Extraterritoriality.

Foreign Concessions: the Past and Future of a Form of Shared Sovereignty.

Par Pál Nyíri

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Dear Rector, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few years ago, Liu Jianjun, a former official from the city of Baoding, near Peking, achieved a measure of fame in China's media through his efforts to promote the settlement of Chinese farmers in Africa. In an interview, he described these efforts in the following way:

The lease on land is usually ninety-nine years. Maybe by then Africa will no longer need food aid from the Un. Its industry and technology will be developed immensely. In the past, some countries called foreigners in their country colonialists. Now they want to open up and tolerate differences, giving you great deals . . . and we still debate about whether we should go or not, whether it is right or wrong. Isn't this too outmoded? (Zhu Bao, 1998[1])

There is more than one kind of irony to this statement. Here we have a former official appointed by the Chinese Communist Party, much of whose official historiography and identity is based on the idea of anti-colonial struggle, saying that the discourse of anti-colonialism is outmoded. Here we have a Chinese official offering the pure essence of developmentalism that long dominated Western discourses of Africa but were ultimately abandoned. And here we have him, an official of a government that treats the inviolability of national sovereignty as a distinguishing trait of its foreign policy, adopting the liberal argument that national sovereignty should not be allowed to trump the free flow of goods, people and ideas (a view that, of course, was deployed by British imperialism and is therefore looked upon uneasily by contemporary Western liberals).

I will argue today that we need both history and anthropology in order to understand the shifting practices of sovereignty and developmentalism that these ironies encapsulate.

Last year, the anthropologist Chris Lyttleton and I visited Golden Boten City, across the Chinese border in Northern Laos. Designated a "special zone" (Chinese *tequ*), Golden Boten has been described in an advertisement as the "most internationally modernized city in [L]ao." Opened a year earlier by the Chinese investment company Fu-Khing, it occupies 4000 acres of leased land. Its central feature is a hotel-casino complex, with a cluster of shops, small eating houses, staff dormitories, and apartments surrounding it. But a conference center, a golf course, and villas are planned, and the developer’s brochure implores potential investors to “believe that thousands of people will gather here in a beautiful morning or an autumn evening. They [will] live and develop here with various occupations and identities, to form a huge community, and a modern society.”

A page from Golden Boten City’s brochure for investors (courtesy of Paul T. Cohen).

