Comments on Panel 17

2007 SHAFR Conference

6/22/2007

Nicole Sackley

©2007 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online

Visioning Development in Asia: American Concepts and Strategies in the Eisenhower Years

Comment on Papers for Panel 17 at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of Foreign Relations, Chantilly, VA June 22, 2007

Chair: Nicole Sackley, University of Richmond

Modern Reston, Modern India: Redefining the Village in Suburban Virginia and Uttar Pradesh
Nick Cullather, Indiana University

Promoting Systems Compatibility: Regional Approaches v. State Building
Marc Frey, Jacobs University, Bremen

John Foster Dulles and "Development": Close Encounters in Asian Areas
Ronald Pruessen, University of Toronto

Commentator: Nicole Sackley

I'd like to thank **Nick** [**Cullather**], **Marc** [**Frey**], and **Ron** [**Pruessen**] for giving us three fascinating and important papers this morning. Not only have they been theoretically rich, and will no doubt offer much fodder for discussion, they also present terrific stories. As a native Washingtonian, I myself will never look at Reston, Virginia, the same way again!

The title of our session, "Visioning Development in Asia: American Concepts and Strategies in the Eisenhower Years," evokes the metaphor of vision and seeing. What did Americans see when they looked at Asia in the 1950s? What plans and possibilities did they envision for its future? Did their sightlines change over time? How and why?

These questions place our historical subjects at the center of our metaphor. But we can also look at the title of our panel and the papers we've just heard as an invitation to reassess our own vision of development in the 1950s. Simply put, what directions and questions do these papers suggest to us about the historiography of this period? Let me offer three tentative conclusions as well as some questions that may open up our discussion.

First, we can see from all three papers that, contrary to earlier scholarship, the Eisenhower (and if I may add, Truman) years were a cauldron of developmentalist activity. The 1950s have, until recently, been the lacunae of development

scholarship. Early studies largely glossed over the period between 1949—when Truman announced his Point IV program of technical assistance for the "development of underdeveloped areas" until 1961 when a constellation of Kennedy-era initiatives, from USAID to the Peace Corps, were launched. By contrast, these papers reveal the 1950s to be a decade in which Americans—both officially (John Foster Dulles) and as independent citizens (Albert Mayer)—launched dozens of plans, theories, and proposals for developing Asia.

These plans and proposals were far from monolithic. A second conclusion we might draw from this panel is that the development patterns of the 1960s simply do not fit what happened in the 1950s. Although guided by overarching certainties about the hierarchy of modernity (who was developed and who was not), development practice in the 1950s was fundamentally a heterodox enterprise. **Marc Frey** reminds us in his paper that the means, methods, and instruments, what he terms the "mechanisms" of development, were still uncertain and untested in these years. In all three papers, we see the varied mechanisms that Americans imagined might hasten modernization, from regional cooperation and public sector institution-building to international trade agreements and model village programs. Sometimes, American developmentalists stamped out these programs from explicitly American templates. At other times, they imagined themselves engaged, as Albert Mayer did, in a syncretic operation in which American expertise and knowledge could retool the so-called authentic traditions of Asia for the project of modernization. As **Nick Cullather** reminds us, not all developmentalists were strict modernists. As well, the very meaning of fostering "American" or "modern" institutions could vary with the political ideology and expert knowledge of the particular American who proposed them. Albert Mayer and John Foster Dulles illustrate this well. While both appeared to their contemporaries as missionary personalities, no one would have mistaken one for the other.

