

Writing the History of the Global

Challenges for the 21st Century

Edited by

Maxine Berg

*Published for THE BRITISH ACADEMY
by OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS*

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

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First edition published in 2013

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available

Typeset by Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

ISBN 978-0-19-726532-1

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1 Global history: approaches and new directions

MAXINE BERG

'Global history' encompasses a new approach to historical writing which has emerged during the past fifteen years. Debates over 'globalization' and paradigms such as the 'great divergence' stimulated historians in many specialisms to think about the historical formation of these phenomena. Just how unique, how distinctive, is our current condition of an intense interlinking of economies and politics? We are now rethinking our histories in relation to those of others beyond Europe or beyond the nations and regions in which we specialize.

Global history first challenged the old national histories and area studies. It is now stimulating a recasting of imperial history, and of Atlantic world history. This volume brings together those who have written major books and articles shifting parts of the historical discipline in this direction, together with historians in fields including empire, area studies, the arts, and technology. It engages them in reflection and debate over what 'global' approaches to history mean, how it has changed the questions they ask, and the ways they do history. It raises the limitations and problems of this approach to history, but also opens out new perspectives.

First, where does global history come from? Many connect global history to debates over globalization. The new level of international flows and connections among economies and politics which social scientists addressed from the 1990s soon attracted historians, who pointed to the long history of global connections, some going back to the prehistoric period, but more significantly to the interlinking of land and sea routes from the first millennium AD. Thus they asked, 'does globalization have a history?'

¹ See, for example, Antony G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London, 2002) and Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton, 2005).

For many historians, however, an interest in the global did not stem from an attempt to join the globalization debate with its initial focuses on international politics, governance, and the economic order. Instead, during this past ten years they have been profoundly affected by the turning to the global in our history writing and teaching. The recent appearance of 'global history centres', 'world history groups', and 'transnational history centres', along with university appointments focused on 'wider world' and 'global' research agendas, provides a new institutionalization of this direction in historical writing. The titles of conferences, 'Global History of Science', 'Global Material Cultures', World and Global History Congresses, and a new range of MA programmes and undergraduate courses convey just how far this has reached. These perspectives have also become central in the museum and art historical world. We have seen high profile events such as the 'Encounters' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2003, the series of 'Empires' exhibitions at the British Museum, and exhibitions with a similar focus in New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tokyo. A total of 850,000 attended 'The First Emperor' exhibition at the British Museum in 2007–08; 54,000 bought the exhibition catalogue. The British Museum's venture in 2010 into an extended radio series, 'The History of the World in 100 Objects', led by its Director, Neil MacGregor, was combined with a presentation on its website, and later a CD series.²

A seminal volume, Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, published in 2000, brought new agendas to the large-scale comparative histories that had re-emerged in economic history, notably David Landes's *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor* (1998). The great divergence demanded the research on China and India that would challenge histories of European exceptionalism, represented by texts such as that by Landes or Eric Jones's earlier work, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (1981) or his *Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History* (1988). For all the problematic hypotheses of these books, they did push us to think beyond Europe: there was a growing dissatisfaction with national histories and area studies. Those borders and boundaries needed to be crossed.³

² I am grateful to J. D. Hill, British Museum, for this information. See his presentation at the Challenging the History of the Globe conference, May 2009 <www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/resources/>

³ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000); David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so*

Economic history was not the only source of this shift. From socio-political history there have been Jack Goldstone's *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (1991) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia' (1997), and more recently Christopher Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004), John Darwin's *After Tamerlane: A Global History of Empire Since 1405* (2007), and Linda Colley's *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* (2006).⁴

A dissatisfaction with national histories and area studies brought a foregrounding of themes long studied in world history: environmental histories, migration, slavery, trade, and travel. But above all, the 'global' in history writing emerged from postmodernist and postcolonial directions where 'crossing boundaries' and going 'beyond borders' joined aspirations to write a 'new imperial history' and to undertake comparative studies of the West and the East. Earlier historiographies of colonialism and imperialism provided histories of East India companies and of private trade, leading on to colonial and territorial dominion. Subsequent histories have focused on the struggles of subaltern peoples and the new national histories of regions earlier marginalized as colonies. Historians of Asia and of empire focused on Asia's domination by Europe and its subsequent escape, but they gave less attention to the ways in which Asia reconfigured the cultural and economic landscape of Europe. In recent generations an area studies agenda has dominated with regard to many of these former colonies, with less emphasis on comparative research across these regions, and connective research on Europe and Asia.

