moving towards large-scale consolidated farming operations, the dynamics of change in societies based on irrigated riziculture increasingly privileged small-scale operations. Or, as Thomas Smith put it so well, "To speak metaphorically, rather than impelling farming forward to a manufacturing stage of production, [operations

associated with wet-rice agriculture] served to strengthen its handicraft character" (1980: 105).

Once emphasis was placed on the skill of cultivators rather than on increasingly complex instruments of production as was the case in early modern Europe, there was a tendential decline in the intervention of landlords in the production process. This implied that though producers may remain formally subordinate, there was no attempt by landowners to constantly revolutionize and transform the labor process. These conditions imposed severe impediments to a ceaseless accumulation of capital since landlords were unable to realize an increase in relative surplus value by constantly reducing production costs. At the same time, the increasing premium placed on skilled labor even constrained their abilities to realize an increase in absolute surplus value.

Large populations also meant that there were no tendencies towards the development of labor-saving devices or to the creation of large consolidated enterprises in manufacturing. The growth of population led to what Hayami Akira (1986) has called an 'industrious revolution.' Central to this transformation was the absorption of labor through labor-intensive strategies—engaging in cottage industries or by migrating during off-peak seasons to work as service personnel to increase household incomes. The employment of an increasing numbers of households in artisanal production as a result of an intensification of wet-rice cultivation led to the emergence of a mass market in which price displaced quality and artistry as the primary consideration affecting production. In these circumstances, rural producers, as Smith noted of those in Tokugawa Japan, had

[a] decisive advantage for they were less encumbered than urban producers by guild restrictions and were nearer to raw materials and water power. Moreover, their labor costs were far more elastic since they did not demand a livelihood from industry, merely part-time employment to fill the lulls in farming (1980: 76).

The importance of skilled labor meant that there was no marked separation between producers and managers, unlike the case in north-western Europe. The household held a decisive economic advantage over large-scale enterprises precisely because family members could respond flexibly to situations that may arise, take initiative in anticipating and resolving potential problems, and work longer hours without thought of extra compensation to maintain the status of the family (Sugihara Kaoru 2003: 87). Rather than individualism, it fostered a collective ethic as indicated by the sense of time among Tokugawa peasants:

Time was regarded as fleeting and precious, and great moral value

attached to its productive use. Farmers made elaborate efforts to coordinate work and to stretch nature's constraints by the skillful use of early and late varieties, between row-planting, straw-covered planting beds, fast-acting fertilizers, and other time-saving devices. None of this ingenuity, however, was for the benefit of individuals. Time was not a personal possession but belonged primarily to families and, through them, to kin, neighbors, and villages. (Smith 1988: 202)

The greater flexibility of labor and the widespread dispersal of craft production meant that the closest parallel to European models of mechanization and factory production in pre-eighteenth century Asia came from the large sake breweries established to quench the thirst of Japanese urban populations in the seventeenth century (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 49-51)—but sake was never a 'leading economic sector' like export agriculture or textiles! In those and other sectors, there was no tendency towards an increasing real subsumption of labor to capital, identified by Marx (1977: 1019-1038) as the hallmark of capitalism as a mode of production *sui generis*.

When the conditions associated with wet-rice farming did not favor the creation of large-scale consolidated enterprises, and thereby did not privilege capital accumulation, there were no tendencies towards *liaisons dangereuses* between mercantile-financial and political elites. Patterns of state-formation were determined by very different constraints than those operating in Western Europe. In the first instance, expansive dry lands frequently interspersed with fertile river valleys stretching from the Atlantic coasts of northern Africa through West and Central Asia to the eastern and southern parts of the Indian subcontinent—Sahasra as this chequered ecological continuum is sometimes called (Gommans 1998b: 4; 2002: 9)—meant that the frontier between pastoral-nomadic societies and sedentary-agrarian ones was an open, flexible, and ever-shifting border till the nineteenth-century. Harold Peake, Herbert Fleure, and Joseph Fletcher argued that unlike the nomads of the northern steppe (from Hungary to eastern Manchuria) or East Africa who had little contact with sedentary societies and rarely traded with cities, the nomads of the southern steppe (stretching from North Africa through Arabia and Persia to western India, or Saharasia) were, since the earliest times, intimately connected with sedentary peoples through war, trade, and religion (Perdue 2005: 30-31; Barendse 2002: 68; Khazanov 1983: 63-65). The 'real scourges' of India and China, Braudel concurred

comparable to the biblical plagues of Egypt, came from the great deserts and steppes. . . which are torrid under the summer sun, and in winter buried under enormous drifts of snow. . . As soon as [nomads] appeared in history, they were what they would

remain until their decline in the mid-seventeenth century: hordes of violent, cruel, pillaging horsemen full of daredevil courage (1994: 164).

