

Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World. By Dominic Sachsenmaier. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. vii + 331. £55.00 cloth, £19.99 paper.

There is nothing more perplexing to writers of “global” history than what, exactly, global history might be. I argued some years ago that it was primarily a set of narrative strategies employed by scholars in a variety of disciplines for the general purpose of levering the historical gaze above particularism, parochialism, and comparativism—a productive suspension of disbelief, a play at telling a story without a centre, as a result of which new questions and answers about the past might be introduced. Other historians have proposed that global history can be disciplined, chronologically framed, and focused on many of the specific twentieth-century processes that are indicated by the phrase “globalization.” The discussion of what global history might be continues, and accommodates greater and lesser degrees of scepticism about the coherence or persuasiveness of the product. In this book, Dominic Sachsenmaier proposes contributing something unique: A review of the evolution of global historical discourse from the point of view of the professional environments in the United States, Germany, and China, mostly during the latter half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. Overall the book is a triangulation on the emergence of a loosely-construed “global history” from specific vantage points.

Chapter 2 of the book offers an overview of the professional milieu of American historians after the Second World War. The dominance of “white men” (as they are reified by the U.S. Department of Education) declines, ethnic diversity among faculty and students rises, dissidence against the war in Vietnam enters the story, questions ultimately arise regarding who controls the historical narrative and why. The author finds the first use of “global history” in 1962, when both Hans Kohn’s *Age of Nationalism* and Leften Stavrianos’s *A Global History of Man* both used it.¹ Kohn used the term to demarcate a secular change in the later twentieth century, as national entities loosened their grip on both power and on the historical imagination; Stavrianos used it to indicate a new standard of inclusive, self-consciously non-national history. The muddle of “global history” as a term persisted into the 1990s—sometimes interchangeable with “world” history, sometimes contrasted to it in a serious conceptual way, sometimes merely counterposed to it as a fashion statement. The author suggests that actually defining global history is impossible (more on this below), yet the field is vital enough and complex enough to tolerate ambiguities or

¹ Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism: The First Era of Global History* (New York: Harper, 1962); Leften S. Stavrianos et al., *A Global History of Man* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1962).

even contradictions and “it is perfectly justifiable to use the term as a marker for a wider academic trend which is actually much larger than the body of literature openly referring to the concept of ‘global history’ ” (p. 72). On the other hand, “universal history” has been largely discredited, as it implied habits of universalizing European patterns and standards by projecting them onto the histories of others. By casting off “universal history” and embracing tropes of connectedness (webs, networks, families, and so on) elder “world” historians (the author invokes McNeill about here) signalled their awareness of the gravity, even the agency, of civilizations outside of Europe and North America.

In the same period of the 1990s, “global history” drew the attention of sociologists, political scientists, and historical comparativists, further fraying notions of the “the West” as an ethical or legal tradition, or “Europe” as its continental embodiment, as well as any claims that this elusive “West” was uniquely rational, materially advanced, or technologically prodigious. Challenges to the old storyline from “Afro-American” history, women’s history and labour history widened the hole left by demolition of the conceptual “West,” and into the hole flowed new ways of writing about history and culture that also tended to denote themselves as “global.” Rich diversities of perspective and conceptual creativity surged, all to the further confusion of what “global history” was. The author concludes the chapter with the reflection that the experience of the American historical profession suggests that instead of fruitlessly searching for a definition for global history, it is sufficient that “global” has been the catalyzing element in a wide-ranging reconceptualization of space, agency, and causality (the last is my word, the author does not use this word in the book) that has broadened and enlivened the scope and presumably the quality of American historical discourse.

