

REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

introduction: the making of international relations

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Book reviewed:

The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations

Barry Buzan and George Lawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015),
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Abstract

In this review symposium, Pinar Bilgin, Ann Towns and David C. Kang discuss Barry Buzan and George Lawson's *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*. In the book, Buzan and Lawson set out to provide a history of how we came to think about international relations in the way we do today. They explore the roots of our contemporary conceptions of the state, revolution, the international and modernity. They identify the long nineteenth century, from 1776 to 1914, as the key period in which the modern state and international relations as we know them today were forged. This was a *global* transformation in that it reshaped the bases of power, thereby also reshaping the relations of power that govern the relations between states and other agents today, across the world. In carrying through this project, Buzan and Lawson show us not only how the modern world was transformed, but also the kind of object it became for the discipline of International Relations. As such, this is also a book about the assumptions that have shaped, and continue to shape, that discipline.

Keywords international relations; the long nineteenth century; modernity; revolution; the state

In *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*, Barry Buzan and George Lawson set out on the task of providing a history of how we came to think about international relations in the way we do today. They explore the roots of our contemporary conceptions of the state, revolution, the international and modernity. They identify the long nineteenth century, from 1776 to 1914, as the key period in which the modern state and international relations as we know them today were forged. This was a *global* transformation in that it reshaped the bases of power, thereby also reshaping the relations of power that govern the

relations between states and other agents today, across the world. In carrying through this project, Buzan and Lawson show us not only how the modern world was transformed, but also the kind of object it became for the discipline of International Relations. This is then also a book about the assumptions that have shaped, and continue to shape, that discipline.

In their reviews of the book, Pinar Bilgin, Ann Towns and David C. Kang take issue with different aspects of *The Global Transformation*. They argue that Buzan and Lawson have omitted important aspects from their history (most notably, gender), as well as important non-Western histories.

beyond the ‘billiard ball’ model of the international?

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The so-called ‘billiard ball’ model of the international is more entrenched in the minds of students of the Social Sciences than many of us would like to believe. Arguably this is because our understanding of world history is conditioned by ‘billiard ball’ assumptions, thereby shaping our conceptions of the international. Barry Buzan and George Lawson’s *The Global Transformation* is an important step taken as part of the broader attempt within the Social Sciences in general, and International Relations (IR) in particular, to move beyond the ‘billiard ball’ model.

The ‘billiard ball’ model of the international is one of the most criticized aspects

of the realist (and especially structural realist) theory of IR. Viewed through this model, states look like unitary (not pluralistic) and pre-given (not in progress) units that have surface (not constitutive) interactions with each other. For long, the critics of realism have argued that states are better viewed as unfinished projects that are made and re-made as they construct their identity and interests in relation to each other as well as internal dynamics.

The realists, in turn, have responded by reminding their critics that the ‘billiard ball’ model is a ‘model’. It is a model that is set up in the attempt to create a ‘closed system’ of international relations so that theorizing the international becomes

possible. Their point being that students of realism know that their portrayal of world politics is not the 'reality', and that they adopt these assumptions for the purpose of theory building.

If it were only the students of realist IR alone that suffer from the limitations of the 'billiard ball' model, but so do many of their critics in IR and the Social Sciences in general! For, this is 'the way we have learned our own history', as the anthropologist Eric Wolf (1982: 4–5) has reminded us. According to Wolf, we read back into history as 'things' notions such as 'state', 'nation' and 'the West'. As a result, he argued, we impede our understanding of the fluid and undetermined nature of the history of humankind.

By turning names into things we create false models of reality. By endowing nations, societies, or culture with the qualities of internally homogenous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the enemies spin off each other like so many hard and round coloured balls, to declare that 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' (Wolf, 1982: 6)

My point being that the 'billiard ball' model of the international has deep roots in the minds of the students of Social Sciences – roots that go beyond realist IR. Our understanding of world history is conditioned by this very model insofar as Eurocentric accounts of world history look at the past through (1) state-centric lenses; (2) often without being aware of the particularity of the notion of state that is used; and (3) overlooking relationships of mutual constitution between peoples, states, empires and civilizations in different parts of the world throughout history.

