

Settlement and Resettlement in Asia: Migration vs. Empire in History*

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Abstract

At its simplest, this essay provides a narrative of migration in Asia since the arrival of Homo sapiens some 70,000 years ago. More fully, it presents the case for conducting long-term, world-historical interpretation for Asia with attention to multiple perspectives, which has become increasingly central to global historical analysis. Following an introductory articulation of the benefits of long-term interpretation, the second section presents a balance of three perspectives—empire, exchange, and migration—as frameworks for interpreting the Asian past. The third section presents further detail on migration in long-term Asian history. The concluding section identifies four changes in patterns of migration during the past two centuries and emphasizes the underlying importance of cross-community migration in long-term human biological and social evolution.

Keywords

connections, diaspora, empire, exchange, long-term history, migration, world history

I. THE LONG-TERM HISTORY OF ASIA IN MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

This essay explores the long-term history of Asia through three lenses: three dimensions of past and present that focus on overlapping stories of historical change, each drawing out particular lessons on the human condition. First is empire, with its tales of dominance, conflict, heroism, and the centralisation of power. Second is exchange, the human readiness to give away some goods or ideas in order to obtain other things that seem to be of value. Third—and receiving the most attention here—is migration, the tendency of young adults to travel long distances and short, in search of new experiences and to gain valuable resources.

By “long-term history” I mean change across periods of more than several generations in length, sometimes reaching across the millennia to as far back as 70,000 years ago. Why attempt to interpret Asian history over such great expanses of time? The recent advances in study of world history and other disciplines exploring the human past have greatly expanded the detail we know on the distant past.¹ We have learned not only about natural history but also about the relatively recent emergence and dramatic spread of our own species. We have evidence that, in the period from 70,000 to 30,000 years ago, humans moved from Africa to occupy every corner of Asian land and littoral.² Once settled, the ancestors of today’s Asia developed widely varying cultures, societies, and even physical form and colour. Now that we know so much more about early times in Asia, we can compare those times to society today and ask what has stayed the same and what has changed. While we are struck by the unmistakably rapid change surrounding us today,

* This essay is a revised version of a presentation given as a keynote at the Third Congress of the Asian Association of World Historians in Singapore, 30 May 2015.

¹ David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

² Robin Dennell, “Asian Paleolithic dispersals,” in *The Cambridge World History, Vol. I, Introducing World History, to 10,000 BCE*, ed. David Christian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 414-32; Patrick Manning, “Migration in Human History,” in *ibid.*, 277-310.

it remains reasonable to ask whether changes at times thousands of years ago might have been very important for us.³

The approach I propose to studying long-term history is to compare and contrast multiple perspectives on the past.⁴ This approach arises logically out of recent studies in world history. Historical interpretation used to give primacy to politics and the state; historical documentation used to rely almost entirely on documents from the written record, focusing on states. Thus, a narrative of successive empires and their conquests was once able to stand for world history.⁵ Much has changed in the last half century, as documentation now draws not only on written texts but on material culture, geology, genetics, linguistics.⁶ With these proliferating types of information about the past, the study of world history has led historians in many directions at once. It becomes clear that historians must address multiple perspectives, in both present and past. To put it simply, historians must grapple with various social perspectives in the past and various disciplinary perspectives in the present. In past times, protagonists in historical situations have had different outlooks, depending on their social situation: the viewpoint of emperors or of the conquered, the outlook of merchants or those at local markets, the views of individual migrants or of those among whom migrants settle. Today's historical researchers have different perspectives depending on their individual identity, their disciplinary orientation, and the scale at which they study the past—such as gender historians, art historians, or maritime historians.⁷

³ Possibilities include the development of paddy rice, domestication of horses, ceramics, textiles, writing systems, and calendars.

⁴ Indeed, throughout the natural and social sciences, parallel encounters with multiple perspectives have changed the philosophy of knowledge. See, for instance, Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

⁵ John A. Garraty and Peter Gay, eds., *The Columbia History of the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

⁶ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples, and Languages*, trans. Mark Seielstad (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Christopher Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁷ Lincoln Paine, *Sea and Civilisation: A Maritime History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 2013); Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History: Global Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

For world historians, the issue of multiple perspectives in knowledge presents a dilemma. The fundamental idea of world history has been to seek information on the existence of broad and common patterns that contribute to a unifying historical tale—for William H. McNeill, it was “a history of the human community.”⁸ Yet the most basic discovery has been that, in every historical terrain, there are multiple perspectives that are inescapable. Remarkably, world historians seem not to be giving up on the idea of a unified vision of the human past. Yet they have had to learn that no such unified vision can be considered unless it takes account of the multiple perspectives in every area of human experience. The dilemma of world history is to create historical interpretations that are coherent, valid, accurate, yet accounting for contrasting perspectives. Falsehood can often be excluded, but truth is difficult to nail down.

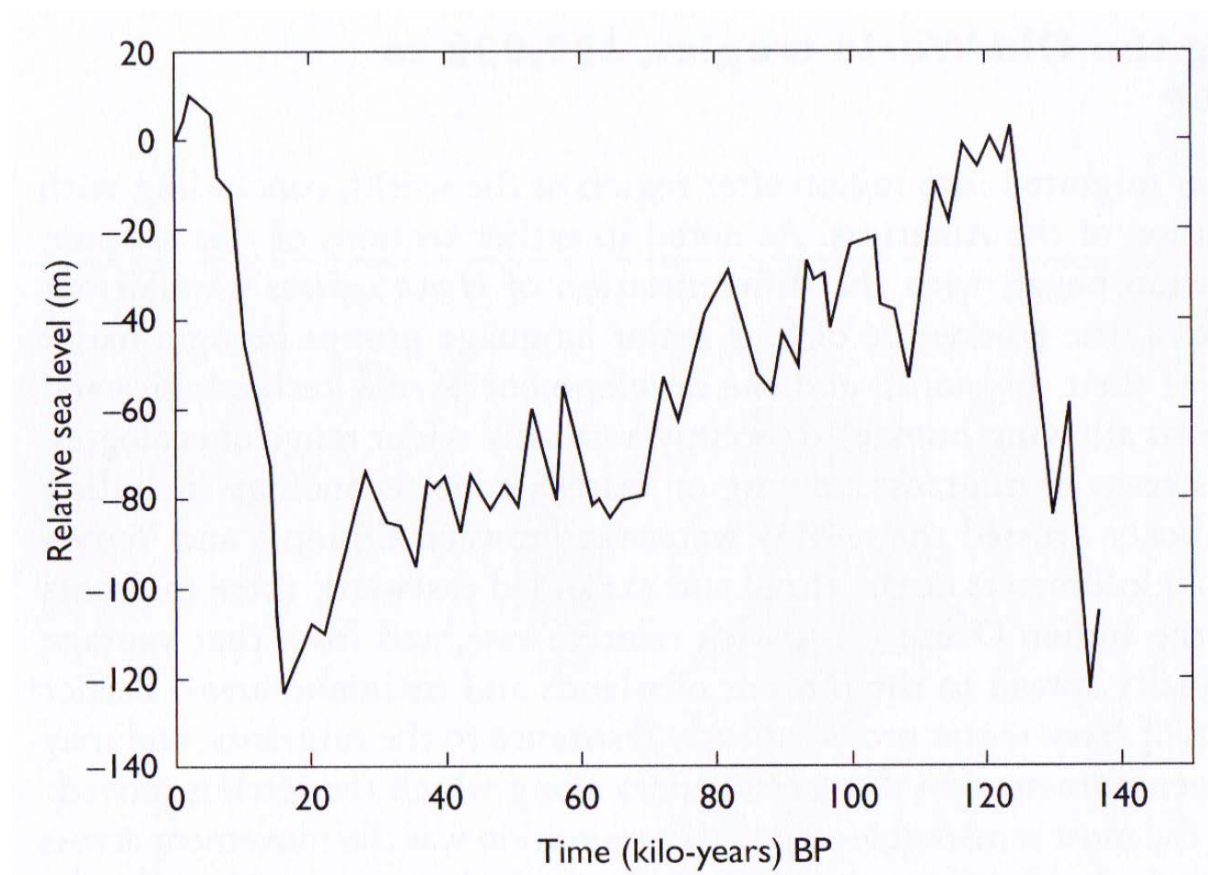
The strategy of this essay has begun, in the preceding passages, with an emphasis on the value of long-term history and the value of exploring that long history through multiple perspectives. In the second section, I compare interpretations of Asian history through the perspectives of empire, exchange, and migration. My purpose is to show that exchange and migration provide views of the past that are distinct from, yet as interesting as, the view through empire. Third, I explore long-term migration in greater detail, to provide further clarity on the historical significance of migration and its influence on history generally. This section emphasizes especially how migration highlights connections, which are important as a supplement to locally-centered studies of empires. Fourth, the essay returns to the initial questions, to see whether the results of this essay have helped to encourage both long-term analysis and the employ of multiple perspectives in long-term analysis.

