



INVITATION TO WORKSHOP

Given the workshop proposal below, our main aim is to establish a dialogue between scholars and specialists across different disciplines and subjects who nonetheless somehow find themselves at various crossroads and intersections of historically connected and shared histories of various types. It is our hope that those scholars will find ways of conversing with each other in the very process of tapping into their highly specialised knowledge.

Rethinking Global Histories for the Present: The Land and Maritime Silk Road in Central Eurasia and the Indian Ocean

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Asian Studies Center, Boğaziçi University, and Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul

Imperial Legacies along Silk Routes

When the Mongols created the first truly Eurasian empire back in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with the rise of *Pax Mongolica* for the first time trade could be carried out over a very large Eurasian territory without many problems. Therefore, the Mongols are the first example of connections over Eurasia enabled by a government that allows for the beginnings of a global economy. The Chinese empire's historical land and sea routes over Eurasia and the Indian Ocean also come to mind here, even though China did not necessarily control those routes. India's age-old participation in overland and maritime trade is another case in point. Two Eurasian empires are also relevant for this workshop, namely the Russian and the Ottoman empires, even though their routes may not have been as extensive as China's or India's. Though the term 'empire' currently brings up unappealing associations with oppression and autocracy (as well as, in some quarters, 'Oriental despotism'), besides colonialism or neo-colonialism, we would like to emphasise here another sense of the word. This sense for us cuts across periods and geographical areas, and is related to forms of government of the economy over large territories. It is also a form of pulling together a global economy, that is, of managing economic ties and various relations that are not necessarily

encompassed only within a given formal imperial territory or formation. In this sense, empire does not necessarily require a past imperial history as such, as the case of the United States, for instance, indicates.

Empire here is therefore a historically reproduced style, if you will, of managing territories, relations, and connections in various domains. Though the economy is the encompassing and enabling framework, empire is of course much more than merely economic. In the past centuries, particularly since the Peace of Westphalia in Europe, the rise of the nation-state and its offshoot, namely, modern colonialism in Africa and Asia Pacific, has made various imperial formations, particularly those related to land-based empires, appear in much traditional historiography as either anachronistic or at best barely capable of modernisation. Empire has also come to be associated with (neo) colonialism only. Also, some experiences of twentieth-century modernisation – for instance, Turkey's – have been cemented on a large degree of historical erasure, particularly of imperial legacies. With the rise of connected and global histories as a research domain, however, imperial legacies can be revisited anew, this time not only as a historical phenomenon or part of heritage and other studies, but also as a continuing, living source for enabling action in the present world.

Global Economy

The notion of empire should thus be thought of in terms of connections and histories of mobility. The global economy is our starting point but is in no way restrictive in terms of theory or research domains. This proposal therefore aims to scrutinise continuities with the past – without prejudice to differences and discrepancies – that may enable the present. One particularly important example has been China's rise to global prominence in the twenty-first century, and the many tensions, expectations, and anxieties this newly acquired stature is generating. China is particularly relevant because it is the one power in today's world that can offer and actually enact a seemingly different way of managing the global economy that is not that of the mainstream West (we use 'mainstream' here in order to problematise the category of the 'West', while also indicating that it is not a homogeneous realm. In this sense, it is important to recollect that the Caribbean and Latin America, for instance, are also part of the West). Though this workshop proposal in no way concentrates on the Chinese case, it is nonetheless impossible not to invoke it. It is to our mind a major example of how 'empire' can be rethought within the framework of connected and global histories – a framework partly first intimated by Joseph Fletcher, a scholar working on the Central Asian borderlands of China, and Marshall Hodgson, who created the notion of 'Islamicate' to indicate an institutional framework encompassing the territories from the Nile to the Oxus in Central Asia. As connected histories, this notion was further highlighted in the work of, among others, Sanjay Subrahmanyam in more recent times, both in what concerns regions in Central Eurasia and the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, we would like to note that, while we bring up the economy as the main framework in our perspective, we also mean to include realms that are not strictly or mostly economic, such as the domain of the political and the religious, besides that of arts, languages, knowledge formations, material cultures, botanical exchanges, and migrations, to name but a few possible fields of interest.

Government

If we take into consideration that the main problem in the global economy is one of government – namely, how to manage connections and exchanges over disparate territories and through diverse populations with various histories, besides different forms of and approaches to historicity - then imperial formations are quite apposite as the starting point for scrutinising connected histories from and for our current present. By government we mean here the administrative styles and practices, institutions, imaginaires, concepts and notions, law-making, and the exercise of power which are not simply governance in the modern sense, that is, legalistic rule by experts. Nor is government something that exclusively concerns a sovereign state's own territory, as the cases of China and the United States within the global economy indicate.

Among the subjects we think relevant for this workshop are the following:

- 1) Response to government and crises in government: for instance, Chinese, Ottoman, etc, responses;
- 2) The shaping of new or emerging historiographies in various contexts (for instance, Central Asia and the Caucasus);
- 3) Arts across networks and routes (for instance, in Central Asia and China, etc);
- 4) The construction of global or imperial lingua franca's and the shaping of local languages through institutional networks;
- 5) Politics of image-making;
- 6) Religious networks and diffusion of religions across imperial boundaries, and the connectivities of and via religions;
- 7) Rethinking imperial modernities (for instance, Ottoman/Turkish, Russian, Brazilian, etc);
- 8) Reassessing government in early modern history;
- 9) Diasporas and migrants as conduits within and for imperial networks;
- 10) Territorial land and maritime conflict management;
- 11) Law and treaties in the global economy (for instance, the Transpacific Initiative, etc);
- 12) New economic networks within and without ancient connectivities.

Organisers:

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