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The Global View of History in China*

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WHEN Geoffrey Barraclough's *Main Trends in History* (New York, 1978) was translated into Chinese and published in 1987, the original phrase "a universal view of history" was translated as the *quan-qiu shiguan* (global view of history). This was the debut of such a concept in China.¹ In the more than two decades thereafter, the idea of global history has become very popular. According to a survey conducted in February 2011 by China's leading Internet search engine, www.baidu.com, the search term "global view of history" yielded more than two million items. A search on www.chinaqing.com, China's leading online source for academic journals, reveals that over the past ten years academic articles titled "global history" or "global view" have seen a rapid and steady rise, with only one in 1997, ten in 2004, and twenty-three in 2009. China's leading academic publications, such as *The Historiography Quarterly* and *The Guangming Daily* (History Column), have carried on written discussions and/or set up special columns on the global view of history, attracting a host of well-known historians across the country. Geoffrey Barraclough, L. S. Stavrianos, William H. McNeill, Kenneth Pomeranz, Jerry H. Bentley, and others have been

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¹ Geoffrey Barraclough first put forward his thoughts on the "global view of history" in his *History in a Changing World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), but the concept was made explicit only later in his *Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences: History* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1978), p. 153. The former book has not been translated into Chinese, while the latter appeared as *Dangdai Shixue Zhuyao Qushi*, trans. Yang Yu (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press, 1987), p. 242. See also Lan Lan, "A Review of Barraclough's 'Global View of History,'" *Lilun Qianyan* [Theoretical Frontiers] 9 (2006): 23.

widely regarded by Chinese historians as leading representatives of the global view of history, with their names frequenting academic journals.

Currently, both Capital Normal University and Nankai University have established global history research institutions, and both enjoy frequent and close contact with relevant international organizations. The Global History Center of Capital Normal University publishes the *Global History Review* (with three volumes so far), the Translation of Global History Series (with seven volumes either published or in press), and *The Global History Reader*. Meanwhile, departments of history in many universities across China have run symposiums on the global view of history.

I

Generally speaking, Chinese scholars have offered both positive and negative ideas on the global view of history. Positive speakers have first affirmed the value and periodization of the global view of history, believing that global history “is a direct reflection of the globalizing process in the field of history”² and that “in the new context of ever more frequent communication and exchanges among peoples of today’s world,” utilizing global perspectives to reexamine the human past “has become an irreversible trend of the times.”³ Thus, “the emergence of global history should be seen as one of the most important achievements of post-war Western historical scholarship.”⁴ In terms of academic significance, as many scholars have pointed out, “viewing the whole world as a totality, examining and probing history from a macroscopic perspective, pose the most significant agendas for the history profession.”⁵ The “holistically global vision” proposed by global historians sound “the most enlightening tips”⁶ for Chinese scholars, and “how to employ the global view of history to replace the old mosa-

² Wu Xiaoqun, “Do We Really Need a ‘Global View of History?’” *Xueshu Yanjiu* [Academic Research] 1 (2005): 22.

³ Li Longqing, “Embracing a New Framework for Reconstructing World History,” *Journal of Central China Normal University* (Humanities and Social Sciences edition) 39, no. 4 (2000): 118.

⁴ Liu Shuang, “The View of History and Methodology in the Process of Globalization,” *Xuexiyu Tansuo* [Study and Exploration] 4 (2002): 123.

⁵ Bo Jieping, “Civilization History, World History, and China’s World History Research,” *Guangming Daily*, 14 December 2000, p. 2.

⁶ Liu Beicheng, “The Challenges of Reconstructing World History,” *Shixuelilunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 4 (2000): 69.

ics of nation states paralleled . . . is an urgent task for China's world historians,"⁷ since it is directly related to the formation of "a genuine world history outlook" in China.⁸

In recent years, Chinese world history compilers have either "adopted the same periodization scheme as L. S. Stavrianos' *A Global History*"⁹ or borrowed from foreign global history writing methods in an attempt to break out of the traditional nation-state mode and to opt for a taxonomy in world history based on civilization types, giving prominence to cross-civilization contact and exchanges, conflicts, and integration. Still others take advantage of theories like "world-systems" to bring a new interpretation to such world history topics as "Hellenization." What's more important, as some scholars argue, is the "reorientation of Chinese history as a result of the emergence of global history":¹⁰ some scholars are reexamining Chinese history, especially the "early modern" part, and bring forth outstanding achievements like *Tea and Opium: China in the Nineteenth-Century Economic Globalization*.¹¹ In fact, on 9 June 2011, the magazine *China Social Sciences Today* carried an article titled "Global History: A Representative of Those Reflecting on Occident-Centrism,"¹² introducing the impact of such historical works as Andre Gunder Frank's *ReOrient*, Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*, and Paul A. Cohen's *Discovering History in China* on Chinese historical scholarship.