At the same time, many historians have pursued the wider concepts of 'connectedness' and 'cosmopolitanism' as these have developed in social theory. Many are now trying to move beyond unilateral comparisons between Europe and China, or Europe and India, and are investigating linkages and interactions between world areas.⁵

Rich and Some so Poor (New York, 1998); Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge, 1981); Eric Jones, *Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History* (Oxford, 1988).

⁴ Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 1991); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies* 31/3 (1997), 735–62; Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (Oxford, 2004); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: A Global History of Empire Since 1405* (London, 2007), and Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London, 2006).

⁵ See, for instance, Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, vol. 2: *Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands*

Global history, of course, had other earlier manifestations. It has a long pedigree stretching back to the ancient world, to Han and Tang China, and to Arab, Persian, and Hindu traditions.⁶ In the early years of the twentieth century there was a resurgence of interest in world history, coinciding with a new interest in China and Japan among Europeans, and with the peace movements of these periods. Global economic history courses at the London School of Economics (LSE) are now reviving (perhaps unknowingly) those comparative histories of trade and agrarian change between West and East taught there in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷ Craig Clunas tells us how Chinese art was part of the curriculum of the Courtauld Institute from 1933 until the Second World War, only to disappear thereafter.⁸

Other global approaches arose out of Marxism and the world systems method from the 1970s which turned analysis of capitalist development outwards to consider reproductions of metropolises and peripheries. Large-scale comparative syntheses, from Perry Anderson's *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974) and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974) to Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974–89), challenged historians to make connective perspectives.⁹

These works, in turn, joined with histories of colonialism and imperialism, histories which continued to provide grand narratives of domination and resistance, and which have left us with enormous amounts of research on trade flows, migration, and slavery, all set within the trajectory of imperial dominion. Again, these have been mainly histories of individual European nations and of the nations arising out of former colonies. They have involved less comparative research across regions

(Cambridge, 2010). See the review article on this by Alan Strathern, 'Reflections on Victor Lieberman's *Strange Parallels*. Volume 2: Mainland Mirrors', *Journal of Global History*, 7/1 (2012), 129–42.

⁶ P. K. O'Brien, 'Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), 3–39.

⁷ Maxine Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power 1889–1940* (Cambridge, 1996); also see William H. McNeil, 'An Emerging Consensus about World History?', *World History Connected*, 1/1 (2003), 1–4. On American, German, and Chinese historiography see Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁸ Craig Clunas, 'The Art of Global Comparisons', this volume, Chapter 11.

⁹ Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1974) and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York, 1974–89).

or the kinds of connective research on Asia or Eurasia advocated by Subrahmanyam as far back as 1997.¹⁰

This has had some perhaps unintended consequences. Some of these were the result of national and radical political shifts in Europe: the 1974 revolution in Portugal led to the disappearance of Asian languages from the Portuguese humanities curriculum because they were associated with imperialism. The social-democratic shifts in Denmark and Sweden also led to a loss of historical interest in the former territories of the Danish and Swedish East India companies. Africa's history was written as a history of the slave trade and coastal wider-world maritime connections, with a vast hinterland left under-investigated.¹¹

New directions in the history of empire have sought a wider comparative perspective and a longer chronology, decentring Europe in the story of empire, and setting its study within the new historical writing on global history. Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* (2003), Darwin's *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire* (2007), and Jane Burbank's and Frederick Cooper's *Empires in World History* (2011) compare the wider political and economic dynamics of empire. Histories that compare the empires of Rome and China with those of Spain, the USA, and Russia, or chart a broad Eurasian story of empire from China and Japan across Russia, Iran, South Asia, and Europe, provide frameworks that are markedly different from those of an earlier generation of studies, represented for instance by *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (1998–99).¹²

Some see global history as an attempt to displace the exploitation narrative of colonialism; be that as it may, the global framework has recast Britain and Europe as the products of their colonial experience. Global historical agendas, set, as so many of them have been until very recently, within a framework of economics and politics, have adopted methodologies still dominated by comparisons of the West and the East. They carry with them new 'centrism' issues. In many comparisons Europe remains the metropolis. The challenge is to convert Europe from a knowing subject to an object of global history. We also need to ask whether we have moved from a Eurocentrism to a Eurasian centrism. The 'global' for former

¹⁰ Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories', 735–62; Dominic Sachsenmaier, 'Global History as Ecumenical History', *Journal of World History*, 18 (2007), 465–90, at p. 466.

