



Reconstructing International Relations Through World History: Oriental Globalization and the Global–Dialogic Conception of Inter-Civilizational Relations

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In this article, I seek to move the agenda for historical sociology of international relations (HSIR) onto the next stage of research by considering how both international relations (IR) and HSIR can benefit from entering into a dialogue with World History and, more specifically, with what I call the ‘new global history’. This is necessary because much of IR — and ironically, the vast majority of HSIR — suffers from ahistorical Eurocentrism. In this article, I begin the process of reconstructing IR by drawing on a range of non-Eurocentric arguments that are furnished in the new global history. My overarching framework explores how ‘Eastern agency’ and ‘Oriental globalization’ have informed many of the developments in world politics that are conventionally assumed to have Western origins. More specifically, I show how various global–dialogic relationships conducted between Eastern and Western agents have shaped the modern world, in particular capitalist modernity and the rise and spread of the sovereign state. In the final part of the article, I argue that great power politics under Oriental globalization differed fundamentally from Western hegemony/imperialism, thereby debunking the myth that great power politics can be universalized through time and place. In the conclusion, I suggest various areas of future research that could propel both IR and HSIR out of their ahistorical Eurocentric *impasse*.

International Politics (2007) 44, 414–430. doi:10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800198

Keywords: dialogue; Eastern agency; Eurocentrism; historical sociology; inter-civilizational relations; Oriental globalization

The Next Stage of the Historical–Sociological Turn in International Relations?

It is now well known that since the 1980s the discipline of international relations (IR) has undergone something of a ‘historical–sociological turn’. Historical sociologists of IR have been vociferous in critiquing the a-historicism and a-sociologism of mainstream IR. Since its early first-wave



beginnings (associated with the works of Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, and Anthony Giddens), the new historical sociologists of IR have progressed on to a 'second-wave' approach (Hobson, 2002). As I shall go on to explain, while this has made significant progress in providing a radical alternative to the mainstream, nevertheless it has in one key respect failed to deliver on its promise. That is, mainstream IR as well as much of second-wave historical sociology of IR (HSIR) remains imprisoned within a Eurocentric cage. The paradox here is that Eurocentrism is fundamentally ahistorical, which means that second-wave HSIR has some way to go before it can properly call itself 'historical–sociological'.

Nevertheless, what underpins the second-wave approach is a rejection of the ahistoricism of mainstream IR theory. Two modes of ahistoricism are relevant here: 'tempocentrism' and 'chronofetishism' (Hobson, 2002). Tempocentric ahistoricism finds its clearest expression in neorealist historiography, wherein the features of the present system are extrapolated back in time thereby effecting a smoothing out of historical ruptures and social differences in international history. This inverted path-dependency approach necessarily leads to a transhistoricism wherein all international actors are seen to have isomorphic properties. So, for example, the conflict between the US and USSR between 1947 and 1990 finds its equivalent expression in the conflict between Athens and Sparta, or British imperialism finds its equivalent expression in Spanish or Portuguese imperialism. And it was precisely this move that enabled mainstream IR scholars to use history as a quarry that could be mined for equivalent data that confirms their analysis of the present (Cox, 1986, 212). Moreover, Eurocentrism is also tempocentric insofar as it takes the presence of Western dominance today and then extrapolates this conception back in time so as to manufacture a permanent picture of Western supremacy.

By problematizing this transhistoricism, second-wavers have revealed how international actors and international systems operate according to different principles that are dependent upon specific temporal, spatial, social, and discursive contexts.¹ Crucially, this is not merely a manoeuvre that sheds more light on the *history* of the international system. More importantly, it forces IR scholars to rethink the specific and unique social origins of the *modern* international system and the behaviour of the major actors, thereby issuing a critical gaze onto the present.

Second-wave scholars have also sought to problematize the entwined 'chronofetishist' ahistoricism of mainstream IR. Chronofetishism, in assuming that the present can be adequately explained only by examining the present and thereby bracketing or ignoring the past, generates an illusory present. In essence, it portrays the present as a natural, spontaneous, self-constituting entity that is cut off from its historical origins and, in the process, is eternalized given that it is deemed to be resistant to structural change. Accordingly, the



pay-off from historicizing and sociologizing IR is that it is able to both denaturalize the present and reveal the specific social processes that created the modern international system as well as those that generate its reproduction and possible transcendence (see also Cox, 1986; Linklater, 1998). Likewise, in this article I seek to overcome chronofetishist Eurocentrism by revealing the role of Eastern agency in the making of modern world politics.

