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"Global Cities" and "Globalization" in East Asia: Empirical Realities and Conceptual Questions

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City formation and change has always occurred in the context of social, political, economic and cultural forces operating across broad geographic regions, including across multiple international borders. This is not to say that unique local processes and structures are not sometimes equally or even more important; nor does this involve a claim that national states do not mightily shape the trajectories of the cities within their boundaries. Rather it is to emphasize that many cities have long been embedded in matrices of “global” processes, and these processes have effected profound change in cities. This is as evident in major East Asian cities as it is in New York, London and Tokyo. Hong Kong grew in population and developed as an important transshipment and banking center (as well as center of light industry) as a British Crown Colony. Shanghai became one of the world’s great seaports and leading trading center under the influence of Britain (beginning, like Hong Kong, with the Treaty of Nanking), the U.S., and, later, Japan. Jakarta was a bustling port with regional relations when the Portuguese arrived in the early 16th Century, soon to be followed by the Dutch and the English, making this city an important southeast Asian node in the emerging European-centered world-economy. Equally influential on this city’s character has been the influence of Chinese immigration, and, as with Shanghai, Japan imposed its dominance on the city in the 1930s. Of course both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City also were influenced by trans-border relations, first and longest with China, then with European powers, principally France, not to mention the United States. Though the two Vietnamese cities are hardly contenders for “world city” status, like Hong Kong, Jakarta, and Shanghai, they are, nevertheless “global” in many ways. In addition to their past histories, both are currently being more implicated into global processes (albeit in somewhat distinct ways), and they seem to be rapidly changing as a result.

As indicated in the introduction to this issue, we do not need to deny the importance to cities of “states, citizens, and domestic politics” in order to acknowledge the crucial role played by global processes in shaping the trajectories of the world’s large cities. Nor do we need to dismiss the possibility that, in the current era, global processes (a.k.a., “globalization”) may play a qualitatively more important role *vis-a-vis* cities than in the past. But the questions these considerations imply should be answered with research, not by popular discourse or mere theoretical assumption. We suspect that such questions will be more satisfactorily addressed by looking at how local, national, and global social forces “articulate” with one another, and holding open the strong possibility that this varies over time and from city to city (or country to country). In this essay, we provide a regional overview and suggest a research agenda to address these crucial conceptual issues.

East Asia: Toward Dynamic Urbanization

In the wake of three decades of “the East Asian miracle,” and three years after the debacle of “the East Asian crisis,” there is little doubt that “globalization” has come to the region, and with a vengeance! It is obvious to even the most casual observer that these countries, including China after years of attempting to wall itself off, are now deeply integrated into the circuits of international capitalism—with the economic meltdown of 1998 proving that this is not always a good thing. For most of the twentieth century this region was among the least urbanized parts of

the world; now it has become one where cities are growing the most rapidly and becoming increasingly important centers regionally and in terms of their places in the global urban hierarchy. Tokyo is unquestionably a key “global city,” with Hong Kong probably following not far behind, and Seoul and Taipei also moving up in the world city ranks as crucial national articulates of highly successful “newly industrializing countries” (NICs) (Friedmann 1995). At the other end of the spectrum, the teeming cities of the poor in southeast Asia seem to epitomize the appellation of Third World “megacities.”

Many questions are raised by the seemingly dramatic social, economic and political transformations attributed to “globalization.” The very *diversity* of development trajectories and urban forms, functions and dynamics in the region (see Smith 1995: Chapter 6) is a caution against facile and premature attempts at generalizations. At the same time, recognizing that trans-regional (e.g., “global”) processes shaped these cities (even in the distant past!) is a caution against either over-emphasizing the uniqueness of their contemporary situation or premature attempts to attribute too much of the current urban dynamics to overarching macro forces. The East Asian region is a particularly crucial one for contentious debates about the reality and ideology of “globalization.” Explanations of the “economic miracles” that occurred in this part of the world during the 1970s and 1980s, which focused on “developmental states” (Johnson 1982; Cumings 1984), gave way to calls for the urgent need for neo-liberal reforms after “the East Asian economic crisis” of 1998 (see Smith 1999). While the swirling debates about the nature of “globalization” are a context for much of what is going on in contemporary East Asia, including its cities, our focus here is more narrowly on the urban realities in the area. We situate East Asian cities in the global network of urban places, we attempt to highlight prominent tendencies in contemporary East Asian urban patterns, and we compare these tendencies with generalizations about global cities more broadly. Extending the conventional discourse of “global city” analysis, the discussion also focuses on those swelling metropolises in southeast Asia that are at the “bottom” of the world urban hierarchy, and suggests that perhaps we need to return to old debates about “dependent”/ “peripheral” cities and the relationship between urbanization and underdevelopment.