My second and related point is that if our attempts to move beyond Eurocentric limitations of the Social Sciences in general and IR in particular are progressing

at an embarrassingly slow pace, this is because our understanding of world history is conditioned by the 'billiard model', which does not allow us to see the fluid, undetermined and *intertwined* character of world history.

The argument about the 'intertwined' character of historical processes has been developed by several scholars across the Social Sciences including Said (1993), Subrahmanyam (1997), Buck-Morss (2009), Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) as well as Wolf (1982). Notwithstanding their noteworthy differences, the gist of these scholars' argument is that world history is better understood as communications and connections between peoples and the ideas and institutions they have generated. Eurocentric exclusions of the Social Sciences (and Humanities), Said (in Said et al, 2004: 52) wrote, do not allow us to see how 'even in the hotly contested worlds of politics and religion, cultures are intertwined and can only be disentangled from each other by mutilating them'. Trouillot (1995: 847) concurred:

the dominant narratives of world history...do not describe the world; they offer visions of the world. They appear to refer to things as they exist, but because they are rooted in a particular history, they evoke multiple layers of sensibilities, persuasions, cultural assumptions and ideological choices tied to that localized history.

While many may not see much to object in Said's and Trouillot's words, such accounts meet considerable backlash when presented in the form of non-Eurocentric histories – as experienced by Bernal (1987) in the aftermath of the publication of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (see also Bernal, 2011). The 'billiard ball' model is so entrenched in our Eurocentric accounts of world history that, even when we are willing to let go of some of our assumptions (above all, the

state as the unit of analysis and/or as a unitary actor), our understanding of the international remains tied to the category of a 'West' that is assumed to have evolved autonomously, without incurring any debts to others. The critics among us identify 'Westernness' as a limitation of IR, without pausing to reflect on the 'billiard ball' model of the world that has shaped that very notion of 'Western' (Bilgin, 2008).

Buzan and Lawson's *The Great Transformation* has done a great service by offering an account of the history of 'global modernity' that locates its dynamics in a myriad of locales (including, but not limited to, 'Europe'). Addressing the limitations of IR, as with the prevalence of the 'billiard ball' model of the international, needs to go hand in hand with addressing the problem of Eurocentrism of the historical accounts that IR draws upon.

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Pinar Bilgin is Associate Professor of International Relations at Bilkent University. She is the author of *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective* (2005) and *The International in Security, Security in the International* (forthcoming).

how grand is this narrative?

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In this monumental book, Barry Buzan and George Lawson provide an outstanding synthetic history of the

nineteenth century roots of contemporary international relations. Drawing on economic history, world history and

historical sociology, they produce a dynamic and highly readable grand narrative that is destined to achieve canonical status in the field of international relations (IR). One of the many strengths of this work is that it elegantly organizes multiple important transformations – imperialism, capitalist industrialization, rational state-building and ideologies of progress – into one book. Another is the convincing placement of inequality and hierarchy front and centre of these key processes. *The Global Transformation* furthermore addresses the inescapable presence of big historical narratives in IR. For some IR scholars, such as Buzan and Lawson, there is a rhythm and a pattern to the story of our world and how it came to be. For others, the big historical narrative is a story about a play of particulars, a story about diversity and localized dynamics, a story without shared plots. Regardless, everyone has to operate with *some* story about what international politics is and how it came to be. Buzan and Lawson explicitly challenge the dominant grand historical narrative of IR and its benchmark dates, a challenge that will encourage more debate – hopefully with lots of voices – about how best to conceive of histories of international politics.

