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Comprehensive Exam Definition (First Field)
Spring 2012

Critical Theories of Globalization: Capitalism, State, and Global Order

The current epoch of capitalism is characterized with the accelerating process of globalization. This field will examine the contested theories and discourses of globalization in the spectrum of critical perspectives, focusing on the intertwined logic of capital and state in this process, the aggregated (or decentralized?) hegemonic power in the current neo-liberal global order, and the forces of resistance that provide the possibilities of constructing a more equal and just global society.

The reading list encompasses five paradigms of critical theories of globalization: the World-System paradigm, the thesis of “new imperialism”, the postmodern approach, the global capitalism thesis, and transnational communications. I will mainly focus on the potential reading questions as follows: (1) how to situate globalization in the historical stage of capitalism? (2) What are the key features of contemporary global capitalism, especially with regard to the significance of information and communication in constructing the “informationalized global capitalism”? (3) Has the expansion of global capital resulted in a fundamental crisis in the legitimacy of the nation-state? What is the reconstituted relationship between capital and state in the global era? (4) What are the features of current global order? Has globalization led to the concentration of hegemonic power or multi-polar power centers? (5) What has been changed in the class structure with the newly emerging global capital accumulation? Have new forces of resistance been constituted to challenge the unequal global order? Drawing on these questions, the contention and consensus arising from the different paradigms and perspectives will be fully explored as the internal logic of the exam.

The first section of the reading list focuses on the world-system paradigm. One of the key assumptions for the world-system theorists is to view the formation of the world-system as a historical process of capitalism. Within this system, globalization is not a qualitative transformation but a continuous phenomenon accompanying with the birth and the spread of world capitalism (Wallerstein, 1979; Arrighi, 1994). The key structure of the capitalist world-system is the division of the world into three strata which are based on geographical and hierarchical tiers: the core, periphery, and semi-periphery countries. In addition to the hierarchical structure of economic relations, the unequal distribution of political power is considered as another immanent feature of the capitalist world-system. The world-system theory believes that the core states are hierarchically organized around a “hegemon” within which the leading country exercises its domination and control over the system. The inter-state rivalries for world market and the hegemonic power reflect the logic of imperialism (Wallerstein, 1979; Arrighi, 1994). Arrighi (1994, 2005) specifically highlights the “systemic cycles of accumulation” as a fundamental analytical unit of capitalist development. He argues that financial expansion is the key factor that drove the shift of hegemon from preceding cycle of accumulation to the new phase. In the cycle of hegemonic transitions, the capitalist and territorialist logics of power are embedded in the expansion of capitalist world system, reflecting the dynamic relations between capital and nation-state in the transformation of capitalism.

The world-system paradigm has been challenged by some criticisms. William Robinson (2011) argues that the world-system theory only views market exchange as a fundamental feature of capitalism, ignoring the ownership of property and productive relations within the system. On the other hand, world-system theories also face criticism which claims that this approach incorrectly attributes the problems of inequality to external factors. According to this criticism, the world-system paradigm fails to fully take into account the internal factors, especially the class structure within the peripheral and core societies, which also plays a dominant role in shaping the hierarchy and inequality of the world capitalism. The emphasis on external exploitation merely portrays indigenous ruling class as the passive follows, victims, or agents of core countries (Shannon, 1996).

The second section of the reading list looks at the thesis of new imperialism. For some political economist scholars, they argue that globalization should be understood in terms of the hegemonic power, particular the imperialist power that dominates the current global order. Ellen Meiksins Wood (2003) portrays current global order as “new imperialism” driven by universalized logic of capitalism. With regard to the relationship between capital and state, Wood argues that globalization does not necessarily lead to a system of declining nation states, but rather stronger roles played by nation-states in sustaining imperialist power. Panitch and Gindin (2004) address that the US has constituted “informal empire” within which the US incorporates its capitalist rivals and undertakes the leading role of globalization. The expansive flow of capital across boundaries led by the US-based transnational corporations directly affected the class structures and state formation of the other countries (Panitch & Gindin, 2004). David Harvey (2003) examines the thesis of new imperialism from a different perspective. He conceptualizes capitalist imperialism as a contradictory fusion of “the politics of state and empire” and “the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time” (p.26). For Harvey, the rise of new imperialism is associated with the world crisis of overaccumulation since the 1970s (Harvey, 2003, 2005, 2010). To resolve this crisis, imperial states and dominant capitalist class adopt the approach of “accumulation by dispossession” to further enforce the hegemonic power, which inevitably leads to the concentration of social wealth and polarization.

