

James Burnes  
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### Problems with Provincialization

Regarding any spatial or geocentric view of history without context of its neighbors either physical or metaphysical leaves the historian with only part of a narrative. Interpreting any historical phenomena without reflecting on its place within the whole is the same as attempting to interpret a painting by only studying a single corner. A general idea or a rough outline might be surmised, but to get the full impact of the work, it must be viewed holistically. The arguments for “provincializing” Europe with regards to the history of science appear to be attempts to make Europe more of an equal player in the historiography of the history of science. That is to say, studying Europe with regards to its neighbors, both geographically and intellectually.

The benefits of this type of provincialization are numerous. On the holistic worldview one could trace the evolution of mechanical and scientific thought through stages from simple to complex machines. This could stand in comparison with other studies and could theoretically be used to chart whether or not mechanical complexity evolves along the same curve when compared with say literacy levels. Output of economical trends could be compared between societies that utilize the wheel and those who never have. Comparison of outcomes is only the basic use of the historiological data.

If the focus is taken off of Europe as the genesis of science, the birth of science among other cultures can be studied more readily and understood from

their genesis and not in comparison to what the establishment was doing in Europe. Did a single heavenly phenomenon observable to the entire eastern hemisphere promote the Arabs, the Indians, and the Chinese to simultaneously stress the importance of astronomy? Did Mayan culture observe any of the same comets that Chinese astronomer's mapped? The ability to look at instances such as this and others from a global perspective could increase understanding of cultures and how they related to one another in ways never before questioned.

The problems that this line of research faces are daunting, but not insurmountable. The fact that European genesis for high thinking is engrained in western researchers is the foremost obstacle to overcome. The prejudices marked by colonial occupation and recordkeeping of indigenous and "primitive" tribes only add to the issue. The mind's eye and historical presumptions must be swept clean and begin anew if any headway is to be made. This problem is illustrated perfectly by Neil Safier's description of Alexandra Ferrier in *Global Knowledge on the Move*. He describes Ferrier as thinking "like a European" even though he was a Brazilian-born naturalist.

There are more localized issues as well. Marwa Elshakry in *When Science Became Western* points out that the idea of what "science" actually changes temporally and spatially. If a consensus on what "science" constitutes cannot be reached how can any type of holistic study be fruitful? This is possibly the greatest obstacle, second only to existing prejudices, to the successful provincialization of Europe on the world stage of the history of science.

Other issues arise when comparing European colonial histories written by missionaries, travelers, and governors with that of a national history written by the indigenous people. This is not always an issue given that some areas did not record a history, or their records were destroyed before they were ever deciphered. But in the cases where they do exist they create a special quandary for the historian. Sujit Sivasundaram's discussion of the Sri Lankan texts in *Sciences and the Global* specifically illustrates the methodological maze that must be navigated. In 2012 The East Asia Science, Technology and Society forum aimed to discuss the more global issue of the "Great Divergence" that is the stagnation of Asian science as European science rose to a world dominating stage.

This discussion raised an interesting idea of going to far in global studies. When attempting to bring all sides to light historians run the risk of creating too many factional histories that all stand alone in their relationship within the global scientific and technological narrative. A balance of individualistic and nationalistic interpretations must be maintained or the pendulum of provincialization will have swung too far in the opposite direction, from a single dominating scientific genesis to a multi-fragmented and what is worse an unrelated multi-genesis. In the case of the provincialization of Europe in the sense of History of Science care must be taken so that the sum of parts equals the whole.