Reading this book, I was struck by the confidence with which its historical narrative is crafted. The book just vibrates with vitality and verve. There is a boldness and self-assuredness in its grand narrative that stands in stark contrast with many of the more tentative and limited international historical accounts that have been written in the past couple of decades. This confidence is impressive. But it is also puzzling. Buzan and Lawson state in several places that extant scholarship on the nineteenth century is partial and incomplete. Echoing Michael Mann, they correctly point out that most scholars tend to privilege single or at least a limited number of themes – for instance, the rise of capitalism, imperialism or the

bureaucratic expansion of the state – missing the ‘configurational character of the global transformation’ (60). ‘By looking at parts of the puzzle, existing accounts tend to miss the whole’, they argue (59–60). Indeed, they underscore, extant scholarship suffers from ‘a narrowness to their analysis that misses a sense of the whole’ (61).

However, the authors tell us very little about the practice or conduct of writing a broader and less narrow, synthetic history. The indispensable role of perspective and theory in selecting, reconstructing and interpreting history has been stressed by other great synthetic historians, such as Eric Hobsbawm, who first launched the notion of the long nineteenth century. One is hard pressed to find any historiographical self-reflection or even theoretical discussions in *The Global Transformation*, however. I am thus left puzzling over how the authors could be so confident in their story. How does one determine what is written into, and what is written out of, a grand narrative of this kind? What principles guide which ‘parts’ are to be selected to construct ‘the whole’, and how?

Another way to pose this question is to focus on one form of power and set of ordering principles that were omitted from the narrative: gender. Why was gender written out of the story about the global transformation? One answer could be that a historical synthesis must focus on the more central empirical developments. However, there is a mass of evidence suggesting that gender has been absolutely integral to each and every one of the processes that is foregrounded in this book. For instance, a number of scholars have contended that gender has been central to the development of modern, rational statehood. During absolutism, there were still some female regents in a number of European states, at a time when the power of the state was vested in the sovereign. Women could,

and did, hold state office, such as that of postmasters. Not all, but a range of polities across the world, in Africa, Asia and the Americas, also made room for women in politics. In the nineteenth century, however, women were squeezed out wholesale, as a sex, from state institutions. This practice subsequently spread across international society, within Europe and from Europe to colonized areas. Nineteenth century states became all male states, and the world is still grappling with those developments. How can the fact that men were channelled into and women out of state institutions in the nineteenth century be written out of a history of modern, rational statehood?

Another answer could point to a lack of scholarship – a synthesis is of course limited to synthesizing scholarship that actually exists. But this makes writing gender out of the story equally puzzling: there is a massive amount of work on gender and colonialism, industrialization, the state, nationalism, liberalism and socialism from the nineteenth century until the present. Some of it is published in the top presses and the finest journals. There is enough scholarship on gender and the social processes that are central to this book to fill a minor library, which makes the fact that virtually none of it made it into the story a bit of a mystery.

No book can capture everything. Some things have to be left out. But precisely because no book can capture everything, the issue of determining what is told and what remains untold becomes all the more pressing. My suspicion is that the answer as to why gender is written out of *The Global Transformation* has something to do with the social sciences or perhaps IR more narrowly, where the convention seems to be to write gender out of grand narratives. Or perhaps the answer is to be found in personal research trajectories or viewpoints. Some discussion of the politics of knowledge production and the inevitable situatedness of the scholar in the processes of selecting, reconstructing and interpreting history would not only have made the viability of this grand narrative more open for assessment and debate – it would also have helped underscore that even an ambitious history such as this one is necessarily partial.

This said, Buzan and Lawson have without doubt achieved a grand synthesis that will become an indispensable reference in current debates about the central dynamics of international relations and their history. Ambitious, engaging and accessible, this will quickly become a classic text around which debates will develop and international relations courses organized.

About the Author

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the origins of the developmental state in east asia

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Barry Buzan and George Lawson's *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* is a magisterial work, covering the entire globe and over two centuries of history. It makes a clear and focused argument – that IR scholars as group have overlooked the most important era for fashioning the contemporary world. It is also an important contribution in that the book self-consciously attempts to move past Western-focused and parochial views of history and international relations. There is much here that I find important and new, and emphasizing the 'long nineteenth century' as central to shaping the world we live in today is a useful corrective. This book is a key theoretical and conceptual contribution towards moving the field of international relations beyond a set of conventionally accepted ideas that takes as obvious and inevitable the triumph of the nation-state and a Westphalian international system.