The critique of the U.S. hegemony is the central aspect of the new imperialism thesis. In the new global order, the US provides a model for other states to emulate and force them to take the neo-liberal road. The universal and standardized values of development have penetrated into different social spheres, echoing Wood’s thesis of “universalization of capitalism” (Wood, 2003). In addition to the imposition of the neo-liberal orthodoxy, the emulation of US consumerism, American lifestyle, and cultural forms also reflect the distributive power of the US hegemony. However, recently there has been a heated debate about the counter-hegemonic forces against the US imperialism. Whether the emerging developing countries could provide an alternative model to the dominant one or whether the rise of these countries only resembles the old path of development has become the center of the debate (Harvey, 2003; 2005; Panitch & Gindin, 2004; Arrighi, 2005, 2007).

The new imperialism thesis confronts a direct challenge from postmodern theory of globalization. The third section of the reading list specifically looks at the postmodern perspective and critiques of this approach. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s co-authored book *Empire* is one of the most influential works in the debate of globalization. Hardt and Negri’s (2000) define the empire as “a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its

open, expanding frontiers” (p.xii). The passage from imperialism to empire signifies that the global order has shifted from inter-state competition to a “smooth” place that establishes no territorial center of power. This transition was realized through the postmodern shift in the mode of production, mainly reflected in the rise of post-Fordist production. The global economy led by the US has also undergone a process of postmodernization toward an informational economy in which knowledge, information and communication have played increasingly important roles in production. This process of informatization involves a change in the nature of labor as well. Hardt and Negri’s (2000) argue that the emergence of immaterial labor in the informational economy represents brand new production relations and laboring practices.

The deterritorialized empire gave rise to an open field of resistance which overcomes the barriers of nation-state boundaries and fosters a unified force across the world. For Hardt and Negri’s (2000), the potential of counter-empire revolution resides in the agent of “multitude”. It involves a “new proletariat”—material or immaterial, intellectual or corporeal—who produces and reproduces social life and who are exploited by capital in the biopolitical context of Empire. This concept is revolutionary because it reverses the limitation of class reductionism and opens up broader possibilities of resistance. However, Hardt and Negri’s are too optimistic with their conception of “multitude” to identify specific agency of resistance. As Wood (2003) argues, the alternative path provided by Hardt and Negri’s is only “some inchoate and immaterial resistance to some mystically ubiquitous force, in some unspecified form, outside any comprehensible space or time” (p.169). Arrighi (2003) also criticizes that the road to the emancipation for all citizens can be expected to be far longer, bumpier and more treacherous than Hardt and Negri’s maintain (p.37).

The following section focuses on the thesis of global capitalism. This theory distinguishes itself from state-centric paradigm and postmodern studies of globalization. Leslie Sklair (2001, 2002) put forward a global system theory to generalize the nature of globalization. He proposes that the most important forces of globalization are transnational corporations, transnational capitalist class, and the culture-ideology of consumerism. He particularly focuses on the rise of transnational capitalist class (TCC) in the practice of global economy. William Robinson (2004, 2008) has advanced a related theory of critical global capitalism by focusing on three perspectives: transnational production, transnational capitalist class and transnational state. Specifically, transnational corporation (TNC) as an active agent in organizing global production and in shaping the formation of TCC has become the focus of research for the theories of global capitalism. Some scholars (Scott, 1997; Holton, 1998; Sklair, 2001, 2002; Carroll, 2010) pay particular attention on the rise of corporate power network, the hierarchical structure of corporate organizations, and its influence on cultivating transnational capitalist class.

The thesis of global capitalism is significant as it explicitly points out the transformation of social relations in the process of globalization. As Robinson (2004, 2008) states, globalization is not a national project but a class project. However, the thesis of global capitalism is problematic in some aspects. Though their argument refutes the dualism between territorial and capital logics in the thesis of new imperialism, at the same time it also commits to the other extreme that completely subsumes the nation-state sovereignty in the single logic of global capitalism (Wood, 2007). Moreover, the theory is not convincing enough to explain the coexistence of statism and nationalism in the process of

globalization. Another problem arises from their optimistic view that sees globalization as a very smooth and autonomous transition without consideration of the internal contradiction and antagonism. But as pointed out by Arrighi (2001), the transition from the nation-state phase to the world-state phase of capitalism will be filled with conflicts and struggles, the process of which will stretch over several centuries.