To provide background on the changing context of human history over the 70,000 years of *Homo Sapiens*' history in Asia, Figure 1 provides a summary of the changing levels of the ocean's surface within at that time. The figure shows the points at which

⁸ W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

periods in human history are divided in this presentation: 70,000 years ago; 45,000 years ago; 25,000 years ago; 12,000 years ago; 4000 years ago; and 500 years ago. At the coldest point in this trajectory, some 18,000 years ago, so much of the earth's water was in the form of ice that the ocean was 100 meters below its present level. The same conditions reduced rainfall and made much of the earth's surface dry and desert-like. In sum, except for the remarkably warm and consistent climate of the past five thousand years, humans lived in climatic conditions that were very different from today and were highly variable from year to year.⁹

Figure 1. Variations in climate: Sea level over the past 140,000 years.



Source: Edouard Bard, Bruno Hamelin, and Richard G. Fairbanks, "U-Th ages obtained by mass spectrometry on corals from Barbados: sea level during the past 130,000 years," *Nature* 346 (1990): 456-58.

⁹ John L. Brooke, *Climate Change and the Course of Global History: A Rough Journey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

II. THREE PERSPECTIVES ON ASIAN HISTORY

This section is to provide the reader with examples of implementing three analytical perspectives, in order to reveal the distinctive visions of the past that appear through each lens. I begin with empire because it is best known. Then I address exchange in relatively brief terms, but show that it is a different lens from either empire or migration, and that it too permits a valuable view of the past. I focus most deeply on migration, to show that this lens provides a distinct and valuable view, and that it reveals deep continuities in history that cannot be seen through empire.

1. Empire.

Why do empires exist and what functions do they perform? Empires, since they are the largest-scale social structures, have therefore been classed among the greatest of human achievements. Empires arose from the legacy of early states and civilizations, as political units gained strength and spilled beyond river valleys to encompass plains, coastlines, and mountain ranges. In particular, empires brought together peoples of different languages and cultures under powerful armies and literate administrations. The scale and focus of imperial history tends to be at the court (the monarch and contenders for power) and at the frontiers as they shift in war and peace.

By four thousand years ago, states had emerged that were to be the core of empires in later times. Sargon had led in conquest of cities throughout Mesopotamia; the Xia state had arisen along the Yellow River, and the Hittite state was emerging in Anatolia.¹⁰ In another fifteen centuries, an empire of far greater scale arose with the Achaemenids, as Cyrus conquered all of Iran and the Mediterranean littoral.¹¹ Empires of this larger scale then arose under the Mauryas in India, the Qin and Han in China,

¹⁰ E. L. Cripps, *Sargonic and Presargonic Texts in the World Museum Liverpool* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010); Cho-yun Hsu, *China: A New Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Trevor Bryce, *The World of the Neo-Hittite Kingdoms: A Political and Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Matthew W. Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

and under Rome in the Mediterranean. Subsequent empires of such grand scale arose with Persian successors (Parthians and Sassanians), the Guptas in India, and the Tang in China.¹² Great empires that focused on religious creed rose with the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates.

Imperial history is commonly periodised into segments of a few hundred years—though with little broader continuity except in attention to the long sequence of Chinese dynasties. This approach focuses attention on the imperial court and on major cities; it thus de-emphasizes the spaces beyond imperial frontiers, the time periods in between eras of great imperial expanse, and the local practice of politics and governance in any time and place. Viewed through this perspective, Asia appeared as the hub of the world in the era of empires. Asia had more empires than any other region, even accounting for its greater size. For the time from the rise of the Akkadian state to that of the Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal and Qing empires, Asian empires appeared to set the standard for assessing the achievements of human society.¹³ This was history based on the state, on centres of power and administration. Such history celebrates inequality and dominance and assumes that imperial concentration of wealth and power was necessary and sufficient for the advance of human society. One must note, however, that the great empires did not rule all of Asia, and that in times between the major dynasties there were interregna during which small states, local warlords or others led in politics.

Empires developed their institutions fairly rapidly. The Achaemenids in Persia and the Qin in China raised and deployed immense armies, along with the necessary logistics. Imperial rulers constructed systems of taxation and administration that were able to maintain control over long distances and multiple cultures.¹⁴ Later empires such as the Umayyad Caliphate, the Mongol states and even Muscovy, while each relied on technical and

¹² Hsu, *China: A New Cultural History*.

¹³ S. N. Eisenstadt, *Political Systems of Empires* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

¹⁴ W. J. Vogelsang, *The Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Jane Portal, ed., *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

organizational innovations, nevertheless relied on the basic models of empire developed by the Achaemenids, the Mauryas, and the Han.¹⁵

The Mongol Empire dominated half of Asia for 150 years in the 13th and 14th centuries. It arose on the strength of pastoral alliances, then expanded through skillful alliances and alert adoption of the latest technology in iron manufacture, siege warfare, and naval warfare. Brutal conquest gave way to orderly administration and encouragement of commerce: the Mongols united three great regions of the steppes, all of China and Iran in a realm of unprecedented extent.¹⁶ Mongol control lapsed, reinforced by the pandemic of Black Plague from the mid-14th century, yet a ring of successor states (each worthy of the term “empire”) maintained Mongol traditions of government for another two centuries: the Timurids, Ottomans, Muscovy, the Golden Horde, and the Ming.¹⁷

From 1500 CE, small European states expanded their form of militarized commerce to the Indian Ocean and the China Sea—at first Portugal and Spain, and later the Netherlands, England, and France. Their impact was barely imperial at the start, though they did succeed in conquering key ports and gaining a significant role in regional commerce. Also in about 1500, Safavid and Moghul empires arose, and Muscovy began its protracted imperial expansion to the east.

From the 18th century, Asian empires began to find themselves under the hegemonic influence of global empires based in Europe. English and Dutch imperial holdings expanded in Asia, followed by French holdings in the 19th century. The imperial era ended officially in 1911 in China, in 1917 in Russia, and in 1947 in India, though each of the succeeding states maintained imperial dimensions. A Japanese empire rose dramatically for the first half of the 20th century. The great victor in World War II, the

¹⁵ For the one which the Umayyad Caliphate drew, see Garth Fowden and Elizabeth Key Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* (Athens: Diffusion de Bocard, 2004).

¹⁶ Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ This list may be added Poland-Lithuania and the later Safavids, and Mughals.

United States, then maintained a sort of imperial hegemony over much of Asia for the remainder of the century.

2. Exchange.

The presentation of gifts or exchange of materials requires acknowledgment but not explicit speech, so that exchange likely took place among hominids before the emergence of *Homo Sapiens*. The exchange of material goods and ideas can be documented far back in history, for instance in the spread of dogs among human societies in most parts of the world once they were domesticated, or in the case of obsidian from Kozushima Island transferred 50 km across the waters to the main Japanese island of Honshu, where it was fashioned into artefacts some 20,000 years ago.¹⁸ Such exchange was clearly purposeful; those who participated in it must have formed ideas about the equivalencies among the goods they exchanged.