But as Owen Lattimore (1940) observed in his landmark study, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, the distinction between pastoral nomads and sedentary populations, when human beings were not separated by natural barriers, only evolved gradually as each group increasingly specialized in activities in which they had a competitive advantage and

It was only when this diverging specialization had been carried out to a certain point that the marginal steppe society ceased to be marginal and committed itself definitely to the steppe. Having reached that point it was ready to take advantage of a steppe technique of horse usage in order to increase the efficiency of life within the steppe environment (Lattimore 1940: 59).

And once people of the steppe, diverging from the "Chinese" way of life, had realized that the practice of agriculture became less important to their standards of importance, power, and wealth, they began to place greater emphasis on the range and speed of their horses and on their abilities to be in command of a wide range of pastures (Lattimore 1940: 63-64).

Balance of power between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary cultivators was ever changing. If cultivators extended the arable by irrigation tanks and canals, pastoralists with superior resources of military man- and horse-power often held peasant societies to ransom. The vulnerability of sedentary societies in West, South, and East Asia to depredations by nomadic peoples stood in marked contrast to the experience of the peoples of Europe and the Western Mediterranean. The broken forests, rather than arid steppes, characteristic of the European landscape posed enormous logistical problems for the nomads and there were no nomadic incursions into Europe after the eleventh century—except for the Mongols on its eastern margins, and even these stopped after the thirteenth century (Sinor 1972: 181-82; Gommans 1998a: 132; Wink 1997: 24).<sup>6</sup>

Precisely as Europe's frontier with the nomads closed in the eleventh century, Saharasia—or more accurately, the arid regions of Central Asia

emerged as a huge continental *mediterrannée*, a vibrant interstitial region that widened the horizon of all its adjoining societies and open new channels for pastoralists, warriors, merchants, pilgrims and other restless wanderers (Gommans 1998a: 130).

Here, Turco-Mongol horsemen began to establish a string of conquest states stretching from the Saljuks in northern Iran through the Ghaznavids in northwestern India to

the Khitan and the Jurchen in northern China. Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as conquest states of the peoples of the Central Asian steppe expanded to encompass large swathes of China and the northern Indian subcontinent, warriors from the dry tracts of the southern Indian peninsula—the Yadavas, the Kakatiyas, the Hoysalas, and the Sambuvarayas—also asserted their dominance over the peoples of the fertile riverine and coastal zones (Gommans 1998b: 14-15; 1998a: 131; Talbot 2001).

Once conquest states had been established, new state builders faced the same problems confronting earlier dynasties: a shortage of pasture sufficient to sustain the numbers of horses required to control large populated territories. Chinggis Khan's intention of turning north China into pasture may have represented a keen strategic analysis of military imperatives but as his grandsons realized, a sustainable polity needed to combine the nomadic pastoralism of the steppe with sedentary agrarian zones. Thus, symbolic of the establishment of conquest states were the rise of a series of new frontier capitals—Delhi, Beijing, Vijayanagar, Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Golkonda—combining access to sources of mobile warfare (horses) and to an expanding agricultural base (Sinor 1972: 176, 180-81; Barfield 1989: 234-35; Gommans 1998b: 15; 1998a: 129-30; 2002: 23-37).

The location of long-standing capitals in frontier areas underlined the mutual dependence of nomads and rulers of large agrarian-commercial empires. Competitive relations between agriculture and pasture—as well as ecological and climatic conditions—meant that the latter lacked the extended grasslands required to provision their armies with sufficient numbers of high quality horses and their only potential suppliers were the nomads—"the very people against whom the cavalry mounted on imperial horses would be used" (Sinor 1972: 174). Conversely, since the horse was the only commodity the steppe produced in abundance, the nomads depended on sedentary peoples for essential or valued commodities. Ghazan Khan (1271-1304), a Mongol chief, succinctly framed the nomads' dilemma:

I am not on the side of the Tazik [Iranian] *ra'iyat*. If there is a purpose in pillaging them all, there is no one with more power to do this than I. Let us rob them together. But if you wish to be certain of collecting grain [*tagar*] and food [*ash*] for your tables in the future, I must be harsh with you. You must be taught reason. If you insult the *ra'iyat*, take their oxen and seed, and trample their crops into the ground, what will you do in the future?...The obedient *ra'iyat* must be distinguished from the *ra'iyat* who are our enemies. How should we not protect the obedient, allowing them to suffer distress and torment at our hand (quoted in Chaudhuri 1990: 268).

The Uighur had been so dependent on China for tribute that they even dispatched contingents to keep compliant dynasties in power by suppressing internal rebellions. This mutual dependence between nomadic and Chinese empires was so strong that Thomas Jefferson Barfield claims that if one collapsed the other followed soon after, “the nomads because they had lost their economic base, the Chinese because they had lost their protection” (1989: 9, 230).

