

# ReORIENT

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Global Economy in the Asian Age

Andre Gunder Frank

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

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*For Nancy, my love and life, who in giving me both hers and mine, made me love it enough to offer her my best book*

*and our family, whose acceptance and love blesses and supports our own:*

*David and Sue the elder, Sue the wiser,*

*Paulo, Miguel and David the younger,*

*and their spouses Jane, Walter, Vero and Fiona, who support us all*

*and to my surgeons Rick and Bob and our caretakers Jo-Anne and Jocelin, whose professional skill and personal friendship made this book possible*

*There is no history but universal history—as it really was.*

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**Leopold von Ranke**

*Il n'y a pas d'histoire de l'Europe, il y a une histoire du monde!*

**Marc Bloc**

*History is marked by alternating movements across the imaginary line that separates East from West in Eurasia.*

**Herodotus**

*History is all things to all men.... Perhaps the most important methodological problem in the writing of history is to discover why different historians, on the basis of the same or similar evidence, often have markedly different interpretations of a particular historical event.*

**R M. Hartwell**

*The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.*

**John F. Kennedy**

*orient: The East; lustrous, sparkling, precious; radiant, rising, nascent; place or exactly determine position, settle, find bearings; bring into clearly understood relations; direct towards; determine how one stands in relation to one's surroundings. Turn eastward, reorient: Give new orientation to; readjust, change outlook.*

**from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary***

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# Preface

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*I think authors ought to look back and give us some record of how their works developed, not because their works are important (they may turn out to be unimportant) but because we need to know more of the process of history-writing.... Writers of history are not just observers. They are themselves part of the act and need to observe themselves in action.*

*John King Fair-bank (1969: vi)*

In this book I turn received Eurocentric historiography and social theory upside down by using “globological” perspective (the term is taken from Albert Bergesen's 1982 article). Early modern economic history is viewed from a world-encompassing global perspective. I seek to analyze the structure and dynamic of the whole world economic system itself and not only the European (part of the) world economic system. For my argument is that we must analyze the whole, which is more than the sum of its parts, to account for the development even of any of its parts, including that of Europe. That is all the more so the case for “the Rise of the West,” since it turns out that from a global perspective Asia and not Europe held center stage for most of early modern history. Therefore the most important question is less what happened in Europe than what happened in the world as a whole and particularly in its leading Asian parts. I render historical events from the much more global perspective and propose to account for “the Decline of the East” and the concomitant “Rise of the West” within the world as a whole. This procedure pulls the historical rug out from under the *anti*-historical/scientific—really ideological—Eurocentrism of Marx, Weber, Toynbee, Polanyi, Braudel, Wallerstein, and most other contemporary social theorists.

Since as Fair-bank observes, writing history is part of history itself, I will follow his counsel and give the reader some record of how my work developed. I will signal only the most significant intellectual way stations and avoid wasting the reader's time with nonessential personalisms. Yet I cannot avoid reference to at least some persons who—often unintentionally—have lighted the way for me and to whom I wish to express my thanks in this preface.

My anthropologist friend Sid Mintz and I have been debating without end since the mid-1950s. He has said, “Culture matters”; and I have always retorted, “Structure matters.” My thesis was first impressed on me in the seminar with the eminent cultural anthropologist Robert Redfield, audited on the second floor of the social science building at the University of Chicago. That is where I was introduced to holism and the importance of its pursuit in social science. In the parallel graduate student coffee-time “seminar,” I argued that what Redfield was missing was structure. Perhaps I had gotten the idea the previous semesters, when I had audited the visiting structural functionalist anthropologists Raymond Firth and Meyer Fortes. I say “audited,” because I was supposed to be on the fourth floor of the social science building, where I was getting my Ph.D. in the Department of Economics. Since then, the members and products of this department and their brethren outliers at the University of Chicago's business and law schools (some of them my then fellow economic graduate students) have gotten about half the Nobel prizes in economics granted in this world, among them five in the last six years. I, on the other hand, flunked my Ph.D. exam three times in a row

inter-national economics, which was my strongest field on the fourth floor; the significance of the hyphen and the italic typeface in the adjective preceding “economics” above should become evident in the present book. The previous sentence may also offer clues to why I felt more comfortable on the second floor. However, much of the “the personal is political” and theoretical intellectual account is already related in my autobiographical “Underdevelopment of Development” (Frank 1991c, 1996). So here I will stick only to what seems most germane for the history behind this book, which pretends to rewrite history.

In 1962 I went to Latin America, armed with the names of some friends given to me by Eric Wolf, also an anthropologist—and with his early writings on how world capitalism had intervened to form (or underdevelop) parts of Mesoamerica. In 1963 in Rio de Janeiro I wrote *On Capitalism and Underdevelopment* (Frank 1975); and in 1965 in Mexico I debated in a national newspaper with Rodolfo Puiggrós, who defended the then received wisdom that Latin America had been feudal (reprinted in Frank 1969). The 1963 manuscript had opened with a critique of received theory (it was published in revised form in 1967 as “The Sociology of Development and the Underdevelopment of Sociology\* and was reprinted in Frank 1969). It was a scathing critique of all the theory I had received on both floors of the social science building as well as from the library at the University of Chicago. In particular relevance to the present book, my critique was directed most of all against Weberian sociology, transmitted to my generation by Talcott Parsons in his mistitled *The Structure of Social Action* ([1937] 1949) and *The Social System* (1951). It was applied to the “Third World modernization theory” by my late good friend and former mentor Bert Hoselitz, as well as by my friend Manning Nash and others there and elsewhere. After reading my draft, Nancy Howell advised me to keep only the theoretical references to them and to take out all the many personal ones, which she then did. Now she again asks me to do the same in the present work, especially with regard to herself; but this time I am more reluctant to do so.

In all these and other works, I sustained that “not feudalism, but capitalism” had generated “the development of underdevelopment” in Latin America and elsewhere in the “Third” World. The crucial factors in this underdevelopment, I argued, were not so much “internal” to any of its regions, let alone due to its peoples, but were generated by the *structure and function* of the “world system” itself, of which all were integral parts. However, I then wrote and continued to think that the “capitalist world system” was born when Columbus “discovered” America. That is why in the early 1970s in Chile I entitled a book analyzing the development of that system *World Accumulation 1492-1789* (Frank 1978a). My account had reached only as far as the latter date when the 1973 military coup in Chile sent my family and me back to my birthplace in Berlin.

