

Labour, Coercion, and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th–20th Centuries

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

LABOUR, COERCION, AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN EURASIA, SEVENTEENTH–EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Alessandro Stanziani

The Main Scope and Argument

The history of the forms of “free” labour is intimately linked to that of coerced labour. This book shows that between the seventeenth and the twentieth century, forms of labour and bondage all over Eurasia were defined and practised in reference to each other. A whole spectrum of forms of dependence, bondage and labour existed in Russia, India and Indonesia as well as in Japan, China, Britain, France, Prussia and the Indian Ocean World.

This was true not only in specific areas—rooted in local institutions, values and economic relationships—but also on a global scale. Serfdom in Prussia and in Russia expressed an extreme variant of Western European notions and practices of labour as domestic service and social obligation. Similarly, in the European colonies, indentured labour was conceived as an extreme form of domesticity and servants’ subordination in Europe. Without the identification of the worker as a servant in Britain, France and the Netherlands, indentured labour in the British, French, and Dutch colonies would have not been possible.

Common tendencies and local perspectives on labour relationships found their sources not only in the global circulation of models, peoples, goods and institutions, but also in market dynamics. From the seventeenth and the late nineteenth century, proto-industry, agriculture, trade and manufacturing experienced unprecedented growth throughout Eurasia. Mostly labour-intensive, this long-term growth put considerable pressure on labour resources and contributed to increased coercion and legal constraints on labour mobility in both Asia and Europe.

The Uncertain Boundary between “free” and “unfree” Labour

Anthropologists, sociologists and historians have highlighted different aspects of labour relationships, according to their disciplines, in an

attempt to draw the line between “free” labour and “forced” labour, particularly slavery. They have discussed social status (membership in or exclusion from the clan, the family, the local community), religion, legal status (the form of dependence, freedom of movement, the hereditary character of such constraints), socio-economic conditions (dependence, non-economic advantages, coercion, etc.), political rights and legal (and procedural) rights.¹ Researchers have pinpointed several variables, but without reaching a consensus. These issues have been debated even more fiercely in the last twenty years as *cultural studies* and *subaltern studies* brought out the relativity of the notions of freedom and coercion. As a result, the question has now become whether or not a given form of dependence, bondage, etc. found in a particular society in Africa, Asia, the Indian Ocean or the Americas could be considered “slavery”. If the answer is yes, then by implication slavery existed before and independently of colonialism; conversely, if the answer is no, it means that these forms of dependence and bondage were specific to a particular place and “imperialist” and revisionist culture would like to call them “slavery” to minimise the West’s “debt” to the Third World.

The debates have become all the more virulent as they are no longer confined to academia. One obvious example is the quarrels that have pitted international organisations against countries and firms accused of practising and legitimising hidden “slavery”.² It is symptomatic and sometimes paradoxical to see cultural relativism espoused both by academics critical of “imperialism”, “colonialism” and now globalisation and by local managers and multinational companies that exploit child labour.

The aim of this book is not to take sides in favour of one or the other “general” definition of labour and forced labour, but rather to set the boundary line between free labour and forced labour in specific historical and institutional contexts and explain why, in a given context, this line was conceived and put into practice in one way rather than another.³ By undertaking a radical re-examination of the historical forms of labour and how they were defined, we are not seeking to relativise and deconstruct categories in order to assert, for example, that “forced labour did not exist”

¹ Testart, *L’esclave*; Meillassoux, *Anthropologie*; Finley, *Ancient slavery*; Miers, Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*; Williams, *Capitalism*; Bush, *Serfdom and Slavery*; Engerman, *Terms*; Klein, *Breaking*; Patterson, *Slaver*; Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

² ILO, *International*; IPEC, *Every Child*; Cunningham, Viazzo, *Child Labour*; Miers, “Contemporary forms”.

³ Campbell, Miers, Miller, *Children*.

or that it is an “intellectual invention”. On the contrary, by viewing these elements in their proper historical contexts, we hope to provide an original explanation of the dynamics of forms of labour. Instead of attempting to establish the moment when “free labour” and “civilisation” emerged, or conversely, stigmatising the continuation of the “guild tradition” or even of latent forms of slavery, we want to grasp the dynamics at work in certain historical forms of labour starting from the historically situated tension between freedom and constraint.

The first hypothesis underlying this book is that so-called “free” forms of labour and bondage were defined and practised in reference to each other, not only within each country and region, but also on a global scale. In the Anglo-Saxon world (chapter by Deakin), until almost the end of the nineteenth century, there were fewer “wage earners” than servants, i.e. workers whose status resembled that of servants in husbandry. These workers enjoyed limited rights in relation to their employers: the absence or unjustified breach of a work contract was punishable by criminal penalties. Yet it was precisely the definition of “free” labour, based on the unequal legal statuses of employers (actually masters) and wage earners (servants) that enabled several forms of bondage to be considered a contractual “free choice” at the time.⁴ In the British empire, the American colonies and later the United States, from the seventeenth century to around the middle of the nineteenth century, the indenture contract⁵ which historians today usually classify as a form of forced labour, was in no way opposed to free labour during this period.⁶ The indenture contract was seen as an expression of contractual free will; in India, this form of servitude continued until the twentieth century.⁷ It is therefore important to note the formal and factual link between the forms of bondage and the definition of “free” labour: if the wage earner had not been defined as a servant, it would never have been possible to consider an emigrant signing an indenture contract a “free worker”. That explains why indenture was not classified as a form of “forced” labour in the colonies until the collapse of the Masters and Servants Acts, when free labour was redefined (1875) in Britain.⁸

⁴ Steinfeld, *Coercion*; Deakin, Wilkinson, *The Law*.

⁵ Steinfeld, *The Invention*; Galenson, *White Servitude*; Northrup, *Indentured Labor*.

⁶ Hay, Rogers, *English Society*; Hay, “Masters and servants”, in Steinmetz, *Private Law*.

⁷ Hay, Craven, *Masters*.

⁸ Northrup, *Indentured Labor*.

The connection between the forms of labour in the “centre” and in the colonies was by no means specific to the British empire. It also existed in the colonies of the Dutch empire, especially Indonesia, where colonial leaders based their conception of post-slavery labour on the constraints imposed on servant wage earners in the Netherlands (chapter by Ulbe Bosma). The conceptions and practices of labour in Europe and its main colonies influenced each other and entered into global dynamics. Indentured labour was not the antithesis of “free” wage labour but an extreme form of the peculiar historical meaning that wage labour acquired in modern Europe.

