

The Art of Convergent Comparison— China and India in Modern Times

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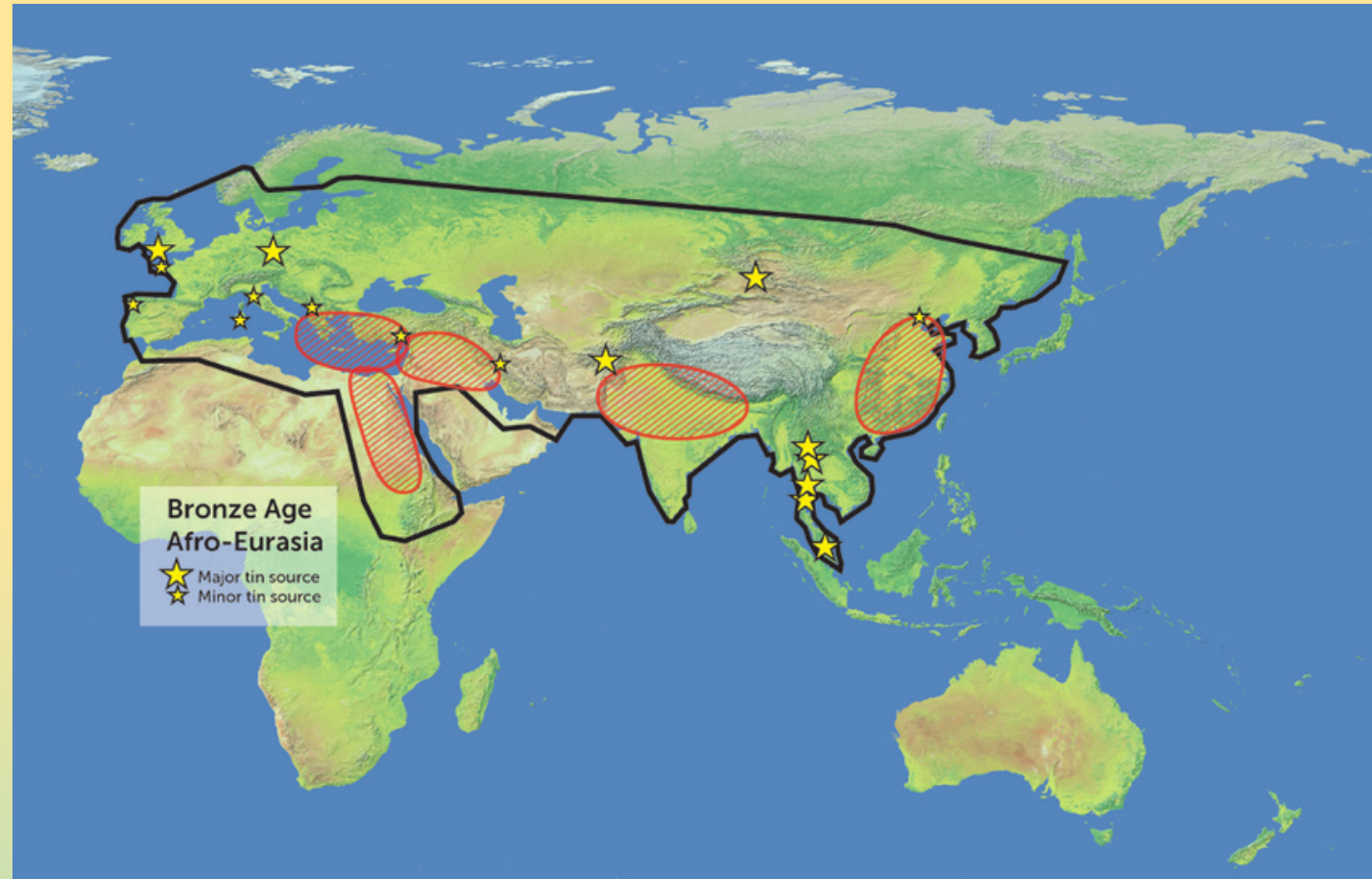
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Themes and Argument

- Theme is global circulatory processes and the ways that human societies—in this case, national societies—have sought to control or regulate these processes. Although Covid19 is not the topic I engage here, my theme alerts us to thinking about largely invisible or inconspicuous modes of circulations and their consequences.
- Goal is to look at modes of global *cultural* circulations through cases of China and India with idea of Convergent Comparison.
 - *Zone of convergence*: impact space of circulatory forces (eg Buddh, nationalism) demanding response
 - *Basis of comparison*: how social forms respond and circulate beyond (eg Chinese Marxism).
- 2nd goal: show how the ideological structure of nationalism in China and India seeks to control and manage the circulatory processes that flow through the cultural sensorium.

