Part II

Theory and critiques
3. Theoretical frontiers in world-systems analysis
3.1 Externality, contact periphery and incorporation

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I summarize and discuss “incorporation” and the “external arena” in the expanding modern world-system, and their relationship to the mechanisms of systemic expansion. This fleshes-out the middle ground between Wallerstein’s (1974, 1980, 1989) analysis (European-focused, state-centric, “inside-out”) and Hall’s (1986, 1987, 1989, 1998, 1999b, 2000) research on frontiers and incorporation (external, indigenous-oriented, “outside-in”). I add a “zone of ignorance” beyond the external arena that prompts the expansion of the European-centered world-system. Building on Chase-Dunn and Hall’s work (1991, 1993, 1997) with nested networks in a world-system, the interaction of the “zone of ignorance” with the “information network” primes the pump of expansion. Myths of riches, luxury goods, and fabulous lands fuel systemic expansion; this is what effectively underwrites the high-cost ventures necessary to extend the European world-system. These myths, misinformation and misperceptions are reflected in historical maps, which also reflect effective political control and the mixture of geographical fact and fantasy. One observes considerable social, cultural and political change prior to the period during which a zone is fully “incorporated.”

A second goal of research on incorporation is to gain insight into “modern” forces of globalization. Case studies provide compelling evidence that the same problems associated with contemporary globalization are inherent in the broadening and deepening of the world-system. “Protoglobalization” serves to differentiate early processes from conceptions of modern globalization (Chase-Dunn 1999; Sklair 1999). This is also an area in need of additional research. While the pace of global change has increased, it should be understood in the context of historical cases of systemic expansion, readily evident at the contact periphery.

The contact periphery characterizes the dynamic initial interaction that occurs between two formerly separate world-systems, which involve significant cultural differences. This mirrors Turchin’s “metaethnic frontier” (2003) and is where cross-cultural forces of “creative destruction” are unleashed. The nature of incorporation depends on the types of systems coming into contact with one another, and can change over time. These frontiers exist on the edge of any system, like the expanding European system, but also exist at the edge of systems or mini-systems of indigenous peoples (Burch 2005; Chase-Dunn and Mann 1998), imperial systems such as China, or other historical non-European systems.

Why incorporation? The process driving expansion

Why examine “incorporation”? Simply put, to understand the expansion of the international system, one must understand the process of that expansion. Examining how actors in the system...
absorb regions lets us break down the process of expansion and allows for a clearer understanding of categories of interrelated activity (e.g., economic, socio-cultural, political).

**The role of multiculturality**

Multiculturality implies that economic and socio-political linkages occur between groups that are culturally distinct, with differences in language, religion, normative institutions, mode of governance and other fundamental characteristics of everyday life. How are these differences reconciled? Who decides? What happens when these societies interact?

Wallerstein (1974) identifies three historical modes of production: mini-systems, world-empires, and world-economies. World-empires are two or more culturally distinct groups integrated by the forcible accumulation of surplus (“tribute;” thus the “tributary mode” of accumulation) organized around a single political center. World-economies are integrated via the market rather than a single political center. Left out of this discussion are the mini-systems, which are small-scale economies, integrated through reciprocity-based family relationships (a “lineage” or “kinship mode” of accumulation) (Chase-Dunn and Mann 1998).

“Incorporation” starts much earlier than commonly held, since trade-induced political evolution is a necessary first step toward full incorporation. Therefore, the process begins with the initiation of contact between the edges of disparate systems. The primary function behind the expansion of the system may be economic (Warner 1998, 1999), while some argue that the “security” of a region is important (Snyder 1991). This presupposes an initial source of cross-cultural contact that needs to be “secured,” or that knowledge needs to be exchanged to perceive a “threat” to security. Regardless, this economic function provides the incentive for political action to support possible military adventurism, often to implement a favorable political regime in the region incorporated. This still neglects those areas and polities that are external to direct trade linkages. How do they become relevant? The notion of “down-the-line” trade helps expose this relationship. For example, West African gold long impacted Middle Eastern, and then European, markets via the trans-Saharan gold-salt exchange and gave rise to the empires of Western Africa.