As such, I wish not to replace one parochialism with another, but rather to suggest that Buzan and Lawson could have been even bolder in rethinking some unquestioned concepts, such as 'modernity', the emergence of rational states, and the implications of those for international relations scholarship. I would argue that the search for modernity was even more complex and subtle than Buzan and Lawson write, and began far earlier. The

process was not solely Western, nor was it recent. They may be correct that much of the current form of states emerged in the nineteenth century, but it also is misleading to call this the first emergence of rational states. They write: 'during the nineteenth century, polities in the core were transformed by a shift in their "moral purpose" from absolutism to popular sovereignty. ... The nineteenth century saw the emergence of "rational states"' (127).

Yet I would move the emergence of recognizably rational states over ten centuries earlier, to East Asia. As Woodside (2009: 1) has written:

The eighth century, indeed, would make a good choice as the first century in world history of the politically 'early modern.' It was in this century that the Chinese court first gained what it thought was a capacity to impose massive, consolidating, central tax reforms from the top down, which few European monarchies would have thought possible before the French revolution These were embryonic bureaucracies, based upon clear rules, whose personnel were obtained independently of hereditary social claims, through meritocratic civil service examinations.

These were important institutional and ideational innovations that predated the rise of the Western rational state by almost a 1000 years. Indeed, the basis of modernity has its roots that far back: the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of

1854, which formed the basis of the modern British Civil Service, explicitly drew inspiration from the Chinese imperial exam system, as did the American Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883. Ming-era China was also centrally organized into administrative districts down to the province level, with appointments made from the capital for most tax, commercial and judicial posts. By the time of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911), China had developed a centralized process by which the government attempted to react to food shortages. Wong (2000: 98–99) notes that these '[state-sponsored] granaries represented official commitments to material welfare beyond anything imaginable, let alone achieved, in Europe'.

Furthermore, the idea that popular legitimacy is a Western invention is also a Western conceit. Perry (2008: 38) has argued that the idea

that people have a just claim to a decent livelihood and that a state's legitimacy depends upon satisfying this claim – goes very far back in Chinese political thought. It has roots in the teachings of Confucius (sixth-fifth century BC) and was elaborated by the influential Confucian philosopher Mencius (fourth-third century BC).

This brief overview of state formation in historical East Asia might be mere quibbling if it weren't so difficult today to explain why some countries develop strong state capacity and others do not. A key element of Buzan and Lawson's argument about modernity is the rise of the rational state in the nineteenth century; but while this explanation works for Europe, it does not explain so well key contours of the East Asian experience. Even this would be mere quibbling if it were not so central to world politics. Buzan and Lawson's discussion for the

rapid rise of the East Asian countries (220–27) is more descriptive than explanatory, and begs the question of why the East Asian region has managed to catch up to the West faster than any other region. This occurred despite a wide variety of political and economic systems – Japanese democracy, Chinese Communism, and military dictatorships and subsequent democracy in Korea and Taiwan. Furthermore, some of the most important and consequential contours of the past century – the rise of Japan in the nineteenth century as the first non-Western great power, the eventual clash between Japan and the United States over the Pacific in the twentieth century, and the return of China as a regional and global economic and political centre of gravity in the twenty-first century – are not easily explained by Buzan and Lawson's argument. Indeed, I would posit that any true understanding of key contours of the past two centuries requires a much deeper view of what states are, how they form, and their intellectual, social, and institutional origins. In particular, this means widening a view of modernity and what it means, and more directly asking why some areas of the world consistently have good governance while other areas do not.

Buzan and Lawson's work is a much-needed step in the right direction from two extraordinary scholars, and there is much to praise in their book. My comments should not be seen as criticisms, but rather extensions of their argument that the field of international relations needs to move past and beyond 'IR's tendencies towards parochialism and West-centrism' (325). Rather, I wish to prod them, and others, to look even more askance and to push perhaps even a bit farther in questioning accepted and almost teleological views of how the world we live in today came to be.

