

## 論 説

## Easternization? A Historical Perspective

A contribution to the panel discussion: “Easternization: The Re-ascendancy of Eastern Economy” at the 10<sup>th</sup> RICA Conference in Bangkok, November 27, 2015<sup>1</sup>

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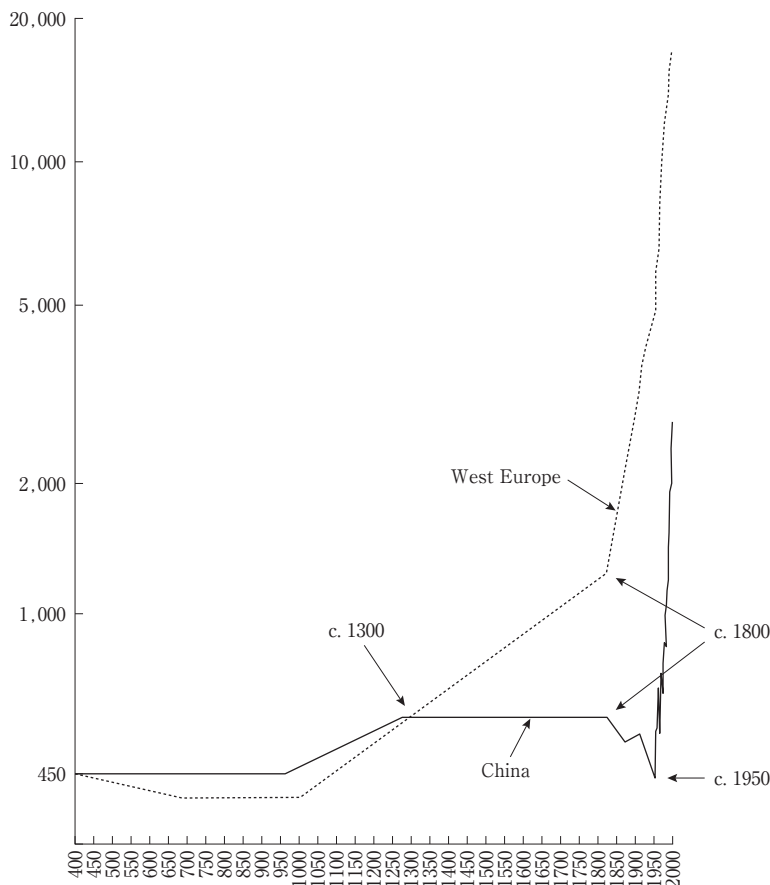
## 1. “ReORIENT”

When I think about the topic of this panel discussion “Easternization,” I remember the names of three scholars. The first is Andre Gunder Frank, a German-American economic historian and a sociologist. In 1998, he published a book with a very impressive title, “Re-ORIENT”: once again the East. In this book, he insisted that Asia and in particular East Asia dominated the world up until two centuries ago. “Only then,” he wrote, “did Asian economies lose their positions of predominance in the world economy while that position came to be occupied by the West — apparently only temporarily.”<sup>2</sup> Frank investigated the development of the world economy after 1400 and confirmed that Asia, particularly China and India, was preponderant not only in population and production but also in productivity up until 1800. This leading position shifted to Europe after the 19<sup>th</sup> century and seems now to be shifting back to the East<sup>3</sup>; thus, the term “ReORIENT” is used.

To better understand Frank’s argument, I show you a chart prepared by Angus Maddison, a British economist (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> This chart provides an estimate of GDP per capita in China and West Europe from 400 to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such an estimation for a very long period and made with likely insufficiently reliable data can provide only an approximate image of the economic development in both areas. However, the trend is clear: GDP per capita in China surpassed that in West Europe up to circa 1300. Subsequently, GDP per capita in West Europe was higher than that in China and increased significantly only after 1800. When we consider the population of both areas, the dominance of China in the scale of the economy is much clear and longer. Moreover, Asia had an additional economic center: India.