But then if the definition of “free” labour included the indenture contract and allowed for numerous constraints and penalties placed on wage earners, what distinguished it from officially recognised forms of bondage, beginning with serfdom?

As a matter of fact, what has been called the “second serfdom” in Eastern Europe needs to be redefined.⁹ Serfs were never legally defined as such in Prussia¹⁰ and Central and Eastern Europe (chapter by Markus Cerman), or even in Russia (chapter by Stanziani). The documents usually cited as proof of the introduction of serfdom actually refer to forms of constraint on mobility and designated those who had the right to own and transfer inhabited estates, i.e. various categories of nobles.

Forms of bondage beyond those justified by “free contracts” were widespread in India (chapter by Joshi) and in Africa (chapter by Campbell). These types of bondage close to slavery were based less on European law than on local customs. Hence, a continuum of solutions appears, with a variety of forms of debt bondage, indenture contract, and other forms of bondage contracts between English masters and Indian coolies, as well as genuine slavery.¹¹

The same complexity was found in China (chapter by Chevaleyre), where the status of servants and bonded labourers differed from European experiences, sometimes resembling more closely the situations of Ottoman palace slaves and servants in husbandry. The complexity of statuses and real conditions and the inadequacy of “European” categories to express them testify first to the widespread presence of these situations and second, to their specific character. The same issue arises in

⁹ Stanziani, “Free labor-forced labor”.

¹⁰ Melton, “The decline”; Ogilvie “Communities”.

¹¹ Patnaik, Dingwaney, *Chains*; Tinker, *A New System*; Pouchepadass, *Paysans*; Condominas, *Formes extrêmes*; Reid, *Slavery*.

every study of slavery as soon as we step outside of the ancient world or nineteenth-century North America, where in both cases slave status was passed on to descendants.

Yet local specificities must be put into a global context. In time as well as in space, continuities and links between free and unfree labour prevail over clear-cut oppositions. Unlike the conventional thesis—celebrating the triumphal march towards freedom starting in the nineteenth century after centuries if not millennia of bondage—recent approaches in historiography underline the changes in slave-trading systems prior to official abolition and, conversely, the continuation of forms of bondage and slavery after the reforms. The conditions of African-Americans and of “free” labourers in the colonies are used to confirm this position.¹²

Similarly, historians of serfdom in Eastern Europe have revealed the decadence of the system well before the arrival of Napoleon and the French codes,¹³ just as French historians have shown how medieval serfdom evolved prior to the Enlightenment.¹⁴ Both groups have also brought to light aspects of bondage and service in husbandry that continued after the official abolition of serfdom.¹⁵ New trends have also arisen among historians of wage labour. Anglo-Saxon historians have underscored the coercive nature of the British and American norms applied to labour (Masters and Servants Acts) until roughly the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ In France, the break between the world of guilds and the Old Regime on the one hand, and the world of free labour on the other, has likewise been questioned.¹⁷ The rise of collective bargaining has been deemed at least as important in terms of its effects on labour relations as the abolition of guilds and of labour service (*corvée*).¹⁸

Our approach confirms these new contributions of historiography and emphasises the continuities rather than the breaks between the late seventeenth century and the early twentieth century in the area of labour and its institutions. Despite institutional and political shifts, important continuities in labour regulations and practices are revealed and confirmed by the cases of Britain (Deakin), France (Vernus), Austria and Prussia (Cerman), Japan (Nagata), China (Chevaleyre), and Russia (Stanziani).

¹² Miller, *Slavery and Slaving*; Drescher and Engerman, eds., *A Historical Guide*.

¹³ Hagen, *Ordinary*.

¹⁴ Bois, *La crise*; Duby, *Les trois ordres*; Bonnassie, *From Slavery*.

¹⁵ Hagen, *Ordinary*, 2004, Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*.

¹⁶ Steinfeld, *The Invention*.

¹⁷ Minard, *La fortune*.

¹⁸ Didry, *Naissance*.

Continuities were even stronger in colonial empires where a significant link has been established between the conditions of European wage earners (mainly servants in husbandry and household servants) and indentured immigrants in Indonesia (Bosma) and throughout the Indian Ocean World (Campbell).

However, the continuities between free and unfree labour are important not only in time but also in space. Surprisingly enough, the recent research orientations we have just mentioned have never come together: there has been little dialogue between historians of slavery and historians of wage labour, and consequently neither group has challenged the presupposition that these two worlds were and remain separate or even opposed. The aim of this book is precisely to overcome this fracture by revealing the connections between these elements underpinned by chronologies that are in fact too common to be unconnected or to have come about merely by chance. To answer this question, the historical dynamics of labour must be understood at once in a global dimension and in their local specificities. We will therefore examine them on these various levels first by studying the circulation of economic and legal knowledge and second, how it was applied locally.

Circulation of Knowledge and Labour Dynamics

Not all the contributions to this work necessarily adopt a global or comparative approach. On the contrary, we think specific national and even regional and local features should be taken into consideration in order to understand how the whole system worked. The strength of global history lies not in collecting second-hand banalities common to a number of different worlds, but rather in achieving a relevant representation of this multiplicity through local and national specificities. The comparative dimension applied at various levels is therefore an integral part of our method, which is why we propose to place side by side situations and historical experiences that are usually studied separately: wage labour in France and England, Russian serfdom and slavery in China, work discipline in India and Japan. This approach reveals striking similarities as well as the differences between the contexts and forms of labour.

From the standpoint of global history we have adopted, two main variables are worthy of mention: the circulation of economic and legal knowledge and economic and institutional dynamics between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Economic knowledge and legal models

circulated along with people and goods. This circulation led not only to increased homogeneity among systems but also to differentiation and even hierarchies of areas and countries. For example, the identification of serfdom with an archaic world in the “East” and even the notion of “Eastern Europe” itself were pure inventions of the Enlightenment.¹⁹ Montesquieu published *The Spirit of the Laws* in 1748, soon to be followed by the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie*.²⁰ In these works, the serfdom of absolutist and medieval Europe was contrasted with the free labour of Enlightenment Europe. The advances of the Enlightenment contributed to the invention of a historiographic break between “enlightened France” and the old France on the one hand, and between Western and Eastern Europe on the other. These two “inventions” mirror each other, e.g., in the fact that serfdom could be found in Eastern Europe as well as in medieval Europe.

