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## **Labour, bondage and economic growth. An Eurasian perspective.**

### Summary

The history of forms of “free” labour is intimately linked to that of coerced labour. Between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries, all over Eurasia, forms of labour and bondage were defined and practised in reference to each other. A whole spectrum of forms of dependence, bondage and labour were available and mutually encroached.

This was true not only in any specific area –settling in local institutions, values and economic relationships- but also at a global scale. Serfdom in Prussia and in Russia expressed an extreme variant of Western European notions and practises of labour as domestic service and social obligation. All the same, 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 Netherland, the indentured labour in the British, French, and Dutch colonies would have not been possible.

Common tendencies and local perspectives in labour relationships found their sources not only in the global circulation of models, peoples, goods and institutions, but also in market dynamics. Between the seventeenth and the end of the nineteenth century, a labour intensive growth was at hand all over Eurasia. In China as in Japan, in India as in Indonesia, in the Indian Ocean World as in Western Europe, in Russia and in Prussia, proto-industry, agriculture, trade and manufacture experienced an unprecedented growth. Mostly labour-intensive, this long-term growth exerted a major pressure on labour resources and contributed to the raising of coercion and legal constraints on labour mobility in Eurasia.

### **Definitions and institutions of labour.**

Not only in each country and area, but also at a global scale, forms of bondage and freedom were mutually defined. In the Anglo-Saxon world, until almost the end of the nineteenth century,

there were fewer “wage earners” than servants, i.e. workers whose status resembled that of domestics. These workers did enjoy 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 contract<sup>2</sup> which historians today usually classify as a form of forced labour, was in no way opposed to free labour during this period.<sup>3</sup> Indenture contract was seen as an expression of contractual free will; in India, this form of servitude continued until the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 French empire, where colonial leaders based their conception of post-slavery labour on the constraints imposed on servant wage earners in France. The conceptions and practices of labour in Europe and its main colonies influenced each other and entered into global dynamics. The indentured labour was not the antithesis of “free” wage labour but an extreme form of the peculiar historical meaning wage labour took in modern Europe.

But then if the definition of “free” labour included 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.<sup>6</sup> Serfs were never legally defined as such in Prussia<sup>7</sup> and Central and Eastern Europe, or even in Russia; the documents that are 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 and in Africa. These types of bondage close to slavery were based less on European law than on

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<sup>1</sup> Steinfeld, *Coercion* ; Deakin, Wilkinson, *The Law*.

<sup>2</sup> Steinfeld, *The Invention* ; Galenson, *White Servitude*; Northrup, *Indentured Labor* .

<sup>3</sup> Hay, Rogers, *English Society* ; Hay, “Masters and servants” , in Steinmetz, *Private Law*.

<sup>4</sup> Hay, Craven , *Masters*.

<sup>5</sup> Northrup, *Indentured Labor*.

<sup>6</sup> Stanziani, “Free labor-forced labor “.

<sup>7</sup> Melton, “The decline”; Ogilvie, “Communities”.

local customs. Hence, a continuum of solutions appears, with a variety of forms of debt bondage, indenture contract, other forms of bondage contracts between English masters and Indian coolies, as well as genuine slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Yet local specificities require to 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 conventional thesis –celebrating the triumphal march toward freedom started in the nineteenth century after centuries if not millenaries 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 condition of African-Americans and of “free” labourers in the colonies are used to confirm this position.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, historians of serfdom in Eastern Europe have revealed the decadence of the system well before the arrival of Napoleon and the French codes<sup>10</sup>, just as French historians have shown how medieval serfdom evolved prior to the Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup> Both groups have also brought to light aspects of bondage and service in husbandry that continued after the official abolition of serfdom.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> Farther upstream, 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*).<sup>15</sup>

Continuities rather than breaks existed 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, France, and Russia.