Despite the accomplishments of second-wave HSIR, it has, nevertheless, largely failed to challenge the ahistorical Eurocentric metanarrative that underpins the discipline (but see Nederveen Pieterse, 1990; Buzan and Little, 2000). Put bluntly: so long as Eurocentrism remains, then the problem of ahistoricism will continue to plague both mainstream IR and second-wave HSIR. In this article, I seek to develop a non-Eurocentric approach by necessarily standing outside of the HSIR literature. Instead, I draw on the 'New Global History turn' within the discipline of World History so as to reconfigure IR and to push second-wave HSIR in new directions. In so doing, I seek to develop a non-Eurocentric historical–sociological 'civilizational approach' that can help elevate HSIR to the next stage of research. The article is divided into two sections. Part 1 provides a brief sketch of how Eurocentrism underpins IR/IPE (international political economy), while Part 2 decolonizes the discipline by focussing on what I call *Oriental globalization* and the inter-related global–dialogical conception of 'inter-civilizational relations'. This provides the framework for rethinking the rise of capitalist modernity and the creation of sovereignty beyond the traditional Western narrative, while the final section problematizes the tempocentric and chronofetishist Eurocentric analysis of great power politics.

Deconstructing IR/IPE

One of the most 'deafening silences' within IR/IPE is that of race. Paradoxically, the neglect of race is inversely proportional to the extent to which racist and ethnocentric ideology — Eurocentrism/Orientalism — pervades the discipline. And so we confront one of the deepest ironies: that *the* discipline that prides itself in specializing in the 'international' does so in an extremely narrow and parochial way. For IR's conception of the international turns out to be an ahistorical Western provincialism *writ large*. To reveal this, it is necessary to begin by defining Eurocentrism.

Eurocentrism or Orientalism is a discourse that was invented by European thinkers during the late-18th and early-19th centuries (Said, 1978). It, of course, places Europe at the centre of all things progressive in the world. Most significantly, having constructed a 'line of civilizational-apartheid' that prized apart the East and West into two separate and self-constituting entities that



stood in opposition, Eurocentric thinkers then imbued the West with all manner of progressive and exceptional properties (e.g., liberalism/democracy, individualism, and scientific rationality), which in turn portrayed its rise to modernity as inevitable. Thus it was assumed that European progress could be narrated as an endogenous and immanent story about the virtuous and ingenious Europeans. And in making the East irrelevant to the European success story, so this obscures the inter-civilizational dialogues that played such an important role in the making of Western and global modernity (as we shall see later). Moreover, having produced this selection bias in favour of the West, Eurocentric thinkers then extrapolated this conception back in time to Ancient Greece, thereby (re)presenting a permanent picture of Aryan–European supremacy (Amin, 1989; Bernal, 1991). Thus Eurocentrism presents a tempocentric narrative of global history — one of Western supremacy written backwards. Put differently, Eurocentric scholars take the *fact* of ‘the economic and political hegemony of the West in modern times — and then ... reason backwards, to rationalize why this supremacy *had* to be’ (Abu-Lughod, 1989, 12). In this way, theorists end up by *imputing* an inevitability to the rise of the West and Western global politics, which in the process, makes Occidental supremacy appear natural and eternal.

At the same time, scholars imbued the East with all manner of regressive characteristics (e.g., Oriental despotism) which ensured that, if left to its own devices, it would remain confined to the ghetto of the stagnant periphery to which it had been consigned by Eurocentrism. Fortunately, ‘salvation’ was at hand in the shape of the Europeans. Charged with an Occidental Messianism and the moral vocation of the White Man’s Burden, the Europeans expanded outwards and bequeathed the gift of progressive civilization to the East through proto-globalization and a gracious imperial civilizing mission; a mission that continues till today through American neo-imperialism.

