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AUTHOR Farmer, Edward L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper wrestles with some of the problems of Eurocentrism that must be confronted in teaching world history. Alert to the problem of perspective, the paper focuses on teaching strategies and not on theoretical justifications for personal opinions. The paper addresses the concepts of Western civilization and a modern world. It discusses five rules from an area studies perspective: (1) Handle the concept of civilization with care in a world history course; (2) Be alert to the problem of Eurocentrism; (3) Do not overemphasize the European origins of modernity; (4) Ask what the term "West" means outside Europe; and (5) Pay attention to East Asian (and other) regional perspectives. The paper explores each rule in detail and concludes that the challenge of teaching world history is to figure out how to prioritize and balance a story that could, potentially, include everything. The paper advocates the need to adopt world history strategies that allow educators to create narratives that are pluralistic or multi-centered to avoid undue parochialism, suggesting comparative strategies for this purpose. (Contains 7 notes and 7 references.) (BT)

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Western Civilization, Modernity, and World History:

Some Perspectives From East Asia

By

Edward L. Farmer

University of Minnesota

This draft paper was prepared for the World 2000 Conference on Teaching World History and World Geography, February 11-12, 2000, Austin, Texas.

At one point I considered changing the title of this paper to something like: "Inspecting the Baggage: How to Purge Our Teaching of World History of Undesirable Bits of Eurocentrism." I take it to be the assignment of this panel on "Western Civilization in the Modern World" to wrestle with some of the problems of Eurocentrism that we all must confront in teaching World History. Toward that end I will try to keep the focus on teaching strategies and not venture too far into theoretical justifications for my opinions. Those can be offered later if anyone is interested.

What is at stake here is the problem of perspective, of understanding, and of balance or fairness. In such matters, terminology counts for a lot. In what follows I will take up both the concept of Western Civilization and the idea of a Modern World. In fact, it may be necessary to dissect these terms into their constituent elements - "Western" and "Civilization" in the former case and "Modern" and World" in the latter. There is a lot of baggage here, and we need to open some of it up to scrutiny.

Already, in my first sentence, I have used the term "Eurocentrism" which does not occur in the title of our panel. It is a term with attitude, less liable to be associated with a

feeling of warm approbation than "Western Civilization" or even the notion of progressive development that some might associate with the idea of the "Modern World." Eurocentrism is a word favored by those who feel that they stand, literally or figuratively, outside of Europe, and are not entirely happy with the contributions of Western Civilization or with the degree to which the agents and champions of that cause have sought to color the Modern World. Eurocentrism is most apt to be used by those with a keen awareness of one or more other areas of the world. I come from such a background, specifically, from East Asian area studies. In the current age of globalization, area studies have fallen on hard times. It is not my goal here to take up the defense of area studies, but to use an area studies perspective to suggest some of the problems that Eurocentrism poses for World History, especially when one begins from a non-Western or non-European starting point.

To underscore what I think we ought to do more of in the teaching of World History I will put my advice in the form of some simple maxims or rules to keep in mind. The paper will outline five of these: (1) Handle the concept of civilization with care in a World History context, (2) Be alert to the problem of Eurocentrism, (3) Don't overemphasize the European origins of modernity, (4) Ask what the term "West" means outside

of Europe, and (5) Pay attention to East Asian (and other) regional perspectives.

1. TREAT CIVILIZATIONS WITH CARE

The terms "civilized" and "civilization" are fraught with danger. Used as an adjective, "civilized" implies a value judgment, a way of saying some people are more advanced in their cultural attainments than others. We often find such claims being made, more in the past perhaps than in the present when the term civilized smacks of political incorrectness. The Chinese, for example, were notoriously fond of labeling their neighbors as barbarians of the four directions. Such use of the term civilized is pejorative, not analytical, and can be dispensed with in the teaching of World History.

The term civilization also is controversial in a World History context. Some avoid the term because of its associations with the stereotyping mentioned above and some use it freely to talk about Western Civilization and even World Civilization. I would like to chart a middle course between these extremes - to retain the term civilization but to restrict its use in talking about World History. There are three main points to keep in mind here.

