Comparing World Systems: Toward a Theory of Semipheral Development

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This is an effort to formulate a theory of fundamental large-scale, long-term social change which uses world-systems (intersocietal networks) as the focal unit of analysis. Several recent scholarly studies of large-scale historical change have emphasized the interconnectedness of societies (e.g. Mann, 1986; Wolf, 1982; Wilkinson, 1987) but only the world-system perspective of Immanuel Wallerstein (1979) places theoretical weight on the idea of core/periphery hierarchy as an important structural element in the reproduction of intersocietal systems. The comparative study of core/periphery hierarchies is yet in its infancy even though several older works on "frontiers" (e.g., Lattimore, 1940; McNeill, 1964; Adams, 1977) and recent collections (e.g. Rowlands, Larsen and Kristiansen, 1987; Mathien and McGuire, 1986) have begun the task of sorting out the different types of regional dominance/dependence relations and examining the importance of these for the dynamics of social development.1

In this paper I will go directly to a first and tentative exploration of a theory of semiperipheral development which suggested itself to me in the course of an overview of very different types of world-systems.2

This paper first discusses the different meanings of the notion of semiperiphery as they have emerged from considerations of the modern world-system. Then it considers three different but related general formulations of a theory of social change, and then it examines several general types of major social change which may be seen as instances of the theory. The intent is exploratory—to turn up conceptual and empirical problems and

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to move in the direction of a more rigorous examination of the utility of such a theory.

I leave aside for now a number of major conceptual and operational problems which would need to be resolved before any comparative study can definitively examine the utility of the concept of core/periphery hierarchy for explaining major social changes. How to best bound world-systems and the relationship between different kinds of networks of interconnectedness is one such problem. The conceptualization of coreness and peripherality in general is a second problem, and a third is the clarification of what is meant by “fundamental” systemic social change. I will not attempt to resolve these problems here.

The Semiperiphery Concept

The notion of the semiperiphery is an original contribution by Immanuel Wallerstein to the analysis of the modern world-system (Wallerstein, 1974, 1979; Arrighi, 1985). In various parts of Wallerstein’s historical and more theoretical analyses of the Europe-centered world-system he suggests several meanings of the concept of the semiperiphery. For purposes of applying this idea to a comparative study of world-systems I will modify and extend Wallerstein’s usage somewhat (see also Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 10).

1. A semiperipheral region may be one which mixes within the same area both core and peripheral forms of organization.
2. Also a semiperipheral region may be spatially located in between core and peripheral regions.
3. Mediating activities between core and peripheral areas may be carried out there.
4. In addition, a semiperipheral area may be one in which institutional features are in some sense intermediate between those of the relevant core and periphery.

Though these four definitional elements are themselves somewhat vague and dependent on the nature of the core/periphery relationship which exists in any particular world-system, I would like to allow myself the flexibility of such a definition for the purposes of this exploratory consideration.
Three Approaches to Semiperipheral Development

Most generally stated, the theory of semiperipheral development contends that semiperipheral areas are likely to generate new institutional forms which transform modes of production and which may lead to domination by new groups, or at least the reorganization of structures of domination. The semiperiphery is seen as fertile ground for social, organizational, and technical innovation and as a strategic location for upward mobility and the establishment of new centers of resource control. Thus the semiperiphery is a structural position which often has developmental (or evolutionary) significance.

Before we turn to a consideration of several types of instances which illustrate this general formulation I will discuss three theoretical approaches which utilize different language but overlap significantly. The purpose of this is to provide several possible related approaches which may help us in more clearly and accurately specifying a general formulation and in fine-tuning its application to different types of circumstances. The three approaches I will consider are:

1. Elman Service's "evolutionary potential,"
2. Alexander Gershenkron's "advantages of backwardness,"
3. Leon Trotsky's "laws of uneven and combined development."

Service

Elman Service first published his discussion of "evolutionary potential" in a volume coedited with Marshal Sahlins (Sahlins and Service, 1960). Later this was republished in Service (1971). I am not a devotee of evolutionary imagery and language because I am at least partially convinced by the historicist approach which acknowledges a wide role for voluntary action and open-endedness in social development. But let us suspend such matters of taste for the moment in order to see how Service's concepts might be of use to a theory of semiperipheral development.

Service argues that development is usually discontinuous in space with older localities losing dominance to new centers. There is an interaction between the qualities of adaptation and adaptivity which produces this uneven development in space. An innovation
in technology, social organization or cultural institutions may allow a society to become well-adapted to a natural and socio-economic environment, but the very specialization in that innovation, or constellation of innovations, will at a later point in time inhibit the ability of the society to adapt to new circumstances. Adaptation involves specialization, while adaptivity is the quality of being able to make new changes. Service argues that a general process of social evolution—the interaction between adaptation and adaptivity—accounts for the rise and fall of civilizations, the spatial discontinuity of innovations in cultural techniques such as writing, and the rise and fall of contemporary nation-states. He is addressing the issue of the benefits and costs of specialization raised in the literature on biological evolution, but his formulation is clearly directed toward an explanation of uneven social development. Older areas become entrenched in earlier adaptations, while newly developing areas can “take the best and leave the rest.”

Gershenkron

Alexander Gershenkron (1966), an economic historian, uses the idea of “the advantages of backwardness” to explain the rapid industrialization of certain countries which followed Britain’s lead in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Gershenkron countries which have certain natural and organizational features favorable to industrialization can rapidly industrialize by importing production technology, although the mechanisms they employ and the sectoral path of economic change they follow will differ significantly from those found in the original industrializer. Gershenkron’s discussion focuses primarily on Germany but he also considers France and Russia.

Gershenkron notes that rapid secondary industrialization has aspects which are similar to social movements in that economic change occurs across many sectors together and the whole process involves a spirit which combines entrepreneurship with collective enthusiasm. He emphasizes the importance of innovations in banking and state sponsorship of economic development in these cases of “catching up” with the leader. The most important “natural condition” which facilitates economic growth is the availability of raw materials. Organizationally it is important to have a unified
state, as opposed to a collection of baronies (e.g. Germany before 1870). Serfdom is mentioned as a social organizational barrier to industrialization, but Gershenkron argues that the very scarcity of an industrial labor force may facilitate rapid industrialization by encouraging the adoption of the most up-to-date labor saving production technology.

Though "backwardness" is generally argued to be a boon for rapid change, under some circumstances Gershenkron does imply, in his contrast between Russia and Germany, that there is such a thing as too much backwardness. This is felicitous for my reinterpretation of his approach in terms of a distinction between periphery and semiperiphery.

**Trotsky**

Leon Trotsky (1932) wrote a history of the Russian revolution which begins with a discussion of the "historic laws" of "uneven and combined development," a formulation he uses to explain the "peculiar" form of capitalist development in Russia and the stage-skipping evident in the sequence of Russian revolutionary transformations compared to the English and French revolutions. It is obvious that both Service and Gershenkron bear an intellectual debt to Trotsky. Service acknowledged this by directly quoting Trotsky on the rapid, stage-skipping nature of Russian industrialization. Gershenkron's "advantages of backwardness" are referred to by Trotsky as "the privilege of historical backwardness."

Trotsky's most general formulations are as follows:

Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development—by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms (emphasis in the original) (Trotsky, 1932: 5 ff.).