The intersection of communication and globalization has increasingly become another noticeable issue in the studies of globalization. Hence, the final section is grounded in the reading of transnational communication and informational globalization. General theories of globalization mentioned above mainly focus on the mutually constitutive relationship between capital and state. The final section specifically looks at the integration of communication and information technologies into the escalated process of globalization, examining the role of media and communication in shaping the new natures of capitalism, state and global order.

In the postwar era, the project of development communication was developed as a dominant paradigm to promote in developing countries (Spark, 2007). Opposing to such dominant discourse of modernization in the field of communications, the thesis of media-cultural imperialism was developed. Some critical communication scholars, such as Herbert Schiller (1976, 1991, 1992), Dallas Smythe (1981), Armand Mattelart (1979), initiated a substantial debate over the US domination in the cultural and media industry and called for a democratic movement to achieve a new international order of communication and information. However, the thesis of media-cultural imperialism was attacked by some criticism, especially by the mainstream paradigm of globalization since the 1990s (Spark, 2007, p.126). With the increasing popularity of post-structuralist and post-modern approaches in communication and media studies, theories of global culture emerged as an important branch of the globalization paradigm. In contrast to the argument of cultural domination emphasized by the political economic perspective, scholars of global culture theories are more concerned with the tension between cultural homogenization and heterogenization, between universalism and particularism, and between globalization and localization in the process of cultural globalization (Featherstone, 1994).

As Mosco (2009) suggests, the post-structuralist and the post-modern criticism “deepened the divide between a global political economy of communication and the emergence of a global cultural studies”. However, the divide of global communications studies has been overcome by Charkavartty and Zhao’s conception of “transcultural political economy” which bridges the approaches of political economy and cultural studies in a unified framework. As Charkavartty and Zhao (2008) identifies, the approach of “transcultural political economy” enables critical scholars to “integrate institutional and cultural analyses and address urgent questions in global communications in the context of economic integration, empire formation, and the tensions associated with adapting new privatized technologies, neoliberalized and globalized institutional structures, and hybrid cultural forms and practices” (p.10). On the other hand, their works make a remarkable contribution in the studies of global communications by involving and presenting non-Western scholars’ perspectives and empirical research.

With the emergence and development of the information society, the contemporary process of globalization has been escalated by new communication and information technologies. Manuel Castells’ (1996) influential metaphor of the “network society” implies a “technologicistic” approach to

globalization. However, the celebration of such a radical shift to the network society serves to conceal the social contradictions and the unequal power relations underpinning the new social modality to which Mosco (2004) refers as the “digital sublime”. In contrast, the political economic approach pays particular attention to the social relations of capitalism constituted and reshaped by new information technologies. In the *Digital Capitalism*, Schiller (2000) addresses how digital capitalism is driven by the neoliberal and market-driven logic in the global system. With regard to the relationship between capital and state, Dan Schiller argues that the state and the transnational capital have formed the cooperative relationships, contributing to the expansion of neo-liberal capitalism and the consolidation of the US hegemony. In *How to Think about Information*, Dan Schiller (2006) refutes the dominant discourse of the information society, claiming that the so-called information era only represents a continuity of the capitalist development.

In the theories of information society, one of the key arguments specifically deals with the rise of knowledge and informational labor. From the critical perspective, the exploitative relationships between capital and labor stay intact in the information society (Schiller, 2006). Deriving from the dependency theory and the world-system paradigm, the critical perspective of the new international division of labor (NIDL) specifically looks at the spatial division of labor in the post-Fordist context. Gerald Sussman (1998) defines that the “information society” is based on a new international division of labor sharing a production platform but dispersed into segmented zones of industrial, semi-industrial and Third World societies (p.1). This mode of production and division of labor further exacerbates the inequality in the global system (Sussman, 1998, p.11).