The Web of World Cities

Scholarship on “global cities” and “world cities” (cf. Friedmann and Wolff 1982; King 1990, Sassen, 1985, 1991) usually begins with the premises that we can look at the relationship of cities in global networks, that these urban systems of connections lead to the emergence of hierarchy and dominance, and that the leading “world cities” are the places “through which regional, national, and international economies are articulated with the global capitalist system of accumulation ” (Friedmann 1995:25-26). This is a dynamic system: urban centers can rise and fall, they can “articulate” with other cities in particular ways, and the role that these places play in these networks will have a great impact on urban social, economic and political life *within* these nodes. The great metropolises at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy play particularly important roles (Sassen 1991). These “command posts” hold great global power as centers to specialized business service providers, loci of innovation, and focal points of vast markets. But Sassen and others (Friedmann and Wolff 1982; King 1990; Ross and Trachte 1990) also argue that these same global cities are sites for growing social and economic polarization. This leads to an intriguing paradox: these “command posts” for the world economy, home to the earth’s wealthiest and most powerful people, are also places with growing low-wage labor forces, isolated and politically marginalized immigrants, and dispossessed racial and ethnic minorities.

This is a powerful vision, which raises a series of fascinating research questions. In this discussion we highlight three of these and attempt to link them to the “on the ground” reality of cities and development in East Asia: 1) empirically mapping urban hierarchies and assessing cities’ relative ranks, 2) the “articulation” of the overlapping networks of cities, nations, and the world-system, and 3) the “world city hypothesis” that argues that rank in the urban hierarchy is

strongly related to intraurban socio-economic structure (i.e., global cities tend to have polarized spatial and class relations). We examine each of these, in turn, and tie them (admittedly with varying degrees of precision!) to urban patterns and processes in East Asia. Finally, we want to introduce a fourth question – which actually revives an old theme from the “urbanization in the world-economy” research of a decade or more ago: Does it make sense to look at the great “megacities” in the poorest peripheral countries of the contemporary global economy as instances of “dependent urbanization”? These places, in effect, *are* part of the global city network. But they are found well-down the dominance hierarchy—to the extent that they are rarely discussed in the “world cities” literature. We need some sort of theoretically informative way of approaching the urbanization/underdevelopment dynamic in these places, too. This paper attempts to provide such a schema, leaving the detailed empirical analysis and case studies for another day.

Measuring World City “rank”

Is there a global city hierarchy that can be clearly measured and “mapped” with empirical data? Can we gauge how this changes over time? What about various regional dynamics? While the early conceptions of the global city hierarchy (see Friedmann 1986) had great “face validity,” the networks and rankings that resulted were theoretical “guesstimates” made by extremely well-informed urban scholars. Moving to a more rigorous image of the morphology of the global urban hierarchy has proven to be nettlesome. Meyer (1986) made an early attempt, examining international banking headquarters in various cities in Latin America, North America and Europe; Sassen (1991) provides mountains of both national- and city-level data to make the case for the dominance of New York, Tokyo and London. Admirable as these efforts were, they still failed to directly tap the *relational* aspect of global cities.

Our recent work (Smith and Timberlake 2001) explicitly addresses this problem by using formal network analysis to examine inter-urban linkages. To date, our efforts are restricted to a particular measure of network connectivity among world cities, arguably an important indicator, but still a deeply flawed one in terms of capturing some of the theoretically significant ways in which cities are tied to one another in global networks. Specifically, our empirical work only looks at estimates of the volume of air passenger traffic, over time, among about 100 of some of the world’s most important cities. Clearly we understand that other network relations among cities would provide better bases for addressing the kinds of global political economy issues suggested above. Nevertheless, our analyses of these data leads us to an image of a hierarchical network of urban centers (with London, Paris, Frankfurt, and New York at the top) that makes theoretical sense. Nearly concurrently with our efforts have been those of a group of scholars headed by geographer Peter Taylor at the Loughborough University who followed an agenda that we originally outlined in the mid-1990s. Taylor and his associates have begun to develop a basis for broadly cooperative research on global cities and world urban hierarchies. By 1997, writing in the journal, *Cities*, Taylor was in a position to issue a plea that echoed one that we had made in a chapter that appeared in his co-edited book with Peter Hall, *World Cities in a World System* (1995).