Events in Chile before the coup already had obliged me to jump a couple of centuries ahead and concern myself with the present world economic crisis of accumulation, an expression of which I regarded the Chilean coup itself. So that is what I then did in several books and countless articles for the next two decades. Nonetheless in the back of my mind, I kept harboring the sneaking suspicion that if “the system” had been born in 1492, or had emerged since 1450 as Wallerstein announced, it could not have just done so suddenly like Pallas Athene out of the head of Zeus. *Something* before, maybe even also systemic, must have led up to the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama and to the rise of the “world capitalist system.”

While still in Chile, I wrote a blurb for the dust jacket of the first edition of the first volume of Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* (1974). I said that it is a rendition of “the early development of a world economy, the understanding of which is essential for the proper appreciation of all subsequent development. This book should become a classic immediately upon publication” (It did.) The other two dust-jacket blurbs were by Fernand Braudel and Eric Wolf. Braudel said that historians already knew that “Europe had formed a world economy around itself. What they had

never thought of...[and] which characterizes I. Wallerstein's thought is that this entity [the world system] provides a new framework for the subject of European history, that...is compelling." Eric Wolf's blurb said that the book would become indispensable for understanding the development of the world system and that "it is a book that people will have to deal with, argue with, cite, learn by *order to* make their own points, take their own departures."1 I cite these blurbs here because of how revealing they are for subsequent developments related below.

Some of these developments ran in several parallel strands but need not be related here, because they were already signaled in the preface to my *World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (Frank and Gills 1993). Nonetheless, I wish to bring at least the following developments together in this preface, because they are also essential to an understanding of the genesis and purpose of the present book.

Eric Wolf wrote *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) to show how they had been incorporated into the modern world-system at the cost of much of their own welfare and culture. Since his thesis is that they *do* have a history, he placed a question mark after the title; but the publishers didn't like it and took it off again. Publishers never like question marks: the same thing happened to Michael Barratt Brown with his *After Imperialism* (1963), or so both authors told me. Eric Wolf's editor, Stanley Holwitz, had invited me to referee the book for publication, but alas for family reasons I had to decline. I much appreciated the book, and not only because its introduction singled out Wallerstein's and my above cited books as the forerunners of his own. At a public tribute to Eric at the 1990 meetings of the American Anthropological Association, I tried to set the record straight after a student had said that my work had been a major influence on Wolf's. On the contrary, I pointed out, Eric and his work had been the most important early influence on mine in showing me my way to and around Latin America: it was Eric who had signaled that all this was about the world capitalist system, already in colonial times.

It turned out for two reasons to be a good thing that I had been obliged to decline to referee Wolf's book. One day at my dinner table in Amsterdam, I told him privately that I was appalled at what then seemed to me a "giant step backward" in his book, which said that "capitalism" began in 1800 and not in 1492 as he had previously led me to believe. The second reason is that since that dinner-table conversation I have found more reason to agree with his book's thesis after all, as my present book demonstrates. For, if there is such a thing as "capitalism" at all, which I now doubt, it would seem better to date it from the industrial revolution in Europe since 1800, as Wolf claims. But now I also see that the "world system" to which he and I referred in our blurbs for Wallerstein's book began much earlier than any of us three imagined. However that also opens the question of what it means, anything, to call the world economy or system "capitalist."

Then Janet Abu-Lughod (1989) wrote *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. Some years before the publication of the book itself, a special issue of a journal was devoted to the discussion of an article-length version of her thesis. The editor asked me to contribute a comment, which I did (Frank 1987). That led me back to my "sneaking suspicion" about the possible earlier roots of the "modern" world system. Abu-Lughod confirmed them by laying them bare for the "thirteenth-century world system," as she called it. But she said that it was only a forerunner of the different modern one, for which she accepted Wallerstein's thesis of its independent (re)invention after 1450. The main point of my critique was extended in my review of her book (Frank 1990b): the "modern capitalist world-system" was not the reinvention, but the *continuation* of Abu-Lughod's version of the *same* world system already in existence since at least 1250. However, if this world system already existed two hundred years before Wallerstein's starting date of 1450, then why not still earlier?

In the preface to my *World Accumulation 1492-1789*,1 I had quoted and followed another

admonition, which I called Fairbanks (1969: ix) Rule No. 2: “Never try to begin at the beginning. Historical research progresses backward, not forward.... Let the problems lead you back.” The “problem” was the origin—and therewith the nature—of the “world system,” and my time had finally come to let it lead my historical research backward as far as the evidence could take me. The beginnings of “the system” were not in 1800, nor in 1492 or 1450, nor in 1250, then perhaps around A.D. 1000. Of course, Wallerstein did not and still does not want to admit any of this, even though he would write that it is clearly laid out and widely accepted that “the long swing was crucial.” According to him, this swing was upward after 1450, but downward from 1250 to 1450, and previously upward from 1050 to 1250 (Wallerstein 1992, circulated in manuscript in 1989). As editor of *Review*, he graciously published my first article, which argued that we probably can and should trace the origins of the world system back much farther still, among other reasons because of the long cycle cited by Wallerstein himself (Frank 1990a).

Barry Gills had already written (but never published) something similar on his own several years before. When he read the draft of my 1989 article, we made the initially obvious connection and then started to work it out. The results were our joint articles on “The Cumulation of Accumulation,” on long cycles from 1700 B.C. to A.D. 1700, on an interdisciplinary introduction to the five-thousand-year world system, and the book *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* of which we are contributing editors (Gills and Frank 1990/91, 1992; Frank and Gills, 1992, 1993). Gills generously shared his erudition with me, both of his historical lore and of his theoretical sophistication. He also loaned me much of his well-selected library and his own early manuscripts. Therein, he was of enormous help to push or allow me to go much further much faster than I otherwise might have. However, he also drew me into some directions about “international relations” and “hegemony” that I liked less and pursued mostly for the sake of our collaboration.