First, the meaning of the term civilization. I think it can have utility as an analytical concept if it is carefully defined. I like to use the term civilization to characterize the

largest culture-bearing units to emerge in historical times prior to the nineteenth century. In this sense the term can be used to classify cultural configurations that extended over a large territory and endured for a long time. Civilizations are cultural wholes that spread beyond the limits of a single polity, society, ethnic group, or speakers of a common language. Thus one can often equate them with culture zones or regions in which common practices and beliefs were widely shared. Hence we can speak of civilizations in various parts of Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas and we can argue about whether the cultural traits that evolved in a particular region constituted the components of a common civilization.[1] In temporal terms civilizations were able to perpetuate or replicate themselves for centuries. Typically the work of perpetuation and replication was carried out by elites who shared common perspectives and values across a span of states or language groups and transmitted them down through many generations. Defining a civilization as the largest of the historically evolved culture-bearing units invites us to be alert to the way cultural beliefs and practices were formulated, communicated, and replicated in historical time.

Such a definition of civilization is minimal and flexible. It is concerned primarily with scale, not value. It does not require or imply judgments of relative moral worth. This said,

there is room for argument about the definition and application of the term. Plenty of ink has been expended on whether such elements as written records or cities are necessary constituents of a civilization. And one can ask if a region in which indigenous peoples shared cultural practices (say Central Asia or North America) should be classified as the home of a civilization. Such matters of definition and application are by no means insulated from value judgements and the kinds of biases that render the term civilized a liability.

Second, if the term civilization is used to characterize large-scale cultural units with a regional character it can make little sense to talk about world civilization. This problem appears first in the close connection between civilizations and religions. To the extent that civilizations are the projects of trans-societal elites with shared world views religions are often at the core of what a civilization is. Thus a number of questions arise when we seek to equate religious community and civilization. Where religious beliefs and practices are transmitted from one region to another we are forced to make judgments about the utility of expanding the definition of the civilization (e. g., Buddhist civilization, Islamic civilization) to a wider range of societies.

In the modern era, the global influence of Western European powers and the transmission of European practices to other

continents lead to similar kinds of questions. Here too a host of judgments are required. Should one extend the definition of European Civilization to all settler societies and colonies under European governance, to only those areas where European settlers outnumbered indigenous peoples, to areas where European languages and religious practices became established, or to no areas outside of Europe other than Iceland? My response to such problems would be to restrict the term civilization to regional cultural units and to think about the diffusion of cultural practices and the migrations of peoples as processes that carried cultural elements of civilizations to new regions that require new designations. Thus I think that it is confusing and imprecise to talk about civilizations without strict regional restrictions. To speak of Western Civilization or Islamic Civilization as a trans-regional cultural unit does not get us very far. One can find Christians and Muslims on every continent. If they are viewed as extensions of civilizations then the civilizations they represent are thoroughly interpenetrated and lose their regional character.

Third, to avoid such confusions I advocate that we give up the use of the term civilization in modern times in favor of talking about nation-states. With the formation of modern nation-states and the rise national identities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries civilizations ceased to be the dominant

cultural forms they once had been. National identities were asserted at the expense of wider regional identities in the competition to consign all the land area of the globe to particular nation-states and their colonies. This process led in time to the formation of new national states and the emergence of new national identities around the world.

2. BE ALERT TO EUROCENTRISM

Eurocentrism plagues the World History enterprise in numerous ways, both practical and conceptual. On the most practical level, we must recognize that World History courses appeared in recent years in institutions that for decades had featured survey courses on Western Civilization. Little wonder then that these courses looked a lot like the Western Civilization courses they joined and in many cases replaced. Most faculty assigned to teach World History had never taken a World History course. They had taken and had often taught Western Civ courses. Thus the transition to World History was frequently made by adding content from Asia, Africa, and the Americas to a course that still traced the rise and triumph of Western Civilization. Textbooks reveal the transition process very clearly. The first generation were Western Civ texts with a chapter or two on India and China added here and there.[2] The second generation texts were more of an amalgam: the world outside Europe and North America might occupy half of the pages but the chronology and

conceptualization still featured the old Western Civ issues and topics: Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Age of the Enlightenment, etc.