This is a thumbnail sketch of the development of Eurocentric theory. But how does this metanarrative infect IR and IPE? In IPE, neorealist hegemonic stability theory (HST) provides one of the clearest examples of Eurocentrism. For HST, US hegemony is typically viewed as a form of Western universalism — a conception that was then tempocentrically written backwards to incorporate 19th-century Britain (Gilpin, 1981). Here we learn of the hegemon’s far-sightedness, their capacity to stand above the competitive fray of world politics and their fecundity in guiding other states to pursue progressive policies that they would otherwise not have followed had they been left to their own devices. Above all, HST assumes that it has been the propensity of (Anglo-Saxon) hegemony to make sacrifices for the greater global good that is solely responsible for bringing the light of economic development/order to the world. Thus while the hegemon graciously provides



and pays for international public goods, Eastern states in particular are portrayed as ungraciously free-riding on the hegemon's largesse (most notably Japan and, no doubt, China in the coming years). Accordingly, this theory appears in effect as the latest version of the 'White Man's Burden' (i.e., as a gracious and benign 'civilizing mission'). After all, if the hegemon declines, there is no one else who can deliver prosperity, order, and peace to the world. Similarly neo-Marxist theories of hegemony, although substituting hegemonic exploitation for the benign provision of public goods, still view global agency as the monopolistic preserve of Western hegemons (e.g., Wallerstein, 1984; Cox, 1987; Arrighi, 1994), as I have argued elsewhere (Hobson, 2007).

The same conclusion applies to neorealist historiography of the rise and decline of the great powers, given that none is Eastern (Gilpin, 1981; Kennedy, 1988; Kindleberger, 1996). No less consistent with Eurocentrism is that these Western powers are typically assumed to play *the* proactive role in world politics (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006). Surely, though, it might be replied that this is only 'natural' given that Western states have been the only ones that *have* led the world? But Western states only appear to be have been dominant because a Eurocentric metanarrative has selected them in while simultaneously ensuring that Eastern powers are selected out. For as we shall see later, the dominant states or regions between 650 and 1800 were Islamic West Asia down to about 1450 and China until about 1800.

Within IPE, liberal development (modernization) theory and early Marxist structuralism also go along with the Eurocentric golden rule. Marxian structuralists — or world-systems theorists — view the West (the North) as the dynamic centre of the world economy, while the East (the South) is conveyed as a dependent object, stripped of all agency. Nevertheless, the recent rise of 'world-system theory' has succeeded in breaking with Eurocentrism (e.g., Frank and Gills, 1996; Denmark *et al.*, 2000). Modernization theory, like classical Marxism but unlike early dependency theory, argues that Third World states can move out of backwardness and into modernity, but only by following the Western recipe for successful modernization. Indeed, Rostow's five-stage model, like Marx's four-stage model, was constructed on the Western experience, although Rostow's begins with Britain's 18th-century industrialization and ends with American high-mass consumption (Rostow, 1960). But this is problematic for its failure to recognize that there is no *pure* Western developmental lineage given that the West was significantly shaped by Eastern forces since 500 CE, as we shall see later.

Eurocentrism also pervades IR's historiography of the sovereign state. Thus it is assumed that the sovereign state emerged in Europe in 1648 and was then exported as the 'gift of civilization' to the rest of the world through Western imperialism and Occidental proto-globalization/globalization (e.g., Bull and



Watson, 1984). Crucially, at no point in this narrative has the East been accorded a proactive role. A complementary narrative forms the basis of globalization theory and the spread of capitalism. Thus prior to 1492, civilizations allegedly lived in splendid isolation (e.g., Huntington, 1996, 21), but thereafter the European ‘Voyages of Discovery’ served to project outwards the Western capitalist system as the Europeans ‘battered down the walls’ of the so-called inward-looking, backward Eastern regions thereby transforming them into outward-looking capitalist economies. From there (Occidental) globalization is allegedly propelled forwards in a linear trajectory by successive Western pioneers until the end of the 19th century, before exponentially taking off after 1945 into its ‘thick’ and fullest form under the *Pax Americana* (e.g., Held *et al.*, 1999). Once again, IR’s general historiography elevates Westerners to the status of global politics’ progressive subject — past, present, and future — while simultaneously relegating Eastern peoples to its regressive object, in the process obscuring the presence of *Oriental globalization*.

Last, but not the least, IR is witnessing a new departure in the form of what might be called inter-civilizational relations; a move that was initiated by Samuel Huntington (1996). Here we are presented with a view of autonomous and discrete self-constituting civilizations — akin to tectonic plates — that are driven mainly by primordial cultural differences and drives. Their edges represent zones of conflict or ‘fault-lines’ wherein these civilizations-as-tectonic-plates meet and abrade or clash. This is effectively a realist analysis of civilizations, typified by Huntington’s claims that ‘The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations’, and that ‘culture ... follows power’ (Huntington, 1996, 28, 310). The Eurocentric tendency to ascribe civilizations as distinct and separate is complemented by his claim that Western civilization is unique and exceptional, such that it rose as a result of its own virtuous characteristics (Huntington, 1996, 51–52). That Huntington’s major political concern revolves around the decline of the West relative to Asian civilizations does not negate his Eurocentrism. For the central political message of the book is that Western leaders — especially American — must police the imaginary line of civilizational apartheid. That is, the United States must ensure that Western civilization preserves its uniqueness and exceptionalism through preventing the ‘contaminating’ incursion of Eastern influences (Huntington, 1996, 308–312); a message that similarly underpins his most recent book (Huntington, 2005).