Yet on the other hand, ever since its first appearance in China, the idea of global history has been questioned and doubted. "Do we really need a global view of history?"¹³ This is the title of an article that nicely sums up all complaints. Some scholars, on comparing global history with Marxist historical materialism, draw the conclusion that global history "is not a compact, uniform normative narrative"¹⁴ and therefore cannot serve as the guiding principles for world history teaching

⁷ Li, "Embracing a New Framework," p. 118.

⁸ Wang Wei, "The 'Global View of History' and World History Research," *Zhengzhou University Journal* (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition) 1 (2003): 32.

⁹ Ji Pomin, "Globalization from a World History Perspective," *Dushu* [Reading] 1 (2003): 24.

¹⁰ Cheng Meibao, "Globalization, Global History, and History Studies in China," *Xue-shu Yanjiu* [Academic Research] 1 (2005): 21.

¹¹ Zhong Weimin, *Tea and Opium: China in the Nineteenth-Century Economic Globalization* (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2010).

¹² Li Qiang, "Global History: A Representative of Those Reflecting on Occident-Centrism," *China Social Sciences Today*, 9 June 2011, p. 9.

¹³ Wu, "Do We Really Need a 'Global View of History?'" pp. 22–25.

¹⁴ Wang Lincong, "A Brief Comment on the 'Global View of History,'" *Shixuelilunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 3 (2002): 101.

and research. And they further warn that Chinese scholars should be cautious about a possible neocolonialist “discourse strategy”¹⁵ of the global era in global history, not unlike modernization studies in the West, which gave birth to structural-functionalist approaches that sustained concepts of Western hegemony. Other scholars argue that Western global historians’ so-called anti-Eurocentric approach, their stated attempt to “transcend nationalist self-worship,” and their efforts to “write a history accessible to the whole world” are mere dream-talk.¹⁶ In their understanding, Chinese scholars can only hope for “a global history of the Chinese” based on their own unique memories of world history.¹⁷

The above responses are obviously opposed to each other, within which are academic controversies as well as a rich culture-specific content. Explicating this phenomenon is, therefore, both historiographically and cross-culturally significant, with the latter quality in full agreement with the gist of global history. So this article focuses on the analysis of these “differing attitudes and responses.”

II

Such an analysis, however, calls for a brief review of the origin and development of the idea of world history in both China and the West.

In the West, world history was for a long time part of the philosophy of history in which the term “world” was just another name for all humanity. Such “world histories” were not intent on narrating historical events; rather, they sought to explicate the fate or destiny of the human species or even history itself, concerned as it was about an overarching power shaping the human lot. During the Middle Ages, this overarching power was reserved for the Christian God and, with the coming of the modern era, it found reincarnation in the exercise of human reason. The “world history rationality” thesis developed through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and found a near-perfect expression in late Immanuel Kant: human beings are destined to develop their naturally endowed potentials in a law-bound progress;

¹⁵ Wang Yunlong, “From Modernization to Globalization,” *Xuexiyu Tansuo* [Study and Exploration] 3 (2002): 121.

¹⁶ Qian Chengdan, “Probing into the Idea of ‘Global History’: An Impression of the 19th Congress of the International Historical Sciences,” *Shixue Yuekan* [History Monthly] 2 (2001): 147.

¹⁷ Yu Pei, “Global History and National Historical Memory,” *Shixuelihunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 1 (2006): 30.

historically, this thesis found expression in the human community in a process of translating those natural endowments into various socio-cultural traits; a world history is a philosophical attempt to deal with history in view of such a goal-guided process. World history, then, aims at revealing how differing cultures progress to the final universal goal of the full development of human potentialities. Kant's theory thus contains and unites the three principles that are most eminent in modern Western philosophy of history: teleology, progressivism, and stage theory.