The next chapter deals with Germany, used here as a case study of an intensely nationally oriented profession willing itself to see more transnationally after the right social and demographic changes have occurred. The chronological framework here is deeper than in the previous chapter, and begins with the blooming of unapologetically nationalist history in the nineteenth century, which as it moved toward World War I and World War II (they go by in the blink of an eye) became reinforced by “Social Darwinist or even racist categories of thinking” (p. 114), with a dash of anti-modernism thrown in. But after the Second World War, historians in Germany opened the window to global perspectives by seeking to characterise Nazism as a discontinuity with earlier German cultural and historical patterns—an intrusion best seen through the lens of modernization and what we would now call “globalization.” This trend in post-War German historical thought came into its own in the 1960s, as the old generation of historians died off and younger scholars priding themselves on more objective “social history” (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) and even unflinching studies

of the darkest corners of Nazi history took up the university positions. As in the United States, demographic change and cultural diversity helped to push ahead the development of a critical school of historians. And a new specialization of the history of German imperialism brought a bit more of the world into the progressive university curricula. Nevertheless, historians found it hard to cast off the habits of a relentless focus on Germany (now as a problem, not merely as a national story), and as a result German acknowledgement of “world” or “global” history remained formulaic and almost universalistic (in the old sense) nearly to the end of the twentieth century.

In the following chapter, we join up with Chinese history writing at some unspecified point “prior to the mid-nineteenth century,” carried by a swift current from dynastic cycles to the Evidential Learning school. Then we are on the eve of the Revolution of 1911/12, and China is being permeated by foreign concepts of Social Darwinism, nationalism, and the general notion that “tradition” can be objectified and superseded. In such an environment, Chinese scholars who could construct a comparativist perspective with the European Renaissance (or, one might add, the American Revolution) were indispensable guides toward a Chinese future beyond the traditional empires. Some historians suggested the possibility of being on the side of the winners, such as the British and, increasingly, the Japanese. Others pointed to the meaning of being on the side of the losers in the global struggle against imperialism and racism in Asia and Africa. From the time of the first revolution through the 1980s, Marxism as it was understood in China was a ready-made vessel for positioning China in a global context; imperialism, capitalism, and feudalism were wieldy (and at times flexible) containers for understanding the histories and global interactions of Europe, the United States, Japan, and China itself. As of the 1980s, the decay of avid thought control in Chinese universities combined with new communications with academic centres in Hong Kong and Taiwan to open up the Chinese historical profession. As the obligation to impose a Chinese Communist Party-approved Marxist model on all historical narrative receded, the way was opened to translate and teach foreign historical writing in translation (which continues to grow to mountainous volumes). In the process, some Chinese historians embraced European history on its own terms, and many more struggled with the problem of approaching Chinese history in some native fashion—not imported and reworked Marxism, not foreign structuralism or even post-modernism. Many contemporary Chinese historians are drawn back to the problem of the early twentieth century, “tradition” and “modernity”: how they are related, how they are distinct, how they are definitive, how they are “Chinese” or “global.” Not surprisingly, many are attracted to earlier arguments about the degree to which the Song empire of the eleventh century anticipated phenomena that when globally manifested were regarded as “modern,” or the ways in which the collapse of the Qing empire was part of a larger global process destroying all the great land

empires. Such integrated thinking, however, is in some tension with a more widely established view that “global” history is simply the story of the world as affected by “globalization” in the modern period. This is reflected in the structure of academic departments and curricula, which still favour a dichotomy between national history and “world” history.

In the same way that these chapters play mischievously on the book’s title by declining to supply “global” perspectives, the book’s subtitle is given a wry twist in the interpretive essays at the front and back of the book. The author stresses repeatedly the point he makes this way on p. 2: “my work seeks to make a theoretical intervention based upon the idea that an important facet of global history’s intrinsically diverse nature lies in the fact that this trend [i.e. the trend away from local and national history toward “border-crossing and global” history] is currently experiencing surging levels of interest in many parts of the world.” Yet the book does not easily surrender this theoretical intervention. The reader construes it to be that the more diverse the body of practitioners of “global history,” the more diverse the definitions, applications, and theoretical fabric of global history. Sound thinking, and as an axiom globally applicable. A clue to the elusiveness of the theoretical intervention might be found on the next page, where the author explains that the discussion cannot “just be conceptual in a narrow, methodological sense.” It has to deal with the professional environments in which historians work. This is an important point, and one that is addressed by relatively few other scholars in the global history milieu.

