10-1-2000

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Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall 
*Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems*  
New Perspectives in Sociology Series: 
Charles Tilly and Scott McNall, series eds.  

Christopher Chase-Dunn, Professor of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University and Thomas D. Hall, the Lester M. Jones Professor of Sociology at De Pauw University, have collaborated to produce the most informative, as well as one of the most provocative, studies of World Systems to date. Although *Rise and Demise* is clearly a “work-in-progress,” it still merits high praise for its illumination of the vast quantity of world-systems literature currently available and the future research this work is destined to generate.

One hardly needs a crystal ball to predict that this text is going to be provocative for it boldly states theses that are bound to instigate controversy. Some readers will definitely question the legitimacy of tracing the evolution of “world-systems” over a 12,000 year span of time. Others will surely entertain doubts as to whether or not a kin-based group of sedentary foragers can be described as a “world-system.” Some will reject the effort of the authors to defend their unique theses on “world-systems” by redefining “world-systems” to allow for the existence of small, non-global systems, which is diametrically opposed to the modern world-system concept. Still others will entertain doubt regarding the contention of the authors that world-systems can be found among stateless, localized clans.

While some readers will reject the world-systems theory contained in this book, the manner in which the theories are presented will tweak the nerves of others. For example an American jingoist would surely react adversely to such statements as “The relative decline of the United States and the relative rise of Japan and Germany are further evidence that major changes are occurring in the world-system.”
While the text will certainly generate controversy, hopefully all critics will give the text a fair reading and will evaluate it on the clearly stated objectives of the authors. First of all, it is not intended to be a finished product, much less the definitive statement on World-Systems. As Chase-Dunn and Hall state, “We are not attempting to rewrite the history of the world. Rather we are building a general model that we – and we hope others – may use to re-examine the history of the world.” At one level what the authors’ proffer is a modification and expansion of Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system theory. Chase-Dunn and Hall jettison Wallerstein’s Eurocentric model for a greatly expanded spatial and temporal consideration of world-systems. Chase-Dunn and Hall also place greater emphasis on the role of intersocietal interactions in social change.

The general theory of Chase-Dunn and Hall differs from Wallerstein, and most other world-system specialists, in that their general account is a holistic structure of local, regional, national, interstate, transnational and global relations. Like Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills, Chase-Dunn and Hall consider Wallerstein to be too Eurocentric and too conservative regarding temporal boundaries. While Wallerstein’s world-system focused on the transformation of Europe and was limited to approximately 500 years, Frank and Gills expanded the spatial boundaries to included Asia and moved the temporal back to 5,000 B.C.E. Chase-Dunn and Hall provide an additional dimension to Frank and Gills’ already panoramic approach by adding a global perspective world-system development that covered a period of 12,000 years. Chase-Dunn and Hall also add a unique dimension to their world-system by allowing for local and regional considerations, while most authorities place the greatest emphasis on the global relations.

The modern world-system is stratified by what is termed a core/periphery hierarchy in which core regions dominate and exploit peripheral regions. The core is composed of advanced core states – such as the Western Europe, the United States and Japan – which are themselves unequally powerful and compete with one another. The periphery consists of the least powerful
countries in the system and includes many of the states in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some states are in the semiperiphery because they are in an intermediate position within the core/periphery hierarchy. They sometimes dominate peripheral areas, but they are also dominated by the core areas (e.g., Mexico, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, India).

The core/periphery hierarchy is a fundamental structure of the modern world-system that is reproduced over time rather than eliminated by national development. In Immanuel Wallerstein’s model, the modern world-system emerged in the sixteenth century in Europe and expanded to incorporate the whole globe by the early twentieth century. Chase-Dunn and Hall use this model as a basis from which to develop their theory of “very long-term” social change. Chase-Dunn and Hall have modified and redefined the modern system to make it applicable to prehistoric, ancient, classical and medieval systems. Thus, in contrast to Wallerstein the modern world-system evolved over a period of 12,000 years. (Thus their emphasis is on very long-term cycles).

Looking at the Chase-Dunn and Hall thesis from an historical perspective reminds one of the classic work of the Spanish historian, Jose Ortega y Gassett. In his “History as a System,” Gassett envisioned history as a 5,000 year chain of events, with each link intricately connected to the one before and the one that followed. Also reflective of the Gassett theory, the Chase-Dunn, Hall model maintains that the “systems” approach provides both for a better understanding of the past and a more promising future.