Similarly, British and Dutch colonisers in India and Indonesia strove to translate local forms of dependence and bondage into their own categories; the disparities and similarities between the forms of slavery and bondage in the two worlds are key factors in grasping the complexity of the definitions and of the labour practices themselves (chapter by Ulbe Bosma). If labour practices had not been translated into English legal terms, the forms of post-slavery and post-colonial bondage would have developed differently.²¹ Conversely, the use of written contracts rather than informal arrangements reveals the need on the part of important Indian traders in Cairo to be able to bring their shop assistants and servants before English courts if necessary (chapter by Markovits). The contracts sought to translate the relationships between caste, type of labour and remuneration into terms and categories derived from British norms.

Yet the circulation of ideas and practices did not necessarily indicate a relationship of dependency of the so-called “periphery” on the core; colonial discourse aside, forms of bondage indeed existed in Russia, India, Africa and the Americas well before the arrival of Europeans.²² And even during the colonial period, dependency was not simple and straightforward. To return to the example of Indonesia, servitude was defined and put into practice based on indigenous notions and practices that had

¹⁹ Stanziani, “Free Labor”.

²⁰ Duchet, *Anthropologie*.

²¹ Prakash, *Bonded Histories*.

²² Coquery-Vidrovitch, Moniot, *L'Afrique noire*; Thornton, *Africa*; Meillassoux, *L'esclavage*.

continually influenced those discussed and applied in the Netherlands itself (chapter by Bosma).

In like manner, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were constant references to the case of Russia in debates over work discipline in Europe, where the assessment of the conditions of “serfs” led people to take a position regarding wage labour, which was viewed either in opposition to serfdom or, on the contrary, considered a new form of slavery.²³

From this same point of view, the specificity of Japan did not consist in simply adapting the Western model. In traditional historiography, Japanese development has always been tied to Meiji reforms and Western influences. On the contrary, recent analyses including Marie-Louise Nagata’s contribution here, demonstrate that Japan’s economic and social dynamism dates back to the eighteenth century.

To sum up, the circulation of ideas and models is important, but it cannot be taken exclusively as a synonym of dependency because 1) the “centre” and its colonies often influenced each other, 2) bondage and slavery did in fact exist, although in different forms, before and after colonisation and 3) finally, emancipation did not come about solely under pressure exerted by the “advanced West”. The role of the circulation of knowledge therefore has to be associated with economic and social trends as a whole.

Global Intensification of Labour

How can we possibly justify the increasing limitations placed on free labour throughout Eurasia between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries? Was this not a period of strong demographic growth and increasing capital development?

Logically those processes should have led to reducing constraints on labour rather than strengthening them. This line of reasoning fails, however, to take into account the above-mentioned values and notions of labour as a social service and an obligation on the one hand, and the fact that this period witnessed unprecedented labour-intensive growth all over Eurasia. Indeed, over the past two decades at least, economic historians have moved away from the interpretation developed in the early nineteenth century by the so-called “classical” economists (Smith, Ricardo)

²³ Stanziani, “Free Labor”.

and Marx, according to which the agrarian revolution and later the industrial revolution were accompanied by the substitution of labour by capital and the concentration of production units. In fact, they occurred mainly in the twentieth century. Before that date, in most of Eurasia, proto-industry, agriculture and even industry rather followed a labour-intensive path. First, with regard to agriculture: conventional histories of economic growth stress the relative decline of agriculture during the industrialisation process; at the same time, agriculture was supposed to provide goods to feed a growing urban population. This outcome required greater productivity and yields, which in turn were obtained through a shift in the organisation of economic units and in the relative weight of the factors (decreasing labour and land and increasing capital). These views have been increasingly challenged, starting with the role of capital in agriculture. Recent empirical analyses show that in many parts of England livestock densities were stable throughout the modern period until the mid-nineteenth century;²⁴ conversely, there was more livestock in Asia and Eastern Europe at the time than is commonly believed.²⁵ In other words, in Britain, the increase in yields that occurred before 1800 cannot be explained by rising livestock numbers.²⁶ On the rest of the continent as well, the long-term trend of rising wheat prices (roughly between 1680 and 1815) led to reducing the surface area devoted to livestock and livestock feeding while increasing the acreage for wheat cultivation.

The role of machines and new sources of power is also undergoing revision: after steam became the dominant form of power employed in manufacturing, the major sources of energy available to farmers continued to be men, animals, wind and water.²⁷ Mechanisation in farming proceeded slowly because agricultural operations were more separated in time and space than industrial processes. Mechanisation was therefore a relatively unimportant component of the changes in agriculture technology up to the mid-nineteenth century²⁸ when the appearance of commercial fertilizers and the development of mechanical harvesting equipment began significantly to affect methods of production.²⁹ Until the machine age, i.e. after 1850, much of the rise in productivity and the growth of output depended

²⁴ Allen, *Enclosures*.

²⁵ Pomeranz, *The Great*.

²⁶ Allen, "Tracking": 226.

²⁷ O'Brien, "Agriculture".

²⁸ O'Brien, "Agriculture".

²⁹ Grantham, "Agricultural Supply".

more on the intensive use of known technology than on novel methods. So-called “new husbandry” was indeed not so new³⁰ and it required more labour, not less.³¹ Only in agricultural systems like those in the United States, characterised by the high opportunity cost of labour, did economic pressure to mechanise come to resemble that experienced by some sectors of industry. On the contrary, in Russia and France as well as Prussia, from the seventeenth century through the second half of the nineteenth century, labour was not only the major input in agriculture, either directly or embodied in land improvements, but its weight even increased during this period.³² Recent analyses converge towards the same conclusion: labour and labour intensity are now identified as the main source of agriculture growth before 1850, with human and physical capital playing a secondary role.³³ Labour-intensive techniques linked to the dissemination of knowledge and attractive markets (with rising agriculture prices) were widely used between the seventeenth century and the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when this trend reversed (agricultural prices went down and wages went up).³⁴

However, increasing labour demand in agriculture had to compete with similar processes in proto-industry and manufacturing. Theories of proto-industrialisation originally associated proto-industry with demographic growth and proletarianisation on the one hand, and a decline of urban guilds and feudal institutions on the other.³⁵ Further analyses have called these assertions into questions and nowadays it is widely accepted that on a comparative scale no single, uniform link can be established between proto-industrialisation and any of the aforementioned variables. Proto-industry developed in Western, Central and Eastern Europe from the end of the seventeenth century in response to market demand and demographic pressure.³⁶ It retained its central position all over Europe at least until the mid-nineteenth century. After that date, and only after, some areas declined and manufactures and industries replaced the putting-out system.³⁷ However, the shift was by no means complete, and in

³⁰ Federico, *Feeding*.