If, as far as Western historiography is concerned, we term the eighteenth century an age of the philosophy of history, then the nineteenth century can properly be called the era of scientific history. The deductive method in understanding human history gradually gave way to various historical narratives. But "the emergence of history as a profession was closely related to the rise of nationalism," and therefore, the historical science, starting with its birth in Prussia, "consciously joined in the effort to construct national identities" and "most frequently utilized academics to legitimize nationalistic endeavors."¹⁸ Thus, under the impact of philosophical traditions of history, historians in Europe, once they started their historical narratives, consciously or unconsciously gave European nation-states the most prominent place in the total scheme of world history.

In fact, this "self-aggrandizement" among Europeans was formed exactly when the philosophy of history came into shape. François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, reviewing world history, once acknowledged that the Orient used to be the center of the ancient world, but later this center shifted to ancient Greece and Rome, a shift epitomizing squarely human progress from barbarity to civilization, and thus all later history of the world was but an extension of this European civilization. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel replaced Kant's Reason with Spirit (*Weltgeist*), arguing that the ultimate end of human history is the full play given to this free spirit. In this scheme, European civilization has reached the acme, and history thus "ends" there, with the budding America but a "post-historical phenomenon." In the view of Leopold von Ranke, world civilization was a copy of the European one: the world after Europe's expansion duplicated the European tradition of "balance of power." All in all, if we follow the European academic

¹⁸ Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers, "Reconstruction of History and Turning Points in Historiography—A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Wen Shi Zhe* [Journal of Literature, History, and Philosophy] 6 (2004): 15.

reasoning, all human history is but the development of Reason or *Weltgeist* with Europe at the zenith; since world history has basically come to an end, then what else is there to write about besides Europe? This seems to be the inner logic of Eurocentrism of the nineteenth-century European world historiography, and it explains why the nation-state has remained its basic narrative unit and why macro world history still lingers about.

We need not say much about how world-shaking changes disturbed the European hegemony and European historians in the twentieth century. What merits our attention here is, generally speaking, historical reflections that come along with epochal changes that almost always stem from where old-fashioned ideas part most strikingly with reality and, in view of academic research, almost always get started from the most recent intellectual topics. Thus, it is not at all surprising that Eurocentrism finds itself as the focus of Western controversies concerning world history. Due to the very nature of the topic, what is being discussed often falls under two umbrella categories, namely the Eurocentrist camp and the Global-Holistic camp. Whatever runs opposite to Eurocentrism belongs exclusively to the Global History camp.

Next, let's briefly review the development of global history in the West. First, we meet with Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. Their greatest contribution is to point out the fact that European/Western civilization has not been and will not be the fixed culmination of civilization. They point to other civilizations to explain the fate of human civilizations. Despite the fact that they did not overtly criticize Eurocentrism, they helped broaden the vision of European world historiography and allow for the role of understanding of other civilizations after a century and more of overweening blindness among the Europeans.

Geoffrey Barraclough explicitly stated his "global history" thesis and called for a return to the macro world history narrative. He argued, for the first time in history, that the idea of "de-Eurocentrism" should be transferred from speculative to narrative history. Though he himself never finished a general world history in his lifetime, his ideas of "impartial treatment of all civilizations and due acknowledgement of their contributions" permeate much of his later writings.

In comparison, L. S. Stavrianos moved forward methodologically and began to actually write global history. His "observer perched on the moon" and "other-than-nation-state narrative unit" bear testimony to his determination to rid global history of Eurocentrism, and, as a result, his *A Global History* was well received across the Pacific.

Global historians as represented by Immanuel Wallerstein, William H. McNeill, and Jerry H. Bentley travel along a different road: they

seek to deconstruct “Western civilization.” Wallerstein’s world-systems theory argues that a civilization cannot stand alone on its own; instead, it is only viable in a system of civilizations. The rise and fall of any one civilization is the result of the system’s fluctuations, this in addition to faults within the civilization itself. In a sense, the “history of the globalizing process” as advocated by Wolf Schäfer and Bruce Mazlish is an extension of the Wallersteinian world-systems hypothesis. McNeill and Bentley argue that no civilization is purebred; instead, any one civilization is a hybridization of multiple elements from other civilizations constantly engaging in a flux of exchange and integration. And any taxonomy or definition of civilizations that ignores this process is presumptuous and absurd.