And elsewhere (1932: 4) he says:

A backward country assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries. But this does not mean that it follows them
slavishly, reproduces all the stages of their past. The theory of the repetition of historic cycles—Vico and his more recent followers—rests upon an observation of the orbits of old pre-capitalistic cultures, and in part upon the first experiments of capitalist development. A certain repetition of cultural stages in ever new settlements was in fact bound up with the provincial and episodic character of that whole process. Capitalism means, however, an overcoming of those conditions. It prepares and in a certain sense realizes the universality and permanence of man’s development. By this repetition of the forms of development by different nations is ruled out. Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historic backwardness—and such a privilege exists—permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without traveling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past. The European colonists in America did not begin history all over again from the beginning. The fact that Germany and the United States have now economically outstripped England was made possible by the very backwardness of their capitalist development. . . . The development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process. Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character (Trotsky, 1932: 4-5).

Trotsky’s argument may be extended to a consideration of the socialist experiment in the Soviet Union. Though I argue elsewhere that the Soviet Union has not successfully established an autonomous and self-reproducing socialist mode of production (Chase-Dunn 1982), it has nevertheless carried through a significant effort to do so, and has in the process developed many institutional forms which are innovative in terms of the possibility of transforming capitalism into socialism. The “laws of uneven and combined development” may be applied to this transformational change as well as to the problem of catching up with core capitalism. It is my argument that fundamentally new organizational forms, activities with very different logics of operation, are likely to emerge first in semiperipheral areas where both core and peripheral forms are combined and development is subjected to very contradictory forces.

Missing from Gershenkron and Trotsky is any consideration of the mechanisms which bring about organizational inertia and resistance to new adaptations in older core regions. They discuss why “backwardness” is an advantage, but not why being first is
sometimes a disadvantage. Service does consider both sides of these processes, but only in the most general (and vague) terms. More attention is given to the processes of "ossification" in old cores by civilizationists studying decline (e.g., Quigley, 1979).

Another problem with the above approaches from a world-system point of view is that they are all formulated in terms of levels or stages of development and therefore they completely ignore the hierarchical and structural aspects of relations among more and less developed societies. I wish to place the whole discussion into a context which explicitly examines mechanisms of domination and exploitation and processes of "the development of underdevelopment." A theory of semiperipheral development is not a claim that catching up or becoming a new center of domination is possible for all regions, although the extent to which core/peripheries hierarchies and uneven development are reproduced is itself an important research question for all the very different world-systems I wish to examine. It is quite possible that there may be some world-systems in which the "spread" effects of development are much stronger than the "backwash" effects which reproduce regional hierarchy. This is not something which should be prejudged. "Spread effects" involve the diffusion or adoption of "more developed" forms of organization, production techniques, etc. to less developed areas, while "backwash effects" act to strengthen existing forms or create new forms which are obstacles to development. This usage was first introduced by Gunnar Myrdal (1957) to describe the processes of uneven development in the modern world. The discussion of the "development of underdevelopment" and processes of peripheralization vs. "catching up" and upward mobility in the core/periphery hierarchy was elaborated by dependency theory and the world-system perspective (see Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 11 for a review). I am arguing that analytically similar processes (but substantively different ones) may have been operating in the ancient world-systems as well.

Rather than trying to be more specific about these processes at this point I will now turn to a consideration of cases in order to give the discussion more grounding. Ultimately I would like to explicate a theory at three levels of generality: a general covering statement of the theory similar to Service's, a less general set of specifications relevant to several different classes of transforma-
tional social change, and a specific consideration of the exact mechanisms of adaptivity and adaptation which are relevant to each particular historical case. The case I am most concerned about is the global political economy of the twenty-first century, and the ultimate utility of both general and specific formulations will be demonstrated by their ability to enlighten us about the possibilities for the present and the future. But this is a distant goal.

**Types of Semiperipheral Development**

Here are several types of semiperipheral development. The types overlap in some cases, and in one category there is only one "case." Nevertheless, I think it may be possible to write middle-level specifications of the theory of semiperipheral development for the following types:

1. conquest by semiperipheral marcher states
2. extensive and intensive commodification by semiperipheral capitalist city-states
3. the emerging domination of the Europe-centered world-system over the Earth, and
4. The rise and fall of hegemonic core states within the Europe-centered world-system.

Let us discuss these in turn.

**Semiperipheral Marcher States**

Secondary state-formation on the marches has frequently been recognized as a phenomenon which is related to the rise and fall of empires and the shift of hegemony within interstate systems. Of interest to a theory of semiperipheral development are the processes which facilitate new and adaptive organizational forms in marcher states and which inhibit or obstruct effective responses in older core regions. Both of these have been discussed in general terms by civilizationists, historians and historical sociologists. Rather than reviewing this rather extensive literature I will begin with the discussion of a particular case, the conquest of Sumer by Akkad. First though let me give the reader an idea of the cases which I think fall into my class of semiperipheral marcher state conquests of older core regions. These are:
There are several uncertainties in the list. Ideally I want a group of instances in which a semiperipheral state conquers an older core region and sets up a new regime. This excludes conquerors which are either peripheral or from a large unconnected region (e.g. the Mongols), and conquerors which simply decimate the older center without setting up a new regime (Huns, Vikings, etc.). Thus the original position within a core/periphery hierarchy of a conqueror is important, and the position of the conquered region is important. Conquests of regions which do not have core status do not count. Really there are two factors which are important relative to one another: the strength of the emerging semiperipheral marcher and the strength of the old core. Some cores fall to marauders largely due to their own internal processes of disorganization, while others are not rapidly decaying but yet are not able to stave off virulent marchers. The intent of constructing the marcher-state category is not to produce a pure ideal type, but rather to help specify a set of processes of semiperipheral development which are very different from those which seem to operate in the other general categories under consideration (e.g. capitalist city-states, etc.).

**Akkad**

Now to narrative for a moment. The Sumerian interstate system and world-economy lasted for seven hundred years before becoming transformed into an empire for the first time by Sargon of Akkad. The states were city-states and they interacted within the context of a regional economic network which included a core/periphery division of labor with surrounding pastoralists, rain-water horticulturalists and specialized quarrying and manufacturing villages. Within the Sumerian core irrigated agriculture was the basis of the first cities. These cities were politically autonomous although they shared a pantheon and the first written language. The early states were theocracies governed by temple priests and an assembly of lineage heads, but as develop-
ment of this form of organization spread up and down the alluvial plain of the fertile crescent and land appropriate to this form of production became more scarce, the city states moved to a form of political organization based on an elected war leader (Lugal) whose power gradually increased as warfare among city-states became more frequent and more important as a means of controlling trade routes and access to raw materials. While recent evidence reveals the existence of some forms of commodification of land and money economy, most production, distribution and trade was carried out by reciprocal kin networks linked together by the political apparatuses of temple and palace.

Both spread and backwash effects apparently operated in the core/periphery hierarchy although the extent, nature and forms of domination and exploitation are uncertain. The emphasis has been on spread effects because it is obvious that irrigation agriculture diffused within the Tigris-Euphrates flood plain and leaptfrogged to other areas. It is also clear that surrounding pastoralists and horticultural communities became specialized in production for exchange with the core region. The core region exported grain, but also textiles and other manufactured goods. It is known, however, that manufacturing emerged also in remote villages near the source of mineral raw materials such as soapstone deposits. Philip Kohl (1987) has argued that technology was quick to spread even to peripheral regions because of high transport costs for raw materials which could not be economically moved to the core zone for working up. Throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages metal-working was often associated with mountain societies. Lamberg-Karlovsky (1975), however, has argued that Tepe Yahya, an excavated Iranian plateau village in which soapstone bowls were manufactured, was probably exposed to unequal exchange by the Sumerian core because little evidence of wealth accumulation has been found there.