¹¹ These points were raised in discussion at the Writing the History of the Global Conference 21–22 May, 2009. See Conference videos at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/events/workshops_events/writingthehistoryofglobal/>.

¹² Bayly, *Modern World*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires*

historians of Northern and Western Europe means comparison and connection with South, South East, and East Asia. 'Atlantic world' history connected historians of north-west Europe and North America, but did not penetrate the north-south divide.¹³ The Spanish American and Pacific Ocean worlds still remain, for many historians, part of separate historiographies.

Divergence and comparison

Historians responding to the global turn have raised questions of transitions to modernity, of divergence and convergence. They are engaging with sociologists in discussing concepts of modernity.¹⁴ Comparative history is now under discussion. The debate on divergence has opened a new space for economic history. That economic history now pursues frameworks of enquiry extending beyond Europe or America, beyond national histories into global comparisons and connections, and beyond this into material culture analysis. The development of different historiographies, as well as recent global perspectives, has reshaped frameworks for analysing the roots of industrialization.

The 'great divergence', which has framed so much of our recent thinking in global history, has yielded large-scale comparative studies on differences in resource bases, capital inputs, population and wages, or institutional structures and state building among the major regions of the world. Investigating the sources of the 'great divergence' attracts us because it challenges us to turn our sights away from our own internal histories, to compare, for example, the resource base of the Yangzi Delta with that of north-western Europe, or to compare London wage rates with those of Beijing. Much data have been collected on such comparisons; the focus has moved out to include comparisons with India as well as China and Japan, and also the Ottoman and Spanish empires.¹⁵

in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference (Princeton, 2011); *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols (Oxford, 1998–99).

¹³ William O'Reilly, *The Atlantic World 1450–1700* (London, 2012).

¹⁴ See AHR Roundtable, 'Historians and the Question of Modernity', *American Historical Review*, 116/3 (2011), 631–7; G. K. Bhambra, 'Historical Sociology, Modernity, and Postcolonial Critique', *American Historical Review*, 116/3 (2011), 653–62. Also see Joseph M. Bryant, 'The West and the Rest Revisited: Debating Capitalist Origins, European Colonialism, and the Advent of Modernity', *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 31/4 (2006), 403–44.

¹⁵ The 'divergence' debate generated many studies which first appeared in the conferences of the Global Economic History Network (GEHN), with a number published later in *Itinerario*, *The Journal of Global History*, *The Economic History Review*, and *The Journal of Economic History*.

The 'divergence' debate has revived an increasingly narrow and even moribund economic history: 'Economic historians previously locked away in the study of their particular country and period have been forced to confront the inter-connectedness of their specialisms.'¹⁶ We have learned much, but there is a sense in which the divergence debate has reinforced a series of much older questions.

First, it focused on what Europe had and Asia did not, subsequently using this as an explanation. Geography, ecology, and environment provided early key indicators of comparison. Pomeranz argued that ecological imbalance in access to coal followed by the development of technologies using coal set the course for a divergence in growth between Europe and Asia from the later eighteenth century. The ensuing debate among a wide group of European, Asian, and world historians has only left entrenched a long-standing emphasis on the part played by Britain's superior coal reserves in her industrialization.¹⁷

Another major issue arising out of the divergence debate is that of wages and prices, which has coalesced into the old question of wages and the standard of living. Once again, intensive and now global effort is focused on demonstrating the higher wages and standard of living in Britain—indeed, not even Britain but England—than in the rest of Europe, and also the rest of the world, with the ensuing consequences for the development of labour-saving technologies.¹⁸ The 'divergence' debate originally challenged historians to think outside their national boundaries, and to

¹⁶ Stephen Broadberry and Steve Hindle, 'Editor's Introduction', special issue: 'Asia in the Great Divergence', *The Economic History Review*, 64/S1 (2011), 7.

¹⁷ E. A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1988) and Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010). The case is reiterated in Paul Warde, *Energy Consumption in England and Wales 1560–2000* (Rome, 2007) and Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2010). Also see Prasanna Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not. Global Economic Divergence 1600–1850* (Cambridge, 2011) which argues a case for lower energy constraints in India. Britain's technological initiative was driven by fuel shortages, and hence the need to innovate in industrial uses of coal. See pp. 165–8; 175–82.