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<sup>8</sup> Patnaik, Dingwaney, *Chains*; Tinker, *A New System*; J Pouchepadass, *Paysans*; Condominas, *Formes extrêmes*; Reid, *Slavery*.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, *Slavery and Slaving*; Drescher and Engerman, eds., *A Historical Guide*.

<sup>10</sup> Hagen, *Ordinary*.

<sup>11</sup> Bois, *La crise*; Duby, *Les trois ordres*; Bonnassie, *From Slavery*.

<sup>12</sup> Hagen, *op. cit.*, 2004, Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*.

<sup>13</sup> Steinfeld, *The Invention*.

<sup>14</sup> Minard, *La fortune*.

<sup>15</sup> Didry, *Naissance*.

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

However, continuities between free and unfree labour are important not only in time but also in space; chronologies are in fact too common to be unconnected or to have come about merely by chance. To understand this point, 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.

### **Entanglements and labour dynamics**

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 work discipline in India. 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 century. Economic knowledge and legal models circulated along with people and goods. This circulation led not only to increasing 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.<sup>16</sup> Montesquieu published *The Spirit of the Laws* in 1748, soon to be followed by the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie*.<sup>17</sup> The serfdom of absolutist and medieval Europe was contrasted with the free labor of Enlightenment Europe. The advances of the Enlightenment contributed to the invention of a historiographic

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<sup>16</sup> Stanziani, “Free Labor”.

<sup>17</sup> Duchet, *Anthropologie*.

break between “enlightened France” and ancient 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 medieval Europe.

Similarly, British colonisers in India strove to translate local forms of dependency and bondage into their own categories; the disparities and resemblances 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. If labour practices had not been translated into English legal terms, the forms of post-slavery and post-colonial bondage would have developed differently.<sup>18</sup> 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 dependence of the so-called “periphery” from the core, colonial discourse aside, forms of bondage indeed existed in Russia, India, Africa and the Americas well before the arrival of Europeans.<sup>19</sup> And even during the colonial period, dependency was not simple and straightforward. 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.<sup>20</sup>

To sum up, the circulation of ideas and models is important, but it cannot be taken exclusively as a synonym of dependence 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.

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<sup>18</sup> Prakash, *Bonded Histories*.

<sup>19</sup> Coquery-Vidrovitch, Moniot, *L’Afrique noire*; Thonton, *Africa*; Meillassoux, *L’esclavage*.

<sup>20</sup> Stanziani, “Free Labor”.

## **A Global intensification of labour?**

How can we possibly justify the increasing limitations of free labour all around Eurasia between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century? Was not this period that of strong demographic growth and increasing capital development?

Those processes should have led to release constraints on labour rather than strengthen them. Indeed, this line of reasoning fails to take into account, on the one hand, the above mentioned values and notions of labour as a social service and an obligation, and on the other hand, the fact that between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century, all over Eurasia, an unprecedented labour-intensive growth was at hand. Indeed, over at least the last two decades, economic history has moved away from the interpretation developed in the early nineteenth century by the so-called “classical” economists (Smith, Ricardo) 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, this process mostly occurred in the twentieth century. Before that date, in most Eurasiatic spaces proto-industry, agriculture and even industry rather experienced a labour-intensive path. Agriculture first: conventional histories of economic growth stress a relative decline of agriculture during the industrialization process; at the same time, agriculture is supposed to provide goods to feed an increasing urban population. This outcome requires increasing productivity and yields, which, in turn, are obtained through a shift in the organization of economic units and in the relative weight of 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 have shown that livestock densities in many parts of England were stable throughout the modern period up through the mid-nineteenth century<sup>21</sup> ; at this opposite, at this moment, livestock was more important than commonly believed in Asia and eastern Europe<sup>22</sup>. That is to say that, in Britain, rising livestock numbers cannot explain the rise in yields that occurred before 1800<sup>23</sup>. On the rest of the continent as well, the long-term raising trend of wheat prices (roughly between 1680 and 1815) led to reducing the surface devoted to livestock and livestock feeding while increasing that for wheat.

