The Centrality of Central Asia

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From time to time *Studies in History* will carry a contribution challenging received wisdoms or turning long-standing issues on their head. Our first dialogue is initiated by Andre Gunder Frank who argues that the history of Central Asia is crucial to the understanding of developments in a very large part of the world. Four scholars of Central Asia then comment on this provocative thesis from an unabashed non-specialist, anchored in world-system theory. Daniel Balland comments as a geographer of the region, Thomas Barfield as an expert on China–Central Asia connexions. Mansura Haider specializes on medieval Central Asia and has a command over the Uzbeg and Persian language sources, and Lawrence Krader, known in India primarily as a Marxist theoretician, is an authority on political processes amongst Central Asian peoples. Frank's rejoinder sums up the debate—for the moment!

editors

The Centrality of Central Asia

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Central Asia is of fundamental importance for understanding Eurasian History . . . . It is the missing link in World History.

Christopher Beckwith

Introductory Scope and Method

This paper poses some questions about how Central Asia fits into world history. The questions arise from my attempt to study world history as a world *system* (Frank 1990 a,b,c, 1991, Gills and Frank 1990a,b). From this perspective, as one non-specialist addressing other non-specialists of Central Asia, the region appears as a sort of black hole in the middle of the world. Little is known or said about it by those who focus on the geographically outlying civilizations of China, India, Persia, Islam, and Europe including Russia. Even world historians only see some migrants or invaders who periodically emerge from Central Asia to impinge on these civilizations and the world history *they* make (cf. McNeill 1963 and my critique in Frank 1990a). Historians of art and religion view Central Asia as a sort of dark

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space through which these world cultural achievements moved from one civilization to another. At best, they see Central Asia itself as a dark *tabula rasa* on which itinerant monks, mullahs, and artists from these civilized areas left their marks. Their remains can be admired in a Thousand Buddha Caves and mosques spread through Central Asia. Or they have been deposited in museums spread through the cultural capitals of the West and Japan after their 'discoverers' unearthed them, crated them up, and carted them away.

Yet Central Asia is also a black hole in the astronomical sense: it is hugely dark or darkly huge. Central Asia is also central to the civilizations of the outlying peoples, whose life space is sucked into the black hole in the centre. It is not clear where civilized peoples and spaces end, and where they interpenetrate with those of Central Asia. None of the civilizations are pristine. All of them were formed and even defined through interaction with Central Asia. Moreover, Central Asia is where all the outlying peoples and their civilizations connected and interacted with each other. Indeed, for millennia the Pulse of Asia (Huntington 1907) probably came from its Central Asian heart-beat. Central Asia is truly the 'missing link' in Eurasian and world history.

Central Asia is also central to any attempt at systematic or systemic analysis of the history of the world *system*. Central Asia is a black hole that must attract the attention and even the enthusiasm of any analyst of world system history. Yet Central Asia is perhaps both the most important and the most neglected part of the world and its history. Some reasons for this neglect are as follows. History is mostly written by the victors for their own purposes, especially to legitimize their victory. While Central Asia was home to many victors for a long time, they either wrote or left few histories of their accomplishments. Then, since the fifteenth century, Central Asian peoples have been mostly losers in two ways. They have lost out to others on their home ground, and their Central Asian homelands ceased to be so central to world history. Moreover, these losses were intimately related to each other: the world historical centre of gravity shifted outward, seaward, and westward.

History has also mostly been written from national perspectives about 'nation' states or at most about 'civilizations'. That is also because history is written by the victors. Moreover, national(ist) or not, historical writing or written history has been overly Eurocentric. This Euro (or Western) centrism has marked and (de)formed not only historical writing about 'the West', but also about 'the East' and the 'South'. Even many non-Western historians writing about their own countries and cultures have been infected by the virus of Eurocentrism. It blinds people to Central Asia and especially to anything important or good coming out of it. Sino-centric, Indian-centric, Persian-centric, Islamo-centric and other histories also omit adequate reference to Central Asia and even to its large influence on their own

histories. 'Civilized' peoples write their own histories about themselves and not about their 'barbarian' neighbours, whom they consider beyond the pale. However, Beckwith (1987, 1990) argues powerfully and I have also suggested (Frank 1990a) that it is high time to stop the injurious appellation of Central Asian peoples as 'barbarians'. I hope this essay will help demonstrate the same.

Finally, virtually nobody writes *world* history, or even international history. Therefore, the millennial centrality of Central Asia in inter-'national' relations and in world history, not to mention world *system* history, goes virtually unnoticed. Only specialists in this or that *part* of Central Asia take notice, but they in turn go largely unnoticed by others. Moreover, political circumstances in Soviet and Chinese Central Asia and Mongolia virtually closed much of the area off from foreign researchers for nearly two generations. For this reason also, a generational gap developed among students of Central Asia outside the area. Fortunately, a new generation of scholars, journalists, and publicists is growing, with renewed interest in Central Asia. Dramatic ethnic movements and political developments in the area now will undoubtedly attract increasing attention. Hopefully, the same events will not again close off access to the same. Today Central Asia is waiting to be discovered by the outside world. So is yesteryear's centrality of Central Asia in the history of this world outside.

Even if my purpose were, which it is not, to focus on Central Asia per se, I believe we would have to follow but also go beyond Barfield (1989: 2, 12). He writes that 'the main obstacle to creating a coherent Inner Asian history has always been the lack of an appropriate analytical framework which made sense of events there . . . . The Mongolian steppe, north China, and Manchuria must be analyzed as part of a single historical system.'

I suggest we would have to go beyond that. Whatever the appropriate framework may be, it would have to encompass far more than these three areas or even all of Central Asia itself. It would have to be derived also from the study of the interrelations within the whole Afro-Eurasian *world* system of which Central Asia was a central part. However, my purpose is not to write a coherent or any other Inner Asian history. Instead, my intent is to help clarify the role of Central Asians in the history of their neighbours beyond Central Asia and thus their place in world system history as a whole. Whatever the purpose, we need a broader systemic scope and analysis to pose more suitable questions. I will pose a dozen questions and some alternative or tentative answers, propose four systemic approaches, and offer two conclusions.

The dozen questions about Central Asia in world history relate to (*a*) the definition or location of Central Asia, (*b*) ecological and climatic factors, (*c*) migratory movements, (*d*) challenges to and responses by Central Asia's neighbours, (*e*) technological change, (*f*) state formation, (*g*) gender

relations, (*h*) ethnogenesis and ethnicity, (*i*) religion, (*j*) special nexuses, (*k*) inter'national' trade, and (*l*) inter'national' political economic relations in the world system. All of these questions have special contemporary relevance today, and they are also selected by me for that reason. Of course, this dozen is not intended to and does not exhaust the long list of other problems, which could and often are studied by others (such as art, kinship, language, or war). I then proceed to consider four systemic structures and processes derived from the study of the contemporary world system, which may be useful also to study the place and role of Central Asia in world history: the process of accumulation, core–periphery structure, hegemony–rivalry alternation, and political economic cycles in all of the above.

We may briefly anticipate two derivative conclusions. One conclusion is that it is high time to abandon the historical and still popular image of Central Asia as the home of nomad barbarians or barbarian nomads. Central Asia was also home to many highly civilized and urbanized peoples. Yet even when many people were nomadic pastoralists, they were no more 'barbarian' or 'savage' than many of their sedentary 'civilized' neighbours. Indeed, the very use of the term 'barbarian' and its supposed difference from 'civilized' is without justification. The second conclusion concerns pastoral nomadism. It was not a 'stage' from hunting and gathering to agriculture and urbanization. On the contrary, much nomadic and highly specialized pastoralism was probably the adaptive reaction to ecological, climatic, and economic exigencies by previously settled agricultural peoples. Even the Bible assigns temporal precedence to the latter. Moreover, nomadic pastoralism and settled agriculture have long been both complementary and alternative, as well as transitory and sequentially interchangeable, forms of existence. It obscures more than it clarifies to regard nomads and nomadism as a permanent type of people rather than as a transitory form of socio-economic organization. It is mistaken to regard 'Central' (or 'Inner') Asia and its many different peoples as somehow all different from the rest of the world then and now. There was and is unity in diversity, and Central Asia was not apart from but rather central to this reality of human history and existence.

Definitions, Ecology, Migrations and (Im)pulses of Central Asia

Definitions of Central Asia

Where and what *is* Central Asia? Or Inner Asia? Are they the same or different? Sinor (1969: 5) regards them as 'virtually synonymous'. Reference to 'Inner' Asia seems to be more an American usage. 'Central' Asia is more used in Europe—and in the region itself. Thus, Harvard has an 'Inner' Asian Center and Newsletter, and London has 'Central' Asian one.

However, they seem to cover the same area. But while Sinor (1969, 1977), the American authority on the area, uses 'Inner Asia' in his titles, he prefers 'Central Eurasia' as a more accurate and self-explanatory, albeit more awkward, denomination.

Whatever the name of the area, varying definitions and boundaries have been offered for it by different scholars and publicists. Toynbee (1934) delimited precise latitudes and longitudes for his definition of Central Asia. Yet Hambly (1969: xi) begins his study of *Central Asia* with the warning that 'as a geographical expression the term "Central Asia" tends to elude precise definition'. Geographically, Hambly features its isolation from oceanic influences, which reduce precipitation and increase aridity. Bounding Central/Inner Asia on the south, he finds some four thousand miles of mountain ranges between China and the Black Sea. However, he recognizes that historically the Tibetan and Iranian plateaus south of the mountains have been inextricably linked to Central Asia to the north. The eastern and western limits of Central Asia are even less easily defined along the Great Walls built by the Chinese, and the Ukrainian–Romanian–Hungarian plains. To the north, there is no identifiable boundary, unless it is where the tundra becomes virtually uninhabitable in the Siberian cold. Thus one set of mountain ranges running from south-west to north-east helps delimit Inner Asia from the centres of civilization to the south and east. Another lower and more or less parallel range divides the arid desert belt—punctuated by a long chain of oases—between these ranges from the steppe and tundra grasslands to the north.

Sinor (1969) prefers more socio-culturally defined boundaries. He suggests that:

> the definition that can be given of Central Eurasia in space is negative. It is that part of the continent of Eurasia that lies beyond the borders of the great sedentary civilizations. This definition implies that the frontier is unstable . . . . Essentially it is a cultural barrier that exists in the heart of man (Sinor 1969: 2; also Sinor 1977: 95).

Sinor (1977) also evokes the analogy of a volcano. Occasionally, the volcano erupts and its molten core of magma overflows into the outlying sedentary civilizations, which try to contain it. Later, however, the molten lava hardens, is assimilated into the surrounding crust and then helps to contain new eruptions and the forces that propel them. Therefore in the view of Sinor also, the remaining 'center' or 'inner' Asia is tendentially shrinking.

Khazanov (1979) is more precise and further distinguishes Middle Asia from Inner (Central) Asia. He limits the latter to Kashgaria, Jungaria, Mongolia, and Tibet. Khazanov denominates the region between the Caspian and Aral Seas in the west and north and bounded by the Hindu Kush and

the Pamir mountains in the south and east as Middle Asia. Khazanov also distinguishes between the now Arabic Near East and the Middle East, where he places Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. Yet he recognizes that much of the latter have historically been very much part of Middle, Central or Inner Asia. Some authors argue that socio-politically speaking, Manchuria was historically also part of Central/Inner Asia. But so were much of Siberia and Southern Russia, the Ukraine, and other parts of Eastern Europe.

The people of Central Asia do not call themselves 'Central Asians'. Rather, they tend to identify with (and themselves as) this ethnicity or that. However, the same ethnic denomination has served and been applied to many different peoples at different times. Over the centuries, the 'same' people also have gone through various different ethnic names, adopting their present name and identity only very recently, as Gladney (1990) shows about the Uighurs in China for instance.

In the meantime however, the 'Inner Asian Frontiers' of China, as Lattimore called them, move back and forth. So do, or soon again may, the boundaries of Soviet 'Central' Asia. The Chinese call their Central Asian region a part of Western China. They expressly do *not* like it to be called 'Eastern Turkestan'. The boundary now threatens to shift again in the near future. For people in Tibet and the Sinkiang Autonomous Uighur Region, and their supporters abroad, seek to reverse Chinese administration and sovereignty, as even the *Beijing Review* recognizes (Vol. 33, No. 34, 20–26 August 1990).

To conclude, perhaps we should return to Herodotus. He already asked why we should distinguish between Europe and Asia (and indeed, Africa), when geographically and socially, that is historically speaking, there is only one continent of Eurasia (or Afro/Eurasia). So where does its centre begin and end? How much of present day China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, or even European Hungary, were effectively working parts of Central Asia during what times of their history? Speaking of Europe, what about the Magyars, Bulgars, Turks, and others who migrated as recently as in medieval times; or Dorians, Hittites, and many other peoples who populated Greece and the Levant in classical and ancient times? Indeed Aryans went to India and Indo 'Europeans' and their languages came to Europe. Yet all originated in 'Central' Asia. So where and when does Central Asia begin and end? Climatic and ecological features and differences also have some bearing.

Ecology and Climate

What effects did ecology and climatic change have on human settlement and migration in Central Asia, on its boundaries if any, and thereby also in neighbouring areas? And vice versa, how did human habitation and use of the environment maintain or degrade it? More than other regions in the

world, Central Asia is marked by shifting tundra steppes and deserts as well as high mountain ranges whose snow water run off permits habitation even in desert oases. Therefore also more than elsewhere, habitation was and still is often at a margin of subsistence, which is sensitive to minor changes in delicate ecological balances. Even small climatic and ecological changes can have large human consequences, and vice versa.

Estimates and interpretations of determinant factors cover the whole range and many variations from ecological to social determinism. Huntington wrote *The Pulse of Asia* (1907) and *Civilization and Climate* (1915/1971) to argue the case for ecological determination. 'History can never be written correctly until its physical basis is thoroughly understood', he said. Lattimore (1940/1962) denied even less determinist interpretations and argued for more social ones. Yet even he recognized that different ecological bases supported different settlement and land use patterns in steppes, oases, hill country and alluvial plains.