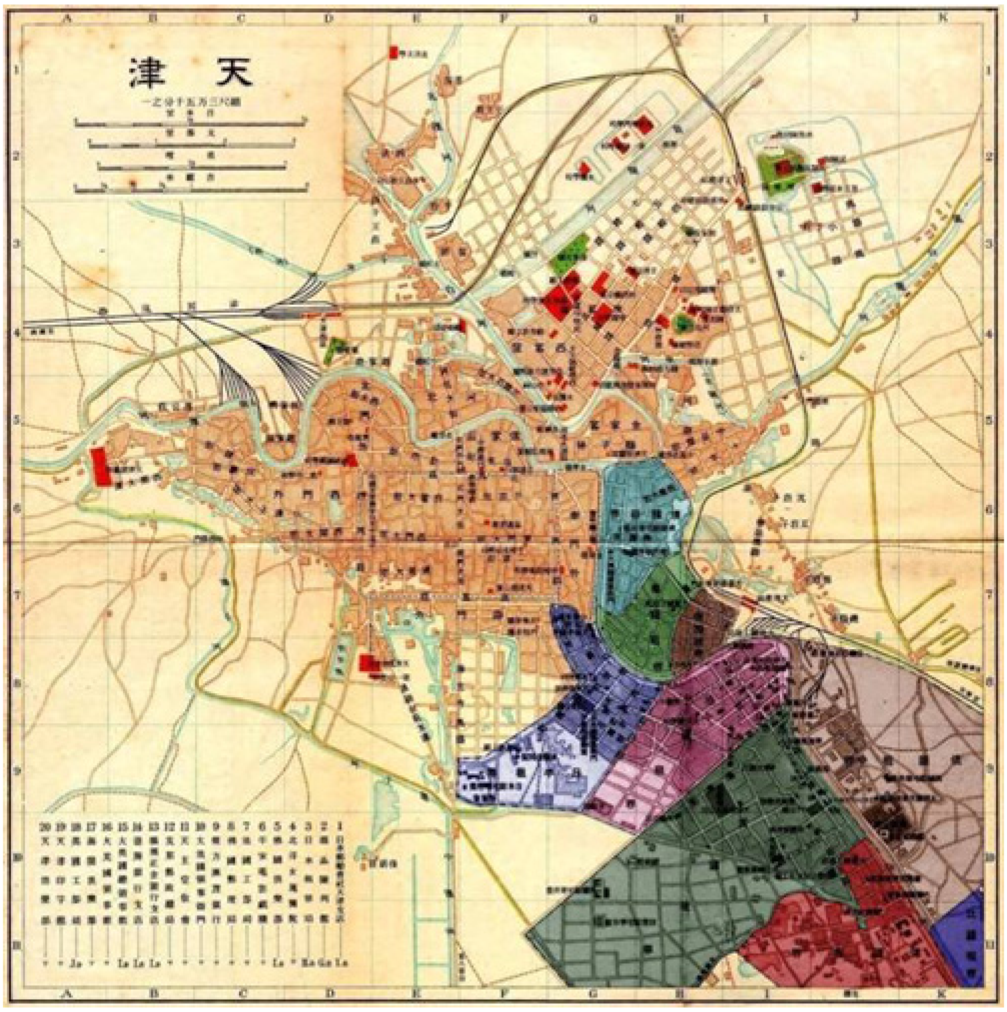
Yet today, apart from a small number of Thai and Lao tourists, virtually everything and everyone in the place is Chinese, from some 3000 employees and small-business owners to the currency (only yuan are accepted), from electric sockets (electricity is also supplied from China) to beer. When we asked a local Lao driver whether Golden Boten was China or Laos, he said in fluent Chinese, “Sure it’s China! China rented it.” The fact that the zone has been leased by its Chinese proprietors for thirty years, with the option of renewing the lease twice, is reinforced by the guards who march around in military formations in uniforms resembling those of Chinese police, emblazoned with “Special Zone Security” in Chinese characters. The number of Lao employees has dropped from nearly 300 to a little over 100, and today Lao dealers are hired only if they can speak Chinese. But dealers’ salaries of about Us$200 a month for a six-day work week are high by Lao standards. These dealers tell us that bodies of Chinese murder victims (there have been seven so far) as well as Chinese citizens accused of the crime have been whisked quietly back over the border in an apparent affirmation of Golden Boten's extraterritoriality.

What is happening here? Is this the work of borderless capital or plain old territorial expansion? Or are we dealing with a return to pre-modern forms of shared sovereignty in the borderlands as China reconstitutes a distinct East Asian interstate system that existed before Western colonial interventions, a view taken by a number of commentators including Giovanni Arrighi (2007)?

Extraterritoriality.

“They toss and turn, capitalist empires / Their teeth clatter as they tear into the world. / Soft Asia, tousled Africa they devour, / And like a bird's nest they knock down the little farm.” When the Hungarian poet József Attila wrote these lines in 1931, over one hundred and twenty Western and Japanese consular courts operated in China. According to treaties China was forced to sign after its defeat in the two Opium Wars, in 1842 and 1860, these courts had sole jurisdiction over their own nationals, a provision known as extraterritoriality.

The establishment of extraterritoriality was simultaneous to the establishment of concessions, also known as treaty ports, in which Western powers and the Qing exercised a form of joint, or more precisely parallel, administration that John King Fairbank called “synarchy.” The division of sovereignty was neither strictly territorial nor national. There were areas rented by foreign governments – as many as nine in Tianjin – in which authority of officials appointed by these dominated, but there was also more diffuse powers that foreign civil, military, and even corporate authorities exercised over buildings and infrastructural installations outside these.



Map of Tianjin, early 1900s (from Wikipedia).

In Harbin, for example, *de facto* power in the first three decades of the 20th century was in the hands of the Russian management of the Chinese Eastern Railroad, even though Harbin was not a concession. Foreign authorities also exercised sovereignty over their subjects wherever they were, but also a large degree of it over certain Qing subjects, i.e., Chinese, to whom the protections of extraterritoriality were extended. Conversely, agents of the Qing, as well as rival foreign powers, were present in the concessions and exercised their own authority over their nationals, as captivatingly described by Kazuo Ishiguro in the novel *When We Were Orphans*.