At the same time, Christopher Chase-Dunn had begun to collaborate with Thomas D. Hall. Chase-Dunn had been a number-cruncher who had, among many other things, “tested” and found support for many of the dependency theory. Simultaneously, but mostly separately, we were also pioneers in incorporating the analysis of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries into that of the “capitalist world system.” Tom Hall's work on tribal and nomad societies in the American Southwest expanded to include nomads elsewhere and with Chase-Dunn also included “marcher states” on the “border” of or temporarily outside the world system. Together, they embarked on constructing more world system theory on the basis of their comparative analysis of several little and big “world-systems.” These include several small ones but also the major one Gills and I were researching and David Wilkinson's “central civilization,” the combination of which Chase-Dunn and Hall rebaptized as the “central world system.”

Chase-Dunn also encouraged me to go to the 1989 meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC), where I met Wilkinson and Stephen Sanderson. From there, I went on to the 1989 meeting of the World History Association (WHA), where I met William McNeill, who has encouraged my work on history ever since. Jerry Bentley, the editor of the just-launched *WHA Journal of World History* also attended both meetings and subsequently published my review of Abu-Lughod and my “Plea for World System History” (Frank 1990b, 1991a). Stephen Sanderson has also been working on parallel strands in his *Social Transformations* (1995). The book includes a study of Japanese development as parallel to that of Britain, which I also use in the present book. Sanderson subsequently edited a special issue of the ISCSC journal *Comparative Civilization Review*, which led to his edited book of comparative studies, *Civilizations and World Systems* (1995). It contains contributions by most of the above-named authors and also includes my “Modern World System Revisited: Re-reading Braudel and Wallerstein” (Frank 1995). Simultaneously, George Modelski and William R. Thompson (1992, 1996) have expanded their long-standing collaborative

from their earlier focus on post-1494 political hegemony and war in the European world to the study of innovation and Kondratieff waves starting in A.D. 930 in China and also to prehistoric world system evolution. The collaboration, help, and encouragement of these colleagues and now also friends was already acknowledged in greater detail in the preface to *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (Frank and Gills 1993) and is gladly reaffirmed here.

The thesis of this Frank and Gills book is that the same features that characterize Wallerstein's "modern" five-hundred-year-old world system can also be found in the *same* system going back at least five thousand years. David Wilkinson and Jonathan Friedman and Kaisa Ekholm joined us with their similar theses (which were worked out separately long ago but by now were mutually influential). My friends (and co-authors of two other books on more recent times) Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin contributed chapters, which demur from the pre-1500 thesis. Wallerstein (1991, 1993) answered, defending his world-system with a hyphen against my world system without a hyphen and still insists that we should "hold the tiller firm" (Wallerstein 1995). Both he and Amin continue to stand their ground in their contributions to a festschrift in my honor (Chew and Denmark, 1996). Abu-Lughod declined to take a stand on this issue and argued that we can't tell if we are now dealing with the same or a new world system in modern times (Frank and Gills, 1993).

The modern "father" of world history, William McNeill, was kind enough to write a foreword (and also to contribute it to my festschrift in "representation of historians"). He now agrees that his own *The Rise of the West* (1963) devoted insufficient attention to world systemic connections and that we must now increasingly map them through all networks of communication. I agree. McNeill's University of Chicago colleague Marshall Hodgson and I shared an apartment in 1954. Marshall talked to me about his own writings, some of which are only now collected in Hodgson's posthumously published *Rethinking World History* (1993). Alas at the time, I was quite unable to understand what he was talking about. If I had understood, it would have saved me about forty years of wandering near-blindly through the historical woods. Only now do I profusely cite and studiously follow Hodgson's guides to rethinking world history.

One way to answer Abu-Lughod's question about whether we are dealing now with the same or a new world system and also to do as McNeill and Hodgson counsel would seem to be to attempt two related things: One is to trace the roots of Abu-Lughod's thirteenth-century world system backward, which she said she was not interested in doing. But I was and did (Frank and Gills 1993). The other task is to look for the possible continuation of Abu-Lughod's system or Frank and Gills's five thousand-year one into early modern times, which she also declined to do. Therefore, that is the task I undertake in the present book. However, doing so also poses many questions about what the implications of our reading of history before 1500 are for the reinterpretation of the early modern (and eventually contemporary and future) history of the world system since 1500.

In 1993 I read the third volume of Braudel's (1992) trilogy, *The Perspective of the World*, and I read some Wallerstein to do an internal critique of their writings (Frank 1995). I confined myself to showing how their own data and especially Braudel's observations about them flatly contradict their own thesis on the European-centered world-economy/system. An earlier version of the same critique had been published as "The World Economic System in Asia before European Hegemony" (Frank 1994). This title combined elements of Wallerstein's and Abu-Lughod's titles with that of the then recently published *Asia before Europe* by K. N. Chaudhuri (1990a). Both authors had shown that Asia was far more important, if not hegemonic, in the world economy before Europe. Re-reading Braudel and Wallerstein showed that, despite themselves and contrary to their own thesis, there were *not* several world economies in the early modern era. Instead there was *only one* world economy and system in which Europe was not and could not have been hegemonic, as they mistakenly claimed.

Thus, also contrary to their claims, this world economy and system also could not have started Europe.

Here the significance of the three dust-jacket blurbs for Wallerstein's first edition of *The Modern World-System* will have become apparent. Braudel said that Wallerstein provided a new framework for the subject of European history so that they could better reinterpret what historians already knew—that is that *Europe had formed a world around itself*. I had written in my blurb that the book would be an instant classic, because we needed it *for the proper appreciation of all subsequent developments*. And Eric Wolf added that Wallerstein's was a book that people would have to argue with and learn from *in order to take their own departures*.

Yes indeed, for my critiques of Braudel and Wallerstein do learn from and argue with Wallerstein to suggest that Braudel is both right and wrong: Wallerstein provides a better framework for the subject of European history, but not for world history, Wallerstein's title notwithstanding. And Braudel and other historians are wrong to have “known” all along that Europe had formed a world “around itself.” My above-cited critiques show on their own evidence that Europe did not expand to “incorporate” the rest of the world into its “European world-economy/ system.” Instead, Europe belatedly joined, or at least cemented its previously looser ties with, an already existing world economy and system. To combine Abu-Lughod's and Chaudhuri's titles, pride of place belonged to *Asia Before European Hegemony*. Or to add Braudel's and Wallerstein's own titles as well, we need a new *Perspective of the Modern World System of Asia Before European Hegemony*.