¹⁸ Robert C. Allen, 'The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War', *Explorations in Economic History*, 38/4 (2001), 411–47; also see S. N. Broadberry and B. Gupta, 'The Early Modern Great Divergence: Wages, Prices and Economic Development in Europe and Asia, 1500–1800', *Economic History Review*, 59/1 (2006), 2–31; Robert C. Allen, Jean-Paul Bassino, Debin Ma, Christine Moll-Murata, and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Wages, Prices and Living Standards in China, 1738–1925: In Comparison with Europe, Japan, and India', special issue: 'Asia in the Great Divergence', *Economic History Review*, 64/S1 (2011), 8–38; Robert C. Allen, 'Why the Industrial Revolution was British:

compare Europe with parts of Asia in the period before Europe's industrialization. But economic historians risk turning back to a series of old methodologies and debates.¹⁹ A key issue in all these comparisons is the question of what is being measured and how. Historians making these global comparisons face the challenges of lack of data and of scholarly work creating comparable accounts from widely differing sources compiled under different assumptions and purposes.²⁰

Where has the divergence debate left us? After more than a decade, the subject is no less attractive to historians. A panel at the American Historical Association Conference in 2011 entitled 'Assessing Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*: A Forum' brought together Peter Coclanis, Jan de Vries, R. Bin Wong, Philip Hoffman, and Kenneth Pomeranz. De Vries challenged Pomeranz's 'informal' methodology of comparison. We must ask what the theories, models, or assumptions are that underlie any comparison, otherwise we fall victim to comparing what might be two ways of achieving the same result, or just two different things. 'More thought needs to be given to the methodology of a comparative history suitable for a globalized history.'²¹ De Vries's critique of a neo-Malthusian analysis where chronologies of difference were more suited to the nineteenth century than to the industrial revolution raises new questions for sources of difference in labour productivity, in technology, and in changing structures of consumption. Hoffman and Wong point to other new agendas on science and technology (useful knowledge), war, and political competition and fragmentation.²²

¹⁹ Commerce, Induced Invention, and the Scientific Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 64/3 (2011), 357–84. See, by contrast, the case made for higher standards of living in India by Prasanna Parthasarathi, 'Rethinking Wages and Competitiveness in the Eighteenth Century: Britain and India', *Past and Present*, 158, (1998), 79–109.

²⁰ Compare Liliane Hilane-Pérez, *L'invention Technique au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 2000); Margaret C. Jacob, *Scientific Culture and the Making of the Industrial West* (Oxford, 1997); Joel Mokyr, 'Intellectual Origins of Modern Economic Growth', *Journal of Economic History*, 65/2 (2005), 283–351; S. R. Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe', *Journal of Economic History*, 58/3 (1998), 684–713; S. R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2008); Christine MacLeod, 'The European Origins of British Technological Predominance', in *Exceptionalism and Industrialism: Britain and its European Rivals, 1688–1815*, ed. Leandro Prados de la Escosura (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 111–26.

²¹ Morten Jerven, 'National Income Estimates in Global Economic History', *The Journal of Global History*, 7/1 (2012), 107–28, especially pp. 109 and 111.

²² Jan de Vries, *The Great Divergence after Ten Years: Justly Celebrated yet Hard to Believe*, *A Historically Speaking*, 4 (2011), 13–15; 'Assessing Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*: A Forum', *Historically Speaking*, 4 (2011), 10–25.

²³ Philip T. Hoffman, 'Comment on Ken Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*', *Historically Speaking*,

The 'divergence' debate has invited economic historians into the wider comparative axis of Europe and Asia. The analysis derived has not changed our picture of Europe's and even Britain's transition in the eighteenth century. Ironically, it has if anything revived an economic history narrowly focused on English exceptionalism. What those large-scale comparative studies of resources, capital, and wages did not do was to investigate the extent to which connections between these parts of the world affected their subsequent development.

It is time to move to some more open-ended questions concerning global connections: how did the transmission of material culture and useful knowledge across regions of the world affect the economic and useful developments in any one of these regions? This leads us into narratives of interaction which could take us deeper into the analysis of imperial domination, but could equally lead us into the connections that contributed to economic development in Europe.