With his argument of “ReORIENT,” Frank criticized a traditional “euro-centric” view of, for example, Karl Marx. Marx argued that the “capitalist mode of production” developed within and out of Europe; the economic development and modernization of the rest of the

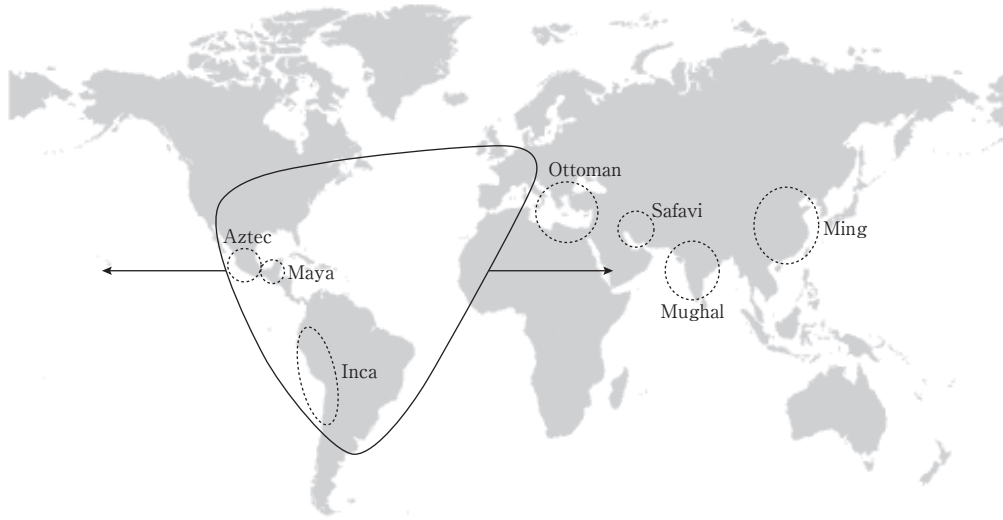
Figure 1: GDP Per Capita: China and West Europe, 400–1998 A.D.



world were enabled only through European assistance and diffusion. For Frank, Marx was a representative “Orientalist” who found that Asian societies were unable to develop themselves through their own power.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The “Modern World System” and Euro-centrism

The second scholar whom I remember is Immanuel Wallerstein, an American sociologist and a historical social scientist. He is well known as the author of the world-famous book “The Modern World System,” whose first volume was published in 1974. Wallerstein understands world history as a process of the emergence and demise of “world systems” throughout the globe. What is a “world system”? Wallerstein defines it abstractly as “a unit with a single division of labor and multiple cultural systems.”<sup>6</sup> In more “normal” words, we can probably describe the “world system” as a large territorial entity with an integrated economy and plural ethnic groups. For example, we understand the ancient Roman Empire

**Figure 2:** Birth of the Modern World System in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

as one such world system.

Wallerstein distinguishes two types of world systems: one with a common political system and one without it. He calls the former a “world empire” and the latter a “world economy.” According to Wallerstein, the world economies were historically unstable structures that led either toward disintegration or transformation into a world empire; as examples, we recall the so-called great civilizations of pre-modern times, such as China, Egypt, and Rome.<sup>7</sup>

An exception exists: a world economy that developed without changing into a world empire. That is, a European world economy emerged in the sixteenth century after the so-called discovery of the New World. This world economy, first born as a trans-Atlantic economic zone, expanded its territory and absorbed other world systems to ultimately cover the entire world (Figure 2). However, politically, this world economy did not become an empire but was an aggregate of many nation-states with colonial appendages. Wallerstein views the history of the modern world as a process of the global expansion of this European world economy. Therefore, he calls it the Modern World System.<sup>8</sup>

Wallerstein believes that we can find three structural positions in the modern world system: core, periphery, and semi-periphery. He argues that the enormous development of this system was enabled only on the basis of the appropriation of the surplus of the entire world economy by core areas.<sup>9</sup> We should remember that the history of the formation of this system in the sixteenth century included the European colonization of America. Using this argument, Wallerstein criticizes the traditional view of the development of European countries in the modern world that saw the decisive factors of this development within Europe without considering periphery areas.<sup>10</sup>

However, for Frank, this argument is insufficient. He criticized Wallerstein for still seeing the modern world system as centered in Europe and expanding from there to increasingly incorporate the rest of the world in its own European-based “world” economy. For Frank, Wallerstein is still not freed from Euro-centrism such as Marx, Sombart, Toynbee, Polanyi, and Braudel.<sup>11</sup> Another prominent representative of these Euro-centric Orientalists for Frank is Max Weber, a giant of modern social science and the third and last scholar in my speech.