Taking this as the primary ambition of the book, one senses that the author has outlined and introduced a topic that he and other scholars will have some work to do to bring it up the level of a forceful intervention. Throughout, the reader is puzzled by a superficial approach to previous scholarship. There are plenty of footnotes, many of which are used to underwrite fairly breezy generalizations in the text. But the footnotes frustrate interrogation. I figure in one footnote, which is attached to a seriously and specifically erroneous characterization of the work being cited. Other scholars are given similar glancing blows that the reader may often find to distort the primary arguments or findings of the works in question. In my observation Patrick Manning, Akira Iriye 入江昭, and Bruce Mazlish receive repeated jabs of this kind. Partly this is a product of the minimal formatting for footnotes (the fault of Cambridge University Press), in which only an author’s name and date in parentheses are supplied. These are not notations, they are notions. The absence of page numbers makes it very hard to reconstruct how the author derived his impression of these works, with resulting deficits of significance.

More serious, however, is the absence of acknowledgement of conceptual antecedents. The book itself, with its stated mission, is in the conceptual line of

historians of science such as Thomas Kuhn—or Benjamin Elman in relation to China—but does not fully exploit the insights of earlier works of this type. The examples of worthy or intriguing points raised by the author but then vaporized by the absence of any scholarly context are many. Two might help get the nature of this problem across. On pp. 177–78, the problem of objectifying, characterizing, and positioning Chinese tradition against an apparently inimical modernity is discussed, and citations are provided to historians writing in English with no acknowledgement that, for better or worse, this theme was established in English-language scholarship by Joseph Levenson, who very long ago wrote out analyses of Liang Qichao 梁啟超 that anticipate those of both the author and his sources (and also have a strong reflection in contemporary Chinese-language scholarship from all over the world). Second, on p. 208 Wang Hui 汪暉 is credited with the idea—and it is suggested that this is original—that the Song represented “the origin of a proto-modern Chinese state formation” and the discussion goes on: “Wang argues that particularly some core ethicopolitical visions of neo-Confucianism developed during the Song dynasty would open possibilities for new forms of critical intervention.” The footnotes are to Wang Hui alone, leaving the reader to wonder whether it is Wang, or the author himself, who chooses to elide a huge slice of Japanese, Chinese, and English-language scholarship based on these ideas written out beginning a hundred years ago by Naito Torajiro 內藤虎次郎 (who may have refined it from ideas of earlier Chinese scholars), and followed by the social, economic, and cultural researches of hundreds of scholars, including Wang Guowei 王國維, Shiba Yoshinobu 斯波義信, Niida Noboru 仁井田陞, Mark Elvin, Yü Ying-shih 余英時, and others. When a historian chooses to ignore the past, a number of problems arise. In this case, the reader is struck by the degree to which diversity and globalization in the writing of Chinese history are not really new, and it may be necessary to tweak the focus to bring out the potential in this book’s primary concept.

The reader is also tripped up at various points by a lack of conceptual commitment in the text. Particularly troubling is the author’s casual use of “historiography” to mean, usually, writing history. We are left to construe the author’s meaning of “history” to be “the past.” To those of us who regard historiography as a serious subdiscipline, this usage tends to cause historiography as many of us understand it to disappear. This is particularly ironic because it could be reasonably argued that “global history” is in fact a species of historiography (not writing about the past, but writing about the inquiry into the past), and that parts of this book—particularly the latter two-thirds of the chapter on Germany—are distinctly good examples of historiography. On a deeper level, the conceptual wobbliness of the book may derive in some way from this casual approach to concepts that are fairly basic to global historical discourse everywhere. Dilthey gets one mention in the book, in a

drive-by of early twentieth-century humanist challengers to proponents of “scientific” history/historiography; this was surely a lost opportunity to explore the sources of Weberian comparativism, a serious (and in the book only sporadically invoked) theme in the development of transnational histories. Ranke, despite being a plausible near inspiration for the agglomerative “world history” textbook genre of the 1960s and 1970s, is dismissed as a national nationalist and culturalist. Spengler, McNeill and Wallerstein get very little attention, despite the fact that they are seminal influences in global scholarship and in translation are better known than many upon whom the author might lavish as much as a full paragraph. Fundamental comparative concepts—in some cases the stepping stones to global narratives—such as feudalism, capitalism, convergence, and various “turns” get nothing more than a mention, despite being well embedded in the coinage of global historical discourse.