The sizes of research tasks implied by this are daunting but they cannot be avoided if we are to come to grips with contemporary social change. The Global Observatory at Loughborough University has been set up to help facilitate such work. This initiative has now completed its establishment phase with a general plea to social science researchers to become involved in its trans-state enterprise. The heart of this paper is a special plea to readers to join in this particular research project to investigate the idea of a global system of cities (1997:331).

The GaWC (Globalization and World Cities) Study Group and Network website now houses several databases and scores of conceptual and analytical scholarly papers on world cities in a

world system. Moreover Taylor, Beaverstock, and others at Loughborough and elsewhere, have developed their own analytic strategies to statistically measure cities' network relations. Some of this work has been published in journals as well as posted as research bulletins at this website.

Comparing Findings on the Global System of Cities

In principle, the difference between a network analytic approach to exploring the idea of a world system of cities and previous approaches is the latter relied on theoretical assumptions that suggested that if cities are linked in certain ways, then they should have certain attributes (Smith and Timberlake, 1995a, 1995b). Most frequently, researchers assumed that cities in the same system would have patterns of relative population sizes that approximated a lognormal distribution of rank-sizes. Chase-Dunn (1995) used this approach in describing the world system of cities over long historical periods up until 1980. In contrast, a formal, network analytic approach relies on direct measures of *relations* between cities. Thus, assumptions about the consequences or precursors of the network positions of cities on their attributes, such as population size, are unnecessary. Instead descriptions of how cities relate to the overall network and characteristics of the overall network are directly observed and described for each particular network. With the network analytic approach to exploring the idea of a global city system, the assumptions are a bit more typical of measurement issues in the social science in general: Is the particular underlying network attribute being measured and used in the analysis theoretically significant (for purposes of the research questions being asked)? Is the measure or operationalization of this attribute valid and reliable?

Our network research with air passenger travel results in several descriptions of the world city hierarchy for various points in time over the last 20-30 years, and the GaWC group at Loughborough has produced others lists of "world-cityness" based on their quasi-network analysis of data they collected on the locations of branch offices for key producer service firms for a more narrow time range. The resulting "maps" of world city hierarchies produced by these different network measurement procedures, with some important exceptions, are largely consistent: London, New York, Tokyo and Paris consistently appear at the top of the world city hierarchy; In addition to Tokyo, East Asian cities are increasingly well-represented among the top 15-25 cities in the global hierarchy of cities.

Regional patterns. There is little doubt that the leading cities of East Asia have become increasingly prominent in the past few decades. Tokyo, of course, is one of the three cities that Sassen (1991) identifies as globally dominant. But other regional metropolises are also clearly rising into the relatively elite ranks of world cities, as well. Surely, Hong Kong, great port and the gateway for trade and finance to China, "fits" near the top of the hierarchy; Singapore seems to play an entrepot role in southeast Asia. As leading cities of their "Newly Industrialized Countries" (NICs), Seoul and Taipei are also positioned relatively high on the global urban ladder, and Beijing is becoming increasingly important as the People's Republic of China "opens up" and integrates into the global economy.

Our recent empirical research on the global network of cities based on air traffic flows, provides hard evidence of the relative rankings of the various cities in the region, as well as remarkable evidence of East Asian ascendance in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The rapid growth of air travel flows into and between East Asian cities provides some initial evidence of the region's growing importance, and the rising status of its major urban centers in the global city system (Shin and Timberlake 2001). Our quantitative network analysis of global flows between pairs of nearly 100 major cities shows that five of the top thirteen ranked cities are East Asian (five were also from Europe and three from the United States), with Seoul showing tremendous "upward mobility" to join Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok among that elite group (Smith and Timberlake 2001). The East Asian cities scored lower on network prominence than the five European cities (London, Paris, Frankfurt, and New York held the top four places in our analysis of air passenger flows in 1997). Of course, there may be some

methodological drawbacks to relying on the air traffic data¹. On the other hand, some leading scholars of global cities argue that air travel links *are*, in fact, basic sinews in the world city system (Keeling 1995; Sassen 1998). However, we also examine air traffic because it is one of a very limited number of flows for which there are accessible city-to-city data. We realize that sometimes this information may under- or over-estimate the importance of some nodes based on “accidents” in world air travel routes². But we cannot think of any obvious reason why this data would lead to artificially high scores for East Asian cities—in fact, it is very clear that the use of airline links *lowers* the score of one major city. With the presence of new “hub-like” nodes in other parts of Japan that funnel passengers and planes away from overcrowded Narita airport, it is almost certain that Tokyo’s place in the global city hierarchy is higher than this analysis suggests.

