

Christof Dejung, David Motadel, Jürgen Osterhammel (ed.), *The Global Bourgeoisie. The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, Princeton (Princeton University Press) 2019, XVIII–375 p., 2 b/w ill., ISBN 978-0-691-17734-2, GBP 25,00.

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One of the major intellectual projects in central European history during the last two decades of the 20th century was the study of the *Bürgertum*. This project, if centered on the German-speaking lands, nonetheless had a strong trans-national element, since many of its proponents understood it as comparative history, placing the German *Bürgertum* in a broader spectrum of the middle classes in Europe and North America. Since that time, global history – global in expanding the comparative perspective outside the wealthier countries of the North Atlantic, but also in placing world-wide interactions at the center of historical structures and developments – has become steadily more influential.

The current volume, a collection of essays based on a workshop held in Cambridge in 2015, is an attempt to take the *Bürgertum* project global. Focusing on the century of empire, 1850–1950, the authors offer both broad, over-arching summary accounts and specific empirical investigations. The quality of the individual chapters, as is usually the case with such essay collections, varies considerably, but the volume as a whole demonstrates both the potential and the problems of going global with the study of the *Bürgertum*.

A central thesis of the *Bürgertum* studies was the understanding of the *Bürgertum* as a group created in the interaction between economic resources, social position and cultural values. What united very disparate groups at the upper end of the middle realm of wealth and influence, including businessmen, state officials, and university-trained professionals, were shared values: an affirmation of industry and productivity, a commitment to civic-mindedness, and openness to evaluating individuals on their actions and accomplishments, rather than in ascriptive terms. An obvious question about the globalization of the history of the middle class is how this understanding can be applied to areas outside Europe and its settler colonies, with differing social structures and economic conditions and quite different cultural traditions from the Enlightenment and Christianity, which shaped the European world.

Globalization as world-wide interaction also creates questions for the study of the middle class. How exactly and to what extent were economic position and social status shaped by world markets, as opposed to more geographically limited forms of economic interchange? Did different cultural traditions converge, interact, and form a dialogue, or did certain ones drive others out in the formation of a middle class? Most broadly, since the years 1850–



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1950 were the age of the imperial hegemony of Europe and its settler colonies, how did the asymmetries of power and influence inherent in empire affect the formation of the middle class?

Essays on the national or regional development of the middle class offer the most interesting insights into some of these questions. Houchang E. Chehabi's chapter on the middle class of Iran shows how membership in it was linked to employment for a government committed to a project of modernization, or, more precisely, of imitation of European social and intellectual models. In Iran, this project drew the hostility of Muslim clergy and the merchants of the bazaars, resulting in a long-term conflict, only resolved by the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This clash between a bourgeoisie in state service influenced by European ideas and a more indigenously oriented Islamic middle class appears elsewhere in the modern Middle East, in Kemalist Turkey or Nasser's Egypt.

Sabine Dabringhaus and Jürgen Osterhammel present a long-term history of the Chinese bourgeoisie, emphasizing fragility and discontinuity. Only gradually emerging as a social group in the initial decades of the 20th century, disrupted both by the authoritarian rule of the Guomindang and the Second World War, it was destroyed by Mao's violent and utopian projects of creating a communist society. Revived, largely ex novo, when Deng Xiaoping instituted market-based reforms, China's middle class, for all its economic advances in recent decades, remains very much under the influence and control of the communist party-state.

The most interesting and insightful essay in the book is David Parker's on the bourgeoisie of Latin America. Parker traces a persistent early 20th century discourse of bourgeois moral failure, of condemnation of the continent's bourgeoisie for not achieving the same independence, economic progress and social and political domination as its more successful counterparts in Europe or North America. Parker suggests this jeremiad arose less from personal or group failure than from Latin America's place in the global division of labor, as primarily a provider of raw materials. It was also, he proposes, the origin of more recent, ironically Marxist and anti-bourgeois, theories of dependency and underdevelopment.

Global interactions are a particular feature of the essays of Kris Manjapra and Richard Drayton, which discuss that portion of the middle class involved in imperial administration and international economic relations. Brokers, foreign currency dealers, translators, and educated professionals in imperial service all come within their purview. These were certainly a middle-class in the service of globalization, but a subordinate one, carrying out policies and facilitating the investments and political plans of others, wealthier and more powerful, but also more distinctly based in a national framework or sitting at the metropolitan centers of empire. One does also have to wonder about the relative size of this global middle class. Manjapra highlights the background and actions of five university-trained German foresters, who worked for the British imperial administration in India, but of course the vast majority of German university-trained foresters worked for German governments.



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Rather the weakest part of the book is the discussion of the cultural values that shaped the middle class and their emergence of these values from the global interchange of ideas. Emma Hunter's discussion of the formation of a middle class in colonial German East Africa focuses on four newspapers, three edited by missionaries, one by the colonial government, with a very modest press run and provides no evidence they were read or in any way influential.

David Motadel's quite interesting essay on the Muslim bourgeoisie of Berlin in the interwar era ends up explaining how German converts came to lead the Islamic community, and used their position to reformulate ideals of the German *Bürgertum* in Islamic terms. The essay of Alison Bashford on Malthusian ideas and the advocacy of birth control in Asia reiterates her monograph on the subject, noting that while European proponents of Malthusian ideas of population and planned parenthood often had a distinctly racist world-view, members of the Indian and Chinese middle classes made the cause of population control their own, turning it into a vehicle for empowerment and social and political self-assertion.

Bashford's essay brings up a crucial point of any analysis of the shaping of a global middle-class in cultural terms during the age of empire, the centrality of the concept of race. Besides stating the obvious, that Europeans of the period were strongly imbued with notions of their racial superiority, the authors of the volume have less of a convincing nature to say about the issue. Christof Dejung investigates European intellectuals who denigrated the working class in Europe by comparing them with racially inferior »savages« in Africa or Asia. One would like to know just how common such a comparison was in Europe; it would certainly not have been a large part of the thinking of the bourgeoisie of North America or Australia.

Particularly lacking in the volume is a consideration of how the middle-classes outside of Europe understood or took up ideas of race and racial superiority, the influence on them of both European racial concepts, coming from Biblical and Enlightened-scientific-Darwinian sources, and of indigenous ideas about racial divisions of humanity. As this last point suggests, and as this volume demonstrates, the project of writing a global history of the bourgeoisie is a work in progress, filled with interesting and challenging notions, but also with many areas still in need of better intellectual articulation and more careful and detailed investigation.



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