Circulatory Histories I

- Afro-Eurasia has been an interconnected region since the Bronze age, agriculture, cities & trade routes. (Goody)
- Circulation of technology, bio-species (animals, germs, people, plants), goods and knowledge
- Circulatory is not circulation; more like oceanic currents. Processes in place A flow to many places, B, C, etc., where they interact with other local and trans-local forces to re-emerge often in place A, though often recognized as something else.



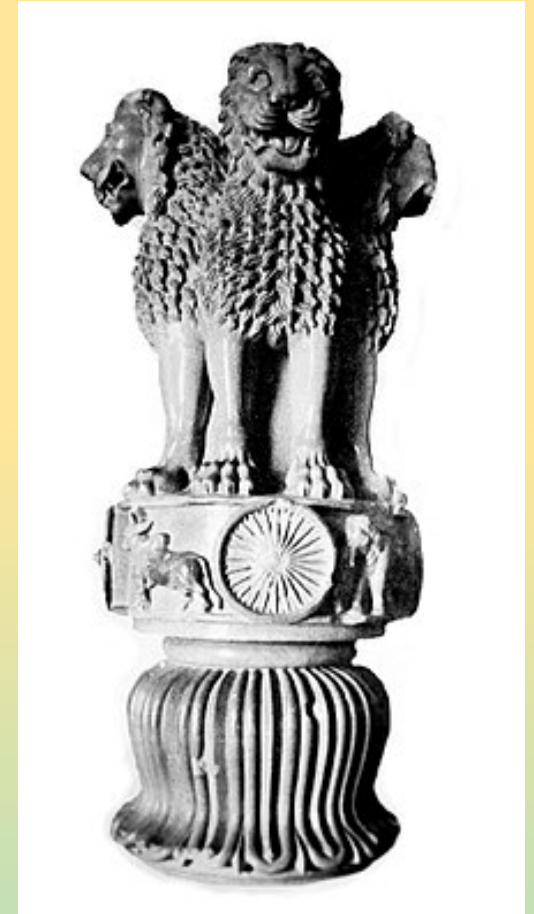
The Bronze Age 2000–1200 BCE Afro-Eurasia.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303710418_Bronzization_The_Bronze_Age_as_Pre-Modern_Globalization

Circulatory Histories II

- We can grasp the logic of this kind of circulatory histories even in this early period: Achemenid imperial pillar inscriptions and Asokan Pillar as modes of communicating imperial power.
- Best known-instance of first millennium circulations from S Asia is Buddhist impact on culture monastic economy and salvation practices.
- Buddhism in China was shaped from different nodes of re-circulation, especially in C Asia—Sogdian merchants. Merge/emerge; continuity/change.
- In India Hinduism of Sankara, et al are in a field of exchange with Buddhist ideas.
- Over the millennium B ideas exchange influence with Confucianism and Daoism
- Old and modern regimes also resist, block and regulate passage.
- Always regulatory escape. Below see how ideological structures of nationalism seek to control and manage flows into cultural sensorium.

Persepolis (Achaemenes 6th-4th BCE) pillars and (right) Indian Ashoka's pillar (Mauryas 3rd BCE) as modes of disseminating imperial sovereignty.



Asokan Pillar at gates of Buddhist temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

City branch of Wat U Mong, Chiang Mai (left).

Replica of Ashoka pillar at Wat U Mong near Chiang Mai, built by King Mangrai in c.13th c (right)



救苦天尊

Daoist Avolokitesvara



The Daoist Avolokitesvara, *Jiuku tianzun*, was evidently introduced because the novel saviour figure had become too popular for the Daoists to ignore.

Conversely, Buddhist disguise of Daoist North Pole god as Buddhist enabled Buddhism to circulate through East, SE & Central Asia.

Novelty in a vernacular medium or vernacular in a novel medium.