The symbiotic relationship between nomadic and Chinese empires meant that with the singular exception of the Mongols, nomadic conquests occurred only when political instability in China led to a situation where there was no government capable of paying tribute (Barfield 1989: 9-11). Relations between nomadic and sedentary peoples were less well-regulated in the more chequered ecological continuation of Saharasia where arid lands with less than 1000 mm of rain offering pastoral nomadism a comparative advantage over settled agriculture till the nineteenth century were interspersed with fertile riverine valleys (Gommans 1998b: 4). Here, if unreliable harvests, long off-seasons, and extensive grazing lands meant that the dry zones had the greatest military potential, they also posed enormous challenges to state builders who could ill afford to leave the bulk of their potential military recruits to competing employers or allow them to set up their own protection-providing enterprises (Gommans 2002: 67, 88). The early seventeenth-century traveler, Joannes DeLaet reported that

The Mughal empire contains many provinces which are rendered difficult of access on account of their mountainous character and the dense forests with which they are covered. Large armies cannot operate in such districts, which are held by Radas [rajās]. . . If opposed by the Mogols with a greater force than they can cope with, they merely retreat into their mountains and await a better opportunity. (quoted in Singh 1995: 26, n.12)

The best resolution that the Mughals and their predecessors could do to what DaLaet characterized as ‘these dangerous diseases of the body politic’ was to provide leaders of warbands with access to the wealth of empire either by assimilating them into the imperial apparatus or by channeling their martial energies outside their realm.

These differences translated into divergent state-making strategies in China and in the Indian subcontinent. Though periodic nomadic invasions made landed gentries in both territorial designations less secure than their European counterparts (Gommans 2002: 40), the lack of internal frontiers enabled successive Chinese dynasties to rely on an imperial bureaucracy, again with

the exception of the Mongols. The intermingling of marchlands with sedentary zones in the subcontinent made pan-regional polities short-lived as they could never cohere the several ‘zones of military entrepreneurship’ (Gordon 1994: 182-208). This entailed the cooptation of leaders of warbands through revenue assignments and the adoption of an itinerant monarchic style to project imperial power over local power holders. From this perspective, the disdain shown by Bahadur Shah for maritime trade was paralleled by rulers devoting considerable energies to protect land routes within their empires, even taking measures to host travelers and traders through temples and charitable foundations (*waqf*).

Marshall Hodgson (1974), William McNeill (1984) and others have argued that the introduction of gunpowder and artillery led to a decline in the importance of the horse, and *ipso facto* of the nomads as state-builders who could effectively use the new military technologies created strong centralized polities—the ‘gunpowder empires’—all across Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, and Asia. There is little question that the introduction of firearms was met with hostility by the professional cavalry almost everywhere, with the significant exception of China. The Chinese exceptionalism, Joseph Needham (1986: 470) plausibly argued, was due to the control of the army by a non-hereditary bureaucracy. Elsewhere, just as feudal knights in Europe scorned medieval archers and crossbowmen who could bring down the knights without endangering themselves, professional cavalry from Mamluk Egypt through the subcontinent to Japan looked down on harquebusiers and cannoneers. Even as late as 1673, during the successful siege of Thanjavur by the Madurai Nayaka’s forces, witnessing the death of his son, the *Taṅjāvūr āndhrarājula carita* reports that Vijayaraghava—the Thanjavur Nayaka—called out to the opposing commander:

You must order your men not to shoot their guns (*tupākulu*) but to fight only with swords and spears. Do you want to know why? Because if one dies from some lousy bullet shot from a distance, he fails to enter heaven (*paralōkahāni*)—that is nothing like a warrior’s death (*āyudhamaranamu*) (quoted in Subrahmanyam 1987: 120-21).

Nevertheless, firearms were rarely decisive in the field in the large agrarian-commercial empires of East and South Asia till the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is underscored by the fact that though gunpowder and firearms were first discovered in China—the earliest evidence for firearms come from sculptures in a Buddhist cave temple dated to the early 1100s (Chase 2003: 32)—



their development proceeded far more rapidly in western Europe and Japan, two areas largely insulated from depredations by nomadic hordes because the early firearms were so cumbersome that they were virtually useless against cavalry charges. Thus, though firearms technology was transmitted from China to Europe by the Mongols, by the time the Chinese first encountered European firearms in the 1500s, these were much superior to the weapons of the Celestial Empire (Chase 2003: 3, 140). Just as the peculiarities of wet-rice cultivation did not facilitate the use of heavy machinery and just as large populations inhibited the introduction of labor-saving devices, so too did the difficulties of firing handguns on horseback constrain the development of firearms. The low cost of handguns also enabled peasants, townsmen, and local elites in the large agrarian-commercial empires of Asia to more effectively resist royal forces.