So far, Kenneth Pomeranz has been the most straightforward in his stance of de-Eurocentrism. He argues that at least before the late early modern era, the center of the world was not to be found in Europe, but in China.

What is enumerated above runs the risk of being oversimplistic or even arbitrary since it touches on the works of only a few eminent global historians, yet considering the fact that “global history is essentially targeting Eurocentrism,”¹⁹ a narrative that focuses on this central thread of critique closely parallels the real contours of global history. Generally speaking, Western scholars’ reflections on Euro- or Occidentcentrism have been sincere, their critiques very much to the point, and their research and explorations rewarding and fruitful. Yet it needs pointing out here, as stated above, that Euro- or Occidentcentrism is but an outgrowth of the Western philosophy of history; it only constitutes the lower reaches or subbranches of the Western idea of world history. Therefore, any writing or any critique that focuses alone on various types of centrisms to the neglect of the commonality and totality of human history, the quintessential Western philosophy of history thesis, or the upper reaches, the root end, lead to doubts whether they can really cast away Eurocentrism and succeed in their efforts to construct a truly new world history outlook. This question, when put in the context of Chinese discourse, is dramatically more revealing.

Despite its long history, Chinese historiography has never offered a systematic elaboration on world history. The idea of world history was imported in the process of successive aggression by Western powers. This larger context largely determined the tangled state of mind of the

¹⁹ Yu Pei, “The ‘Global View of History’ and a Few Thoughts on Chinese Historiography,” *Xueshu Yanjiu* [Academic Research]: 1 (2005): 5.

Chinese in approaching world history. On the one hand, they hoped to benefit from world history knowledge, concepts, and methodologies to empower China; yet on the other hand, they felt that those imported theories were largely unconvincing and were emotionally unpleasant. Driven by this mentality, Chinese scholars, while avidly preaching the “revolutionary” significance of “New History,” apparently receptive to the whole discourse of Western historiography, were actually laboring hard to find their own expressions in world history. For example, He Bingsong, in his 1928 book titled *Tong Shi Xin Yi* (A New Perspective on General History), showed exceedingly high respect for the concepts and methodologies of Western historiography. In fact, in the first half of the twentieth century, a time when China’s national historiography was suffering a severe shock confronting the Western “scientific methodology” and “universal truth” and when China’s supreme research institution—the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica—saw “the establishment of a scientific Oriental orthodox” as the ultimate end of its pursuit, it was a sheer impossibility for Chinese world historians to resist Western historiography. But still, Zhou Gucheng tried. In his three-volume *Shijie Tongshi* (General History of the World) of 1949, compiled on the basis of his lecture notes, Zhou took particular care to insert his own ideas and judgments in a Euro-American-style textbook. In the introduction to the textbook, Zhou made his position explicit by arguing that “general world history is more than the sum of nation-state histories.” This, of course, was not original, but it was rare at the time among similar historical writings in the West. Zhou was highly praised partly because his position contained an implicit correspondence with the traditional Chinese notion that history essentially aims at “justifying the way from Heaven to Man and the changes from antiquity to the present day.”

The founding of New China saw the whole philosophy and social sciences sector accepting Marxism-Leninism as its only guiding principle. Marx’s historical materialism totally negated Hegel’s historical idealism and restored world history to a realistic process instead of the projection of the absolute spirit, thus opening up broad vistas for a correct understanding of world history. But the political climate of the 1950s to 1960s dictated that China’s Marxist world history theory had to be imported from the former Soviet Union. Whether those self-styled Soviet Marxist world historians actually took care to read through Marx’s texts concerning world history remains unknown to us, but it is an undisputed fact that in their multivolume general world histories, they, besides being guided by Marx’s historical materialism, injected a big element of Leninist and Stalinist thought in an effort to

prove that “the socialist revolution can succeed in one single country and the socialist system can be established there as well.” Thus, the first general world history college textbook in China, the four-volume set of the 1960s, was a direct descendant of the Soviet general world history, featuring obviously the history of nation-states and revolutions. (Chinese scholars were seemingly aware of the shortcomings of the textbook, which, due to various reasons, were left uncorrected at the time.)