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<sup>21</sup> Allen, *Enclosures*.

<sup>22</sup> Pomeranz, *The Great*.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, “Tracking”: 226.

The role of machines and new sources of power is also under 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<sup>24</sup>. Mechanization in farming proceeded slowly because agricultural operations are more separated in time and space than industrial processes. Mechanization was therefore a relatively unimportant component of changes in agriculture technology up through the mid nineteenth century<sup>25</sup> when the appearance of commercial fertilizers and the elaboration of mechanical harvesting equipment began significantly to affect methods of production.<sup>26</sup> Until the machine age, that is, after 1850, much of the rise in the productivity and the growth of output depended more on intensive use of known technology than on novel methods. The so called “new husbandry” was indeed not so new<sup>27</sup> and it required more labour, not less.<sup>28</sup> Only in agriculture systems characterized (as in the USA) by high opportunity cost for labour did economic pressure to mechanize become similar to that experienced by some sectors of industry. On the contrary, not only in Russia and France, but also in Prussia, since the seventeenth and up through the second half of the nineteenth century, labour was not only the major input in agriculture, either direct or embodied in land improvements, but its weight even increased during this period.<sup>29</sup> Recent analyses converge towards the same conclusion: labour and labour intensity are identified as the main source of agriculture growth before 1850, human and physical capital playing a secondary role.<sup>30</sup> Labour-intensive techniques linked to the diffusion of knowledge and attractive market (with increasing agriculture price) were at hand between the seventeenth and the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when this trend reversed (decreasing agriculture prices and increasing wages).<sup>31</sup> However, increasing labour demand in agriculture had to compete with similar processes in proto-industry and manufacture. Original theories of proto-industrialization associated proto-industry to demographic growth and proletarianization on the one hand, to a decline of urban guilds and feudal institutions, on the other.<sup>32</sup> Further analyses have put all these assertions under

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<sup>24</sup> O’ Brien, “Agriculture”.

<sup>25</sup> O’ Brien, “Agriculture”.

<sup>26</sup> Grantham, “Agricultural Supply”.

<sup>27</sup> Federico, *Feeding*.

<sup>28</sup> O’ Brien, “Path Dependancy”.

<sup>29</sup> Clark, “Productivity growth”

<sup>30</sup> Grantham, “Agricultural Supply”; Allen, *Enclosures*; O’ Brien, “Agriculture”.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, “The Second”.

<sup>32</sup> Mendels, “Des industries rurales”; Mendels, “Proto-industrialization”; Kriedte, Medick, Schlumbohm,

questions and nowadays it is widely accepted that on a comparative scale no one single uniform link between proto-industrialization and each of the mentioned variables can be detected. Proto-industry developed in Western, Central and Eastern Europe since the end of the seventeenth century, in response to market demand and demographic pressure<sup>33</sup>. It kept a central role 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.<sup>34</sup> However, This issue was far from being general, and in many European areas and districts proto-industry kept a leading role during the second half of the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> This timing was even more relevant in Asia; authors such as Lee and Sugihara have maintained that the “industrious revolution” De Vries had identified in Europe<sup>36</sup> was at hand also in some Asiatic areas<sup>37</sup>. In all these areas, as in most Russia regions, agriculture did not turn into a simple supplier of produce and labour-force for industry; quite the contrary, estates and peasants took part to the development of local and national markets, for both wheat and proto-industrial products. In Russia as in Central Europe, peasants’ commercialization was not always nor necessarily “forced” (by the landlords and/or the state); economic and legal dependence of many peasants was not in contradiction with the attraction the market exerted on many others.<sup>38</sup> As in many areas in Russia and Western Europe, in Japan as well increases in agricultural output and income lead to a growth in demand for manufactured goods that was met by an expanding rural industry utilizing labour-intensive technology. The resulting growth in rural non-agricultural activity in turn generated increased incomes for rural households and hence increased demand for agriculture output.<sup>39</sup>

Similar results are now available on India; unlike traditional view, stressing the decline of cottage industry under the British rules and the growing international markets, fresh researches show that “traditional” labour-intensive techniques were well developed until our days; thanks to

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*Industrilization before industrialization.*

<sup>33</sup> Hagen, “Capitalism in the countryside”.

