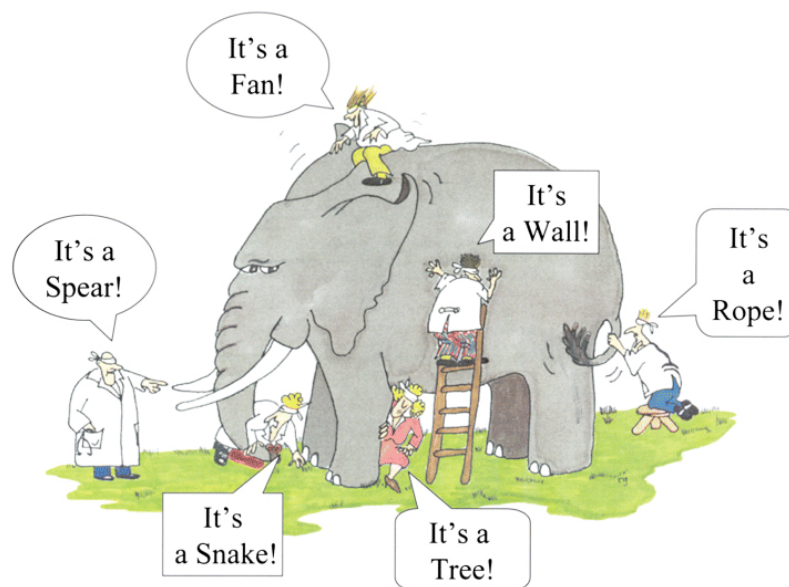


## **V. Islamic Culture and the World We Live In**

### A. Organizing *World* History

1. A famous and amusing fable that originated in India is known as “The Blind Men and the Elephant.” It captures the predicament that emerges as one tries to study something as big and complex as world history using conventional means.
2. As the story goes, a group of blind “wise men,” never having witnessed an elephant before, resolved to encounter one. As each of them grabbed a part of it, they came to very different assessments of what an elephant is.
3. By touch alone, each was able to grasp only part of what an elephant is. Unwilling or unable to appreciate the need to *integrate* their separate experiences, none of them could understand what an elephant actually is.
4. The fable is an apt description of how people experience the complexity of history. They study one part — usually a part that matters to them on some emotional level — and insist on the truth of what they know about that *part*, without being able to incorporate the partial truths of others into their understanding. Consequently, no one can see the “elephant” when it comes to history.
5. This an unintegrated jumble that most people are stuck with when they study history can be called a “spear-snake-fan-tree-wall-rope.”

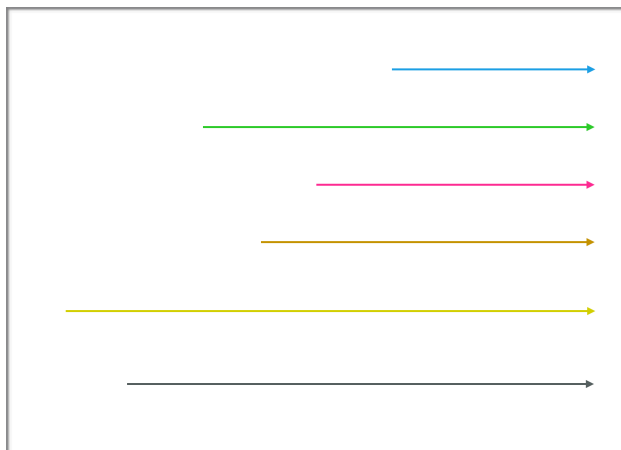


6. Now that we have studied the history of China and Japan, and we are preparing to study the history of yet another major culture, we can easily fall into the trap of seeing each of these things separately and *failing to see* how they are connected as *parts* of the story of the world we live in.
7. To overcome this problem, we need to find a way to combine the “spear,” the “snake,” the “wall,” and the other separate pieces together.