With reform, China opened itself to the world. The old ideological trammels were cast away, and class struggles gave way to economic growth as the supreme guiding principle. Inquisitive, open-minded, consciously reflexive, and burning with a desire for new knowledge, these epochal traits in the early years of China’s reform and opening up were nowhere more clearly manifested and unique than in her world historians. There was both a strong discontent over “imported” world histories and an earnest longing for new insights. They were eager to assist the country’s economic construction program, yet the discipline as a whole was ill prepared theoretically. They consciously adhered to historical materialism, yet they lacked experience in carrying it through in their research. It was amidst this context and mentality that they encountered “global history” head-on, ten years after a closed China of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The Chinese acceptance of global history has been a rather natural process. In 1978, when China’s first post-Cultural Revolution world history delegation went abroad, China had no idea of what global history was, as one delegate recalls later: “We asked whenever we met with our foreign colleagues: what books are you reading now? And many of them replied that they were reading McNeill’s *The Rise of the West*. So we tried to find the book to read although we did not know much about what it says at the moment.”²⁰

The thing that touches Chinese world historians most about global history is that some of its basic tenets were quite agreeable with the Marxist ideas on world history. The late Professor Wu Yujin, general editor of the above-mentioned general world history textbook, who consistently occupied himself with theoretical issues of world history, came to the conclusion that, according to Marxism, human history became world history, that is, an interconnected whole, only when human society had reached a certain stage. In other words, world history is the product of this particular stage. Based on this, as Wu argues, world history as an academic discipline is to account for the process of this

²⁰ Based on a private conversation between Ma Keyao and the present author in 2008.

transformation and to see the world as an interconnected whole. And therefore, the Soviet general world history model of separate nation-state histories with a focus on chronological development within each society to the neglect of horizontal connections must be rectified and corrected. In this connection, the holistic trans-nation-state narrative of global history coincides with Wu's thinking. Wu made reference to Barraclough and Stavrianos in his writings.

Global history's criticism of Occidentcentrism is a second reason why it is highly regarded in China. Chinese scholars have always been antagonistic to Occidentcentrism. The reasons are not difficult to fathom—first, national sentiments; second, political stance; third, academic positions.

Concerning national sentiments, Liang Qichao advocated as early as 1902 when he published his "New History" that "nationalist" histories were to inspire patriotism and identity formation among people. And in line with this, Zhou Gucheng said, "there was nothing particularly wrong with European bourgeois historians placing Europe at the center of world history. But when *we* talk about world history, this Eurocentric approach becomes unacceptable. Patriotism says no to it." This patriotic feeling occasionally looms even these days. In 1998, two Chinese scholars published a book titled *Shijie Wenming Guguo Shulue* (A Concise History of Ancient World Civilizations) by the Shanghai Education Press.²¹ As reviewers pointed out, the book aims to give full expression to the splendor of ancient Asian and African civilizations while diluting the ancient European civilization as a gesture to negate Eurocentrism. The reviewer also pointed out that this was a continuation of the late "Zhou Gucheng's idea."²²

China's political stance was closely related to the Cold War environment. During the second half of the twentieth century, China conducted two rounds of debate concerning general world history writing, world history systems, and periodization in particular. Both rounds of debate targeted Eurocentrism. It was widely believed that the issue was politically sensitive to the progressive nature of the emerging socialist system. China's academic positions are only too obvious to merit further elaboration. Except for those who were "deliberately blinding themselves," no one fails to notice the fact that all peoples of the world

²¹ Xu Jianyi and Liu Yalin, *Shijie Wenming Guguo Shulue* [A Concise History of Ancient World Civilizations] (Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 1998).

²² Sheng Zhiguang, "A Review of *Shijie Wenming Guguo Shulue*," *Qiu Shi* [Seeking Truth] 4 (1999): 112.

contributed to human history in various ways and at different times. The Chinese, as a people boasting several thousand years of history and civilization alien to the West, are particularly sensitive to this. For the above-mentioned reasons, Chinese scholars, regardless of their general evaluations of global history, have always approved of its anti-Occidentcentristic stance.