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omissions and extensions

barry buzan and george lawson

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INTRODUCTION

There are four main ways that book reviewers tend to approach their task: first, a full-frontal assault on the book in question; second, a critique mainly centred on a book's omissions; third, an extension of a book's argument; and fourth, a combination of one or more of the above. We are fortunate to have had reviewers who have not chosen the first of these options. Ann Towns' review is largely of the second kind, Pinar Bilgin's the third and David Kang's the fourth as his review combines concerns about omissions with a possible extension of our argument. We are grateful to all three reviewers for their thoughtful comments on the book's main themes and arguments. In this response, we first examine concerns about omissions before turning to issues around extensions.

OMISSIONS

Ann Towns is simultaneously enthusiastic and troubled by *The Global Transformation*. On the one hand, she likes the book's 'vitality and verve'; on the other, she is concerned by the extent of the book's 'confidence'. Shouldn't an endeavour such as ours be more 'self-reflective', particularly when it comes to issues of selection? What was left in, and what was left out of the book? More particularly, why was gender written out of the narrative? Towns is right to note that our book is premised on choices about what to include and what to omit. And we take well her point that we could have been more explicit about the practice by which we chose particular storylines and downplayed others. We are happy to take the chance in this response to come clean.

Our approach was to pool what we took to the main findings that have emerged

from many decades of work on modernity in economic history, world history and historical sociology. From this literature, we abstracted three dynamics that appeared to us to be the main ingredients of the global transformation: industrialization, rational state-building and what we came to call (after a fair few iterations) 'ideologies of progress'. As these macro-dynamics emerged largely from existing literatures, they were not particularly novel in and of themselves. But we did rescue them from Eurocentric usages that saw modernity as a process internal to Europe. Hence, in our book, industrialization goes hand in hand with de-industrialization, rational state-building with imperialism and ideologies of progress with the stratification of international society into 'civilized', 'barbarian' and 'savage' peoples. More innovatively, we connected these three dynamics into a single configuration, which we saw as so important as to constitute a new 'mode of power' in world affairs. This mode of power – that is, the whole configuration rather than any single component of it – drove the emergence and spread of global modernity.

To date, and to our surprise, few respondents have questioned this set-up. Some have pushed us to stress one dynamic more than others, but there has been little pushback on the core analytical scaffolding that we construct in the book. Perhaps that is to come. Or perhaps we are simply right! More likely, the acceptance of our analytical categories reflects something of an unspoken misrecognition in much of International Relations (IR) about the relationship between theory and history. As noted above, and as Towns discusses in her review, the empirical components of *The Global Transformation* relied on choices about what to foreground and what to suppress. As with theory, doing historical work is an act of occlusion – to paraphrase Robert Cox, history is always for someone and for some purpose. Regardless of sometimes

stark disagreements over epistemology, subject matter and sensibility, the majority of historians see their core task as 'emplotment' – the process by which certain events are given a sense of order and meaning (Lawson, 2012). This, too, was our approach in *The Global Transformation*. Yet most reviewers seem to assume that the book simply parsed the available historical scholarship into an uncontroversial assemblage. We strongly suspect that the reason for this is that most people in IR see history as an uncontested point of data collection rather than a living archive of available resources. Yet our choices of industrialization, rational state-building and ideologies of progress were exactly that: choices. Clearly we think that our choices are sound. But equally clearly, our claims are built upon acts of selection – there is no 'total history' any more than there can be a 'total theory'. Rather, causal narratives such as that offered by *The Global Transformation* rely on acts of interpretation that serve to render historical mess both ordered and meaningful. Towns is right to point to the need for a degree of self-reflection about what this enterprise entrails: the act through which we chose which dynamics to highlight was a highly significant one.