Despite the superiority of their guns, Europeans could not establish their dominance over much of Asia till the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century not only because their guns were relatively ineffective in the conditions of war but also because rulers of Asian states quickly started producing European-style weaponry. Within a year of Vasco da Gama's arrival, two Portuguese deserters were making European-style weaponry for rulers in the subcontinent and from the sixteenth century large numbers of Europeans took up service with Asian monarchs. The Jesuits—"the world's first global arms salesmen," Peter Perdue (2005: 539) calls them—the Portuguese, and the rival European trading companies also gifted guns to Asian potentates: Portuguese breechloading culverins presented to the Ming emperors in 1522,<sup>8</sup> the matchlocks carried by two Portuguese castaways on the Japanese island of Tanegashima in 1543, the guns regularly supplied by the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English to their allies in the subcontinent, or the Javanese princess, Tarurôgô, allegedly sold to a Dutchman for three guns, to cite just a few of the more salient instances (Cipolla 1965: 107-16; Needham 1986; Parker 1988: 129-30; Subrahmanyam 1987; Khan 2004: 59-90). At least till the second half of the seventeenth century, however, matchlocks could not be used by the mounted cavalry. Besides being heavy, inaccurate, and slow to load, in the hot tropical climates, these pieces rusted quickly. It was also hard for them to function in heavy monsoon downpours even if the powder was dry (Scammell 1980: 4; Perrin 1980: 15-16; Gordon 1998: 231; Khan 2004: 154; Chase 2003: 25). Simply put, what Nicola di Cosmo said of China, remains true for much of the subcontinent as well:

the presence of Western military advisors, technicians, and

engineers appears central and ancillary at the same time: central because without them the level of firearm technology achieved in China between 1600 and 1690 would have been either unattainable or achieved only much later; ancillary because it was the adaptation of technology to the specific needs of Chinese warfare, based on decisions made by the Chinese officials, which made the adoption of such technology and its further development possible. . . . A supposed Western military superiority remains both untested on evidential grounds and purely speculative even in theoretical terms, as military superiority is based only partly on technology. It requires a full assessment of the context of war, together with an analysis of the fighting parties' ability to mobilize, supply, and coordinate the movements of large numbers of soldiers (2004: 127).

In Japan, however, firearms were critical to political centralization under Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Beginning with Hideyoshi, and followed through by his Tokugawa successors, the Japanese shoguns ferreted out and confiscated guns and swords from the peasantry to contain challenges to their authority.

Seas and dense forests however blunted the effectiveness of mounted archers and heavy cavalry as indicated by the failures of the Mongol campaigns launched from Sichuan and Yunnan against rulers of the Southeast Asian mainland and those launched against Japan (Reid 1993: 203; Souyri 2001: 61-63; Wink 1997: 35-36). In mainland Southeast Asia, the inherent difficulty of overland communications between the east and west significantly undermined both the potential of prolonged conflict between major powers and the role of cavalries (Lieberman 2003: 60, 149). Here, however, firearms were more effective against the elephant corps which did not have the speed and maneuverability of light cavalries. In 1388, for instance, the Ming forces that had earlier been routed by the Maw Shan elephants, adopted 'volley firing'—one row of soldiers would shoot their fire-arrows (*shenjijan* or *huojian*) and if the elephants continued to advance, the second row would fire, and then the third—to overwhelm the Shan elephant corps and in the 1406-07 Ming invasion of Vietnam, the army was led by at least four "firearm generals" (Sun Laichen 2003: 500; 2006: 77).

The region's considerably smaller population limited the growth of commercial linkages and dry zones in the interior, where extensive wet-rice agriculture was practiced, had a demographic, and therefore military, superiority over the lowlands. Additionally, since it was easier to sail down the major arteries—the Irrawaddy and Chaophraya rivers—than to go upriver, capitals in the interior were better placed to quell revolts in the lowlands. Vietnam was a major exception as it lacked a central arterial river and its elongated coastline was

punctuated by several east-west valleys which complicated political integration.

By the mid-1500s, the introduction of European-style artilleries reinforced processes of political consolidation in the western and central regions of the Southeast Asian mainland as monarchies devised new political strategies to mobilize large infantries, build better fortifications, and exercise greater control over local powers, especially the ports which were the main conduits for guns and cannons. The arrival of European interlopers also fundamentally transformed political and economic conditions in archipelagic Southeast Asia and if major ports like Melaka soon succumbed to the Portuguese, other principalities, notably the Sultanate of Aceh, were strengthened by their ties to the Golkonda Sultanate and the Sublime Porte and even blockaded Portuguese Melaka on occasion. In short, in Southeast Asia, patterns of socio-historical change followed a different trajectory from those in peninsular India, southern China, and Tokugawa Japan.