³¹ O'Brien, “Path Dependency”.

³² Clark, “Productivity growth”.

³³ Grantham, “Agricultural Supply”; Allen, *Enclosures*; O'Brien, “Agriculture”.

³⁴ Thompson, “The Second”.

³⁵ Mendels, “Des industries rurales”; Mendels, “Proto-industrialization”; Kriedte, Medick, Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before industrialization*.

³⁶ Hagen, “Capitalism in the countryside”.

³⁷ Ogilvie, Cerman, *European proto-Industrialization*.

many European areas and districts, proto-industry continued to play a leading role during the second half of the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth century.³⁸

This timing is even more relevant for Asia: authors such as Lee and Sugihara have maintained that the “industrious revolution” identified by De Vries in Europe³⁹ was also visible in areas of Asia.⁴⁰ As in Russia, the success of proto-industry in Japan (chapter by Nagata) and China, too, particularly rural proto-industry, was at the root of a labour-intensive path of growth.⁴¹

In all these areas, as in most Russia regions (chapter by Stanziani), agriculture did not turn into a simple supplier of produce and labour-force for industry; on the contrary, estates and peasants took part to the development of local and national markets for both wheat and proto-industrial products. In Russia (Stanziani), Japan (Nagata), and Central Europe (Cerman), commercialization of produce was not the consequence of extra-economic coercion but responded to market dynamics.⁴² As in many areas of Russia and Western Europe, increases in agricultural output and income in Japan led to growth in demand for manufactured goods, which was met by an expanding rural industry using labour-intensive technology. The resulting growth in rural non-agricultural activity in turn generated increased incomes for rural households and hence greater demand for agricultural output.⁴³

Similar results are now available on India. Contrary to the usual view, which stressed the decline of cottage industry under British rule and the growth of international markets, new research shows that the use of “traditional” labour-intensive techniques has remained widespread up to the present day. Thanks to their flexibility, these techniques have allowed a labour-intensive pattern of growth linked to family units to remain integrated in both agriculture and industrial markets.⁴⁴

The persistent, global strength of agriculture and proto-industry had an unanticipated effect, however: urbanisation and the supply of labour for urban manufacturing were mostly seasonal.

³⁸ Sabel, Zeitlin, *Worlds of possibilities*.

³⁹ De Vries, “The industrial revolution”.

⁴⁰ Sugihara, “Labour-Intensive”; Lee, “Trade and Economy”.

⁴¹ Frank, *Rural Economic*; Pomeranz, *The Great*.

⁴² Sugihara, “Labour-Intensive”.

⁴³ Frank, *Rural Economic*; Saito, “The Labour Market”.

⁴⁴ Roy, *The Economic History*; Perlin, “Proto-Industrialization”.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, double employment (rural and urban) was the rule rather than the exception not only in Russia (Stanziani), Japan (Nagata) and France,⁴⁵ but also in Britain. According to Lindert and Williamson, for the larger occupational groups such as “agriculture”, “commerce” and “manufacturing trades”, the census and statistical error margins are probably within the range of minus 40 to plus 66 per cent!!⁴⁶

Seasonal needs in agriculture were the crucial variable here. In Russia (Stanziani), China and Japan (Nagata) as well as Britain, France, and Central Europe (Cerman), the solution to seasonal and local shortages of manpower lay in interregional migration and, later in the nineteenth century, in the transformation of hand harvesting techniques and tools.⁴⁷ In fact, the labour requirements for harvesting were especially high since labour input peaked sharply at harvest time.⁴⁸ Thus, as Markus Cerman clearly shows in his chapter, landowners in Brandenburg satisfied part of their manorial labour needs by requiring the children of their peasant tenants to serve on the manor for a period of three years. However, at harvest time, the labour services provided by peasants and their children fell short and recourse to seasonal day labour was widespread. The proportion of rural dwellers that worked part time for corn growers depended on what they did outside the peak season.

These activities were extremely problematic for rising manufacturing and industry which, like the other parts of the economy, mostly relied upon labour. Because the price of capital was still high, urban employers sought to cope with labour shortages by putting legal pressure on labourers, who were not allowed to leave before the end of their terms, as well as on competitors through strong penalties for unfair competition, etc. The first industrial revolution in Britain was far from the overall substitution of labour with capital. Feinstein’s estimations show that in Britain, capital and labour grew at about the same rate from 1760 through 1830, so that there was effectively no change in the capital-labour ratio during these seven decades. In the last three decades, the ratio slowly rose, as capital per worker increased at a rate of about 1/2% per year.⁴⁹ The rate

⁴⁵ Postel-Vinay, “The Dis-Integration”.

⁴⁶ Lindert, Williamson, “Revising”; Lindert, Williamson, “English workers”.

⁴⁷ For Britain: Collins, “Migrant labour”; for France: Postel-Vinay, “The Dis-integration”; For Germany: Melton, “Population structure”.

⁴⁸ Grantham, “Divisions of labour”.

