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Europe and Asia's Melded Future: A Critique of The Dawn of Eurasia

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Introduction

Will Eurasia’s “unifying wind blow from the east or the west?”¹ With the fall of the Berlin Wall between Europe and Asia, the United States anticipated that Russia and China would adopt a Western model of democracy.² Instead, they have risen as two distinct poles, and their ascension makes possible a move away from Western influence as the globe turns toward Eurasia: a new melding of East and West in which neither is dominant. The first quarter of political scientist Bruno Mações’ 2019 publication, *The Dawn of Eurasia*, explores this turn and details the emergent supercontinent Eurasia, Russia and China’s role in shaping it, and what preceded this shift. While the latter part of the book focuses on the cultural implications of considering Eurasia its own entity, the first quarter delves into the theoretical background that makes this Europe and Asia pairing unprecedented and crucial to understand in today’s political landscape. Mações argues that beyond general integration, the world has stepped into the next stage of globalization, which is inherently unstable due to an increasing juxtaposition of different cultures and civilizations that muddle the geopolitics of Europe and Asia. He goes on to say that this new moment has made a shift in power towards the East possible and attractive, teasing out how Russia and China continue to shape the Eurasian landmass.

An emergent Eurasia, as illustrated in the adjacent map, raises significant new questions for international relations that center on geopolitics as it relates to political and economic integration.³ In the new world, dominance and reciprocity must be used in tandem if the West is to keep up. Ultimately, Mações argues that the current “artificial separation between Europe and Asia cannot hold in a globalized world,” and while his argument that the two continents will become one political and economic unit in the next twenty years is convincing, his assertion that it will most likely adopt a new, vaguely-defined set of universal values crafted by Russia and China is unconvincing given their human rights histories, their current governments, and human nature.⁴



Summary of Book

Mações writes that geography factors heavily into global positions of power, and so understanding Eurasia’s geographic landscape is crucial to engaging with current shifts in international relations towards the East. To begin, he lends the book’s thesis a historical foundation by asserting that everything the United States did during the Cold War was in consideration of Eurasia—continually contemplating its future and determining its shape.⁵ He establishes that the question of Eurasia has long been America’s primary question, as it works to merge its relations

¹ Bruno Mações, *The Dawn of Eurasia* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 58.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

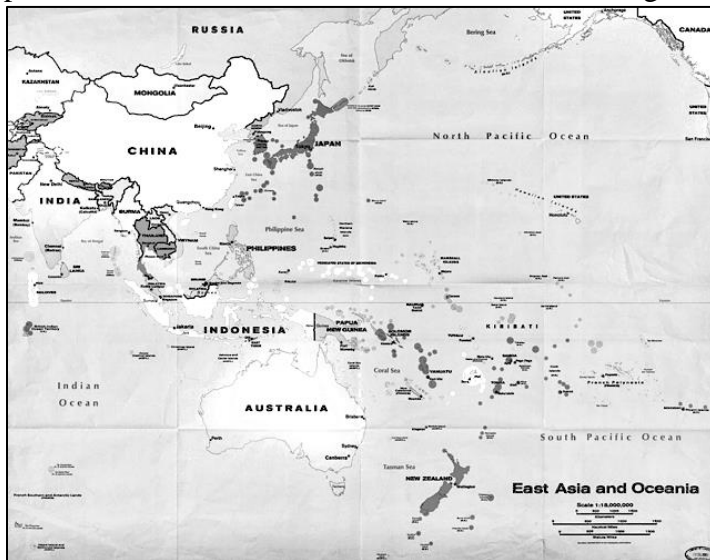
³ Keepsases / CC BY-SA / Desaturated, *Eurasia Orthographic Projection*, Map, 2018.
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eurasia_\(orthographic_projection\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eurasia_(orthographic_projection).svg).