In sum, given that Eurocentrism has significantly contaminated much of both IR and IPE — critical and orthodox (Hobson, 2007) — it is necessary to enquire as to how the discipline might be *decolonized* and reconstructed in order to break out of the ahistorical Eurocentric *impasse*. To do so, I shall draw on the ‘New Global History turn’ within World History.



Reconstructing IR Through the New Global History

The New Global History differs from traditional World History insofar as it challenges Eurocentrism. Despite its wealth of insight, the mark of the traditional approach was its focus on civilizations as the central unit of analysis. Civilizations, like neorealism's states, were conceived of as largely separate and autonomous entities (e.g., Spengler, 1932/1971; Toynbee, 1948; McNeill, 1963). And Eurocentrism has been explicitly defended by some as appropriate to the study of World History (Roberts, 1985; Landes, 1998).

The New (anti-Eurocentric) Global History was pioneered by McNeill's Chicago colleague, Marshall Hodgson (1974). It was then developed further through a line of world historians including Wolf (1982), Abu-Lughod (1989), Nederveen Pieterse (1990), Blaut (1993), Fernández-Armesto (1996), Frank and Gills (1996), Frank (1998), Ponting (2000), Pomeranz (2000), Goldstone (2000), as well as in my own work (Hobson, 2004). The transition from traditional World History to the New Global History was reflected by McNeill's candid claim that,

the central methodological weakness of my book [*The Rise of the West*] is that ... it pays inadequate attention to the emergence of the ecumenical world system Somehow an appreciation of the autonomy of separate civilisations ... across the past 2,000 years needs to be combined with the portrait of an emerging world system, connecting greater and greater numbers of persons across civilised boundaries Being too much pre-occupied by the notion of civilisation, I bungled by not giving the initial emergence of a transcivilisational process the sustained emphasis it deserved (McNeill, 1995, 310, 313).

Accordingly, the new view suggests that “Europe”, “Asia” and “Africa” are not continents with separate independent histories. The attribution of distinctive characteristics to the continents [or civilisations] is on the contrary, an invention of human [Orientalist] imagination’ (Holton, 1998, 31).

The New Global History deploys what has been described as a ‘relational’ civilizational approach (Jackson, 1999; see also Barkawi and Laffey, 2006), the upshot of which is that civilizations are viewed as impure, promiscuous, and hybrid. Accordingly, their edges should not be viewed simply as ‘zones of conflict’ or ‘fault-lines’, but as ‘zones of contact’ (Pratt, 1992) wherein civilizations come into mutually constitutive dialogue. This in turn requires a shift away from the conception of the international as Western provincialism *writ large* towards a global-dialogic conception of inter- or trans-civilizational relations, which grants agency to both East and West. And this necessarily requires embedding such relations within the *longue Oriental global durée* that reaches back to about 500 CE.



Revealing Oriental Globalization

As noted earlier, both traditional IR and globalization theory share a historiography in which the world before 1500 comprised numerous regional entities or civilizations that were separate and failed to come into contact. The Eurocentric linear narrative starts with 1492 and then progresses forward through a long line of European imperial, proto-global pioneers, culminating in globalization's take-off into its full or thick form after 1945 under the *Pax Americana*. But a growing number of world historians now argue that a thick globalization emerged well before 1945. Some trace this back to the 16th and 17th centuries (e.g., Hopkins, 2002; Bayly, 2004). But the crucial manoeuvre involves breaking the Gordian knot of 1492/1500 given that, in traditional historiography, this (falsely) represents the moment of Europe's arrival at the apex of world historical development. Indeed, a growing number of scholars argue that globalization and the global economy emerged well before 1500. Some single out the 13th century (Abu-Lughod, 1989), others the sixth century (e.g., Hobson, 2004), others the Axial Age (Bentley, 1993), and still others 3500 BCE (Frank and Gills, 1996; Goody, 1996). Moreover, a number of scholars agree that the West only rose to significance *after* 1800, while before then various Asian states/regions had been predominant (Frank, 1998; Goldstone, 2000; Pomeranz, 2000; Hobson, 2004).