For Chase-Dunn and Hall world-systems are intersocietal networks that are systemic. By systemic they mean that they exhibit patterned structural reproduction and development. Basically the authors of Rise and Demise envision a sequence of changes in which thousands of very small-scale world-systems merged into larger systems which eventually merged to become the global modern world-system. One major questions intriguing the authors is, how and why did these small systems coalesce and transform over many millennia into a single, global system? They maintain that when viewed over a very long period of time,
it is possible to discern the patterns involved in the mergers and transformations of world systems and "we assume that knowledge of past transformations will shed light on the possibilities and probabilities for future transformations, thus making it possible for the creation of a more humane and collectively rational world in the future. We hope that an explanation of these patterns may improve our collective chances of survival." Historians are reluctant to accept the notion that knowledge of the past can be used to predict the future, and the idea of using knowledge of the past to create a safer future comes dangerously close to a deterministic view of history.

The authors divide the text into four parts with parts one and two containing three chapters; part three has four chapters and part four consists of two chapters, including the conclusion. Part One seeks to explain the various definitions and concepts of world-systems transformations. Since the present work is based upon the combined labors of numerous scholars working in various disciplines, chapter one traces the pedigrees of the concepts advanced by Chase-Dunn and Hall. With special attention devoted to "Definitions of World-Systems," "Spatial Bounding of World-Systems," and "The Problem of Systemic Logic," chapter one summarizes and analyzes the theories of such notable scholars as Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills, Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, Charles Tilly, and David Wilkinson, to name only a few. This is an extremely valuable chapter for those seeking an initiation into world-systems literature.

In Chapter 2 the authors present their definition of world-systems and their approach to modes of accumulation. They conclude the chapter with a brief overview of relations within world systems and a sketch of measurement problems. Chapter 3 presents a provisional typology of world-systems to guide their discussion and develops a few elementary hypotheses about world systems. This chapter devotes considerable attention to understanding the problem of bounding world-systems, conceptually and spatially.

Part Two addresses the problem of how and why world-systems change. Chapter 4 discusses the problem of incorporation,
that is, what happens when new areas and new regions are drawn into an expanding world-system. A key issue here is how incorporated areas, people and social processes are transformed by incorporation. This chapter merits special attention as it addresses the process of evolution and how to distinguish between changes brought on by internal evolutionary processes and change brought on by incorporation. The latter is too often overlooked in favor of the former. Chapter 5 address the problem of semiperipheral regions, the actors who have often been major initiators of world-system transformations. Chapter 6 completes Part Two with a theory of world-systems evolution.

In Part Three the authors use the analysis from Part Two and the concepts from Part One to examine three different cases and to explicate the important similarities and differences in different types of world-systems. Chapters 7-10 show how case studies can be used to modify concepts and theories. The first case study is that of prehistoric northern California, which has to create wonder as to how this tiny entity could be classified as a “world-system.” The purpose of this case is to sort out what properties are general to all world-systems and to examine the question of core/periphery relations in a system that is radically different for large and more hierarchical systems. The second case study concerns the expanding linkages that formed in Afroeurasia from about 500 B.C.E. to about 1500 C.E. This puts flesh on the theoretical bones of incorporation and mergers that were discussed in Chapter 4. The third case study is a reexamination of the modern world-system in the light of the comparative perspective theory of world-systems evolution expounded by the authors. Chapter 10 contains a formal comparison of different types of world-systems, though the authors caution that this is a tentative and exploratory effort because of the paucity of existing studies.

Part Four draws conclusions, raises questions and speculates about the future of the modern world-system. Chapter 11 addresses the issue of transformations in world-systems. While the authors note transformations they also note that there have been important continuities; on the basis of these transformations and continuities the authors speculate about the kinds of future
transformations that might occur and offer some comments about agents and actions that might either encourage or discourage some of these processes. Finally they conclude with a chapter that summarizes the findings and describe the many yet unanswered questions.

It should be noted that the authors fully acknowledge that this book by no means constitutes a complete theory. Rather, it is hopefully a well reasoned starting point from which to study the historical evolution of world-systems. Their hope is that others will now join them in the study of past transformations.

Rise and Demise will appeal to scholars and students alike as the authors have been conscious of the needs and interests of a wide range of readers. For the curious neophyte there is a glossary defining the specialized terms (printed in boldface) associated with the study of world systems. For the scholar the thirty-one pages of bibliography, listing more than five hundred sources and the fifteen pages of endnotes contain a vast amount of information drawn from a variety of disciplines. In addition to the endnotes, bibliography and glossary, the text also contains two tables, nineteen figures and eight maps to aid the reader in processing the already lucid information.

Speaking personally, I quite frankly like this book. Not because I agree with all of its contents, but because I greatly admire the boldness of the authors' theses combined with such clarity of presentation. This book leaves no doubt as to the position of Chase-Dunn and Hall with regard to world-systems and the authors clearly identify how their theories differ from those of other systemic experts. Whatever else might be said of this text, the authors have jettisoned any temerity they might have had with regard to espousing unique positions and have boldly stated their current theories on world-systems.

Wayne Bledsoe