Extending foreign protection to certain local subjects too had its precedent in the Ottoman Empire, where it was generally Christians who enjoyed the protection of foreign powers. In a limited form, extraterritoriality had also been practiced in China earlier, in the foreign trading factories at Canton. These constituted an enclave in which only men were allowed to live. They were prohibited from going outside its boundaries, and contacts with them were strictly regulated. This earlier system of extraterritoriality was consistent with the imperial logic in which various groups of the population could be governed according to differing laws, and which accommodated diverse forms of shared or overlapping sovereignty, fuzzy boundaries, and complex tributary relationships that involved nomadic tribes. As James Hevia (1998) has pointed out, in China's case the imperial logic also allowed a relationship with Tibet in which both sides saw themselves as the centre and the other as the tributary.

But the extraterritoriality imposed on China in the mid-19th century – which foresaw no such limits on the movement of foreigners – was an entirely different matter. It occurred at a time when legal pluralism was considered inconsistent with modernization, and the Westphalian system of territorial nation-states with precise borders and exclusive, absolute and equal sovereignty over their subjects had acquired a global reach. Its imposition meant that the Western powers did not consider the Qing government capable of exercising the functions expected of a modern nation. The provisions of extraterritoriality were abrogated only in the 1940s, when China was fighting a war with Japan on the side of the Us and Great Britain.

Extraterritoriality was central to China's experience both of Western colonialism and of modernization. Based on treaty stipulations, China was forced to surrender degrees of sovereign power: control of customs and security in treaty ports, legal jurisdiction over non-nationals, foreign concessions, privileged treatment of foreign business and missionary activity. For China's political leaders, foreign concessions in port cities, and later the state of Manchukuo, a *de facto* Japanese protectorate that was established in 1932 and collapsed in 1945, were at once a burning humiliation and a lesson in industrialization, urban planning, and public administration (cf. Duara, 2009). As Prasenjit Duara points out, although Manchukuo and the concessions were semicolonial formations, they do not lend themselves well to the usual conceptualizations of colonialism that stress underdevelopment and traditional forms of exploitation, because they received massive foreign investment in industry, infrastructure, and public amenities.

A Manchukuo propaganda poster (from Japan Focus).

On the face of it, Manchukuo's Japanese imperial ideology of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which emphasized an East Asian autarky based on shared cultural values and opposed to those of the colonialist West, was exactly the opposite of the Universalist ideology of free trade that underlay the establishment of treaty ports. Yet in both cases the Chinese were to supply land and labour, and the Westerners or Japanese would furnish technology, capital, management, and political and military leadership. For reasons that will become clear later, it is worth noting that the establishment of Manchukuo was preceded by the transformation of Zhang Zuolin's warlord administration in Manchuria into a Japanese client state by extending it a series of loans for railway construction and other infrastructure projects. As Duara writes, a simple model of economic exploitation was to be supplemented (if not replaced) by high levels of investment, the development of new modes of mobilization and identity production, and a rhetoric of brotherhood and regional federalism.

Duara shows that the chief Japanese ideologist of Manchukuo, Matsuoka Yosuke, was convinced of the Japanese-led project's inclusiveness and benefits for the prosperity of the Chinese people, and distinguished these sharply from the racist nature of Western imperialism. The business magnates, magistrates, and military officers who ran the treaty ports were indeed likely to hold a racist view of the world; indeed one can argue that the very way in which extraterritoriality was made to fit the modern nation-state system was based on it. Yet this did not diminish their own conviction that the liberal model of governance and justice they were offering to the Chinese, along with the flourishing finance, arts, and press, was far more beneficial for their development than the oppressive militarism practiced by the Japanese in Manchukuo.

Treaty ports and special zones.