⁴⁹ Feinstein, “Capital Formation”.

of capital formation in Britain was relatively slow on the whole until the mid-nineteenth century and the capital-labour ratio increased sharply only afterwards.⁵⁰

By 1850, relatively few workers were employed in factories: only a small proportion worked in technologically advanced industries such as cotton, iron and steel, and metalwork, and the full impact of steam power in transport and production was yet to be felt.⁵¹ This view breaks with the traditional scenario of the first industrial revolution and strongly reduces the gap between Britain and other countries, particularly France. Historiography long considered France “backward” in comparison with Britain, precisely because of its slow rate of concentration and capital intensification in industry.⁵² Recent analyses have consistently modified this view: if British capital intensification and the increasing capital-labour ratio in industry have been revised downwards, on the contrary, French dynamics have been corrected upwards. From this standpoint, the relatively slow pace of capital growth in France, and the increasing ratio of labour to capital industry are no longer seen as exceptional or “inefficient”.⁵³

This means that not only in Russia, but also in France and most of the European countries, economic and industrial growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remained on a small scale and was labour intensive. Growth was most often achieved within the same production function whose scope expanded slightly until the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁴ There is evidence that much of the productivity increase was not associated with specific innovations, but rather with workers operating more machines.⁵⁵ Christine Mac Leod reveals that the most frequently declared goal of innovation was either improving the quality of the product or saving on capital, not labour. And if inventors were not particularly intent on saving labour, those who judged their inventions were even less so. In other words, economic actors did not wish to substitute labour with capital and the final outcome for the whole economy was an increasing demand for labour.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Craft, *British Economy*; J. Williamson, “Why was British growth”; Harley, “British industrialization”. Deane, “Capital Formation”; Feinstein, Pollard (eds.), *Studies in capital formation*; Craft, *British Economic Growth*.

⁵¹ Deakin, Wilkinson, *The law*: 20.

⁵² Crouzet, *British ascendant*; Lévy-Leboyer, Bourguignon, *L'économie française*.

⁵³ Craft, *British Economic*; O'Brien, *Economic Growth in Britain and France*.

⁵⁴ Craft, *British Economic*.

⁵⁵ Clark, “Productivity Growth”.

⁵⁶ Mac Leod, *Inventing*: 158–181.

Overall, in British industry during the second half of the eighteenth century, labour input grew at about 1.2–1.3 per year, 2/3 of which was caused by a larger population, and the remaining third coming from longer working hours.⁵⁷ Following E.P. Thompson,⁵⁸ legions of historians have endeavoured to show that working time actually increased with the industrial revolution. Indeed, this process started much earlier, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the “industrious revolution”⁵⁹ and the multiplication of farming and industrial activities.⁶⁰ Thus, the global history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in all the countries we mentioned shows a similar evolution of working time, i.e. workdays became longer as labour became more intensive.⁶¹ The innovations and technical improvements recorded in agriculture, industry and trade did not take place at the expense of labour but actually fostered employment. This mechanism is confirmed in the study of manufactures in France and England, Japan and India. From the point of view of labour institutions and the relationship of labour to other production factors, it thus became a common “wave of capitalism” (to borrow Braudel’s expression but not his chronology) that lifted Eurasian capitalism as a whole from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

Hence questions concerning working time deserve to be studied within a more complex set of dynamics: if labour was already becoming more intensive in every sector during the preindustrial era, then how could presence at work be controlled when families, landowners, traders and manufacturers were competing for it?

Child and Female Labour

In labour relations, children have always played a crucial role in every context as the focus of controversies relating not only to economics but also the social order, religion and institutions. Of course it is necessary to consider how “child” was defined, which changed according to the period and place⁶² (chapter by Gwyn Campbell). At the same time,

⁵⁷ Voth, “Time and Work”.

⁵⁸ Thompson, “Time, work-discipline”.

⁵⁹ De Vries, *The industrious*; Voth, “Time and work”.

⁶⁰ Craft, *British Economic Growth*; Mokyr, *The Economics*.

⁶¹ Cross, *Worktime*; Cross, *A quest*; Fridenson, Reynaud, *La France et le temps*. Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries*.

⁶² Ariès, *Centuries*.

this relativism does not rule out identifying similarities and differences as well as continuities and breaks between these definitions and child labour. The differences concern the status of children relative to that of their parents: the children of slaves were not always or necessarily slaves themselves. Conversely, pawnship, i.e. the pawning of children by debtors, was a form of non-hereditary belonging, at least from a formal standpoint. Above all, unlike slavery in the strict sense, pawnship expressed a form of integration in society rather than the alienation of a slave in another society.⁶³ Hereditary status influenced the evolution of families and societies before, during and after Western expansion. Slavery as practised by Westerners in Africa led first to an intensification of local forms of bondage. Later on, when the Westerners themselves decided to prohibit pawnship, which was considered slavery, new forms of dependency were introduced in various African societies. This interaction with the Western world was essential: the status of children in eighteenth century England was linked to the authority of the head of the household, the employer and children's rights. Children—as children or as apprentices—had fewer rights in relation to their fathers/employers or their masters outside the family. These unequal rights accompanied and supported the industrious revolution⁶⁴ and later the industrial revolution in the strict sense, both in Europe (chapter by Deakin) and in Japan (Nagata). Child bondage was not incompatible with the growth of the industrial world and that connection was transplanted to the colonies, where slaves were immediately treated like children with fewer rights. When slavery was abolished, first the British (1832–1842), then the French (1848–1860) and towards the end of the nineteenth century the Dutch (chapters by Bosma and Campbell) assigned temporary “apprentice” status to their former slaves.⁶⁵ This status was naturally used to demonstrate that former slaves were not fully civilised, but also and more precisely, the fact that, as apprentices in Europe, they were still subject to the authority of their masters/employers. The special status attributed to children and former slaves underpinned the encounter between European countries and Asian and African societies in the nineteenth century. These worlds had a reciprocal influence on each other, which led to perpetuating a special status for children within the societies concerned.

⁶³ Lovejoy, Fayola, *Pawnship*. Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

⁶⁴ De Vries, *The Industrious*.

⁶⁵ Davis, *The Problem*; Engerman, *Terms*; Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

Women, too, were subject to unequal rights. Keeping in mind the fundamental differences between matrilineal and patrilineal societies underlined by Laslett, Meillassoux and many others,⁶⁶ it is nevertheless important to think about how these forms of hierarchy interacted and how people were placed in situations of dependency or slavery. In several African and Asian societies, even before the arrival of the Europeans, female slaves were sold for a specific use. Concubines and servants certainly played a role, but the rise of rural and later plantation slavery changed the context. The type of crops influenced the choice of male or female slaves, and hence, the price of women. Once again, the status of women was related to the form of economic activity in the broad sense of the term in both “free” and slave-holding societies. In Europe, women had fewer rights than men and these inequalities were intensified rather than reduced by the advent of urbanisation and industrialisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The diminished rights of women workers, not to mention widespread workhouses in Britain as well as France, Germany and Russia, testify to these continuities.⁶⁷ This trend was not reversed until the twentieth century, and even then, mainly during the second half.⁶⁸

In view of these facts, it is possible to conclude that, not only in the seventeenth but also the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries, the continuing importance of cottage industries and frequent migration between the city and the country created a strong link between two types of constraint: presence at work and compliance with working hours, on the one hand, and competition among employers (including heads of households), manufacturers, landowners and trader-entrepreneurs for the control and appropriation of labour, on the other. This is where presence at work and discipline encountered institutions and labour law. Along with the rules governing workshops, agricultural estates and plantations in Europe and Asia, a set of provisions was devised to control mobility and presence at work, such as the worker’s booklet, laws against poaching workers and begging, forms of bondage, etc. Constraint in the organisational sense became linked to institutional constraints; presence at work conveyed concerns about internal organisation, competition and public

⁶⁶ Meillassoux, *Anthropologie*; Laslett, *The world*.