Musty old books aside, the author seems reticent to dwell upon the role of state discipline of the academic world as a conceptual problem. The issue is raised directly in a discussion of the intellectual environment after the Tiananmen 天安門 incidents of 1989, but is clearly not considered to have much effect beyond the brief period of overt censorship and intimidation. That historians of the Third Reich had few options in the way they told their history is implied, but little more. The fate of Chinese historians who questioned orthodoxy under the Chinese Communist Party is incompletely conveyed. Jian Bozan 翦伯贊 and Wu Han 吳晗, for instance, are mentioned as voicing disapproved views in the early 1960s but their consequent misfortunes only a few years later are unnoted. The treatments here of Germany and China raise the question in the reader’s mind: Is there a relationship between coming out of a period of state control on the one hand and serious meditation on the issue of discontinuities between the present and some objectified “tradition” on the other? Despite the current influx of foreign historians and their translated works into Chinese universities, the openness of an intellectual world which only a little more than a generation ago required the lives of historians who told the wrong story is something that must be carefully qualified. The lack of textured exploration of the intellectual sources as well as the political architecture of the milieu the author is investigating becomes an obstacle to the book saying all it might say. We are left with a sketch of various national historical professions without a way to grasp the actual discourses in use or the dynamics shaping them.

A work living up to the potential of this interesting book would be much longer and substantially better documented than this, and in some ways it is unfair to criticize a short work for not being a long work. This book has many passages that accomplish a good deal, particularly in descriptions of historical writing in Germany and China. It also establishes for discussion several interesting points. One very striking issue, raised but not developed, is the role of the English language as a hegemonic element

in the global discourse of history. The degree to which this is true and the more subtle effects of this on the conceptual underpinnings of global/transnational/translocal/inter-area history could be the subjects of a number of books. The fact that, as the author underscores, “global history” is neither defined nor profitably definable is ironic given that this English phrase has become the source for virtually all renditions (including, as the author notes, Japanese *gurobaru reikishi*) of the genre’s name. There is more to say here, and one hopes that the author will follow his own breadcrumbs to even more stimulating and enlightening work.

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A Northern Alternative: Xue Xuan (1389–1464) and the Hedong School. By Khee Heong Koh. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011. Pp. xiii + 353. \$39.95/£29.95.

本書以明代北方著名思想家薛瑄(1389–1464)及河東學派為研究主題，作者結合思想史、社會史、政治史的多元研究角度，廣泛參照目前學界對於江南地區類似議題的研究成果，透過比較的視野來說明以薛瑄為代表之明代北方學派的特色，以及南北學術發展的差異。

全書共有五章。第一章從明代學術思想史的角度討論薛瑄及北學，在簡短介紹元代與明初的理學家後，說明北學在學術史上的邊緣地位，指出黃宗義的《明儒學案》以王學為主，刻意貶抑薛瑄及河東學派的學術成就。接著介紹薛瑄的生平、為學、仕宦經驗、著作，及其交友網絡。薛瑄是一位自學有成的學者，並無明顯師承，作者認為此是明初北學不同於南方的重要特色。

第二章主要討論薛瑄的思想，尤其是關於薛瑄對道統觀、理氣論、復性觀的看法；作者也強調思想理念與實踐行為的密切關係。本章先說明《讀書錄》的體裁，此書乃薛瑄平日讀書與反思的心得，作者特別強調在理解薛瑄思想時，必須留意《讀書錄》與《讀書續錄》的寫作時間差距二十餘年，兩書所記的重點不盡相同，反映著薛瑄思想的變化。關於道統傳承方面，作者認為薛瑄不強調直接師承關係，此與南方金華學者不同。對於理氣論的討論，作者指出薛瑄強調理氣無先後、始終不離，雖然他的觀點前後期並無大差異，不過後期文獻明顯少談「聚散」的問題，很可能是因為談「氣之聚散、理無聚散」，容易給人理氣有間的印象，故後期較少論及。至於復性觀，是薛瑄思想的核心，薛瑄以復性為成聖之道，也是千古學政與教化之本，作者認為這樣的思想與薛瑄全力支持朝廷官學而沒有建立書院有密切關係。