<sup>34</sup> Ogilvie, Cerman, *European proto-Industrialization*.

<sup>35</sup> Sabel, Zeitlin, *Worlds of possibilities*.

<sup>36</sup> De Vries, “The industrial revolution”.

<sup>37</sup> Sugihara, “Labour-Intensive”; Lee, “Trade and Economy”.

<sup>38</sup> Sugihara, “Labou-Intensive”.

<sup>39</sup> Frank, *Rural Economic*; Saito, “The Labour Market”.



their flexibility, these techniques allowed labour-intensive pattern of growth linked to family units integrated in both agriculture and industrial markets.<sup>40</sup>

Though, such a persistent and global strength of agriculture and proto-industry had an unanticipated effect: urbanization and the supply of labour for urban manufacture were mostly seasonal.

Not only in Russia and France<sup>41</sup>, but also in Britain, until the mid-nineteenth century double employment (mostly in rural and urban areas) was the rule rather than the exception. According to Lindert and Williamson, for the larger occupational groupings, 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!!<sup>42</sup>

Seasonal needs in agriculture were the crucial variable here. Not only in Russia, but also in Britain, France, and Central Europe, seasonal and local shortages of manpower were overcome by interregional migration and, eventually, only later in the nineteenth century, by a transformation of hand harvesting techniques and tools.<sup>43</sup> In fact, labour requirements of harvesting were particularly important since labour input peaked sharply at the harvest.<sup>44</sup> However, at harvest time, the labour services provided by peasants and their children fell short and recourse to seasonal day labour was widespread. The part of rural dwellers who worked part time for corn growers depended on what they did outside the peak season.

These attitudes were extremely embarrassing for the raising manufacture and industry which, as the other parts of the economy, mostly relied upon labour. Because of the still high price of capital, urban employers sought to face labour shortages with legal pressure on labour as well on competitors (interdiction to move before the end of terms, strong penalties for unfair competition, etc). The first industrial revolution in Britain was far from being the realm of capital over labour. 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 ration in these seven decades. In the last three decades the ratio slowly rose, as capital per worker increased at a

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<sup>40</sup> Roy, *The Economic History*; Perlin, “Proto-Industrialization”.

<sup>41</sup> Postel-Vinay, “The Dis-Integration”.

<sup>42</sup> Lindert, Williamson, “Revising”; Lindert, Williamson, “English workers”.

<sup>43</sup> For Britain: Collins, “Migrant labour”; for France: Postel-Vinay, “The Dis-integration”; For Germany: Melton, “Population structure”.

<sup>44</sup> Grantham, “Divisions of labour”.

rate of about ½% per annum.<sup>45</sup> As a whole, the rate of capital formation in Britain was relatively slow until the mid nineteenth century and the capital/labour ration strongly increased only afterwards.<sup>46</sup>

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 metalworking; and the full impact of steam power in transport and production was yet to be felt.<sup>47</sup> These issues break with the traditional view of the first industrial revolution and strongly reduce the gap between Britain and other countries, namely France. Historiography considered this last as “backward” in comparison with Britain, precisely because of its slow rate of concentration and capital intensification in industry.<sup>48</sup> Recent analyses have consistently modified this view: if British capital intensification and the increasing capital/labour rate in industry have been revised downwards, on the contrary, French dynamics have been corrected upwards. From this standpoint, the relatively slow pace of growth of capital in France, and the increasing rate Labour/capital industry are no more considered as exceptional nor “inefficient”.<sup>49</sup>

This means that not only in Russia, but also in France and most of the European countries, economic and industrial growth of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remained at a small scale and was labour intensive. Growth most mostly achieved through a movement along the same production function whose scope slightly moved upwards until the mid nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> There is evidence that a lot of productivity increase was not associated with specific innovations, but with workers operating more machines.<sup>51</sup> Christine Mac Leod has found out that the most declared goal of the innovation was either improving the quality of the product or saving on capital, not labour. And if inventors were not particularly intent on saving labor, 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 of labour<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Feinstein, “Capital Formation”.