Particularly important is the question of just when and how (much) climatic changes may have influenced patterns of settlement, land use, and migration in various parts of Central Asia, and thereby also in other parts of the world. Huntington (1915) found a dry period from 1400 to 1200 BC, moist conditions from 400 to 500 BC, greater dryness around 200 BC, and better conditions when Christ was living. These were followed by renewed desiccation reaching its climax about AD 650, improvement until about AD 1000, renewed dryness culminating in the thirteenth century, followed by a recovery and then minor fluctuations in climate. Huntington saw climatic degradation leading to economic distress, political instability, and increased migration. Conversely, he saw 'the repeated coincidence between periods of improving climate and periods of cultural progress [which] appears to be due not only to the direct stimulus of climate . . . but to that stimulus combined with a high racial inheritance due to natural selection' (Huntington 1915: 28).

Huntington's geographic and climatic determinism is now mostly discarded (but we will encounter its resurrection by De Meo in the discussion of gender relations below). There seems to be no generally accepted theory of climatic change; and the thesis that tendential warming, desiccation, and desertification engendered the conversion of sedentary agriculturlists into nomadic pastoralists is the subject of much dispute. Prince Kropotkin (the anarchist!) and Toynbee and others gave it credence. The Russian and American authorities, Barthold (1956: 13) and Lattimore (1962), rejected it. Contemporary writers such as Khazanov (1979: 87–95) regard climatic change as an important, albeit not necessary and certainly not sufficient, explanation for the emergence of nomadism and other social changes.

Still, climate and ecology seem to deserve more attention than social scientists and historians are usually willing to give them. In Central Asia especially, small changes in global and regional temperature move the

snow line up and down the mountains and alter the resulting water flow. Habitation in the lowland steppes, oases, and even plains is dependent on the same. Moreover, the amount and geographical pattern of precipitation and summer and winter temperatures change in the lowlands. Therefore, the amount and location of agricultural and grazing land and desert change, as do ever shifting 'frontiers' between them. Areas of settlement and pasturage, and of migration or invasion, were affected accordingly. Therefore 'the Inner Asian frontiers', not only of China but also with other neighbouring peoples and among Central Asians themselves, were subject to periodic adaptations to climatic change. For instance, did climatic change contribute to the decline of the Hsiung Nu and the early (and later?) Han Dynasty in China? Did the same also help change Han Chinese relations with peoples in Central Asia and contribute to their westward migration and invasion into Europe? Did a regional increase in temperature in East Central Asia during the early fourteenth century contribute to the increase in the population of rats there? These, in turn, helped spread the Black Plague across most of Eurasia in the third and fourth decades of the century. Did they follow the Mongol advance, and was this also a response at least in part to a climatological impulse? Migrations and land use or disuse, also by deforestation and through irrigation destroyed by warfare, could also affect the environment in general; and they could alter precipitation and erosion in particular. We will take note of some major historical migratory movements through and out of Central Asia below. Whether and how climatically induced they were or not remains open.

Migrations

When and what were the major migratory movements out of Central Asia? What were their causes and consequences there and elsewhere? It is a commonplace that peoples from Central Asia crossed the Bering Straits to settle the Americas. Increasing evidence also points to eastward maritime migrations to the New World from Southeast Asia and the Islands across both the South and the Central Pacific. However, even these people of Indian and Malay origin—who also peopled Madagascar—could also have had some origins in or impulses emerging from Central Asia.

Central Asian peoples repeatedly emerged and migrated into outlying areas. From a European perspective, Gimbutas records radiocarbon evidence of three major westward thrusts of migratory waves by steppe pastoralists in 4300–4200 BC; 3400–3200 BC; and 3000–2800 BC (cited in Eisler 1987: 44). For more recent periods, McNeill (1963), Phillips (1965), and Hambly (1969), have also observed recurrent waves of migration emerging from Central Asia towards all directions. However, the predominant direction was westward; perhaps, as Khazanov (1979: 173) suggests, because that was where the more fertile and richer regions lay. Each of these waves

was about 200 years long, and they occurred at intervals of about 500 years. Huntington attributed these recurrent migrations to a 640 year cycle of climatic change in Central Asia, but others dispute this. Gills and Frank (1990b) suggest the existence of long cycles of approximately 200-year upswings and 200-year downswings in economic growth and hegemonial expansion, which we have tried to identify since 1700 BC.

Whatever the reasons for the migrations, perhaps by 1900 BC but certainly between 1700 and 1500 BC, Hittites and Kassites moved to Asia Minor; Aryans moved into India and Iran; etc. These and other migrations out of Central Asia affected not only each of the receiving regions and peoples. The consequences also altered the relations among these outlying peoples and regions themselves, as for instance those between Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Another major migratory movement occurred around 1000 BC, from perhaps 1200 to 900 BC. Indo-Europeans moved eastward and perhaps became ancestors of the later Tocharians of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang. Around half a millennium before the birth of Christ, the movement of the Massagetae drove the Scythians westward, and they in turn pushed the Cimmerians west and southward. The latter crossed the Caucasus and arrived in Asia Minor in 680–670 BC. Later, Herodotus recorded their incursions—and their supposedly exceptional savagery—for history. They were followed by the Sarmatians.

Around the beginning of the Christian era, migratory movements emerging from Central Asia contributed to far-reaching changes. On China's 'Inner Asian Frontier' the Ch'in and Han rulers fought off the Hsiung Nu in Zungaria across the Tien Shan Mountains. To do so, the Chinese tried to enlist the aid of the Yue Chi along the Kansu (Haxi) Corridor and Dunhuang. However, the Hsiung Nu defeated the Yue Chi, who migrated westward. It is still disputed whether the former became the Huns who later invaded Europe. However, the latter did conquer the Saka people and/or the Bactrian successors of Alexander the Great. Their descendants founded the Kushan Empire, which ruled the north of India. Parthians invaded Persia from the north to conquer the Seleucids who had taken over there from Alexander.

Around AD 500, new movements of peoples from Central Asia spread in all directions and had domino effects. Ephtalites moved into India, Goths and Huns into Europe (Attila attacked Rome in 452). Tang China, Western and Eastern Byzantine Rome, Persia, and the later spread of Islam, among others, would not have become what they did without the impact of these migrants and invaders from Central Asia. Before AD 1000, the Turks, who originated in the Altai near Mongolia, moved into Anatolia, which became Turkish. Perhaps the most memorable migration and invasion movement was that of the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his successors to Tamerlane in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The world's largest empire

which they created was short-lived, but its consequences were far reaching in the development of Ming China, Moghul India, Safavid Persia, the Ottoman Empire and perhaps even through its effects on subsequent European development and expansion.

Migrations in, through, and out of Central Asia must still be viewed as both cause and effect of the long-term evolutionary and cyclical history of the Eurasian ecumene as a whole—and perhaps as an expression of the process of accumulation in the whole world system, which we will invoke at the end of this essay. However, a note of caution about migrations should perhaps also be expressed. Diakanoff (1990) suggests that not all supposed mass migrations really occurred. The evident diffusion of languages through Eurasia, for instance, need not have occurred only through massive migrations of peoples who spoke these languages. Instead, according to Diakanoff, many languages were passed on from one population to another like a baton in a relay. That, he suggests, was the case with the spread of Turkish languages, more so than through massive westward migration, for which he finds little genetic or other evidence. Diakanoff expresses similar reservations about the diffusion of Indo-European languages through earlier migrations. However, if Diakanoff's reservations about migrations and his alternative explanations in terms of economic and political contacts are well taken, the thesis of systemic linkages across Afro/Eurasia would be better sustained.

Challenges to and Responses by Civilization

What were the challenges that these Central Asian incursions posed to their neighbours, and how did the latter respond? We may recall that Toynbee (1934, 1946) placed great emphasis on the responses of civilizations to the challenges they encountered, both inside and outside themselves. 'Time and again they [peoples from Central Asia] developed military powers capable to change the course of history of urban civilizations' (Azzaroli 1985: 66). Therefore, Stavarianos (1970: 6) suggests 'The ancient, the classical, the medieval periods of pre-1500 Eurasian history . . . were heralded by major turning points primarily attributable to these nomadic invasions'.

Similarly, McNeill (1963) observed important civilizational impulses all around Eurasia *after* the periodic incursions from Central Asia. Beyond the 'civilizing of the barbarians' who came, McNeill suggests repeatedly, civilization itself benefited from and responded positively to the newcomers.

> Throughout its length this Eurasian civilized belt confronted steppe nomads whose raids and migrations continued, like ocean waves, to break from time to time upon the fringes of civilized, sedentary societies.

> Indeed, the nomad challenge was sufficiently important that the political history of the ecumene may in large part be understood as the consequence of shifting pressures brought from the steppes against the various segments of the civilized world (McNeill 1963: 316–17).
> [The] resurgence of civilized imperial power [was] drawing at least part of its strength from a 'native reaction' against foreign intruders (389) . . . . The civilized communities of Eurasia (excepting China) were impelled to modify their military, political, and social systems by introducing many of the features we are accustomed from European history to term 'medieval' (391).

Moreover, the opposite was also the case:

> As commerical [and other] links among the major Eurasian civilizations weakened, outlying areas were thrown back more exclusively on their own resources. Interruption or drastic diminution of contacts with the outer world then allowed the local peoples to elaborate their own styles of life, while making use of civilized elements which had come to their attention during the earlier, more cosmopolitan, and better travelled age (362–63).

Certainly, except that the same thing was also true of relations between outlying areas and Central Asia, and except that China was not so much of an exception in this respect, as we will observe below. Lattimore in his last work concluded that nomad incursions promoted the unification of China. Khazanov (1979), more cautious, asks 'by way of a conclusion' whether 'in Chinese, Middle Eastern and Near Eastern societies . . . the general direction of evolution and tempo of evolution . . . [was] affected by the fact that they were frequently conquered by nomads? If so, in what way? These are all themes for further research rather than problems which have already been solved' (Khazanov 1979: 303).

A world systemic approach, such as that proposed below, can offer an analytical framework to further this research.

Technology, State Formation, Gender Relations, Ethnicity, and Religion in Central Asia

This interaction between Central Asians and civilized peoples to the east, south, west and finally also to the north of the heartland of Eurasia took the forms of migration, invasion, war, alliances, and trade. The interaction involved the diffusion of technology, artifacts, social institutions, culture, and religion. As a result, political, social and economic organization also underwent far-reaching transformations. States and empires developed, decayed, and were overthrown or incorporated by others. None of these

influences would have been possible without technological developments or adaptations in Central Asia itself, which were sufficient to generate and diffuse these social consequences among the supposedly more 'civilized' and advanced neighbours.

Technology

So, what technology was developed or improved in Central Asia and/or in response to it? Today technology is widely regarded as the major driving force of development and civilization. Scientific and technological development itself is widely associated with Western civilization. Unfortunately, much technological development is today and always was derived from the military sector and the competitive pressures of political, economic, and military rivalry. Various parts of the West (and now also Japan) have gained an upper hand in this technological development for centuries. Needham (1954–84) has devoted a lifetime to writing *Science and Civilization in China* as a balancing corrective, especially for earlier times. Others recall the development of agriculture, astronomy, alphabets, Arabic numerals (apparently invented in India, which maintained close contacts with Central Asia), especially the zero and other contributions to knowledge and technology by other civilizations. Thus again 'barbarian' Central Asia is made to appear as a dark void. Is this really a fair and balanced accounting?

There is substantial evidence that many military, transportation, and livestock developments came from Central Asia. Other developments were made by the outlying civilizations in response to their relations with Central Asians. Horses and (Bactrian) camels, and probably sheep were put to human use and domesticated in Central Asia. Domestication of the horse began in Czechoslovakia, the Ukraine, and southern Russia about 6000 years ago; but the most important developments occurred farther east in Central Asia in the second millennium BC. This may seem like small potatoes in our mechanized age. But for thousands of years, these animals were the main source of human overland transportation, military superiority, animal protein, warm clothing, tenting, etc. Moreover, the developments were complemented by others in transportation and military technology *and metallurgy* (especially in the Caucasus), much of which also came from Central Asia.

Sinor (1977: 171) notes that the horse was certainly the *ultima ratio* of Inner Asian power, as generations of Chinese recognized. The incursions of Central Asians into 'more' civilized outlying areas in the period 1700–1500 BC were victorious largely thanks to the horse-drawn, spoked-wheel, war chariots, which were developed or improved in Central Asia. They must also have brought with them a social organization, which was effective enough to conduct their military campaigns and to make them victorious

over their 'more civilized' neighbours. Half a millennium later in the period around 1000 BC, Central Asian incursions were again victorious as noted above. This time they *rode* bigger domesticated horses and came armed with weapons made of iron. In the meantime, Central Asians had again made important advances in transportation and military technology, including metallurgy, to bring on the iron age. The fact that Central Asians were again victorious suggests that they had developed something of value in a competitive world. Their more sedentary neighbours also developed technology and social organization in response to their relations with Central Asians and of course also with each other. This organization includes the formation of states and the organization of political power.

State formation

What was the role of Central Asia in state formation and political organization, also in outlying civilizations and empires? 'The origins of the state' is the subject of a long-standing debate, which is beyond our present scope. The formation of states and their administration has almost universally been interpreted as a function of the 'internal' needs of 'societies' to organize their economy, society, culture, and therefore also polity.

However, the distinction has also been made between the 'primary' state whose origin is sought within its own 'society' and the 'secondary' state, which develops at least in part in response to another (primary) one. Webb (1975) proposes the terms 'intrasystemic' for the probably only six or eight primary state areas (including Mesoamerica and Peru) and 'intersystemic' states for the many formed by processes involving long distance contact. Cohen (1978) distinguishes between (theories of) state formation based on 'internal' factors and those based on 'inter-polity relations'. Among the latter, inter-polity long-distance trade, the exaction and/or payment of tribute, and warfare take pride of place as reasons to form a state better to intervene in these relations between 'societies'. Cohen and others also note that not necessarily all members of society, but only the interests of a privileged few may be enough to generate the concentration and organization of power in a state for these purposes.