Of course, leaving aside the questions of the accuracy of the measurement (and the degree to which “noise” intrudes on “signal”) there is a broader conceptual question about what measuring city rank really means. It seems fairly obvious that world cities—especially those that are less dominant than New York and London – do not just fall into a one-dimensional hierarchy: instead, each one ends up playing a somewhat distinct global role. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is Los Angeles, which is the headquarters for few multinational corporations or financial institutions but is the dominant center for world “culture” and media in the form of “Hollywood” films and other mass media. Similarly, it makes sense to try to understand the global cities of East Asia in terms of their specific roles and functions in the world, regional and their national economies. This raises another question: How important are cities and their relative positions, compared to national political-economic systems or the international system of states and economies? We shall turn to these issues now.

Global City Networks, Nations, and the World-economy

How does the world city system articulate with the wider world-economy? In a way, this is related to one of the key questions raised in the introduction to this collection: to what extent are cities’ statuses inextricably tied to the nations in which they are located? In part, this question involves examining urban areas in terms of their countries’ relative “world-system position” on a continuum from global hegemony to dependency, or in terms of simplified images like core, semiperiphery and periphery. In East Asia, perhaps more than anywhere else on earth, this is complicated by fact that some nation states still proclaim themselves “socialist” (with enormous variance in the actual practices in these places). Indeed, the idea of “world cities in the world-system” (which mirrors Knox and Taylor’s 1995 volume) implies that there is an articulation or nesting between the global urban network and the capitalist world-economy. These two hierarchic systems clearly overlap and mutually reinforce one another (the global cities are the command and control centers for the far-flung transnational economic enterprises with global reach). Over twenty years ago, Walton (1977) suggested that the world city hierarchy is “nested” into the broader world system; today Sassen (2002) claims that global cities are key “pivots” on “global circuits.” Contemporary global restructuring may bring about changing

¹ For instance, while some other scholars believe that the “the Rhine-Main conurbation” is, indeed, a leading world city (Kunzmann 1998), the very prominent position of Frankfurt suggests the potential problem and limitation that air traffic data present. Since Frankfurt’s international airport is a major “hub” for international travel into and within Europe, we suspect that at least some of this city’s centrality in our network is dependent on the particular type of intra-city flow.

² However, we suspect that such “accidents” are increasingly the result of efforts by local “growth machine” elites to promote their land-based interests by harnessing local public support for large-scale urban development projects such as bigger airports, deeper harbors, and even Winter Olympics. This is obviously suggestive of a potentially fruitful line of inquiry linking the global to the local...and vice versa.

relationships between cities, regions, states and the global system. Peter Taylor (forthcoming) now argues that various forces of restructuring and “denationalization” of the state (cf. McMichael 1996), along with the dynamics promoting social polarization within global cities (he calls the growing urban poor and powerless “the creation of a new semi-periphery at the very heart of the world-economy”), may mean that cities will become key loci for protests against globalization and, ultimately, world capitalism, in the twenty-first century world-system. Perhaps Taylor is right to see global cities emerging as centers for progressive “anti-systemic” collective action. In any case, it makes sense to envision a more dynamic and complex world-system in the coming years, in which nation states, corporate actors, and transnational classes remain key players, but the importance of key global cities fulfilling their “command post” functions becomes hard to ignore, and global urban networks become more obvious in defining the contours of the world-economy.

Regional patterns. The issue of the complex interplay between the roles of cities (and urban-based interests), states and world-economic forces is much more difficult to describe in a quick overview for the region. Clearly, Tokyo is every bit the global command and control post that Sassen describes—and its dominant role as a quasi-imperial center for East Asia is even more indisputable. Japanese firms, with guidance, finance, and often direct coordination from the state, are the dominant players throughout the East Asian region (Johnson 1982). Rather than relying on American-style foreign direct investment, Japanese capital frequently exerts control of far-flung business empires indirectly through licensing of technology (Smith 1997) or control of shipping and access to resources (Bunker and Ciccantell 1995). Hong Kong and Singapore are also centers for finance and business services that control and coordinate global sourcing in low-wage manufacturing in mainland China and southeast Asia, respectively.