In the last few years a third generation of texts has appeared. Like the second generation, these works are written by teams of authors, but the design and conceptualization is much more balanced. The focus is on the world, not on Western Civilization, and the treatment is politically correct. Care is taken to include women, people of all races, and common folk as well as elites. Most strikingly, the perspective has shifted from a celebratory concern with cultural self-image at the heart of the Western Civ enterprise, to an emphasis on material culture characteristic of the best World History scholarship. Still, even the latest texts give a disproportionate amount of space to the experiences and accomplishments of Westerners.

Why, even in the third generation of texts, should this be so? I suspect it is so because of the demands of the market. Publishers are tying to span the shift of demand from Western Civ to World History by fudging the boundaries. They intensely vet proposals and manuscripts among a range of classroom teachers, many of whom prefer a Eurocentric perspective or are trying to make one course serve two ends. In this case I would submit that marketing concerns are not giving us so much "dumbed down" products, although there is that too, but "fuzzed up"

products that fail to reflect clearly thought-through visions of World History.

Beyond such practical concerns the World History enterprise is beset with knotty theoretical tangles that challenge our ability to think clearly, to communicate effectively with one another, and to offer our students a realistic perspective on their world. These theoretical difficulties are largely byproducts of recent history. We live in the shadow of the immediate past - the nineteenth century in which Western European powers exercised something approaching global hegemony and the twentieth century in which the United States emerged as the most influential nation. These overwhelming realities threaten our understanding of World History in two principal ways: they shape our identities and they dictate the vocabulary we use to think and talk about World History.

The identity question is already implicit in what I said about Eurocentrism. Our population is largely, but by no means entirely, descended from European ancestors. European influences are dominant in many aspects of our culture. Hence the importance of Western Civ in the curriculum. To avoid misunderstanding, I should stress that while I want to separate the Western Civ enterprise from the teaching of World History I do not disparage Western Civ, I celebrate it. We cannot make sense of our society and its culture without special attention

to this essential component of our historical roots. The problem I want to draw attention to here is the degree to which this aspect of our cultural identity colors our understanding of the wider world. As Americans we need to be aware of our European heritage without falling into the trap of thinking that we are Europeans. We come from all the continents - the Americas, Africa, and Asia as well as Europe. And, most important, we are not in Europe. The impact of nineteenth-century European hegemony continues to distort our historical perspective. Within the historical profession we need to seek ways to advance our understanding of European history without letting it dominate our view of the past. The same thing is true for our understanding of American history. Here we confront the fact that we are trying to study and teach about the world from within the wealthiest and most influential society. The temptation to see ourselves as somehow at the center of World History or on it cutting edge constantly threatens to subvert our search for breadth and balance.

The European parentage of our vocabulary imposes another major handicap on our historical understanding. One of the consequences of the European hegemony just alluded to is the fact that much of the terminology and many of the concepts we use to do historical work are of European origin and carry the stains of Eurocentric bias. This begins with the names of the

continents - the privileging of Europe as the sole culture zone accorded a continental designation - and goes on to such absurdities as naming the Americas after a European and designating indigenous peoples there as Indians. Eurocentric terminology, such as Middle East, Far East, and Orient, compound the problem, especially when used in North America where they are doubly misleading. Strides have been made in sensitizing historians to the influence of names, but little progress has been made in standardizing less Eurocentric terms.[3] I take the coining of terms like Afrasia to indicate the connected landmasses of Africa and Eurasia as a step in the right direction. Much remains to be done here.