### 3. “Rational” and the Emergence of the Modern World

In the opening paragraph of the introduction of his monumental work on the “Sociology of Religion,” published in 1920, Weber expressed his core interests as follows:

“What chain of factors has led to the fact that on the soil of Occident, and only here, cultural phenomena emerged, which was in a development direction of *universal* importance and validity.”<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, in the rest of the world, such as in Asia, no cultural phenomenon emerged that was in a development direction of universal importance and validity. Such a statement sounds “Orientalist.” When we think of the economic development of Asian countries in the last few decades, Weber’s argument appears completely distorted or simply incorrect. However, before discarding him as an Orientalist, we examine his argument.

The fact that Weber saw in “rationality” the most basic and prominent character of the modern European culture is well known. He classifies several types of rationalities. However, we do not have time to go into the details and must concentrate on the main element of “rationality.” What is being “rational”?

To understand the meaning of “rational” in Weber’s argument, I show you two pictures. The first picture is of a world-famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci (Figure 3).<sup>13</sup> This picture is painted using the perspective method. We find a small peg hole on the temple of Jesus. The painter was thought to have stretched several strings from this hole to decide on the position and size of the characters and furniture in the picture. Perhaps, we can paint a similar picture such as that of Leonardo — of course, not a masterpiece — but a picture only with a similar composition.

We regard the perspective method as a rule that we should follow if we want to place objects in a picture at the “correct” size and position. In other words, the size and position of objects in a picture can be “predictable” when we follow the rule. This “predictability” is the core essence of “rationality” in Weber’s argument. Related to “rationality,” he repeatedly used the German word “*berechenbar*”<sup>14</sup>; in English, it means “countable” or “predictable.”

I show you one more picture (Figure 4),<sup>15</sup> which was painted by a Japanese woodblock

Figure 3: The Last Supper (Leonardo da Vinci)

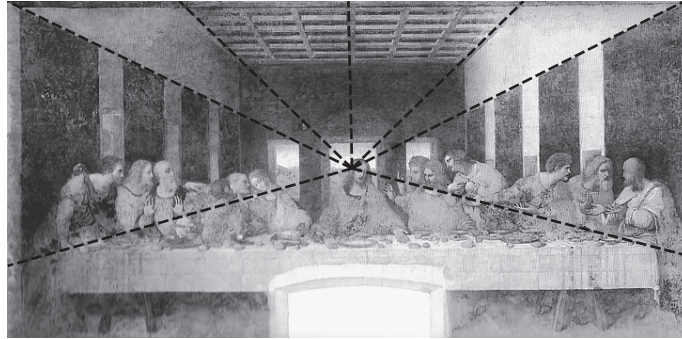


Figure 4: A Theater Scene (Hokusai Katsushika)



artist from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hokusai Katsushika. In particular, he is famous for a series of woodblock prints of Mt. Fuji. Compared with his marvelous paintings of Mt. Fuji, the picture of the theater scene is no masterpiece and gives us a strange impression. Why?

As you easily find, this picture uses the perspective method. However, we are perplexed when we attempt to find a “peg hole on the temple of Jesus” in this picture. We can likely find several “peg holes” or — using the correct word — vanishing points, which are not well adjusted. Hokusai, a painter of full curiosity, attempted to introduce the European painting method into his work but — in this case — without much success. An experiment in uniting the Japanese and European painting styles ends with a strange picture.