Large-scale shipping and exchange became organized particularly among the Phoenicians of the Eastern Mediterranean shores after 1200 BCE. Their construction of ships, ports, and marketplaces and their reliance on alphabetic script began the institutionalization of commerce. The next big step in exchange came with money and monetized exchange. The first known coins were created in Lydia in the 6th century BCE; the stamping of coins spread rapidly through the Mediterranean and West Asia. While states took charge of stamping coins, money also developed outside of states, especially with the circulation of cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean, and also with textiles and other commodity currencies. At much the same time, the creation of copper currency began in China; cowrie shells also served as currency in China; especially in the southwest but as far north as the Yellow River.¹⁹

¹⁸ Jon M. Erlandson, "Ancient Immigrants: Archaeology and Marine Migrations," in *Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, eds., Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, and Patrick Manning (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 201.

¹⁹ Bin Yang, "The Rise and Fall of Cowries Shells: The Asian Story," *Journal of World History* 22, no.1 (March 2011): 1-25.

Commercial exchange appears to have undergone periodic waves of expansion and contraction over the centuries.²⁰ Meanwhile, two great paths of commercial exchange grew to prominence in the first millennium CE. On the mainland, the Silk Road sustained caravan routes from the Yellow River Valley through Central Asia to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Dunhuang was a major stopping point on this road in the first millennium CE; Sarai, the Golden Horde capital city on the lower Volga River, played a similar role in the 13th and 14th centuries.²¹ An oceanic path linked the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf with the ports of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South China Sea. Mariners of several ethnicities overlapped in their exchange of goods along these routes: from the 7th through the 13th centuries, the Sumatran-based commercial empire of Sri Vijaya coordinated Southeast Asian linkages in this commerce.²² Less spectacular but perhaps equally important were the north-south trade routes across Asia, linking ecological zones: routes northward from the Persian Gulf, from Punjab, from Bengal to Yunnan, and including fur trade from Siberia to China.

Commerce developed impressively in the second millennium CE. In luxury goods, competition developed among the finest textiles and ceramics, produced in various parts of Asia.²³ Navigation techniques and ship design improved at sea; provisioning systems improved on land for caravans; expanded labour forces included family labour, wage workers, slaves, and contract workers. In the 16th century, Asia became central in the newly created global commercial system: the flows of Mexican and Pe-

²⁰ Andre Gunder Frank and Christopher Chase-Dunn have led in investigating such cyclical behaviour. Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand* (London: Routledge, 1993); Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

²¹ Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²² Craig Lockard, *Southeast Asia in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²³ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2015).

ruvian silver around the world symbolized the emergence of global trade.²⁴

From the 18th to the 20th century, European powers came to dominate Asian trade, though the balance shifted back toward Asian commercial leadership late in the 20th century. The technology of commerce changed rapidly with the industrial revolution: communication became instantaneous, coinage became bank and credit card balances, and longshoremen gave way to containers and cranes. Nevertheless, even as monetization spread even into intellectual property, non-monetary ideas of exchange regained influence with such ideas as open-source and open-access programming.

3. Migration.

While migration in general is a characteristic of almost all species, *Homo Sapiens* developed a specific type of migration along with the development of fully articulated speech some 70,000 years ago. This pattern, "cross-community migration," accounts for the majority of migration since that time. Migrants—especially young adults—move to new communities, where they must learn new languages and customs to get along. The result builds their experience in learning, and brings exchange of local innovations in both directions. The reasons for such migration vary from the search for resources, adventure, even expulsion or escape from the homeland. In any case, the social benefits of migration made it a favoured behaviour. Only a minority migrated in this way, but most people were affected by migration. The intensity of migration fluctuated, depending especially on shifts in environment, new technology, and changing social organization.²⁵ Once this pattern of cross-community migration developed, especially through the rise of language and language

²⁴ Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, "Born with a 'Silver Spoon': The Origin of World Trade in 1571," *Journal of World History* 6, no.2 (Fall 1995): 201-21.

²⁵ Patrick Manning, "*Homo sapiens* Populates the Earth: A Provisional Synthesis, Privileging linguistic data," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 2 (June 2006): 115-58; Manning, "Cross-Community Migration: A Distinctive Human Pattern," *Social Evolution and History* 5, no.2 (September 2006): 24-54.

communities, its institutions changed little over a long period of time.

With this pattern of migration through settlement in neighbouring communities, Homo Sapiens occupied all of Africa, Asia, and the rest of the world, moving by land and water. Migration meant not only occupation of new territories, but the continuing movement of humans across community boundaries everywhere. For most of that time humans lived by foraging, although the process of migration led to steady development of new techniques and tools for foraging. Within the past 10,000 years, the same migratory patterns spread such new technologies such as agriculture and pastoralism.

As empire and monetized commerce arose, especially within the past 4,000 years, migration became linked to each. Empires, sometimes created by invading groups, often led to the expulsion of refugee groups. Merchant groups migrated, often setting up family and ethnic networks or “trade diasporas” at distant marketplaces—whether the marketplaces were in empires or in between empires.²⁶

Though empires grew in the first millennium CE, the main migrations continued to be those beyond imperial boundaries: pastoral migrations east and west across the steppes and Siberia, Turkic movements to the south, and smaller movements of migrants in Asia’s more densely populated tropics.

Especially in West Asia, but also in surrounding regions, institutions for capturing and moving slaves developed during the era of empires, then developed to a much larger scale from the 16th into the 19th centuries. As global connections in the world’s economy and society became denser, the number of Asian migrants increased, century by century, although with important fluctuations depending on economic and political conditions, as in the 1930s and 1940s. Long-distance migrations expanded considerably, but in the late 20th century urbanisation—mostly in

²⁶ Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the global trade networks of Armenian merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

one's home country—accelerated and outstripped migration across national borders.

These three narratives, reflecting three perspectives on Asian history, are each complex and multifaceted. To sum them up we may note the substantial continuities in each; the periodic formation of new institutions sustaining exchange, migration, and empire; and the ways that the three perspectives interacted with each other (and with such other dimensions of past change as technology) to bring about overall social change. The three perspectives entail different levels of hierarchy: *empire* is most clearly hierarchical in its political and social roles; *commerce*, since it allows for creation of varying levels of wealth, brings an intermediate level of hierarchy, though it exposes really or fictionally wealthy individuals to jealousy and attack. Migration allows for hierarchy, as in the conditions of travel and in access to good treatment in the land of settlement, yet all migrants must face the risks of travel and mortality.