Even Seoul and Taipei, have become crucial intermediaries in the global manufacture of consumer goods like clothing and electronics. These types of goods are now produced via “buyer driven commodity chains” (Gereffi 1994)—US- firms, often retailing giants Walmart or Macy’s, sometimes famous labels like Nike or Liz Clairborne—developed a relationship with firms in Taipei and Seoul during Taiwanese and Korean economic miracles of the 1970s and 1980s, when these NICs shoe and apparel factories were highly competitive. Today the low-wage manufacturing has largely moved offshore to the Chinese mainland, Indonesia and other parts of southeast Asia (Smith 1996) – but the orders continue to flow through Seoul and Taipei. The Korean and Taiwanese firms play the role of global middlemen, taking the order from US buyers and seeing to it that factories in rural China or Vietnam produce the goods, on time and of sufficient quality. In this way, Seoul and Taipei have managed to retain their roles as important mediating nodes in global commodity chains. Of course, the irony that “socialist” China and Vietnam are such integral parts of global capitalist production chains is one of those wonderful ironies of the contemporary world-system.

The issue of “communist states” ruling from Beijing, Hanoi or Pyongyang, raises another set of conceptual issues about the nature of regional urban variation. In an influential book in the mid-1980s, Whyte and Parish (1984) argued that the Chinese cities in the People’s Republic are rather distinctive, essentially arguing that “the highly developed bureaucratic allocation system” of the socialist state created institutional patterns quite different from those found in western capitalist urban areas (although the authors point out that some of the results are unanticipated, contradictory, and fail to realize their egalitarian goals). The notion that urbanization dynamics are (and/or should be) distinct in socialist versus capitalist societies seems logical and was widely accepted during the heyday of the “eastern bloc” (see Szelenyi 1983). The remarkably well preserved traditional core areas of central cities in places like Prague in the late 1980s or Hanoi a decade later, do suggest that communist planning and control had some impact on urban development, at least slowing the predation inherent in capitalist real estate markets. But the clear impression that even causal observers get is that places like China and Vietnam have undergone massive changes in the past decade or so. Various reforms in China, particularly those initiated under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in the mid-1980s, led to an unprecedented

growth of market exchange within that nation, as well as an opening to external trade and investment. Similar tendencies—if somewhat less pronounced—are present in Vietnam (Tran and Smith 1998). (Enigmatic North Korea appears to be an exception – but, of course, even this rigid society could change rapidly if the current dialogue on “reunification” with South Korea goes in certain, as yet rather unpredictable, directions). The bottom-line is that despite avowing continued adherence to socialist ideologies, the Chinese and Vietnamese regimes are working hard to re-integrate their economies into global capitalism. This means that Ho Chi Minh City is rapidly becoming more like Bangkok or Jakarta in its form and function, while the formerly distinct Chinese cities also are rapidly becoming more like counterparts in the rest of East Asia (e.g., Song and Timberlake, 1996) (some highly publicized examples of the clearing of traditional housing compounds in Beijing to make way for shopping plazas and high-rise office buildings illustrates this). Indeed, perhaps the most interesting question about contemporary China for comparative urbanists is the emergence of Shanghai as a potential challenger to Hong Kong for the role as a premiere gateway for trade, commerce and investment in the country’s interior, with its huge market and enormous supply of labor. This may be a case of a new “global city” in the making.

Global City Status = Intraurban Structure?

The final issue swirling around “the world city hypothesis” involves the notion that the global city status has ramifications for social dynamics within these urban areas. The literature on world cities suggests that these most dominant urban places are also centers of some of the global economy’s most severe and intractable contradictions. The great metropolises at the lofty heights of the urban dominance structure are home, simultaneously to enormous wealth and poverty, they are the locus of tremendous power, but also centers of polarization and marginalization. Various case studies provide qualitative and quantitative evidence of growing inequality in world cities (cf. King 1990; Sassen 1991: Ch. 8 & 9), and Sassen attempts to explain how the concentration of upper-income business professionals in global cities creates pressure for gentrification forcing poor people from affordable housing, while simultaneously generating demand for low-wage, sometimes informalized service jobs that attend to the needs of these wealthy residents. While the link between global cities and polarization seems to be borne out by some data—and the fact that contemporary cities like New York, London, or even Tokyo empirically fit effectively debunks that fallacious image associated with urban boosterism that moving to world city status is an unalloyed benefit to all city residents. However, recent evidence suggests that socio-economic polarization is increasing world-wide promoted by policies of “global neo-liberalism.” This raises some important questions: Is the increased inequality reported in various urban case studies really intrinsically linked to global cities? What particular mechanism might be at work in these places that do not operate elsewhere?