The problem does not stop with names. All the conventions of our thought and communication bear the hallmarks of European origin. Our discourse is carried on in English. We measure time with a Christian solar calendar and according to imaginary divisions of the earth based on the location of the British Naval Observatory at Greenwich.[4] Global adoption or employment of such conventions have a great deal to do with who was powerful when; i.e., these standards reflect European domination at the time when steam power shrunk the globe. One might argue that imposition of such standards, regardless of place of origin, moves us closer to common global usage and hence to the possibility of more objective World History. Against this pious

hope we may observe that in the era of greatest American influence the United States has shunned the adoption of the metric system in favor of the more parochial Fahrenheit temperatures and English miles, acres, gallons, and the like. Being influential in the world is not the same as being in tune with the world. Doing World History entails seeing past our own identities to those of others and somehow figuring out where we fit in a bigger picture. To the extent that we assume ourselves to be at the center of the world we will have trouble grasping the contours of the whole or working out our relative position.

3. THE EUROPEAN ORIGINS OF MODERNITY

Let us turn now to the question of modernity. What is modernity and where did it come from? Furthermore, if we can agree on a definition of the modern and identify its sources, how important is its genetic heritage?

There are many ways to use, and misuse, the terms "modern" and "modernity." For the purposes of this panel we can adopt a very general designation of the modern world to include at least the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and perhaps also an "early modern" era before that. (I like to use 1350 to 1750 as a definition of the early modern period. I will try to stay away from the question of whether it makes sense to speak of a post modern era.) Presumably the modern era can be marked off by some set of changes or developments that differentiate recent

centuries from the slow evolution of the long duration that went before. Recognizing that historical change is infinitely complex we may still, for the purposes of World History instruction, select a handful of factors around which to concentrate our narratives and analyses. If asked to make a list, I feel sure that each of us would come up with a somewhat different set of definitions with considerable areas of overlap. For the sake of argument I will venture four "revolutionary" elements essential to the modern transformation: (1) first, picking up speed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a commercial revolution that linked the global economy together and culminated in the emergence of capitalism, (2) somewhat later, most notably in the nineteenth century, an industrial/energy revolution that transformed the nature of work and shrank the globe with steam-powered transportation on land and sea, (3) the emergence of formalized scientific discourse through learned societies and their publications to create a socially-constructed, open-ended and ever-expanding body of "scientific" knowledge or truth, and (4) an on-going discourse on human rights that took off in the French and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century.

The point I wish to make about this list, or another list that you might devise in its place, is the degree to which these transformative developments, definitive of the modern era, were European, even Western European, in their genesis. One might

argue that the commercial revolution was a gradual formation of a trading system on a global scale and that merchants and traders from all parts of the world took part in the process. Recently, historians have been busy finding the elements of capitalism in a number of societies outside of Europe. I do not doubt that we will learn much from such inquiries. But it still strikes me that the essential components of the modern corporation - the managerial structures, the investment instruments, the legal protections of property, and the like - all go back to European roots such as the Dutch and English East India Companies. In the case of the other factors the European origins of modernization are even clearer. The question is what we are to make of this European origin. Does it mean that subsequent "modernization" is a form of "Europeanization" or "Westernization"? What is the link between Western Civilization and the Modern World?

The entry on "modernization" in the Penguin Dictionary of Third World Terms puts the matter this way:

> Modern and modernization are highly subjective terms. The term 'modern' implies that which pertains to the contemporary period. It suggests a counter-position to that which went on in the past. To modernize is to adopt the customs, habits and culture of present times. In its applications to the Third World, modernization implies the adoption of the institutions and values of the West. Behind this view is the assumption that progress in the Third World means the discarding of traditional institutions in favour of those that exist in the West. Western society is

posited as a model to which modernizing nations ought to aspire.[5]

The entry goes on to a refutation of the assumptions of modernization theory and an assertion of the modernity of the Third World or the South even as it coexists with a wealthier West or North. Setting these issues aside, it seems to me that the naïve modernization theory of the 1950s was right in one important respect. A process of convergence is everywhere observable; questions of relative wealth aside, cultural forms and practices are drawing closer together. Older practices, and many indigenous languages are eroding or dying out. We can observe people on all continents wearing blue denim pants and running shoes and drinking Coca-Cola. Does this mean that they are Westernized?