III. MIGRATION HISTORY IN FURTHER DETAIL

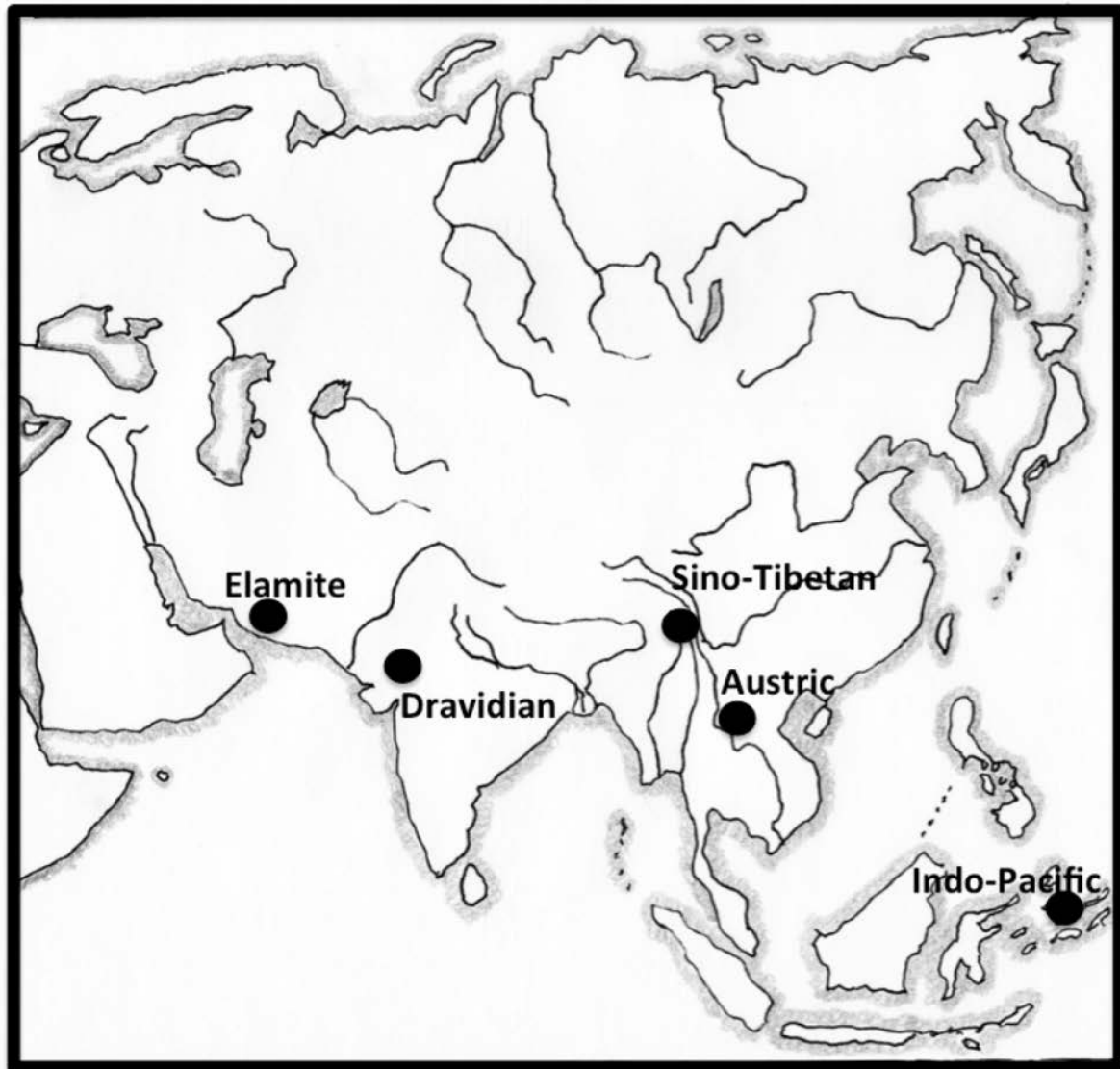
To describe the movements of people, we turn to the study of languages and language groups of people living and moving about various parts of the world. How to trace migrants? Genetics—lots of work to do, and it yields evidence on all ancestors of a present-day individual whose genome is analysed. Language—each language has only one parent. So languages change but remain within discrete families. Still movement of languages and movement of people speaking the languages are not exactly the same. Language reflects but does not cause migration. Exceptions and extremes. (a) big migration, little language change (African migration to Brazil); (b) small migration, big change in language (expansion of English in Asia). Nevertheless, there is an overall correlation.

1. Migration before Empire.

The expansion of human migrants across Asia can be summarized in four great stages that were completed before the rise of empires a scant 4,000 years ago.²⁷ The first of these stages was the tropical settlement of the Indian Ocean coastline, by sea and by land. As human communities in Northeast Africa developed syntactic language in addition to their other accomplishments, some 70,000 years ago, they began expanding to the south and west in Africa. Some moved by boat across the narrow Bab al-Mandab to Yemen, and from there gradually expanded their settlements eastward along the littoral. Their boats are assumed to have been reed boats, made from materials available at water-side, of a type that is still used in some localities. Archaeological and genetic evidence of this migration is gradually coming to light, but the clearest indication of this migration is linguistic, in that the core areas of six major language groups are set along the path that migrants would have taken. The language groups, shown on Figure 2, are Sumerian/Elamite, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, Austric, Indo-Pacific, and Australian. As indicated in Fig. 1, the average temperature cooled steadily as these migratory movements expanded, yet the migrants were exploring an area of relatively constant climate, vegetation, and fish and fauna, so the expansion was completed without great difficulty.

²⁷ Earlier stages of migration took place within the African continent. Christopher Ehret, "Early Humans: Tools, Language, and Culture," in *Introducing World History*, 339-61.

Figure 2. Tropical language groups, established 70,000 to 50,000 years ago.



Source: Patrick Manning with Tiffany Trimmer, *Migration in World History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 35.

Movement north—from the subtropical Indian Ocean littoral to the temperate zone of Eurasia—was an open possibility for Asian populations, but it was not an easy move to carry out. With the steady cooling of the era, lands north of the Indian Ocean coastline were dry and arid. This condition held for the Sahara in Africa, for what later became the Fertile Crescent, for Iran, for the Himalayas and even for central China. In those lands and in the temperate grasslands to the north, the flora and fauna were quite different, requiring new knowledge and new techniques for human communities to sustain themselves. For this reason there was a pause of perhaps five to ten thousand

years, during which Asian populations expanded within tropical regions, without expanding further.

By 45,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens* had expanded into temperate Eurasia, and had rapidly settled in regions from Europe in the west to Manchuria in the east. What is still unclear is the route by which migrants moved northward. I propose, based on a combination of environmental and language data, that migrants moved from their settlements in Yunnan and Assam, along the southern and western flanks of the Himalayas (through the Khyber Pass), and then east and west along the Eurasian grasslands. In this view, for instance, Europe would have been settled by migrants moving north of the Black Sea rather than through Anatolia. Traces of languages related to Sino-Tibetan remain throughout this region—in the Caucasus, in Basque language, and in Yeneseian languages of Siberia. Archaeological remains appear all across the temperate zone beginning about 45,000 years ago.

The language distribution in temperate Eurasia makes it appear that there was a second great migration across Eurasia. The Eurasiatic languages, as analysed by Joseph Greenberg, include subgroups spreading from the Pacific to the Atlantic.²⁸ The greatest density of subgroups is near to the north Pacific coast, which thus suggests that the migration was from east to west. I have proposed that this migration took place about 30,000 years ago, and that it relied on an important technological innovation—the development of skin boats.²⁹

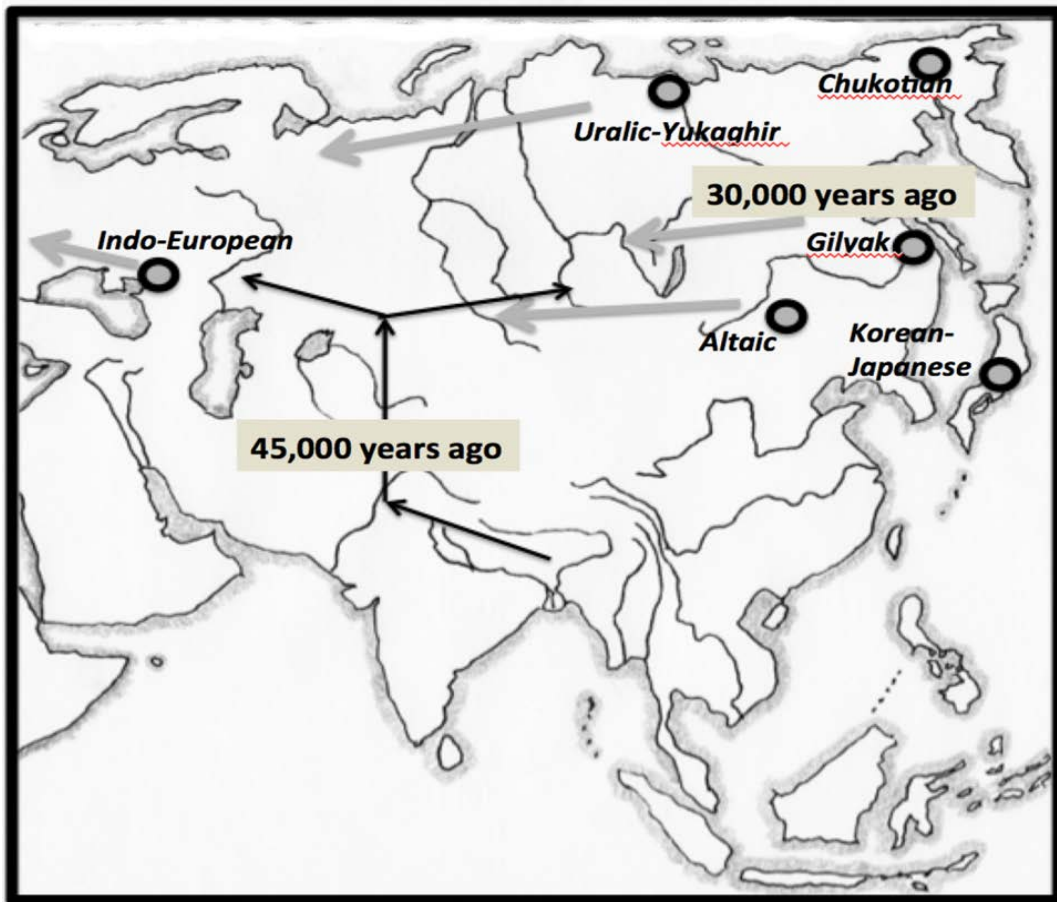
Boats made of wooden frameworks covered by sewn and stretched animal skins provided light, seaworthy vessels that kept mariners dry. They were valuable not only for the oceans but for the fast-running rivers. The regions within which skin boats are used or have been used fits rather precisely with the distribution of Eurasiatic languages. Figure 3 indicates the areas at which the main subgroups of Eurasiatic languages developed. Thus, the Altaic languages (including Turkish) have moved steadily west. Indo-European languages were a subgroup of Eur-