Friedman and Rowlands (1977) argue that the main dynamic of exchange among cities with the core area was based on a prestige goods economy, which they argue makes it especially hard for older core cities to monopolize power resources. Prestige goods economies are vulnerable to copying or redefinition of the symbolic goods which signify high status. The pantheon of shared gods within the Sumerian core indicates a struggle over the claims
of different city deities to superior position within the regional pantheon. 

Igor Diakonoff (1973) has argued that exploitation within the Sumerian region was primarily based on “internal” extraction of surplus product from subjugated classes rather than “external” exploitation based on political-military subjugation. He contrasts this early period with a later period of “warrior empires” in which conquest and exploitation became much more important. It is known from the surviving mythical literature of Sumer that kings took armies into peripheral areas to obtain scarce objects such as building wood, etc., but Diakonoff claims that such dominance relations were unstable. The multicentric nature of the Sumerian core may have allowed peripheral groups to play off competing cities against one another. We know that the Sumerian cities attempted to control peripheral resources by establishing settler colonies (Tepe Yahya may have been one such) in peripheral regions, but Michael Mann (1986) argues that even these colonies were difficult to control under the circumstances of high over-land transport costs and severe logistic problems.

The question of the importance of core/periphery hierarchy in the Sumerian or any other world-system and the relative importance of spread vs. backwash effects can only be determined by surveying the whole system. Kohl’s (1988) comparison of two peripheral regions, Transcaucasia and Western Turkestan, concludes that archaeo logical evidence indicates that these two areas developed rather autonomous and successful new centers in interaction with the Sumerian core in the Bronze age. A study which focussed on the nineteenth century United States or Japan (or Korea or Taiwan) in the twentieth century might conclude that upward mobility or rapid spread effects are the usual case in the modern world-system. But any decision about what is typical must be based on a survey of the whole system and must take account of relative rates of development. Peripheries are not areas that do not change at all, but rather areas which develop core-like features more slowly than the relevant core. Peripheralization often involves the development in the periphery of social structural features which impede further development toward the core. Any comparative study of core/periphery hierarchies should take these matters into account.
Sargon was a cup-bearer at Kish, one of the core cities. He was originally from Akkad, a newly emergent village up-river from the old core region, and populated, it is thought, by recently settled non-Sumerian Semitic pastoralists. The interstate system of Sumer had already begun to exhibit the features of a balance of power mechanism and the rise and fall of hegemons, but no city had managed to conquer the whole core region. Sargon led the Akkadians on a military campaign which defeated all the other cities as well as much of the peripheral hinterland and erected the first empire composed of formerly sovereign city-states.

There is some disagreement about which were the most important factors which led to the Akkadian conquest, and here we can distinguish between two models both of which are compatible with a general theory of semiperipheral development. Mann's (1986) developmental history of power techniques stresses the importance of military technology and organization in the expansion of empires. In his chapter on the "first empires of domination" Mann lays out an admirable model of the contradictory forces of centralization and decentralization which operated in the ancient empires. Mann (1986: 130) also suggests, "What had been hitherto semiperipheral areas became, in a sense, the new core of civilization. Marcher lords were the pioneers of hegemonic empire."

Speaking explicitly of the Akkadian conquest, Mann claims that the recently settled pastoralists combined peripheral with core-type military techniques in a way which gave them an advantage over the older Sumerian core. The Sumerians used heavy infantry phalanxes and cumbersome chariots drawn by equids "(perhaps onager and ass hybrids)" (Mann, 1986: 132). True horses for riding or more mobile and speedy chariots had not yet been developed. The core infantry were "suited for slow, methodical campaigns whereby small densely settled areas could be conquered and defended. They arose from the necessity to defend the early city-state and perhaps to conquer its immediate neighbors" (Mann, 1986: 132 ff.).

According to Mann the Akkadians combined heavy infantry force with the use of a newly developed composite bow. Mann's contention that Sargon combined peripheral and core-type military techniques rests on his claim that the bow used was a peripheral product. He says, "But archery was apparently de-
veloping rapidly from hunting practices, and the use of the bow seems to have given a comparative advantage to the marchers if combined with infantry force" (1986: 133).

Mann also asserts that the old core was in some ways “ripe for the picking.” The reliance on trade routes became increasingly dependent on military protection as core development created new needs and abilities in peripheral peoples. Though the old core still had a comparative advantage in production, reliance on long distance trade exposed merchants to raiding and tribute extraction. Competition among core city-states often spurred the development of semiperipheral marchers directly as core states made alliances with marchers in order to win struggles within the core.

Mann’s discussion of “piecemeal treachery” suggests that cleavages within the core state societies were developing. In the context of a discussion of the grave logistical problems of an ancient conquering army Mann points out that campaigns approached one city-state at a time, and success was dependent on a quick victory. Both superior force and “coercive negotiations” were important. Mann (1986: 141) says, “The defenders were not being offered much of a choice. If they resisted, they might be killed or enslaved; if they surrendered, their entire visible surplus might be pillaged and their walls knocked down. But a discontented cousin or younger son and his faction could be promised more, and the city delivered up by them. This faction would be added to the army or left in charge of the city.”

A rather different picture, in some ways complementary, is presented by the Soviet Assyriologist Igor Diakonoff (In Press). Diakonoff focuses more on class relations in his explanation of how the Akkadians conquered Sumer, although he also mentions the importance of Sargon’s use of the bow. Diakonoff (In Press: 162) says, “It is entirely possible that Sargon had access to yew-tree (or hazel-tree) groves in the foothills of Iran and Asia Minor, or that a composite bow, glued together from horn, wood and sinews, had already been invented at that time.”

Diakonoff claims that the conquest by Akkad was based on both ethnic and class factors. He says (In Press: 161):

Legends of much later times describe Sargon the Ancient as a man of very humble origin, and there is no reason to doubt the credibility of this tradition. It was said that he was a gardener, the adopted son of a
water-bearer, and that he became a cupbearer of the lugal of Kish. . . . The fact that Sargon had no roots in the traditional nomes and did not depend on the nobility allowed him to draw his support from the common people, forming a militia which might have been more or less voluntary.

Another contributing factor to the superior solidarity and motivation of the Akkadian army is based on their status as Semitic speakers who had only recently settled down from pastoralism. McNeill (1963) and others have argued that pastoralists have a kinship structure which promotes solidarity among male lineage heads, and their experience with domesticated animals is easily transformed into the husbanding of peoples. A kin-based reciprocal society can more easily mobilize collective energies than a more stratified urbanized society. Private property and the differentiation between temple and palace increased competition within the urban ruling class, and increasing stratification between classes made mobilization of the commoners for warfare more dependent on material incentives and less susceptible to calls for sacrifice in the name of the society.

The “piecemeal treachery” which Mann mentions may well have been a function of increasing competition and conflict within the ruling classes of the old Sumerian core. As to increasing interclass polarization Diakonoff (In Press: 162) says:

In Lagash the events which led to the coup of Uruinimgina attest to the accumulation of many grievances against the prevailing order. Sargon could encounter support everywhere. The poorest community members may have been interested in curbing the inordinate growth of the nome aristocracy's power; service in Sargon's army offered them hope for social and material betterment . . . But also within the temple and the state economies, the personnel was stratified to such a degree that it was always easy to find here people who were willing to help destroy the nome order.

The disagreements over matters of fact regarding the Akkadian conquest stem from problems of the availability of evidence for this most ancient case of semiperipheral marcher conquest, and this makes it difficult to draw conclusions about which particular mechanisms were important and about the implications of this example for later instances. But the Akkadian case is important because it was first, and because it probably transformed the basic logic of a world-system more completely than did later
instances. Ironically as Diakonoff (In Press: 166) points out, "Thus, the popular masses, who had supported Sargon, gained little from his victory and eventually lost considerably, because a despotic and bureaucratic form of government became more established in Mesopotamia and lasted for millennia." The semiperipheral region which combined elements of a peripheral kin-based mode of production with elements of the core tributary mode, succeeded in eliminating many of the vestiges of the kin-based mode which had remained in the old core and in establishing a more centralized, more exploitative, purer form of the tributary mode of production than had ever existed before.