Mosco and McKercher (2007, 2009) acknowledge the central role of knowledge workers in the construction of the global information society and address workers’ agency in mobilizing and organizing labor movement through trade union convergence. Drawing on the traditions of the autonomist Marxism, Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999) reconstitutes labor and class struggle as a vital category of analysis in the information society. He argues that the capitalist globalization is accompanying with the “other globalization” (p.164) which is characterized with countermovement confronting transnational capital. This opposing tendency and struggle successfully draws on the emancipatory nature of new technologies and the emerging knowledge workers’ subjectivities, which provides a positive and practical solution to challenge the unequal global order.

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Reading List

(A) World-system Paradigm

1. Arrighi, G. (1994). *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*. Verso Books.
2. Arrighi, G. (2005). Hegemony Unraveling–II. *New Left Review*, 33, 83–116.
3. Robinson, W. I. (2011). Globalization and the Sociology of Immanuel Wallerstein: A Critical Appraisal. *International Sociology*, 26(6), 723-745.

4. Shannon, T. R. (1989). *An Introduction to the World-system Perspective*. Westview Press Boulder, CO.

5. Wallerstein, I. M. (1979). *The Capitalist World-economy: Essays*. Cambridge Univ Pr.

(B) The New Imperialism Thesis

6. Arrighi, G. (2007). *Adam Smith in Beijing : Lineages of the Twenty-first Century*. London ; New York: Verso.

7. Harvey, D. (2003). *The New Imperialism*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

8. Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

9. Harvey, D. (2010). *The Enigma of Capital : And the Crises of Capitalism*. London: Profile.

10. Panitch, L., & Gindin, S. (2004). *Global Capitalism and American Empire*. London: Merlin Press.

11. Wood, E. M. (2003). *Empire of Capital*. New York: VERSO.

(C) A Postmodern Shift: From Imperialism to Empire

12. Arrighi, G. (2003). Lineages of Empire. In Gopal Balakrishnan (Ed.), *Debating Empire* (pp. 29-42). London, New York: Verso.

13. Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

14. Wood, E. M. (2003). A Manifesto for Global Capitalism? In Gopal Balakrishnan (Ed.), *Debating Empire* (pp. 61-82). London, New York: Verso.

(D) The Thesis of Global Capitalism

15. Arrighi, G. (2001). Global Capitalism and the Persistence of the North-South Divide. *Science & Society*, 65(4), 469-476.

16. Carroll, W. K. (2010). *Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class*, the Zed Books.

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19. Robinson, W. I. (2008). *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

20. Scott, J. (1997). *Corporate Business and Capitalist Classes*. Oxford England ; New York: Oxford University Press.

21. Sklair, L. (2002). *Globalization: Capitalism and its Alternatives*. Oxford University Press Oxford.

22. Sklair, L. (2001). *The Transnational Capitalist class*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

23. Wood, E. M. (2007). A Reply to Critics. *Historical Materialism*, 15(3), 143-170.

(E) **Transnational Communication and Informationalized Globalization**

24. Castells, M. (2010). *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd). Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

25. Chakravartty, P., & Zhao, Y. (2008). *Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

26. Dyer-Witheford, N. (1999). *Cyber-Marx : Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-technology Capitalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

27. Featherstone, M. (1994). *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. Sage Publications.

28. Mattelart, A., & Chanan, M. (1979). *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture: The Ideological Apparatuses of Imperialism*. Harvester Press Brighton.

29. McKercher, C., & Mosco, V. (Eds.). (2007). *Knowledge Workers in the Information Society*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

30. Mosco, V. (2004). *The Digital Sublime*. MIT Press Cambridge, MA.

31. Mosco, V., & McKercher, C. (2009). *The Laboring of Communication: Will Knowledge Workers of the World Unite?* Rowman & Littlefield.

32. Mosco, V. (2009). *The Political Economy of Communication* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE.

33. Schiller, D. (2000). *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System*. The MIT Press.

34. Schiller, D. (2006). *How to Think about Information*. University of Illinois Press.

35. Schiller, H. I. (1976). *Communication and Cultural Domination*. White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press.

36. Schiller, H. I. (1991). Not yet the Post-imperialist Era. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 8(1), 13-28.

37. Schiller, H. I. (1992). *Mass Communications and American Empire* (2nd , updat ed.). Boulder: Westview Press.

38. Smythe, D. W., & Walker, D. (1981). *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada* Ablex Publishing Corporation.

39. Sussman, G., & Lent, J. A. (1998). *Global productions: Labor in the making of the "information society"* Hampton Pr.