The ultimate significance of dating globalization *prior* to the 16th century is that it brings the East back in as an agent of global production and transformation. This new departure effectively inverts traditional narratives. In this new narrative, the mainstream of global history well before 1500 and *up to the 19th century* appears as Eastern — especially East Asian — and, after a short Western interlude, appears to be returning once more to China. In short, Eurocentrism has obscured the presence of *Oriental globalization* that existed between 500 and 1800 and, although continuing on thereafter (albeit in muted form), is now showing signs of a return to Eastern normalcy.

One emergent point of consensus is that the 500–900 era constitutes the vital turning point, ushering in the period of what I call *Oriental globalization*. For it was then that we can discern a major intensification of global relations, largely as a function of two critical developments: first, the emergence of a series of inter-linked Eastern empires and second, the rise of Islam. The critical regional empires comprised T'ang China (618–907), the Islamic Ummayyad/Abbasid empire in West Asia (661–1258), the Ummayyad polity in Spain (756–1031), and the Fatimids in North Africa (909–1171). Moreover the kingdom of Śrīvijaya in Sumatra was important in that it constituted the vital entrepôt that connected China to the Indian Ocean between the seventh and 13th centuries (Curtin, 1984; Bentley, 1993; Goody, 1996). These inter-linked regions promoted an extensively pacified space that fostered considerable trade



and enabled the transmission of Eastern ‘resource portfolios’, a point I will return to later in the article. The second major factor here was that the Afro-Eurasian economy was woven together by three major trade routes (Abu-Lughod, 1989), which were promoted by Islamic capitalists after about 650, with the additional input of Jews, Africans, Javanese, Indians, and Chinese.

Islam led global development in terms of two major indicators: extensive- and intensive-global power. Extensive power refers to the ability of a state or region to spread its economic tentacles outwards, whereas intensive power refers to a leading economy that provides high supply and demand for global trade and other capitalist transactions. Islamic West Asia led in both indicators after about 650. Around 1100 the batten of global intensive power was passed not to the leading Italian city-states but to China (during the Sung industrial miracle), where it remained down to the early 19th century. And around 1450, the leading edge of global extensive power passed not to the Iberians but to the Chinese. Nevertheless, the distribution of global economic power was ultimately polycentric. For alongside China, Islamic West Asia and North Africa, as well as India and later Japan maintained high levels of intensive and extensive global power throughout the period down to 1800, although Europe remained a bit-player in the vast Afro-Asian trading system (Hobson, 2004, chapters 2–4).

Eurocentrism makes much of China’s official ban on foreign trade in 1434 in that it allegedly opened up a vacuum into which the pioneering Iberians flooded, with the ‘rest being Western history’ (e.g., Landes, 1998, 94–96). But the paradox is that the ban on foreign trade came just before China moved to or near the centre of the global economy (Frank, 1998; Hobson, 2004, chapter 3). China’s voracious demand for silver, owing to her hugely productive economy and large trade surplus with the rest of the world, ultimately sucked Europe *directly* into the Afro-Asian-led global economy. For China’s demand for silver provided the main outlet for the plundered Spanish-American bullion, thereby enabling the Europeans to finance their trade deficit with China (and other Asian countries) as well as to support their, albeit modest, presence within the Indian Ocean trading system. It also enabled Europeans to directly insert themselves into the global gold–silver arbitrage system that was centred upon China (Flynn and Giraldez, 1994; Frank, 1998). Accordingly, we need to recognize that numerous *Eastern* societies and agents played vital roles in creating and maintaining the global economy and the dominant processes of *Oriental globalization* right down to the early 19th century.

Oriental Globalization and Eastern Agency in the Making of ‘Western Modernity’

If the West emerged within a pre-existent Afro-Asian-led global economy, then the Eurocentric assumption that the Europeans single-handedly made their



own developmental history and subsequently that of the world's is brought fundamentally into question. Here I note the existence of a global dialogue between East and West, wherein *Oriental globalization* disseminated the more advanced Eastern 'resource portfolios' (ideas, institutions, technologies, and trade) to the West. These were then assimilated at every major turning point in order to fuel European development throughout the 500–1800 period, in the absence of which Europe would surely have remained on the backward periphery of the Afro-Asian-led global economy.