**The role of bulk vs. prestige goods**

In addition to political and cultural differentiation, the type of trade goods matters: are they “necessities” or luxury goods? Chase-Dunn and Hall (1993: 854) note that Wallerstein “originally defined necessities in terms of food and raw materials that are necessary for everyday life. Subsequently he has also included bullion and ‘protection’.” Lane (1979) includes “protection rents,” as protection is an important political tool responsible for considerable historic transfers of wealth. Structured trade between polities is not enough to be considered part of the world-system. The kind of trade matters, and shapes the incorporation process. For Wallerstein, “non-essential” trade is trade in “preciosities”—prestige goods—which does not produce important systemic effects and therefore does not indicate systemic inclusion.

Yet some involvement and process had to occur prior to the emergence of trade in bulk goods, and this stage is underappreciated. Some attention has been paid to luxury goods (Feinman 1999; Peregrine 1992, 2000; Schneider 1977) and Chase-Dunn and Hall (1993: 855) argue that “prestige-goods economies constitute systemic networks because the ability of local leaders to monopolize the supply of these goods is often an important source of stability and change in local power structures.” These initial networks have important priming effects. Important social, political, and economic changes are likely to occur well before an area is considered “incorporated” into the system by the criterion of bulk goods exchange.
While contact between societies can have immediate socio-cultural impact (e.g., disease, new technology, new precious resources, mere "awareness," identity re-structuring), it is not as clear how luxury trade shapes the political and economic arenas. Yet, a "prestige system" represents the myriad of ways in which prestige is accrued and maintained in the society. It includes knowledge, rituals, and symbols which convey and display status (Peregrine 1999: 39). Political power, derived from status, comes from prestige systems.

This introduces two additional points. First, is "knowledge" a luxury good? Dealing with information networks and exchange of knowledge is one area of world-systems theory that needs to be expanded, and should prove fruitful. Second, what roles do symbols and rituals associated with "prestige" play in changes that result after the initiation of trade? Can the exchange of information or ritual create systemic interdependence (Peregrine 2000)? These are worthwhile points to consider when identifying cultural and social change, and they become good measures of cultural and social incorporation.

**Spatial boundaries: From “Zone of Ignorance” to core**

Another orienting concept of the world-system has to do with how goods and wealth are accumulated. Traditionally, a "tipping-point" for whether or not a region is part of the world-system depends on the division of labor in a region—or "zone"—at a given time. This allows the conceptions of "external arena," "incorporation," and "peripheralization." Indeed, one may view incorporation as a period of "broadening" capitalist development. Since the drive to broaden and deepen the system is inherent in the functioning of capitalism, an area carrying on any trade-based relationship with Europe would be effectively "hooked," as incorporation into the system is tacitly inevitable. Incorporation is the continued broadening of a world-system, while peripheralization is the deepening of systemic relations.

The notion of "commodity chains" helps expose linkages, and "describe[s] the production of goods as they move from raw to cooked, slave-cultivated cotton becoming Manchester textiles, peasant-grown Columbian coffee becoming Detroit labor power, and so on" (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Goldfrank 2000: 168–9). Capital accumulation—and market responsiveness—are hallmarks of when a commodity chain is "integral to" the world-economy, and a region thereby officially incorporated. Not only is the arena undergoing incorporation seen as "not internal" and yet "not quite external," but as "a given zone is incorporated into the world-economy, this often led to an adjacent further zone being pulled into the external arena. It is though there were an outward ripple of expansion" (Wallerstein 1989: 167, emphasis added). This delineation is relevant, "As a zone became incorporated into the world-economy, its transfrontier trade became ‘internal’ to the world-economy and no longer something ‘external’ to it" (1989: 171).