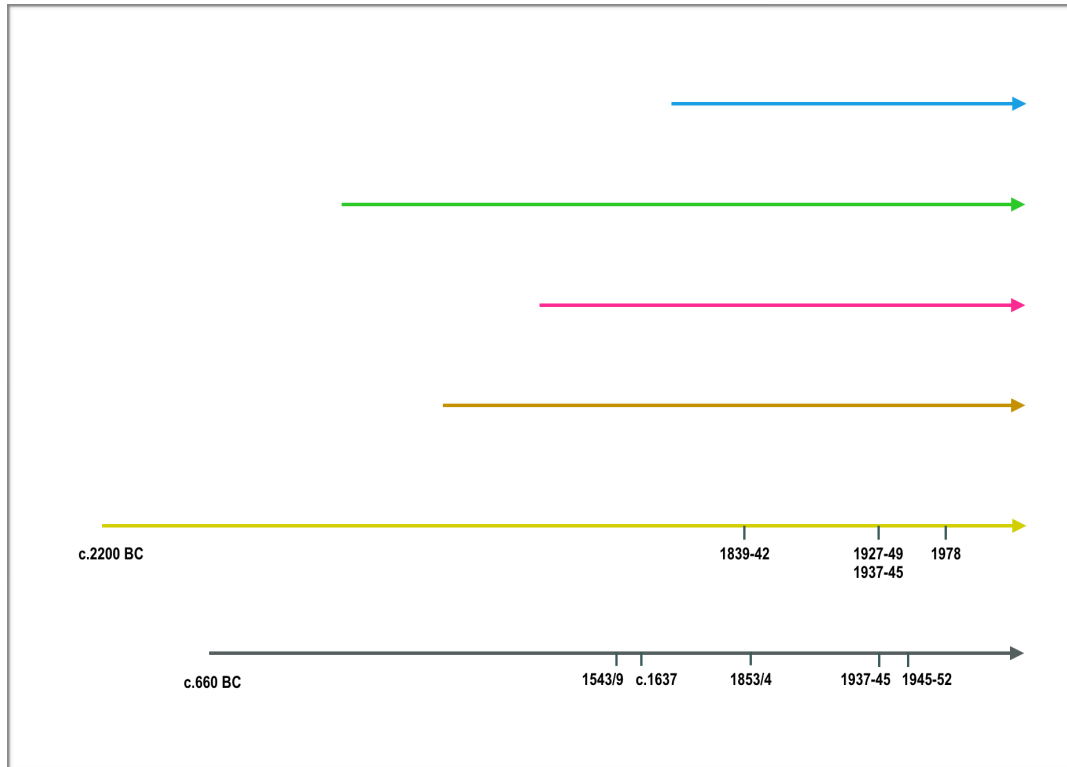
8. The method we will use is a kind of visual outline or timeline.
9. In the basic version of this timeline we will represent the histories of the five most important cultures—the “cardinal cultures”—as color-coded lines. As revealed in class, they are (from top to bottom) America, Europe, Russia, the Islamic World, and China. On a blank sheet of paper turned on its side, the lines representing their histories are drawn as follows:



10. The lines are not “to scale” because American history, which begins in **1776** is so much shorter than Chinese history, which begins in **c.2200 BC** that representing the lines that way would be impractical. It would also place undue emphasis on the distant past, when history changed very little, and which is far less relevant to us today than modern events.
11. The *relative* lengths do matter, however. China is the longest, then Europe, then the Islamic World, then Russia, then America. This relative arrangement must always be respected, even though we will often stretch various parts of the diagram to highlight some segment of special importance.
12. When we want to study another culture—a “fan,” or a “rope”—such as Japan, then we have to always make sure to include the cardinal five and then add that extra piece. That way we are always aware of the *elephant!* Here is what the elephant looks like including Japan:

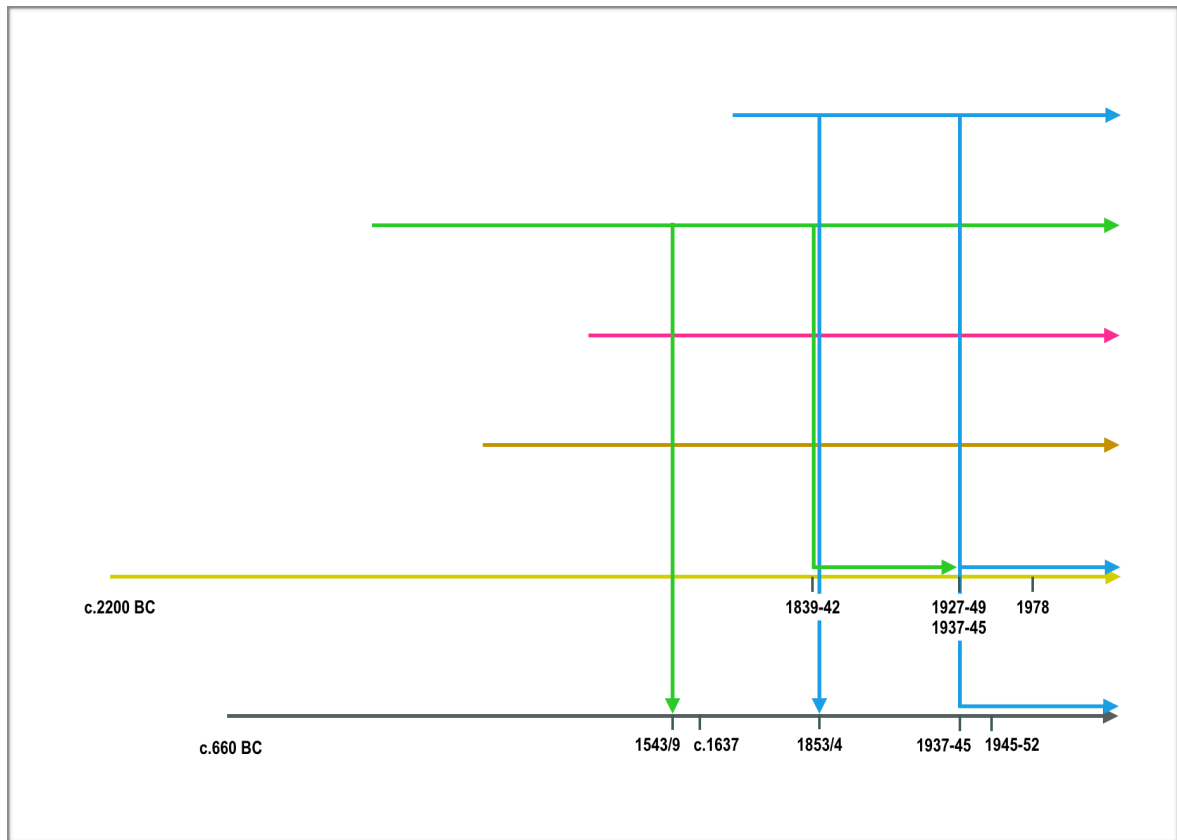


13. This basic diagram of course needs to contain some kind of specific information for it to serve a historical purpose. On it, we will indicate the anchor facts of each story, which for China and Japan are the following:



14. It is preferable to only mark the dates for each key event, because including an additional label that summarizes what happened would easily clutter up the diagram and make it messy. Obviously, if you are writing the date for an anchor fact on a timeline of your own, it is critical that you know what you are writing. A “date” that is just a “date” is useless, and even dangerous. If you become accustomed to writing them without knowing why, you will start to feel lost and discouraged. *Never write a date that you don't know the significance of on a diagram!*
15. Two more steps are required to *see the elephant!* On the diagram until now, we have six separate lines. How can we understand them as parts of one history? We need a way to illustrate the connections between the cultures that act upon one another, such that events in China or Japan are not merely thought of as parts of their stories only, when they are in fact events involving them and others. Obviously, the First Opium War is not just an event of Chinese history. It is an event of world history, where Europe imposed its will on China. Likewise, America defeated Japan in World War II. This is not just an event of Japanese history. It's an event of *world history*, that hugely impact China (and others as well).

16. On the next incarnation of the diagram therefore, two types of connecting lines will be shown: 1) arrows that show the impact of one culture on another—such as the impact of Europe on Japan, because of missionaries arriving in **1549**, and 2) lines and arrows that show the consistent role of one culture imposing itself on another in some form—of one culture *subordinating* another—such as America policing the world against the spread of communism, and thus preventing China from regaining Taiwan, and America recruiting Japan as a subordinate ally for that purpose in a post-imperial role.



16. The final step in making the whole diagram intelligible as a representation of all of history is to indicate the periods between the anchor facts, to help us focus on the evolving identity of each culture, as it acts and is acted upon by others over time. (The lines and arrows tie different cultures together. The period labels tie the different parts of each culture’s history together as a logical progression.)
17. The final diagram of history so far, in preparation for the study of the Islamic World is shown at the top of the next page.