In this regard, I have related before (in Frank 1991c, 1996) what my then about fifteen-year-old sons told me almost two decades ago. Their remarks turn out to be even more relevant to the thesis of the present book than I or they could have realized at the time: Paulo said that if Latin America was colonial, it *could not* have been feudal; Miguel said that England is an *underdeveloping* country. The significance of these observations to the present book is several-fold. If Latin America was colonial, it was so because it was part and parcel of the world system. Therefore, not only can it make no sense to call it “feudal,” but it also makes questionable sense to categorize it at all—even as “capitalist”—other than as a dependent part of the world economy or system. What do we gain by any such definition, if we can even “define” it at all? Really nothing: indeed this focus on “modes of production” only diverts our attention from the much more importantly defining world system in which everything is a part, as I have already argued elsewhere (Frank 1991a, b, 1996; Frank and Gilman 1993).

In that world economy/system, we can observe “the development of underdevelopment” here and there, then and now. Much of Latin America and Africa are still underdeveloping. However, now we can also observe that “Great” Britain is also underdeveloping, as my son Miguel had observed in 1978, before Margaret Thatcher took over as prime minister. Miguel (and maybe Mrs. Thatcher) lacked sufficient world systemic hindsight to make the following observation, but in fact we can see that Britain has been underdeveloping since the beginning of the Great Depression in 1873. How so? Even with the benefit of Wallerstein's modern-world-system perspective, we can now see that some sectors, regions, countries, and their “economies” not only move up, but also *move down* in their relative and even absolute positions within the world economy and system as a whole. Britain began its decline over a century ago, when its pride of place began to be taken by Germany and North America. They fought two world wars—or one long war from 1914 to 1945—to dispute who would take Britain's place. Alas for some, today their place in the sun is also being displaced by the “Rising Sun” in East Asia. One of the theses of this book is that these developments should come as no surprise, because parts of East Asia already were at the center of the world economy/system until about 1800. In historical terms, “the Rise of the West” came late and was brief.

So one of my early purposes in the present book is to show first that there already was an ongoing

*world* economy before the Europeans had much to do and say in it. There are two naturally derivative points: One is to show that Asia, and especially China and India, but also Southeast Asia and West Asia, were more active and the first three also more important to this world economy than Europe was until about 1800. The other derivative point is that therefore it is completely counterfactual and antihistorical to claim that “historians already knew that Europe built a world around itself.” It did not; it used its American money to buy itself a ticket on the Asian train. However, this historical fact has still other far-reaching implications, both for history and for social theory based on historical understanding.

Under the title “Let's Be Frank about World History,” my friend Albert Bergesen (1995) points out that the proposition “the world economy/system did not begin in Europe” also pulls the rug out from *all* Eurocentric social theory. It is based on the temporal precedence and structural priority of Europe around which the remainder of the world was allegedly built. If Europe did not have that place and function, then the derived Eurocentric social theory also does not rest on the firm historical foundation that it claims to have in what historians “knew.” Thus, the very scaffolding of Western social theory threatens to come tumbling down around us. It now does so through its own undoing, at least through the wrongdoing of its principal architects and all the “master” builders who constructed their theoretical scaffolding and built on unstable historical foundations. As I show in [chapter 1](#), these architects of our social theory include Marx, Weber, Werner Sombart, Karl Polanyi and others, as well as Braudel and Wallerstein (and indeed Frank 1978a, b). All of them (mis)attributed a central place in their theories to Europe, which it never had in the real world economy. How and where does that leave us? Well, just about like the proverbial (European/American/Western) Emperor Who Had No Clothes. Naked!

More or less well-known critiques of this Eurocentrism have already been made at the ideological level by Edward Said (1978) in his discussion of the idea of *Orientalism*, Martin Bernal (1987) who he argued for the African origins of Western culture in *Black Athena*, and Samir Amin (1989) who he inveighed against *Eurocentrism*, as well as others cited in chapter 1.1 mention these three here mostly as other precursory strands for the critical part of this book. Another major one is J. M. Blaut (1993a), who literally demolishes all the myths of European “exceptionalism” in *The Colonizer's Model of the World*. All these writers have done yeomen work to point out the now naked Eurocentric Emperor. So what is to be done, as Lenin might have said? Bergesen insists that we do something “globological” about it, even if it is not yet quite clear just how to do it.

It is not my purpose to fashion a new set of clothes for the same old Eurocentric Emperor, although others who are too embarrassed by his new-found nakedness may wish to try. I frankly prefer no emperor at all. However, I am not naive enough to think that we can just think him away. Nor will we do simply to “deconstruct” him and his garb, postmodernist fashion. I do believe that we are in dire need of an alternative *Perspective of the World* for the new world (dis)order in the making.

*The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (with a question mark!) was my first attempt to fashion an alternative “perspective of the world” and analytical tool to grapple with its own structure and function. Marta Fuentes used to say that I was still a “functionalist,” because I asked her all the time what the sense was of this, that, or the other. She said that by “sense” I really meant “function” within the structure of the system. She thought it was all only in my head. I think the system is really out there in the real world, and it is about time that we fashion ourselves at least a rudimentary mental picture of this system, its structure, and its dynamic. My friend Robert Denemark agrees. He co-edited the festschrift for me, which was nice of him. However, he is also very demanding of both of us. He insists that we must, and helps me to, study the *whole* (system) which is more than the sum or its parts. That is, we need a more holistic theory and analysis of the whole world, and not of just the part that centers around Europe.