The exact combination of elements which allowed semiperipheral marchers to conquer older cores varies from instance to instance, and these different combinations also vary in their degree of fit with a general theory of semiperipheral development. But rather than try to confront these problems now I will move on to a consideration of a very different kind of scenario for semiperipheral development.

Autonomous capitalist city-states

The historical process of commercialization within the states and empires dominated by the tributary modes of production has not received sufficient scholarly attention. It has been ignored because of the vociferous debate between, on the one hand, those who focus on the differences between the ancient and the modern world and those others who argue that the instinct to truck and barter is a universal feature of human nature, and thus all societies can be analyzed in terms of the model of "economic man." I side with Polanyi and the substantivists with respect to the distinction between normative, political and market-based forms of social integration. I do not believe that market rationality is natural. Rather, as Marx claimed, the market and the commodification of aspects of life are socially constructed institutions. But the debate between the substantivists and the formalists has clouded the analysis of the historical development of commodity forms within the context of normative and tributary modes of production. The substantivists tend to argue that either market forces did not exist in the ancient world, or that they were so encumbered as to be unimportant. The primitivists, such as
Weber (1978) and Finley (1973) argue that ancient capitalism was different from modern capitalism and that the dynamics of ancient society were not importantly affected by market forces. This debate about similarities and differences has served to obscure the study of the actual processes of commodification of land, labor, wealth and goods and the causes and consequences of commodification for the dynamics of development within the tributary modes of production. The fact that market relations are not dominant does not by itself prove that their existence in certain spheres is unimportant, and in any case, since we know that market relations eventually became the dominant mode of production, and since we want to know how modes of production change their basic logic, it makes sense to study the actual processes of commercialization and their agents.

My category of capitalist city-states in the semiperipheral interstices of empires dominated by the tributary mode of production has boundary problems, of course. What do I mean by capitalist? I mean merchants and financiers who are trading on their "own" account and producers of commodities for sale who mobilize the labor of others whether through wage payments, slavery, clientage, corvee, tenancy, serfdom, helotry or other commodified, semi-commodified or coerced means of labor control. Also ownership may take various forms (e.g. state, kin-based, guild, etc.) as long as commodity production with mobilized labor is occurring. This definition rejects the dichotomous distinction between ancient and modern capitalism in favor of the notion of degrees of commodification. Even within modern capitalism perfectly operating price-setting markets are a rarity, especially for "problematic" commodities such as labor, and some aspects of life are protected from commodification. The extent to which competitive bidding by buyers and sellers sets exchange ratios is a variable which is influenced by the operation of both normative and political (coercive) regulation. Capitalism has become the dominant mode of production in a socio-economic system when market forces have greater weight in the determination of the dynamics of growth, reproduction and decline (and greater weight in the competitive struggle determining the distribution of social resources) than normative or political-coercive forms of regulation. When we examine intermediate forms which combine elements of different modes of production (such as family busi-
nesses, tax farming, capitalist slavery, capitalist serfdom, etc.) we need to study the effects of these forms on extending or inhibiting the further development of market forces.

The question of the control of states by these "capitalists" is also problematic. Control is a variable, and is always shared or conditioned to some extent. For me control is best indicated by its effects. State policy is bent to the provision of "protection rent" in the sense of Frederic Lane (1979) not Michael Mann (1986). Lane defines protection rent as the differential returns received by merchants whose trading efforts are supported by a cost-efficient and protection-providing state. This assumes that the point of state policy is to maintain (and extend) the conditions for profitable trade at minimal cost. This definition can easily be extended to cover the foreign and domestic policies which are beneficial to capitalist accumulation through production as well as trade. No state measures up to the pure type because all states must make compromises to some extent with other groups besides capitalists, but some of the autonomous capitalist-dominated city states of antiquity approach closely the pure case.

The mix between those emphasizing merchant capitalism (accumulation through exploiting price-differentials across different regions) and production of commodities for sale varies across cities and over time within cities, and some cities combine these forms of capitalism with a more typical (in the context of tributary mode empires) accumulation through taxation and tribute. There are also important differences depending upon the sector in which capitalist production is carried out. The Greeks combined production of wheat, olives and wine for use and for sale, a type of partially commercialized economy which demanded control over agricultural land, while the Phoenicians concentrated on merchant capitalism and production of manufactures for export. This meant that they did not need to control large tracts of land and so their cities were built on promontories which could be protected by naval force. They did utilize nearby land for truck gardens to supplement staple food imports, but this did not weigh them down with the necessity to control large land areas, an advantage for capitalism which is emphasized by Fernand Braudel (1984) in his study of merchant cities in Europe. Another complication in the delineation of a class of autonomous capitalist city-states is their degree of autonomy. One reason
why the autonomous city-states of antiquity are semiperipheral is that they are on the edges of empires or the boundaries between empires. Spatially they are often intermediate between empire cores and peripheral regions and they mediate the exchange between core and periphery. But the autonomy of such cities varies. Often they act as allies to one or another empire, and they are often swallowed up by imperial expansion (Frankenstein, 1979). Also some cities within empires are allowed partial autonomy for merchant and production capitalism, and this is increasingly the case as tributary mode conquerors become more sophisticated about how to extract surplus. As empires become more commercialized, kings and emperors learn to tax merchants rather than expropriating them outright, and conquered cities are granted some autonomy to pursue production and trade. The point here is that the autonomy is itself a variable. I will focus here primarily on those cases where formal sovereignty exists, but a more detailed study of merchant cities should also look at cases within tributary states and empires (e.g. Tlateloco, Canton, Babylon, Osaka).

Here is a tentative list of the autonomous cases I have in mind:

- Dilmun
- Minoans?
- Byblos
- Tyre
- Sidon
- Carthage
- Venice
- Genoa
- Antwerp
- Malacca
- Hansa towns

There were, of course, other autonomous towns which carried on extensive trade as a result of being located on overland routes, but in most of these the trade remained secondary compared to production for use in agriculture. I am focussing on those cases, always maritime in nature, where basic foodstuffs are primarily obtained through trade. I also want to examine the extent to which the form of exchange is market-mediated rather than being predominantly based on normatively regulated reciprocity or political-coercive extraction. The actual extent of market mechanisms and the degree of commodification is variable and needs to be researched for each case. It matters exactly how production for profitable sale utilizes partially commodified labor in each case, and these differences will affect the conse-
quences of the exchanges for reproducing or transforming the logic of socio-economic activities.

Karl Polanyi’s students and colleagues (Polanyi, Arensberg and Pearson, 1975) utilized the concept of the “port of trade” to characterize long distance state-administered exchange in the context of the early empires. The idea is that real price-setting markets are not operating because exchange is regulated by political deals among states, and merchants operate primarily as state agents. Subsequent research has revealed new evidence that some of the cases studied by Polanyi and his students did indeed have independent merchants trading on their own accounts and extensive monetization (e.g. Curtin, 1984). Polanyi’s overall implication is that ports of trade are simply reflections of the dominant tributary mode of production which do not constitute important sources of social change toward a more commercialized type of economy. I am sure that in many cases his analysis is correct, but he did not choose to analyze the autonomous capitalist city-states I have listed above. For these I think the evidence will show that they not only represented agents of market forces within the interstices of tributary empires but their activities were an important stimulus to the further commodification of large regions including peripheral areas and the empires themselves.