Diplomatic historian Eileen Scully described concessions in China as “anomalous zones” in which government suspends fundamental norms. This is remarkably similar to the way critics of neo-liberalism have applied philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s (2005) notion of exception to places in which national rules are suspended and human beings can be stripped of their rights and dignity. Such “zones of exception” most obviously include places such as Guantanamo Bay, but anthropologist Aihwa Ong has argued that all manner of zones of exception – such as free trade areas, export manufacturing zones, or construction sites populated by foreign workers – in which prevalent labor and civil rights are suspended are crucial for the functioning of flexible capitalism in the world and in Asia in particular. Yet while the genealogy of zones of exception is linked to the ideology of free trade, it is not simply neoliberal doctrine that is behind their recent proliferation. In what follows I will argue that China has now taken on a leading role in promoting modernization through zones of exception, not only in China but also outside it. Although this model seems to fit with the neoliberal approach to the global economy, the Chinese state in fact plays a major economic and political role in the establishment and operation of these zones – the government initiating some of them, state banks providing credit, state construction companies building facilities, state resources companies exploiting them – just as Western powers did in the operation of concessions. In fact, recipient governments increasingly see this model of development as an alternative to the World Bank’s free-market orthodoxy.

How has this come about? The lesson in modernization that concessions offered was not forgotten by China’s Communist leaders. China’s post-1978 development crucially relied on the Special Economic Zones (Sezs), a form of “internal concession” within which foreign investors as well as their Chinese employees, in exchange for helping to develop the nation, were given greater economic and social freedom than elsewhere. While these freedoms were significant for people’s everyday lives and the running of business, they were of course relative: the zones’ administration was firmly integrated into the national party and state bureaucracies, and state enterprises flocking to them were some of their main beneficiaries. Like the treaty ports, the first fourteen special economic zones were set up around coastal cities (and in some cases, like Queshi Island, off the coast of Swatow, new free trade zones were in fact identical to the old treaty ports; on this island, the old foreign consulates were reused as government offices of the

Ftz). These zones have subsequently lost significance, but the current Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau operate on a similar principle: they are spaces of interaction between Chinese and foreign capital in which the rules are relaxed and to which Chinese citizens' access is limited.

One can discern a remarkably similar silhouette of extraterritoriality emerging around Chinese concessions in various places in Africa, Southeast Asia, South America and the Pacific as China becomes an increasingly significant overseas investor and development aid donor. To begin with, across the border from China, three of the four "Special Regions" in Northern Burma (Kokang, Mong La, and the Shan State No. 2 Special Region) are run by ethnic Chinese elites that regularly appeal to China's government for support (Icg, 2009). When Kokang was occupied by Burmese government troops earlier this year, the 30'000 refugees who fled across the border to China were described in Chinese reports as ethnic Chinese. These populations go back to earlier waves of migration from China (including those of Kuomintang soldiers and Red Guards), but they fit neatly into the *tequ* logic: today, they benefit from renewed inflows of migration and investment and use Chinese currency and the Chinese language, and are connected to China's telephone network and power grid, in more than one sense (*Haitang Shequ*, n.d.; 51nb.com, 2009). Farther afield, a 42-km² Chinese-run Special Economic Zone officially opened in Zambia in 2007 (Alden et al., 2008, p. 15), and four further zones in Africa are planned. Zte, a Chinese telecommunications company, has received a 100'000-hectare oil palm concession in Congo-Kinshasa (Bräutigam and Tang, 2009, p. 697). In 2008, a group of Chinese investors in Uganda reportedly signed a ninety-nine-year lease for the development of a 518-km² Lake Victoria East Africa Free Trade Zone with its own legislative structures and plans to attract 500'000 Chinese settlers (World Chinese Federation, 2008). Plans for the zone, one of the largest in the world, are said to include an airport, a free port serving five East African countries, roads, a power plant, a water purification plant, mining, an agriculture demonstration zone, a fishery, a golf club, a sports village, a university, headquarters of a new China-Africa Volunteer Corps, and residential real estate consisting of 200'000 bungalow-style buildings. According to some reports, by 2007, there were twenty-right so-called "Baoding Villages" in seventeen African countries, with a total population of 7000 Chinese farmers engaging in agriculture on rented land and united into a transnational council that sets unified rules for the villages. In addition, Chinese mining, logging, oil, and energy projects across continents also operate as concessions (in the case of power plants, often under a bot system). These have more limited populations and a narrower range of Chinese-local interactions, but they too are there for the long term and in some instances seem to assume extraterritorial privileges, such as the use of extralegal force against individuals who disrupt their operations.

