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Victor Lieberman. *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830, vol. 2, Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands.* Studies in Comparative World History Series. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 976 pp. $39.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-521-53036-1.

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This is the second volume of Victor Lieberman's magisterial work on the medieval and early modern history of Southeast Asia in global context. In the first volume, published in 2003 and subtitled "Integration on the Mainland," Lieberman challenged the master regional narrative of Southeast Asian history advanced by Anthony Reid in his two-volume *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680* (1988, 1993). Coming in the wake of the post-1965 explosion of research on the precolonial history of Southeast Asia, which sought to shift attention away from the almost exclusively classical (or medieval) focus of prewar scholarship to the early modern centuries and which often emphasized "autonomous" factors of change, Reid's work sought not to exclude foreign influences but to show how local peoples were able to absorb, translate, and recontextualize external influences. In a highly successful attempt to write "total" history, Reid was the first historian to link indigenous changes in political, urban, commercial, and religious organization to global economic shifts while abandoning the elitist focus of Southeast Asian history and dealing extensively with common people and nonelite merchants. According to Reid, the expansion of Indian Ocean and Chinese commerce from the early fifteenth century onward brought a new prosperity and cultural cosmopolitanism to Southeast Asia, together with centralized and absolutist states. But these trends of the age of commerce were reversed by a global downturn beginning in the early to mid-seventeenth century and peaking in the 1680s, which was due to a deteriorating climate, falling profit margins, Chinese and European navigational advances, and stepped-up assaults by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). As a result, Southeast Asia entered an era of stagnation, economic and cultural impoverishment, political fragmentation, and disengagement from the international economy, which in its turn was not reversed until the twentieth century. By contrast, what Lieberman set out to demonstrate in volume 1 was that this broad scheme, although it worked well for the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago, was in fact questionable for the mainland.

The result was an argument that many have found persuasive.

The Age of Commerce thesis, according to Lieberman, had four problems. First, it ignored a number of cultural and political transformations that had to do with ethnic/cultural homogenization, territorial consolidation, and (in Vietnam) the spread of Neo-Confucianism on the mainland; and that were without sustained parallels in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. Second, it over-relied on European sources and thereby obscured the importance of domestic impulses to integration and sources of dynamism on the mainland between 1450 and 1680 other than maritime trade. Third, there was no mid- to late seventeenth-century watershed on the mainland. And fourth, it reverted to a model of East-West incomparability (once maritime revenues were lost, Southeast Asia regressed).

Lieberman's own interpretation in volume 1 offered an alternative scheme, which, like Reid's, charted a middle course between "externalist historiography" and "autonomous historiography," but explored a variety of hitherto ignored transformations, treating maritime influences as one of several dynamics, and viewed the period 1450-1680 in the context of accelerating political and cultural consolidations over a much longer time span between the ninth to the nineteenth centuries. Most important for the subsequent argument of volume 2, Lieberman, while taking elaborate care to distinguish between mainland trajectories and those in the archipelago as well as between variant patterns on the mainland, rejected East-West dichotomies to consider "sustained, if lethargic parallels" (vol. 1, p. 21). Thus, his detailed analysis of the types of territorial changes and the growing uniformity of religious practices, languages, and ethnicities (both laterally and vertically) in the western, central, and eastern sectors of the mainland was a challenge not only to Reid's work but also to those authors, like Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, who posited a yawning, unbridgeable divide between premodern (As the case may be, precolonial) political allegiance and European-style nationalisms. Lieberman insists, however, that his book is not meant to be a refutation of European exceptionalism. It merely draws attention to hitherto ignored but limited similarities between Southeast Asia and other parts of Eurasia, including Europe. Every early modern integration was in some ways different. The problem, as Lieberman sees it, is that Southeast Asia has been marginal to comparative world history because of an excessive preoccupation with industrial potential, which obscured the type of "strange" parallel developments that he finds so intriguing. Drawing parallels among six realms, he does emphasize their differences at the same time. In succinct terms in the second volume he writes: "In 1830 France, Russia, Burma, Siam and Vietnam did not look much alike.... And yet, despite these differences, over the long term all five realms showed unmistakable similarities in political strategy, chronology, and trajectory" (p. 368). Whereas in Japan "we see how differences within Asia could exceed those between Asia and Europe" (p. 492).