In an age of territorial 'nation' states, the tendency is to identify a particular territory with its own nation and state, as though these naturally go together. Actually, it is curious that this should be so when as I am writing, the Gulf region and South Asia are convulsed by issues of what territory is in whose state (all of which were formed and their boundaries drawn by Western colonialism). Also two forty-year-old post war states in Europe are reuniting as a single 'nation' in boundaries very different from any previous ones. Post-colonial African 'national' states are still trying to form their 'nations' in the face of tribal and inter'national' disputes. In Central Asia itself, ethnic disputes and rivalries are (re-)erupting to challenge

territorial and state organization of a half, one, and two centuries standing. Therefore, the identity of state, nation, and territory is doubtful even today. They were not identical in the past, least of all in Central Asia.

In a parenthetical aside, I have long since lamented (for instance to students) the limitations and distortions of our vocabulary, which obliges us to speak of 'international' trade and relations. This vocabulary suggests that the 'national' states came first in time, space, and importance, and that only then did they go on to establish 'inter'national relations among themselves. That is also the nearly universally accepted political and economic theory and popular viewpoint. According to these, international relations and trade then become the secondary object of study and attention after that of our own 'society'. Immanuel Wallerstein and I have long argued that this supposed sequence of events and importance is historically contrary to fact since 1500. We argue that the world economy and the world system came first in time *and* importance. We submit that the not so national states arose later to organize political and economic power in order to be able to compete against others in this competitive world economy and system. I believe that the historical evidence is overwhelmingly on our side, even if the terminology is not. Wallerstein and others may not wish to follow me in my claim that the same was also equally true for several thousand years before AD 1500 (vide our debate in Wallerstein 1991 and Frank 1990c as well as my analyses in Frank 1990a,b, 1991 and Gills and Frank 1990a,b). Yet I believe that over a very long period already, systemic unity preceded and helped form the 'separate' parts and their relations with each other. Central Asia and the relations of its people with each other and with others 'outside' were perhaps the most important cases and the central factor in this systemic unity.

Historically, the identification of state, territory, and nation is false. In Central Asia, it is easy to see that matters were largely otherwise. State power was organized and reorganized by often nomadic peoples on the basis first of tribal allegiance; then of political alliances, rivalries, and conquests; and only lastly, on shifting and temporary territorial bases. What then was this 'society'? And apparently sedentary states or those of supposedly sedentary peoples and societies were not very different. Only in a few major alluvial plains was the agricultural base relatively territorially fixed. These were around the Tigris/Euphrates, Nile, Indus, and Yellow rivers—and even these shifted as the river-bed changed. Yet even in these territories *different* states came and went. Their ethnic, national, cultural, and social base and rulership changed, as did their political centres from one capital to another, and their administrative territorial ranges. Nothing was politically fixed. Moreover, the comings and goings of Central Asians contributed importantly to this flux elsewhere.

Throughout Afro/Eurasia, including not only nomadic Central Asia,

state and imperial political power was formed and reformed on a catch-as-catch-can basis with only temporary territorial and very little national basis. Even 'China' with its millenarian civilization did not exist as such (and may again change). Dynasties with different bases and territories came and went. Over half of the time during the past three or even two thousand years, these dynasties had 'non-Chinese' origins, mostly in Manchuria and some in Central Asia. The (non) territorially and nationally based organization of state and imperial political power was not so different elsewhere than it was in Central Asia.

Was state power organized only or even primarily to serve 'internal' social needs? The central thesis of Khazanov's *Nomads and the Outside World* is that 'nomads could never exist on their own without the outside world and its non-nomadic societies' and that 'the important phenomenon of nomadism . . . consists in its indissoluble and necessary connection with the outside world' (Khazanov 1979: 3). The same relationship extends to the formation of the state among the nomads—and perhaps among their sedentary neighbours also. Khazanov (1979, Chapter 5 and 1981) links state formation among nomads mostly but not always with external expansion at the expense of their sedentary neighbours. He distinguishes between conquest and subjugation of sedentary peoples, from whom the nomads exact tribute, and sedentarization of the nomads themselves on their neighbours' territory. In either case, state formation is an important instrument for the nomads. Sometimes also, a nomad state may be formed to derive tribute from a sedentary one to which it offers protection from other nomads.

Barfield goes another step further. In his analysis of *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China*, he criticizes the

> common assumption that the creation of a nomadic state was the result of international development. Yet historically known nomadic states were organized on a level of complexity far beyond the needs of simple nomadic pastoralism . . . . The development of the state among nomadic pastoralists, therefore, was not a response to internal needs; rather it developed when they were forced to deal with more highly organized sedentary state societies on a continual basis. Drawing on cases from southwestern Asia, Irons [1979] came to the same conclusion and reduced it to a hypothesis: "Among pastoral nomadic societies hierarchical political institutions are generated only by external relations with state societies and never develop purely as a result of internal dynamics of such societies" (Barfield 1989: 6–7).

Barfield devotes much of his book to confirming this hypothesis for Eastern Central Asia. He extends it by showing that

> Powerful nomadic empires rose and fell in tandem with native dynasties in China. The Han and Hsiung–nu empires appeared within a decade of one another, while the empire of the Turks emerged just as China reunified under the Sui/Tang dynasties (*ibid.*: 9). The unification of China under the Ch'in/Han dynasties and the steppe under the Hsiung–nu after centuries of anarchy occurred within a single generation. Three hundred years later, dissolution of central power in both China and the steppe also took place within a generation. It was no accident that the steppe and China tended to be mirror images of one another. Ultimately the state organization of the steppe needed a stable China to exploit. The Turkish empires and the T'ang dynasty provide an unusual opportunity to test this hypothesis (*ibid.*: 131).

Since Barfield's book is primarily about nomadic empires, he tries to demonstrate how trade relations with and surplus from China was an essential input into nomadic societies. The acquisition and administration of this surplus from the outside was necessary to establish and maintain claims to political power for and among the nomadic rulers themselves. That is, much nomadic political power was based on the ability of particular tribal rulers to guarantee the input of surplus derived from their relations with the Chinese. This input was especially essential for the organization and maintenance of imperial alliances and conquests among nomadic tribes themselves. However, DiCosmo (1990) points out, and Barthold (1956; 1962: 11–13) seems to confirm, that class and intra-nomadic power struggles preceded (and were more bloody than) the nomadic winners' incursions into neighbouring sedentary states.

However, this stable relationship with a stable imperial dynastic power in China was so important for the nomad rulers that the Central Asian Uighur state helped the Tang dynasty defend itself against the major An Lu–shan rebellion in 755. (We must return to this important period and its outcome, including the decline of Tang power, in another context below). Thus nomadic and Chinese power rose and fell not only in temporal tandem but also in structural symbiosis.

This part of Barfield's analysis suggests at least three important further questions and extensions of research and analysis:

(*a*) How true was this same tandem and symbiosis for the formation and decline of major states elsewhere in Central Asia? Irons (1979) already suggested that the same was true for the formation of Central Asian states in their relations with West Asia. This requires further investigation, also for South Asia. Indeed, the formation and expansion of these states may also have been part of Eurasian wide economic and political cycles, to which we will return below.

(*b*) What was the mix of 'internal' and 'external' dynamic, needs and possibilities in the ups and downs of the many smaller states in Central

Asia? They were more territorially based on oases and special nodal nexuses and crossroads of interchange with other peoples. We will also return to them below in other contexts. Here, it is enough to observe that these oases and other nodal regions *and states* were vitally dependent on long distance trade and that they were the object of constant rivalry among their neighbours. Therefore it stands to reason that state power in these localities came, was organized, and also went very much as a function of the ups and downs of their relations with their neighbours near and far—and as part of Eurasian political economic cycles.

(*c*) The most interesting and important further question and possible reinterpretation of the historical evidence is the implication of Barfield's hypothesis of secondary or intersystemic state formation for civilizations and empires 'outside' Central Asia. Was the formation, organization, and decline of states in the outlying areas 'internally' or 'externally' shaped and determined? Central Asian states rose and declined not only in tandem but also in symbiosis with those of the 'highly organized sedentary state societies'. Therefore, was political power in these latter societies also organized at least in part as a function of their relations with those of Central Asia *and* with each other? The old adage has it that asking the right question is getting more than half of the right answer. It stands to reason that political organization in these sedentary state societies was a function of their 'external' relations as well as of their 'internal' needs. Indeed, many of their 'internal' needs *were* 'external' relations. This internal/external relation was particularly pressing for and on the state. For the state was needed to organize economic, political, and of course military relations and rivalry with other 'societies' near and far.

The demonstration of the importance of 'external' factors and of relations with Central Asia in the 'internal' organization of states around Afro/Eurasia (and for that matter elsewhere) is beyond our scope and my capacity. However, (re)investigating this 'external' relationship and the role of Central Asia in the formation, maintenance, and decline of state and other political power elsewhere is a major task of historical research and (re)interpretation. It can begin with the analysis of state formation in the alluvial plains of Mesopotamia, the Indus, and Egypt. These regions had relations with each other and with the Levant, Anatolia, and with the peoples of Central Asia. Thus, in 2350 BC, Sargon sent military expeditions into the highlands of Persia and Anatolia to safeguard the supply of metals and other products essential to his people and his own rule over them.

The repeated incursions of Central Asian peoples outward into all directions east, south, and west, as well as day-to-day economic and political relations across these 'Inner Asian frontiers' obliged all outlying sedentary societies to adapt their political organization to the exigencies of these relations with Central Asia. For instance, Masson and Sarianidi (1972: 169) conclude their study of pre-Achaemenid Turkmenia with a reference to:

> the complex process of migration of peoples belonging to the Indo-Iranian language group, in which many of the modern peoples of Western Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and India had their origin. Thus all the evidence clearly reveals the close and indissoluble links between the history of West Central Asia and that of its neighbours. Close ties and mutual influence have from the earliest times lighted the difficult road of the progress of mankind.

At the other end of Central Asia, Eberhard (1977) suggests that the Qin were able to build the very first centralized state in China at least in part thanks to their control of trade with Central Asia through the Wei and Tao valleys. Of course, the later dynasties in China also were at least reformed if not originally formed as a function of the ups and downs of their relations with the peoples of Central Asia.

Excessively Sino-centric perspectives and accounts among both Chinese and others may have obscured this tandem and symbiotic relationship, but it was nonetheless a historical fact. Indeed, perhaps it was so important, that it was necessary for Chinese and Sinophiles to try to obscure it.

> The traditional interpretation of Sino-barbarian relations . . . is thus clearly not a valid one . . . . The evaluation of the latter, whether done by a Chinese or a Western scholar, has been too Sino-centric. Unquestionably, China enjoyed a higher level of cultural achievement, but it was not isolated from its neighbours. From Han times, there is evidence that China was subjected to outside cultural influences, and these were even stronger during the Sung dynasty, when China was never in a position to force its world-view on recalcitrant powerful neighbours (Kwanten 1979: 104).

Gender relations

Were they different in Central Asia from those elsewhere, and if so, how? This question has become important in recent feminist interpretations of history. Since history has been very much written by, of, and for men (to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln), all people can or should welcome this new feminist historiography and its effort to set the historical record straight. However, Gimbutas (1980, 1981) and Eisler (1987) in particular attribute partriarchy (in the West) to the incursion of warring nomads from Central Asia.

> As Aryans in India, Hittites and Mittani in the Fertile Crescent, Luwians in Anatolia, Kurgans in eastern Europe, Acheans and later Dorians in Greece, they gradually imposed their ideologies and ways of life on the lands and peoples they conquered. There were other nomadic invaders

> as well. The most famous of these are the Semitic people we call Hebrews (Eisler 1987: 44).
> It is what seems most definitely to unite these peoples of so many different places and times: the structure of their social and ideological systems. *The one thing they all had in common was a dominator model of social organization*: a social system in which male dominance, male violence, and generally hierarchic and authoritarian social structure was the norm. Another commonality was . . . not developing technologies of production, but through ever more effective technologies of destruction . . . . There seems little question that from the very beginning warfare was an essential instrument for replacing the [gender equal] partnership model with the [patriarchal male] dominator model (*ibid.* 47 emphasis in the original).

The reading of history by Gimbutas and Eisler is open to many doubts if not denials. For instance, Khazanov (1979: 90) calls the Kurgan culture, which plays a prominent role in the argument of Gimbutas, only an artificial and speculative construction. There is indeed considerable question whether previously egalitarian partnership was really the norm, and warfare absent, in the southern and western Eurasian societies, as Eisler claims. Moreover with regard to Central Asia, there is also some question as to whether patriarchy was especially the norm among the invading nomads from Central Asia. De Meo (1987; 1990) argues in favour of both cases and even in support of greater egalitarianism in Central Asia itself *before* climatic change supposedly obliged people there to abandon what he calls matrism and to adopt patrism. He says 'these are nearly identical in concept' with those of Eisler (De Meo 1990: 22, n. 2). He refers to what he calls Saharasia, a 1000 mile wide belt running from the Sahara through Central Asia to North East Asia.

> What of the peoples who inhabited Saharasia during the wetter times of plenty? The evidence is also clear on this point: *these early peoples were peaceful, unarmoured, and matrist in character*. Indeed, I have concluded that there does not exist any clear, compelling or unambiguous evidence for the existence of partrism anywhere on Earth significantly prior to c. 4000 BCE. However, strong evidence exists for matrist social conditions (De Meo 1990: 30 emphasis in the original).
> A systematic and global review of such evidence revealed distinct global patterns in these archaeological transitions, wherein entire regions were transformed from matrism to patrism within the same general time periods, or where the transition to patrism swept across major positions of a continent, from one end to the other, over a period of centuries. Of major significance was the finding that the earliest of these cultural transformations occurred in specific Old World regions (notably in

> North Africa, the Near East, and Central Asia, around 4000–3500 BCE), *in concert with major environmental transformations, from relatively wet to arid conditions in these regions* (*ibid.*, 25 emphasis in the original).

Thus De Meo attributes the change from matrism to patrism first to the desertification of previously settled Saharasia, and the starvation, nomadization and mass migration produced by this climatic change. Then patrism was diffused from Central Asia to the outlying regions of still sedentary settlement and civilization.