The current Chinese leaseholds are not of the same order of imposition as the treaty ports in China, “where the overlap between the law of power (gunboats) and the power of law (extraterritoriality) was palpable” (Scully, 1995). But there are notable similarities. To begin with, lease rights, including extension options, typically range between sixty and ninety-nine years. Trade rights are clearly privileged, legal jurisdiction vague, and *de facto* security is maintained either by Chinese forces or by local armies that are in effect seconded to site management. In addition, there are also other, less-readily-acknowledged comparisons that signal these concessions as a contemporary version of “soft extraterritoriality.” Scully writes that despite dreams of Western trade and investment opening up the Chinese commodity market in the early 20th century, it was in fact the management and employment of prostitution by Western entrepreneurs that had a greater impact within the informal economy of the Chinese treaty ports, in particular Shanghai:

> The brisk trade conducted by American sex workers in Shanghai and by their male compatriots who profited from brothels and gambling casinos reveals the existence of two, competing, China markets; one “legitimate” (at least under the unequal treaties forced upon China), a potential outlet for America’s production glut if Chinese could be remade into conspicuous consumers; the other deeply corrupt, overtly predatory, transnational, transracial, conducted without regard to a “national interest.” The latter market offered a wider range of illicit goods than consumers might find in ordinary boomtowns because it was located on the borderlands of empire, where Chinese authorities were pre-empted from exercising control over their own territory and where the policing capabilities of the pre-empting great powers were overextended and problematic. (Scully, 1995, p. 64)

Here Scully points to something more than just superficial similarity with special zones like Boten or those in Burma, where next to gambling, prostitution, drugs, and erotic entertainment are mainstays of the economy. Her point recalls that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), who (unlike those scholars who have celebrated a future post-nation-state world as a state of liberation) have suggested that a paradigm of power that rules through differential hierarchies may indeed be coming to replace the modern paradigm of the nation-state, but this power will be no more benign than the old one. While I do not think that Hardt and Negri’s framework is adequate to describe the world as it endeavors to do, it may be applicable in the emerging new interstitial world of concessions.

The return of the concession.

In recent years, the concession model has been growing more prominent in the global economy. Concessions have never entirely disappeared from the world map. In postcolonial times, they survived as extractive enclaves run by oil companies or mining giants, which continued to exercise state-like coercive and sometimes welfare functions of the state. But today the concession model has expanded to cover all sorts of purposes. My colleague Sandra Evers does research in Madagascar, where the largest investment to date is a 15’000-acre mining concession by Rio Tinto. Rio Tinto also supports the World Wildlife Fund’s effort to convert 40’000 km² of Madagascar into conservation areas (Wwf, 2009). The two projects have very different aims, but both involve the displacement of people and the implementation of new governance regimes as powerful non-state actors (Rio Tinto and Wwf) devise strategies to mitigate the effects of displacement and undertake social-responsibility commitments. The most ambitious project in Madagascar is a plan by Daewoo, supported by the Korean government, to lease 3’250’000 acres of land – half the size of Belgium – for food-crop production. The project, which partly triggered the 2009 coup that removed the president who had negotiated it, is now on hold, but it is indicative of a new trend in which corporate ventures are linked to strategic decisions by cash-rich, land-poor states that scout the world for concessions to ensure their food security. At the end of 2006, concessions covered nearly 15% of Cambodia’s arable land, and the Kuwaiti government has proposed to lease land to grow rice on an area that some sources suggest is 240’000 acres. Cambodia is also said to have been approached by Qatar for a 750’000-acre concession; Qatar also wants to lease 350’000 acres in the Philippines (Afp, 2009).