Nine Stars of Dipper
(Daoist) in Buddhist
temple [Christine Mollier]



Rationale of Circulatory Histories

- Developed the argument of ‘circulatory histories’ in *Crisis of Global Modernity*. Now seeking to develop a paradigm of oceanic time to see historical processes as currents that are both temporally and spatially interactive.
- Histories merge and emerge from each other; a circulatory, liquid way of seeing continuity and discontinuity. Circulatory histories have to be thought transitively or processually and not in terms of origins. Mongols, Dali and Ahoms
- Not deny internal institutional processes, but they cannot be understood apart from porosity to circulatory processes. ‘
- Networks—social, economic, knowledge, media-based- have been carriers and shapers of history as much as national, internalist models of history.
- Argument is for history as a shared collective and planetary heritage and de-center narratives grounding sovereignty of the nation.
- Critique of nation: competitiveness led to world wars and environmental disasters; also limited possibilities for global cooperation (as in today’s Covid epidemic).

Comparing Modern Histories of China and India

- On first sight, two histories are very different.
- But from 16th c, especially after accelerating trade with New World silver; and especially after mid 19th century, both are subject to intensifying global capitalist & imperialist forces demanding responses
- British and European penetration produces massive uprisings: Taiping and 1857 Rebellion. Failure of both lead to new elite responses in the two societies (though contd popular responses also comparable).
- Indigenous modernizing groups in newly formed 'public sphere' and economy generate many common debates: social reform, pol representation, etc
- Politics: Moderates of late 19th c parallel to Constitutional Reformers of 100 Days reform; weakness of moderate reformers lead to 1911 revolutionaries in C and extremists demanding indep/swaraj in India.
- Mass movements also same time (after WWI and Russian rev; boycotts).
- Despite difference in Mao's Communist Party and Gandhi's Congress Party, the framework of a mass movement – its goals, rhetoric, visual or representational techniques and results—allows for comparability.

Responses to global forces of nationalism, competitiveness, rights and markets in PRC & ROI

- The Republic of India (established in 1947) and the People's Republic of China (1949) were founded on fundamentally different political principles.
- But after riding mass and rural movements, leaders in both societies faced comparable imperatives of nation- and state-building.
- China, following the Soviet Union, explicitly constructed its command economy upon anti-capitalist foundations, while India pursued autarkic development with strong socialist characteristics.
- 3 waves— changes occur within 10-15 years of each other.
 - Wave I : Struggles of State- and Nation-Building (Tibet, Kashmir etc)
 - Wave II: Logic of Citizenship and Rights (Post Emergency India; 1982 Constitution in China)
 - Wave III: Responses to post CW Globalization and Neo-Liberalism (1990s modes of land acquisition, human capital formation etc)