The Eurasian thesis that forms the subject of volume 2, then, broadly makes seven claims about parallel developments. First, during the second half of the first and/or the early second millennia CE, the "protected rimlands" or "protected zone" on the periphery of the "exposed zone" of the older Eurasian civilizations--northwestern Europe, northeastern Europe, Japan, and mainland Southeast Asia--underwent a process of "secondary state formation" (a term borrowed from Barbara Price), developing "charter states" with domesticated world religions and grand monumental architecture and flourishing more or less in parallel between c. 900 and 1300 CE. The critical feature of these "charter states" was that they were not subjected to Inner Asian nomadic conquest elites. This set them apart from the exposed zone, which included Southeast Asia's principal neighbors, China and South Asia, together with most of

Southwest Asia. Second, the charter states disintegrated more or less in parallel, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but territorial consolidation in each of them resumed between 1450 and 1590 and continued to gain in scope and efficiency well into the nineteenth century. Third, throughout the period between approximately 800 and 1830, both political collapse and consolidation were heavily dependent on demographic and commercial expansion in the realms of each of the charter states. Fourth, throughout the same period, but particularly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, horizontal and vertical cultural standardization occurred in parallel in each realm. Fifth, in the six realms of Burma, Siam, Vietnam, Russia, France, and Japan, the combination of accelerated political integration, firearms-based warfare, broader literacy, religious textuality, vernacular literature, wider money use, and more complex international linkages marks the years c. 1450 and 1800/1850 as a more or less coherent early modern period. Sixth, with the exception of Vietnam, these six realms enjoyed relatively good internal communications and/or an economic/demographic imbalance markedly favorable to their capitals, and in the early modern period all six enjoyed substantial protection from external invasion (whether from Inner Asia or Europe). And seventh, China, much of Southwest Asia, South Asia, and island Southeast Asia exhibited the same early modern features as did the other six areas under consideration, but these areas at the same time stood apart because their dominant early modern ruling stratum consisted of a conquest elite (Turkic, Afghan, Persian, Manchu, Dutch, and Iberian), which was clearly differentiated from the chief populations over which they ruled and thus impeded elite/mass cultural unity.

To demonstrate the above, the area case studies of this volume begin with the protected zone whose developmental patterns closely resemble the mainland of Southeast Asia. With the project firmly rooted in the soil of mainland Southeast Asia, the overall aim of the successive chapters is to show how ostensibly unconnected peoples on the fringes of two continents "experienced broadly comparable political and cultural trajectories" and "variations on a hitherto unrecognized, thousand-year-long Eurasian pattern," as well as "why during at least a thousand years ... regions on the far reaches of Eurasia, with distinctive social and economic systems and little or no contact, experience[d] parallel consolidations" (pp. xxii, 9). Thus chapters 2 to 4 focus on Russia, France, and Japan. Chapters 5 and 6 shift attention to the exposed zone areas of China and South Asia. Both of the latter two areas had a different relation between indigenous and external agency and a different developmental chronology than any area of the protected zone, but the same basic forces that were at work in the protected zone (population growth, agrarian expansion, European style firearms, local and long distance trade, wider literacy, military competition, and accumulated institutional and technical expertise) encouraged integration in China and South Asia. There was no fundamental divide between the six protected zone areas on the one hand and China and South Asia on the other, even though the latter were set apart by Inner Asian (nomadic-equestrian) exposure, developmental chronology, and physical scale. Finally, the seventh and last chapter considers the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. For most of its history the archipelago's role was much like that of the mainland, but from the sixteenth century onward European interventions in the archipelago in some ways resembled nomad interventions in Asia's agrarian heartlands. According to Lieberman, Europeans in those areas before 1830 can be seen as exercising an early modern integrative function similar in some respects to that of Inner Asians in China and South Asia.

These arguments are presented in great detail and with considerable nuance but always in a commendably crisp, clear, and jargon-free style. The bibliography of 130 pages (for both volumes) posted on the Internet is outstanding. For those

who find the book too long, both volumes provide useful summaries of the principal arguments (volume 2, chapter 1, section 2, provides a summary of volume1; volume 1 offers a more extended one; and the main theoretical arguments of volume 2 are outlined in volume 2, chapter 1, section 3). Thanks to these summaries, any interested reader, in a matter of a few days, will be able to get meaningful access to what is perhaps the most ambitious and wide-ranging work of comparative history undertaken since Plutarch--and learn and benefit a great deal from it. Lieberman commands truly formidable, possibly unsurpassed, analytical skills. His problem is that he is too assiduous to ever let go. For some readers, this entire work, for all its merit, may read too much like a history of the world as seen from Burma (Myanmar--the country that was Lieberman's original research interest). Others will object that too much is staked on the concept of "integration," and that the binary opposition of "integration" versus "fragmentation," which informs the work, has become a new straitjacket replacing the earlier, discarded ones of East and West, and modern and premodern. Some will rightly question the legitimacy of his choice of areas (France rather than Spain or England), and argue that the focus of the work is at once too broad and not broad enough (it is not a real world history). Still others will rightly point out that Lieberman ignores arguments and evidence that do not support his preconceived notions. There will be many who, as the author himself anticipates, will find the work too abstract and will want to have real people put back in. All such objections are undoubtedly fair up to a point. Comparative history is always a notoriously risky business. But, as Jack Goldstone once remarked, "the test of the worth of a work of comparative history is whether it identifies and illuminates relationships heretofore unrecognized or misunderstood in particular sequences of historical events that have occurred."[1] Seen in this light, ***Strange Parallels*** succeeds magnificently.

Note

[1]. Jack Goldstone, ***Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*** (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991), 61.

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