Marx’s (1967: Chapter 20) analysis of merchant capitalism discusses how, under some circumstances, the action of merchants in buying cheap and selling dear not only equalizes prices across different regions but also encourages production for exchange and specialization. For Marx labor only becomes a commodity when labor power can be bought and sold and when the alternative uses of labor power in the production process are influenced by market forces which subject all production to the constraint of “average socially necessary labor time.” This means that market forces will eliminate forms of production which are inefficient in terms of the utilization of labor, i.e. new forms of labor-saving technology will be implemented and drive older forms out of the market. This occurs to some extent even when labor is not commodified or is only partially commodified.16

The process by which regions become integrated into a single market economy begins with the commodification of goods through the carrying trade of merchants who move things from
places where prices are low to areas where prices are high. The ability to do this obviously depends on the existence of forms of transportation which are economic in the sense that the transport costs do not wipe out the profit. A human carrier cannot economically carry corn further than the distance over which he will eat his pack full of corn regardless of the mode of production. Transport costs thus are the main determinants of the concentric rings within which bulk goods and lighter per value prestige goods move, and this is also an important reason why trade-based cities are built near waterways.

Another reason why semiperipheral capitalist city-states are reliant on water transport and naval power has to do with their interaction with conquest-based tributary empires. Merchant cities located inland are much more susceptible to conquest than those located on coasts or promontories which can be supplied and defended by naval forces. These maritime powers usually combine merchant-shipping with naval supremacy, and are often considered “pirates” by their competitors.

But it is mistaken to characterize many of the cities on my list simply in terms of merchant capitalism. In many cases they specialized in manufacturing special products for export in conjunction with their carrying trade, and this aspect of their operation also functioned to expand and deepen market demand. The Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre borrowed glass-making technology from the Egyptians and manufactured relatively cheap glass vases which they exported to the entire Mediterranean littoral. The Carthaginians reproduced Greek style pottery and statuary for export. Besides reminding us of Taiwan these examples show how the Phoenicians were agents of technological change through the operation of socially necessary labor time within an ancient world-system. There is no way to describe these developments in terms of the static notion of a “port of trade.”

Only much more detailed research can examine the forms of labor control and particular degrees of commodification present and operating within the list of cases above. Also it should not be decided ahead of time that all the cases acted to transform the tributary mode of production in a direction based more on market mediation. This is a subject for research. And further, the complex interaction between the semiperipheral capitalist city-
states and the processes of commercialization occurring within the tributary empires needs examination.

In addition, Weber's (1978) characterization of the religions and political structures in these ancient city-states as "non-rational" needs to be examined more closely. The forms and methods of calculation used were certainly more primitive and inexact than modern capital accounting techniques, but perhaps a more interesting comparison is with the forms and methods employed within the contemporaneous empires. Service points out that cultural inventions often occur in non-core areas because the best and latest invention can be utilized without bringing along all the archaic baggage which accumulated during its development. Thus we know that the Phoenicians carried on a greater simplification of phonemic written script than the earlier improvements. And this is surely an instance of an improvement in efficient communications which Weber would designate as rational. Let us now turn to a different instance of semiperipheral development.

*The Rise of the West*

Here I will be focussing on the coming domination of the capitalist mode of production within Europe and the rise to global dominance of the Europe-centered world-system. The Macedonian and Roman marcher states created empires which extended the core area of "central civilization" (Wilkinson, 1987) westward, but I want to focus on what happened after the fall of Rome.

What was the world-system position of Europe after the fall of Rome? First, Europe was never a world-system separate from the older Near Eastern core region by any definition of interconnectedness. "Europe" is a civilizational idea invented by the semiperipheral Greeks to differentiate themselves from the Persians and the Phoenicians. Europe is not geographically separate from Eurasia, and the Mediterranean littoral became joined to the interconnected world-system formed by the fusion of Egypt and Mesopotamia around 1500 B.C. (Wilkinson, 1987b).

After the fall of Rome the core of this system moved back toward the East and became more multicentric. The Islamic marchers, like Alexander, created several empires within the same world-system. While parts of Europe were conquered by this new
core, most of it remained autonomous and unpenetrated. The official policy of Islam forbade trading with infidels and so the Christian Mediterranean was, for a time, cut off from trade with the Moslem empires and with the Far East.

The fall of Rome had resulted in a political fragmentation, but it was isolation from regional and long distance trade by the Islamic blockade which, according to Pirenne (1980), caused the involution of the European economy into a manorial system of production for use. The cities shrank to the point of becoming only either ecclesiastical or military strongholds. Manors were largely self-sufficient. Some may wish to argue that Europe was a separate world-system during this period because it was not trading with other areas. But this was indeed a peculiar world-system, because there was very little local trade either.

There was, however, political-military interaction within Europe. European feudalism was a military contest among landlords for the control of land. In a sense the state devolved to the level of the manor. The well-known “parcellization of sovereignty” (Anderson, 1974a) was a consequence of this extremely decentralized polity, in which the king was simply the landlord who could muster the loyalty of a number of other lords.

At the same time that Europe was politically and economically decentralized the ruling class was culturally integrated by Christianity, the transnational organization of the church, and the use of Latin as the language of state.

So what was the world-system position of Europe? Northern Europe was clearly peripheral for a long time, culturally, politically and economically. The areas which had been conquered by the Roman empire were semiperipheral spatially and organizationally. Spatially the region at the edge of Roman military control had gone through a process of marcher state formation in which pastoralists had become stratified under war chiefs who alternately attacked the Romans, traded in slaves and cattle with them, and served as Roman allies against peripheral steppe raiders and hunters (Anderson, 1974a). After the fall of Rome (primarily of “internal” causes—a subject for another time), the semiperipheral invaders combined Roman with Germanic institutions. The villa became the manor. Vassalage, benefice and fief were relations composed of both Teutonic and Roman ele-
ments. The church, bearer of the classic culture, took on a subsis-
tent organization form—the monastery, which fit into the struc-
ture of the manorial economy as another, internally different, 
manor. Core and peripheral elements combined—one of the 
aspects of semiperipherality.

The introduction, or reintroduction, of commercialized forms 
of exchange and the institutions developed by the relatively 
commercialized Roman empire was spearheaded by Venice and 
the other Italian city-states, now semiperipheral to the core area 
in the Near East. Certainly the crusades softened up the Moslem 
barrier to the long distance trade, but it was the Italians who 
relinked Europe with the Mediterranean world-economy and the 
Far East. In the thirteenth century the old core of the Near East 
was undergoing a period of decentralization which facilitated the 
further revitalization of European long-distance trade links (see 
Abu-Lughod, 1987). Europe was now already intensifying intra-
regional trade and forming its own core region, the “dorsal spine” 
linking Flanders with Italy, but European trade with the Near 
East and China remained unequal exchange, with Europe send-
ing silver bullion in exchange for the luxury goods and spices of 
the East. The trade with China was still to the relative disadvan-
tage of the Europeans into the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-
turies, although “import substitution” (e.g. the production of 
porcelain at Meissen) and the shift of the burden onto regions 
peripheral to the European core were well underway by then. But 
why was Europe such fertile ground for the development of 
capitalism that it could become the first core area in which 
capitalism emerged as the dominant mode of production? This is 
a question that has been given many different answers even 
though the “facts” are generally agreed upon. It is not a situation 
like that of Akkad where the evidence itself is lacking.

Weber (1978) argues that it was a combination of political 
decentralization of Europe and the peculiarly high level of formal 
rationality of European law, business enterprise, religion, and 
political authority which led to the success of capitalism in 
Europe.

