
World-Systems Evolution and Global Futures

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Comparing Globalizations

Historical and World-Systems
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*To all those struggling to understand
and change globalization.*

Foreword: Toward a Science of Comparative Globalizations

Globalization. It is supposed to characterize the contemporary moment. Yet, many feel it is already waning and being replaced by geopolitics, nationalism, territorial disputes, and border tensions. It has also been observed that the end of the nineteenth century was also a period of what we would now call globalization with high rates of international flows of capital, trade, and migration.

If globalization is now receding, and has actually appeared before, it is eminently reasonable to believe that the properties of international life associated with the term globalization have appeared as far back as the Bronze age, if not before, and that it will certainly appear sometime again in the future. We could even, in theory, speak of micro-, meso-, and macro-globalizations, as sorts of trans-settlement flows of resource and population that have characterized social life since the emergence of anatomically modern humanity some 200,000 years ago.

But just as obvious as the possible presence of earlier globalization periods are endless questions. Are these moments but phases in some globalization/geopolitical cycle—e.g., expanding out beyond settlement boundaries (expanding globalization) to then recede back behind territorial walls to emphasize the specific, particular, and concrete of immediate geographic locale? Or, when and how did micro-globalizations of very early human history come to be merged like drops of water in contact to form larger drops and then ponds, lakes, and oceans? Or, how was the earlier Sino-centric Asian meso-globalization different from say the Mongol-led meso-globalization of the Eurasian Steppes? Globalization and Mongols? Aren't they usually associated with empire, not globalization? Consider for a moment the fifth-century BCE Athenian maritime empire. Upon a moment's reflection, it is obvious that this was also a period of extensive inter-city-state trade along with the flow of Greek culture, constituting in effect a micro-globalization period in the eastern Mediterranean. Closer to the present, it is clear that the late nineteenth- and late twentieth-century hegemonies of Britain and the United States were also periods of globalization. Therefore, it would seem if there is globalization there is also hegemony and maritime empire and, interestingly enough, evidence that interstate conflict is more localized. More generally, what we note is that economic contraction is associated with expansion of great power war, while economic expansion is associated with localized wars. The 100-Year Peace (1815–1914) was largely free of systemic major power war and at the same time a world under

British hegemony and generalized economic expansion. And, with the decline of Britain came growing geopolitical tensions, the depression of 1873–1896 followed by the Great War in 1914, the Great Depression in the 1930s, and World War II of 1939–1945. At a general theoretical level, it isn't at all clear that political theory, especially of the normative type, has fully come to grips with the irony that striving for the normative ideal of equality among nations (pluralism, multipolarity, etc.) would also entail raising the odds on the outbreak of great power war. Much of this evidence for this association comes from the history of the West such that there is an important role for the emerging science of comparative globalizations to see if this seeming correlation of international equality with major conflict is found in earlier globalizations as well.

There are other questions this new field should address. For instance, if we are to mean by globalization heightened flows of goods, ideas, and human migration across political boundaries of whatever scale, we come to the realization that by the end of the nineteenth century such a process had now fully encompassed the geographic globe itself. This raises the following question. Does this change the substantive nature of pre- and post-late nineteenth-century globalization expansions? That is, if earlier trans-settlement, trans-society, and/or trans-polity expansions could move into new territory, then that might mitigate some effects or trigger others that could not be possible once said expansive globalizations were fully geographically global. The most obvious example is the disappearance of overseas colonialism as earth is now fully chopped up into national sovereignties. Of course, there are endless types of “neo-colonialisms” and efforts have been made to identify such control by postcolonial great powers over weaker states.

It is also possible that maxing out territorial expansion possibilities leads to new forms of heightened or intensified globalizations where the “frontier” is removed as a release valve for various social, political, and economic pressures and contradictions that might accompany the globalization process. In this regard, it has been suggested that the commercialization of Near-Earth Orbit is not so much a matter of science, discovery, or exploration but the age-old capitalist search for raw materials and new profit-making opportunities. That position, of course, has its defenders, with the NewSpace movement suggesting that it is precisely the private sector that is the one to take the lead in space exploration, colonization, and developing new economic opportunities.

At the most macro of levels of human relations, the issue of globalization and outer space can also be viewed as part and parcel of the long history of human migration. Anatomically modern humanity appeared some 200,000 years ago and has been migrating out of Africa and into Eurasia and then into the Americas. Over time, new settlements and their inter-settlement connections grew, leading to the concepts of micro, meso, and macro world-systems and globalizations; until, today migration seems to be jumping the earth's gravitational hold with humanity moving into Near-Earth Orbit and planning to advance further into the solar system.

In the broad sweep of human history, the migration/globalization dynamic reached its territorial limit at the end of the nineteenth century. Migration, links, and world-systems now encompassed the globe, and at this point, the globalization

story can be theorized as moving in at least two different directions. The first is re-cycling whatever was the essential globalization logic that got humanity up to being a globe spanning species. There are a number of possibilities here. One is that all globalizations, from micro to macro, are in essence the same and all that changes is scale. Go back a moment to the earlier observation that globalizations are also tied to aquatic based hegemony and local wars. If it's just a scale question, then something like a *globalization genome* is worth pursuing, where the same set of base elements combine and recombine to yield the commonality of globalization independent of historical time, place, or territorial scale.

Alternatively, if scale is tied to essence, then as history proceeds through micro- to meso- and macro-globalizations at some identifiable point, a certain fixed logic sets in and the process stabilizes, or reaches a steady state, and then seems to periodically oscillate. Oscillation, though, could occur at either globalization's final, and truly "global" state, or in its scale-independent eternal state. Here, the reasoning would be that where there is humanity there is society and where society, intra-societal relations, which oscillate between globalizing (expanding the intra-societal) and geopoliticalizing (contracting the intra-societal). As such, this oscillation can be considered an evolution-delivered bio-endowed property of human nature and not a stage of human development. Like mind, rationality, personality, emotion, and language, globalization can be considered a given human property with which social actors have to adjust to, or deploy in their interests, rather than something they create. The model here is exemplified in the history of our understanding of language: first thought of as a social creation and now realized as a discrete combinatorial faculty of the mind/brain.

Let me conclude with a final thought. The social science idea of globalization is tied to a geographic entity—planet earth: the globe. Humanity with its accompanying social webs (globalizations, really) has now completely covered the planet. We can, as mentioned earlier, see globalization as oscillation cycles of expanding outward beyond societal homelands and then back behind their walls, or we can begin to think about *post-globalization* where human social expansion/contraction cycles are not tied to just planet earth. Shortly after the modern world-system became truly global at the end of the nineteenth century, humanity began to make tremendous strides against the earth's gravitational pull. As early as 1903, the Wright Brothers showed how to defy gravity with flight, and by 1957, we had objects circling earth, Sputnik, and by 1961 a man in orbit, and by 1969, we were walking on the moon. Today, human social relations must include not only global relations *and* near-earth relations, but also global *to* near-earth relations. The global, as the environmental termination of the social, is, therefore, out of date.

Human social cycles of expansion/contraction can no longer be thought of as merely "globalization" for they would now must include the human on the globe and the human in space. In some sense, this is just a matter of semantics, but in another sense it is clear that we are entering an entirely new domain of human social experiences that have not been incorporated into standard social thought in any serious fashion. Perhaps it's still just earth-bound globalization but now with a near-earth orbital component. But it is just as likely that the social will need to be thought

about in an entirely different way. Regardless of what the future may hold, we are still largely terrestrially bound and subject of moments of globalization and de-globalization, such that we can all benefit from the study of comparative globalizations.

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