De Meo resurrects a sort of Huntingtonian climatic determinism, even of character. He correlates 34 'dichotomous behaviours, attitudes, and social institutions' grouped under the rubrics of child rearing; sexuality; women; cultural and family structure, including violence and military structure; and religion, beliefs and attitudes for hundreds of societies for which archaeological, historical and some contemporary data are available. He concludes that patrism is highly correlated with the nomad warrior societies in Central Asia. However, it is also found in those outlying settled societies that received migrations, and had to adapt to military and other pressures, from Central Asia. Thus, De Meo goes even further than Gimbutas and Eisler in his claims, which would support a new feminist reinterpretation of history.

I have therefore tried specifically to ask every 'professional' Central Asianist I have met whether the evidence available to them supports the Eisler and De Meo theses. Unanimously, they have all said that it does not. According to their evidence, on the contrary, Central Asian nomad societies accorded women higher status and had more egalitarian gender relations than their sedentary neighbours in Eurasia.

Central Asian nomad societies were certainly patrilineal and patrilocal. Although women's status was definitely lower than men's, their authority and prestige grew as women aged and assumed economically and socially important roles within the family and society. Hambly (1969) notes relatively free fraternization among men and women and their important roles in managing nomadic households and sometimes herds. Krader (1966: 145) attributes to women a domestic and agricultural empire within a nomadic empire. Inheritance, however, was a patrilineal corporate family matter. Nonetheless,

> Women had more authority and autonomy than their sisters in neighbouring sedentary societies. Among political elites polygyny was common, but each wife had her own yurt. It was not possible to practise the forms of seclusion so common in many sedentary Asian societies. Day-to-day life required women to take on a more public role in economic activities. Although the details cannot be confirmed for the entire history of Inner Asia, most visitors made comments [to this effect] (Barfield 1989: 25).

> The impact of alien [semi nomad] rule in [early Tang] north China was illustrated by many debates between southerners from the Yangtse region, which had remained under Chinese rule . . . . In the north women had much greater freedom. They handled legal affairs, business, and lobbied for themselves at court. A sorry state of affairs that could be attributed to the steppe traditions of the T'o-pa Wei, according to southern writers—who secluded women (*ibid.* 140).
>
> The recovered commercial documents provide tantalizing insights into economic and social practices of the time. Information dating from Mongol times suggests that women in the steppe empires had more rights and independence than their counterparts in sedentary states. These indications are confirmed for the Uighur empire. Women were entitled to own property and were free to manage and dispose of it as they saw fit. They were also entitled to act as guarantors in contracts, and were provided for in testamentary regulations (Kwanten 1979: 58).

This important question remains open for others to pursue the evidence more assiduously. Whatever the answer(s), greater study of Central Asia can only emerge as still central to yet another of our contemporary concerns.

Ethnogenesis and Ethnicity

Another vital concern for which Central Asia is of special relevance is ethnogenesis and ethnic identity, not to mention racial identification. The recurrent major and incessant more minor Völkerwanderungen in, through, and out of Central Asia have certainly mixed and mixed up ethnicity and race. So how can they be identified today? In the West, 'Caucasians' 'Aryans' and others speak 'Indo-European' languages. What in Western parlance is now termed the 'Near' or 'Middle' 'East' was another of the world's major crossroads and melting pots for millennia. It is now inhabited by many peoples whose origin was also in Central Asia. They later adopted Hebrew, Christian, and Muslim faiths whose essential historical and religious commonality seems increasingly forgotten in their contemporary religiously clothed disputes. East, South and Southeast Asians all share racial, ethnic, and other cultural features with past or present peoples from Central Asia. 'Indigenous' Americans, 'native' to the New World, have 'Mongolian' features and also retain some terminology of Central Asian origin. Are we—and even some Africans—all Central Asians?

At the same time, Central Asians do not recognize themselves or each other as such. Their ethnic identities are much more local. Yet few if any people have been in any particular locality for very long. Nor have they been there alone, since other peoples also came into and passed through the same localities. What then is the source of ethnic identity, let alone racial identification, in Central Asia or anywhere else?

Soviet scholars (only some of whose writings have been translated) and others have devoted much but still incomplete effort to ethnogenesis in Central Asia and elsewhere. Whatever the gaps in our knowledge, or the disputes about past ethnogenesis and present ethnicity, their fundamentals are clear: ethnogenesis is less traditional than situational, and ethnicity is less of an identity among 'us' than a relation with 'them'. Both the situation and the relation are substantially defined by state and other political power; and the presence, absence, and especially the change in economic welfare occasion changes in the perception of ethnic identity and in the urgency of its expression. Barth (1969) persuasively argued for the recognition of situational and relational ethnic identity. The same was reiterated in more general terms by Glazer and Moynihan (1975). In the words of Ballard (1976), 'ethnicity is, then, a political phenomenon, in which material interest unites with moral and emotional bonds.'

Most of the existing ethnicities and their denominations in Central Asia and elsewhere are of very recent origin—and continue to change in response to changing circumstances. The names of some ethnicities, like Uighur or Tadzhik, may be very old; but often the same name has been used by very different peoples, who had little or no genetic or social connection between them. Gladney (1990) shows how the present day majority ethnicity in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China only became so quite recently. Moreover, the adopted Uighur name had historically been used before by quite different people. Similarly, Krader (1966) argues that in some sense the Soviet Tadzhiks may have three millennia of continuous residence in Central Asia, but were composed of a dozen different peoples, including Indians, Turks, and Arabs. Indeed, according to Barthold, the very name 'Tadzhik' originally meant 'Arab', as first the Persians and then the Turks and Chinese called them. Among the many Turkish speaking peoples, according to Krader, only the Turkmens can be traced back before the Mongol invasions.

Ethnic conflict in Central Asia and elsewhere is expressed against existing or for desired state power. Ethnic conflict also arises among different and even among the same peoples. All of these promise to become more and more acute, and they threaten to engulf the fortunes and misfortunes of others near and far. Indeed, today most ethnic identity and change seem to be mobilized by changing economic fortunes and misfortunes. The resulting ethnic strife poses a serious threat, but can also be defused through more timely attention to processes of ethnic identification. Krader (1966) sees a continuous long term development of common identity among Turkic peoples in Central Asia, and Pipes (*International Herald Tribune*, 14 February 1990) foresees a large scale Turkish nationalist revival across all of Central Asia. (Ever since Atatürk, Turkey itself seems to prefer becoming the last wagon on the European train. But if Europe now closes off that option, perhaps Turkey will opt for becoming the

locomotive on a Pan-Turkish Asian train instead). Ethnicity cannot be separated from political and economic relations, either national or international.

Religion

Why have Central Asians been so hospitable to so many religions brought from elsewhere without developing any major religion of their own? However, Sinor (1977: 101) claims that several mythological themes in China and Greece originated in Central Asia. Why were some and not other major religions welcome in and transmitted through Central Asia? Why did some religions succeed others, where and when they did, but not elsewhere or at other times? Why have some religons, but not others, survived to this day, and what are their future prospects?
Teggart had observed,

> I may point to the great religious movemen. . .ociated with the names of Zoroaster in Persia, Lao–tzu and Confucius in China, Mahavira (founder of Jainism) and Gautama Buddha in India, the prophets Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, Thales in Ionia, and Pythagoras in southern Italy. All these great personages belong to the sixth century BC, and their appearance certainly constituted a class of events. Yet, though the correspondence of these events has frequently been observed, no serious effort has ever been made, so far as I have been able to discover, to treat these apparently great teachers—within a brief compass of time—as a problem which called for systematic investigation. But without this knowledge how are we to envisage or comprehend the workings of the human spirit? (Teggart 1939: xi-xii).

A half century later the same tasks and questions still remain. A quarter century ago, McNeill (1963: 338) noted important resemblances among some of these and also other later religions that might be attributable to mutual borrowings:

> But parallel invention should not be ruled out, for, if social and psychological circumstances of the submerged people and urban lower classes were in fact approximately similar in all parts of Western Asia, we should expect to find close parallels among the religious movements which arose and flourished in such milieux. This is in fact the case.

McNeill went on to distinguish three common features among Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity: eternal life in a blissful afterworld, participation of women, and a saviour God. Whatever the common features and possible functions, some of them did and others did not spread to and

through Central Asia. Manicheaism, Nestorian Christianity, and Buddhism spread. Why and how did they successively replace each other? Hinduism, Confucianism, and Judaism were brought by travellers, merchants, and even conquerors of these persuasions. Yet they did not find fertile ground in and were not transmitted through Central Asia. Why not? We may suggest that this failure was the failure of any hegemonic power to impose its domination—and to legitimize it through the imposition of its own state religion—in or over Central Asia for any long period of time. Buddhism did not spread through Central Asia until some 500 to 700 years after its birth, when the Kushan and later the Gupta empires rose to dominance. However, perhaps their power was too ephemeral to implant Buddhism as an imperial religion. Other religions, like Zoroastrianism and even lesser known ones, did not even leave any traces. (Zoroaster may have been born in Bactrian Central Asia, but even the temporary spread of his teachings seems to have required Persian power). Hellenistic culture made important incursions in Central Asia, both directly and indirectly via West and South Asia. So why did no Greek religion make its way through Central Asia? Perhaps because no Greek power did after the failure of Alexander. Of course, some religions also 'made it' only some of the time, among some peoples and regions, and not among others. How so?

On the other hand Dussel (1966) proposes an interpretation, which distinguishes between the Weltanschauung of all 'Indo-European' religions and that of the 'Semitic' religions. The former, emerged in and around Central Asia, were dominant throughout Eurasia for millennia, formed the spiritual basis of ancient Greece and Rome, and still survived in Asia thereafter. The Semitic Weltanschauung and religions began among very marginal and largely nomadic peoples in the Middle East, yet spread and eventually displaced the Indo-European Weltanschauung even in large areas of its origin and of course in the West. There it was through Christianity, and elsewhere it was through Islam, until the Christian West itself expanded.

Beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam spread like wildfire through much of Central Asia. Sometimes people became Muslims because their old or new rulers adopted Islam for their own convenience. Often Islam was received by popular acclaim. Rarely was it imposed by the sword, as some legend incorrectly has it. No doubt very over-simplistically, I suggest an analogy of the spread of Islam then with that of 'Reaganomics' of the 1980s: Islam offered and was welcomed as 'getting the (old) government off the peoples backs' and 'letting the magic of the market enrich people' or at least some of them. It must have appealed to and been supported particularly by merchants whose hands had been tied by previous political restrictions. Moreover, the Islamic *jihad* offered to legitimize some states' conquests of their neighbours. Conversion to Islam also offered

protection from enslavement; since Muslims did not enslave other Muslims, or Jews and Christians either.

However, the Muslims never penetrated China and did not even reach the eastern end of the Tarim basin until the sixteenth century, long after the Mongols had left. When Islam did arrive there, it also served the local needs of the moment. Yet Mongolia and Tibet remained Buddhist, which China did not. Some possible socio-political explanations were inconclusively debated on our Silk Roads expedition (cf. Kim 1990s). Soviet and Chinese Central Asia has remained Muslim, and Tibet, Buddhist, to this day. In the face of growing unemployment, environmental degradation, and the sense of foreign oppression and exploitation, these religions—along with ethnicity—promise to offer yet another important rallying cry for their peoples in the near future.

Nexuses

Central Asian Bactria was long known as 'paradise on Earth', the 'land of a thousand cities', and its capital Bactria, the 'mother of cities'. Toynbee (1961: 2, quoted in Holt 1988: 31) wrote of Bactria as a place where 'routes converge from all quarters of the compass and from which routes radiate out to all quarters of the compass again'. These routes connected China, India, Iran, the Mediterranean, and of course other parts of Central Asia itself. For centuries before the Greek Alexander arrived, Bactria was an important nexus, and that is why Alexander went and married there. What were the other important commercial and political nexuses and racial/ethnic and religious melting pots in Central Asia, or between it and neighbouring regions? What were special crossroads of trade and migration and/or focuses of political and military rivalry and attention? Gills and Frank (1990a: 24) suggested that

> three magnets of attraction for political economic expansion stand out. One is sources of human (labour) and/or material inputs (land, water, raw materials, precious metal, etc.) and technological inputs into the process of accumulation. The second is markets to dispose of one zone's surplus production to exchange for more inputs, and to capture stored value. The third, and perhaps most significant, are the most privileged nexuses or logistical corridors of inter-zonal trade.
>
> Certain strategically placed regions and corridors have played such especially important roles in world system development. They have been magnets which attracted the attention of hegemonial powers and also of migrants and invaders. Major currents of thought also migrated through them.

In Western Asia three nexus corridors have played a particularly pivotal and central logistical inter-linkage role:

1. The Nile–Red Sea corridor (with canal or overland connections between them and to the Mediterranean Sea, and open access to the Indian Ocean and beyond).
2. The Syria–Mesopotamia–Persian Gulf corridor (with overland routes linking the Mediterranean Coast through Syria, or via the Orontes, Euphrates and Tigris rivers, to the Persian Gulf, which gives open access to the Indian Ocean and beyond). This nexus also offered connections to overland routes to Central Asia.
3. The Aegean–Black Sea–Central Asia corridor (connecting the Mediterranean via the Dardanelles and Bosphorus to the overland 'Silk Roads' to and from Central Asia, from where connecting routes extended overland to India and China) (*ibid.* 24).

On the 'Inner Asian Frontiers of China' a similar role was perhaps played by the silk road and the routes of migration and invasion by the Kansu (Haxi) corridor, the Tarim Basin oases, Kashgar and the passes to the southwest across the Pamirs and to the northwest across the western end of the Tien Shan mountains. These passes led to Taxila in Kashmir and to Samarkand and Bukhara in Sogdian Transoxania, where the silk roads connected to the West.

Lombard (1975: 219) identifies related trade routes and three centres of particular importance: Merv, Herat, Balkh, and especially Nishapur on the fork of the road between Baghdad and India; Khwarizm in the Oxus delta on the Aral Sea, which was pivotal for both the east–west and north–south trade; and the oases of Ma wara' an–Nahr on the east–west route to China.