Regional patterns. Sassen’s book shows that there are surprising parallels between Tokyo and London/New York, in terms of undocumented migrants and polarization. Cities like Seoul also exhibit some similar patterns that defy our images of that city, in particular, and of South Korea, more generally. Illustrating this are the presence, not only of a small but significant number of illegal immigrants from southeast Asia, but also of a far larger and more invisible group of undocumented migrants who are ethnic Koreans from the PRC. The evidence also suggests that the aftermath of “the East Asian financial crisis” in cities like Seoul will lead to increased levels of inequality: the middle classes and small business are the ones who have been the most battered by “the IMF crisis” (as it is called in local parlance). The gathering of hundreds (thousands?) of Filipino maids and housekeepers each Sunday morning in a downtown square in Hong Kong, suggests that some of the dynamics of global city polarization are occurring in the former crown colony, as well.

On the other hand, we must seriously consider the counter-argument presented by Richard C. Hill and June Kim (2000), who vigorously dispute the world city hypothesis about

polarization for Tokyo and Seoul. They claim that the presence of developmental states in East Asia, and the pattern of late industrialization make unique (a) Tokyo's global role (to a more nationally focused center), (b) the mix between service and manufacturing employment there, and (c) low levels of socio-economic polarization. These authors provide a rather similar argument about Seoul. Their argument hinges on the claim that Tokyo and Seoul are cities in the hands of a (wiser and more benign?) political bureaucratic elite rather than the transnational bourgeoisie. They also assume that the underlying logic of economic growth and urbanization lie within these societies' distinctive national and regional characteristics.

But there is some reasons for skepticism: although there are, of course, salient differences in the structure and composition of the global financial and transnational producer firms headquartered in Tokyo and New York City (or London, which they discuss very little), Hill and Kim seem to minimize the degree to which Tokyo and Japanese interests benefit from regional and global capitalist dynamics that generate extreme inequality, particularly in the East Asian region. Some of the "anomalies" that they observe—like a higher level of manufacturing employment within Tokyo and Seoul—may be artifacts of the sprawling size of these cities, whose political boundaries were drawn to encompass large expanses of ex-urban space. Finally, while we admire the successes of the developmentalist state and acknowledge the distinctiveness of the East Asian model in the past few decades, there is growing evidence that the pressures of "global neo-liberalism" are weighing heavily on these societies. Even the current President of South Korea is a vocal supporter of western-style globalization and, implicitly, the dismantling of the developmentalist state. While we think this may be a fundamental policy mistake which could damage South Korea's future prospects for continued upward mobility in the world-system, it is rather strong evidence against an enlightened political bureaucratic elite that pursue policies distinctly different from a transnational capitalist class. Furthermore, it strikes us that only a very narrow interpretation of the world city hypothesis would anticipate uniform patterns and processes in every major center. There are bound to be differences between upper level world cities—indeed, we would *expect* variations based on their non-identical roles and positions in global networks, not to mention differences of the sort Hill and Kim point to—those borne of distinct histories and cultures. It's possible that we might ultimately reject the global city assumptions that key cities are distinctive because of their structural positions in the world city hierarchy, and instead focus on global processes that generate inequality and uneven development everywhere. But, to dismiss global forces as strongly, if not exclusively, determinant of urban morphology and change seems naïve. Whether we like it or not, we do live in a unified capitalist world-economy. In our view this is the reality as we begin the twenty first century. Hill and Kim (2000) claim that contemporary New York, Tokyo and Seoul are "cities lodged within a non-hegemonic and interdependent world political economy divided among differently organized national systems and regional alliances" (2188). Their implication is that we must understand each city and region as following distinctive regional or national trajectory, somewhat akin to the old separate paths argument of modernization theorists. If this sort of view was ever tenable, it certainly no longer is today.

"Dependent Cities"? Urbanization and Underdevelopment

If we take the notion of a global urban network seriously, that web reaches out to virtually all points on the planet today. While they are relatively low on the world hierarchy the giant lead cities of most of the earth's poor countries are linked into this system in structurally peripheral positions, at the fringes of these networks. These conurbations are also peripheral in a world-system sense (cf. Walton 1982) and they are examples of dependent urbanization (Castells 1977: Ch. 3).

