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COMMENTS ON FAUSTIAN DELUSION II

Andre Gunder Frank

Melko’s second version of his Faustian delusion argument requires little additional comment from me, but perhaps from others who can speak with more authority on their own work, which Melko (mis?)interprets. For by my reading, for instance, Chase-Dunn and Hall envision world systems that go much farther back than only five hundred years. Wilkinson’s “Central Civilization” is not “Western” by another name, but on the contrary originated in the Asian “East” and spread out from there only belatedly to engulf what Melko rightly terms an outlying peninsula at the western end of Asia.

Whatever Coulborn may have said, and what Melko attributes to him, does not correspond to my recollection; “feudalism” is not characteristic of times of recovery. On the contrary, as Melko himself points out earlier in the same sentence, “feudalism” occurs during bad times when a society or civilization suffers involution or turns in upon itself as the bad times crisis breaks the external ties, which were forged during the expansion and recovery from the previous crisis. Examples are the “dark ages” in much of Asia from about 1700 to 1500 BC, and especially again from 1200 to 1000 BC. The “dark ages of feudalism” in western Europe were associated with recovery only insofar as this outlying region did not participate in the periods of recovery that swept across Asia from AD 500 to 800 (including Tang China), though Europe did eventually participate in the generalized recovery from about AD 1050 to 1250 (including Song China). Of course, it is a world system perspective, if not “model,” that permits us to see “feudalism” in this context. As for myself, on comparison and interaction, I did not cite the civilizationist James Farmer (Melko’s selective misperception) but the historian Edward Farmer. Fairbank was a sinologist, but his “rule” to study history backwards can apply equally or even more so to the history of the world (system) as to that of China, wherever “its” history may be bounded in space. On that, we could consult (worldwide) Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast, where Fairbank set out his rule. On Kroeber, thanks but no thanks for not telling me about his book that I have had since I studied anthropology in graduate school. On culture, I plead guilty to benign neglect. My anthropologist friend Sidney Mintz and I have been arguing for 40 years: he keeps telling me “culture matters,” and I keep responding “structure matters.” A chicken/egg question? Melko seems to have missed my concession, at least in principle: the three-legged stool of ecology/economy,
power/politics, and culture/ideology. All three keep the stool itself upright. They are (equally?) necessary for sitting on the stool — or even for analyzing its balance. Can civilizationists and world systemizers sit together on the same stool?

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