A couple of observations may be offered in response to this question. The first is to note that the radical "new" conditions that demarcate the modern era were no less destructive to traditional beliefs and practices in Europe than they have been elsewhere. The commercial and industrial revolutions wreaked havoc with premodern European social structures. Scientific knowledge challenged and threatened to discredit many teachings of the Christian theologians who had for centuries claimed a monopoly on the truth. Doctrines of individual equality disrupted the political and social orders in ways that were, and

still are, literally revolutionary. These modern changes were not so much expressions of the essence of European or Western culture as they were threats to what had gone before. When their influence reached beyond Europe they had similarly disruptive impacts. It was not the European character but the innovative character of modern changes that made them influential outside of Europe. Modern change can be likened to an influenza epidemic: the Europeans caught if first and passed it on to others. It was not a normal part of European life; it just started there.

As the quotation above about modernization theory indicates there is ample room for confusion about what is modern and what is Western and how the two are related. This confusion has plagued Europeans and non-European alike. Europeans who thought themselves superior to or more advanced than others were apt to think that all European practices were superior to alternatives elsewhere. When the first Jesuit fathers got to China in the late sixteenth century they discovered that their astronomical calculations were more accurate than those currently available in China. Still, Matteo Ricci was hardly justified in disparaging the Chinese science of that day because the Chinese believed in a five element theory whereas the Jesuits thought there were only four elements. Similarly, people in the Third World, when they became convinced of the superior power of

Europeans were apt to be undiscriminating in their admiration for and adoption of European ideas and customs. Reformers in nineteenth-century China thought that they could strengthen and enrich their country by adopting Western technology while preserving the essential core of their Confucian beliefs. When that strategy failed, a later generation of patriots thought it would be necessary to adopt Western political institutions as well as attack and root out the influences of Confucianism. They, and many of their Western advisors and teachers, were profoundly split on the question of whether they should also accept Christianity if they wanted to achieve modernity. What was modern and came from Europe and what was merely European in origin were very hard to distinguish. The distinctions were often no clearer to Europeans than they were to non-Europeans. And they still are not entirely clear to us.

4. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "WEST" AND "WESTERN"?

The terms "West," "Western," and "Westernization," are problematic on several levels. One source of difficulty is the imprecision with which such terms are employed. The usage goes back to the ancient period when Greeks distinguished themselves from those to their east, hence the concepts of Asia and the Orient. As adjectives, Oriental and its counterpart Occidental, did not hold strictly to their directional implications - where the sun rises and sets - but accreted other layers of meaning.

The West was home, the familiar, the good. The East, the Oriental, was foreign, strange, often sinister. Oriental could be variously applied: esthetically to cultural forms such as the Moorish architecture in the Iberian Peninsula well to the west of Europe, philosophically to the despotic governments of Asia in Enlightenment discourse, or racially to Chinese and Japanese immigrants along the California coast.

Labeling of the Western and its opposites was the product of contact and interaction. The label was needed as Europeans and European practices came to be scattered around the globe. This grew to be a commonplace condition in the modern world. It is worth considering some of the mechanisms that brought Europeans into contact with cultural others to see how the label of Westernization came to be applied. Four instruments of contact and transmission are trade, evangelism, colonial rule, and migration.

Trade was one of the first great engines that brought Western Europeans into contact with the rest of the world but it was probably not a strong force for Westernization until the later centuries of the modern era. An expanding European trade diaspora joined existing trade networks around the globe. Europeans increased their understanding of the world and their wealth but probably had little cultural influence on other regions through the mechanism of trade alone before the

nineteenth century. In more recent times it might be argued that the industrialized economies exert cultural influence most powerfully through the commercialized agencies of advertising, film, and television.