Even before the current trend began, and partly because of different concerns, some American politicians and scholars advocated the return to limiting the absolute sovereignty of certain states. Martin Indyk, an assistant secretary of state under Bill Clinton, has argued for the establishment of a Un protectorate in Palestine. In effect, something similar has happened in Bosnia and in Kosovo. The prominent political scientist Stephen Krasner writes,

> In the future, better domestic governance in badly governed, failed, and occupied polities will require the transcendence of accepted rules, including the creation of shared sovereignty in specific areas. In some areas, decent governance may require some new form of trusteeship. . . . Contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq are the obvious

> cases in point. . . . Shared sovereignty, arrangements under which individuals chosen by international organizations, powerful states, or ad hoc entities would share authority with nationals over some aspects of domestic sovereignty, would be a useful addition to the policy repertoire. (Krasner, 2007)

What for Krasner is a cause for enthusiasm is a source of anxiety for Duara: "Is it possible to think of Manchukuo as the beginning of an imperialism that culminates with . . . Iraq'" No doubt, the United States is the source of many current extraterritorial tendencies, including its use of private military contractors in Iraq, the so-called extraordinary renditions, Guantanamo Bay, and Us resistance to the International War Crimes Tribunal, which in a limited sense signals the end of extraterritoriality as far as wars go. Yet while there may be parallels between Manchukuo and Iraq, I want to argue that there are far more obvious parallels between the treaty ports and China's emerging overseas concessions, and that it is erroneous to identify the concessionary model of development with neo-liberalism. The concessionary model of development is by no means uniquely Chinese, not even in its state-supported form. But there is an assertiveness and enthusiasm to the promotion of concessions as engines of modernization for the countries they are established in (but whose jurisdiction they are partly removed from) that is peculiar to Chinese projects, perhaps, as I have suggested, for historical reasons.

In the Chinese discourse, concessions are seen as "model units" that, by disseminating their advanced practices (economic and technological as well as values and behavior), will pull up the rest of the country they are inserted in. The way the legal constructions of the concessions are described, for example, the ninety-nine-year concession in Uganda, bears a similarity to Western concessions in Chinese history (notably Hong Kong) that is likely to be intentional rather than uncanny: to Chinese readers, it may well conjure up a vision of a future replete with skyscrapers and horserace tracks. In this discourse, poverty eradication, school building, and opium replacement (a scheme under which Chinese companies investing in Laos can receive state subsidies for planting other crops in opium-growing areas) can be unproblematically and seamlessly connected to offshore oil or gambling.

Rather than checking the spread of concessions, then, the current "post-neoliberal moment," in which there is frustration with *both* the financial prescriptions of neoliberal economics *and* the individual-empowerment approach to development, and the kind of state capitalism represented by China suddenly has a wider appeal, may actually speed it up. Not only have special zones played a central role in China's modernization throughout the 20th century, its continued experimentation with them reflects the fact that China is currently less averse than Western states to what Aihwa Ong (2000) calls “graduated sovereignty . . . whereby citizens in zones that are differently articulated to global production and financial circuits are subjected to different kinds of surveillance and in practice enjoy different sets of civil, political and economic rights.” Graduated sovereignty, she suggests, can strengthen state powerand protections in certain areas, but not in others. Ong’s argument was based on Southeast Asia, and it has been suggested by others, such as Xiang Biao (2009), that applying a differentiated approach to governing their populations – that is, having different sets of rules for different groups of people – is generally more acceptable in contemporary East and Southeast Asia than in Europe and North America, where the political and legal homogeneity of the population is still officially a fundamental tenet of the modern political system (although recent proposals for the treatment of immigrants and refugees in Western Europe, or Gypsies in Eastern Europe, may well suggest the erosion of this system).

Orvar Löfgren (1999) has likened the transition to the modern state to one from an avocado to a coconut, where internal borders are abolished but external ones strengthened. Yet in China the avocado has never disappeared: the walls around the city have been maintained through the household registration system. Today, it is no longer effectively used to prevent migration, but rather as a tool for the differential governance of more or less desirable segments of the population, largely on the basis of their contribution to economic development. The limitations of rights imposed on foreign workers (wages, contracts, civil status, differentiation by nationality) in Singapore or Malaysia function in a similar way and serve similar goals. Southeast Asian states inherited this legal pluralism – if you want to put it in positive terms – or racism – if you want to put it in negative ones – from British colonial rule. Indeed, even as the colonial metropolises built their coconut states, differentiated communitarian governance remained typical of the colonies, and not just those of Britain. I am referring here not so much to the well-known racial/religious categorization that, say, South Africa or India inherited, as to institutional arrangements such as the congregation system in the French colonies, in which all Chinese were required to register with an organization representing their dialect group. This system has effectively been resurrected by the *de facto* party-state that Cambodia currently is, and it currently links the political elites of Cambodia and China through a patronage network of Chinese-Cambodian entrepreneurs in an arrangement that implies a tacit sharing of sovereignty and erodes the boundaries of citizenship.