²⁸ Joseph H. Greenberg, *Indo-European and its Closest Relatives: The Eurasiatic Language Family* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²⁹ Manning, “*Homo sapiens*.”

asiatic that moved far to the west and later expanded. With these migratory processes, all of Asia had become occupied by humans as of roughly 30,000 years ago; within each region, societies developed with steadily improved adaptations to local conditions.

Figure 3. Temperate language groups, established 45,000 to 30,000 years ago



Source: Patrick Manning with Tiffany Trimmer, *Migration in World History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 44.

Then came the greatest environmental challenge of human experience. About 25,000 years ago, temperatures began falling rapidly, continuing downward until about 18,000 years ago, bringing about a massive expansion in glaciers but also expanding arid regions everywhere. This was the Last Glacial Maximum. Then, from the low point in temperature, temperatures rose very rapidly up to 13,000 years ago, and continued to rise thereafter at a slower rate.

For human populations, this meant extraordinary fluctuations in weather from year to year, plus major long-term shifts.

As the LGM expanded, populations tended to move to the south, and populations in mountainous areas tended to move to lower elevations. These migrations reversed as temperatures began to rise. Remarkably, this environmental challenge seems to have brought about impressive innovative responses. Among the innovations launched or expanded in the era from 25,000 to 13,000 years ago were greater use of bows and arrows, the weaving of fabrics from various fibers, the use of improved fires and kilns to create ceramics, the development of permanent houses (made of adobe in South Asia and stilt houses in Southeast Asia). In addition, and perhaps better known, were the advances in domestication of animals that took place in this era and the initial moves toward food production—gathering of wild grains and harvesting of tubers. As a result, it can be said that the era of the Last Glacial Maximum was also the era in which human society took crucial steps from relying on foraging to amassing the production of its resources.³⁰

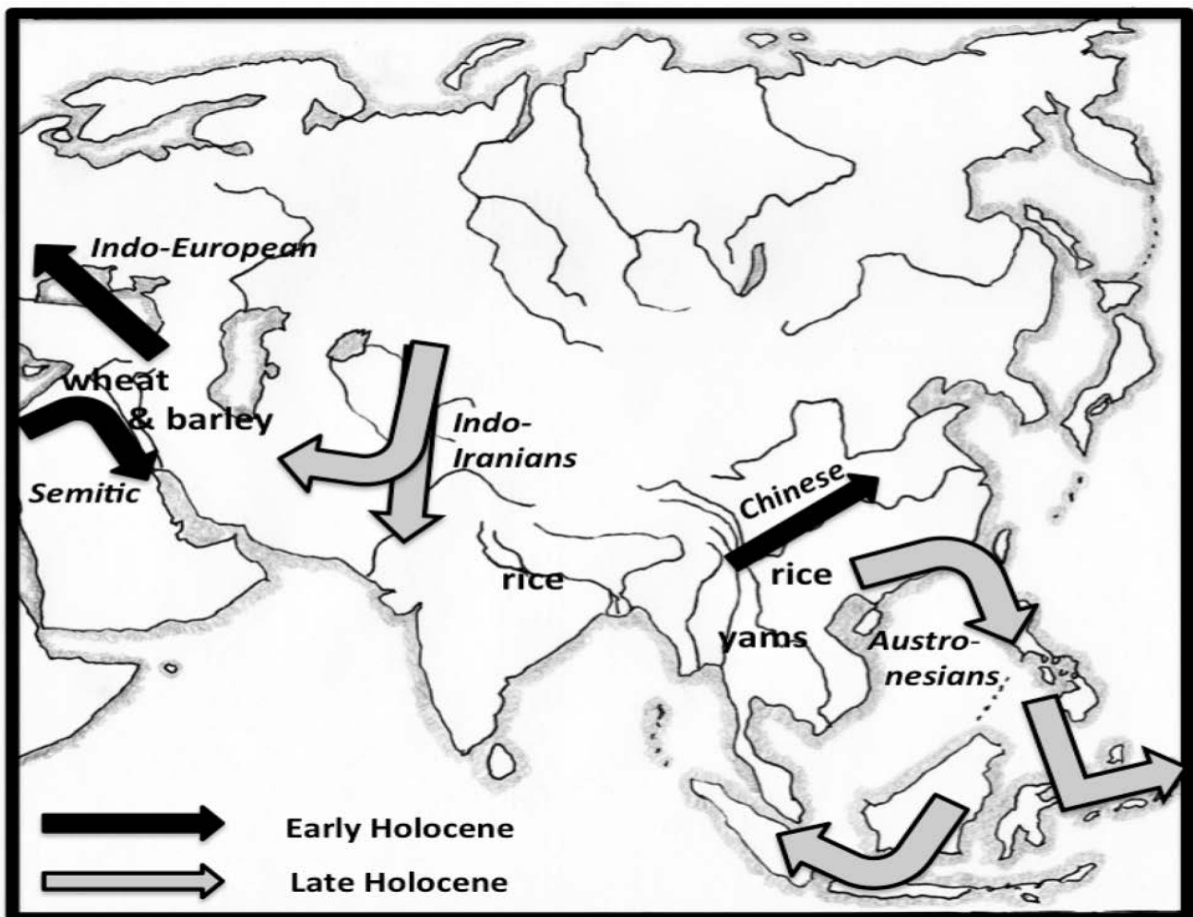
From about 12,000 years ago, with sea level at about 50 meters below its level today, warming and increase in humanity continued systematically. This juncture, known to geologists as that between the Pleistocene and the Holocene eras, brought expansion and flourishing for human and other populations. An example of Holocene warming is the expansion of the Black Sea. The Black Sea, which had declined in volume after being cut off from the Mediterranean throughout the LGM, underwent an inundation at a moment between 9500 and 7500 years ago, as the rising oceans filled the Mediterranean and spilled over the Bosphorus, reuniting the Mediterranean with an expanded Black Sea.

In the early- and mid-Holocene periods, from 13,000 years ago to about 6000 years ago, populations in several parts of Asia developed agriculture. As shown in Figure 4, certain populations expanded dramatically. Semitic-speakers developed wheat and barley; their Indo-European-speaking neighbors to the north shared in the development of wheat and barley, and spread far to

³⁰ Steve Mithen, *After the Ice: A Global Human History, 20,000-5,000 B.C.* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2003).

the northwest. Rice and sorghum developed in China. Austric-speakers developed yams and rice. Dravidian-speakers developed rice and also adopted wheat.

Figure 4. Early and Late Holocene Migrations, 12,000 to 4,000 years ago.