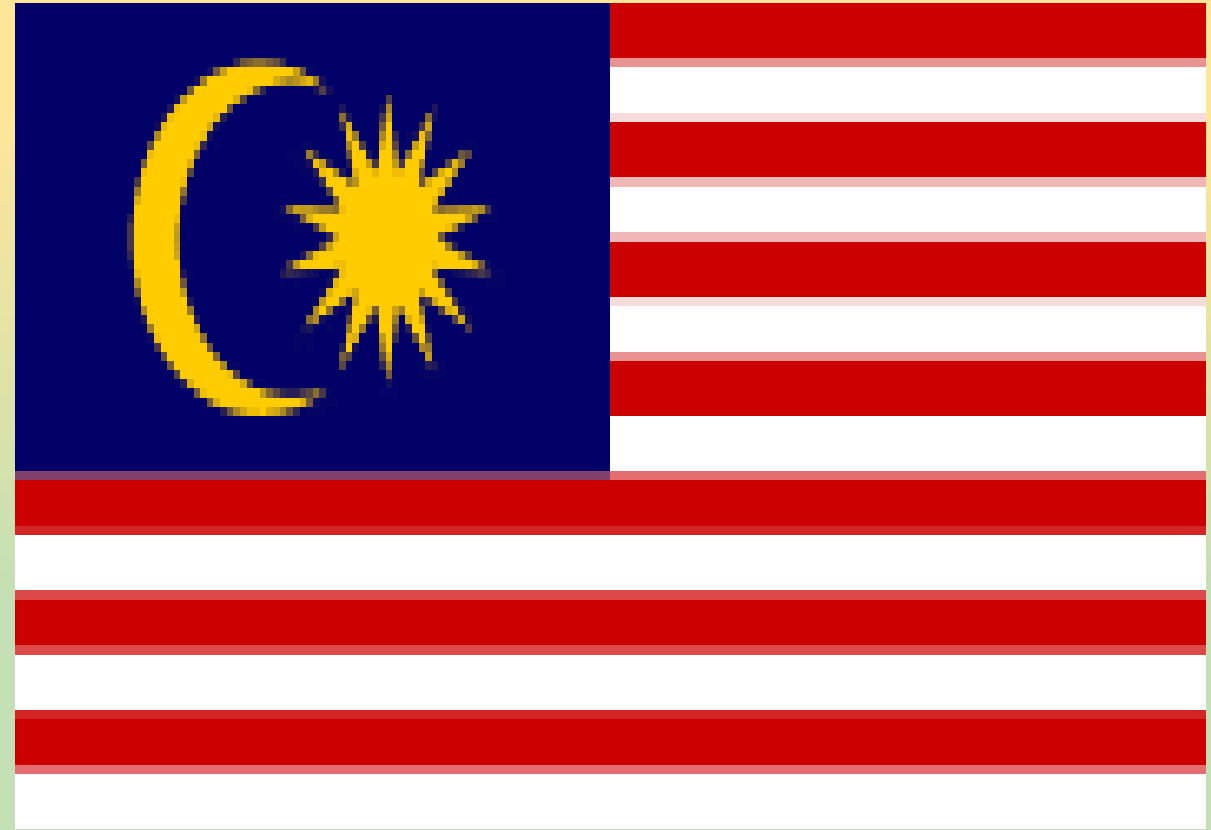
Nationalism: Cognition and Mis-recognition

- Nations emerged in the crucible of capitalist competitiveness and national histories undergird ideals of popular sovereignty *while* developing the (ideal) nation into a sleek, competitive body (even when they are originally anti-imperialist).
- Nations are themselves globalized circulatory entities that need to be like each other to be re-cognized as nations; but also because of imperative of competition (best [competitive] practices). Eg of child; etc
- Circulatory forms—goods, ideas, styles, etc— tend to ingress a society more easily incrementally and through everyday routines (culture with a small 'c').
- When penetrating through more systematic means they often encounter gate-keeping by Culture/Civ/doctrines of authenticity: eg role of women.
- While earlier societies certainly witnessed such gate-keeping, the modern nation-state system faces this tension with acute volatility.
- But they also misrecognize that sameness because the sovereign power of the nation is based on its (often ethnic) historical distinctness or authenticity. This is how the national self is created vs the Other, whether foreign enemy/rival or internal Others.

Flag of the Federated Malay States from 1896 to 1946.



Current Flag of Malaysia



Discourses and the cultural sensorium

- Fundamentally, there is no enduring inside and outside of nations; rather there is a volatile tension between its globality and nationness (structural hypocrisy: Belgrade protests, Hindutva in USA).
- Purity and authenticity of nations are policed by the state and nationalists largely at a *discursive* level, including recognizably transgressive arts.
- Aporia of *cognitive globalization/national misrecognition* is, where possible, ignored by rational discourse. Tensions are often too acute for logical discourse to rationalize; although myths continue to play a most important role.
- Rather, visual, aural, smells, sounds, touch – the ‘cultural’ sensorium is the space where tensions between global/national/local are negotiated and managed.

Gigi Scaria's 'Any Parallel?'

- The cultural sensorium permits ingress into a culture through various modes of engagement combining vernacularization and novelty.
- This includes displaying or packaging the old in new forms and vice versa.
- *Infracultural* frames: technology and techniques of representation in the sensorium that can convey a different message from the content. Medium and message have complex dialectic. 'Any Parallel'
- Contents: vernacular clothing, political friendships,
- parallel mass action, modes of communication; leadership styles; Deng=Nehru (political/cultural)
- Principal point: 'culture' has a different logic from Culture; culture & *infraculture* permits both cognitive globalization and Cultural misrecognition.