As you know, the perspective method was developed in the Renaissance age after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, first in Italy and then in other areas in Europe. With Max Weber, we call this method “rational” because it provides paintings with a high level of “predictability.” According to Weber, such “rationalization” occurred in Europe not only in paintings but also in

music, architecture, natural and social sciences, politics, the economy, and others.<sup>16</sup> The entire society was involved in a wave of “rationalization”—an epochal change in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe. For Weber, this change led to the emergence of the modern world.

The difference in views between Andre Gunder Frank and Weber is clear. Frank argues only about economic development in Asia and West Europe. Weber knew well that pre-modern Asia had a high level of economic activity. He wrote that “‘capitalism’ and ‘capitalistic companies’ existed in all civilized areas on earth; in China, India, Babylon, Egypt, the Mediterranean ancient world, the Middle Ages, as good as in the modern age.”<sup>17</sup> “Capitalism” means simply a monetary economy. However, Weber simultaneously states that the Occident created a completely different type of capitalism in the modern age. He defines this capitalism as, for example, “the rational-capitalistic organization of (formally) free labor.”<sup>18</sup> What is that? Can we really distinguish between pre-modern and modern capitalism? At this time, I cannot discuss this controversial topic from the studies on Max Weber. Instead, I want to consider another critical topic in Weber’s argument: the “*universal*” meaning of an Occidental civilization that I previously mentioned.

#### 4. “Universal” Meaning of European Culture?

Let me cite once again the words of Weber:

“What chain of factors has led to the fact that on the soil of Occident, and only here, cultural phenomena emerged, which was in a development direction of *universal* importance and validity.”

For many people, this sentence is nothing but a pronounced expression of Weber’s Orientalism that denies Asian societies the ability to develop by themselves. However, let me ask whether Weber’s argument is truly groundless. If it is not, we must seek possible reasons for why the Occident and not Asia is able to create a culture with a “*universal*” meaning.

One reason may be found in the economic and military power of European countries in the modern world. This power enabled these countries to put the rest of the world under their dominance, not only economically and politically but also culturally; the global dominance of Europe has made its culture “universal.”

However, I believe that we can perhaps find another answer and hints for it in Weber’s argument on “rationality.” In his study on Confucianism and Taoism, Weber wrote; “The personalistic restriction of “*Versachlichung*” has a significant importance as restriction of objective rationalization [...] because the personalistic restriction has tendency to tie each individual to clans or members of clan-like groups, at any rate to ‘persons’, and not to ob-

jective tasks.”<sup>19</sup>

The German word “*Versachlichung*” is the nominalization of the verb “*versachlichen*,” which can be translated as “objectivize” or “depersonalize.” “Making a relationship between people into a business-like one” can be the meaning of this word. A business-like relationship can be more “rational” than a “personalistic” or clan-like human relationship. Why? We should recall Weber’s argument on “rationality” and “predictability.” In a “personalistic” relationship, arbitral decisions by a person are frequently of significant influence. We think of a despot in a despotic regime. Alternatively, let us think about a family with a despotic father. Their decisions are often arbitral and therefore unpredictable; in Weber’s meaning, they are “irrational.”<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps you have a counterargument. Are decisions by a despotic father truly unpredictable? Not always; at least for family members, decisions by their father are even more predictable than decisions by, for example, customers from their business connections. However, “at least for family members” is the important point. The predictability of a despotic father is high only for a restricted circle of persons; in this sense, we can say that the predictability (or rationality) cannot be “universal.”

Please recall what I talked regarding the perspective presentation in Renaissance paintings. This method can be considered to be a rule that restricts arbitrariness in composing a picture and, in this sense, brings European paintings a high level of “predictability” and therefore “rationality.” Indeed, paintings in the rest of the world, such as Asian paintings, have their own rules. However, the European rule seems to be prominent in terms of its clearness and objectiveness; therefore, it presumably has an inherent quality to be open not only to people in Europe but also to people of other parts of the world. The dissemination of classical European music today seems to offer another example of this “universal” character of European culture. Compared with the European music, traditional music in other areas of the world normally remains “special” in its own area and is often accepted from outside as “exotic” music.