⁶⁷ On France: Perrot, *Les femmes*; on Britain: Burnette, “An Investigation”; on the USA: Goldin, “The Quiet Revolution”; on Russia: Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia*; on Germany: Biernacki, *The Fabrication*.

⁶⁸ Orloff, “Gender and the Social Rights”.

order. Yet if this was the case, what were the specificities of each area and how did they enter into global dynamics?

Empires of Eurasia: Global Dynamics/Centres of Development

Why Eurasia? We chose to focus on this area for a number of reasons, first of all because studies of the evolution of labour in “Western” Europe has been excessively dominated by a Eurocentric approach that views the industrial revolution and the French Revolution as the major breaks. On the contrary, we would like to show that those turning-points were merely partial, at least as far as labour institutions were concerned, and that the dynamics at work in France, England, Russia and Europe in general can be grasped only in their interaction with other parts of the world.⁶⁹

Our decision to focus on Eurasia and only in one paper (Campbell) on Eastern Africa in no way indicates a lack of interest in the rest of Africa and the Americas. The choice was partly based on the existing bibliography pertaining to slavery and labour. Researchers, especially in the last few years, have written at length about the interaction between Europe and the Americas and between Europe and Africa, whereas the relationships between Europe and Asia have received relatively less attention. Examining Europe and Asia together also has the advantage of avoiding retrospective thinking about Europe; we will see that labour institutions and practices in Europe were connected to what was happening in its colonies and in Asian empires.

Of course it was necessary to select particular areas. We have included a great number of regions of Asia and Europe: Russia, Great Britain, France, Prussia and Austria, India, Japan, China, Indonesia and the Indian Ocean region extending from China to Eastern Africa. These choices were made not because the regions are statistically representative, but rather because they are especially relevant to the questions we are asking. Thus, the French case is of interest not because it was the land of Colbertism opposed to liberal England, or because nineteenth century France was the country of free, codified law compared with Germany, which still lagged behind. On the contrary, France is of interest because its labour norms in the nineteenth century were actually quite well suited both to a capitalist economy and to the heritage of the Old Regime. This case is all the more

⁶⁹ Pomeranz, *The great*.

likely to raise new questions as, contrary to a widespread preconception, common law in England was in fact accompanied by a considerable degree of regulation and state intervention and labour remained subject to criminal constraints until the end of the nineteenth century (chapter by Deakin). Highlighting the case of France and comparing it with England leads us to question the differences between liberalism and regulationism or between free labour and guilds within the capitalist world, and from there to narrow the distance separating so-called “free” labour from the varieties of bondage.

We have paid special attention to India, in particular, because the time is ripe for a new analysis of the forms of dependence on England and its Empire specifically based on labour status. Unlike traditional analyses, these new studies, including the excellent examples presented here, are drawn from archival sources and provide a concrete picture of how norms and the labour market actually worked. We will show that while British norms and perceptions translated into various forms of bondage and slavery in India, and thereby helped perpetuate slavery well after its official abolition, the latter nevertheless existed prior to any British intervention. The solution adopted in India and the practices that were accepted did not result solely from British influences, but rather from interaction between those influences and local traditions. From this point of view, the chapters presented here by Joshi and Markovits concur with those of Campbell on the Indian Ocean and Bosma on Indonesia as well as with an increasingly extensive bibliography demonstrating the complexity of non-Western area “dependence” in the nineteenth century, thereby explaining the rise of proto-industry and then industry in India from the nineteenth century to the present day.⁷⁰

Finally, the case of Japan (chapter by Nagata) stands out because the stereotyped image of its economic dynamism as a reproduction of the Western model adapted to its own institutions and local culture is countered here by an analysis that emphasises the specificity of Japanese capitalism within a global dimension. Proto-industrial growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the role of the family in those dynamics were part of a more general trend of the worldwide economy.

The French, Japanese and Indian examples, with the similarities and differences we have just mentioned, are put to the test by comparing them with other regions in Asia and Europe. The Russian empire is interesting

⁷⁰ Roy, *The Economic History*.

(Stanziani): although serfdom and its history have been abandoned for decades, they constitute a kind of intellectual icon, apparently unshakable in spite of new studies on slavery and on serfdom in Eastern Europe and above all despite new data in Russian economic history revealing considerable economic and demographic growth at the time of serfdom. We explain this data by showing that Russian serfdom was never actually institutionalised and was in fact more flexible and more complex than is usually assumed.

These conclusions coincide with those regarding Central and Eastern Europe where the evolution of institutional relations, social relationships and economic dynamics did not wait for Napoleon to adopt a market orientation. As the chapter by Markus Cerman shows, there was sizeable proto-industrial growth at work in these regions.

Once serfdom—especially the second serfdom—has recovered its place within the comparative history of forms of labour, we will take another look at the differences and similarities in relation to other possible configurations of the labour world. Within the structure of this book, China in particular seems to pose a problem.⁷¹ The chapter by Chevaleyre demonstrates the specificity and complexity of the forms of bondage and the special legal status of bonded people compared with the familiar social and legal forms in the West during the same period. Like the chapters devoted to other contexts, the one on China attacks the traditional breaks proposed by historians. In particular, it re-examines the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty around 1644 precisely from standpoint of the status and condition of serfs, which encompassed various situations ranging from servitude and debt bondage to hereditary slavery. The continuities exceed the so-called changes in Chinese history. Indeed, historical research⁷² has underlined a Chinese specificity compared with the rest of the Eurasian continent: the studies show that slavery and the most restrictive forms of bondage were weaker and eliminated sooner in China than in the West. This outcome is often explained by the demographic factor, namely, the abundance of available labour in the country.⁷³ This is an altogether traditional, rather widespread argument in the literature on

⁷¹ I acknowledge my debt to Kenneth Pomeranz, Christine Moll-Murata, Yves Chevrier, Christian Lamouroux, Choi Wai for having helped me on this point.