While the Italians led the way in Europe after about 1000, the financial institutions upon which they relied were borrowed from West Asia. Moreover, without the many Islamic ideas that diffused across to Europe, there might never have been a 'European' Renaissance or scientific revolution (Hobson, 2004, chapters 6 and 8; Goody, 2004, 56–83). In Eurocentrism, the Voyages of Discovery signify the emergence of early, proto-globalization at the hands of the Europeans. But they might better be labelled the Voyages of Rediscovery,² given that the regions the Portuguese 'discovered' had been in contact with each other and with Europe through *Oriental globalization* since at least 500. Moreover, without the diffusion of Eastern resource portfolios there might never have been any Voyages of Rediscovery, given that the critical navigational and nautical techniques and technologies upon which they rested originated in Islamic West Asia and China. And when we note that the weapons deployed by the Iberians — gunpowder, gun, and cannon — had been invented in China in 850, 1275, and 1288 respectively, then there is very little left for the Iberians to claim for their own. Last, but not the least, the European Enlightenment was in part enabled by the diffusion of Chinese ideas, while British industrialization was significantly fuelled by the *assimilation* of Chinese ideas and agricultural/industrial technologies (Hobson, 2004, chapter 9). There was, therefore, nothing inevitable about the rise of the West for there was a great deal of contingency and luck that governed the whole process (Blaut, 1993; Pomeranz, 2000; Hobson, 2004, 313–316).

Accordingly, the West has never been a pure, self-constituting entity that created modernity through its own indigenous properties. Rather, both the making of the West and modernity have been achieved through Eastern agency and inter-civilizational dialogue. Accordingly, the West is better understood as an impure, hybrid formation with a 'creolized culture', which suggests the more appropriate label of the 'Oriental West'. Thus the term 'inter-civilizational relations' is problematic only insofar as it might imply the existence of discrete entities. Perhaps, therefore, we might better refer to 'trans-civilizational relations' in order to secure the point that civilizations are mutually embedded within, and co-constitutive of, each other through a dialogic relationship. Moreover, this dialogic approach can also reconstruct IR's traditional historiography of the sovereign state.



Oriental Globalization and Eastern Agency in the Making of Sovereignty

The standard view held in IR is that the sovereign state emerged autonomously in Europe before it was subsequently exported to the rest of the world through Western imperialism/Occidental proto-globalization (e.g., Bull and Watson, 1984). With respect to the narrative on the rise of the European sovereign state, there are three main Eurocentric approaches. Some scholars focus on the European Military Revolution (1550–1660) which, in creating new military technologies — the gun, cannon, and gunpowder — led to a rapid rise in defence costs that in turn led on to the emergence of the centralized sovereign state (e.g., Gilpin, 1981; Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990). Others emphasize the impact of long-distance trade (e.g., Spruyt, 1994), while others emphasize various European materialist and ideational factors associated with the Renaissance (e.g., Ruggie, 1998). But as already explained, the Western sovereign state emerged during the period of *Oriental globalization*, wherein the Military Revolution, trade and the Renaissance were all heavily dependent upon manifold influences emanating from the East.

The claim that the sovereign state diffused from Europe to the East via Western imperial proto-globalization is also problematic. For imperialism could be defined as the *denial* of sovereignty to Eastern states. Indeed, none of the Eastern states were ‘deemed worthy’ of sovereignty given that they had been judged to have fallen short of meeting the Western ‘standard of civilization’ (Gong, 1984). And it was this that ‘justified’ imperialism. Moreover, the Eurocentric narrative obscures the dialogic-agency of Eastern peoples. After 1945, Western states did not simply abdicate their imperial power to bequeath the gift of sovereignty. Nor did the colonized peoples passively internalize Western norms of political discourse — specifically democracy, self-determination, and the Rights of Man. Rather, the colonized fought back by contesting the legitimacy of empire, both through violence (Fanon, 1961/1990) as well as through dialogue. Focussing on the latter, Eastern agency took the form of a ‘mimetic challenge’ (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007) or ‘mimicry’ (Bhabha, 1994), wherein appeals to Western norms were used to subversively reveal and discursively challenge the contradictions of Western actions in the face of their own political discourse. That is, Eastern peoples rhetorically hoisted the West on its own liberal-discursive petard, forcing the Europeans to recognize that empire was illegitimate within the terms of their own self-referential discourse. And when this dialogic relationship was coupled with the various rulings of the UN, the way was opened for decolonization and hence the spread of sovereignty throughout the world. Moreover, the spread of sovereignty is not a pure sign of Western global power, since Eastern peoples and rulers value sovereignty precisely because it gives them a political defence or bulwark against



subsequent Western colonial intrusion. In sum, then, this global-dialogic conception of inter-civilizational relations deconstructs sovereignty and recasts the traditional Eurocentric narrative by revealing the role of Eastern agency.