The early modern expansion of European contacts with the rest of the world coincided with the heroic missionary efforts of the Counterreformation. The Spanish and Portuguese rulers were most active in supporting and promoting the work of Catholic orders in the Americas, Africa and Asia. Protestant overseas missionary work picked up in the nineteenth century. In both cases, European evangelism was premised on the assumption of the superiority of Christianity to other religions, aimed at conversion, and overtly sought to change social customs. Even the secular activities of missionaries in the fields of health and education were explicitly designed to imprint European behavior patterns on the recipients of the services offered. The results of these efforts were at best mixed. Many were converted but many more were not. Furthermore, evangelism, like trade, is a two-way street. While many Europeans set out to convert the world to their faiths some found themselves converted to non-European systems of belief. Today, European cities are dotted with Islamic mosques, Hindu temples, and Buddhist centers. Conversion and cultural influence is decidedly multi-directional.

Colonial rule, the overt and prolonged extension of coercive power over subject peoples, was undoubtedly a major means of European cultural influence throughout the world. Before the nineteenth century revolution of steam-powered travel and telegraphic communication colonial administration frequently entailed considerable adaptation to local conditions. Often Europeans and their colonial subjects intermarried or worked out syncretistic accommodations embracing elements of both cultures. In the second half of the nineteenth century, as communications improved, control on the colonies was tightened, the gap in standards of living widened, and racist theories were put forward to rationalize European domination. Under such conditions, cultural accommodation was discouraged and European standards were promoted or imposed in the colonies.

Migration was another obvious source of cross-cultural contact in the modern world. For the most part the Europeans who administered overseas colonies - administrators, soldiers, merchants and missionaries - were sojourners who retained citizenship in their home country and often returned there at the end of a career of service. In some places, however, Europeans settled in their colonies in substantial numbers. The societies that resulted from this process were characterized by mixed populations of European and indigenous descent. In many cases demand for labor led to the importation of other groups -

African slaves or Asian contract workers - contributing to a further diversification of the population. Depending on their location, some of these societies, or the nations formed after they gained independence, have been classified as part of the West while others have not. Australia, New Zealand, and all the countries of the Americas are usually viewed as Western. Settler colonies in Africa are not so ranked despite the existence of parallel conditions. Algeria, for example, was at one time a department of France, but even that annexation did not suffice to make it part of the West.

The classification of settler societies offers a convenient point to ask how the concepts of "European" and "Western" are related. In the era of European ascendancy many parts of the world came under European administration. Some areas saw substantial European settlement while others did not. All were the recipients of European cultural influence in varying degrees. But should we think of them as part of Western Civilization? When colonial subjects gained independence from European rule they asserted new national identities that underscored in various ways their American, African, or Asian locations. But ties to Europe were not forgotten. In many cases the cultural bond was asserted in a claim of kinship in a common Western Civilization. As I indicated above, the extension of a common civilizational designation to nations on various

continents with populations of mixed heritage makes little sense.

Another cut at the question of Westernization can be taken at the institutional level. From this angle the question is not European control or ancestry but the degree to which institutions and practices outside of Europe resemble those in some part of Europe. This is a slippery slope. Does the adoption of a practice initiated in Europe (or the Americas?) constitute Westernization? Should we in the United States be considered part of the West just because we speak English and have a representative government? What then is to be made of India? To what extent can South Asia be said to be Westernized or part of the West? Or consider the case of the automobile. Once large numbers of motor vehicles come into use in a country some system of regulatory conventions becomes imperative. Only two choices are possible: keeping to the right or keeping to the left. Adoption of one convention will result in traffic patterns that resemble those in the United Kingdom; the other, those in the United States. Is this Westernization? Consider the wearing of blue jeans. The practice began in California where Levis were first produced and popularized. They were introduced to the rest of the United States in the 1950s and to Europe and the rest of the world in subsequent decades. Is this Westernization? Or consider the Walkman, the personal radio or tape-player with

headset that allows one to create a zone of private experience even in a public place. This most personal expression of modern, (Western?) individualism was the development of a Japanese corporate executive. In what sense does it represent Westernization?

One can, of course, say that Japan is part of the West. To do so is to equate the West with some standard of development that has nothing to do with cultural or racial ancestry and everything to do with wealth. In the postwar era of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), when it emerged as an economic powerhouse, Japan was classified as one of the dominant group of seven major trading nations (the G-7). In Chinese, this group is referred to as "the seven Western nations" (Xifang qiguo), an explicit recognition of the Western character of Japan by East Asian neighbors. What this construction of West really implies is a degree of industrialization and standard of living. This usage equates the West with the "North" in a world divided between a developed North and a poorer South, or with the Core as opposed to the Periphery or Semi-periphery in World Systems Theory.