This difference is underscored by the far more impressive development of handicraft production in China and the Indian subcontinent than in mainland or archipelagic Southeast Asia. The ability of areas under wet-rice cultivation to support larger densities of population fostered the spread of craft production but not the development of labor-saving devices. Technological improvements tended to be scale-neutral and labor intensive and were typically implemented to raise product quality and output. It was manifested by an increasing specialization in ever-narrower segments of the production process as evident by the multiplication of occupational castes. The progressive elaboration of the division of labor and the spread of cultivation to the interior led both to a ruralization of craft production and to a greater monetization of the economy. The widespread dispersal of craft production, the increasing breadth and density of commercial linkages, and the evolution of financial institutions and credit mechanisms did not, however, lead to the development of capitalist relations. Even though skilled craftsmen could earn much more than less skilled artisans, in the absence of labor-saving implements, these advantages were individual rather than institutional and successful artisans and traders tried to safeguard their political influence and social status by becoming land owners—which again, as we have already noted briefly, conferred prestige and local power and rather than economic advantage.

The increase in artisanal production also led to the increasing exports of cotton textiles from the subcontinent to locations on both wings of the Indian Ocean and by the seventeenth century, Holden Furber (1965: 12) even

argued that if “mercantilist navigation laws of Britain and other European nations had not prevented it, there would have been a brisk direct trade in Indian cotton-piece goods between India on the one hand, and both West Africa and the Caribbean on the other.” A crucial ingredient in the extraordinary market penetration achieved by cotton textiles produced by subcontinental weavers was because steady increases in agricultural productivity kept food prices low.<sup>9</sup> In the 1750s, while the South Indian gold pagoda could purchase 90 pounds of rice, its equivalent 8s. could only purchase 70 pounds of bread, in caloric terms the same as 45 pounds of rice, in England (Parthasarathi 1998: 101-02).<sup>10</sup> In other words, while weekly wages in terms were broadly comparable in South India and in England in the eighteenth century, money wages in South India were about half the English level and therein lay its competitive advantage. Consequently, the only way European manufacturers could overcome India’s competitive advantage, Braudel argued, was to use machinery to offset lower subsistence costs in India:

The cotton revolution, first in England, but very soon all over Europe, began by imitating Indian industry, went on to take revenge by catching up with it, and finally outstripped it. The aim was to produce fabrics of comparable quality at cheaper prices. The only way to do so was to introduce machines—which alone could effectively compete with Indian textile workers (1984: 572).

Intensive agriculture and increasing craft production generated expansive webs of commercial linkages but these relations differed significantly from the zonal divisioning of labor in the capitalist world-economy invoked by the idiom of core-periphery relations. This is evident both in the long-distance trade in some high-value commodities as well as in the exchanges over long distances of some low-value bulk goods. In the first instance, relationships between highly monetized economies and non-monetized economies—as in the case of the exchange of cloth from Gujarat for ivory and gold from the Zimbabwe Plateau on the Swahili coast in the sixteenth century—was often an exchange between two distinct social systems. Even though this had all the characteristics of an unequal trade between primary products and finished goods, and high profits were reported in this trade by Portuguese officials,<sup>11</sup> gold had little value in a non-monetized economy and was, as Pearson (1998: 115) notes, exchanged like any other commodity by weight. Gold production in the Zimbabwe Plateau was a discretionary activity and peasants washed and mined for gold only during slack periods in the agricultural cycle to exchange it for more utilitarian commodities like cloth. Even in the late eighteenth

century, Diogo do Couto observed:

As the Kaffirs are numerous, they always obtain a great quantity [of gold] although they are by nature so indolent that when they have found sufficient to buy two pieces of cloth to clothe themselves, they will not work any more (quoted in Pearson 2003).

Trade in commodities that functioned as money—gold and silver, certainly, but also lesser monetary media such as copper and even cowrie shells—between different social systems also refutes Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974: 40-42, 306-07) claim that trade between two world-systems is a trade in luxuries, that is a trade in dispensable goods. Currency media are after all central to the functioning of circuits of exchange in highly monetized regions as well as to the exercise of political power (for the payment of salaries to troops, collection of taxes, etc.). Yet, commodities can function as money only because of their scarcity or because their conditions of production were unknown in locations where they circulated as currency. A cowrie-based currency as Marion Johnson (1970b: 18) pertinently observed, "would be unworkable if money could be picked up in quantity by every beachcomber." In the case of West Africa where, since at least the eleventh century cowries—the shells of *Cypraea moneta* from the Maldive Islands and of *Cypraea annulus* from the East African coasts—had functioned as local market currencies after being conveyed through North African routes, it was the greater integration of West Africa into European-based political and economic networks and the increasing imports of cowries that led to a devaluation of cowries and to their eventual eclipse (Johnson 1970b; 1970a; Heimann 1980).