Several other nexuses were mentioned at the Urumqi seminar. Duojie (1990s) referred to four international trade routes which passed through the Tupo Kingdom between China, Tibet, and India. Höllman evoked the area where the Hunza, Gilgit, and Insua rivers meet. The Iron Gate and other passes through the eastern Tien Shan mountains were bottlenecks of military conflict or invasion between China and the steppes, as well as connections with the east–west and north–south trade routes, north of the Tien Shan range.

All these and other nexuses deserve special attention, and of course additional archaeological digs. Their privileged locations can reveal much about migratory, economic, political, military, social, and cultural currents in and through Central Asia and its neighbouring regions. They are likely to have been especially active melting pots—not only as important points of transit. Because of their trade and strategic or other importance, these nexuses also were bones of special contention for economic, political, and military control. Therefore they are even more likely to have changed

controlling hands (and inhabitants) than other areas in Central Asia. Some of these crossroads and other nexuses may thus also offer special opportunities for study. They could reveal the extent to which their social institutions, culture, and religion were changed by new rulers or were instead syncretically fused with or adapted to already previously prevalent ones. All these possibilities are all the more reason to identify and privilege these nexuses in reasearch and analysis.

Political Economy of International Relations in and with Central Asia

Production and Trade

What place and role did production and trade in and through Central Asia have in the world economy or the Afro-Eurasian economic *system*? Unfortunately, it remains the case as Kwanten rightly observed that 'whenever the history of nomadic societies is examined, the social sciences, particularly economics, are rarely taken into consideration, even though the materials refer directly and indirectly to economic affairs' (Kwanten 1979: 286).

More lamentably, this lacuna is even greater when it comes to examining the place and role of the nomadic and other societies of Central Asia in the political economic development of Eurasia as a whole. The geographical—and perhaps structural and functional—Central Asian centre of this system is a dark, if not black, hole indeed. The little light we can shed on this matter should perhaps distinguish between local production and trade, exchange between adjoining regions and/or interdependent sectors like nomad pastoralism and settled agriculture, and long-distance trade through Central Asia.

Several Central Asian regions, especially in what Khazanov calls 'Middle Asia', long had highly developed agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and of course commerce, which supported large and very civilized urban settlements.

> Archaeological surveys in Central Asia are at last setting straight the record . . . . Exceeding all earlier expectations, the spade has uncovered ample evidence for the early development of irrigation, commerce, and fortified cities in ancient Central Asia. Excavations at Mundigak, Deh Morasi Ghundai, Shar-i-Sokhta, Bandi Khan-tepe, Kizil-tepe, Talich-khan-tepe, Altin-tepe and numerous other sites have shown the evolution of Bactrian urbanization from the time of the Bronze Age (Holt 1988: 27).

For instance, Soviet excavations at Namazga-tepe and Altin-tepe in southern Turkmenia reveal bronze age urban and proto-urban developments about 2,000 BC. Timber-grave Srubnaya and Androvono sites in

western Turkmenia reveal high cultural developments. There is evidence of trade links from some of these settlements with Iran and Mesopotamia to the southwest, with the Harappan civilization with its capital of Mohenjo-daro on the Indus to the southeast, and with Bukhara and Ferghana to the East.

> It seems likely that trade was the motivating force behind connections between India and Central Asia, which became much more marked in the middle Bronze Age . . . . We see then that the settled, agricultural communities of southern Turkmenia in the middle Bronze Age comprised societies with a complex and highly developed economic structure, with crafts as a special sphere of production on the one hand, and agriculture on the other, the very existence of this division suggesting an internal exchange system growing into trade as an essential link in the economic system as a whole (Masson and Sarianidi 1972: 124, 128).

Then, this Central Asian civilization declined, as did its neighbours in the Mesopotamian and Indus valleys. Developmental ups and downs also characterized other parts of the long chain of irrigated oasis and urban settlements—and the trade routes that linked them—stretching from the Caspian Sea to Lop Nor on the eastern end of the Tarim Basin. Especially noteworthy among them were the Tarim Basin oases in and around the Taklamakan Desert, Samarkand, Bukhara, Ferghana and its 'heavenly horses', Herat, Merv, and Bactria, the last of which we will return to below.

The age-old relations of these agricultural and urban settlements in Central Asia and also in East and West Asia with the nomad herdsmen in between have been the subject of much debate. The trade and political relations between nomads and settlers across the *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* were prominent in Owen Lattimore's (1940/1962) classic. Lattimore and many observers since, agree that war was an extension of trade between nomads and settlers, to adapt Clausewitz's famous dictum. There is less agreement about when and why trade/war was initiated and how the costs and benefits were shared among the participants. Most Chinese spokesmen maintained that 'China' was self-sufficient and traded with the nomads only at their behest. The nomads were 'greedy' or 'needy' as Di Cosmo (1990) terms these theories of nomad–settler relations, with which most foreign observers have agreed. Therefore, both also have argued that the periodic wars were either due to nomad invasions to despoil China of her riches, or they were threats of more to come in order to have China agree to a sort of 'protection' through trade. To save face, the Chinese also argued that the nomad 'barbarians' were paying her 'tribute'. Others, and especially Di Cosmo (1990) argue that Chinese frontier society was little more self-sufficient than their nomad neighbours and that the initiative for

the recurrent wars never came from the nomads. Moreover, the nomads also drew on the desert oases for agricultural and handicraft supplies.

What is established is that the nomads' main export was horses raised on their steppe grasslands. The Chinese had an insatiable demand for horses they could not raise themselves, especially for military purposes including defence against the nomads themselves. The Chinese in turn exported silk and other luxuries, but also grain, coarse textiles, arms, and tea. Sinor (1977: 175) cites Rossabi to the effect that for the Chinese, tea and horses were so inextricably related as to be administered by the same authority. The price of horses in silk and/or cash fluctuated with supply and demand, which in turn varied according to changing economic and poltical/military circumstances.

Khazanov (1979: 3) pursues his thesis of the nomads' 'indissoluble and necessary connection with the outside world' and examines a 'wide spectrum of turbulent interrelations between nomads and the sedentary world' (*ibid.*: 222):

> The spectrum of these relations varies from irregular raids on and robbery of agriculturalists and townsmen to the imposition on them of more or less long-term relations of protection and dependence. The benefits from such non-economic relations for nomads are so evident that they need not be examined in detail here. Nomads are in a position [due to their military superiority and mobility] in which they are able to acquire agricultural products and handicraft goods they need (and also livestock) by force, or by threatening such, while giving little or nothing in exchange . . . . In the long-term it was more beneficial and safer for nomads to insist the sedentary population paid them protection and defence against other groups of nomads, and just to be left in peace. On the local level such relations were more widespread in the Near East and partly also in the Middle East. They were considerably less common in the Eurasian steppes (Khazanov 1979: 222, 223).

There, Khazanov (1979: 224–27) distinguishes (*a*) direct, irregular, and uncontrolled pillage, (*b*) tribute, (*c*) direct taxation, (*d*) the nomads' own creation of agricultural and handicraft sectors, and (*e*) seizure of land and exaction of rent or exploitation of peasants who are turned into tenants. Another dimension, mentioned by Barfield (1989: 239) with regard to a particular case, may have had more general applicability: the nomadic leadership/elite may have been served more by trade that provided luxury goods, and the commoners by raids that yielded more grain, metals, manufactures, and livestock. Trade and perhaps raids did support greater differentiation and inequality within nomad society, and perhaps within settled frontier society also. Thus Central Asian peoples and their neighbours were dependent on this division and exchange of labour and its

products with each other, however much some of them may have sought to deny or denigrate this inter-dependence.

There was also long-distance trade, mostly through a chain of shorter relays along the 'Silk Road(s)' from one end of Eurasia to the other. Central Asian intermediaries along the way took their cut and sought to protect their interests in this transcontinental trade. Recently there have again been many nostalgic references to the 'Silk Road' (whose name was coined in the nineteenth century by the German Baron Ferdinand von Richthoven). UNESCO organized an 'Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue'. I took part in its First Desert Route Expedition. It covered 5,000 km overland along the eastern end of the Silk Road from Xian to Kashgar, and nearly 10,000 km with almost daily side trips. The Urumqi seminar, at which I presented an early version of this paper, was an adjunct to this expedition. Scholars from many countries and disciplines participated in both the expedition and the seminar. Yet trade along the Silk Road received no attention on our expedition and only very short shrift at the closing seminar. There was little or no consideration of the economy in our, let alone any other, part of Central Asia. The place of the economy in connecting the outlying Afro-Eurasian areas, let alone their role in the operation of the entire continental economic system, went unmentioned, except in my own uninformed and brief interventions. I expressed hope that these and other important questions receive more attention in the expeditions, which are still planned by UNESCO over the steppe and maritime routes.

The 'Silk' road could equally well be called the road of jade (indeed, it probably began that way, as jade was imported into China from Central Asia). Or the road could be called one of gold, silver; other metals, wood, wool, clay and their manufactures; spices, grains, and other foodstuffs; and especially horses, other livestock, human slaves and a host of other items produced and traded through an organized division and exchange of labour in and through Central Asia and its neighbouring regions.

At best it is only possible to raise here a few selected and selective general questions about these economic relations. In some cases, I will also offer some elements of answers suggested in other papers presented at the Urumqi seminar. (I will identify these as 1990s).

When was the Silk Road and effective East–West, but also North–South, long distance trade across Asia opened? The Chinese traditionally date this opening to 105 or 115 BC, or with Zhan Qian's mission to the West in the second century AD. However, Franck and Brownstone (1986: 1) open their *The Silk Road. A History* by saying that 'the Silk Road is actually far older than this, perhaps by 2,000 years or more. It was, for at least 4,000 years, the main avenue of communication between the Mediterranean and China'. Lin Zhichun (1990s), cites evidence of Chinese trade and migratory

contacts with Siberia and with western Central Asia already 500, 1,500 and even 5,000 years before Christ. Wang Binghua (1990s) argues that archaeological finds in China indicate 'ancient traffic routes . . . [whose] scale of connections is not weak . . . as early as the Yinshang Dynasty of the twelfth century [BC]'. A. Askarov (1990s) found Chinese silk dating from 1,500 BC in several Bactrian excavations and especially from Sapalle in what is now southern Uzbekistan. Similar vases dating from 1200 BC excavated there and in parts of China make it 'now possible to say that already during the period of the Western Zhou and Zhou Yuan, trade contacts existed between the civilizations of Shanxi province and those of Ancient Bactrium and Sogdiana.' Perhaps it is revealing that the name of the early Shang Dynasty in China meant 'merchant'.

Persia was near the other end of the Silk Road and along the connecting Persian north–south Royal Road and the Spice Road into Arabia. About 521 BC, the Achaemenid King Darius of Persia had the following inscribed on his palace:

> This is the palace which I built at Susa. From afar its ornamentation was brought . . . . The cedar timber . . . from a mountain named [Lebanon] . . . The Assyrian people brought it to Babylon; from Babylon the Carians and the Ionians brought it to Susa. The yaku timber was brought from Gandara and from Carmania. The gold was brought from Sardis and from Bactria, which here was wrought. The precious lapis lazuli and carnelian, which was wrought here, was brought from Sogdiana. The precious stone turquoise was brought from Chorasmia, which was wrought here. The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned was brought from Ionia. The ivory, which was wrought here, was brought from Ethiopia, and from Sind and from Arachosia. The stone columns, which here were wrought, were brought from Elam. The stone-cutters who wrought the stone were Ionians and Sardians. The goldsmiths who wrought the gold were Medes and Egyptians. The men who wrought the baked bricks were Babylonians. The men who adorned the wall were Medes and Egyptians (quoted in Franck and Brownstone [1986: 65–66]).

Even as the crow flies, the sources Darius mentions were several thousand miles distant. However, as Darius did not tire of reiterating, this long-distance trade also supported local industry as well as, of course, himself. There is also evidence of earlier and farther reaching organized trans-Asian trade. Herodotus' references to the Scythians and modern archaeological finds suggest trade through Central Asia of gold from Siberia and silk from China. In the third century BC, the Mauryan empire in India maintained the 'Grand Road' from Bactria, through the Kabul River

Valley and the Khyber Pass into the Punjab to the Bay of Bengal 4,000 km distant. The state maintained the infrastructure of roads, signposts, guard-houses, water wells, causeways, ferries, etc., and shelters were provided for traders and other travellers.

The *Hou Han Shu* Official History of the Chinese Han Dynasty, in its Chapters 61 and 96A on the western regions (translated, commented and edited by Hulsewe and Lowe) records numerous Chinese contacts with lands and their points of political and commercial interest across Asia. Each is introduced with the size of its population and the men it can put under arms, and its distance in thousands of *li* from the Chinese capital Loyang. However, even where and when we lack such written official testimony by contemporaries or archaeological evidence, we may suppose that trade was still older and more widespread than recorded. Thus, for instance, Han China's envoy Chang Ch'ien wrote about his travels in the second century: 'When I was in Bactria, I saw there a stick of bamboo . . . and some cloth from [Chinese] Szechuan. When I asked the inhabitants how they obtained possession of these they replied "the inhabitants of our country buy them in India" ' (cited in Franck and Brownstone 1986: 96). That is, trade relations preceded and exceeded diplomatic ones.

How were trade relations maintained between Han China and Imperial Rome, and how significant were they to them and their intermediaries? Some archaeological evidence remains. Odani (1990s) refers to bilingual coins with Chinese script on one side and Kharosthi on the other. Kushan gold coins were of the same (about eight gram) weight as Roman Aureus ones and 'might be exchangeable with each other. If I may be allowed a little exaggeration, an international currency system from Rome to China came into existence in the ancient world.' Contemporary observers, like Pliny, and several historians of our time like Hudson (1931), Teggart (1939), Wheeler (1954), and Yu (1967) have commented on Rome's import of silk and export of bullion. They noted the deleterious effect on Rome of its resulting negative balance of trade and payments with the East. Teggart (1939) also quotes Cicero to the effect that 'the credit of the Roman money-market is intimately bound up with the prosperity of Asia; a disaster cannot occur there without shaking our credit to its foundations' (p. 74, no. 20).