⁴ Mações, *The Dawn of Eurasia*, 60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

with Europe, Russia, and China into one coherent strategy. These two assertions rest on the idea that the Cold War was inherently a conflict between Europe and Asia that set the stage for a present-day shift in international relations theory as ideological and territorial borders move around. Maçães goes on to say that today's key consideration is that the globe has moved to the next stage of globalization: one in which borders are diffusing, but cultural and civilizational differences are not, creating "a permanently unstable compound" of conflicting elements.⁶

This tension between geographic space and cultural practice has given rise to a permanent state of instability coupled with interconnectedness, which Maçães calls the Eurasian age. Political scholar Nadège Rolland agrees with this, stating that there is an "increasingly deep condominium" between both Europe and Asia, and on a smaller scale: Russia and China.⁷ Both countries look in the same direction for the future, seeking increased Eurasian integration and global primacy. While they have separate tactics, such as Russia's Eurasian Economic Union or China's Belt and Road Initiative, both are in pursuit of the aforementioned common aims, allowing the two to draw together both Europe and Asia by creating political and economic ties through their initiatives.⁸ Maçães writes that this new world order, where power is progressively balanced between East and West, is similar to the last thirty years' in that it "believes in the inevitability of interdependency and connectivity," but that it adds to that a "recognition of division and conflict."⁹ He seems to believe that Asia will be the predominant entity in this next age of globalization, stating that it is "almost a truism to say that our century will be an Asian century" because of the rapidly growing economies in China, Japan, and India.¹⁰ However, he clarifies that 'Eurasian' is a more fitting title for this age because the world is increasingly composite, a place in which "different visions of political order are intermixed and forced to live together."¹¹



The first quarter of the book's main argument is that Eurasia in its very nature, conveys that parts of the world no longer embrace European rules and ideas, suggesting that the European world order has failed to maintain its primacy and thus has come to an end, though it continues to influence how the world works.¹² This reorienting is another example of the next stage of globalization and necessitates a change in Europe's rigid strategies if it is not to be left behind. Further, Maçães argues that Eurasia, as shown in relation to the United States and Canada on this map,¹³ has escaped much of the scope of

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Nadège Rolland, "A China–Russia Condominium over Eurasia," *Survival* 61, no. 1 (2019): 7.

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Maçães, *The Dawn of Eurasia*, 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ United States Central Intelligence Agency, *East Asia and Oceania*, Map, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2002. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002627531/>.

America's influence.¹⁴ However, he remarks that this is now changing as President Donald Trump's current foreign policy seems to align more with models offered in Asia, pivoting the United States towards Eurasia: Trump's "main concern - which was the main concern of Trump the businessman - is to be able to compete with the new sources of economic power in the world...adapting to their methods - even adopting them at times."¹⁵

While American foreign policy evolves on the perimeter, Maçães suggests that Eurasia is primarily shaped by Russia, China, and the European Union's (EU) competing visions for future global dominance. He writes that Russia sees the future as a place of permanent rivalry and competition in which power must be taken, China sees it as an age where its foreign policy goals of influence can be accomplished through economic strength, and the EU hopes to maintain the status quo of its own primacy through the application of rules to complex sociopolitical issues.¹⁶ As Maçães states: "sovereignty in our time is no longer expressed by the image of the impregnable fortress. It is open to the world, it is the will to participate in all the global exchanges with an open mind..."¹⁷ The heart of his argument is that deep Eurasian integration will result in heightened modern conflict as attempts are made to meld together Western and Eastern ways of thinking, but that Russia and China's economic expansion towards Central Asia and Europe will accomplish a new kind of global collaboration. Maçães holds that this pairing will change the face of modern politics by shifting the power of influence away from Europe, making it "no more than a peripheral peninsula" in a new world order whose defining features remain hazy.¹⁸