Now, we turn back to the title of our panel discussion. When we talk regarding the “Easternization” or “Re-ascendancy” of Asia, our discussion seems frequently too concentrated on the economy. I wonder if Asia has really succeeded in establishing a social system with a “universal” meaning. I do not mean that we should abandon our own cultures. I love traditional Japanese and Asian music and pictures. However, we know that Asian countries still significantly suffer from arbitrariness in politics, economics, and business administration. Frequently, this arbitrariness disturbs not only the sound development of each country. The lack of “predictability” or “rationality” can also be a barrier for establishing a better partnership among Asian countries. My message is that we should not be too much of an economist.



## Notes:

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- 1 Regional Innovation and Cooperation in Asia (RICA) is a joint project of four Asian academic institutions: National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA, Bangkok/Thailand), Pusan National University (Busan/Korea), Jinan University (Guangzhou/China), and Ritsumeikan University. From 2006, an annual international conference has been held in rotation at each of these institutions. Professor Matsuno, to whom the papers in this volume are dedicated, is one of the co-founders of the RICA. This paper was originally prepared for my speech at a panel discussion at the 10<sup>th</sup> RICA conference in Bangkok and was subsequently revised and supplemented. The lecture style is maintained.
- 2 A. G. Frank, *ReORIENT. Global Economy in the Asian Age*, London: University of California Press, 1998, p. 7.
- 3 Op. cit., pp. 7, 166.
- 4 A. Maddison, *The World Economy. A Millennial Perspective*, OECD, 2001, p. 44.
- 5 *ReORIENT* p. 14.
- 6 I. Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 6.
- 7 Op. cit., pp. 5 f.; I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York/London: Academic Press, 1974, p. 16.
- 8 *The Capitalist World-Economy*, pp. 5 f., 66, 145 f.
- 9 Op. cit., pp. 18 f., 96 f., 122 f.
- 10 Cf. *The Modern World-System*, pp. 125–127. As a harsh and persuading criticism of Wallerstein's argument: C. Torp, Die Weltsystemtheorie Immanuel Wallersteins. Eine kritische Analyse, in: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1998/1, pp. 217–241. Torp criticizes Wallerstein's pronounced concentration on the circulation of goods and the negligence of forms of production. Wallerstein defines "capitalism" as "production for the sake of selling goods on a market to achieve a maximum profit." Torp criticizes that, according to this definition, Wallerstein must have recognized that capitalism already existed in the Middle Ages and even in ancient times, such as in the Mediterranean region, India, or China, whereas he rejects classifying the pre-modern world economies as "capitalism." His negligence of production forms leads Wallerstein to an "anachronism" that characterizes the *Gutsherrn* (landlords) in the east of the Elbe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as "capitalist farmers" and neglects the epochal meaning of a fundamental transformation of the traditional ruling class in Prussia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century into a capitalistic agrarian entrepreneurial class. Op. cit., pp. 228–232.
- 11 *ReORIENT*, pp. xv f., 16, 30.
- 12 M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Bd. 1, Tübingen 1920, p. 1.
- 13 P. B. Barilon/P. C. Marani, *Leonardo. The Last Supper*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 85 (lines added). Cf. p. 415.
- 14 *Religionssoziologie*, pp. 10 f.; M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, 5. Aufl., 1980, pp. 94 (§ 30–5, 6), 128 (§ 5), 166 (§ 17–2), 174 (2), 227 f., 294, 468, 505, 563, 643.
- 15 *Catalogue for the HOKUSAI Exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum, October 25 — December 4, 2005*, Tokyo, 2005, p. 77.
- 16 *Religionssoziologie*, pp. 1–6.



- 17 Op. cit., p. 6.
- 18 Op. cit., p. 7.
- 19 Op. cit., p. 523.
- 20 Cf. op. cit., p. 544. Here Weber puts the words “rational” and “impersonal” in an almost synonymous position: “The more rational and therefore more impersonal.”