The coming of global history also agrees with China's current academic pursuit of innovation. The sweeping changes in the world, China's rapid development, and in particular the intensified globalization process during the past few decades, have sparked a new impulse for innovation in the Chinese academy, especially the philosophy and social sciences sector. As scholars point out, since "philosophy, the humanities and social sciences serve as an important guide to constructing an intelligent and responsible culture in the incumbent globalization process,"²³ the Chinese have every reason to switch "their modes of thinking and research perspectives" so as to "embrace both national character and a global vision" and to "reshape the humanities and social sciences."²⁴ As "globalization is supposed to constitute a new stage of world history," and China's "domestic scholars' discussion [of it] is largely confined to the present while lacking a historical dimension,"²⁵ historians in China are calling for strengthened macro world history research to reverse the trend of "having class struggles as the guideline of world history research over the past few decades . . . to the neglect of civilization and cultural research."²⁶ More emphasis should be given to investigation of "multiple civilizations, especially the interconnections between different civilizations"²⁷ to "better understand the current economic globalization" and to "cope with globalization."²⁸ All these calls find whispering repercussions in global history. Similar to Stavrianos's proclamation that "a new world requires a correspond-

²³ Jörn Rüsen, "Following Kant: European Idea for a Universal History with an Intercultural Intent," trans. Zhang Luo and Wang Bing, *Shixuelilunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 1 (2004): 117.

²⁴ Yu Keping, "Globalization, New Dimensions of Thinking, and New Perspectives for Observation," *Shixuelilunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 1 (2005): 8.

²⁵ Wang Side, "Globalization: A Logic and the Progress of History," *Zhongshan University Journal* (Social Sciences edition) 3 (2000): 89.

²⁶ Pan Guang, "A Few Observations on the Development of China's World History in the New Century," *Shijie Lishi* [World History] 1 (2000): 5.

²⁷ Chen Zhiqiang, "Contemporary Background of China's World History Research and Its Development," *Shixue Jikan* [Collected Papers of History Studies] 3 (2004): 89.

²⁸ He Ying, "Marx's Theory of World History," *Makesizhuyi Yanjiu* [Marxism Research] 2 (2003): 41.

ingly new historical approach,” Chinese historians have also affirmed the need for a “new history.”²⁹ As one historian said after attending the Nineteenth International Congress of Historical Sciences in Oslo in 2000, the pioneering new perspectives and research methodologies offered by global history will certainly bring new insights by putting specific historical issues in global contexts. Nearing the end of 2000, we find another illuminating piece in *The Guangming Daily* titled “History of Civilizations, World History, and China’s World History Research.” The editorial remark goes: “In today’s world of accelerating globalization, it’s become an important task for history professionals to see the world as a whole and to approach and examine history from a macro perspective.”³⁰

Entering the 1990s, a number of new world history textbooks are showing obvious signs of incorporating elements of global history, like a concern for the global totality, an eschewing of European experience as basis for world history periodization, the adoption of transnational frameworks, the stress on exchanges and interaction between different civilizations, and so forth. One noteworthy example is the six-volume *World History* textbook compiled under the joint editorship of Wu Yujing and Qi Shirong and published between 1992 and 1994. Though, as Wu reiterates in it, the textbook “has barely started” to put the new world history concepts to test, it showcases systematic dissimilarities from general world history textbooks of the 1960s, as can be glimpsed from the periodization scheme of the former. It treats the whole pre-1500 period as “Ancient History” and thus neglects the traditional “Ancient” and “Medieval” framework; it has 1500 as the dividing line simply to give prominence to the global trend of increasing connectivity as stimulated by the European “Age of Discovery”; it singles out the twentieth century as “Modern History” to highlight the trends of globalization during the past hundred years and more.³¹ By the end of 2002, China’s Higher Education Press started the project of revising the textbook by inviting a number of world historians to a symposium. This author advocated the borrowing of the global view of history in implementing an overall reform and innovation of the textbook compilation scheme, which won the approbation and encourage-

²⁹ Qian Chengdan, “Probing into the Idea of ‘Global History,’” pp. 145–150.

³⁰ Bo Jieping, “Civilization History, World History, and China’s World History Research,” p. 2.