Towns should not, therefore, mistake the 'confidence' we show in our narrative for certainty. Nor should she associate it with a claim to have provided a total history – for as the above discussion illustrates, we do not think that any such thing exists. Our approach was more modest. We spent considerable amounts of time ensuring that we were up-to-date with the main debates in the fields we assessed and, when it came to parts of the narrative where we were less sure of our footing, set a minimum bar that, at the very least, we should 'not be wrong'. We also made liberal use of colleagues who knew more about parts of the argument than we did. In this sense, the novelty of the book relies not on particular fragments of its narrative, and

still less on any claims of completeness, but in its synthetic quality based on combining IR, various strands of history and socio-logical accounts into a single interpretation. The academic pay-off of this approach is, we hope, a common conversation about the origins and development of global modernity added to a particular concern about the consequences of the global transformation for IR. By talking past each other, or at least in parallel to each other, many accounts of the global transformation that have accumulated in different parts of the academy have failed to see the build-up of insights into what Pinar Bilgin usefully calls (following Edward Said) the 'multiple beginnings' of global modernity. Our aim was to pool the insights generated by diverse modes of scholarship into a composite story.

But even composite stories have omissions, and Towns is right to pick up on one lacuna in our story: gender. We have already replied to Towns on this issue (Buzan and Lawson, forthcoming). For readers of this journal, therefore, we have only three relatively brief points to make. First, gender is not completely absent from our book. We highlight the ways in which understandings of the status of women during the nineteenth century were entwined with novel distinctions between public and private in order to construct gendered divisions within Western orders and legitimate discriminatory policies towards 'primitive' peoples. We also point to the ways in which patriarchy was, in many ways, reconstituted during the long nineteenth century. And we note the ways in which the discourse of 'martial races' was infused by patriarchy – Sikhs, Zulus and Masai were imbued with heroic, masculinist qualities, while Malays and Tamils were considered 'soft', 'effeminate' and 'emotional'. Clearly, there is much more to say about these subjects – and there is any number of gendered components of the global transformation that we did not discuss.

But given our limited expertise on these issues, it seemed disingenuous to do more than open up these lines of enquiry for scrutiny by more qualified interlocutors. Second, and linked to this point, it should be remembered that ours was not a book that was *primarily* concerned with the gendered construction of a core-periphery order and its relative disembedding in the contemporary world. Rather, our main aim lay elsewhere – in developing a narrative that could speak to IR as a whole. In this sense, we were (relatively) content to confine *The Global Transformation* to the development of an overarching narrative within which work on the gendered aspects of the global transformation could subsequently be undertaken. Third, and back in self-reflective mode, gender was one of the few issues that fell foul of the politics of co-authorship. Because we disagreed about how important gender was to our core narrative (very important for Lawson; less so for Buzan, who was unconvinced that gender had as much importance as a range of other factors, such as race, in our overall narrative), we did not manage to find a workable accommodation about how to treat the subject. Our mode of co-authorship worked by establishing a veto point when any such difficulties arose. We were pleasantly surprised to find that such veto points were rare. Gender, however, was one of them.

EXTENSIONS

Pinar Bilgin looks to extend our argument by using our approach as a means of critiquing 'billiard ball' models of IR research. Bilgin enlists *The Global Transformation* in her desire to demonstrate the 'intertwined' character of world history – a move we very much favour. This 'relational' sense of history as concerned with the (usually asymmetrical) interactions between peoples, networks,

institutions and polities is the mainstay of transnational and global history. We hope it is a sensibility that IR takes up in greater numbers. Similarly, we see Bilgin's approach as a warning against using concepts and categories without due regard for historical specificity. IR is far too glib about its use of terms such as 'state' – our book makes clear that there were very few 'states' in the sense that we mean it today before the nineteenth century. Indeed, for most of the world's peoples, statehood is a post-World War Two phenomenon. This, in turn, opens up broader debates about periodization and temporality in IR. We have examined this issue in depth elsewhere (e.g., Buzan and Lawson, 2014). Here we would simply note that taking seriously the 'intertwined' histories of 'multiple beginnings' promoted by Bilgin would be a major advance on the narrow, parochial character of much of IR's existing historical imagination.