Comparison has also generated new challenges to methodology from historians of the wider world. Gareth Austin has proposed a method of 'reciprocal comparison' as a response to long traditions of approaching African history from the stylized facts of European historiography. He compares the differences in labour and land endowments of sub-Saharan Africa with those of East Asia and the West, discussing reasons why an abundance of cultivable land can generate technological and institutional factors that limit economic growth. He asks that Africa be compared, not with Europe, but with other relatively poor, formerly colonized regions, including India, South East Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Furthermore, Americanists and European historians might find new perspectives from looking at their own continents 'in an African mirror'.²³

Likewise, the focus on China and Europe in the divergence debate has diverted historians from another significant comparative perspective, and one with a long historiography. This is the comparison of labour-intensive paths of industrialization, as in the case of Japan, with developments of proto-industrialization in Europe. Kaoru Sugihara's concept of an 'East

4 (2011), 16–17; R. Bin Wong, 'Economic History in the Decade after *The Great Divergence*', *Historically Speaking*, 4 (2011), 17–19. Also see Jear-Laurent Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, MA., 2011).

²³ Gareth Austin, 'Reciprocal Comparisons and African History: Tackling Conceptual Eurocentrism in the Study of Africa's Economic Past', *African Studies Review*, 50 (2007), 1–28 (at pp. 11 and 13).

Asian development path' that was labour-intensive can lead us to investigate the legacies of proto-industrialization in wider regions of Europe, and not to focus singularly on the English alternative of a capital-intensive path.²⁴ And yet comparison from the standpoint of Africa, of Japan, or of China still leaves us grappling with essentialist frameworks. What we see is what Jean-Frédéric Schaub calls a paradigm of asymmetries. Cultural and colonial encounters between ruling or ascendant powers and 'other', foreign or 'alien' peoples reveal the capacities of such dominant groups to change other societies and to dominate cultural transfers.²⁵

Comparison and connection

Running parallel to methods of comparative history and the histories of encounters and colonial domination there is a long lineage of histories of composite regions and of regions bordering oceans: Braudel's Mediterranean world, Bailyn's Atlantic world, Chaudhuri and Das Gupta's Indian Ocean world. But these transoceanic perspectives have also been comparative histories of the maritime world.²⁶

Recent global agendas drawing on social theory focus on concepts of 'connectedness' or 'cosmopolitanism', of 'entanglement', and even 'ecumenae'.²⁷ In so doing historians now seek the connections that impacted on Europe's and Asia's cultures and development. These new agendas, however, also risk losing the vigour of those big questions previously raised in comparative studies. And yet, moving away from comparative histories brings us a whole new set of questions and subject areas: those of diasporas, of embassies and trading missions, of religious ideologies, of the connected histories of city life, of the transmission of material cultures, and of useful knowledge.

Global history's methodological agendas have also challenged another great divide between economic history, on the one hand, and cultural and social history, on the other. Economic histories of early modern Europe and its colonial empires are still separated off from social and cultural

²⁴ Kaoru Sugihara, 'The European Miracle in Global History: An East Asian Perspective', this volume, Chapter 9.

²⁵ J.-F. Schaub, 'Global History: Notes on Some Discontents in the Historical Narrative', this volume, Chapter 4.

²⁶ Markus Vink, 'Indian Ocean Studies', *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007), 41–62.

²⁷ Sachsemaier, 'World History as Ecumenical History'.

histories of consumption and material cultures. Jan de Vries set out to unite these histories in his concept of the 'industrious revolution'.²⁸ His pan-European study connected household behaviour with macroeconomic labour and capital markets. De Vries opened the gates of economic history to questions of consumer desire, taste, and sentiment that changed households and fostered incentives for large-scale productivity growth. He also linked consumer cultures in Europe to encounters with wider-world material cultures. It is now time to pursue the possibilities he opened up; to connect up those divided and comparative questions asked by economic historians.