<https://sites.duke.edu/iconicinterruptions/any-parallel/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=13&v=GXX05-T3ngg



St Paul, by Raphael. Mao in Anyuan 1922



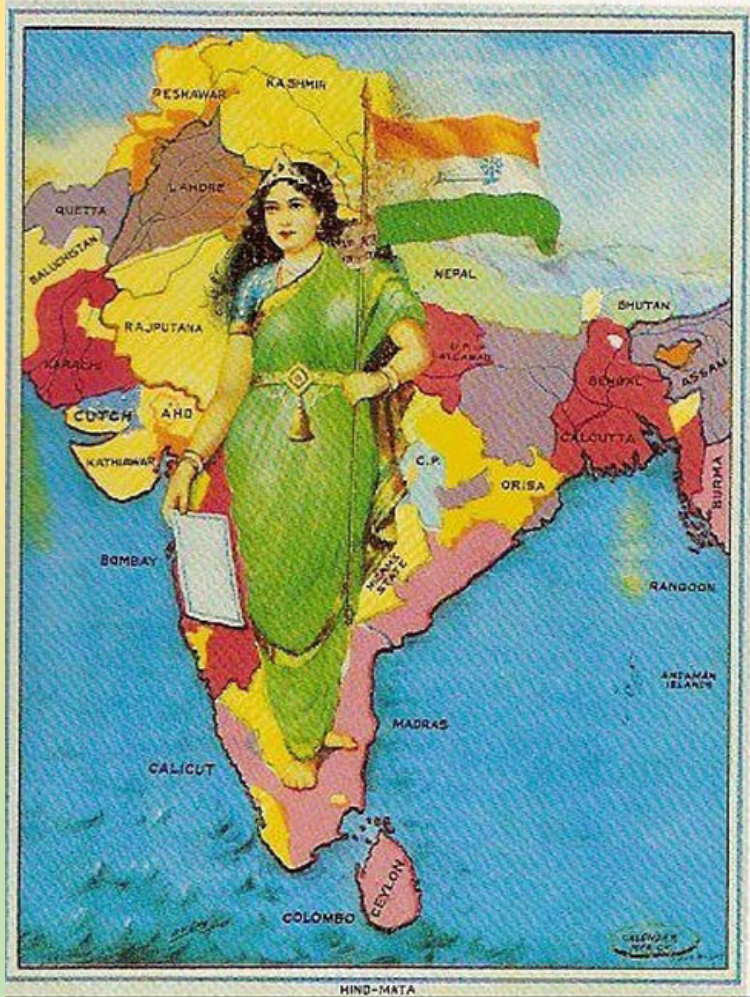
Sensorial Negotiations

- Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan. (analyzed by Elizabeth Perry)
- What is picture? By Liu Chunhua 1967 (in CR) of 1922 strike in Anyuan coalmines inspired partly by religious paintings of Raphael.
- **Content:** combines **traditional** imagery with modern style: scholar gown, cloth shoes, umbrella, *yunhai* (sea of clouds); **modern** resolve, clenched fist; going to liberate workers.
- Above is intentional content: Politics of CR is to displace role of Liu Shaoqi and Li Lisan in Anyuan strike of 1922.
- **Infracultural language:** Biblical figuration; a copy hung in the Vatican mistakenly as a Christian missionary in China.
- CR – religiosity of Mao is hidden message with CR halos; global icons of religious imagery transferred to rev hero.



主席的革命文艺路线胜利

Mother India & Michelangelo's Pieta



Courtesy of TasveerGhar

Dialectic of Politics and the Senses

- Above are images of Mother India and it is easy to see vernacularization of the **geo-body** that incrementally slides into Christian imagery of sacrifice for the world/nation.
- Visuality is easiest for us historians, but aurality is also very important. Very evident dimension of aurality are the national anthems most of which have heroism of Romantic music, martial and hymnal qualities, but make people cry for the nation.
- - Olfactory: Durian then and now; the displacement of garbage.
 - Sartorial: Sun Yat-sen suit and Nehru Jacket are improvisations of western suits. Qibao too.
 - Ben Anderson's Imagined Communities jacket picture.
 - Meiji emperor in two types of sartorial splendor.
- Cannot see these as simply adjustments to modernity; rather they develop their own language between infraculture/content to negotiate the aporia of national modernity.
- This kind of structural hypocrisy—the aporia—is necessary to maintain the present system of nation-states.
- But given the planetary crises—the immediate pandemic and the only somewhat slower one of environmental devastation—we face, we cannot but hope to distribute sovereignty differently, to develop institutions that are not territorial, but functional and scalable, and identities that are multiplex and collaborative.