The Specificity of Oriental Global Great Power Politics

These arguments culminate in a rethinking of great power politics, which in turn leads to the problematizing of 1648 as the temporal watershed that divides the modern from the pre-modern international system. Here I suggest that the critical watershed lies in the 1800/1840 period, for it was at this point that we can discern a fundamental transformation of global politics. Prior to 1850, *Oriental globalization* had dominated world politics whereas after this point, a series of Anglo-Saxon powers rose to the fore.

In transcending tempocentric Eurocentrism, I argue that the basis of great power politics was in certain key respects quite different when *Oriental globalization* dominated world politics/economics. Wars had undoubtedly occurred and it would be facile to view the world outside of the West as entirely peaceful. But when compared to the ca.1840–2005 period of Western imperialism/neo-colonialism, it appeared relatively peaceful and cosmopolitan. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, for example, had lived peacefully side by side throughout Islamic West Asia, as they had done in Spain until 1492. And throughout the East, from Alexandria to Melaka, a wide variety of merchants and trading diasporas resided and traded peacefully together. Perhaps the one unique thing that the Europeans exported into the Indian Ocean trading system after 1498 was not domination but violence. For prior to then, Asian shipping had no need to deploy heavy weapons given that with the exception of sporadic piracy, trading relations had been peaceful (Curtin, 1984).

The leading great power in the world between about 1450 and 1800/1840 was China, pioneer of the international tribute system. But while China had the capacity to colonize much of the world (Levathes, 1994), its identity led it to *choose foregoing* imperialism (Fernández-Armesto, 1996, 129, 134; Hobson, 2004, 61–70, 305–312). It is true that China's identity, like Europe's, was hierarchical, with China imagined as the 'civilized Middle Kingdom' in contradistinction to all other outlier races that were perceived as 'barbarians'. But the unique conception of Chinese identity gave rise to an international system that was radically different to Western imperialism. Indeed, the tribute system was more voluntary than forced and moreover, at virtually no point did the Chinese state try and culturally convert or even exploit its so-called vassal states (Deng, 1997; Abernethy, 2000, chapter 10). The tribute system was designed more to lure 'vassals' towards China by giving them lucrative access



to China's economy. Ultimately, China's identity was more a *defensive construct* that was designed to maintain Chinese state–society legitimacy. Thus the system was based on the need for vassal states to send representatives who would kow-tow to the Chinese emperor. For in this way, the emperor could demonstrate to his/her own population that (s)he enjoyed the allegiance of the barbarian world and hence the 'mandate of Heaven' — the basis of the ruler's legitimacy within China — was secured (Zhang, 2001).

By contrast, Europe's identity came to be defined in imperialist terms, beginning after 1453 through Catholic Christianity, but crescendoing in the 18th and 19th centuries with a new racist identity. By then, the Europeans had constructed a Eurocentric line of civilizational-apartheid between East and West. As noted earlier, defining the East as dependent, child-like, and incapable of self-development while simultaneously defining the West as independent, proactive, and paternal, naturally prescribed imperialism as a *moral duty* (i.e., the civilizing mission). And the rise of scientific racism cemented the imperialist discourse. Of course, Europe's lead in military power was important. But there was nothing *inevitable* about the imperial role that the Europeans *chose* to undertake. Ultimately, the Europeans did not seek to remake the world simply because 'they could' (as in materialist explanations) — they sought to remake the world because they *believed they should*. That is, their actions were significantly guided by their racist identity that deemed imperialism to be a legitimate policy (Said, 1978; Hobson, 2004, chapter 10). By contrast, China *chose not to impose* its standard of civilization on other states. This means that there is no innate, trans-historical relationship between great power capacity and imperialism, precisely because great power capacity is *expressed* differently depending on the specificity of the temporal, social, and cultural contexts. And this in turn breaks fundamentally with the Eurocentric tempocentrism of IR, which portrays great power politics/economics as isomorphic through time and space.