So let me sum up. I started by recalling the role of extraterritoriality and concessions in the spread of global modernity in the era of imperialism, and suggested that while they appeared to have been thrown onto the rubbish heap of history in the era of decolonization, they have been making a comeback in various forms, underpinned by the economic logic of flexible capitalism, the securitizing logic of post-9/11, and I might add the cosmopolitan logic that questions the absolute sovereignty of the nation-state. I argued further that extraterritoriality and concessions were central for China's experience of its own modernization, and that they appear to have a place in the new vision of China as the engine of global modernization. Southeast Asia, both thanks to its relative propensity to legal pluralism and differentiated governance and its recent use of "special zones" for economic development, may see a more extensive revival of concessions as China continues its development export. A master plan for the economic development of Northern Laos, prepared by Chinese specialists on behalf of the Yunnan Province Reform and Development Commission and presented to the Lao government at the end of 2008, envisages setting up new free trade zones along the country's borders and developing tourism concessions, operated and controlled by contractors (Northern Laos, 2008). Ironically, those most sanguine about China's promise for a new form of non-capitalist globalization, such as Arrighi, fail to notice how this globalization draws its model and legitimization, not from China's pre-colonial lineage of interstate relations, but on Western experiences. At the same time, and especially in the Southeast Asian borderlands of China, the modernizing ideology of "special zones" meets and builds on another, pre-modern but still relatively recent, imperial logic of shared sovereignty (Leach, 1960). That logic, whose historical memory is still alive (Diana, 2009), was in some ways the opposite of the concessionary one: in it, rulers of marginal polities had a tributary relationship to empires (notably the Chinese, but sometimes multiple ones), which claimed nominal overlord-ship over them but did not interfere with internal governance.

What sort of governance Chinese concessions might bring is not easy to tell. Most Western accounts associate Chinese projects overseas with corruption, plunder of resources, indifference to human and labor rights, and to the environment. Yet, at the same time, the appearance of young Chinese volunteers overseas, made possible by expanding middle-class lifestyles, is a reality, and negotiations are reportedly on the way to set up a branch of a Chinese university in Phnom Penh to teach accounting. While certain types of concessional agreements, especially in Africa, have included school and hospital construction (such as the thirty-two hospitals included in a mining contract with Congo-Kinshasa), for the time being the spread of small, private Chinese clinics run by migrants – including at Golden Boten City – is a far more significant development. Although they are expensive by local standards and the credentials of their doctors are hard to verify, they are locally seen as superior to existing healthcare options. One possible outcome of new social responsibility guidelines is that we may see an expansion of education and health projects. The Chinese master plan for Northern Laos, for instance, calls for the setting up of vocational schools and "special trainings to the rural poor labors, one person from each household" (Northern Laos, 2008, p. 90).

So if indeed concessions, by whatever name, reappear on the world map, and if some of them will be Chinese-run, it is likely that, like their historical predecessors, they will simultaneously become enclaves of vice and order, harsh exploitation and skills transmission, new epidemics and professional healthcare, cosmopolitanism and racism. The forms of governance and sociality that they give rise to, not least the implications of extraterritoriality, will need careful study. But these new-old polities of “graduated sovereignty” already appear to meet an aspiration that is perhaps shared by large numbers of officials and ordinary people: the desire to believe in the possibility of progress. What the Chinese State and Chinese investors are offering is the affirmation and attainability of progress through hard work, in the social evolutionist language of Northern European colonizers:

> The mentalities of most people are still at the starting stage of agricultural economic development, which is unsuitable for development of market economy and economic globalization. Their awareness of development, competition, openness and self-reliance and hard working still need to be improved. (Northern Laos, 2008, p. 15)