Microhistories and global history

Global approaches challenge us to recast the method and scale of our research in much the same way that microhistory did in the early 1980s. Microhistorians wrote of episodes of everyday life or of individual experiences as 'strange'; they thus required for analysis the insights of different disciplines such as cultural anthropology or literary textual analysis. Such microanalysis, once achieved, would, they believed, also provide access to the real. Such history was seen to convey a spirit of human agency, of sharing and communality, of sympathy and closeness. The issues of a different scale and a different point of view confronted by the microhistorians have their parallels in those issues confronting global historians. The search for an access to closeness and familiarity allowed by different historical and disciplinary methodologies is not so different from what we now seek to understand from distance and strangeness. Microhistory allowed interrogation of identity and human agency; it brought a critique of determinist history. But it often focused on the exception, on deviations; the microhistorian's use of court records shaped the methodology. Such microhistories rejected the grand narratives, but their plots were shaped by those narratives. As John Brewer has argued, they still aspired to notions of 'histoire totale', of writing history from the ground up.²⁹

²⁸ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008).

²⁹ For a recent discussion of microhistory see John Brewer, 'Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life', *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010), 87–109; Pat Hudson, 'Closeness and Distance', *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010), 375–85; Filippo De Vivo, 'Prospect or Refuge,

Focusing on one individual or family, however, allowed transcendence of boundaries of identity and culture. Now historians found histories of families or of individuals migrating from one continent or culture to another, as for example in Natalie Zemon Davis's study of Al-Wazzan in *Trickster Travels*.³⁰ What many global histories missed out on were the historical actors and issues of agency so central to the plots of micro-narratives. Linda Colley, in *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*, used biography, and looked to smallness as a way of connecting to the large. She could investigate the lives of the conventionally marginalized—in this case, a literate but uneducated woman, a wife, a middle-class person of no wealth—through a research tool that globalization has given us—the world wide web. Although her story was of a woman in empire, she also wrote of all the global forces impinging on the lives of Marsh's family, friends, and those she encountered. Elizabeth Marsh noticed, for example, that the Sultan of Morocco drank tea out of porcelain cups and the women in his court wore Indian muslins. A more recent treatment of family and individual histories across continents, Emma Rothschild's *The Inner Life of Empires*, sets a court case centred on slavery and infanticide within a Scottish landed family whose members spanned the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Indian empires.³¹

Methods

Beyond economic history the comparative histories have given way to investigations of connectedness, cosmopolitanism and entanglement, and now of ecumeneae, concepts often referred to and just as often left undefined. We are rapidly moving, however, into a new stage where the global and the transnational have taken over from where empire left off. The global is rapidly becoming a brand, and one that is losing the edge and the clarity of focus, the frisson offered by those big comparative questions of divergence and convergence, of wealth and poverty, of the crisis of

Microhistory: History on the Large Scale', *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010), 387–97. Also see Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 97–119.

³⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: In Search of Leo Africanus, A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York and London, 2007).

³¹ Colley, *Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*; Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, 2011). Also see other collective biographies of individuals in the

empires. We may not have liked those questions raised in the comparative histories of the 1980s and 1990s, such as 'why are we so rich and they so poor?'. But these were the questions that pushed us out of our introverted localism. Historians have moved the questions of 'divergence' that dominated global history after 2000 out to other areas of the world: they have looked at regions, for instance the Islamic world and China; they have looked at composite zones, or, like Kaoru Sugihara, marked out an East Asian development path.

We have the excitement as historians of moving out of our national borders and of connecting across our former area studies. This will require new methodologies of collaboration and interdisciplinarity as well as the rapidly disappearing tools of foreign languages. Languages become more, not less vital as historians move beyond the imperial and national archive. Area studies specialists who do have the languages central to their chosen regions are now also breaking into comparative and connective questions. These may require, for example, not just Korean and Japanese language skills, but also Russian. Linguistic constraints shape possible networks among historians. They also shape possibilities of engagement in debate, in meetings, and in collaborations. Just how we go forward will also depend on collaborations. Many of us are not archaeologists, geographers, geologists, or environmental scientists, nor are we curators, art historians, or historical sociologists. We have different questions, we research and write differently. But we now need to work with the theories, findings, and techniques of these groups, and indeed work with them in collaborations. We can move from traditional models of the lone researcher to alternative academic models, experimenting with teamwork, networks, and electronic forums; we can engage in joint publications based on transnational research networks.

In recent years we have had great comparative studies of different empires in one region, such as John Elliott's *Empires of the Atlantic World*, or of one empire in two different parts of the world, such as Peter Marshall's *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*.³² Few of us can aspire to the mastery of printed and archival material at this level, and perhaps this is only possible among very senior historians. But historians who have grouped

British Empire, for example, Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World 1550–1800* (Cambridge, 2008).