Source: Drawn by the author

2. Migration in the Age of Empire.

Mid-Holocene saw a warm period, from about 7000 to 5000 years ago. Thereafter, the earth experienced a slight decline in humidity, entering an era of relatively stable climate for the last 5000 years. This late Holocene era—the time in which human society underwent the most remarkable expansion—relied on the amazing situation of being able to depend on relatively constant climate and regular annual variations.

While this era of late-Holocene climate stability included the rise of major states and early empires, major migrations continued throughout Asia. Figure 5 shows several of these migrations. Further expansion of Chinese speakers—that is, speakers of several related Chinese languages—throughout north and central China laid the basis for the rise of large-scale states. Meanwhile, major migrations and social changes in the steppes and Siberia brought changes throughout Asia. Language distributions show that speakers of the Yukagir languages of the Arctic fringe moved steadily westward, relying on their association with reindeer and dogs. In the steppes, in areas with Altaic- and Indo-European-speaking people, the domestication of horses led to large-scale change. Horses, previously hunted and then raised for food, came to be linked to chariots shortly before 2000 BCE. The expansion of chariot warfare continued for several centuries in the steppes, and then spread to the south, from Anatolia to China. For archaeologists, the signature indication of this culture is burials including charioteers, their horses and their chariots.³¹

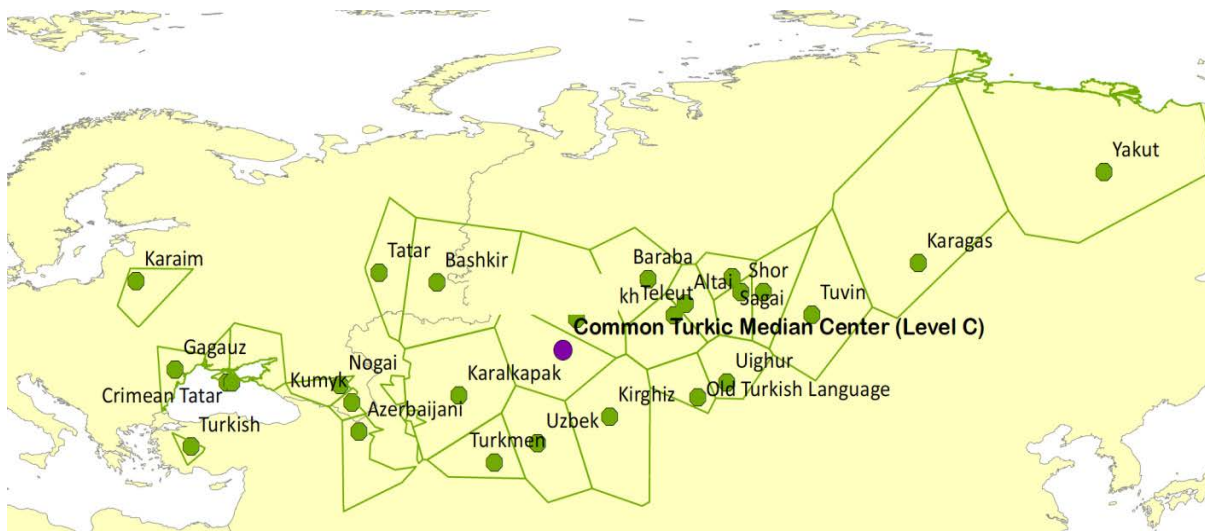
In roughly 2000 BCE, charioteers invaded and dominated the Hittite state in Anatolia, the Akkadian state in Mesopotamia, and the Egyptian kingdom. At the same time, Indo-European speakers (the Indo-Aryan and Indo-Iranian subgroups) migrated in large numbers into northwest India, gradually extending their influence through much of the subcontinent. Again at the same time, chariots and charioteer burials appear in Shang China. The Altaic-speaking migrants spread across the steppes (these people were agricultural as well as pastoral).

In a migratory movement that began small but led to recurring expansion over three millennia, Austronesian-speaking peoples, part of the Austric group of languages, developed systems of rice production in south China, also relying on stilt houses and outrigger canoes. In roughly 2000 BE, Austronesian migrants sailed from China to Taiwan, and there settled and expanded at the expense of previous inhabitants. Further migrants expanded this cultural complex southward to the Philippines

³¹ David W. Anthony, *The Horse, The Wheel and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

and then into the Indonesian archipelago. Some of these migrating farmers moved to the east, where their descendants mixed with Indo-Pacific-speaking peoples of New Guinea and nearby islands, eventually becoming the Melanesian and Polynesian peoples of the Pacific. Other Austronesian-speakers moved west, occupying Java, Sumatra, and portions of the mainland in the Malaya peninsula.³²

Figure 5. Turkish languages, showing their expansion to CE1600.



Source: Map drawn by the author and Madalina V. Veres from information in Joseph E. Greenberg, *Indo-European and its Closest Relatives: The Eurasiatic Language Family*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

In the first millennium BCE, Aramaic-speaking migrants moved eastward from the Mediterranean through the Achaemenid empire; Armenian merchants later followed the same path. With the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek migrants created and settled in new cities from Mesopotamia to Bactria. Movements from east to west included the Hsiong-nu who fought the expanding Han empire and whose westward movement included dispatching the Huns to Europe and also the es-

³² Matt Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

establishment of the Kushan empire, which facilitated the expansion of Buddhism in Central Asia and in China.³³

In the first millennium CE, Arab armies conquered for Islam, taking West Asia, Iran, and the North African littoral. A long process of Arabization in these regions included recurring waves of migrants from Arabia and cultural assimilation of the existing populations to Arabic language and culture. In a rather similar movement, Turkic migrants expanded westward in the steppes, southward into India, and westward through Iran to Anatolia. These migrations brought foundation of two imperial dynasties in the 13th century: the Ottomans and the Delhi Sultanate. In later centuries, slave soldiers known as Uzbeks were brought in from the steppes to North India and slave soldiers known as Siddis and Habshis were brought from East Africa to North India.³⁴

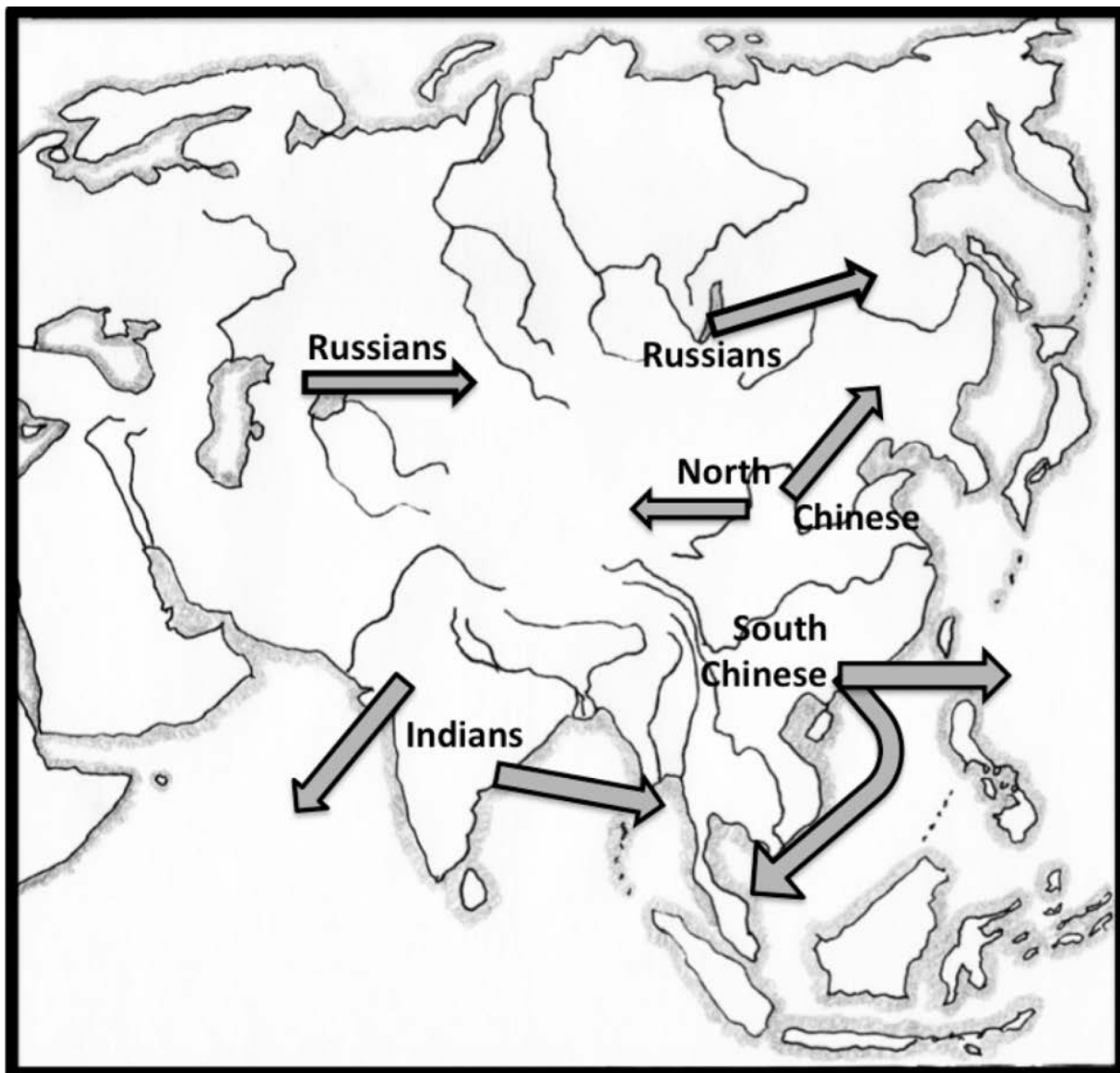
3. Migration since 1500 CE: The Era of Global Empire and Commerce.

