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CSSH NOTES

Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Vol. 1. Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830; Vol. 2. Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia and the Islands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 and 2009.

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This is an astounding book. Written by an expert in Burmese history, it first attempts to place that country in the context of Southeast Asia. This he does most successfully and in a very learned way. But his more ambitious aim is to bring that region into the frame if not of world history then at least of Eurasia. This he again accomplishes in a most professional manner by pointing to the similar trajectories of the main actors but also of a number of others, not only in a structural sense but also in a chronological one.

Thus the central changes, the recording of which he sees as the core of historical enquiry, occurred throughout Eurasia at roughly the same time. He relates these to a number of factors, including the possibility of medical ones such as the plague, or even climatological ones such as the El Nino effect, but on these he is suitably tentative. In terms of these external factors, he makes much of the advent of gunpowder and firearms, first in China and the Islamic world from where they were exported to Southeast Asia, and subsequently in Europe with more efficient models and better techniques of use. But the transmission of goods was not the only factor in creating contemporary changes; the transfer of information was also hugely important, as in the basic diffusion of metal technology at the beginning of the Bronze Age. This aspect of "connectivity" is perhaps not given as much stress as one would wish but it has been of singular importance since very early times, and more so since the advent of cheap paper technology.

These factors, guns and paper, are relatively easy to trace and to fix in a chronological framework. Others with which Lieberman deals are more difficult to particularize and so their timing becomes more malleable. I think especially of "integration," which he selects as his main dependant variable. It is taken primarily in the sense of political integration, the appearance of larger and larger units. One can see that in many cases such a movement did take place but there is also a movement in the opposite direction, toward more local expression. Nor, of course, was integration only political. With early Islam, one achieved a "common market" stretching from Spain to the

borders of China based on religion (which overrode most other bases of attachment).

The study of world history oscillates between the comparative and "connective," the latter being an "enquiry into contacts between physically distant societies," the former being the "investigation of structural similarities regardless of physical linkages." Lieberman lays stress on the second but does not neglect the first. Indeed, he draws attention to the common roots of east and west in the Ancient Near East, a topic neglected by all too many historians that approach the question. But the genealogy of "civilisation" seems to me critical for the whole enterprise.

In this respect Lieberman does not perhaps give enough stress to "connectivity," though, unlike many historians of the Old World, he gives some account of early links between India, China, and the Near East which led to the diffusion of farming and herding, and later of metallurgy. Those links across the Eurasian corridor remained of prime importance for the history of Eurasia and of their importance Lieberman is certainly aware. But as the result of his concentration on integration (primarily political), and of his chosen method of taking "countries" as units for comparison, his emphasis falls on the quasi-contemporary conjuncture of various structural factors in those different polities. Conjuncture here has to be taken in a chronological as well as a structural sense. He sees certain features—firearms, Eurasian demand, administrative experiments—as changing together at (roughly) the same time, for example, in the 900 CE upsurge of growth of economic activity in Eurasia. The parameters are wide enough to encompass a great deal, which makes their coincidence sometimes less convincing.

For Lieberman, connectivity cannot explain the "broadly comparative integrative trajectories at roughly the same time" for example in the "protected zone" around the edges of Eurasia. It should be explained that integration includes territorial, administrative, and cultural trends so that it is a wider category of social action; parallels, though obviously significant, are perhaps less "strange" than he suggests. But they are linked to common structural factors as well as possibly to medical or climatological ones. In some cases the structural variables seem too broad, and so too is the dependent one, integration, since this covers not only political but other cultural forms. However, Lieberman makes an important point about structural features. In Eurasia some of these "strange parallels," which were certainly present, occurred as the result of human societies starting off from similar points of departure, parallels in subsequent elaborations being due to building up in similar ways, irrespective of subsequent connectivity. Such a process most obviously occurred not in Eurasia but in the Americas, which achieved a metal technology without any apparent link to the Old World. That demands an explanation, and elaboration from a similar structural base seems the only answer. Our predecessors spoke of independent invention, which differed from diffusion, but we have learnt not to be confined to binary opposites.

There is one problem of my own that I would wish to bring out. Like most historians of literate societies, Lieberman appears to discount the achievements of earlier cultures. I yield to no one in my acknowledgement of our debt to literacy, but earlier societies knew not only kinship but of state formation, religious worship, economic activity, and the transformation of society which the development of communication entailed. Chinese peasants did not "remain pre-literate"; when writing came they became "illiterate" for they were of course greatly influenced by the presence of literacy, perhaps through icons and other "figurative representations," as in the Bible of the Poor in Europe. In this way non-readers were "Christianized," that is, they adopted an essentially written religion with its many permanent texts. The same thing obviously happened with Buddhism and even with Confucianism, although in the latter case the fundamental text was secular, which allowed for greater freedom to explore the "natural" world, especially, than in monotheistic religions, when all had already been said (in writing) and which could not be queried. The question of illiteracy is not just a terminological matter but affects culture in a wider sense.

Lieberman's work is a massive achievement that treats the division between East and West in a positive manner. This division he tends to attribute to Marx (in the case of feudalism), but it was used much more widely. However, his extensive analysis does much to clear away the cobwebs that still surround the writing of most of "world history."

———Jack Goody

Mark Traugott, *The Insurgent Barricade*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2010.

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The barricade in public recollection, as well as in the historical imagination, is at the same time synonymous with, a synthetic description of, and a symbol of revolution, reminiscent of Benjamin's poetic invocation in his famous pages dedicated to Baudelaire's urban landscape: "magic cobblestones rise up to form fortresses." Mark Traugott is a sociologist-historian who specializes in nineteenth-century French history and author of a well-known book on the Parisian insurrection of 1848 (*Armies of the Poor*, Princeton University Press, 1985). With his new book he asks us to pay attention to the history of the insurgent barricade as a significant and long-lasting form of contention well entrenched in the history of Europe.

The perspective through which Traugott reconsiders the topic is a broad one: chronologically it spans the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and spatially it includes all of Europe, though France and Paris are the essential