In his paper on Dulles and development, **Ron Preussen** excavates Dulles' thinking about development and finds his priorities had longer, more tangled, roots than historians have allowed. Preussen sees Dulles' formative experience in international economic relations and Wilsonian world politics as critical to his conceptions of what Asia should look like and how the United States should shape its direction. Thus, a third conclusion we might draw from Preussen's research—and Frey's and Cullather's—is that "development" visions were not invented whole cloth in the wake of the Cold War. This is not a new insight. In recent years, historians have shown us how development coalesced within a wider framework of missions, decolonization, neo-imperialism, and new nationalist agendas. Yet, Preussen, Frey, and Cullather deepen our understanding of development's intellectual origins by demonstrating the critical role that the interwar years (and particularly the Great Depression) played in postwar American visions of development. Sometimes, the 1920s and 30s proffered models that could be projected abroad: the planned rural and urban communities of the New Deal are re-imagined in post-independence

Uttar Pradesh. At other times, as in economic autarchy and regional non-cooperation of the 1930s, the Depression provided cautionary lessons of what not to do. By alluding to the interwar years, these papers call into question the phrase "Cold War development." How much about development visions and policies can we ascribe to the evolving geopolitical realities and conceptual frameworks of the US-Soviet conflict? What was ultimately exceptional about the Cold War period? Were other aspects of postwar American culture—trepidation about the anomie of modern urban life, for example—as pertinent to the ways that American understood development? In talking about the Cold War, these papers call for a precision in our language and a widening of our view of development's sources.

Let me close my comments by lingering a moment longer on this metaphor of seeing, pointing out some places where I'd like to see the connections in these stories and arguments painted with greater detail.

Nick, for too many years, development models and ideas have been characterized by historians as an unwanted export, imposed overseas by colonizing Americans. From its opening moment, your paper shows that the trade in plans and projects was never so simple. Plans meant for Baghdad or Uttar Pradesh washed back ashore in Tempe, Arizona, Marin County, and the "urban renewal" of the 1960s. This global traffic raised several questions for me. First, did the experience of "community development" planning in Asia change the product that came back to the United States? Was Reston, Virginia, built in the 1960s, demonstrably different than the New Deal community of Greenbelt, Maryland? Second, your paper describes the intellectual construction of "the village" in the American global imagination. The building blocks of that construction are brought in to sharp relief, but perhaps at the expense of understanding how they changed over time. What happened to the image of the village when Americans went abroad? What changes between the late 1940s and mid-1960s? Finally, your paper pushes us to recognize the multiple modernisms of developmentalist. Mayer's modernity differed from that of Le Corbusier. Yet, both men were planners and architects. What happens to the discourse of modernity as it moves into other realms of expertise and knowledge? Mayer himself was eager (indeed anxious) to understand the contributions that experts in culture might bring to the modernization project. By placing Mayer in a more diverse community of experts, your picture of multiple modernisms would be, I think, enriched.

Marc, your paper makes the critical point that the course of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia was not set in Washington. US-backed Regionalism in Southeast Asia failed not only because US policymakers and politicians deemed a Marshall Plan for Asia too expensive, but also because of conflicting priorities among southeast Asian states and the political calculations Southeast Asian elites made them favor bilateral aid. This is a wonderful picture of development made in transnational negotiation. Later in your paper, you describe how U.S. policymakers

abandoned regionalism in favor of authoritarian political institutions, such as the army, that they believed offered them the key to the order and stability that they increasingly valued above development. My question for you is what role did Southeast Asian elites play in that process? How did they participate, contest, or negotiate that change in American priorities? Did they, like Lucien Pye or Samuel Huntington, use the language of modernization to describe the armed forces?

Ron, your paper was an important reminder that, while historical actors play pivotal roles at particular moments, they carry with them the intellectual baggage of a lifetime. As I read your paper, I wondered how cognizant Dulles himself was of the sources of his ideas. Have you found any records of Dulles's drawing explicitly on his earlier experiences in his discussions about economic development in Asia? Second, in making U.S. policy toward Asia, did Dulles draw on, or respond to, postwar work on international trade and development? Historians have tended to focus on the more radical models of Raul Prebisch and Arthur Lewis, but neoclassical economists like Jacob Viner were also attempting in the 1950s to build models that would have appealed more to Dulles's views. Was Dulles tuned in to that broader intellectual conservation? Did advisers like C.D. Jackson act as intermediaries for him in this regard? Finally, your paper shows us Dulles the economic and political Wilsonian. John Milton Cooper would say that Wilson's vision of the world also had religious sources. How did Dulles own religious beliefs and experiences shape his approach to development?

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.