After 1500, the arrival of European merchants, soldiers, and transport workers added a dimension to this pattern of Asian migration. European migrants were small in number, but through their military might and intermarriage created social strata that became significant all along the Indian Ocean littoral.

³³ Liu Xinru, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, AD 1–600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

³⁴ In a remarkably well-written mix of empire, exchange, and migration, Stewart Gordon, has used the device of biographies to show the steady expansion in interconnective links across Asia from 500 to 1500 CE. Gordon, *When Asia Was the World* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2008).

Figure 6. Asian Migrations, 19th and 20th centuries.

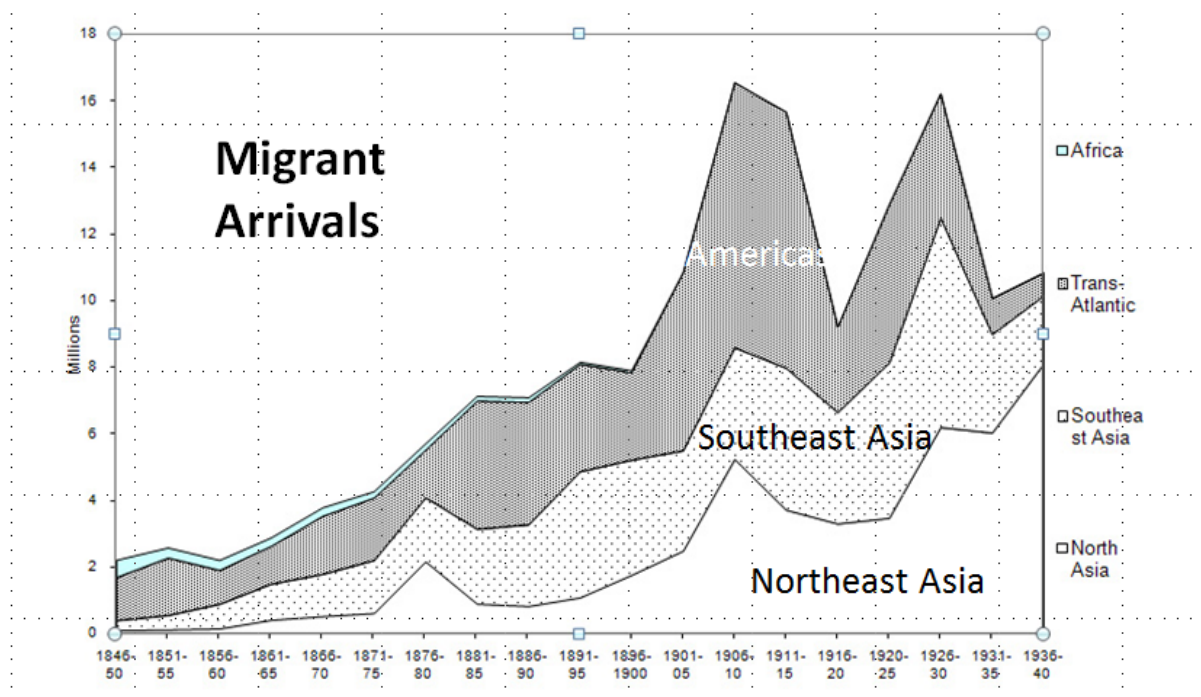


Source: Drawn by the author.

Asian migration expanded in the 18th and 19th centuries through the rise in enslavement. African captives went to the Western Indian Ocean; in Southeast Asia and India captives were delivered to other parts of the region. Then, especially with the development of steamships, large numbers of migrants from India and South China migrated to become workers on mines and plantations in Southeast Asia. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, equally large numbers of migrants from North China and Russia moved to take up agricultural settlement—the Chinese to Northwest China and Manchuria, the Russians to Central Asia, Siberia, and the Pacific coast.

Adam McKeown's summary of global migrations from 1840-1940 shows the importance of these migratory movements.³⁵ In the case of Russia, millennia of westward migration across the steppes were reversed by a few hundred years of eastward migration by Russians, most of it within the past 150 years.³⁶ In the case of China, the combination of migrants from north and south China was as large as the total number of European migrants, in the same era, who crossed the Atlantic.

Figure 7. Global Migrations, 1840-1940. Aggregated global migration (five-year totals, in millions).



Source: Adam McKeown, 'Global Migration 1846-1940', *Journal of World History* 15 (2004): 165.

A remarkable perspective on migration in this era comes from comparison of three regions that each received roughly 30 million immigrants between 1850 and 1940: the United States, Northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia. In each case numerous migrants returned home after a time, but in all cases the number of

³⁵ Adam McKeown, "Global Migration, 1846–1940," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (June 2004): 155-89.

³⁶ Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

permanent settlers was huge. The cultural consequences of the migrations were distinctive in each case. For the United States, immigrant communities from many European regions gradually adopted the English language and American identity.³⁷ For Northeast Asia, the immigrants extended their Russian and Chinese identities into their areas of settlement.³⁸ For Southeast Asia, migration from China brought speakers of Cantonese, Hakka, Min, and Mandarin languages, while the migration from India brought speakers of Telugu and Tamil. These imported languages survived in their new setting. At the same time, pre-existing communities maintained their language, cultural identity, and much of their land. Further, colonial boundaries, administrations, and languages of government were imposed on Southeast Asian regions by British, Dutch, French, Spanish, American, and Japanese empires. In sum, Southeast Asia is a remarkable region in the way it has been able to absorb immense numbers of migrants and allow for an unusually diverse cultural kaleidoscope.³⁹ This large-scale and somewhat intriguing issue is an example of the fascinating historical puzzles that arise when one combines the histories of migration, commerce, and empire.

IV. MIGRATION, EXCHANGE, AND EMPIRE IN ASIAN HISTORY

1. Migration

Within the last few centuries, migration has developed several new processes and it has brought important changes to society generally. The four changes are expansions in slave trade, diaspora identities, urbanisation, and refugee populations. *Slave trade*, while it has been documented in detail since the 10th-century visit of the Baghdad scholar Ibn Fadlan to the Norse

³⁷ Native American communities were marginalized in this process, losing their lands and, mostly, their languages.

³⁸ Immigrants to Northeast Asia also included significant numbers of Korean and Japanese settlers. The previously established populations (Manchus and others) were generally marginalized in this process.