However, China may have lost bullion as well. Gold seems to have travelled predominantly eastward and silver westward, because of differential gold/silver ratios. There is general agreement that both ends of the road dealt with Kushan India and especially with and through Parthian Persia. Indeed, particular merchants only travelled back and forth part of the way then and later. The same goods were bought and sold many times along the way. The middlemen, mostly professional merchants from urban regions, seem to have derived the greatest benefit from this trade, and they sought to defend their monopoly position on the route(s). Palmyra and its

over half a million population lived entirely from this trade, and Antioch, Petra, Sidon, and other cities in the Levant substantially so. Barthold argues that the greatest advantage from this trade was derived by the Persians, first under the Parthians and then under the Sasanids.

> By every means at their disposal [they] impeded the communications between China and the Roman Empire, in order to retain the profitable role of commercial intermediaries. Under the Sasanids, the Persians held the most important sea and land routes of world commerce. The influence of Sasanian Persia, as well as of China and India, and the remnants of Graeco-Bactrian culture helped to raise the culture level of the Central Asian Iranians, especially the Sogdians (Barthold 1956: 6).

Then as later, political alliances and rivalries as well as military operations often had competition over trade and trade routes as their background, if not their very cause. We will return to this matter below.

Was the long post-'classical' and 'medieval' period one of 'feudal' isolation? Or on the contrary, did pan Afro-Eurasian trade and other contacts flourish, especially in and through Central Asia?

For the early period, McNeill believes that the Gupta state in

> India therefore appears to have played the leading role in the entire Eurasian world between 200 and 600 AD . . . . Military conquests played almost no part: merchants and missionaries took the place of the armies of Macedon and Rome. Consequently, Indian expansion followed trade routes, particularly the sea route to southeast Asia and the islands of Indonesia, and the overland trail through the oases of Central Asia to northwest China (McNeill 1963: 362, 367).

The eastward migration of Buddhist religion and art, begun in Kushan times, continued eastward along the Silk Road. It left its mark in the 'Thousand Buddha Caves' that our expedition visited in Xinjiang or Eastern Turkestan. However, Gupta power and influence waned, and Turkic trade and power increased (also at Gupta expense?).

During the sixth century much of Asia from Manchuria to the Aral Sea was dominated by the Eastern and Western Turkic empires.

> Trade played an important role in the Turkic empire. Through their victory over the Juan-juan, the Turks had gained control over Central Asian trade routes, and hence over the lucrative silk trade between China and Byzantium. The Turks had no intention of either abandoning the trade or sharing it with other intermediaries. . . . Inevitably, this led to war between the Turks and the Sassanian empire [who had been the intermediaries]. In order to create a viable monopoly, the Turks needed

> to be certain that the Byzantine empire was willing to purchase silk directly from the Turks rather than via established routes (Kwanten 1979: 39).

The Turks first sent a Sogdian emissary to the Sassanians; and when these rejected his proposals, they sent him on to Constantinople. The Byzantines, for their part, had no love lost for the Persians and had already made overtures for direct contact with China. Thus the Byzantine Emperor Justin II concluded an anti-Persian alliance with the Turk Istämi (also Grousset 1970: 83). The silk trade across Central Asia was the common denominator. Moreover,

> The western domains of the Turkic empire had the principal role in the sale of the silk while the eastern domains acquired it from China. Hence the requirements of the western domains had important repercussions in the eastern domains, in particular on Sino-Turkic relations . . . . Because of the importance of trade to the Turkic empire, it is imperative to examine the relationship between war and trade in Turkic politics. It then quickly becomes clear that the principal reason for the numerous wars the Turks launched, on both the eastern and western frontiers, but especially on the former, were economic ones (Kwanten 1979: 39–40).

Similarly, Beckwith (1987: 178–80) summarizes that the Turks

> impinged on the borders of all of the great Old World civilizations, including the Central Asian city-states and India. The Turks made it their first order of business to inform their neighbours to the east and west that they were vitally interested in trade. When the Turks annexed most of the Central Asian city-states—great centers for the east-west and north–south caravan trade—in the second half of the sixth century, they also removed the political obstacles to relatively high-volume transcontinental trade . . . . The Turks' great interest in commerce did not mean that they dominated it; they were its patrons. Most of the international trade during the Early Middle Ages was in the hands of others . . . . Trade was almost totally monopolized by two or three great trading peoples: the Jews, the Norsemen, and the Sogdians. The profits from this trade in silk, spices, perfumes, war material, horses, and other products stimulated not only imperialism, but also local industry and local trade.

Among the 'other products', an important place came to be occupied by gold, silver, and slaves, particularly during the later Islamic caliphate. Shipments of bullion and coins greased the way for trade, including the very important slave trade. Lombard (1975: 194–203) mentions three main

sources for slaves: Africa, Slavic Central and Eastern Europe (although Western Europe was also a source, and Radhanite Jewish and Frankish merchants used the Mediterranean and Black Seas for transhipment), and Turkestan. Turkish wars, even if they were fought for other reasons, also generated captives and a supply of slaves. Georgia became a well-known source of slaves. However, Kim Ho Dong (personal communication) suspects that captives on the 'inner Asian frontier' of China were not used in Eastern Central Asia as much as they were also transhipped westward. Lombard (1975: 195) regards the slave trade as of 'utmost importance'. Albeit referring to its western end, Adelson (1962: 47) suggests that the slave trade may well have been *the* most important part of medieval international commerce.

Byzantine Constantinople often had little hinterland of its own and lived for many centuries from this commerce, of course including that with Central Asia. The city thrived on its location on the east-west crossroads between Asia and Europe and the north-south ones between the Baltic, the Mediterranean, Western Asia, and North Africa. One of Constantinople's functions was to funnel African gold from Nubia and the Sudan to Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and 'to the trading centres of Central Asia—Samarkand, Bukhara, Khwarizm—which commanded the route to the Russian rivers, the country of the Turks, China, and India' (Lombard 1975: 114). However, gold was also produced in the mountains of the Caucasus, the Urals, the Altai, Tibet, and in Turkestan. The more commonly used silver often came in combination with lead in the Caucasus, northern Persia, and parts of Central Asia, especially in Afghanistan, as well as from the traditional silver mines in Spain.

The Turkish empire(s) did not last long. In the seventh and eighth centuries they gave way to the Tang Dynasty expanding westward from China, the Tibetan empire expanding northwards, the Muslims overrunning Iraq and Persia and expanding eastward, the Byzantines still holding their own, and the Frankish empire rising in Western Europe. The Islamic caliphate and the 'world' economy around it, so masterfully analyzed among others by Hodgson (1974) and Lombard (1975), was probably the driving force, with its driver's seat in Baghdad. Hodgson comments

> It can be surmised that the commerical life of the lands of Muslim rule was given a positive impetus by the great activity in China, especially considering its important connections with China both via the Southern Seas and overland through Central Eurasia (Hodgson 1974: I, 233).

Beyond that indeed, as Beckwith notes,

> the evidence shows that, during the Early Middle Ages, the Tibetan Empire and Frankish Western Europe were integral parts of a civilized

> world which included the Islamic caliphate and T'ang China and was 'focused' (to adapt Pirenne's usage) on Central Eurasia . . . . The importance of the international trade routes through Central Eurasia cannot be overemphasized. All of the great early medieval powers bordered on and had intimate political and military involvement in that vast region, and the newer powers, the Frankish, Arab, and Tibetan empires expanded deep into it (Beckwith 1987: 193, 196).

World System Wide International Political Economic Relations

What role, then, did Central Asia play in Eurasian wide inter'national' political, economic and military relations? How did the world system work through its 'missing link' in Central Asia? In his synthesis of *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, Grousset (1970: 32) writes that his

> aim here is to show the colossal impact of the first Hunnic thrust on the destinies of Asia . . . [that] started a sequence of repercussions which were felt as far away as Western Asia and India. Afghanistan was lost to Hellenism . . . . The same process continues throughout history which is our present study. The slightest impulse at one end of the steppe inevitably sets in motion a chain of quite unexpected consequences in all four corners of this immense zone of migrations.

Indeed as we have already noted before, throughout millennia of history this chain of links transferred repercussions beyond the four corners of Central Asia itself and into the outlying civilizations and empires. Moreover, the links in the chain were forged not only by migrations. As Grousset goes on to demonstrate time and again, the links also included widespread cultural, political, and economic events, processes and diffusion, which included areas in Central Asia along with others. Grousset himself however is among those who 'give little consideration to economic affairs' as Kwanten observed. Therefore he also fails to give their due to the impulse and far-reaching consequences of local and inter'national' political economic relations.

An interesting instance is the already prior political economic relations, whose importance attracted Alexander the Great to invade Egypt, establish a capital in Babylon, conquer Persia, and advance into Bactria and India. Gills (1990) suggests that Alexander the Great married Roxane in Bactria as part of his project to unite a vast and long since commercially and politically key area under the political rule of a 'Johnny come lately' outsider. Arrian, the chronicler of Alexander, remarked that the latter 'did not think it derogatory to his dignity to marry her' (quoted in Franck and Brownstone 1986: 77). As Holt (1988: 32, 37, 42) remarks:

> Bactria was already known as a worthy prize by the late fourth century BC. Material finds prove that this much, at least, was so: it was an ancient region of cities and a hub of trade no matter what people were responsible for the 'miracle' . . . . Archaeology leaves no question about the advanced state of Bactria's cultural and commercial development during the centuries preceding Alexander's invasion . . . . On the basis of this evidence, it is clear that Bactria occupied a prominent place in the empire of the Achaemenid Kings, and was perhaps the key satrapy on the eastern frontier. Cyrus' conquest and Darius' consolidation under his own family gave this region a notable place in the political history of the Persian empire, while Zoroaster's legendary activities there were of added religious significance.
>
> Plutarch's 'Alexander miracle' [which ascribed Bactria's florescence to Alexander's arrival] must clearly be rejected as no more than a return to Bactria's ancient prosperity once the region had recovered from the turmoil of Persia's collapse. Do we then look back to the Achaemenid kings for a 'Persian miracle' in Bactria? This is quite possible, although . . . there is growing consensus that Bactria experienced a specifically 'Bactrian miracle'—a local, independent evolution into a powerful and prosperous state predating the arrival of imperialist forces from Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean (*ibid.*: 32).

Thus the Greek Alexander was attracted by the area's already pre-existing structure and dynamic of economic relations among Central, South, and West Asia, North Africa and Southern Europe. Alexander's untimely death spelled the failure of his project and the subsequent (re)regionalization and separation of these areas, until the Romans again tried something similar on a much more modest scale.

Teggart (1939) examined international political economic linkages through Central Asia for the Roman period:

> It follows, therefore, that knowledge which is indispensable for an historical account of Roman affairs . . . can be obtained in no other way than by the comparison of events throughout Eurasia. Thus, apart from any wider interest, the comparison of histories is necessary for a comprehension of what has actually happened within the borders of any national state (p. 243).

Thus Teggart notes that

> when war occurred on the routes in the Tarim Basin, disturbances broke out in Parthia and either in Armenia or on the border of Syria. Evidently then, war in the Tarim occasioned an interruption of traffic on the silk route, and this interruption aroused hostilities at points along the route

> as far west as the Euphrates. It seems highly probable, for example, that the invasions of Armenia by the Parthians, while Armenia was controlled by Rome, were inspired by the suspicion that the Romans had succeeded in diverting the movement of commodities from Central Asia to some route which avoided Parthian territory. But these secondary and derivative wars, that is, the conflicts between Parthia and Rome for control of Armenia, brought about new interruptions of trade and thus led to new wars in more and more distant areas. So interruptions of traffic on the Black Sea stirred up peoples north of the (lower) Danube, and the long train of disturbances ended finally in collisions of the barbarians with the Roman legions on the Rhine. Consequently it is to be seen that peoples in no way concerned with the silk route might yet be connected with the interruptions of trade on that route through the hostilities which the interruptions precipitated between Parthia and Rome (Teggart 1939: 240–41).

Teggart correlates and compares the timing of wars and barbarian invasions in Rome and China to demonstrate that for the period 58 BC to AD 107 alone 'even in briefest summary it must be pointed out that, of the wars in the Roman East, eighteen followed wars in Chinese Turkestan, so that of the forty occasions on which outbreaks took place in Europe, twenty-seven were traceable to the policy, or rather changes of policy, of the Han government [in China]' (*ibid.*, p. viii). Teggart concluded,

> Thus the effects of wars which arose out of interruptions of the great 'silk route' through Persia are plainly visible in the internal history of Rome . . . . Seemingly there could be no better illustration of interdependence of nations than the consideration that a decision of the Chinese government should have been responsible for a financial panic in the capital of the Roman empire . . . . (*ibid.*, p. x).

However, even Teggart seems to have considered wars and other political disturbances more as the *cause* of interruptions of trade, rather than the other way around. Yet it may be argued with equal or greater reason that many uprisings, wars, alliances, and other political developments were themselves stimulated if not caused by changing local, regional, or even system-wide economic conditions and interests. We may note here and reconsider the implications below that *both the rise and then again the decline* of Han China (*and* their Central Asian Hsiun–nu neighbours), Kushan India, Parthian Persia, and Western Imperial Rome *occurred at very much the same time*. The political economic decline of these empires was also manifested in the notable simultaneous decline of Central Asian and maritime trade among them. There is archaeological evidence of the

decline and desolation at the same time of a whole string of cities between Kashgar and Bactria and also in India. The fourth and fifth centuries indeed appear seem to have been a period of Eurasian (system) wide economic and political decline.

Then from the mid-seventh century came the rise and expansions of Taika and Nara Japan, Silla Korea, and Tang China in the East. The Chinese and the Turks expanded westward, the Tibetans northward, the Muslims eastward, the Scandinavians southward, and the Byzantines consolidated and held their own as best they could. Meanwhile, Indian, Persian, and Axum power in East Africa declined and/or was replaced by these expansions and rivalries. West Europeans languished for another century until Charles the Great. Is it likely that these far-flung developments occurred simultaneously only by historical accident, or is it more likely that they were 'a sequence of repercussions in a chain' of events running through Central Asia, to recall Grousset's terminology?

