

# Overview of the great western transmutation



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The Great Western Transmutation is the term coined by Marshall Hodgson. He explains it as the change in the northwestern Europe that changed the Occidental society from being traditional to rational. Marshall Hodgson was one of those historians who substituted the Eurocentricism with a pattern of world history recognizing the larger contributions of non-Western cultures. Various regions developed different cultures at different rates. In the recent millennia the differential rate of development has been big enough to allow some regions to attain disparity over the others. The great example of such a fast change is the changes in the northwestern Europe. After the French and the Industrial revolutions Europe grew to lead the world and the historians' view became Eurocentric. The historians portrayed industrial revolution as a unique phenomenon with no precursor. In the last thirty years the course of historians' notions on the origins of modernity has changed. The scholars now perceive the European infiltration as the vital development in a series of advances that stretch way back in time and covers Europe, China, Africa, Middle East, and India.

Marshall Hodgson and William McNeal both were colleagues at the University of Chicago and both were developing the similar ideas at the same time. McNeill credited the Chinese revolution which affected the global commercial activity and the initial penetrate to modernism. Marshall Hodgson quest the interesting questions of why did the modernization happen in Europe by finding the links going back to the Islamdom. Unfortunately he died at the age of forty seven leaving behind two unfinished projects, a general history of Islamic civilization and a history of the world. Hodgson was among the first historians to explain the emergence of modernity what he called " Great

Western Transmutation”, which by the beginning of the nineteenth century changed the face of the world. Hodgson spoke of Transmutation as a collective achievement that depended upon earlier advances in eastern and Islamic worlds. The Transmutation would not have been possible without the vast global market developed by 1500, largely under Muslim patronage. Hodgson also pointed out that the breakthrough to the modernism required a certain level of global population and commerce; it could not have become earlier than the middle of the second millennium A. D. Europe happened to be the lucky one to nurture favorable local conditions allowing the expansion of economy at the right time. This transformation has affected not only the Occidental people but dominated the rest of the world and established the European authority. Europeans outperformed in every sphere of human life - military, merchants, science etc. which resulted into a global political and commercial system formulated by the Europeans for their benefits. The rest of the world had to adjust their governments and economies to compete Europe. By 1800 Europeans including their overseas descendents arrived at the highest level of social power. The European education system made its individual to create group feelings which made them able to think and act more effectively.

The focus not as much as on God but more on how the nature works led to the expansion of learning and philosophy. This drove Europeans to continue improvement of the old technologies and creating new ideas. After the invention of compass and improved ship designs Europeans explored the world and discovered new areas to expand and the circumvention of Africa opened new trade routes breaking the Middle Eastern monopolies on the

trade route. These events culminated in the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. This made the rest of the world depended on their products. The Western Transmutation primarily transformed the world culture in three ways: the economic, the intellectual, and the social (P 99). In economic life the great increase in productivity because of the industrial and agricultural revolution. In intellectual life there have been new discoveries and inventions led to the Enlightenment which I believe stayed in dark age after Archimedes (212 B. C.) because of the prevail of religion with the exception of early Islamdom when the intellectual ideas developed and did not conflict with the religion. Later on this exception did not continue to be an exception as the ulemas felt that the knowledge of philosophy and science weaken their beliefs. In social life the replacement of agrarian culture by bureaucratic and mercantile power was significant. The great Western Transmutation was so effective that it foreclosed the possibility of its happening anywhere else.

The transmutation was also possible in Islamdom, but there were some natural reasons that it did not happen there. The climate change ushered longer growing season in Western Europe, the middle east became drier. Mongols destroyed their irrigation system and depopulated the entire area. The feeling of being superior among the scholars and philosophers deterred the path of their growth in science and technology. This intellectual ignorance prevailed in Ottomans until the nineteenth century. The later Ottoman sultans were secluded, not educated and inefficient. The stop of new conquests stopped devshirme eventually allowing long term interests in the hand of Janissaries who practiced their own wills. As the Muslims were declining from their most brilliant period, Europeans were going through the

Renaissance florescence. The crucial changes were quite clear by the sixteenth century. And by the eighteenth century the Westerners set off decisively from the rest of the world.

Hodgson concluded that we might have found similar transmutation taking place in other agrarian societies each with its own terms. For example we might have found China repeating the Sung achievements with more success. By the sixteenth century the situation was changed, the gradual diffusion was no longer possible. The Great Western Transmutation could not successfully copied in Afro-Eurasian Oikomeme because they did not share the European cultural presuppositions. I absolutely agree with Hodgson explaining the reasons of the Western Transmutation. Soon after Hodgson's death, his discipline was invaded by the waves of cultural relativism variously called postmodernism, postcolonialism, or multiculturalism. Hodgson broadened the range of scholarly vision by challenging the Eurocentrism and multiculturalism to rethink the place of Europe in the world history.