This indicates that there is some sort of "supra-external" arena that is undefined by the capitalist world-economy and exists as what is essentially a "zone of ignorance" (Carlson 2001, 2002, 2011). What is really an external arena and what is not? One is literally talking about the known universe at any point in history, and that which is not known. Additionally, this indicates that instead of a three-tiered working definition of the world-system (core, semiperiphery, periphery), there are actually six tiers (core, semiperiphery, periphery, incorporating zone, external arena, zone of ignorance).

An external arena is a "zone from which the capitalist world-economy wanted goods but which was resistant (perhaps culturally) to importing manufactured goods in return and strong enough politically to maintain its preferences" (Wallerstein 1989: 167). China and Japan in the eighteenth century both serve as examples. Presumably, the governing agents in any zone
bordering the expanding capitalist world-economy have three potential paths: (1) they can be strong enough to maintain their preferences and not choose incorporation; (2) they can be strong enough to maintain their preferences yet choose incorporation; (3) or they can be too weak to maintain their own preferences. In the latter case, the zone is presumably assimilated and transformed, if it has resources desired by agents in the world-economy. Regardless, any zone adjacent to the world-system will eventually be absorbed, either in the short or middle run.

Various bounding mechanisms are one area Chase-Dunn and Hall (1997; Hall 1999c: 7, 2000: 239) address. They present four types of “bounding mechanisms” within any world-system, which only rarely coincide. The broadest is a boundary of information or cultural flows; an information-exchange network [IN]. This is the “known universe” of a system. The outer edges are “fuzzy,” as incomplete information or misinformation become more apparent and the domain of legend or rumor more prevalent. This is the beginning of my “zone of ignorance.” The next boundary encompasses luxury or prestige good flows. This is the prestige goods network [PGN]. This is of comparable size, but not coincident with the information network. The third bounding mechanism is political/military interaction [PMN]. The fourth consists of bulk goods, makes up the bulk goods exchange network [BGN], and corresponds to Wallerstein’s world-system. Typically, these networks are “nested” within one another.

Frontiers

How are frontiers formed and transformed? What do we mean when activity (e.g., trade, information exchange) is “transfrontier”? Hall (2000: 241) proposes that a frontier is “a region or zone where two or more distinct cultures, societies, ethnic groups, or modes of production come into contact.” Like a membrane (cf., Slatta 1998), a frontier’s permeability varies with the direction and type of things (information, goods, people) moving through it. While expansion usually posits that the incorporation process is driven from the center outward, a membrane image recognizes that influences can (and often do) flow from the area being absorbed toward the center. How much is inevitable? To what extent can one “negotiate peripherality” (Kardulias 1999, 2007; Morris 1999) or even “negotiate externality” and thus resist incorporation?

While any frontier is “narrow and sharp” from a global perspective, “from nearby it is a broad zone with considerable internal spatial and temporal differentiation” (Hall 2000: 240). It is in this zone of historical interaction that conflict often arises from contact, and where “no one has an enduring monopoly on violence” (Baretta and Markoff 1978, in Hall 2000: 241). Monopoly on violence? This is the stuff that defines politics! Frontiers are the zone just beyond the “state,” just past the political markings of borders. Frontiers are where the rules of the system are laid bare, and where anything goes.

Modeling incorporation

As has been observed, the very conception of incorporation is problematic: “(a) with respect to incorporating state or system (b) with respect to types of incorporated groups (c) with respect to both timing and degree of incorporation, and (d) with respect to a variety of factors that can affect the process” (Hall 1986: 398; also 1999c, 2000). There are two interrelated aspects involved with the incorporation of an external region. First, we are talking about a series of ongoing processes, which may be divided into separate phases. Second, against this background of ongoing process, a zone will experience different “states of being” or conditions within that process.
Processes

Something is involved in the “hooking” of an arena into the external (and ultimately internal) domain. Accordingly, I suggest three sub-processes in the larger incorporation process. First, a “zone of ignorance,” or mythic domain, largely unexplored and unknown to the current members of the system is contacted; here the “grooming” process of conditioning the area toward capitalist exchange and production is initiated. This may be the process in which most social and behavioral change takes place. Organized production develops, and the notion of “craft specialization” is instrumental in expansion (Kardulias 1990). Consumerism is introduced or develops, along with “induced wants” (Sklair 1991: 131) or “false needs” (Marcuse 1964). Peoples literally learn the values of the world-system: what has value and what does not.