The eighth century, as Beckwith observes,

> saw the development of serious crises and major economic, political and cultural changes, in every important Eurasian state. Typologically speaking, these changes followed more or less the same pattern, due no doubt to their common origin in international, specifically economic change, of a fundamental nature . . . . The great crises of the eighth century were followed by absolutely astonishing economic and cultural growth across Eurasia, from Japan to England. The enormous expansion in trade brought about an explosion in the growth of cities and market towns everywhere. Besides the huge metropolises of Baghdad, Constantinople, and Ch'ang-an, the old [Central Asian] centres of Samarkand, Khwarazam, etc., there were fast growing cities where once there were none: Rasa, Karabalagasum, Rostov, Quentovic, and many others. The internationalism of the age burst into full bloom, as commerce and culture, hand-in-hand, flourished as never before (Beckwith 1977: 92–94).

Prior to this international development, however, there were at least two periods—in the mid-eighth and again in the mid-ninth centuries—in which major political crises were not only nearly simultaneous but very probably mutually interlinked throughout Eurasia and across Central Asia. About the first of these periods, Beckwith (1987: 192) observes:

> It is a curious fact that, unlike the preceding and following centuries, the middle of the eighth century—specifically the period 742 to 755—saw fundamental changes, usually signalled by successful political revolts, in every Eurasian empire. Most famous among them are the Carolignian, Abbasid, Uighur Turkic, and anti-T'ang rebellions, each of which is

> rightly considered to have been a major watershed in the respective national histories. Significantly, all seem to have been intimately connected with Central Eurasia.

A major event of this period in the history of Central Asia and a turning point in the history of the world was the reversal of Tang Chinese expansion in Asia at the battle at the Talas river in 751. The Arab Muslims and the Turks combined forces and defeated the Tang General Kao Sien–chi (lent to the Chinese by the then flowering Silla kingdom in Korea). He had previously led the Chinese expansion into Central Asia during two victorious campaigns across the Pamirs. The same year, the new Kitai confederacy defeated the Chinese in their northeast; and a Chinese expedition to the southwest into Yunnan failed. Four years later in 755 began the major eight year long internal rebellion against Tang rule led by An Lu-shan. He was the son of a Sogdian merchant and a Central Asian woman who was adopted by a royal concubine. The rebellion was put down with Uighur help from Central Asia. Nonetheless, Tang power and the regime of the Tang Dynasty never really recovered from this external defeat at Talas River in 751 and the internal Lu-shan rebellion from 755 to 763. The weakened Tang Dynasty hung on until 907, after another major rebellion from 874 to 883. China lost all its western territories again; and the Turks and much of Central Asia—eventually right up to the Great Wall of China—became Muslim.

In the course of the four years 838 to 842 during the second period mentioned above, Beckwith (1977) notes that in the West the trade route between the Volga and the Baltic was closed in 838 (not to reopen for another generation), and the Frankish Empire broke up in 840. In the East, the Uighur Empire fell to the Kirghiz in 840, the Tibetan Empire was split up in 842, and the same year began the open persecution of Buddhism and then of other foreign religions in China. At the same time (after the Arab–Byzantine war of 837–42 and Turkish expansion), the last Caliph in Baghdad began the persecution of heretics under Islamic rule. We may ask again whether it is likely that these political and cultural events are entirely responses to 'internal' pressures that are unrelated to each other. Or were they also related to each other and to economic problems or even a crisis, which was common to them all and/or transmitted through Central Asia? We will never know—unless we ask!

Kwanten (1979: 53) suggests that at least the decline of Tang power and the simultaneous collapse of the Tibetan empire made geopolitical economic space for Uighur expansion east and west. Then

> the Kan–chou Uighurs established themselves on Central Asia's principal trade routes and were soon in control of the trade. They were bent on continuing friendly relations with China [against Chinese demurral

during their own difficulties] . . . . It was not until the creation of the Later T'ang dynasty (923–936) that relations were resumed on a regular basis and trade and diplomatic exchanges were revived. The Uighurs became China's principal foreign traders, selling primarily horses, jade, and other precious materials and acquiring primarily silk in return.

The Uighurs understood the importance of the Chinese connection and immediately replaced the Turks upon their defeat. By aiding the T'ang against rebels, they preserved the dynasty while at the same time terrifying it . . . . The Uighurs were vastly more successful than the Turks in running a steppe empire, although their conquests were not as extensive. This was due in large measure to the stability of their imperial government . . . . They ruled their empire from a permanent city [Karabalghasun] . . . founded and maintained by international trade . . . . Like the imperial confederacy itself, it grew as a result of the extortion of the Chinese economy. It was the flower of a plant that had its root in [the Tang capital] Ch'ang-an (Barfield 1989: 54–58).

[However] the model for the city was not Chinese but Sogdian . . . . The Sogdians controlled the oases of Turkestan. They were famous as merchants and had established trading communities in China . . . . These merchants were also in a position to act as buyers of extorted silk and other goods for trade with the West. Moreover the nomads controlled most of the territory linking the Iranian world with China. Therefore in order to conduct the caravan trade it was necessary to establish cordial relations with the steppe tribes . . . . Both groups held that trade was a vital resource (*ibid.* 158).

It is inescapable therefore that the study of these and other inter'national' connections in and through Central Asia are essential for the reconstruction and understanding of the history of all Afro-Eurasia and of each of its never separate parts. For

even a cursory examination of the major Arabic and Chinese sources for the period (Tabari and Ssu-ma Kuang, respectively) reveals that Central Eurasia was the overwhelming focus of Arab and Chinese foreign policy and the source of strong cultural influences on them. There should be little doubt that Central Eurasia was a most influential factor in the history of the early medieval empires. Scholars of earlier generations had good reason to look to that region for their 'missing link' in world history (Beckwith 1987: 193–94).

In Gills and Frank (1990b) and in the final section of this paper below, I inquire whether this world history, at least in its Afro-Eurasian 'old' world 'eastern hemisphere', may not have presented itself as a long world system cycle, within which Central Asia was indeed the missing link.

World System Capital Accumulation, Core–Periphery, Hegemony–Rivalry, and Cycles

There has been much recent work on the modern world system since 1500 by Wallerstein and some on its extension backward to 5000 years of world system history by Gills and myself (Gills and Frank 1990a, b, Frank 1990a, b, c, 1991). All this work focuses (*a*) on the process of capital accumulation as the principal motor force of world system development. It also distinguishes three principal features of world system structure and process; (*b*) core–periphery structure; (*c*) alternations of hegemony and rivalry; and (*d*) cycles of ascending (A) and descending (B) phases in the same. I suggest that these same systemic features may also be useful for the analysis of the historical place and role of Central Asia in the world system.

Capital Accumulation

On a world scale this seems to have been central to the operation of the world system as a whole, even if it did not always seem so for some of its parts. For instance, it has often been observed that it was difficult if not impossible to accumulate much capital in nomadic pastoral societies. Their very mobility was an impediment, and their herds only permitted limited accumulation. Perhaps, but we have seen that many of these societies also derived much income, and were able to accumulate some capital. They derived income from trade with their more sedentary neighbours and from the caravans, which traversed their territory. Moreover, for that and other reasons some 'nomadic' societies also settled down for extended periods at least in part. Furthermore, Central Asia was also home not only to many semi-nomadic societies, but also to city and other states in oases and other fixed locations. They also produced, traded, and accumulated on bases other than pastoralism.

Most significant however is that world system accumulation need not have taken place in and by Central Asia or any other region. For a particular region to have played a significant role in the process as a whole it is not necessary for accumulation to take place in the region itself. It is enough for Central Asia to have been contributory to or instrumental in accumulation elsewhere!

My argument in this paper is that Central Asia did participate in the systemwide process of capital accumulation. This was implicit in the previous questions/tentative answers, and I want to make it explicit here. However, this capital was accumulated primarily in and to the benefit of outlying 'civilized' sedentary societies. The standard assumption about the latter has been that their accumulation and their very 'civilization' was derived exclusively from their own 'internal' agricultural and other production. Indeed, it has often been argued that the sedentary societies had no use for trade and other relations with their neighbours in Central Asia.

This has been the argument by the Chinese themselves and by those who observed them from afar. This argument is still partly accepted and repeated even by such astute recent observers as Barfield (1989). Yet I believe that it is belied by many facts, including even those few that were tentatively presented earlier in this paper. The tandem and symbiotic relations between Central Asia and their outlying 'civilized' neighbours also contributed significantly to their accumulation of capital and civilization. These relations were 'necessary' to their development, at least as it historically did occur.

The Core–Periphery Structure

This is often also called 'centre-periphery'. It is extended to 'semi-periphery' by Wallerstein and to the 'hinterland' by Gills and Frank (1990a). In the present context, I prefer to use the word 'core' to avoid confusion with my other uses of the term 'centre' in Central Asia and its centrality in the world system. Rowlands, Larsen and Kristiansen (1987) have already inquired into *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World*. They review and apply 'dependency and world systems theory . . . to stimulate thinking in archaeological and historical research' (p. 11). Referring to ancient Assyria, Rowlands (p. 9) notes that 'the function of a periphery is to serve its cosmological centre to assure its proper functioning' so that 'in other words the relation between centre and periphery is organic . . . [and not] mechanistic.'

Rowlands *et al.* concentrate on Mesopotamia and Western Asia, but they, like us extended the same into Central Asia and its relations with its neighbours. However, Rowlands *et al.*, and among them especially Kohl, see multiple cores, each with its own periphery, no single Bronze Age world system, and instead a patchwork of overlapping and constantly shifting world systems without direct contact from one end of these systems to the other. Moreover, 'the development of underdevelopment in the Bronze Age was sharply constrained or itself underdeveloped' (p. 3), in particular because there was little technological gap between core(s) and peripheries, and the latter could not monopolize metal working and military technologies. 'Central Asia clearly interacted with South Asia and Iran in the late third millennium, but it was neither a core, periphery, or semi-periphery in terms of economic exchange with any of these areas' (Kohl in Rowlands *et al.*, 1987: 23).

However, perhaps Rowlands and his collaborators try to apply modern world system structures and processes too stringently to the distant past. Direct contact and dependence in its contemporary sense are not necessary to 'demonstrate the existence of a unified world system in any meaningful sense' (p. 23). The many chains of indirect contact we observed above through a patchwork of shifting cores and peripheries may be enough to constitute a system. Morever, the shifts themselves may have obeyed

systemic influences and perhaps cycles, as Rowlands *et al.* have observed. Of course, they refer only to the Bronze Age. However, we could still make meaningful sense of a unified world system somewhat later, which would still be one, two, or three thousand years before AD 1500.

The core concentrates and 'centralizes' the accumulation of capital, including that which is derived from its exploitative structural relation with the peripheries and the hinterland. The core need not be the geographic centre of the system. Western Europe and Britain were not. Similarly, the geographic centre of the system in Central Asia, through which many of the relationships pass, need not be and mostly was not the accumulating core of system accumulation. On the contrary, even despite their occasional technological superiority in some respects, the various parts of Central Asia were mostly peripheries or hinterlands to the cores of accumulation in the outlying civilizations and empires.

These cores in East, South and West Asia frequently sought to imperialize and peripheralize parts of Central Asia as inputs to their own processes of accumulation. Even when Central Asians used military superiority to invade and try to dominate these outlying cores, they only succeeded militarily and at best politically, but not economically. That is, even then Central Asia remained subject to the economic exploitation of these cores. At best, their process of accumulation and the structural core–periphery relationship was brought to a temporary halt. Particular ruling groups in these outlying cores may have been eliminated for ever, or they were replaced by new ones from Central Asia itself. Temporarily, there may have been an interregnum of chaos or relative equality. Eventually, however, a similar core–periphery relationship with Central Asians was reestablished, albeit then sometimes with ruling groups that had recently come from Central Asia itself.

The important implication, not only for Central Asia or for these particular cases of its relationship with its surrounding cores, is that military and political dominance was never enough to establish and maintain an economic core–periphery structure. This implication runs counter to most of our received wisdom, which attributes strength primarily to military capacity and secondarily to other political power. At least, as Samir Amin (1991) repeatedly argued during our Silk Road's expedition, the argument is that political power dominated economic power before 1500. In this view, only under 'capitalism' since then has it been the other way around. Again the study of the 'centrality' of Central Asia can be most useful in challenging this widely accepted point of view. For the core-periphery relations of accumulation between Central Asia and its outlying sedentary societies seem to disconfirm this received theory.

Two periods offer additional interesting evidence: the eleventh and twelfth centuries when the Sung governed *China among Equals* to use a title of Rossabi (1983), and the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of

Mongol rule and the Yuan Dynasty, which he includes in his period. Sung China was economically strong; but it is said that it was politically weak, if only because the empire was split between north and south and/or did not cover so large an area. Moreover, its Jurchen, Khitan and other neighbours to the north and west were its 'equals'. There were several more regional and changing core–periphery structures both in Central and East Asia, and the larger one was suspended since the decline of the Tang dynasty. The lack of—or inability to exercise—control over Central Asian trade during this period may have been an important factor in this lack of power, or was it vice versa? Neither incidentally nor accidentally however, the time of the Sung was also the period of Chinese maritime expansion and strength in and to the south. Which of the two, maritime strength in the southeast and continental weakness in the northwest, was a cause and which an effect may be subject to dispute. However, they surely were not independent, but related.

The period of Mongol ascendancy from Genghis Khan to Kublai Khan has received more attention than any other in the history of Central Asia. Therefore, it need receive less here. Suffice it to make two observations. One is to repeat the observation, for instance of Kwanten and Barfield, that the empire of Genghis Khan did not emerge out of nothing. Instead it grew out of a long heritage of Central Asian history *and* with the input of the recent strength of several of the Central Asian neighbours of the Mongols. The other observation is that *the* major political, economic, and military imperial venture of Central Asians in almost all of Eurasia may seem like the exception to my interpretation of Central Asia's place in core–periphery structures. For under Genghis Khan and his immediate successors, Mongolia and its capital at Karakorum seem to have become the core of a system. It thrived on trade with and tribute from the outlying civilizations, which the Mongols promoted like never before. Indeed, the Mongols also used and adapted to civilizational inputs from their neighbours, including the Central Asian Sogdians and Uighurs. However, they were the exception that proves the rule, because they were unable to maintain this core–periphery structure with an inadequate productive apparatus of their own. One result was the Mongol–Chinese Yuan dynasty in China. Finally, the 'traditional' relations were re-established under the Ming and then the Manchus. However, the Ming withdrawal from overseas trade and the removal of the capital to Beijing may have been part and parcel of the need to deal with Central Asians and Manchurians on their own terms (cf. McNeill 1983).