Alas, we lack even an adequate terminology, not to mention the analytic constructs and overarching theory, to replace “international” trade and other relations. To say instead “world trade” in the “global system” (or vice versa) is only a small step in the right direction, if that. The point is to elucidate how the flow of trade and money through the “body” of the world's economy is analogous to the oxygen-carrying blood that pulses through the circulatory system (or to the other information carried by the nervous system). The world economy also has a skeleton and other structures; it has organs that are vital to its survival but whose “function” is also bodily determined; it has cells that live and die and are replaced by others; it has daily, monthly, and other short and long cycles (indeed a life cycle); and it seems to be part of an evolutionary (albeit not predestined) scheme of things. Last but by no means least, our world economy and “system” is not independent of the ecology or the cosmos, with both of which it can and does have mutual interactions, which also bear more and more systematic attention. The other co-editor of the festschrift for me, Sing Chew, insists that most attempts at “humanocentric” analysis are not enough. What we need, he says, is “ecocentric” theory *and praxis*. Alas, we or at least I lack even the conceptual wherewithal adequately to address either of these problematiques, let alone their combination.

This book is my first more holistic attempt at extending Denmark's and my “perspective of the (whole) world” onward to early modern world economic history. The task is to attempt to see how the structure/function/dynamic of the world economy/system itself influences, if not determines what happened—and still happens—in its various parts. The whole is not only greater than the sum of its parts. It also shapes the parts and their relations to each other, which in turn transform the whole.

So this is the record of how the beginnings of the present work developed out of partly parallel and partly already intermingled strands. This book now seeks to go beyond these roots in order to make my own points and take my own departures, as Eric Wolf correctly predicted. That means to take and make a departure, indeed a radical break, also from him and all the others—including myself—cited above. Nonetheless, I gratefully acknowledge much help from *all* of them and others.

I gladly accepted the invitation in March 1994 from my often coauthor Barry Gills and his University of Newcastle to begin the joint construction there of such an alternative perspective. My twenty-page first draft was entitled “The Modern World System under Asian Hegemony: The Silver Standard World Economy 1450-1750” (Gills and Frank 1994). This work was interrupted, largely due to illness on my part. Only in late 1995 did it become possible again for me to pursue and now to expand this work, but now, after my retirement from the University of Amsterdam, on my own here in Toronto.

Not really on my own! For Nancy Howell and I were married in Toronto in 1995, and she has given me untold emotional and moral support to resume this project and carry it further as the present book. It would and could not ever have been undertaken, let alone completed, without Nancy. Moreover, she also provided me with the physical facilities to do so in a beautiful study in our home and access as her spouse (a compensation for my lack of any other institutional support) to the library facilities of the University of Toronto.

That access also allows me the use of e-mail to communicate about issues in and sources for the book with colleagues all over the world. There have been so many, in addition to those already acknowledged elsewhere in this preface, that I can here only name and thank a few of the many whom I have consulted (some still by snail-mail) who have helped me most: Bob Adams in California, Jim Blaut in Chicago, Greg Blue in British Columbia, Terry Boswell in Georgia, Tim Brook in Toronto, Linda Darling in Arizona, Richard Eaton in Arizona, Dennis Flynn in California, Steve Fuller in England, Paulo Frank in Geneva, Jack Goldstone in California, Takeshi Hamashita in Tokyo, Satoshi Ikeda in Binghamton, N.Y., Huricihan Islamoglu in Ankara, Martin Lewis in North Carolina, Victor Lieberman in Michigan, Angus Maddison in Holland, Pat Manning in Boston, Bo

Marks in California, Joya Misra in Georgia, Brian Molougheny in New Zealand, John Munro Toronto, Rila Mukherjee in Calcutta, Jack Owens in Idaho, Frank Perlin in France, Ken Pomeranz California, Anthony Reid in Australia, John Richards in North Carolina, Morris Rossabi in New York, Mark Selden in Ithaca, N.Y., David Smith in California, Graeme Snooks in Australia, Dorothy and Burton Stein in London, Sun Laichen in Michigan, and Richard von Glahn, John Wills, and B. Wong all in California.

The attentive reader will find that most of these names reappear in the text in connection with the use of their work or the work used or recommended by them. Before proceeding to publish especially my disputes with them (for example, about estimates and other issues regarding population, trade, production, income, money, cycles and institutions in China, Europe, India, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and West Asia, as well as Africa), I submitted my relevant text for their personal review and acceptance. I then amended my text in accordance with their collegial comments, for which I wish to express my gratitude here. Unfortunately, communication was not possible or was interrupted about my disputes with some colleagues in India.

Last but not least, I am thankful to David Wilkinson for his suggestion of how to entitle this book, to Paul DeGrace, cartographer at the Department of Geography of Simon Fraser University, for converting my hand-sketched designs into his computer-generated maps and to the World Society Foundation in Zurich, Switzerland, for financial support to pay for them and other expenses; to my longtime friend Stan Holwitz and now also my editor at the University of California Press in Los Angeles for humoring me through the travails of the book's production in Berkeley; and to the ever active production editor there, Juliane Brand. My special and greatest thanks in this department go to Kathleen MacDougall. Her good substantive suggestions far beyond the call of duty as copy editor helped me strengthen this book's content and argument, while her professional expertise combined with endless patience and good cheer much improved its form and communicability to the reader, whose name I therefore thank her as well.

To conclude, I hope I may be excused if I repeat something from the preface of my previous book on world accumulation:

The very *attempt* to examine and relate the simultaneity of different events in the whole historical process or in the transformation of the whole system—even if for want of empirical information or theoretical adequacy it may be full of holes in its factual coverage of space and time—is a significant step in the right direction (particularly at a time in which this generation must “rewrite history” to meet its need for historical perspective and understanding of the single historical process in the one world of today). (Frank 1978a: 21)

To end this already too long preface, I would like to continue my quotation from and agreement with John King Fair-bank:

The result can only be an imperfect approximation. Fortunately, no one has to regard it as the last word. Once an author looks back at what he thought he was trying to do, many perspectives emerge. Foremost is that of ignorance, at least in my case. A book that to its author is a mere antechamber to a whole unwritten library, bursting with problems awaiting exploration, may seem to his readers to have a solidity which shunts their research elsewhere. It is useless to assure them that the book is really full of holes. (Fair-bank 1969: xii)

Unlike Fair-bank, at least I need not fear that any of *my* readers may be fooled into seeing nonexistent solidity here. Surely, they will note that this book *is* full of holes. I do hope, however, not to shunt all of their research elsewhere, and I invite them to use at least some of it to help fill these holes—and to dig up new ones of their own.