Nowadays, such language is associated with neo-liberalism; yet it is better seen as an older and more universal language of “work harder and your life will be as good as ours”: a hope of catching up that, for all the recent microcredit fads, global modernization theory’s erstwhile Western propagandists no longer seem to offer. That hope continues to resonate in China, and I dare say it does so in many poor societies. As the anthropologist James Ferguson (2006, p. 186) writes, “Some contemporary Africans seem to feel a sort of nostalgia for the modern.” His Zambian mineworker informants “said, in effect, ‘We used to be modern ? or, at least, well on our way ? but now we’ve been denied that opportunity.’ Modernity, for them, was not an anticipated future but a dream to be remembered from the past” (p. 186). Ferguson suggests that Africans increasingly see modernity not as something to be attained but as a global status hierarchy one is born into. Yet the Chinese entrepreneurs they encounter confound this picture. An article in *Global Times*, the *People’s Daily*’s popular offshoot, relates that a driver in South Africa asked the reporter if “you Chinese are the richest people in the world.” The author comments that “Robert’s views are representative of the respect a very large number of lower-class South African blacks have for success. Because of this respect . . . they want to learn from the Chinese.” It is easy to dismiss such stories as self-congratulatory state propaganda, but the sentiments they convey are likely to be real for at least some.

Applying anthropology to history.

How does an anthropological perspective on history help us? Is the mutual reliance of anthropology and history simply an outcome of the requirement that any sound understanding of a society, in my view at least, must involve both a grounded, ethnographic view and historical depth? I hope what I have said demonstrates that there is more to it.

I have cited Prasenjit Duara, a historian whose work I, an anthropologist, have found consistently inspiring. Perhaps because he is a historian who works with the perspective of a hundred years, Duara sees common patterns in the operation of states wielding their power through very different ideologies. In this way he avoids the pitfalls of some anthropologists, whose epistemologies of power and suffering are excessively focused on the current (or just past) neoliberal moment. Apart from its political position on the global Left that English-speaking anthropology has adopted since the 1980s in atonement for its colonial complicity, there is a deeper reason for this: anthropology, even where it was at the service of the nation-state, has tended to avoid the nation-state as a political category, and accented those processes and relationships that cut against its grain. Anthropology's relationship with colonialism ensured that it developed as the study of those who could not be (or should not be allowed to be) nations. In many ways this legacy continues, as anthropologists continue to focus on groups, though no longer necessarily remote tribes, who have a different story to tell. Today, anthropologists retain their ability to tell these stories, but they attempt – in the felicitous words of a colleague – to grasp larger social processes without being just scribes of the local, marginal, or minimal in which those processes are refracted. Contemporary anthropology is thus highly attuned to investigating the effects of the global market on human lives, but relatively uninterested in the depredations of national governments when they cannot be linked to the global market. In this respect, it usefully complements history, which by and large continues to be researched, taught, displayed, and disseminated as a study of nations. Partly for that reason, it remained attentive to the limits of the reach of market logic throughout modernity: Fernand Braudel's (1979) conceptualization of the state as a power acting above, and in some cases against, market logic in early modern international trade, which Arrighi inherited, is relevant here. For me, then, anthropology and history are complementary as much because of their respective methodological or ideological blind spots as because of their subjects and methods.

In this respect, what I am proposing differs from the famous seminars by anthropologist Clifford Geertz and historian Robert Darnton in Princeton in the 1980s, to which my learned colleague Herman Roodenburg referred in his lecture here two months ago. For Geertz and Darnton, anthropology and history were to work not in complementary but identical ways, except that one worked in space and the other in time. At the centre of that collaboration was the rehabilitation of the social and cultural within a (mostly Western) history that was then predominantly concerned with the political. At about the same time, subaltern studies, with a similar focus on non-elites but in the postcolonial context, and pioneered mostly by historians, resonated deeply with anthropologists. It seems to me that these perspectives have now become firmly established in history, and that interest has turned, or should rightfully turn, back to political history that has been somewhat neglected in the past twenty years. Yet it is clear that the national conceptualizations of political history will no longer do. The perspective that anthropology today can contribute to the study of global history is not only, and not so much, the “native voice” that asserts the existence of alternative modernities by virtue of its position. Rather, it enables us to see history in the light of non-European historiographic traditions, allowing conceptualizations of modernity and modernization that help us understand what is happening in the world today.

It remains for me to thank the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences for lending their support to an undertaking that requires more than the usual share of interfaculty cooperation and institutional flexibility, and my teachers who, in the flesh and through their writing, have helped me along my intellectual journey.

I have spoken.