⁷² Zurndorfer, *Change*; Hansson, *Chinese Outcast*; Campbell, Lee, “Free and unfree”; Cartier, “Travail; Schottenhammer, “Slaves”.

⁷³ Pomeranz, *The Great*, 82–84.

the historical forms of forced labour. Following Herman Nieboer,⁷⁴ countless scholars have explained forced labour by population scarcity.⁷⁵ This argument is now being challenged by historians of serfdom and slavery and of wage labour. The latter have shown that coercion in wage relations increased rather than declined between the early 1750 and the mid-nineteenth century Britain, at a moment when the population growth was already perceptible.⁷⁶

On the other hand, the cases of Australia and Canada testify to the fact that the colonisation of new territories did not necessarily call upon massive imports of slaves, as in the United States.⁷⁷ To be sure, in Australia, convicts initially played an important role but their number were small compared to forms of indentured and contract labour immigration.⁷⁸ These last forms also prevailed in Canada in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although “free” and “unfree” immigration can no longer be opposed as such,⁷⁹ and conditions for indentured immigrants were harsh (in particular for Asian immigrants during the second half of the nineteenth century), they still cannot be assimilated to slaves because their legal status was never passed on to their children and they could always return home. However difficult their situation, they did not endure the radical exclusion of slaves.⁸⁰ Thus, while Canada and Australia were not lands of freedom, they never experienced massive slave immigration like Brazil or the United States. Indeed, for indentured contracts in general, the forms of immigration to Australia and Canada seem to have been linked far more to immigrants’ motivations than to population scarcity.⁸¹

Last but not least, the case of Russia (chapter by Stanziani) also shows that the introduction and implementation of serfdom rules was never connected to population density and the availability of labour.

Thus, from a reverse angle, it seems legitimate to have doubts on this subject with regard to China as well. In comparison to the rest of world, the demographic rise in China, already considerable in the sixteenth and

⁷⁴ Herman Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (Original: 1900).

⁷⁵ Just a few example in a huge bibliography using this argument: for Russia: Blum, *Lords*; for the USA: Fogel, Engerman, *Time*.

⁷⁶ Deakin, hereafter.

⁷⁷ Engerman, *Terms*, “Introduction”.

⁷⁸ Northrup, *Indentured Labor*.

⁷⁹ Lucassen and Lucassen (eds.), *Migration*. Eltis, *Coerced and free migration*.

⁸⁰ Northrup, *Indentured Labor*.

⁸¹ Galenson, *White servitude*.

seventeenth centuries, even accelerated in the eighteenth century.⁸² At the same time, there is no proven correlation between the increase of population and the abolition of bondage. There were significant regional differences in mobility throughout the nineteenth century. In particular, though restrictions on the movements of a portion of the rural population were soon abandoned—in certain regions and for certain peasants, especially those on government-owned estates—, constraints nevertheless survived for a long time, at least until the end of the nineteenth century.⁸³

In general, a kind of caste separation between *liangmin* (good people) and *jianmin* (lowly people) continued until the nineteenth century. These different statuses were hereditary; the category of lowly people included servants, prostitutes and musicians as well as craftsmen and wage earners. These categories enjoyed fewer rights than the other social groups. They were also subject to more severe criminal punishments and greater discrimination in labour relationships.⁸⁴

In this context, debt bondage, bonded servants and rural labourers were quite widespread, not to mention slave prostitutes.⁸⁵ Though there are no hard figures to quantify this phenomenon, legal disputes on the subject suggests it was a considerable problem throughout the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ And even until the late twentieth century, serfdom and rural slavery were widely practised by the Yi in the mountains of Sichuan and Yunnan.⁸⁷

In the cities, too, the heritage of the guild system, which guaranteed fair competition between employers just as it did in Japan (chapter by Nagata), conditioned the mobility of labourers by laying down rules of apprenticeship and remuneration.⁸⁸

All the same, it would be worth doing detailed studies on the forms of labour in China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until the beginning of the twentieth century to determine whether forms of constraint and bondage were maintained or actually disappeared.

In short, it is possible to identify similarities and differences in work constraints in Eurasia. The similarities lie mainly in the dissemination of

⁸² Lee, Feng, "Malthusian".

⁸³ Campbell, Lee, "Free and unfree".

⁸⁴ Hansson, *Outcasts*.

⁸⁵ Schottenhammer, "Slaves".

⁸⁶ Hansson, *Outcasts*.

⁸⁷ Hui, "Les esclaves".

⁸⁸ Moll-Murata, "Chinese Guilds".

those constraints from the end of the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, along with an intensification of labour during periods of agricultural, trade, proto-industrial and industrial growth. Labour intensification in support of growth, rather than a workforce shortage as such, accounts for the constraints. Continuity in the forms of labour regulation during this period was particularly evident in Japan and Great Britain. The differences concern primarily the strength of proto-industry, which was greater in Asia than in Europe, but also the early liquidation of the forms of bondage in China. This liquidation, which no doubt should be qualified, was in any case accompanied by a strengthening rather than the disappearance of the forms of infra- and inter-village solidarity, especially during migrations to the city. At the time, the same forms of solidarity were found in Russia, which, unlike China, nevertheless maintained “serfdom” well beyond the period of eighteenth century growth.

Finally, the forms of labour in Japan stood in stark contrast to these models and were equally far removed from the solution adopted in Western Europe around the end of the nineteenth century, i.e. the social state. Japanese enterprises encouraged workforce loyalty and set up internal systems of social protection, both of which were among the main arrangements developed to support the transition from small to large industry.

At the same time, these comparisons at the national and imperial level are valid only as a rough approximation. No doubt legal rules (civil, tax and customs laws) refer to the national dimension of these phenomena, yet those rules were only one of the components of economic action, along with symbolic, cultural and political aspects. Hence, we cannot ignore the importance of local components and the strong differences between the dynamics of different regions within a single country. Let us look at that dimension now.