Andre Gunder Frank  
Toronto, January 26, August 8, and December 25, 1999

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to Real World History vs. Eurocentric Social Theory

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*The really important lesson to be learned from Marx and Weber is the importance of history for the understanding of society. Though they were certainly interested in grasping the general and universal, they concerned themselves with the concrete circumstances of specific periods, and the similarities and contrasts of diverse geographical areas. They clearly recognized that an adequate explanation of social facts requires a historical account of how the facts came to be; they recognized that comparative-historical analysis is indispensable for the study of stability and change. In short, it is these two extraordinary thinkers in particular, who stand out as the architects of historical sociology well worth emulating; for both of them subscribed to an open, historically grounded theory and method.*

Irving Zeitlin (1994: 220)

*The expectation of universality, however sincerely pursued, has not been fulfilled thus far in the historical development of the social sciences.... It is hardly surprising that the social sciences that were constructed in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century were Eurocentric. The European world of the time felt itself culturally triumphant.... Every universalism sets off responses to itself, and these responses are in some sense determined by the nature of the reigning universalism(s).... Submitting our theoretical premises to inspection for hidden unjustified a priori assumptions is apriority for the social sciences today.*

Immanuel Wallerstein (1996b: 49, 51, 60, 56)

### Holistic Methodology and Objectives

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My thesis is that there is “unity in diversity.” However, we can neither understand nor appreciate the world's diversity without perceiving how unity itself generates and continually changes diversity. We all have to live in this one world in which diversity must be tolerated and could be appreciated in unity. Of course, I refer to toleration and appreciation of diversity in ethnicity, gender, culture, taste, politics, and color or “race.” I do not advocate acceptance of inequality in gender, wealth, income, and power without struggle. Therefore, we could all benefit from a world perspective

that illuminates not only the subjective immorality but also the objective absurdity of “ethn cleansing” and “clash of civilizations,” which once again have become popular in some circles today. This book proposes to offer at least some basis in early modern world economic history for a more “humanocentric” perspective and understanding.

The European but exceptionally worldly historian Fernand Braudel remarked that “Europe invented history and then made good use of them” to promote their own interests at home and elsewhere in the world (Braudel 1992: 134). This statement is revealing in several important ways. First, it is not really true that the writing of history was invented by Europeans, not even by Herodotus and Thucydides. History had also been written by the Chinese, Persians, and others. Moreover, Herodotus himself insisted that “Europe” has no independent existence, since it is only a part of Eurasia, which has no real internal boundaries of its own. Perhaps Braudel had in mind a generation of historians who wrote long after Herodotus. Yet even they invented Eurocentric history long after Arab historians, chroniclers, and world travelers of such fame as Ibn Batuta, Ibn Khaldun, and Rashid-ad-Din, who had already written Afro-Eurasian world history which was much less Arab- or Islamocentric.

Indeed, Europeans seem to have invented geography as well, for “Eurasia” itself is a Eurocentric denomination, albeit one invented on a distant marginal peninsula of that land mass. Before his untimely death in 1968, Marshall Hodgson (1993) denounced maps drawn according to the Mercator projection, which makes little Britain appear about as large as India; and J. M. Blaut (1993b) has shown how Eurocentric the mapping of the “march of history” has been. Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen (1997) refer to *The Myth of Continents*. One example is that against all geographical reality, Europeans insist on elevating their peninsula to a “continent” while the much more numerous Indians have but a “subcontinent” and the Chinese at best a “country.” The relevant geographical and historical unit is really Afro-Eurasia. However, that could more appropriately be called “Afrasia,” as Arnold Toynbee suggested and the former president of the World History Association Ross Dunn recently recalled. Even this syllabic order still fails to reflect the real orders of geographical and demographic magnitude and historical importance of these two continents. Europe, of course, is not one of the above.

Latter-day historians, it is true, have preponderantly gazed at their own European navel. That might be excused or at least explained by the social, cultural, political, and economic support they have received to do so. After all, historians received much support to write “national” histories with the ideological support of European and American “nationstates” and to serve the ideological, political, and economic interests of their ruling classes. However, these historians also went beyond the confines of their own “nations,” to claim that “Europe” or “the West” was and is the “navel” (indeed also the heart and soul) of the rest of the world. If they gave any credit to anyone else, it was only begrudgingly with a “history” that, like the Orient Express on the westward bound track only, ran through a sort of tunnel of time from the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians, to the classical Greeks and Romans, through medieval (western) Europe, to modern times. Persians, Turks, Arabs, Indians, and Chinese received at best polite, and often not so polite, bows. Other peoples like Africans, Japanese, Southeast Asians, and Central Asians received no mention as contributors to or even participants in history at all, except as “barbarian” nomadic hordes who periodically emerged out of Central Asia to make war on “civilized” settled peoples. From among literally countless examples, I will cite the preface of one: “*The Foundations of the West* is an historical study of the West from its beginnings in the ancient Near East to the world [sic!] of the mid-seventeenth century” (Fishwick, Wilkinson, and Cairns 1963: ix).

Modern history, both early and late, was made by Europeans, who “built a world around Europe” as historians “know,” according to Braudel. That is indeed the “knowledge” of the European

historians who themselves “invented” history and then put it to good use. There is not even a inkling of suspicion that it may have been the other way around, that maybe it was the world that made Europe. Yet that is what I propose to demonstrate, or at least to begin to show, in this book.

This book sets itself a number of tasks. They are at once far-reaching and still very limited. The tasks are far-reaching in that I seek to challenge the Eurocentric historiography on which much received “classical” and “modern” social theory is based. The intentionally set limits are even greater: I—and I hope the reader—will be satisfied with the bare outlines of an alternative rendition of the world economy between 1400 and 1800. It offers a basis for a now only very preliminary—but later hopefully deeper and wider—structural, functional, dynamic, and transformational global analysis and theory of the single world political economy and social system in which we all (have to) live together.