³¹ Wu Yujin and Qi Shirong, eds., *Shijieshi* [World History], vols. 1–6 (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 1992–1994; 2nd ed., 2001–2005).

ment of a number of senior world historians, including Qi Shirong and Ma Keyao, at the symposium. Later, in collaboration with Professor Liu Beicheng, another world historian noted for his translation of Andre Gunder Frank's *ReOrient: The Global Economy in the Asian Age*, compiled and edited volume 2 of the new *World History*.³² The book offers a completely new narrative of the early modern period and substantial revision of the late modern period on the basis of the latest research on global history in other countries, especially Jerry H. Bentley's *Traditions and Encounters*. The three-volume textbook *General World History* compiled and edited by Wang Side, as part of a national government-sponsored project, offers another macro perspective on world history.³³ The textbook adheres to the Marxist thesis of "history becoming world history"³⁴ and recognizes that "world history" in a strict sense only came into being gradually during the past five hundred years" and that all previous histories are but "regional histories of a pre-world-history period"; despite the establishment of widespread connections worldwide from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, "a greater number of countries and regions had [by that time] never gained their own initiatives into the world system, a fact that renders history of this period but the initial stage of world history," a stage only to be "brought into global modernity from regional modernities" as a result of the new technological revolution of the twentieth century.³⁵ The three volumes are titled, respectively, *Pre-Industrial Civilizations and Regional Histories: The World Before 1500*; *Emerging Industrial Civilizations: The World Between the 16th and the 19th Centuries*; and *Development and Choices of the Modern Civilizations: The World of the 20th Century*. The *History of World Civilizations* compiled and edited by Ma Keyao was first published in 2004.³⁶ Its preface shows clearly that the editor has a profound grasp of the academic acumen of L. S. Stavrianos, William H. McNeill, Kenneth Pomeranz, and other world historians. The textbook takes level of productivity as the sole criterion and divides human history into two large periods, the "Agricultural Civilization" and the

³² Liu Xincheng and Liu Beicheng, eds., *Shijie Shi* [World History], vol. 2, *The Early Modern [Jindai] Period* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007).

³³ Wang Side, ed., *Shijietongshi* [A General History of the World], 2nd ed., vols. 1–3 (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2009).

³⁴ *Makesi Engesixuanji* [Selective Collections of Marx and Engels' Writings], vol. 2 (Beijing: People's Press, 1972), p. 112.

³⁵ Wang, *Shijietongshi*, pp. 1, 3.

³⁶ Ma Keyao, ed., *The History of World Civilizations*, vols. 1–3 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2004).

“Industrial Civilization,” with the latter subdivided into “Emerging Industrial Civilizations” and “The Global Spread of the Industrial Civilization.” It lays particular stress on the exchanges between different civilizations by pointing out that “cross-civilizational exchanges constitute an important drive behind civilizational changes.”³⁷ Summing up the essential features of civilizational exchanges at different stages, the book pinpoints the increasing speed from the agricultural to the industrial era and the fact that the exporting party usually carries with it an element of aggressiveness that often creates obstacles to further exchanges and finds manifestations even in the current information age, in which the fleeting velocity of goods and services exchanges is coupled with tariff barriers, trade sanctions, technological embargoes, and so forth.³⁸ In comparison, *A Course in General World History* compiled and edited by Qi Tao tends to treat world history as part of the “history of globalization,” in which the progress of productivity serves as the drive and background of the globalization process. The volume on ancient history terminates with the “Age of Discovery,” regarded as “an epochal turning point of world history from fragmentation to integration”;³⁹ the volume on modern history (*Jindai*) begins with the “Start-up of World Integration” and ends with “A ‘New Era’ Featuring Higher Levels of ‘Integration’”; the last volume also focuses on modern history (*Xiandai*) and states explicitly that the twentieth century features the history of globalization.⁴⁰ Such references as the Eurasian continent, transcontinental empires, religiocultural ecumenes, and the like replace “nation-state” as the basic narrative units of the textbook.

The above-mentioned books feature joint authorship, with the number of authors ranging from ten to several dozen. Yet, due to the unevenness of authorial expertise and usually diverging interpretations of the editor’s principles and purposes, these books show correspondingly uneven levels of actual compilation. It is perhaps just this awareness of the overall weak foundation of China’s world history research that has substantially hindered efforts to “build a world history scheme with Chinese characteristics” that a large-scale Cambridge Histories Chinese translation project has recently been launched. Heading the project is Wu Yin, associate director of the Chinese Academy of Social

³⁷ Ma, *History of World Civilizations*, 1:15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:16–18.