The next phase is one of incorporation, wherein an external arena’s contact and involvement with the world-system is developed, ultimately producing “nominal incorporation,” building toward “effective incorporation.” Here, the processes that began during the grooming process become more developed and socially pervasive. Once the incorporation process is advanced, the process of peripheralization takes over. An effectively incorporated arena moves into the periphery of the world-system and may proceed into the semiperiphery. Beyond this, additional refinement is also needed to understand the processes behind transition from one “level” to another within world-systems.

“States of Being”

Against the background procedural change, a region is contextually fixed in various “states of being” during specific periods of examination. Since the “patterns that we see on a map are actually freeze-frame snapshots of complex processes of incorporation” (Hall 1999c: 11), it makes sense to take this one step further and use historical maps to operationalize the phases of incorporation. There is a growing body of literature evaluating “maps as text” (Wood and Fels 1992). Yet “we must remember that the map is a picture, that every picture tells a story, and that every story makes part of the text … Like any story, maps are propaganda, but maps have the full weight of science behind them” (Mitchell 1999: 40–41). Evaluating maps made during incorporation is a method of reading the text of incorporation, and provides the ability to clarify different “states of being.”

For example, some regions exist beyond the bounds of the external arena. While these regions may have trade links, social links, or geographic proximity to regions considered external, they may not be “known” to members of the world-system (e.g., pre-Columbian America, interior Africa). Thus, these regions exist in only a mythic sense beyond the boundary of the information network, or in a zone of ignorance outside the information network. This zone would not appear on maps of the members of the world-system, and is characterized by the “Cave, Hic Dragones” approach to mapmaking.

The next state of being toward involvement with the system is the external arena. A region is known to members of the system, but not productively. The next stage is being in the IN. The system members know of a region and can place its name roughly on a map, but this may not reflect geographic accuracy and is commingled with regions that only exist in myth. Priming, luxury trade develops. Trade increases. This includes prestige goods, along with an increase of information exchange and cultural pollination. The region is still considered to be in the external arena (i.e., the PGN). Maps begin to reflect a region, but lack significant detail. Outlines of continents should be fairly accurate, but little knowledge of internal features will be evident.
As involvement increases and economic linkages develop with the world-system, a region may be seen as having moved into a state of being *nominally incorporated* (i.e., the political-military network—PMN). Maps have some detail of major cities and geographic features, but will still be incomplete, missing major features beyond the areas central to interaction. Next is a state of being *effectively incorporated*, whereby a given region enters the periphery (i.e., the bulk goods network—BGN). Here, there should be complete detail on maps, as the region is now part of the system. Beyond this, a region may develop out of the peripheralization process into a state of being *semiperipheral*.

To clarify, process overlays states of being:

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**Figure 3.1.1 Typography of incorporation**

*Source: Carlson (2001: 249).*

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This typography helps visualize the larger processes associated with incorporation. These are not discrete, they segue together and the transition between phases is “fuzzy.” Similarly, the transition between states of being is indistinct, even though the core of each may be readily distinguished. In different states of being, particular emphasis on socio-cultural, political, or economic factors may be more relevant than at other times.

Chase-Dunn and Hall (1997: 63) use a similar tool to illustrate the continuum of incorporation. It also helps decipher the verbiage scholars use for incorporation or types of peripheries: external arena, nominal or formal periphery, margin, or hinterland. This is particularly handy for precapitalist settings, but needs refinement:

First, incorporation is not unidimensional, but multidimensional along the four types of world-system boundaries. Incorporation can be economic (for either bulk goods or luxury goods), political/military, or socio-cultural, which includes all types of information and symbols; Second, incorporation creates multiple frontiers, corresponding to each of the boundaries; Third, *ceteris paribus*, incorporation will begin at the furthest boundaries (cultural, symbolic, informational, or luxury goods) and proceed to narrower, more intense forms along the political-military boundary and finally along the bulk goods dimension; and Fourth, relations among the dimensions of incorporation and the resulting frontiers is complex theoretically and empirically.