This analysis suggests that we need to locate the major transformative moment of world politics in the 1800/1840 period rather than in 1648. For this provides the watershed between modern globalization and its Oriental predecessor, and the break between Chinese and Western great power politics. Thus the standard analysis of the rise and decline of great powers is redundant not simply for its omission of Eastern powers, given that it would be problematic to simply 'add Eastern powers and stir'. Rather, the ultimate significance of including Eastern great powers is that their different modes of behaviour derived from their specific social, cultural, and temporal contexts requires us to refocus our attention on the social particularities of Western great power politics. Accordingly, we must resist the temptation to view Western great power politics as normal or natural and, therefore, capable of being universalized through time and space.



Conclusion: Towards the Next Stage of HSIR

I have drawn from and developed further many of the insights from the New Global History in order to decolonize IR's Eurocentric and tempocentric/chronofetishist conception of the international. This in turn suggests that we need to move beyond the Eurocentric conception of the international as a pure Western provincialism *writ large* to acknowledging the creolized, global-dialogic conception of inter-civilizational relations that has occurred over the last 1,500 years. And this in turn derives from acknowledging the presence of Oriental globalization and Eastern agency. While second-wave HSIR promises to deliver on this alternative perspective, at present such a promise remains only immanent. How then might this be realized in terms of a future research agenda?

First, we need to recognize and explore the existence of *Oriental globalization* in its past and present configurations. Few second-wavers have sought to historicize globalization (but see Rosenberg, 2005), let alone recognize its Eastern foundations. This also brings to light the issue of global 'continuity vs discontinuity'. Thus while globalization's existence between 500 and 2000 reveals the importance of continuity, nevertheless to extrapolate backwards modern globalization would reproduce Eurocentrism and tempocentric ahistoricism. Accordingly, we also need to recognize that modern globalization and global politics/economics are in certain respects very different to *Oriental globalization*, thus pointing up the importance of difference and discontinuity. Nevertheless, further research into the changing configurations of globalization through world-historical time is required.

Second, while there is a flourishing literature on 'political systems change' (Rosenberg, 1994; Spruyt, 1994; Reus-Smit, 1999; Buzan and Little, 2000; Teschke, 2003) it is curious that far less attention has been paid to 'economic systems change' (i.e., the rise of capitalist modernity). Thus, exploring non-Eurocentric avenues for both political and economic systems change should be a priority. Third, a profitable area of research lies in rethinking great power politics. For as noted above, focussing on earlier Eastern powers — including Islamic West Asia, Japan, and China — as well as concentrating on the differences in their international systems (Zhang, 2001; Suzuki, 2005) enables us to pinpoint the social particularities of modern Western powers and their international systems. It also enables us to deconstruct the 'historiographical myth of 1648' as *the* defining moment of modern IR.

Fourth and finally, this article suggests that IR scholars need to pay serious attention to the politics and political economy of inter-civilizational relations. Of course, on first reading, this immediately resonates with Samuel Huntington's (1996) project. And this prompts the retort made by various critics: that elevating civilizations to the status of the key unit of analysis within



IR is problematic since this operates at far too high a level of abstraction (e.g., Henderson and Tucker, 2001). But as should be obvious from the foregoing discussion, this is only a problem if we insist on defining civilizations as pure, self-constituting entities that can be likened to solid billiard balls. This article responds by proposing a 'relational approach' that reveals them as co-constitutive and hence impure and hybrid, such that they are shaped through the poly-cultural/poly-civilizational influences that pass backward and forward through the 'dialogue of civilizations'. Noteworthy here is the point that developing a relational approach marks the next stage of civilizational analysis in IR (Hall and Jackson, 2007).

All this culminates in my final point: rather than celebrating all that is Western, we need to acknowledge the important roles that Eastern peoples have performed in creating the modern world. Only then can we sufficiently decolonize IR and, more importantly, the practice of world politics. And in this political context the closing words of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, remain equally as valid today as when Fanon penned them over forty years ago, 'For Europe [and America] ... and for [global] humanity ... we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man' (Fanon, 1961/1990, 255). Accordingly, I suggest that this normative project should, among others, underpin the next stage of IR and HSIR.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Buzan *et al.* (1993); Spruyt (1994); Rosenberg (1994); Linklater (1998); Hobden (1998); Reus-Smit (1999); Hall (1999); Halliday (1999); Buzan and Little (2000); Hobden and Hobson (2002); Teschke (2003); Lawson (2005); Jönsson and Hall (2005); Seabrooke (2006).
- 2 I owe this phrase to George Lawson.

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