These concepts, of course, were central to the 1980s version of "the urbanization in the world-economy" approach, but are little used now. It is clearly true that an oversimplified theory: of dependent urbanization, positing bifurcating paths of core and peripheral city growth,

or even one that used a Wallersteinian tripartite division (arguing for distinctive semiperipheral urbanization patterns) was bound to quickly run into empirical problems. There really are many variations on the general urban themes across the face of the planet—and they *do* reflect local historical contexts and regional trajectories, as well as the structural positions that cities and their hinterlands occupy in global hierarchies. No simple categorization will explain this diversity—the type of synthetic urban theory building that a new approach to cities in the world-system should attempt would be much more complicated (Smith 1995). The idea is to use the concept of dependency or peripherality as an entry point for global historical studies of cities and as a tool to pry into the political economy of urbanization in varied circumstances (see Timberlake 1985). This was a productive theme of many of the case studies of Third World urbanization of the 1980s.

As we enter the new century, cities in the poor and underdeveloped regions of the world are growing as rapidly as ever and are sites of immense inequality, poverty and deprivation, and human suffering. But comparative urban studies seems to be at an impasse: the favored terminology to describe these places is “megacity” (Dogan and Kasarda 1988). But, while this nomenclature is widely used it is not very theoretically useful: if it implies anything beyond a description of the great scale of these urban areas, it can only be conceptually confounding, by implying similarities based on sheer size. Alternative approaches that emphasize distinctive regional patterns of urbanization (cf. Gugler 1996) are better at capturing historical nuances—but this also ends up offering little overarching theoretical direction.

Regional patterns. Detailed case studies of the various relatively underdeveloped countries of Southeast Asia lie well beyond our purview in this paper (see Smith 1996: Chapter 6 for an attempt to do this in historical perspective). Here we only present some “stylized facts” from a rather impressionistic tale of three cities: Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

Jakarta is the giant sprawling capital of Indonesia. It’s now home to about 20 million people. It is a city of stark contrasts (Sudarmo 1997; Jellinek 2000). On the one hand, are vast expanses of shimmering skyscrapers and six- and eight-lane highways, a downtown filled with luxury hotels and the corporate logos of the world’s pre-eminent multinational firms and populated by elegantly dressed men and women who work, recreate, shop, and dine in the ultra-modern fully air-conditioned buildings of the city’s core. Rapid development in the boom years of the 1970s and 1980s led to an orgy of conspicuous consumption by the elites (Jellinek 2000). But there is a dark underside to Jakarta: the less visible parts of the city, where the masses of residents live in squalid slums, shantytowns and squatter settlements, hoping to find employment in either the vast informal sector or in an outlying export processing zone, where workers earn the rupee equivalent of about \$2 per day. Needless to say, after the East Asian economic crisis hit Indonesia with particular ferocity, the situation got even worse: “estimates suggest that 60 to 70 percent of the middle to low income communities on the edges of Jakarta have suddenly fallen below the poverty line” (Jellinek 2000:275) This is a city that can be described as the epitome of the “overurbanized” dependent city of peripheral capitalism.

The two cities of Vietnam offer interesting parallels and contrasts. Recent urban history in the country follow a rather unusual path: while Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and Hanoi have been the leading cities in the south and north, respectively, throughout the past century, the dynamics of population growth in both places were linked to the vagaries of war and changing government policies—these tended to slow urban growth in Hanoi and actual “de-urbanization” in Ho Chi Minh City during the period ending in the mid-1980s (Thrift and Forbes 1986). More recently, as the government leadership pushes cautiously and uncertainly toward market reforms and the country moves toward reintegration into the global economy (Tran and Smith 1998), a process of rapid city growth concentrated in the largest cities, parallel to the pattern in many other poor less developed countries, has begun. Mundle and Arkadie (1997) argue that the urban population is “expected to double over the next 15 years,” with about half

the population living in cities within 25 years (up from about 20 percent now)³. But the growth in the two major urban areas is distinctive. While Hanoi is the capital city, it is a remarkably quiet city with a marked traditional feel to it. The population is probably a little over one million people⁴. Even in the central districts most of the buildings are rather old—and many are residential. In the late 1990s the bicycles remain a major mode of transportation with motorcycles becoming the preferred form, and cars still rather exceptional. Ho Chi Minh City, on the other hand, is now approaching 5 million residents; its streets contain few bicycles, many motorcycles and increasing numbers of automobiles. The commercial core of the city is crowded and (like so many other Third World cities) becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate by foot due to dramatically increased motor traffic and a tendency toward urban sprawl. The logos of western-headquartered firms are much more evident here than in Hanoi. Mundle and Arkadie discusses the challenges poised by the increasing urban primacy of Ho Chi Minh City, as it grows more rapidly than all other urban places. One senses greater degrees of inequality here, too: the affluent are more noticeable here than in the north, yet there is also evidence of great poverty, as well.