³² J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2006); P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India and America c. 1750–1783* (Oxford, 2005).

themselves as economic historians, as imperial, new imperial and post-colonial historians, as European historians, Indian or Chinese historians, can draw on the large amounts of valuable research in all these different historiographical traditions, and approach these with new questions.

Contributions

Writing the History of the Global raises new agendas in historical research and questions the concepts we have deployed hitherto. But we are also in a period of great uncertainty over where this is going. This volume captures historians at a key moment of shifting their subject areas and how they write about them. Part I, 'Interpretations: Ideas and the Making of Global History', addresses how historians of Europe, India, and the Spanish American world have resituated their questions. David Washbrook addresses how writing history in a global perspective has recast many of the problems previously taken as given. The long periodization of global history puts notions of the modern under scrutiny. Global history challenges us to convert our understanding of Europe from a 'knowing subject' into much more of an object of that history. If the global history of the 'British' Industrial Revolution takes us to China, on the one side, and the Americas, on the other, by what rights does it deserve, any longer, to be described as 'British'? Global history has risen in the wake of the retreat from post-structuralism. There is a need for some meta-narrative or theory of causation. These will differ from those of earlier historiographical traditions. How successful has global history been, thus far, at finding or erecting signposts to a new, and significantly different, historical understanding of the past?

Jan de Vries addresses the difference that global history has made to non-national historical agendas, and raises problems as to how to conduct professional academic history at this level. His early work focused on ecological zones, and even in his most recent on the 'industrious revolution', that concept was applied to a zone or region. There is no special route to global history from this regional approach, but the methods of regional history have many parallels with global history. Boundaries are not a given, but a historical contingency inviting questions of connection and comparison. The conceiving of a polycentric early modern world challenges us to cross mental boundaries.

Finally, Jean-Frédéric Schaub, writing from a context of French historiography and the colonized Spanish American world, develops a concept of 'asymmetries' to address European writings on encounters and

cultural transfers. European historians who compare societies risk essentialist frameworks, but their analysis must be placed within a longer and broader framework of conquered and colonized peoples.

Part II, 'Approaches: Methods and Methodologies in Global History', addresses approaches of comparative histories, the spaces of global history, and new directions in collaborative research. Prasanna Parthasarathi poses the methods of comparative history as an analytic focus for global history. This entails a problem-centred approach to writing history. Comparison must analyse not just one or two, but multiple paths of economic and historical development in the early modern world. Different economic and ecological contexts in early modern Eurasia produced not a dynamic Europe and stagnant Asia, but strikingly different needs and imperatives leading towards different paths of economic and technological change.

Whereas Jan de Vries discussed the role of the 'ecological' region or zone in his approach, and Prasanna Parthasarathi that of comparison across multiple development paths across Eurasia, R. Bin Wong takes up the regional approach from the context of China. He examines the Chinese empire as a part of multiple regions, for example of north-east Asia, or of the eastern and south-eastern maritime regions. How can an analysis of different kinds of space take us beyond environmental history into wider issues of global history?

Finally Jan Luiten van Zanden considers new research methodologies of teamwork and collaboration. He sets out the ways historians and economic historians can work together to provide historical datasets covering the world. Key questions are: 'when did global divergence begin and why?' and 'why the reversal of fortune?'. Much of the literature written thus far on these issues is impressionistic. We lack global datasets on economic performance, and on the economic, social, and cultural causes of development. New evidence-gathering and analysis through teams of historians pooling expertise can create new public goods for global history. There is currently a gap in approaches between history and the natural sciences. There is scope for greater teamwork in history, as indicated in some current collaborative projects on national income, prices, real wages, and labour relations. The problems with this approach that historians must confront include agreements over who owns the data, the division of labour, and who is to lead the projects and publications.

Part III, 'Shaping Global History', takes us further into comparative methodologies. Kenneth Pomeroy, whose book *The Great Divergence* was

one of the key starting points for global history, develops in Chapter 8 a methodological approach to the concept of 'divergence'. Investigation of a particular divergence raises the key point that historical divergences are provisional unless we specify the time frame. Divergence in growth between Europe and the Lower Yangzi Delta shows the results of delays in initiating economic growth in the Chinese region. Historical divergences raise many questions: those of perspective, issues of 'origins', points where differences become divergences, and those of multiple timescales. Pomeranz uses the examples of Alfred Crosby's military metaphors in his environmental approaches, and of Jack Goldstone's comparisons of unique divergences and the more common efflorescence.