Michael Mann (1986) argues that it was the combination of 
political decentralization, the “normative pacification” provided 
by Christianity, and the geographical and climatic conditions
peculiar to Europe which interfaced positively with the economic, technological and military power techniques which had been developing in the old Near Eastern core for millennia.

Nearly everyone agrees that political decentralization was an important condition for the rapid growth of a market economy. First feudalism and later the European interstate system allowed market forces to escape state control, and allowed some states to be controlled by capitalists. For the first time states within a core region became controlled by capitalists. The Dutch state was the first capitalist nation-state to be hegemonic within a core region. But was political decentralization really so unique to Europe? Feudalism in the sense of small weak states with shifting alliances is well-known to other areas, and is often simply a phase of the cycle of the rise and demise of empires. When the forces of decentralization win out over the forces of centralization, as they did in the Roman empire: feudalism. Was European feudalism really all that different or was Europe simply at the right phase of the cycle to receive a strong implantation of capitalist institutions and market forces from the already rather commercialized Chinese, Indian and Islamic empires in the Eurasian super-world-system?

The answer to this question is neither yes nor no. Europe was at the same time just one more semiperipheral area which developed new institutional forms in a way which enabled it to later dominate an older core (and the rest of the globe) and there were unique features and combinations of features within Europe which facilitated this. Also the content of the innovation was unique and the consequence, global domination, was unique. But saying this does not mean that I have accepted Weber's or Mann's version of which factors were most important.

Weber's (1978) focus on the concept of formal rationality is rather problematic. He argues that rational capital accounting and the use of numerical techniques of decision-making are the essence of capitalism. Formal rationality of the economy means the actual use of capital accounting to estimate the profitability of activities and the existence of a social context in which risks are calculable. Associated with the contextual elements are the types of formal rationality appropriate to the state and law: bureaucratic organization and rational-legal authority. My own approach to capitalism focusses more on the objective existence of price-
setting markets than on the decision-making techniques of merchants and producers. If people are producing for price-setting markets I assume that their decisions are taking that into account even if their ideologies and world-views seem magical or primitive in contrast with modern cultural forms. This is not to say that individualistic accounting is unimportant to capitalism, but rather to argue that capitalism can also exist and expand using other, more collective, ideological formulations.

Mann’s (1986: Chapter 12) emphasis on the importance of early Christianity does not rely, as does Weber, on a distinction between ethical and magical forms of religion. Rather Mann emphasizes the relevance of the Christian ecumene as a network of communication, with which I entirely agree. But he also argues that it is the actual content of Christian ideology which acts to provide “normative pacification” within a decentralized and competitive Europe. This, he argues, prevents competition from dissolving into destructive conflict of the kind seen in other warlord-based feudalisms.

Even though we cannot conclude with certainty at this point which factors were most important in the rise of Europe, I have shown that this emergence fits the general model of semiperipheral development.

The Rise and Fall of Hegemonic Core States

Using the Wallersteinian concept of hegemony there have been three hegemonies within the Europe-centered world-system: the Dutch, the British and the United Statesian. Because the context is now a larger world-economy in which capitalism has become the dominant mode of production we expect the nature of competition and the types of institutional innovation employed by successful rising semiperipheral powers to be different. All of the three states that became hegemonic core states were semiperipheral before they moved into core status.

The Netherlands was a swamp (wetland) where Protestant rebels from Antwerp retreated from the Duke of Alva. The core at the time was Spain and Austria, even though the House of Habsburg had already failed to turn the nascent European world-economy into an empire. The interstate system had been preserved by the operation of the balance of power mechanism.
and the alliance between the French and the Ottomans. Protestantism was an ideology of the semiperiphery, an ideology which democratized access to the deity and challenged the authority of the old core.

The Dutch Republic combined features of earlier capitalist city-states with a federalist nation-state policy dominated by the merchants and production-capitalists of Amsterdam. The carrying trade linked the Baltic and American peripheries with the older core region.

England was a relatively strong medieval state but economically it was an exporter of raw materials, mainly wool, to Antwerp and then to Amsterdam. Efforts to gain control of trade (expulsion of Jews) and to support import substitution began in the time of Queen Elizabeth, as did colonialism and the marauding of Spanish galleons by state-sanctioned pirates like Sir Francis Drake. The eventual success of these policies in expanding trade and manufacturing for the home and export market led England to core status in the eighteenth century and to hegemony in the nineteenth.

The U.S. was peripheral during the eighteenth century, although the “triangle trades” shipping, ship-building, and some manufacturing had already developed in New England before the Revolutionary War. The South remained a classical producer of peripheral raw materials employing coerced (slave) labor until the Civil War, but the North and the West developed core capitalism. The struggle over the federal state between core and peripheral capital and over various areas of state policy such as tariffs has been studied from a world-system perspective (Chase-Dunn, 1980). The U.S. was semiperipheral in the sense that it contained within it a balance of core and peripheral activities and the U.S. merchants mediated trade between the European core and the Caribbean and Latin American periphery. The U.S. obtained core status in the 1880s and hegemony after World War II.

The hegemonic cycle, stages of hegemony, and the causes of both rise and decline have already been analyzed elsewhere (Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 9) but this has been done using comparisons of the three hegemons with each other and with other core and peripheral states within the modern world-system. These cases fit the general theory of semiperipheral develop-
ment, but a detailed comparison of the mechanisms of rise and fall with those operating in the scenario of semiperipheral marcher states has not been made. The paths to success of these rising hegemons relied much more on comparative advantage in the production of commodities and the use of military power to protect trade routes and access to raw material inputs to commodity production than did the semiperipheral marcher states. This is simply another way of saying that the logic of competition has shifted away from the extraction of taxes and tribute by military force to the accumulation of profit through commodity production in the system as a whole, and this is most convincingly demonstrated by the fact that the most successful players rely on this new form of competition.\(^\text{13}\)

One important difference between uneven development within the modern world-system and in ancient world-systems has already been pointed out in my study of world city systems (Chase-Dunn, 1985). Since the capitalist world-economy is politically organized as a multicentric interstate system, the process of rise and fall is more routinized and less disruptive for the system as a whole. When tribute and taxation are the main forms of accumulation the failure of an empire is very disruptive of all social relations, but in a system of generalized commodity production the center of power, based now more on competitive advantage in production, can move from Holland to England to the United States with relatively less disruptive consequences for the operation of the system as a whole. The fall of Rome was not fatal for the European region, but recovery took a long time, at least compared to the consequences of the decline of a modern hegemom. I submit that this difference is a consequence of the transformation of the mode of production.

Another interesting comparison between upwardly mobile semiperipheral states within capitalist versus tributary modes of production focusses on relative degrees of internal stratification. I have argued that the relatively more egalitarian political forms within states which became hegemons in the modern world-system (federations, democracies) served to reinforce national solidarity and this was an advantage in the struggle with other states. We have also seen a somewhat similar situation with respect to Diakonoff's version of the Akkadian case. This whole matter is complicated by another observation, however. In the modern
world-system core societies are less internally stratified than peripheral societies, while in ancient world-systems the opposite appears to be the case. The question of the forms and degrees of intrasocietal inequalities and their relationship with core/periphery hierarchies is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating aspects of the comparative study of world-systems.