Precisely because Wallerstein does not acknowledge the extent and depth of commercial relations in the trading world of Asia, he discounts the importance of bullion flows from the Americas to Asia after the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru and the Portuguese occupation of Brazil. Thus, he claims that though the extraction of gold and silver from the Americas "was essential to the operation of the [European] world-economy, and it was essential to the extent that it was used as *money*" (Wallerstein 1980: 109), he summarily dismisses bullion's role in Asia. There, he claims, it was merely used "to decorate the temples, palaces, and clothing of Aristocratic classes" (1974: 41),<sup>n</sup> thereby ignoring overwhelming evidence on the increasing commercialization of economic relationships in much of Asia, especially in China and the subcontinent.

In the second instance, even when the trade was in necessities, as in the case of the supply of rice to areas that specialized in cloth production, this exchange did

not necessarily have the exploitative character of trade between core and peripheral zones in the capitalist world-economy. Locations exporting manufactured goods did not reap disproportionate benefits from the systemic divisioning of labor precisely because conditions of production in distant locales was unknown as indicated by the example of the exchange of gold and cloth on the Swahili coast. The absence of the sedimented layers of accumulation associated with core zones is underlined by the peculiarly labile quality of cities along the Indian Ocean coastlines and their related hinterlands, their striking lack of monumentality. In Southeast Asia, the lightness of building materials not only meant that cities could be rebuilt easily but also that there was no distinction between the sylvan simplicity of the country and the sophisticated urbanity of the town as evident from a French Jesuit's description of Aceh in the seventeenth-century:

Imagine a forest of coconut trees, bamboos, pineapples and bananas, through the midst of which passes a quite beautiful river all covered with boats; put into this forest an incredible number of houses made of canes, reeds and bark, and arrange them in such a way that they sometimes form streets, sometimes separate quarters: divide these various quarters by meadows and woods: spread throughout this forest as many people as you see in your towns, when they are well populated. . . (quoted in Reid 1993: 88-89).

As building materials were light and inexpensive, a typical strategic response to attack was withdrawal into the forests to wait while the invaders plundered the city and departed with the spoils as an English trading party to Indragiri found out in 1634. Returning to this Sumatran port after an interval of six years, they had to spend two days searching for the town because "the whole population had moved three days' journey up the river in response to an Acehnese invasion" (Reid 1988: 122-23; 1993: 89-90). Even more astonishingly, when the Portuguese besieged Melaka in 1511, the king and his court retreated into the interior on the assumption that Afonso de Albuquerque's forces would merely plunder the entrepot and sail away!

In the subcontinent, the monumentality of Mughal palaces and forts and Hindu temples highlight the absence of a civic architecture. In the fourteenth-century, when Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi, he thought it was 'the greatest of the cities of India (*mudun al-hind*) and even of all the cities of the Islamic East.' But, soon afterwards, when Muhammad bin Tughlaq decided to shift his capital to Daulatabad in the Deccan, the Moroccan traveler said Delhi was 'entirely abandoned. . . without fire, smoke, or torch. . . immense city that it is. . . it was empty, abandoned

and its population completely scattered' (quoted in Wink 2004: 74-75). Ferishta similarly recorded that the rapid depopulation of settlements was a characteristic of the subcontinent and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier wrote that after the Mughal court moved to Shahjahanabad, even the nobles remaining in Delhi lived in tents (Tavernier 1977: I, 78; Wink 2004: 69). In the mid-seventeenth century, when Surat was one of the grandest ports in the world,

The walls of the city are built of earth, and the houses of private persons are like barns, being constructed of nothing but reeds, covered with cow-dung, mixed with clay to fill the interstices. . . In the whole of Surat, there are only nine or ten well-built houses. (Tavernier 1977: I, 6)

And Matteo Ricci was to observe that in Ming China, buildings were constructed to last for a generation rather than to endure for generations (Chaudhuri 1990: 198). The ephemeral prosperity—even existence—of glittering entrepôts, and the lack of monumentality of cities underscores that the founts of their fortune lay in fleeting situational factors rather than on processes of accumulation that characterize core zones in the capitalist world-economy. Hence, rather than deploy the idiom of core-periphery relations to characterize the exchange of primary products for finished goods—say, rice for cloth—it is perhaps more appropriate to view this as a trade between grain-producing areas and weaving areas.

Though the Portuguese, by virtue of their naval superiority—like the Dutch and the English after them—claimed sovereignty over the high seas, and made some effort to exercise sovereign authority by compelling local vessels to pay a 'protection rent' or risk attacks, imprisonment of their crews, and confiscation of their cargos, it was largely inefficient. As we shall see this was primarily because the Lusitanians could not challenge the large terrestrial empires with impunity as they could easily overrun the Portuguese-controlled ports. Often, as in the case of Portuguese Goa, trade with neighboring territories—its *umland*—was more lucrative than overseas trade and hence an additional reason not to provoke hostilities (Barendse 2002: 60).