<sup>46</sup> Craft, *British Economy* ; JWilliamson, “Why was British growth”; Harley, “British industrialization”. Deane, “Capital Formation” ; Feinstein, Pollard (eds.), *Studies in capital formation*; Craft, *British Economic Growth*.

<sup>47</sup> Deakin, Wilkinson, *The law*: 20.

<sup>48</sup> Crouzet, *British ascendant*; Lévy-Leboyer, Bourguignon, *L'économie française*.

<sup>49</sup> Craft, *British Economic*; O'Brien, *Economic Growth in Britain and France*.

<sup>50</sup> Craft, *British Economic* .

<sup>51</sup> Clark, “Productivity Growth”.

<sup>52</sup> Mac Leod, *Inventing*: 158-181.

As a whole, during the second half of the eighteenth century, in the British industry, labour input grew at about 1.2-1.3 per annum, 2/3 of which was caused by a larger population, and the remaining coming from longer working hours<sup>53</sup>. Following E. P. Thompson<sup>54</sup>, legions of historians have endeavoured to show that working time actually increased with the industrial revolution. Indeed, this process started well before it, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the “industrious revolution”<sup>55</sup> and the multiple farming and industrial activities.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the global history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows a similar evolution of working time in all the countries we mentioned, i.e. the workdays became longer as labour became more intensive.<sup>57</sup> 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 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 up Eurasian capitalism as a whole from the seventeenth to the early twentieth 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?

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 place<sup>58</sup>. At the same time, 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

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<sup>53</sup> Voth, “Time and Work”.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, “Time, work-discipline”.

<sup>55</sup> De Vries, *The industrious.*; Voth, “Time and work”.

<sup>56</sup> Craft, *British Economic Growth* ; Mokyr , *The Economics*.

<sup>57</sup>Cross, *Worktime* ; Cross, *A quest*; Fridenson, Reynaud, *La France et le temps*. Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries*.

<sup>58</sup> Ariès, *Centuries*

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.<sup>59</sup> Hereditary status influenced the evolution of families and societies before, during and after Western expansion. Slavery as practiced 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 revolution<sup>60</sup> and later the industrial revolution in the strict sense, both in Europe and 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 assigned temporary “apprentice” status to their former slaves.<sup>61</sup> 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.

Women, too, were subject to unequal rights. Keeping in mind the fundamental differences between matrilineal and patrilineal societies underlined by Laslett, Meillassoux and so many others<sup>62</sup>, 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

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<sup>59</sup> Lovejoy, Fayola, *Pawnship*. Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

<sup>60</sup> De Vries, *The Industrious*.

<sup>61</sup> Davis, *The Problem*; Engerman, *Terms*; Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

<sup>62</sup> Meillassoux, *Anthropologie*; Laslett, *The world*.

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.<sup>63</sup> This trend was not reversed until the twentieth century, and even then, mainly during the second half.<sup>64</sup>

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 hand. 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 order.

Yet, 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

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<sup>63</sup> 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*.

<sup>64</sup> Orloff, “Gender and the Social Rights”.

unification took place, institutional pluralism continued.<sup>65</sup> It was more widespread at the level of empires where legal pluralism was an important instrument of economic and political action.<sup>66</sup>

Local practises 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. In Russia as 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 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<sup>67</sup>, just as those between proto-industrial districts in Europe.<sup>68</sup> These resemblances express the close link between technical solutions, economic and local institutional heritage, national discipline and international phenomena.

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