Quite possibly the limitations of this book are even greater than the ones I have set intentionally and so will prevent me from reaching even this limited goal. However, it is already exceptional even to attempt a review of the early modern global world economy and its structural characteristics in order to inquire how they impinge on its sectoral and regional parts. Most of the historical development of this world economy and its parts may receive shorter shrift than it requires and deserves. The attempt is not so much to write a world history of this period, nor even an economic history, which is beyond my present capabilities, as to offer a global perspective on early modern economic history. Although historical evidence is important, I seek less to challenge received evidence with new evidence than to confront the received Eurocentric paradigms with a more humanocentric global paradigm.

The principal intent is to show why we need a global perspective and approach, which we require not only on the history of the world economy itself, but also so that we can locate its subordinate and participant sectors, regions, countries, or whatever segments and processes within the global whole of which they are only parts. Concretely, we need a global perspective to appreciate, understand, account for, explain—in a word, perceive—“the Rise of the West,” “the development of capitalism,” “the hegemony of Europe,” “the rise and fall of great powers,” including formerly “Great” Britain, the United States, and the former Soviet Union, “the Third-worldization of Los Angeles,” “the East Asian miracle,” and any other such process and event. None of these were caused only or even primarily through the structure or interaction of forces “internal” to any of the above. All of them were part and parcel of the structure and development of a single world economic system.

A derivative observation is that Europe did not pull itself up by its own economic bootstraps, and certainly not thanks to any kind of European “exceptionalism” of rationality, institutional entrepreneurship, technology, geniality, in a word—of race. We will see that Europe also did not do so primarily through its participation and use of the Atlantic economy per se, not even through the direct exploitation of its American and Caribbean colonies and its African slave trade. This book shows how instead Europe used its American money to muscle in on and benefit from Asian production, markets, trade—in a word, to profit from the predominant position of Asia in the world economy. Europe climbed up on the back of Asia, then stood on Asian shoulders—temporarily. This book also tries to explain in world economic terms how “the West” got there—and by implication why and how it is likely soon again to lose that position.

Another derivative thesis is that early modern Europe was neither more important in the world economy nor more advanced in any way than other regions of the world. This was not the case even counting all of its Atlantic outliers. Nor was Europe in any way “central” to or a “core” of any world embracing economy or system. The “world-economy and system” of which Europe was the “core” in the sense of Braudel (1992), Wallerstein (1974), and others including Frank (1967, 1978a, b), was itself only a minor and for a long time still quite marginal part of the real world economy as a whole.

We will see that the only real means that Europe had for participating in this world economy was in American money. If any regions were predominant in the world economy before 1800, they were in Asia. If any economy had a “central” position and role in the world economy and its possible hierarchy of “centers,” it was China.

However, the very search for “hegemony” in the early modern world economy or system is misplaced. Europe was certainly not central to the world economy before 1800. Europe was not hegemonic structurally, nor functionally, nor in terms of economic weight, or of production technology or productivity, nor in per capita consumption, nor in any way in its development or allegedly more “advanced” “capitalist” institutions. In no way were sixteenth-century Portugal, the seventeenth-century Netherlands, or eighteenth-century Britain “hegemonic” in world economic terms. Nor in political ones. None of the above! In all these respects, the economies of Asia were far more “advanced,” and its Chinese Ming/Qing, Indian Mughal, and even Persian Safavid and Turkish Ottoman empires carried much greater political and even military weight than any or all of Europe.

This observation also has relevance to the contemporary and future world development problematique. The recent economic “development” of East Asia is receiving much attention around the world these days, but it generates equally much bewilderment about how to fit the observed developments into the Western scheme of things. The problem is easily illustrated by considering the absurdity of reclassifying Japan as part of “the West” or of having called the Japanese “honorary whites” in South Africa during apartheid. Beyond Japan, the focus shifted especially to the Four Tigers or Dragons of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. However, increasing notice is now also being taken of the other little dragons countries in Southeast Asia and of the big Chinese dragon looming on the horizon. Even the press sees that

in large ways and small, subtle and heavy-handed...China is making itself felt across Asia with a weight not seen since the 18th century.... Now that the dragon has stirred, it is altering issues from regional trade patterns to manufacturing, from the decisions Asian governments make.... [which] confirms a shift in the geopolitics of a region stretching from Japan and South Korea to the Southeast Asian belt. (Keith B. Richburg of the Washington Post Service in the *International Herald Tribune*, 11 March 1996)

To drive still further home the relevance of this point to the present argument, it may be apt to quote from the same paper on two successive days. Under the headline “America Must Learn to Respect Asia's Way of Doing Things,” we learn that

Westerners have been accustomed to telling Asians what to do. That period is now coming to an end. Asian countries are becoming strong enough to assert their autonomy and maintain it.... Any further attempt to remake Asian countries on Western lines is not likely to succeed. It would carry the risk of bringing about another in the long series of conflicts between Asia and the West.... Westerners need to accept the equality of Asians, and their right to do things their own way...and asserting the validity of “Asian” values. (Bryce Harland, *International Herald Tribune*, 3 May 1996)

Under the subtitle “At Issue Is the Nature of the International System,” this same newspaper reported on the following day that

The conflict over China is a conflict about the nature of the international system, and its political, financial and trade agencies. By design or otherwise, China is aggressively pushing to shape an alternative international system friendlier to Beijing's aims [which is] evident in the Chinese struggle to remake the WTO [World Trade Organization] rules for admission. (Jim Hoagland, *International Herald Tribune*, 4–5 May 1996)

Why is this so? Hill Gates (1996: 6) argues that it is because in the world only China has been exceptional in successfully resisting being “reshaped by the pressures of capitalism originating in western Europe...[and] to have survived the Western imperialist remaking of the world in the past few centuries.” Others have sought and offered all manner of “explanations” for this Asian

awakening, from “Confucianism” to “the magic of the market without state intervention.” Alas, the contemporary East Asian experience does not seem to fit very well into any received Western theoretical or ideological scheme of things. On the contrary, what is happening in East Asia seems to violate all sorts of Western canons of how things “should” be done, which is to copy how “we” did the “Western way.” Too bad!