Commercial linkages across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea were greatly strengthened by the arrival of the Europeans primarily due to two reasons: their conveyance of gold and silver from the Americas to India and China, and their own participation in intra-Asian trade—from Arabia through the Indian subcontinent, Melaka and the Indian Ocean archipelago to China and Japan—to economize on their export of bullion. Since there was little demand in Asia for European goods, Europeans could purchase Asian commodities only through the export of bullion, especially silver since the

gold price of silver was substantially higher in China than in Europe. They were, hence, as Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giraldez (1995: 203) were to claim, merely "intermediaries in the trade between the New World and China." In a continent starved of currency media, inflows of gold, silver, copper, and other humbler currency media—like the cowries the Portuguese conveyed to Bengal in large quantities—were essential. "When the Chinese smell silver," wrote a Portuguese Captain-General of Macao, Manuel de Cũmara de Noronha, in the 1630s "they will bring mountains of merchandise" (quoted in Moloughney and Xia Weizhong 1997: 167).

Most notably, in a bid to stem the flow of bullion from Europe, chartered trading companies—especially the VOC—became major participants in intra-Asian trade and helped forge and reinforce trade dependencies between textile-producing areas of India and the eastern Indian Ocean archipelago as well as between China and Japan through its role in the export of Japanese silver to China (Prakash 1998b; 1998a). Their role in conveying the currency media vital to lubricate the wheels of commerce in the Indian Ocean world and in China, their participation in the intra-Asian trade, and indeed their participation in the inter-state systems of Asia, implied that the Europeans were integral elements of the Indian Ocean and Chinese world orders. Yet, this did not mean that these world orders were 'nodes in a hemisphere-wide network or process of evolving capitalism' as Blaut claimed. The rhythms of economic activity were dictated by different processes, and there were no tendencies to forge and reinforce alliances between mercantile/financial elites and state-builders that was central to the emergence of capitalism in Europe. Put differently, as Mao Zedong once said, if differently constituted entities are subject to the same processes, the results would not be identical. Thus, after the bullion famine of the fifteenth century, the availability of new sources of precious metals from Central Europe, Japan, and the Americas led to world-encompassing circuits of exchange, their impact on the different societies across the planet varied considerably as the reactions in the different locations were conditioned by their peculiar socio-economic and political constitutions.

The arrival of the northern European trading companies, and their vigorous participation in intra-Asian trade also changed the balance of power between indigenous merchants and the foreigners. As European ships provided better protection, local merchants began to ship goods aboard their vessels and thus the decline of local vessels were not tantamount to a decline in their participation in intra-Asian trade. Rather, by exploiting the new opportunities, merchants from the subcontinent

expanded their orbits of activity. Since the English and the Dutch operations were commercial ventures, rather than state enterprises like the Portuguese *Estado*, their warehouses and factories in the territories of subcontinental potentates were vulnerable to retaliatory action if they violated their agreements at sea as we have already seen. This also meant that powerful administrative officials like Mir Muhammad Said, head of the revenue administration of Golkonda, or Mir Muhammad Murad of Masulipatnam, or powerful Mughal officials like Itimaduddaula and Asaf Khan began to outfit ships to trade with ports in the Persian Gulf and the eastern Indian Ocean archipelago. Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Christopher Bayly call them 'portfolio capitalists.' However, this is very different from the *liaisons dangereuses* between governing and mercantile elites in Europe because these figures were not only not enduring features of the pre-colonial subcontinent. Subrahmanyam and Bayly (1988: 416) concede that "in so far as they persisted, it was through buying or fighting their way into land rights,"—that is to say, that they transformed themselves into landlords rather than to a capitalist class. Instead of signaling an alliance between ruling and commercial-banking elites, or the penetration of the latter into the state apparatus, these 'portfolio capitalists' were simply some administrative or military officials who derived additional revenues from their commercial ventures (Parthasarathi 1996: 86).

As both the overland and the seaborne trade was dominated by a large numbers of small traders—transmitting market intelligence through networks of kinship, religion, and caste and reinforced small, localized market niches (Palat 1991: 27)—who were unable to accumulate capital on a scale sufficient to subordinate the immediate producers. In short, it was, as Robert Marks (1998: 11) characterized the economy of late imperial China (1500-1850), "commercialization without capitalism."

Rather than incorporating the histories of the 'non-Europes' into a European modernity that sees a drive to capitalism operating uniformly across the Eastern Hemisphere as revisionist historians do, this recovery of patterns of socio-historical change in societies based on irrigated riziculture offers a way to put Eurocentric models of societal transformation in their place. Though the ability of lands under wet-rice cultivation to support larger densities of population than the staple crops of Europe promoted a more wide-ranging divisioning of labor in China, India, and Japan and thereby generated expanding circuits of exchange, these were based on very different imperatives than the expansion of trade networks in Europe as indicated above. Since

technological conditions of production and the greater densities of population in areas under wet-rice cultivation did not privilege the accumulation of capital, the creation of larger units did not provide economic advantages in most agricultural and craft sectors. Consequently, there was no impetus towards forging *liaisons dangereuses* between state and mercantile/financial elites that undergrid the emergence of capitalism in Europe. Socio-historical and ecological conditions in areas suitable for wet-rice cultivation—ranging from the arid lands and deep forests interspersed with fertile river valleys that prevented the emergence of pan-subcontinental polities in India to the relative insulation from nomadic incursions enjoyed by Japan and much of mainland and archipelagic Southeast Asia—led to divergences among these areas as already alluded to above.