Critique and Analysis of Argument

Maçães' thesis of the increasing importance of Eurasian integration is convincing and clarifies the implications of globalization for international relations and the global power dynamic in general. He rightfully shows that the issue is personal and affects each individual by pointing out that Russia and China are actively working towards increasing their influence through accumulation of territory in Russia's case and economic dominance in China's case. These tactics have far-reaching political ramifications that can now be seen in the EU's faltering organizational structure and the United States' changing economic policy. Russia and China's actions inherently seek to disrupt the current norms of international relations, which are largely Western-centric. So far, these two countries have been successful: the globe's economy and thus its politics have moved towards the East for the past thirty years and continue to do so.¹⁹ Maçães accurately notes that this shift towards the East is accelerated by the EU's failure to maintain order amidst growing chaos within and outside its borders from crises such as Russia's annexation of Crimea, an influx of refugees into Europe, and Greece's financial crisis. The latter resulted in Greece's eventual move away from the EU in 2018 towards an opportunity to make its port in Athens, Piraeus, a key point of trade between Europe and Asia in China's Belt and Road Initiative: a pioneering investment plan that seeks to link Asia, Africa, and Europe.²⁰ This initiative flows from China's belief, articulated by President Xi Jinping, that it should be the one to guide the world in shaping a new

¹⁴ Maçães, *The Dawn of Eurasia*, 260

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁰ Jens Bastian, "Southeast European Crossroads in China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Südosteuropa-Mitteilungen*, no. 1 (2019): 39.

world order that is “more just and reasonable” in a time of multipolarity and economic globalization.²¹ This map from one of China’s government agencies, the National Development and Reform Commission, illustrates what the Belt and Road’s two-pronged route might eventually look like as China pushes forward.²²

Significantly, Maçães’ arguments throughout this section of the book ring true as they flow from the international relations theories of realism and liberalism. Russia seeks influence through hard power in Europe, exemplified



in its invasion of Ukraine,²³ because it operates under realism, a theory that asserts that one’s sovereignty must be maintained and strengthened by leveraging power for the state’s self-interest.²⁴ China operates under the theory of liberalism as it seeks more influence by increasing its economic cooperation and interaction with other nations on the world stage.²⁵ The tactics diverge, but both models threaten the EU’s position of power because they thrive in opportunities that spring from a chaotic world order, whereas the EU relies on predictable political and economic exchanges that fit into its ordered system of rules. While the EU is not a sovereign power, Maçães regards its influence on the European peninsula as similar to the influence which Russia and China exert on the Asian landmass—resulting in the lines he draws between the three entities.

Maçães’ arguments have the strength of not asserting what cannot be generally known. He writes with humility in saying that while the concept of a coming Eurasia makes sense politically and economically based on the changing norms, he “cannot predict...what it will look like” and questions whether the “unifying wind will blow from the east or the west.”²⁶ What can be known, however, is that while the world is continuously reshaped and its future is uncertain, history does repeat: Maçães accurately recognizes that the new dichotomy in international relations that he describes “between system and environment replicates almost exactly the old one between a supposedly rational and orderly European civilization and the chaos of the Asian steppes.”²⁷ This broader perspective is brought in throughout the book and the combined view of Eurasia’s divergent past with its melded present strengthens Maçães’ view of its future. The book’s other strengths are his balanced approach to stating the goals of both Russia and China, as well as the

²¹ Ibid., 127.

²² China’s National Development and Reform Commission, *Belt and Road Portal*, Map, 2019. <https://en.ndrc.gov.cn>, retrieved from <https://www.thelocal.it/20190322/chinese-president-in-italy-to-sign-silk-road-deal>.

²³ Vsevolod Samokhalov, “Ukraine between Russia and the European Union: Triangle Revisited,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 9 (2015): 1381.

²⁴ Joshua S. Goldsterin and Jon C. W. Pevehouse, *International Relations*, (Hoboken, NJ: Pearson, 2020), 36.

²⁵ Karen A. Mingst and Ivan M. Arreguín-Toft, *Essentials of International Relations*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 83.

²⁶ Maçães, *The Dawn of Eurasia*, 58.