*(Hall 1999a: 444)*

Incorporation takes place at different rates and degrees for different regions. Regions may exist only in the information network of one system member, yet be involved in the trade of luxury or bulk goods with another member of the same system. Taken with the recognition of the multiple frontiers involved, incorporation is a complex phenomenon.
Comparative cases and measuring incorporation

A structured, focused comparison seems most promising as a way to study these issues empirically (cf., George 1979; George and Bennett 2004). To examine processes of incorporation, one can trace relevant “markers” over any time period in question. These markers may be degree of political autonomy, type and volume of trade with the system and the core specifically, or alterations in traditional social or cultural behavior. Some type of “pre-contact” baseline for factors should be clarified, so that change may be studied in relation to type of systemic interaction. Certainly processes are interrelated and reciprocal, but by addressing them as separate facets we develop a clearer understanding of the dynamics of incorporation.

Societal change may take the form of alteration of traditional lifestyles, coercion of labor, or other fundamental discontinuity. This may include alteration of migration patterns, gender role shifts, alteration of spirituality, or identity changes. As incorporation increases, changes in classes and mode of production emerge. If early change is present, then an argument for incorporation is strengthened. When looking at the political-military arena, signals include political-structural change (e.g., “state-building,” changes in laws, regime change, alteration of power structures), or if a formalized political relationship with the “internal” area has been instituted. Finally, the type and quantity of goods exchanged, including how they are “produced,” are measures of the process.

This approach is appealing because it offers a more concrete examination of what is otherwise theoretic posturing. We “see” historical processes in action. Second, as cartographic information was jealously guarded, using maps as a measure provides a method of tracking the transmission of information among system members. Third, maps make it easier to distinguish when states knew certain information about a frontier region. The variable rates of incorporation among relevant actors in a region are distinguishable. Finally, this helps understand not just the important role information plays in the expansion of the system, but the impact of lack of information. Geographic ignorance or dis-information was actively promoted as a tool of imperial expansion. On the frontier of a system, fanciful myth usually trumps boring fact. Mere rumor of goods, lands or mythic peoples was enough to prompt imperial adventuring, and thereby jump-start the systemic incorporation processes.

Additional theory-building leverage can come from individual case studies, and this is another area for future research. For example, Carlson (2011) looks at the lengthy, cross-systemic incorporation of Abyssinia from a pre-capitalist stage to its peripheralization. The case supports the “pulsation” thesis of world-systems (Beaujard and Fee 2005; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Hall 1987, 1989, 2005), offering insight for future cross-systemic study: are zones along system borders repeatedly incorporated as they fall in and out of neighboring systems, or are they mere geographic socio-cultural bridges between systems? Accordingly, such cases are also applicable to research on “contested peripheries” (Allen 1992, 2005; Cline 2000; Hall 2005). Cases offer insight into the ability of regions to maintain externality or “negotiate peripherality” (Kardulias 1999, 2007). Ethiopia (née Abyssinia) maintained independence from colonial subjugation well into the twentieth century, despite being linked to the African, Eurasian and Indian Ocean systems (Beaujard 2007; Beaujard and Fee 2005). Finally, because of the long historical overview of the case, it lends support to the application of world-systems analysis to pre-capitalist settings, as has been argued by Abu-Lughod (1989, 1993), Chase-Dunn and Hall (1991), Frank (1990, 1998), Frank and Gills (1993) and Gills and Frank (1991), and it echoes concerns with globalization in having a considerable historical legacy (Gills and Thompson 2006). The interaction between systems is a useful homologue for contemporary discussions about cultural globalization and civilizational “clashes” (Huntington 1993), and the mini-industry that has arisen around the “clash of civilizations” thesis. Thus, careful attention to incorporation offers a rich research agenda with application to “modern” questions and contemporary global problems. Globalization is not new—it has been going on for millennia. Studying incorporation illuminates this.
References


Externality and incorporation