Global versus Local Labour Dynamics

The forms of forced labour—the existence of bondage or even slavery alongside “free” labour—often varied from one city to the next and from one place to another. This observation is especially relevant in our case as the institutions and economic activities in the world we are studying were extremely fluid, multiple and local from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Several institutions coexisted at the local level and even when a process of national unification took place, institutional

pluralism continued.⁸⁹ It was more widespread at the level of empires where legal pluralism was an important instrument of economic and political action.⁹⁰

Local practices and customs played an important role and they were recognised in nineteenth century Russia with regard to property, in Islam with regard to transferring ownership of slaves, in Kyoto and Lyon with regard to work discipline. These elements account simultaneously for common phenomena (restrictions on labour mobility), the diverse ways they were expressed and their source (worker's booklet, Russian serfdom, criminal punishment in the British Empire). They also explain the differences in the dynamics of Lancashire, the south of France and western Russia as well as those between individual English or Japanese factories and villages. Different solutions were adopted within a few miles of each other and similarities developed more frequently with factories in distant regions than with those nearby. The solutions adopted concerning working time testify to local irreducibility within a space that was nevertheless global. The chapters by Nagata and Vernus confirm this phenomenon. In Japan as in France, despite national norms and theoretically common techniques, the solutions that were adopted differed from one region to the next, often significantly. On the other hand, surprising similarities can be detected between certain districts of these two countries. These results confirm the similarities between certain Chinese regions and English districts, which have been the subject of recent research,⁹¹ just as those between proto-industrial districts in Europe.⁹² These resemblances express the close link between technical solutions, economic and local institutional heritage, national discipline and international phenomena.

Book Outline

This book is divided into three parts, reflecting the coexistence of several levels of analysis. The first part reveals how the circulation of economic knowledge and legal models was related to economic behaviour and dynamics through case studies of England, Indonesia and the Indian

⁸⁹ Royer, *Histoire*.

⁹⁰ Benton, *Law*.

⁹¹ Pomeranz, *The great*.

⁹² Cerman, Ogilvie, *European*.

Ocean World. Simon Deakin shows that, contrary to its reputation as the country of common law and free labour, Great Britain multiplied the statutes and constraints governing labour, unlike France where guild-based constraints proved less important than is usually acknowledged. Thus it becomes easier to understand the interface between the categories of European colonisers and those at work in the colonies. Ulbe Bosma discusses the attempts by Dutch colonial elites to establish certain labour relationships in Indonesia using the specificity of that region compared with their homeland as a lever. Similarly, the chapter by Gwyn Campbell takes a very long-term view in examining the forms of labour, bondage and slavery in the different societies of the Indian Ocean. They contributed to the proto-industrial growth experienced in other regions, which raises the question of their different trajectories over the very long term, even though the dynamics in which they took place were identical.

The second group of articles examines in greater detail the way local forms of dependence interacted with global dynamics. Marie-Louise Nagata explains how families and production units in Japan under the Tokugawa regime coped with proto-industrial growth. Taking the example of silk production in Tokyo, she brings out the interaction between family ties, the market and working time. This serves as a basis for comparing its similarities with and differences from Lyon, another silk production region. Pierre Vernus studies the solutions developed in this industrial district in the face of rapidly growing international markets in the nineteenth century and the undermining of local practices concerning labour and product quality. Claude Markovits looks at these same constraints in Indian trading companies. This case opens up at least three interesting perspectives. First, it fills a gap in the study of labour in India, which is too often focused on manufacturing. Next, it shows that Indian emigration was not necessarily limited to coolies and bonded labourers but also involved trading networks. Third, the presence of Indian trade organisations at the international level reflected international economic dynamics in which Asia, far from being a mere spectator of European development, in fact played an active role.⁹³ In his study of silk marketing by Indian firms, Markovits provides an important supplement to the chapter by Vernus by bringing out the connection between the dynamics of silk production

⁹³ Chaudhury, *The Trading*; Tracy, *The Rise*.

in nineteenth century Asia and the rise of local trade networks that were solidly integrated in the international markets.

Taken together, the three cases of Kyoto, Lyon and an Indian trading firm in Cairo testify to the importance of forms of dependence rooted in family networks, which was to a certain extent common to Europe and Asia. This aspect is the core of the third and final part of the book, devoted to what Braudel described as “long-term prisons”. We will be discussing these constraints more from the standpoint of labour relations than of food. We have selected four cases: Central-Eastern Europe, Russia, China and India. The first two cases lead to questioning the “second serfdom” in Central and Eastern Europe, and from there, to re-examining the slow evolution of these societies. Instead of a shift from feudalism to capitalism, in keeping with the favoured tradition of theoreticians and historians, we will emphasise the interaction over the very long term between forms of bondage, constraints and market dynamics. The obvious differences between these situations, which we have already underlined, cannot conceal the common problem they all faced, namely economic and territorial expansion and the conflict between elites that it produced. From this point of view, the polymorphous legal status of “serfs” corresponded to the difference in status separating servants, coolies, shop assistants and agricultural labourers from their masters. The status of the different forms and degrees of service in husbandry and bondage reflected different economic conditions. Work discipline and its organisation were never a simple contractual matter but rather took place at the intersection between the private order and the public order of the markets. That is why it is important to compare the evolution of the second serfdom with that in China and later in colonial India. In the case of China, we will also learn in the chapter by Claude Chevalyere that the existence of a multitude of forms of dependence ultimately adapted quite well to the order of civil servants, “castes” and naturally the markets. In the end, these elements will be compared with the forms of constraint in colonial India, particularly in the area of public works (article by Chitra Joshi); to meet workforce requirements, the British government resorted as readily to (Indian) criminals as to the “free” population. Underlying these measures was the notion of labour as social service. This connection was possible due not only to the hazy distinction in English law between *a servant* and a bonded labourer, but also to the fact that in Mogul villages in India, peasants were traditionally hired for public works projects (road construction, labour during periods of famine, etc.). It was the convergence of these different traditions that made it possible to mobilise compulsory labour to build imperial roads.

The same convergence of private and public interests—of the state and the village economic community—, already noted in France and Russia, accounts for the emergence and duration of the system.

We have thus come full circle: we find the link between freedom and constraint discussed in the first section in the organisation of labour and the movable boundary line between the private order (contractual) and the public order (regulatory and legal) of labour.