Finally, there is the problem of essentialism. Is everything that came from Europe to be called Western? If so, what are we to make of the multifarious and contradictory elements within Europe itself? For example, if parliamentary democracy is seen

to be an essential element of political modernization and a fundamental characteristic of Western societies, what are we to make of fascism or Marxist-Leninist dictatorship which are equally European in origin? If the doctrines of human rights had their origins in Europe, so did the racist doctrines that led to the Holocaust. If all that is of European provenance is Western then the term Western is too general to be of much use. If the term Western encompasses some more particular set of characteristics not tied to Europe, what is the utility of a regional or directional term to describe it?

5. PAY ATTENTION TO NON-EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

One way to get out of a Eurocentric or American-centered view of World History is to adopt a multi-centered approach. Instead of privileging one region, the world can be viewed as composed of a number of regions or, at a small scale, a larger number of nation-states. These areas can then be looked at comparatively. A comparative approach has a couple of advantages. One is that it avoids the parochialism of a perspective that privileges one area. Another is that the very process of comparison obliges us to be aware of the terms of the comparison and in so doing to look for commonalties and contrasts. A few comparisons using East Asian examples can illustrate what I mean.

If we think about civilizations as regional cultural configurations evolving in historical times we can construct a

picture of major world areas developing in a kind of parity down to early modern times.[6] In times when trade and other contacts were still limited, some migration and diffusion of technologies and biological agents occurred, but the most important regional interactions were the spread of religious doctrines. The scale of interregional contact increased dramatically around the thirteenth century with the conquests of the Central Asian peoples in Eurasia and again in the sixteenth century with the Western European maritime expansion. This latter development, because it led to a rapid demise of the American civilizations and the creation of a network of European outposts and colonial holdings around the globe, should not be equated with European world hegemony. European domination of Africa did not come about until the nineteenth century and control over various parts of Asia developed in stages and was never complete. In East Asia, European maritime trade and contacts continued for more than 300 years before military superiority was achieved. Even then the region was subjected to exploitation through unequal treaty mechanisms that constituted only a form of semi-colonialism for a hundred years from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century.

That there was not European political domination in East Asia does not mean that the region never experienced colonialism. China's early modern history was in fact a history of

subjugation to Manchu rule during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Manchu conquests in Mongolia, Turkestan, and Tibet dramatically expanded the definition of modern China. If we look around Eurasia we see that a cohort of land-based empires dominated enormous territories and populations in just the centuries when the Western European maritime empires held sway elsewhere.[7] Ottoman Turks governed parts of Southeastern Europe and Arabic-speaking peoples in the Middle East and North Africa. In South Asia Chagatay Turks - Mughuls - conquered north India. The Russian Tsarist empire expanded eastward across the Eurasian landmass and down the east coast of North America. In all of these empires colonial administrations implanted their cultural influences at the same time processes of "Westernization" were at work in European colonies. The scale of these events alerts us to the need for comparative study in a World History context.

During the growth centuries of the world trade system East Asia, specifically China, experienced a favorable balance of trade. Chinese exports of tea and handicrafts sucked in silver from around the globe. The influx of silver transformed the Chinese domestic economy; commercialization, urbanization, and population growth led to dramatic social and cultural changes. That the growth of the world trade system transformed the Chinese economy invites comparison with the modern transformation in Europe. The comparison is all the more

interesting because of the notorious ambivalence with which Chinese and Japanese elites viewed foreign trade. Chinese scholars have for decades puzzled over the question of the extent to which these "sprouts of capitalism" did or did not parallel the modern transformation of Europe.