**Conclusions**

Let us now return to our discussion of theoretical problems in the light of our consideration of the above rather different types of semiperipheral development. The different vocabularies used by Trotsky, Gershenkron and Service are not really a problem. Whether we talk of stages, phases or levels of development or evolution is not really crucial. I prefer levels and phases of development because of all the standard criticisms of evolutionism and philosophies of progress. A more serious problem confronting an effort to translate the above theorists into a world-system perspective on social change is the potential for confusion and circularity in the definitions of structural position within a core/periphery hierarchy on the one hand and the “level of development” on the other. It could be true by definition that new cores are previous semiperipheries, but this would not be a very helpful explanation. In order to solve this circularity problem we must be able to distinguish in each case between the indicators of semiperipherality and the outcome variables of social transformation or changing position within a core/periphery hierarchy. Semiperipheral actors are thought to be agents of social transformation (such as extending commodification), and sometimes “successful” attainers of core status. We must be careful in every case to distinguish the structural position indicators from the outcome indicators in order to avoid the circularity problem.

When we are considering the question of upward mobility—the moving of a semiperipheral society into core status (or hegemony or empire-formation)—we need to distinguish between position in the core/periphery hierarchy and changes in that position. In the modern world-system this is accomplished by examining relative indicators comparatively at one point in time (indicators of world-system position) and rates of change over time in those indicators relative to the population of competing actors. For
example, if we can consider, as some do (e.g. Arrighi and Drangel, 1986), GNP per capita to be a good indicator of a country's position in the contemporary core/periphery hierarchy, then the growth rate of GNP per capita can be used as an indicator of change or stability in world-system position when it is compared to all the other growth rates of countries in the system. A semiperipheral country will have GNP per capita which is roughly intermediate in the distribution of crossnational comparisons, while an upwardly mobile semiperipheral country will have a relatively high economic growth rate (e.g. South Korea, Taiwan).

Of course an entire army of researchers and bureaucrats have worked on methods of national economic accounting and crossnational comparisons for fifty years to produce the concepts, operations and actual data which make these quantitative measurements possible, and even so, the data are skimpy before 1950. But the existence of such a system for the global political economy demonstrates that the distinction between position in a core/periphery hierarchy and change in that position can, in principle anyway, be meaningful for earlier intersocietal hierarchies. The solution is to develop concrete understandings of the forms which earlier core/periphery hierarchies have taken, and to conceive of mobility within these hierarchies as relative to the development of the existing intersocietal network as a whole.

Assume we have solved the circularity problem for the universe of core/periphery hierarchies. The theory of semiperipheral development claims that semiperipheral areas are disproportionately the locus of agents of major social transformations. In order to evaluate this broad claim we would need to bound the universe of "major social changes." It would be important to distinguish activities which reproduce the dominant mode of production from activities which expand the logic of another mode of production. The definition and operationalization of modes of production would need considerable further clarification in order to be able to make these distinctions across the many different types of transformation. One problem is that some activities involve the logic of one mode internally while simultaneously contributing to the reproduction of another mode.

One solution is to decompose the general question of transformation into particular types of major social change as suggested by my consideration of different kinds of semiperipheral de-
velopment. So in our consideration of ancient capitalism we might focus on the regional extension of commodification. Suppose we operationalize one aspect of commodification by the indicator of the coming into near synchrony of price changes within a region. If we could actually measure prices in several different locations over time in several separate ancient world-systems, would we find that semiperipheral capitalist city-states are important agents of such price synchrony?

One problem is that price synchrony can result from either market integration or political regulation, and thus it may be a poor indicator of commodification. Comparative research on ancient world-systems must develop feasible and valid measures before we can definitively test this aspect of the theory of semiperipheral development.

A related matter of interest is the extent of commodification within the semiperipheral capitalist city states. Did the forms of labor control, monetization, contract law, land ownership, money-lending, etc. within these societies display higher levels of commodification than other areas within the relevant world-systems? If so this would be additional support for the contention that these were agents of commodification.

In my discussion of semiperipheral marcher states I intentionally excluded both core and peripheral conquerors, but a real test of the theory must include these, as well as conquerors who emerge from regions previously unconnected with the relevant world-system. My hypothesis is that conquerors from the semiperiphery are most likely to perform empire-formation and the expansion of empires, while peripheral or external invaders are more likely to be destroyers or to form short-lived states. Thus I am here defining transformation as political centralization and increasing stratification of a system. I have in mind the expansion and further institutionalization of the centralized versions of the tributary mode of production. Those conquests which result in decentralization are also a transformation, I suppose, although the evolutionists call this “devolution” and the civilizationists call it “decline and fall.”

Support for the above contentions is to be found in Tom Hall’s (1988) study of the relationship between nomadic pastoralists and states. Most often nomadic pastoralists are employed as border guards of empires (e.g. Comanches, Cossacks) but those who do
succeed in conquering core areas are unsuccessful in forming long-lasting empires. It is rather recently settled pastoralists who have already undergone some state-formation of their own who are prime candidates to be empire-builders. In the act of settling down on the edges of a core region these societies become semiperipheral (e.g. Akkad, Aztecs). A real test of this thesis would need to survey the universe of empire-formations and classify the core/periphery positions of all the empire builders.

How is it possible to “test” the hypothesis that the rise of the West was importantly stimulated by the semiperipheral location of Europe within a larger Eurasian super-world-system? Since there is only one case comparative hypothesis testing is made difficult, but just as we may study the global world-economy “comparatively” by using the generalized logic of time-series analysis (see Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 14) we can examine changes in Europe and Europe’s relationship with larger networks over time. One observation which has been made by Mann (1986) is that Europe’s rise occurred over a very long period of time and no single explanation can be made which will cover the whole trajectory. There were several conjunctural points at which the rise of the West might have been stymied, and each of these needs to be analyzed to see how semiperipherality may have played a role. This is somewhat complicated by the obviously “nested” quality of core/periphery relations in this case. First Europe was reduced to a semiperiphery and periphery of the Near Eastern core. Then it began to form its own internal core region, and to dominate its own periphery and semiperiphery, and later its core region came to dominate older cores of the Near East, India and China. For a long while Eurasia was a multicentric super-world-system in which some unequal (and some equal) exchange between the European, Near Eastern, Indian and Chinese core regions was occurring. An understanding of the real history of these relations and their causal impact on the development of capitalism requires further theoretical clarity and empirical operationalization of the various network boundaries. Bounding world-systems as networks of fundamental goods exchanges does not mean that we should ignore other relationships and forms of interaction.

Within the modern world-system is it true that both success within the system and transformative influence on the mode of
production comes disproportionately from semiperipheral countries? Obviously I am not arguing that all semiperipheral areas are transformative or upwardly mobile. Rather my theory implies that those countries which display the greatest successes at capitalism have been formerly semiperipheral, and also that the most significant challenges to the logic of capitalism emerge from the semiperiphery. Evaluating such claims is obviously not without some difficulties even for the modern world-system, although I will submit that the first claim, that the most successful capitalist countries (i.e. the hegemons) were indeed previously semiperipheral.

The matter of transformation to socialism is more problematic. The large socialist states—China and the Soviet Union—have undergone the most structurally transformative changes toward socialism. Russia/USSR was obviously semiperipheral, but what about China? By most economic measures (e.g. GNP per capita) China is a peripheral country still. But I would argue that China was never completely peripheralized, though areas within China were. The civilizational strength of China enabled her to resist colonization by the West and to maintain political unity and some military strength within the Europe-centered interstate system. These features have similarly contributed to the socialist transformation (still not complete) within China and to China’s upward mobility within the capitalist world-economy. Aspects of socialism have also emerged within both core and peripheral countries but I submit that these have been less transformative than the changes which have occurred within China and the Soviet Union. I am not arguing that socialism is impossible in the core or the periphery, but rather that it is more likely to emerge strongly in the semiperiphery. This is because the modern core/periphery hierarchy stimulates class struggle in the semiperiphery, while it cross-cuts and dampens it in both the core and the periphery.