The implications of this book are that the “Rise” of East Asia need come as no surprise just because it does not fit into the Western scheme of things. This book suggests a rather different scheme of things instead, into which the contemporary and possible future events in East Asia, and maybe also elsewhere in Asia, can and do fit. This is a global economic development scheme of things, in which Asia, and especially East Asia, was already dominant and remained so until—historical terms—very recently, that is less than two centuries ago. Only then, for reasons to be explored below, did Asian economies lose their positions of predominance in the world economy, while that position came to be occupied by the West—apparently only temporarily.

The Western interpretation of its own “Rise of the West” has suffered from a case of “misplaced concreteness.” What should become increasingly apparent is that “development” was not so much “of the West” as it was of and in the world economy. “Leadership” of the world system—more than “hegemony”—has been temporarily “centered” in one sector and region (or a few), only to shift again to one or more others. That happened in the nineteenth century, and it appears to be happening again at the beginning of the twenty-first, as the “center” of the world economy seems to be shifting back to the “East.”

This idea is also cropping up elsewhere, but in rather dubious form. The book *Coming Full Circle: An Economic History of the Pacific Rim* (Jones, Frost, and White 1993) begins a millennium ago with a description of the economic growth in Song China. Yet Ming and Qing China and Japan are described as essentially isolated and largely stagnant, while the Pacific becomes first “a Spanish lake,” and then subject to “Pax Britannica” and “the American Century”; only after an alleged interval of five to seven hundred years and substantial intervening Western incursions are the Pacific Rim and its eastern shores rising again. On the other hand, Western incursions in Asia remain only superficial and marginal until the past two centuries, and the ascendancy of the West is termed brief and fleeting in Felipe Fernandez-Armesto's 1995 study of the last millennium of world history. Nonetheless in his account, the present and possible future rise to dominance of China and other parts of Asia in the world only resurrects the Chinese economic and cultural predominance of the Song dynasty from nearly a thousand years ago. In my book, in contrast, I argue that that lapse of dominance lasted less than two centuries. Moreover, I seek to show how these shifts have also been part and parcel of a long cyclical process of global “development.” This introductory chapter—and the concluding one—explore the implications of these historical observations for social theory.

## Globalism, not Eurocentrism

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“The West” has for some time now perceived much of the rest of the world under the title “Orientalism” (the pairing of the terms “West” and “Rest” comes from Huntington 1993, 1994). The Western world is replete with “Oriental” studies, institutes, and what not. This Western ideological stance was magnificently analyzed and denounced by the Palestinian American Edward Said in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*. He shows how Orientalism operates in the Western attempt to mark off the rest of the world in order to distinguish the West's own alleged exceptionalism. This procedure has also been denounced by Samir Amin in his 1989 work, *Eurocentrism*. Martin Bernai, in *Black Athena* (1987), has shown how, as part and parcel of European colonialism in the nineteenth century

Europeans invented a historical myth about their allegedly purely European roots in “democratic” but also slave-holding and sexist Greece. The Bernal thesis, apparently against the original intentions of its author, has been used in turn to support the idea of Afrocentrism (Asante 1987). In fact, the roots of Athens were much more in Asia Minor, Persia, Central Asia, and other parts of Asia than in Egypt and Nubia. To compromise and conciliate, we could say that they were and are primarily Afro-Asian. However, European “roots” were of course by no means confined to Greece and Rome (nor to Egypt and Mesopotamia before them). The roots of Europe extended into all of Afro-Eurasia since time immemorial. Moreover, as will be shown in this book, Europe was still dependent on Asia during the early modern times, before the nineteenth-century invention and propagation of the “Eurocentric idea.”

This Eurocentric idea consists of several strands, some of which are privileged by political economists like Karl Marx and Werner Sombart, and others by sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber. The last named did the most deliberately to assemble, combine, and embellish these features of Eurocentrism. All of them allegedly serve to explain *The European Miracle*, which is the telling title of the book by Eric L. Jones (1981). However, Jones's book is only a particularly visible tip of the iceberg of almost all Western social science and history from Marx and Weber, through Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, to the spate of defenses of supposed Western exceptionalism since World War II, particularly in the United States.

The use and abuse of this kind of Eurocentric “theory” has been critically summarized with regard to Islam, although the same applies equally to other parts of “the Orient”:

The syndrome consists of a number of basic arguments: (i) social development is caused by characteristics which are internal to society; (ii) the historical development of society is either an evolutionary process or a gradual decline. These arguments allow Orientalists to establish their dichotomous ideal types of Western society whose inner essence unfolds in a dynamic process towards democratic industrialism.... (Turner 1986: 81)

However, as the Islamicist and world historian Marshall Hodgson wrote,

All attempts that I have yet seen to invoke pre-Modern seminal traits in the Occident can be shown to fail under close historical analysis, once other societies begin to be known as intimately as the Occident. This also applies to the great master, Max Weber, who tried to show that the Occident inherited a unique combination of rationality and activism. (Hodgson 1993: 86)

Hodgson (1993) and Blaut (1992, 1993a, 1997) derisively call this a “tunnel history,” derived from a tunnel vision, which sees only “exceptional” intra-European causes and consequences and is blind to all extra-European contributions to modern European and world history. Yet as Blaut points out, in 1492 or 1500 Europe still had no advantages of any kind over Asia and Africa, nor did they have any distinctively different “modes of production.” In 1500 and even later, there would have been no reason to anticipate the triumph of Europe or its “capitalism” three and more centuries later. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century development of economic, scientific, rational “technicalism” that Hodgson regards as the basis of the subsequent major “transmutation” occurred, as he insists, on a worldwide basis and not exclusively or even especially in Europe.

Europeans and Arabs at least had a much more global perspective before it was suppressed by the rise of Eurocentric historiography and social theory in the nineteenth century. For instance, the Tunisian statesman and historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) evaluated and compared the “wealth of nations” before and during his time:

This may be exemplified by the eastern regions, such as Egypt, Syria, India, China, and the whole northern regions, beyond the Mediterranean. When their civilization increased, the property of the inhabitants increased, and their dynasties became great. Their towns and settlements became numerous, and their commerce and conditions improved. At this time, we can observe the condition of the merchants of the Christian nations who come to the Muslims in the Maghreb. Their prosperity and



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