David Kang also seeks to extend our argument, although he combines this with a critique of when and where modernity emerged. For Kang, elements of modernity were visible in Asia by the eighth century. In this period can be found rational 'embryonic bureaucracies' and other 'institutional innovations' that preceded the global transformation by a millennium. Again, this view demonstrates the benefits that IR stands to gain from a fuller engagement with economic and world history. The 'relative modernity' of China and Japan has been the subject of considerable debate in these fields (e.g., Pomeranz, 2000; Goldstone, 2002; Broadberry, 2014). From our point of view, the more engagement there is between IR and these literatures the better, not least as it represents both a temporal and spatial stretching of IR's historical universe, something that should allow for a more worldly enterprise to emerge.

We are happy, therefore, to concede Kang's basic point that many of the developments that enabled global modernity

can be traced back well before the nineteenth century. However, our argument is somewhat different in that we are interested less in points of origin than in sustained take-off. We do not argue that everything changed during the nineteenth century. Nor do we argue that modernity is a year zero, a moment of 'all change' or a single point in time before which things were radically different. Rather, our argument is that, during the nineteenth century, a concatenation of dynamics combined to produce a major transformation in how social orders were organized and conceived, and also in how polities and peoples related to each other. Significant changes were underway well before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, from the early-to-middle decades of the nineteenth century, these changes combined to generate a new mode of power that, in turn, reconstituted the foundations of international order.

This argument is one that is to a great extent reinforced by Kang's review. After all, the examples he cites of British borrowing from Chinese bureaucratic practices, such as the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report, took place during the nineteenth century. Similarly, notwithstanding deeply held systems of governance and traditions of political thought, most of the key events in modern Asian history took place during the 'long' nineteenth century, which was a painful, and frequently traumatic, period for most polities in the region. As Paine (2003: 336) rather unkindly puts it: 'Only in the late nineteenth century did the Chinese learn that civilization had a plural'. When the Chinese imperial order fell, it did so from a great height. But fall it did. Between 1820 and 1950, Chinese per capita income dropped from 90 per cent to 20 per cent of the world average, while the country's share of global GDP fell from around a third to five per cent; in 1952, China's GDP per capita was lower than it had been in 1820 (Maddison, 2007: 43, 164). Between the

mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, China lost wars with Japan, Britain and France. It saw large parts of its territory handed over to foreign powers and suffered the ignominy of having to sign a number of unequal treaties, as well as accommodating foreign consuls, officials and merchants, all of whom enjoyed extensive extraterritorial rights. China went through two major rebellions, including one (the Taiping Rebellion) that produced more casualties than any other conflict during the nineteenth century. Between 1911 and the late 1970s the country underwent political fragmentation, bloody civil war, foreign invasion and violent revolution before embracing market reforms. No wonder that this period is known in China as the 'Century of Humiliation'.

We welcome, therefore, Kang's desire to open up IR – and our account of global modernity – to different periods of history and diverse parts of the world. But in the case of China, what we see is not a sustained early development of 'modernity' as much as a remarkable eighth century 'efflorescence', akin to the Italian Renaissance or Dutch Golden Age (Goldstone, 2002). We agree that this Chinese efflorescence was in large part based on rational bureaucratic practices. But this is not the same thing as nineteenth-century rational statehood, which

combined new forms of administration with a radical set of economic practices, novel ideational schemas, dramatic new technologies and vastly more powerful weapons. Only during the nineteenth century did the sporadic, if spectacular, growth of China and some other places turn into sustained development free from Malthusian constraints – what we now know as modern economic growth. In this sense, as remarkable as the rapid development of Asia has been, whether carried out by Meiji Japan, the post-War Asian Tigers, or China since the late 1970s, this relies less on histories of pre-modern governance than on the peculiarities of modern development, which has become more interdependent, more intense and more compressed. In the temporality of the global transformation, if not in world historical terms more generally, polities in Asia are not early adopters but relative latecomers, which had to overcome both predation from outside powers and domestic sources of resistance to the global transformation. The spread of global modernity has been a story premised not on the revival of past glories, but on adaptation to a new mode of power. If we accept the point that China's 'rise' is, in many ways, a 'return' to pre-1800 international order, the basis for this return is new. And so too are its consequences for global order.

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