While I have shown that a loose specification of the theory of semiperipheral development can serve as a covering rule for several rather different types of major social change, only a more detailed analysis of similarities and differences in the mechanisms of transformation can be useful for helping us understand the possibilities for future change. The right mix of historical and structural analysis is required to produce knowledge which is
useful in a particular situation. It remains to be seen whether or not a theory of semiperipheral development can be politically useful, but with further conceptual clarification and examination of particular mechanisms in cases it may prove to be an advance in social science and a guide to future decisions.

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ENDNOTES

1. It may be that some world-systems do not have stable core/periphery hierarchies (see Chase-Dunn, 1986).

2. As I began working on the conclusions of a book which theorizes the world-system perspective on the modern world-system (Chase-Dunn, 1988) I realized that to understand the transformation problem it is necessary to compare the modern system with very different systems, and to study the process of transformation as it has actually occurred in earlier systems. I formulated a preliminary and tentative typology of world-systems as follows:
   1. stateless, classless world-systems
   2. primary state-based world-economies
   3. primary world-empires
   4. complex world-economies containing empires
   5. commercializing world-economies
   6. the global capitalist world-economy

In the course of an overview (Chase-Dunn, 1986) of the structure and institutional nature of these types with attention to the notion of core/periphery relations a theory of semiperipheral development suggested itself to account for a number of quite different instances of transformation.

3. The simplifying assumption I have tentatively adopted is to focus primarily on the network formed by the exchange of “fundamental” material goods, that is basic foods and raw materials used for the everyday reproduction of “typical” members of the linked societies. This does not however necessarily entail a rejection of the importance of other types of interconnectedness. Following Schneider (1977) and Friedman and Rowlands (1977) I agree that “prestige goods” are often important for systemic processes. Wilkinson (1987a, 1987b) has proposed that regular involvement in military conflict as in interaction among a set of competing states and empires constitutes an important systemic boundary, and Tilly (1984) proposes the spatial limits of regularly influential authority as a delimiter of world-systems. Obviously all of these plus connections of genetic and information flows should be examined empirically. In Chase-Dunn (1988) I argue against Wallerstein’s contention that the modes of production (see below) should be used to delimit world-systems.
4. Applying the notion of a core/periphery hierarchy to other than the modern world-system is itself somewhat controversial. The esteemed economic historian Paul Bairoch (1986) has claimed that premodern core/periphery relations were relatively unimportant because there were not (he claims) significant differences in the level of living between core and peripheral areas, at least compared to the large gap which emerged during the industrialization of the European core. The formulation of the core and periphery concepts has been carried out primarily in the context of analyzing the modern world-system and thus we are in danger of repeating the old error of imposing ideas suggested by the present on the past. Indeed, there are as yet many unresolved controversies about how to best conceptualize and measure coreness and peripherality within the modern world-system (see Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 10). The use of these ideas in very different contexts must be done with care in order to avoid distorting very different realities or simply imposing our terminology indiscriminantly. On the other hand we may prejudice the outcome of an investigation of the usefulness of these ideas by defining them too narrowly or rigidly. Since this is a frankly exploratory approach I will start with a general and purposely vague definition which incorporates several different elements. Later we may be able to fine tune these concepts. For now a core/periphery hierarchy will be understood generally as any regional or territorial difference in the level of development among societies in regular interaction with one another. Level of development may be understood as consisting of:

1. level of productivity of material production technology per labor hour or per unit of land area,
2. societal complexity in terms of the size of politically integrated groups and levels of hierarchy.

When such regional relations exist among societies at different "levels of development" we may then investigate the extent and forms of intersocietal political domination and resource extraction as well as cultural definitions of superiority/inferiority. We need not assume that the core always exploits the periphery. Indeed the extent of this probably varies, as does the consequence for social change of such exploitation under different conditions. Indeed, we may find instances in which the "periphery" exploits the "core," or at least such a finding should not be impossible in principle.

5. By fundamental social change I mean transformation of the basic logic which reproduces social structures. I tend toward the use of Marxian structuralist terminology, discussing "modes of production" following Wolf (1982) and Amin (1980). Kin-based, tributary and capitalist modes of production have been defined in a way which follows Karl Polanyi's distinction between reciprocity, redistribution and market-based forms of societal integration. The fine distinctions between systemic logics necessary to a real study of the transformation problem have not yet been sufficiently clarified for us to empirically study the articulation of different modes of production and the process by which
one mode becomes dominant over another. In Chase-Dunn (1988) I have respecified Marx’s definition of capitalism to include both core and peripheral forms of capitalism, but I do not claim, as does Wallerstein, that capitalism is a feature of the modern world-system as a whole.

6. Other possible transformations which might be explained by a theory of semiperipheral development are: the rise and fall of chiefdoms, primary state formation, the neolithic emergence of horticulture, the Greek cultural revolution, and the transition to socialism in the modern world-system. I must leave these possible extensions for another time.

7. Contrary to Mann’s claim that Sargon used heavy infantry, Diakonoff (In Press: 162) says, “Sargon and his successors changed the traditional battle tactics by replacing the small, heavily armed detachments with large masses of lightly-armed, mobile warriors, who either fought in chain formations or dispersed.”

8. Mann (1986) uses the term “protection rent” to mean extraction of surplus by coercive taxation of merchants. I would classify this as one form of the tributary mode. Lane’s usage suggests rather the nature of policy and action taken by capitalist states.

9. Obviously this emphasis on capitalist hegemony within cities comes also from Weber, although I deny that these cities existed only in the West. Which raises the question, was the rise of the West purely Occidental?

10. Marx considered wage labor—the commodification of labor time (labor power) to be the only form of labor mobilization appropriate to capitalism. While I agree that this form is most flexible, allowing market forces to most easily restructure the production process, I argue that various forms of partly commodified labor (e.g. slavery) and even uncommodified labor (e.g. serfdom) can be used for capitalist production. We may want to call this semi-capitalism or something else, but its historical importance should not be mystified by equating it with all other “precapitalist” forms of production.

11. Philip Curtin (1984) studies the role of “trade diasporas,” ethnically integrated trading groups which mediate cross-cultural trade among separate societies. Curtin notes that trade diasporas are no longer necessary once the cultural understandings and trust necessary to intersocietal trade have emerged, a situation he calls a “trade ecumene.” Although the semiperipheral capitalist city-states I want to study do not perfectly fit the notion of a “trade diaspora,” we should examine the role which these city-states played in the formation of the cultural bases of more regularized intersocietal exchange.

12. Immanuel Wallerstein’s claim that sixteenth century Europe was a separate world-system from the Ottoman empire is based on his use of mode of production criteria to bound world-systems. I have criticized and revised his “totality assumption”—the idea that a world-system can have only one mode of production—elsewhere (Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter I). Using definitions of interconnectedness Eurasia formed a
single multicore world-system in the sixteenth century, and was already linked to the East Indies, Africa and Spanish America—a nearly global system, but not yet globally dominated by Europe.

13. There have been other "paths of development" within the modern world-system however. Prussia and Japan attained early success through state-building and military strength, only later converting to commodity production. The case of Russia/USSR is also very different. The dependence of capitalism on the interstate system (see Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 7) reproduces the logic of geopolitics even while commodity production becomes the dominant mode of accumulation.

14. I have argued elsewhere (Chase-Dunn, 1988: Chapter 11) that in the modern world-system core/periphery exploitation and domination acts to reproduce the capitalist mode of production by reinforcing nationalism and softening class struggle within core states. Imperialism may have had a similar function in other world-systems, e.g. Greece and Rome.

15. Stephen Bunker says, “The middle is the muddle, but the middle is the model.”

REFERENCES


