



Shanghai in Global City Theory

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During his nine months research in Chengdu and Shanghai in 2008, the speaker nurtured the idea that China cannot be seen only from the larger 'reference units' of territorial states in comparative political economy vis-à-vis India but also from micro level units – provinces and cities. Complementing with study of literature by David Harvey and Saskia Sassen, he argues, gave a new perspective and approach to study comparative political economy involving cities and urban experiences, and thus, to understand Shanghai and Delhi in context of global flows—Shanghai in 1990s, and Delhi much later. Both of these cities are facing and responding to parallel set of processes due to global flows leading to restructuring of cities and creation of urban built-in spaces.

Dwelling on the topic, he pointed out the existence of large multitude of migration of rural labours in construction and civil works in urban cities both in Shanghai and Delhi, resulting in the rise of 'labour assemblage' through 'intermediaries'—labour contractors in both China (*baogongtou*) and India (*tekedaars, jamedaars*). In both the cases, the origin of the urban labour is from the rural milieu, and has strong parallels with regard to migration, social origins and role of intermediaries.

The talk focussed on locating Shanghai in 'Global city' theory dwelling on works of Saskia Sassen in *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Sassen argues that one of the important aspects of globalization is 'geographical dispersal of production'—leading to increasing linkages with the local economy worldwide requiring 'coordination' with 'producer services' as geographical location of production units no longer matter. Thus, he argues that these cities are doing central functions, and become 'commanding spaces', 'sites of coordination', 'post-industrial production sites'. Thus in the global city theory, these cities have become a centre of flows—where flows between transnational cities (Shanghai with London, New York, Tokyo) have become denser unlike cities traditionally, and especially during colonial empires period of 19th century. It has been creating new architecture which supersedes national territories and sovereignty. The rise of mega global cities has led to restructuring of these urban spaces and flows, and has become highly integrated spaces. With dispersal of production, coordination and complex linkages in these cities, the third aspect *i.e.* the number of global firms or institutions locating in the area also re-configured the city. These cities also mark the global ascendance of new units in new world economy, and many cities have come closer through trade, business and travel. And thus, Shanghai's increasing role in Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia partly indicate the special transformation of the city in the global city theory from the time of Zhu Rongji in the 1990s. However, the under belly of these transformations bring a stark indicators of large rural migrants involved in physical labour in constructions, house-services (maids, house-keepers) to supplement the migration of highly professional skilled workers in these global cities. Therefore, it is not surprising to see large number of such people in Shanghai and other cities across the globe.

Historically, Shanghai was one of the important six cities in the world with rich and iconic architecture with cosmopolitan society with linkages with other cities till the so called 'dull dreary period' of 1930 to 1990s. However, with its insertion to the global flows, its development of Pudong-near the Huangpo River (Puxi) opposite the Bund Area has radically transformed the city itself by location of new financial districts to the former new area from the old Shanghai city street.

Basing his research on labour historiography and locating Shanghai in global city theory, and interests on city's relationship with rural labour, he pointed out that the pre-liberation labour was highly mediated in China-shipyard, tobacco processing, factory workers, (Perry & others). These labours were networked by the intermediaries such as gangsters, labour contractors and the native place 'guilds' of carpenters. This mediatory labour system though progressively declined after the formation of the PRC, and especially in radical socialist era, but was never overthrown completely.

But looking at Shanghai in particular today, many forms of labour intermediation is returning, and Chinese scholars like Pun Ngai and Jenny Chan's studies show the rural origins of urban labour via work and labour contractors in urban China indicate the trend. In India, the role and institution of labour contractors have been more resilient since the Bombay textiles mills and have existed till now. But, in the post-reform period China, this institution has returned through the 'native-place affinities' despite experiencing dis-junctures in history as a cultural source for collective bargaining and rights against arbitrary ways of firms.

Finally, the speaker ended by stating that 'despite China's long 20th century history of transformation, there has been a *sense of increasing convergence of institutional practices and social norms between Indian and Chinese cities.*' In China, the party and the municipal parties are not in a position to control this trend and have failed to regulate, where as in India, this labour institution have remained resilient with no ruptures

Prof. Mohanty, the chair summarised the talk by laying three arguments of the speaker,

1. How the context of globalization has created a new exchange and production linkage among cities, especially to global cities like Shanghai, Delhi, Tokyo, etc? And the shift of interactions from nation states to cities.
2. Shanghai-modernization and development and its centrality in both pre-liberation and post liberation discourse.
3. The return or re-appearance of dis-appeared institutions such as 'native place affinities' and 'labour contractors' (*bāo gōng tóu*) leading to convergence in both India and China.

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