

and cooperation between these centres through personal relationships. The partnership contract (*enkeragir* in Armenian) was based on the model of a sedentary businessman, usually based in Julfa, and an active agent who travelled on the business of his master. This operative mechanism was dependent on extended family networks and reputations to work efficiently, and was thus intrinsic to the organization of community life and the societal fabric of the Julfians. Conversely, it was this successful system that ultimately bred the insularity that contributed to the demise of the network, a subject that is considered in Chapter 8. The concluding chapter has a useful comparative analysis with two other long-distance trading networks operating concurrently, the Multani Indians and the Sephardic Jews. Though the analysis is dense and insightful, one possible criticism is that it could have been expanded to do greater justice to the author's commitment to placing the Julfians in a comparative context.

This book was awarded the PEN literature award for UC Press Exceptional First Book and was also chosen as the first book in the new series Author's Imprint from the California World History Library. It is indeed an outstanding work, which will be of interest to those working on world history, economic history, trade diasporas, and diaspora studies more widely.

The great American mission: modernization and the construction of an American world order

By David Ekbladh. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011. Pp. xvi+386. 17 b/w illustrations. Paperback £16.95/US\$24.95, ISBN 978-0-691-15245-5.

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David Ekbladh's book provides a rich and thoughtful examination of American ideas about modernization and development (words that he uses mostly interchangeably). He argues that the concept of modernization that is often associated with the early Cold War and the writing of Walt Rostow has a much longer trajectory.

The book's chapters trace more than a century of modernization efforts, although the author's most detailed research focuses on the 1930s to the 1960s.

At the turn of the twentieth century, American colonial officials used state power to bring their vision of development to the new colony in the Philippines. In the 1930s, the New Deal championed efforts to apply state planning to boost electricity, agricultural productivity, and grass-roots democracy – a model exemplified in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and touted as a liberal alternative to fascism and communism. Thus, by the late 1940s, when post-war containment of communism became an urgent national priority, US policy-makers, social scientists, and NGOs turned to already well-accepted assumptions about the importance of 'modernizing' impoverished nations into an American-led world order. From the late 1940s to the 1960s, the TVA became both a global symbol and a prototype for how technology, public-private cooperation, and large-scale energy generation could alleviate poverty and make social transformation consistent with a liberal democratic order. So deeply rooted has the 'Great American Mission' of modernization been that, despite the failures and doubts that emerged from the late 1960s on, its constellation of beliefs re-emerged after 9/11 within the national security establishment, which sought to thwart future threats by sponsoring US-led economic and social transformation. Ekbladh concludes that, for more than a century, US efforts on behalf of development abroad have often been found wanting yet repeatedly invoked anew.

The book offers several significant interpretive interventions. One is the emphasis on the New Deal roots of the modernization theories that were widely embraced during the Cold War. Ekbladh's thorough research shows how dam-building and community development ideas shaped the TVA and then became key to America's attempts to appeal to the developing world during the Cold War.

Another major contribution is the book's emphasis on more than governmental actors as agents of the 'great American mission'. Ekbladh draws upon the records of universities, major foundations such as Rockefeller and Ford, religious organizations, and international agencies to illustrate the broad intellectual milieu from which faith in the feasibility and transferability of development models emanated. In a related discussion, he thoughtfully examines the breakdown of the consensus around development that occurred from the late 1960s onwards. The failure of modernization schemes such as the strategic hamlet programme during the Vietnam War provided the backdrop to disillusionment from many corners: conservatives

challenged both foreign aid and the New Deal–Great Society view of government; the left denounced the Vietnam War and the militarized modernization methods that were embedded in it; feminists argued that development schemes failed partly because they were blind to gender roles in different cultures; the new environmental movement launched a broad rethinking of how to design *sustainable* development; and anti-poverty activists noted that many of modernization’s technological fixes – such as promoting large commercial agriculture – widened the gap between rich and poor. Ekbladh’s account shows how both government and non-governmental groups, which had once joined together in praise of modernization planning, became more fragmented in their goals.

Finally, the book suggests that, over the twentieth century and beyond, even presidents who were ideologically sceptical of an activist governmental role in promoting economic and social change at home and abroad often came to embrace a mission of development consistent with shaping an American-led world. Ekbladh’s careful examination of the Eisenhower administration sustains this view. His brief account of the embrace of community-building and economic reconstruction in early twenty-first-century counter-insurgency programmes provides another telling example.

Although the chronological breadth of the book may contribute in some ways to its strength and relevance, the periods before the 1930s and after the 1970s appear in somewhat cursory fashion, in the first and last chapters respectively. These examinations are not as heavily researched as are the book’s main concerns with the rise and fall of TVA-style modernization programmes. Governmental officials did take the lead both in the colonial transformations attempted in the Philippines in the early twentieth century and in various post-9/11 attempts at nation-building, but the differences in the context of these ‘missions’ are certainly as striking as are their similarities to modernization discourses of the 1930s–1960s. Ekbladh uses the term ‘liberal development’ to cover the entire century of his book, but he gives insufficient attention to the historical vagaries of the word ‘liberal’ and how it came to accommodate, or not, very different views of the state over this span of time. Colonialism had its technologically modernizing elements, as students of colonialism recognize, but ideas about the trajectory by which nations and races might ‘develop’ changed markedly between 1900 and the late 1930s. Moreover, although Ekbladh discusses the anti-Keynesianism

that increasingly challenged state-directed modernization after about 1970, he still positions early twenty-first-century nation-building within the ‘liberal development’ mission. Is his description of American mission so broadly defined as to flatten out the specificities of historical context? The period from 1930 to the late 1960s seems a coherent timeframe for one style of ‘liberal development’, but the reach for century-long breadth may have been a stretch too far.

It should also be noted that the book concentrates on policy ideas more than on their implementation in specific places. It has a solid chapter on the importance that American leaders gave to establishing a developmental model in South Korea, especially after the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and, even more so, in the aftermath of the shooting phase of the Korean War. It also has a fine chapter on the enthusiasm for dam-building in the Mekong Delta, a TVA-style project that American leaders once hoped might preclude or ameliorate military involvement. Even these two chapters, however, take American thinkers and planners as their subjects rather than analysing in detail the place-specific unravelling of the missions. Readers may profit from considering this book alongside Nick Cullather’s *The hungry world* (2010). Cullather’s book also presents the US mission in the early Cold War as focused primarily on modernization in Asia and provides some additional in-depth examination of how modernization theories played out in particular regions and villages. Giving greater attention to the dynamic of local interactions, his analysis provides a valuable complement to understanding the variety of different strategies that claimed the terrain of ‘modernization’ in this era.

These possible limitations of Ekbladh’s book do not, however, take away from its overall significance. Ekbladh convincingly shows that New Deal-style ideas about development provided the basis, during the era of the Cold War, for the nation’s fight against communism, the battle against the global poverty that was presumed to propel radical movements, and the dense working relationship among American foundations, religious charitable organizations, new UN agencies, universities, and the US government. This well-written and prizewinning book will be an essential companion to work by Michael Latham, Nils Gilman, Ron Robin, David Engerman, Nick Cullather, and others in explaining how often US foreign policy has rested on ideas about America’s ability to transform the world through a technologically driven model called modernization.