Comparisons must also be reciprocal. Kaoru Sugihara contrasts an East Asian development path with the 'European miracle'. He identifies in East Asia efficient institutions fostering greater use of labour, an 'industrious revolution' path entailing extensive use of family labour, and technological paths encouraging double cropping. The result was a path to 'labour-intensive industrialization' such as occurred in Meiji Japan. That labour-intensive path now shapes the centres of most of the world's manufacturing employment, centres that have shifted in recent decades from the West to East, South East and South Asia. The search for resources has also been a major force behind recent global history. The challenge for Japan and other East Asian economies has been to develop resource- and energy-saving technologies.

Part IV, 'Knowledge and Global History', takes us from global comparison to global connections in chapters on technology, the arts, and material culture. Dagmar Schäfer's chapter addresses the approach of the Chinese of the Ming/Qing dynasty to technology and invention. In what ways did the knowledge of Chinese craftsmen contribute to the development of scientific thinking in the Chinese world? The Chinese assigned a place and function to technologies and their products in statecraft, public life, and scholarly achievement. Ming connoisseurs valued craftsmanship. Court advisors defined which technologies were emblematic to the imperial eye. Porcelain and silk were used to negotiate political control and economic interests, or to buy obedience from servants of empire. But free markets emerged for the products of craftsmanship. How were the products marketed, and how were original designs and techniques claimed and marked by their craftsmen?

Craig Clunas asks us to consider comparisons made hitherto between Western and Chinese art. He considers Mieke Bal's cultural critique that

comparison becomes a ground for relative judgement; it establishes hierarchies and distracts from looking. He uses the example of different attitudes to Chinese art before and after the Second World War. Chinese art was part of the syllabus of the Courtauld Institute between 1933 and 1945; it was excluded thereafter. Bernard Berenson's high regard during the 1930s for Chinese painting gave way by 1950 to his new judgements that relegated Chinese art to the margins of the exotic arts. Craig Clunas returns to Mieke Bal to argue that comparison should not be an instrument of judgement, but a source of differentiation.

From art we move to material objects, conveying contention and entanglement. Glenn Adamson and Giorgio Riello consider objects as displayed in museums, as architecture, and as consumer goods. They unwrap the meanings of a Japanese suit of armour in the Tower of London, discuss the hybrid architecture and design of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, known in the West as Victoria Terminus, in Mumbai, challenging its former status as a symbol of empire, and finally present the football and soccer as evoking debates on globalization and the global condition.

Part V, 'Round Table', brings together short statements on issues explored in current writings on global history. John Darwin considers recent themes of 'connectedness' in global history, and assesses the contributions offered by archives of imperial history. All empires had a vested interest in making connections with the territories they conquered, but also interpreted and controlled the impacts of such connections. Megan Vaughan discusses the marginal place of Africa in current global history writing. But global history should not be the only approach; she also warns against framing the history of the entire African continent in terms of its external relations. A major area left underexplored in our new global narratives is the state. While we seek to move beyond histories of individual nation states, the role of the state remains crucial in global formations. Peer Vries questions the recent focus of global historians on connections, networks, exchanges, and transfers. This history leaves out wars, violence, conflicts, and especially the state. The big challenge is to encompass the role of the state without turning to narrowly national histories. Finally, histories of global connections can be conveyed through more studies of individuals and families. Recent histories of families and individuals in the British Empire, such as those by Linda Colley and Emma Rothschild, raise questions of global identities conveyed through transnational biographies of individuals. Sufumi So and Billy Kee-Long So ask whether a global identity can be found in narratives of individuals across

time and place. We can seek to trace more stories of individuals in Asia as well as Europe who perceived themselves within wider-world identities through oral histories, biography, and autobiography.

Conclusion

Global and transnational histories have now become a significant part of the historical disciplines. There are many volumes now treating subjects once presented in a European framework in the broad comparative frameworks of the global. Historians coming from many different specialisms, not just regional, but also economic, cultural, and intellectual history, have been stimulated to rethink and to debate with each other by the idea of the global. *Writing the History of the Global* captures a group of historians from different countries and different specialisms at a key point of uncertainty and transition; here we find them debating concepts, methods, and the future of historical writing.

Part I

Interpretations: Ideas and the Making of Global History

