STRANGE PARALLELS: PATTERNS IN EURASIAN SOCIAL EVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Most professional historians have abandoned the search for general patterns and laws of history, but not Victor Lieberman. Strange Parallels II (SP II), following on SP I, proposes that similar mechanisms governed state building in such different, and distant, regions as Southeast Asia, China, Western Europe, and Russia. During the period covered by Lieberman (c.800-1830) the general trend within these regions of Eurasia was towards increasing political and cultural integration. This overall trend was not monotonic; it was periodically interrupted by interregna periods of state breakdown and territorial fragmentation. However, as time unfolded the interregna became shorter and less disruptive. Remarkably, during the second millennium cycles of political integration and disintegration became increasingly correlated between the widely separated Eurasian regions. Liebermans bold thesis is combined with truly encyclopedic scholarship and a breathtaking scope. SP II is a major achievement in comparative world history that will take future researchers years to fully digest. This review essay aims to make a first step in this direction.

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I believe that social evolution of complex societies of pastoral nomads is an alternative to the state (Kradin et al. 2011). The cross-cultural studies of the cattle-breeders show that extensive pastoral economy, low population density and lack of settled way of life do not suppose an institutionalized hierarchy. ... I argue that Eurasian steppe pastoralism developed along distinct local trajectories in the western, central, and (south)eastern steppe, sparking the development of regional networks of interaction in the late fourth and third millennia BC. The "Inner Asian Mountain Corridor" exemplifies the relationship between such incipient regional networks and the process of economic change in the eastern steppe territory. The evolution of behavior relates to the origins of behavior patterns and how these change over generations. This discipline was founded by American biologists and psychologists, primarily after WWII, and included considerable emphasis on laboratory experimentation. Many behavioral psychologists emphasized the study of learned behaviors. The modern discipline of ethology begun during the 1930s in Europe and parallel to but rather independent of the Modern Synthesis. Ethology is a combination of laboratory and field science, with a strong relation to certain other disciplines — e.g., neuroanatomy, ecology, evolution.