## NOTES

1. While Wong limits his comparisons to Europe and China, Pomeranz ranges more widely to include Gujarat, the Kanti plain, and even parts of Southeast Asia. Pomeranz, however, largely limits himself to the economy while Wong also looks at state formation in Europe and China.
2. Similarly, Blaut (1992: 356) argued that "Capitalism would (one suspects) have arrived in any case, but it would have arrived many centuries later and it would not have seated itself in Europe alone (or first) had it not been for European colonialism in America." And again: "If the Western Hemisphere had been more accessible, say to South Indian centres than to European centres, then very likely India would have become the home of capitalism, the site of the bourgeois revolution, and the ruler of the world" (Blaut 1992: 369).
3. The original translation of this passage had translated Braudel's '*rapport de force*' as 'balance of power' rather than as 'relationship of force.' The latter interpretation is suggested by Immanuel Wallerstein (1991: 210).
4. The creation of a salt administration since the Tang dynasty was designed to provide a stable source of revenue for the government since salt could be produced only along the coasts and in some marshes and interior lakes while it was universally consumed. Hence, it was easy to levy a tax at source and as the returns would be higher if the incidence of the tax was small, there was an incentive to keep the tax low (Adshead 2004: 50). A monopoly on iron was implemented to facilitate collection of taxes or the distribution to merchants on a quota basis rather than to generate substantial profits.
5. Rulers of small port-cities and local officials of ports, when these were part of larger jurisdictional entities, were certainly more conscious of the need to protect commercial interests of local merchants. Or, as Ashin Das Gupta (1982: 421-22) once put it: "Golconda or Bijapur, Vijayanagara or the Mughal Empire never had any serious interest in maritime trade and usually relegated all matters relating to the sea to their local administrations. In an emergency which called for central assistance, it was the local administration and the regional network of mercantile interests which tried frantically to

- persuade the Olympians to intervene, not usually with the kind of success they desired."
6. Based on the assumption that in the early second millennium 120 acres of grazing land was required to support one horse per year, Denis Sinor (1972: 181) estimated that the Hungarian Plain could provide pasture for only 205,920 horses compared to the Mongolian grasslands which could support 2,500,000.
  7. After Mughal forces commanded by Mir Jumla conquered Assam and returned with many iron guns and Western-style gunpowder in the seventeenth-century, a tradition arose suggesting that guns and gunpowder were invented there and then transmitted to China (Tavernier 1977: II, 216-17; Chaudhuri 1990: 101-02). However, the earliest mention of firearms in Assam according to local records—the *burunji*—date to the early sixteenth century, suggesting that the Ahom received firearms technology from Tibet (Sun Laichen 2003: 504-05).
  8. There is some evidence to suggest that breechloaders had arrived in the southern regions of China by around 1510 and, given that the Portuguese reached Melaka only in 1509, this suggests an extremely rapid pace of technology transfer. The first Portuguese ship to visit a Chinese port was in 1514 (Cipolla 1965: 107; Needham 1986: 372; Di Cosmo 2004: 131).
  9. In Tokugawa Japan, agricultural production in 1850 was some 25 percent higher than in 1730 (Sugihara Kaoru 2003: 11-12).
  10. This claim has been disputed by Stephen Broadberry and Bishnupriya Gupta (2006) who dismiss without examination the possibility that the higher yields of lands under wet-rice cultivation and the reduced subsistence requirements (clothing, shelter, and fuel) in warmer areas may have contributed to higher living standards in the Yangzi delta, Bengal, and the Coromandel. Additionally, while they argue that despite the failure of higher 'silver' wages to translate into higher 'grain' wages in north-western Europe due to an 'industrious revolution,' again without examination, they rule out of court the possibility of a similar spurt of industriousness in the rice-growing tracts of India and China.
  11. A Portuguese source reported that small yellow and blue beads purchased in Cambay for 1.05 maticals could be sold in 1525 in Sofala for 21.28 maticals and that cloth would sell for five times its purchase price. Others reported that cloth that cost 100 in Gujarat sold for 220 in Malindi and 780 in Sofala (Pearson 1998: 113). A matical or *mithqal* was an Arabic weight (also known as metical or nital) of approximately 4.25 grams (Pearson 2001: 32).
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