Though this sketch is meant to be evocative rather than conclusive, we would suggest that these three cities reflect varying degrees of global dependency and peripherality—Jakarta, like much of Indonesia has a long neocolonial relationship of complete accessibility to foreign capital that stretches back to World War II and earlier. Vietnam, on the other hand, did make an attempt in the period after the war ended in the 1970s to develop in a socialist manner and to isolate itself from the capitalist world-economy (a policy choice that was no doubt reinforced by the imposition of a U.S. trade embargo from 1975 through the mid-1990s; see Tran and Smith 1998). The gradual (but not always linear) movement toward market reforms and opening in Vietnam have also taken on a distinctive geographic character, as Ho Chi Minh City and the southern part of the country consistently led the way, while bureaucratic control and adherence to socialist planning remained stronger in the north, and particularly in Hanoi. To us this suggests that the process of dependent urbanization should be much further along in the former than in the latter – and this, indeed, seems to be the case.

We do not pretend to have hard evidence of divergent patterns of city growth in the northern and southern metropolises of Vietnam—or empirical data that other so-called megacities in the relatively underdeveloped countries of Southeast Asia (such as Jakarta, or Bangkok or Manila) are following a trajectory that can be characterized as dependent urbanization. Frankly, the type of research that is needed to explore these issues—involving both comparative work that might include statistical profiles and quantitative analysis and ethnographic and historical case studies of particular cities—seems to have fallen out of favor with urban sociologists. Indeed, most of the current studies of urbanization in this world region seem to have been left to urban planners and local policy-making agencies. We think it would be a good time for a revitalization of more systematic, theoretically-motivated, sociological research in this area.

The type of work that we have in mind is found in an interesting attempt to do this sort of work, a collection of recent essays on the urban Caribbean (Portes, Dore-Cabral, and Landolt 1997). The authors attempt to collect comparative data on demographic patterns, economic

³ Mundle and Arkadie (1997: 7) note that the official statistical data on urban populations and growth is “somewhat confusing” and that it seems likely that government data underestimates the growth of the major cities. While unofficial sources estimate large numbers of rural-to-urban migrants (particularly moving into Ho Chi Minh City), government sources, rather implausibly, suggest that urban populations fell between 1990 and 1994. The demographic numbers provided in this paper are the best estimates we could find – but they must be approached with some caution.

⁴ Population estimates for Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are for 1999 from the Vietnam Economic Information Network (<http://www.vneconomy.com.vn>) which reports official government statistics.

changes, urban inequality and poverty, residential segregation, political participation, etc, on various large cities in the Caribbean archipelago. While the resulting case studies are empirically uneven, they are motivated by common concerns about how the interaction between global dynamics and historically conditioned local and national conditions effect urban outcomes. This combines an appreciation of national/regional distinctiveness in the face of increasingly strong integrating and subordinating pressure from the new global economy (which may weigh particularly heavily on this region in the shadow of the United States). One can imagine a similar study of peripheral cities in Southeast Asia, which might take the distinctive geo-political and economic realities of their regional context.

The larger point is that theoretically informed research on cities and urban systems in the South (or “the periphery”) still holds great promise. It is important that comparative urban studies move beyond mere description (of either the quantitative or qualitative sort) as well as intellectual barren eclecticism, and return to systematic, conceptually-rich, research that takes the theory building project seriously again. In this essay, we argue for a revitalization of an urbanization in the world-economy perspective, which can integrate recent work on global cities and hierarchies with renewed attention to dependent cities in peripheral areas of the global economy. New studies in this genera must begin by situating cities and urban systems in the hierarchic global system (of world cities and world-system), understand the underlying capitalist dynamic of the process, appreciate that national and regional contextual variations will come into play, and focus on the essential political nature of the processes and roles of state (local as well as national) and corporate actors. Furthermore, this research should be multimethodological, and it must be attuned to the changing rhythms of capital accumulation and how that will affect the nature of urban development. A renewal of this broad focus on cities in the world-economy would help comparative urban scholars sift and sort through what we have learned about cities in various parts of the world (and, perhaps, inform the work of enlightened planners and policy-makers, while also pointing to priorities for further research). Similarly, bringing cities back in to a more central role in studies of global political economy and the contemporary world system –at a time when some cities may be eclipsing many states in terms their global reach–should be equally important to unraveling the complexities of global capitalism in the 21st century.

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