Repetitive Alternation between Hegemony and Rivalry

The role of economic power and military power or war and repetitive alternation between hegemony and rivalry is another feature of long standing in the world system. Hegemony is by definition a relation of dominance

that is exercised by one power over others. Yet the ups and downs of hegemony are often treated like those of states and empires themselves, as though they are derived primarily if not exclusively from dynamics that are 'internal' to the hegemonic power. That is the procedure, for instance, in much of Paul Kennedy's bestseller (1987). Yet hegemony, and probably war, is not only a relation between A and B, C . . ., but a feature of the whole system of which they are all but parts. In this system, the hegemony of one power is soon replaced by that of another. This usually happens after an interregnum of intense rivalry and war among various contenders, including the old hegemonial power, for its place. A 'system' of temporary and shifting alliances is also part and parcel of this process of hegemony–rivalry. It has relevance to Central Asia and its place in the world system in several ways.

To begin with, hegemony, rivalry, war, and alliances in their support have always characterized nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary peoples *within* Central Asia. Barfield (1989) analyzed how the establishment and maintenance of one tribe's or ruler's hegemony over others was a function of its political-economic relations with neighbouring sedentary economies and their states. Therefore changing relations of hegemony and rivalry, not to mention shifting alliances and wars, also played important roles in the structural core–periphery relations between Central Asian and neighbouring societies. There were many instances of regional and even Eurasian wide shifts of hegemony involving Central Asia, only some of which we have noted above. Kohl (1987: 18-19) mentions some early cases when he enquires into the 'decline' of Turkmenistan at the end of the third millennium BC. He summarizes five interpretations: environmental degradation, 'barbarian' invasions, a shift from overland to maritime trade related to the expansion of Harappan civilization, over-urbanization, and colonization or emigration towards Margiana (Merv) and Bactria. However, the last of these suggests to Kohl that the 'decline' was posed as a 'false problem'.

> A crisis in urbanization or social devolution in southern Central Asia (and by extension throughout areas farther to the south) never occurred. Urban life did not collapse, but settlements shifted in Central Asia to the lowland plain formed by the lower Murghab and the southern and northern Bactrian plains . . . . The known core area of southern Turkmenistan was replaced by new centers in Bactria and Margiana at the end of the third and beginning of the second millennium (Kohl 1987: 19).

I suggest that such shifts among hegemonial centres and peripheries occurred repeatedly and countless times in the history of Central Asia and the world since that time. Moreover, climatically, economically, and/or politically occasioned shifts in long distance trade routes repeatedly helped

raise some new areas and cities to prominence and centrality; while the same shifts converted old previously flourishing areas into decadent backwaters, which were then bypassed by history itself. These shifts did not represent only the 'rise' and 'decline' of particular areas, peoples, economies, or polities. These shifts among its parts and their relations also represented and expressed changes, transformations and the development of the *system as a whole*—which was probably cyclical.

Most interesting perhaps is the question of Central Asia's place and role in worldwide shifts of hegemony. We have implicitly referred to several earlier such shifts in our historical review above. A more recent shift is examined by Abu–Lughod (1989: 338) who suggests that '"the fall of the East" preceded "the Rise of the West".' That is, there was a hegemonial shift from east to west in the world system as a whole. Abu–Lughod, like Wallerstein, argues that the system since 1500 is a different one from the preceding. I argue that *the same world system* experienced a hegemonial shift (Frank 1990 a, b, c; 1991; Gills and Frank 1990a). This shift was very significant for the history and place of Central Asia in the world. For this hegemonial shift involved a shift in the center of gravity westward within Eurasia and from the importance of continental political-economic and military relations to overseas maritime ones. 'Sea power in world history' (to use Admiral Mahan's celebrated phrase) already rose in importance during the ascendancies of Sung China or Venice or Genoa. Yet before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, sea power and maritime trade only competed with and did not yet importantly bypass Central Asia. Since then, sea power, maritime trade, and the westward shift of the world's centre of gravity have left Central Asia in the dark.

There may be disputes about exactly when and why trans-Central Asian trade declined in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, and whether the decline was absolute or only relative to increasing trade elsewhere. The relation of this trade through Central Asia and the seventeenth century crisis is also of interest. So is the revival of trade during the eighteenth century world economic expansion and commercial revolution, but now along the more northerly trans-Siberian route. Rossabi (1990) recognizes a clear decline of the caravan trade in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries but observes a revival along a more northerly route a century later. Therefore, Rossabi argues, the earlier decline could not have been due to competition from maritime trade and must be attributed instead to political instability along the southern caravan route. Yet another explanation is equally or more plausible: both the caravan trade *and* political conditions responded to cyclical economic considerations. Trade may have declined and political instability increased during the seventeenth century economic crisis, and trade as well as Russian administration in Siberia increased and improved during the eighteenth century recovery and expansion. But, however much Rossabi and Togan (1990s) may wish to look into

the ins and outs of changing relations within Central Asia and between it and neighbouring peoples since the sixteenth century, the far-reaching impact of the major shift in world history across the Atlantic is inescapable.

Cycles

This is the fourth feature in the world system. Indeed cycles seem to characterize all systems. All cosmic existence and biological life seem to be in cycles. Numerous ups and downs have been identified in studies of Central Asia and its relations with its neighbours, which seem to be cyclical, that is endogenously self-reproducing. Lattimore entitled the last chapter of his *Inner Asian Frontiers*, 'The Cycles of Dynastic and Tribal History.' 'But why were the cycles repetitive? . . . There is a striking resemblance between the origins of Chinese dynasties and of dynasties beyond the Great Wall' (1962: 536, 540). Lattimore asks whether these 'two interacting cycles . . . were independent of each other' and answers, 'the nomad cycle was at least in part a product of the Chinese cycle' (*ibid.* 550). Yet, as Lattimore goes on to note, then the nomad cycle also began 'to interact on the cyclical history of China with independent force' (*ibid.* 551). Similarly, Barfield (1989: 10) writes of 'a cyclical pattern to this relationship, which repeated itself three times over the course of two thousand years.' Barfield's long cycles also contained shorter ones in turn. Surely, cyclical relations have been or can be identified also between Central Asians and their neighbours to the south and west. Some aspects of Huntington's (1907) *Pulse of Asia* may have been among them. Certainly, the fourth and fifth centuries seem to have been a major instance of Eurasian-(system)-wide economic and political crisis.

In their *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World* Rowlands *et al.* (1987) conclude their introduction:

> In all these arguments, it is ultimately the temporal that is seen to dominate over the spatial shifts in the waxing and waning of particular centres . . . . It has not been sufficiently appreciated that a theory of cyclical change also includes a theory of shifts of centres in space. In other words, expansion and contraction processes have rarely been geographically stable. In the case of shorter cycles, this may involve intra-regional shifts in influence between competing centres within a single core area . . . . However, it has been frequently claimed that these oscillations in intra-core hegemony are interspersed by much larger scale shifts in the arrangements of centres and their peripheries (Rowlands 1987: 10, 11).

However, Rowlands also correctly notes that 'the question is more whether the long-term cycles exist at all as autonomous determinants . . .

rather than being formed from a coalescence of shorter cycles of political expansion and decay' (Rowlands 1987: 9).

Similarly, Gills and I (1990a, b) posed questions about cycles not only of capital accumulation, core–periphery relations and hegemony–rivalry on regional levels. We also suggested the possible existence of cycles of 'super-accumulation' and of 'super-hegemony' and rivalry on a world system-wide basis since at least 1700 BC. Therefore, I also raise a related question about the cycles of Sino-Nomad relations identified by Lattimore, Barfield, and others, as well as similar cycles elsewhere: may these cycles not also be part and parcel of system-wide cycles of accumulation, core–periphery relations and hegemony–rivalry?

The above-mentioned major crises, or perhaps more appropriately crisis, of the fourth and fifth centuries, and again of the seventh and eighth centuries could lead us to answer this question in the affirmative—and should also lead us to look for other such historical instances (as in Gills and Frank 1990b). Similarly, Sinor (1977: 105) argues on the one hand that trans-Asian trade became brisker when great nomad states flourished and improved conditions of travel. On the other hand, we observed above that Rossabi (1990) attributes the late sixteenth century decline and eighteenth century revival in caravan trade to political considerations. However perhaps at these and at other times, the nomad states flourished and trade expanded when and because the Eurasian economy as a whole was in a cyclical upswing. Concomitantly, trade may have declined and people fought more over a smaller economic pie—and smaller rakeoffs from the caravan trade—during periods of cyclical downswing.

Gills and Frank (1990b) try to trace a system-wide long cycle through alternating upswings and downswings of some two hundred years each, back through history to at least 1700 BC (and of shorter duration since 1450). In that paper and again (Frank 1990c) I argue that the 'European' cycle of expansion between 1050 and 1250, contraction between 1250 and 1450, and (renewed rather than original) expansion between 1450 and 1600 was part of a wider cycle in the world system as a whole. From this perspective it then appears that the 'B' down phase in *this* world cycle found its resolution in the aforementioned westward shift of hegemony. This shift has since left Central Asia in the historical lurch. Of course, this interpretation leads not only to the easy acceptance of the continuation of the westward hegemonial shift first across the Atlantic and now across the Pacific. Then we may also ask whether Central Asia's time may not also come again, be it as another wave of (more peaceful) outward migration (whose half millennial 'pulse' is already overdue) if only of unemployed labour, or otherwise.

A fifth important and perhaps even more neglected characteristic structure and (also cyclical?) process in the world system, and especially in Central Asia, are bottom-up mass social movements. I have looked into

their cyclical history over the past two centuries in various parts of the world (Fuentes and Frank 1989; Frank and Fuentes 1990). Bottom up social movements of liberation and/or opposition, often taking ethnic and/or religious forms, have certainly played important roles in Central Asia and elsewhere for a long time. One problem is finding their historical traces, if any, and recognizing their importance. The other problem is that we will never do so, unless we look, which very few historians do.

Some Obvious (?) Conclusions about Civilization and Settlement in Central Asia

From an analytic point of view, there seems to be much promise in extending the world system approach much farther back in history and 'outward' to include Central Asia. In particular, we must try to relate the cycles within Central Asia to the cyclical history of other parts of Afro–Eurasia. Perhaps they were part and parcel of one world system cycle. However, even those analysts who do not see—or see nothing promising in—the world 'system', must recognize that we must relate Central Asia to the rest of the world, to whose history Central Asia was in many ways 'central'.

From a more popular point of view, we should reject the derogatory names applied to Central Asians; and we should stop belittling their historical significance and accomplishments. The supposed distinctions between 'civilized' and 'barbarian' people are more than doubtful, and the idea and term that Central Asian peoples were 'barbarian' should be abandoned altogether. It is dismaying indeed that (after Owen Lattimore's exile by McCarthyism) the perhaps best known American Central Asianist, Dennis Sinor (1969: 5), could still introduce a 'syllabus' for the U.S. Office of Education dedicated to promoting teachers' and their students' knowledge of the area and its peoples by writing that 'the history of Central Eurasia is a history of the barbarian'. Very properly, Beckwith (1990) has powerfully argued against this usage, also on the basis of the etymology of the word. Even the few indications about Central Asians above should make it obvious that they were not 'barbarian' in the sense of the common usage of the term. Moreover, there is much reason to doubt that many Central Asians were in any sense less 'civilized' than their neighbours, even if the latter reached higher levels of 'civilization'—also in part thanks to their relations with Central Asians and through them with other civilizations. It is, rather, the insufficiently civil and civilized Sino- Euro- and other centric thinking and behaviour, which lead exponents of the latter to denigrate their neighbours from Central Asia and elsewhere. They probably could find some of their own forefathers among them, if they cared to look.

Similarly, the supposed distinctions between Central Asian nomads and sedentary people elsewhere may obscure much more than they clarify. We have noted in passing above that Central Asians themselves were nomadic, semi-nomadic, semi-sedentary, and sedentary in all sorts of combinations and successions. They also had cities, big and small; agriculture, near and far; mining, metallurgy, and manufacturing; trade and its adjunct of written record keeping, and of course other culture and 'high' religion. Sedentary peoples also moved about. Moreover, they incorporated many 'nomad' invaders and other migrants into their own way of life. An intermediary category on the frontier between agricultural China and pastoral nomads on the steppes, suggested by Lattimore (1962) and others, may be useful to analyse the *structural* relationships across the shifting frontiers. However, as a category of people it is no more useful than calling them or others 'semi-feudal'. Moreover, rulers in China and in other outlying civilized areas repeatedly sent people into or across the 'Inner Asian frontiers' towards Central Asia. They also resorted to migration, often forced, to form agricultural colonies, and military garrisons to protect them, or the former to feed the latter. The one often became the captive of the other across the frontier. Thus, these sedentary peoples set up or occupied an intermediary category, or a category of intermediaries, between themselves and others. In so doing, the sedentary societies also helped diffuse and permeate the supposed distinctions between themselves and others. Despite his reference to 'nomads' in his sub-title and throughout his book, Barfield (1989) also has doubts about the hard and fast distinction between them and their 'settled' neighbours. Thus 'nomadic pastoral' and 'settled agricultural' then are not so much hard and fast categories of peoples as they are temporary conditions, which different people(s) adopt according to changing circumstances.

In conclusion, we would do much better to treat Central Asia, its peoples, and their history like anybody else in the world. We should recognize their centrally important part, role, and contribution in world history for what it long was, and again may come to be. I hope that this essay by someone who is not a Central Asian nor a specialist on the area can help stimulate others to devote more incisive attention and more qualified study to this area. May this help convert Central Asia from the sort of dark hole in the middle that it was, to a real black hole, whose gravitational attraction can soon engulf the outside and outsiders.

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