If the lens of modern transformation is shifted from China to Japan quite another picture emerges. Examination of the internal changes in the Japanese economy during the Tokugawa era (1600-1868) reveal some changes strikingly similar to what took place in Western Europe leading to the formation of capitalism. This line of scholarly inquiry has led to distinctions being made in East Asia between Chinese and Japanese patterns of development similar, respectively, to Eastern European and Western European patterns at the other end of the Eurasian landmass. How else are we to explain the rapidity with which Japan, following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, transformed itself into an industrial economy, a major military force, and a colonial power within just a few decades? Absent the experience of European colonial rule the Japanese trajectory of development raises many questions about our understanding of the relationship between the modern and the Western.

Japan's career as an imperialist power also offers fertile ground for comparative study. Japan and the United States were the two principal military and industrial powers to emerge

outside of Europe by the early twentieth century. In a comparable time period both powers came to control islands in the Western Pacific: Japan, Taiwan; the United States, the Philippines. In a recent doctoral dissertation Paul Barclay has explored some of the striking parallels in these two colonial administrations. In both cases, newly industrialized powers took over from older empires, the Manchu-Qing and the Spanish, of an earlier era. In both cases, colonial administrators found ethnically mixed populations of plains-dwelling farmer and relatively unassimilated mountain-dwellers. The administrative strategies of the earlier and later empires and the ways that the rulers understood the situations they confronted provides a rich opportunity for comparison. In particular, the development and application of Japanese and American academic anthropology to the two colonies in the first half of the twentieth century reveals a good deal about the unfolding discourses on race and ethnicity during the high tide of colonialism.

Suffice it to say that East Asia offers innumerable possibilities for comparative study of modern change. Other areas of the world pose similar challenges to our understanding. The point I wish to stress is that comparison is an effective strategy for World History purposes because it mitigates the influence of Eurocentrism and because it forces us to constantly

formulate the terms of comparison and in so doing to examine our assumptions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The challenge of World History teaching is to figure out how to prioritize and balance a story that could, potentially, include everything. Because the modern era saw a period of European ascendancy and later of American preeminence there is a natural tendency for us in the United States to see the world through Euro-American spectacles. This might distort our understanding of World History in either of two ways. One way, the most parochial and least defensible in my view, is the assumption that our culture, however defined, represents the acme of human achievement and the future of the rest of mankind. Such a view harks back to a proud tradition in European historiography and is voiced from time to time as in the Neo-Hegelian triumphal cheers that went up when the Soviet Union collapsed. Another, more plausible, view is one that asserts that European ascendancy did in fact transform the modern world in a definitive way and that the dominant trends in modern change are essentially forms of Westernization. If one takes this latter view, then one might be tempted to conflate the story line of World History in the modern era with the most recent chapter in the history of Western Civilization.

I urge rejection of either of these two perspectives on the modern world. As a teaching enterprise, Western Civ is the narrative of the European culture zone. When the story line reaches the modern era of nation-states, colonialism, the out-migration of Europeans, and intensified global interaction of all kinds the narrative becomes hopelessly muddled. It would make more sense, I think, to restrict the notion of Western Civilization to the European region and to think of the wider impacts of Europe on other areas under some other headings. To stretch the term Western Civilization to cover global events abandons the notion of a civilization as a regional culture and invites vague and imprecise usage of the term "Western." We need to refine the vocabulary we use to talk about the actions of European, persons of European descent, European institutions and practices, and European influence outside of Europe itself. At the same time we need to find ways to recognize and characterize these elements in modern world and global history without resorting to mislabeling and overstatement.

Finally, I think that we need to adopt World History strategies that allow us to create narratives that are pluralistic or multi-centered to avoid undue parochialism. I particularly commend comparative strategies for this purpose.

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NOTES

[1] Using a definition of this sort a group of us wrote a textbook comparing civilizations in Asia. See Farmer, et al, 1977.

[2] See, for example, Burns, et al, 1982.

[3] See Lewis and Wigen 1997.

[4] The influence of the Mercator projection on Eurocentric perceptions of the world has been much noted. See Peters 1983.

[5] Hadjor, 201-202.

[6] This was done with great success by McNeill (1963) as a background to his account of the preeminence of the West.

[7] I develop this idea in Farmer 1985.

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