²⁷ Ibid., 232.

space he takes to look at Europe's historic role as a key global influence. He breaks down technical terms like geopolitics and makes his arguments accessible by stating that the crux of his argument sits in the fact that the world's borders are rapidly dissolving even as cultural practice and nuance increases—particularly along Asia's artificial border with Europe. Thus, Mações is effective at conveying the relevance of this issue with modern international relations. His work is appropriately speculative and well-researched, providing a timely analytical lens for the future.

Where Mações' argument of Eurasian integration and future world dominance breaks down is his assertion that it will likely, and most fittingly, be governed by unspecified "universal values" made up by Russia and China for the modern age.²⁸ This idealistic assertion captures a faulty idea at the core of his argument: what is right and inevitable for the future is that which fits the global scene best, regardless of plausibility or morality. This is inaccurate, as it follows a view of the world that believes humanity is always progressing. Mações suggests that man in his finite knowledge can eventually create a new model to live under that will be universally beneficial across two continents and serve as an example to the world. He insinuates that, in the future, man can learn from his mistakes and leave behind self-interest for himself and his nation long enough to create globally unifying values, despite this having never before been possible.

Mações writes that this model might arise from Russian and Chinese collaboration, despite the fact that the histories of both these nations are stained with flagrant human rights violations and overreaching governments, with little sign of change in present times. His vision of universality is vague and springs from what he has heard from academics in China who say they are "developing values that can appeal to every human being: some version of development and well-being that can be readily understood and assimilated by every nation on the planet in a way that democracy and human rights cannot."²⁹ International relations scholar Natalia Eremina states that the view of a universalized civilization "is an ideal and it cannot be realized."³⁰ She holds that since European civilization has lost its former attractiveness due to its various financial crises, "the modern world is not unified by the one dominant civilization power."³¹ This leaves a vacuum that enables Eurasia to gain influence and "become a platform for cooperation of different nations, cultures, and states."³² Accordingly, universality is not possible because no one entity stands at the helm of the globe's civilizations, and arguably, no entity could—humanity is and always has been self-serving with diverse visions for how society should be oriented. Civilizations rise and fall in relation to the fluctuating needs of different cultures, religions, and geographic locations. Thus, Eremina's statement that "in the future there will be a world of different civilizations that will have to learn to coexist with the others" aligns with what can be known from history's mosaic of human experience, which often skews towards a moral downward spiral rather than a straight line of progress.³³ Her assertion is therefore more plausible than Mações' prediction. While humanity and the globe's rising state powers may try to create universal values that seem good to the individual, ultimately it is a morality centered on truth and absolute values which must be returned to if the world is ever to pivot towards a sustainable state of peace.

²⁸ Ibid., 58.

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁰ Natalia Eremina. "Advent of a New Civilization Project: Eurasia in – U.S. out?," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2016): 169.

³¹ Ibid., 170.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 169.

Conclusion

In the first quarter of *Dawn of Eurasia*, Maçães predicts that Europe and Asia's artificially established border will dissolve entirely, allowing for the rise of Eurasia—a new geopolitical space to be explored through international relations theory and practice. Maçães successfully makes his argument by illuminating the steps that Russia and China are taking to further their integration with each other and the world, and the power that both are capable of as they utilize realism and liberalism in their interactions with other states. However, while his thesis that Europe and Asia will become one political and economic unit is convincing, his view that it will most likely operate under a new set of universal values created by Russia and China is a poor point that overreaches. The suggestion that two countries with problematic human rights records and authoritarian governments can come together to create a new moral world order is idealistic, improbable, and a faulty hope for the future.³⁴ Despite this flaw in Maçães' argument, the portions of this book that delve into analyzing the concept of Eurasia are well written, the ideas are accessible, and his stance is humble enough to allow that the world will unfold and shift its shape in the coming decades in ways that may not align with his predictions.

³⁴ Thomas Ambrosio, "Authoritarian Norms in a Changing International System," *Politics and Governance*, 6, no. 2 (2015): 122.

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