³⁹ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

slave markets on the Volga, expanded steadily from the 15th century, reaching a peak in the mid-19th century in much of Asia and Africa. Institutions for this migration included large-scale recruitment and policing, nourishment and shipping of captives, and the sale and later exploitation of slaves. From its late-19th-century peak, slave trade then contracted sharply because of a complex yet powerful emancipation movement. *Diasporas*—communities of migrants and their descendants—commonly took on a new character in response to improved communication and expanded literacy from the 18th century forward. *Diasporas* were no longer limited to heritage—cultural, social, and biological links to past homeland. *Diasporas* now became identities—cultural and social communities in the present.⁴⁰ Migrants from various Asian regions maintained active links to their homeland. Relying on mails, newspapers, and visits home, *diaspora* communities became able to play important roles in the economy, culture, and even politics.⁴¹ In this sense, one may argue that the global political interactions of the 19th and 20th centuries included the interplay not only of empires and nations but also of *diasporas*. *Urbanisation* expanded especially from the 19th century, with European cities growing rapidly; in the 20th century Asian cities caught up to them and in some senses passed them. With this transformation, a basic and long-standing pattern had changed: where migrants had previously moved to agricultural or relatively sparsely populated regions, migrants in the 20th century settled increasingly in conurbations relatively close to their home. *Refugees* rose in number, especially during the 20th century. It appears that nations, rather than empires, were especially central to setting punitive limits on citizenship and thereby expelling great numbers from their homes.

⁴⁰ Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Northrup, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Pranah Chandra Roy Choudhury, *Gandhi and His Contemporaries* (Jullundur: Sterling Publishers, 1972); M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, trans. Valji Govindji Desai, 2nd ed. (Ahmedabad: Navalivan, 1950); Harold Z. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen, Reluctant Revolutionary* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980).

Migration has become sufficiently well documented in recent centuries to support the development of quantitative measures of levels of migration in modern political units.⁴² Quantitative comparison of migration rates brings more attention to the role of migration in modern society, but does not mean that the character of migration has greatly changed. Recent changes in migration have arisen through modest revisions of ancient migratory patterns rather than from a revolution in human behaviour. Underlying most migration is the crossing of linguistic and cultural boundaries and the learning and exchange that results from cultural interaction. A long-term review confirms varying factors that have shifted patterns of migration: environmental change (as with Holocene warming), new technology (as with chariots and steamships), and social organization (as with slavery or the recent global expansion of Thai cuisine). Today as in the past, the reasons for migration vary rapidly, and are not limited to short-term search for employment.

In addition to these points on the *historical* character and influence of migration, it is now appearing that migration has influences that can be considered *transhistorical*. That is, the human pattern of cross-community migration—relying on verbal communication—make the human species distinct from others. Slow and steady impact of cross-community migration makes the human species develop in directions that are more and more distinct from other species in two fundamental ways. First, migration transforms biological evolution, minimizing the ability of localized communities to develop into sub-species. Steady migration and sexual reproduction across community boundaries, even of small numbers, maintains the commonality of the human genome.⁴³ Second, cross-community migration accelerates

⁴² Jan and Leo Lucassen have defined a “cross-cultural migration rate” (CCMR) that can be calculated over fifty-year periods for modern states. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, “Measuring and Quantifying Cross-Cultural Migrations: An Introduction,” in *Globalising Migration History: The Eurasian Experience (16th–21st Centuries)*, eds., Lucassen and Lucassen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 3-54. Cross-cultural migration rate (CCMR).

⁴³ Humans have been highly successful in controlling the breeding of plant and animal species. But efforts to breed human populations have generally failed, as the populations escape the control of the breeders. Nonetheless, environmental pressures have worked on regional populations at a pace sufficient to create regional characteristics in external physical appearance.

social evolution—it spreads and creates ideas in ways for which there are no equivalents in other species.

2. Exchange

The topic of exchange is very broad, ranging from gift to purchase, so its ramifications can develop in many directions. On one hand, the practices of gift and simple exchange have existed for a very long time and have developed gradually, though they have necessarily involved steady rethinking of the equivalency—social, material, or economic—of the items exchanged. Further innovations in exchange have included the development of containers (of wood, basketry, and ceramics), modes of transport (ships, donkeys, and camels), and shifts in social organization or ethnic leadership.

The biggest shift in commerce was the institutionalization of commerce, with the creation of markets, ports, large-scale transportation of goods, and especially money and monetary exchange. This shift arose concurrently with the rise of empires, yet somewhat independently. Exchange has expanded from era to era, not necessarily causing empires to expand but expanding imperial contacts. Meanwhile, exchange has brought streams of migrating merchants and transport workers. In another dimension of exchange, multiple systems of currency and accounting have coexisted, yet have undergone periodic standardization. Further, now as in the past, both equity and inequality arise from exchange.

3. Empires

Empires have had a much briefer existence than exchange or migration. Since their establishment, empires have changed very little in their basic structure, but have changed immensely in their technology. The Achaemenids set the new standard in 550 BCE; the Mongols expanded to more than four times the geographical extent of the Achaemenids. The European overseas empires did not reach the territorial size of the Mongol regime, but they handled more complex logistical linkages. The short-

lived empires of the Qin Shihuangdi, of Napoleon, and of World War II had lasting impact.

One lesson of this exercise in multiple perspectives is that empires are best considered not just on their own but in contact with other themes. For instance, the approach of multiple perspectives encourages one to continue considering states of less than imperial size and to note how they continued to be invented and reinvented, inside and outside of empires. Similarly migration, commerce, religion, and technology can be seen as factors that interacted with empires, but were not necessarily consistent with imperial ups and downs. Most of all, historians need to remind themselves that, even in the age of empires, most people in Asia spent their lives living outside of great empires rather than within them.

V. CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this overview of three perspectives on the past, how shall we summarize the significance of multiple perspectives in a long-term history of Asia? Each yields comments on the other. Each draws attention to yet another important aspect of world-historical interpretation, which has been left implicit so far: interactions among multiple scales of human existence, from the individual through the planetary level. Further, attention to multiple perspectives draws attention to the debates within each area of analysis. That is how this essay will conclude: with brief looks at basic debates about migration, exchange and empire, phrased in terms of whether one emphasizes the positive or negative sides of each—crudely, whether one supports or opposes migration, exchange, or empire.

For and against migration: conflicts in migration show that migration encounters problems of social hierarchy, discrimination, violence, and neglect. The long-term view shows that migration is inevitable, as it is built deeply into human family life. Further, it is reinforced by major shifts in environment, economy, or political order, as it creates disorder in some regions and opportunities in others. Most of all, over the long term, migra-

tion continues to be of immense benefit in developing the human social order as a whole—and also maintains the unity of our biological nature. This very combination of positive and negative dimensions of migration shows the importance of analysing world historical questions at multiple levels. Interpretation in terms of migration has particular benefits in revealing long-term continuities in history. It shows the way in which basic human characteristics can be put to service in addressing new problems and opportunities.

For and against exchange—especially monetized commerce—the benefits in spreading goods and services widely are evident. At the same time, commerce has been consistently associated with social inequality, with greed and rapacity. In addition, one must remember that gifts and non-monetary exchange remain part of the equation and may actually be expanding.

For and against empire: the successes of empires in mobilizing resources, in building large and safe spaces are evident. It may be that empires accelerate innovation by concentrating skilled individuals and productive resources under imperial protection, or it may be that concentrating these resources does not advance their productivity, and that empire has simply weakened regions outside the imperial centre. For those outside the empire or those struggling to break free of it, it may appear that the empire is more about the exercise of power and oppression than about producing social benefits.

The study of history may not resolve these debates about the benefits and disadvantages of migration, exchange, and empire. But by assembling and linking data and perspectives on these topics, across time and space, history can raise the debates to a higher level—pointing out relationships that have been verified and identifying assertions or arguments that are demonstrably fallacious. The focus on multiple perspectives in history is inevitable at any time frame. The exploration of history over the long term, based on an assumed commonality of humankind, gives us many more examples of human experience in considering the nature and path of human development.