

summarized in his book of the same name which they are fond of quoting), they should have provided data to the effect. However, they do not provide that data for such optimism in any of their regional studies. I would have loved to see a good review of many intra-regional material and ideological pressures for sustainability. However, this is missing despite being a crucial argument of the editors. Fourth, this is the other flaw methodologically, and it follows from the first methodological critique: the editors disagree with ‘declensionist’ narratives of environmental decline theoretically (perhaps because these are so closely related to dependency narratives), yet declension and decline are seen throughout their regional cases. It does not make sense that they miss this glaring fault, though they do.

In conclusion, what they could have done was to remove an intellectualized false dichotomy ‘between’ regional and dependency or world-systems views by discussing the expansion of one region worldwide, or the expansion of scale of this constructed regionality worldwide over time, or how world cross-regional interaction created modern state formation and environmental conditions in the first place (mentioned in the books above). Such are the books the editors ought to examine to reevaluate their pointless attempt to differentiate between regional and global processes. I encourage more world historians to tackle environmental issues. The attempt to combine sociological theory of environmental problems with fine-grained regional histories of state degradation is a good start because there has been an analytic separation between much environmental sociology and deep historical analysis and because there has been an analytic separation between the biophysical environment and the social sciences in general. Both divides have been crippling for understanding long-term processual political pressures that create environmental problems. However, after solving the above two divides, the editors’ insert a novel artificial divide between global and regional processes. World historians should take a more historical view of regionality by seeing a regional process as changing in scale over time typically toward a larger regional interaction. More time should be spent building bridges between sociology, history, and environmentalism. This book contributes toward it, though there are more bridges to build that are incomplete in this book.

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Turchin, Peter, and Sergey A. Nefedov. 2009. *Secular Cycles*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 362 pages, ISBN: 978-0691136967 Cloth (\$35).

Biologist Stephen Jay Gould used to tell the story of how physicist Richard Feynman once boasted to him about an amazing new discovery. Feynman had discovered evolution. In 1961 Feynman had the incredible biological insight that the distribution of genetic traits in a population should change over time due to the survival of the fittest. Within a week he had worked out the basics of sexual selection: why peacocks have fancy feathers, etc. He even rediscovered

evolutionary incentives for monogamy in females and polygamy in males. Feynman's idea was certainly brilliant; the only problem was that it was a hundred years too late.

Turchin and Nefedov's cliometric tour de force is reminiscent of Feynman at his best: absolutely brilliant, somewhat quirky, sometimes amateurish, but always provocative. The authors take a neo-Malthusian approach to interpreting the historical development of large-scale agrarian societies including pre-modern England, France, and Russia as well as an extended discursion into ancient Rome. One is tempted to call their approach "neo-Goldstonian," since for Turchin and Nefedov the only historical sociologist is Jack Goldstone (with an occasional nod to Theda Skocpol and Randall Collins). Their idea, in a nutshell, is that the histories of agrarian societies were dominated by demographic booms and busts not just of the general population, but of elites as well. They follow Goldstone in calling this the "demographic-structural" theory of history.

In the demographic-structural approach, demography is not determinative in itself (as for Malthus) but must be examined in conjunction with social structure (as for Goldstone). The authors present a simple model of agrarian societies, which they define as those in which at least 50% of the population and more often over 80%-90% of the population engage in agriculture. They reduce agrarian social structure to two classes (elite and non-elite) and study how the relative demographic weight of each changes over time. They posit four demographic-structural phases:

- Expansion phase: population grows from nadir; elite numbers low;
- Stagflation phase: population is high; elite numbers rise;
- Crisis phase: population begins to decline due to Malthusian pressures; elite overpopulation leads to political conflict;
- Depression phase: population stagnates; elite numbers are decimated by war and economic collapse.

The key driver of capital – H "History" in their model – the elite history of politics and wars, kings and castles – is elite overpopulation. To put it bluntly, as long as there is plenty of empty land to develop (expansion phase) or plenty of peasants to exploit per member of the elite (stagflation phase), elites focus on living the good life. However, once the carrying capacity of the land is reached (crisis phase), intra-elite competition starts to tear apart the fabric of society. Interestingly, Turchin and Nefedov see the rise of elite education and commoner artisanship as signs of crisis: elites seek university degrees and consequent bureaucratic employment only when opportunities to exploit rural peasants are scarce, and commoners turn to craft production for elite markets only when there is no free land available to farm. I had never thought of museum-quality artifacts in this way, but their analysis makes complete sense.

Similarly provocative is the authors' observation that secular cycles of the kind they describe would occur much more rapidly in societies that are characterized by elite polygyny. They cite Ibn Khaldun in noting that elite numbers can grow much more rapidly in traditional Moslem societies than in traditional Christian ones due to the very large number of inheriting children produced by Moslem elites. The result is that medieval Moslem elites soaked up any excess social production almost immediately after a demographic collapse, whereas medieval Christian societies took many generations. Cycles thus had a much shorter time from trough to trough in Moslem agrarian societies than in Christian ones.

The main shortcoming of this book is its lack of sociological grounding. To be fair, the authors are not sociologists – Turchin is a biologist and Nefedov a historian – but their material is fundamentally sociological. After all, if sociology is not the science of history, then what is it? The authors excitedly conclude that they are "optimistic about the future of history as science" (p. 314) but for the rest of us history has existed as a science since the days of Emile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, and Max Weber, not to mention Karl Marx. Moreover, many contemporary sociologists (besides Jack Goldstone) are working on long-term historical dynamics. It is odd that the authors do not so much as cite Janet Abu-Lughod, Chris Chase-Dunn, Gunder Frank, Thomas Hall, Stephen Sanderson, or Immanuel Wallerstein.

This lack of sociological grounding is surely due in part to the authors' own background, but poor editing must also take some of the blame. The authors write as scientists, taking a "just the facts, ma'am" approach to their subject that results in over 300 pages crammed with evidence – and very little else. For example, there is no preface. There is no explanation of why they wrote the book, why the topic is important, or how the authors' arguments fit into larger theoretical debates. There is not even a brief "about the authors" blurb. The text abounds with statements like "Here are some examples:" and "Here are some facts:" followed by long lists of data. These kinds of stylistic problems should have been addressed in the editorial process; it is odd to see a book from a major university press that is so poorly edited.

That said the intellectual content of the book is staggeringly impressive. It is hard to quarrel with Turchin and Nefedov's careful analyses, and their data sources are extensively documented. For anyone interested in applying social theory to historical data on pre-modern Europe, *Secular Cycles* will be a treasure trove of data from obscure sources; the authors have certainly done their homework. Turchin and Nefedov's demographic-structural model also has the potential to spark several Ph.D. theses applying it to societies other than the four studied here. In short, this is a solid and persuasive work, a true scientific monograph. It is certainly not easy going, but highly-motivated scholars will find it extraordinarily rewarding reading.

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Beckwith, Christopher I. 2009. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 472 Pages. ISBN 978-0-691-13589-2 Cloth (\$35).

Acknowledging the Other

Over world history, Central Eurasia has often been viewed as providing the conduit (the Silk Road) for trade to flow between the East and the West, and on different occasions, it has impacted on the social, political, economic relations in the East and West with the migrations/invasions of its nomadic tribes. That has been our understanding of world history as told to us by most historical studies of Central Eurasia. Christopher Beckwith's *Empires of the*