³⁹ Qi Tao, ed., *Shijietongshijiaocheng* [A Course in General World History], 4th ed., vol. 1, *Ancient History* (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2008), p. 1.

⁴⁰ Qi Tao, ed., *Shijietongshijiaocheng* [A Course in General World History], 4th ed., vol. 3, *Modern History* (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2009), p. 1.

Sciences, with a host of world history associations in China and hundreds of translators involved.

Concerning the popularity of “global history” in China, there is a particular advantage in that, unlike in Europe and America, world history in China does not suffer from prejudice as an academic discipline. I have noticed that in much of Europe and America, world history is not regarded as part of the mainstream field of history, to the extent that some doctoral candidates and their advisors are reluctant to profess that they study world history. The situation is dramatically different in China, where world history has always been a compulsory course for all history majors, amounting to eight to ten credits. Just a short while ago, China’s national academic degrees supervision and management authorities issued a newly revised curriculum catalogue, with world history standing on par with Chinese history under history as an academic discipline.

Yet as stated above, there are also Chinese scholars who voice very negative ideas about global history. And similarly, this negative attitude bears testimony to the characteristics of world history in China and China’s special discourse.

For obvious reasons, global history is an imported approach. Like world history, which found its way into China at the beginning of the twentieth century, global history also comes from the West, a civilization that was once strongly scornful of the Chinese civilization. The Chinese antagonism to Western importation—including historiography concepts—is almost instinctive. It is said that during his Yan’an years (1940s), Mao Zedong turned up his nose at the notion that “any talk [of human civilization] has to find recourse to Ancient Greece and Rome.” With the spread of global history, some people warn that “if our historical research is simply to repeat Western historiography concepts and conclusions, if we allow ourselves to be blindly duplicating Western historiography theories and methodologies, we will find it contributing little . . . or nothing to our own historical memory. Instead, it is a debilitating or even destructive practice. We can ask ourselves: what is the value of such kind of research?”⁴¹ “When we study or borrow from ‘global history,’ we can never afford to give up our own theory and discourse. . . . Confronting any Western historiography theory and methodology, including that of ‘global history,’ we can never indulge in the luxury of simply copying it and putting into practice.”⁴² Some

⁴¹ Yu, “Global History and National Historical Memory,” p. 30.

⁴² Lan Lan, “A Review of Barraclough’s ‘Global View of History,’” p. 23.

scholars have gone so far as to denounce global history as a new form of “xenophilia” and are particularly scornful at the thought that “nowadays, it seems that we Chinese can only explain [historical] phenomena by employing other’s ideational structure, and that devoid of such a naming system, we are at a loss as to what we are doing.”⁴³ Other scholars are more pointed in their critiques, saying that global history is nothing new in Western historiography, and that the Chinese should not be blind to what is not really new even though they are “aspiring for what is new.” Besides, in China, the global perspective is not at all a rare occurrence, or, in their own words, “if we insist that the two most important things about global history are a stress on cross-cultural interactions and a denunciation of the nation-state narrative scheme, we can notice that since a long while ago, there have been foresighted Chinese scholars who studied Chinese history using what we now call a global history perspective. Since the first half of the twentieth century, many Chinese historians have taken particular care to use alien cultural resources to study the formative process of the Chinese culture to answer from multiple perspectives the question of ‘how China became the China of the Chinese.’”⁴⁴ All in all, “each nation has the right to independently propose its own understanding and thinking of world history. So it is not at all advisable [for a nation] to literally succumb to the globalization scheme and its related norms of the strong culture of others. We are never to explain our own ideas using other peoples’ conceptual system.”⁴⁵

Besides emotional factors, the Chinese have also displayed an ideological caution toward global history. The world, after all, is in the hands of Western powers, who remain the greatest beneficiaries of globalization, and therefore global history is naturally regarded as a Western theory of globalization interpretation, with its ideological biases inevitably arousing the Chinese alert. In China, there have always been scholars who interpret global history methodology as a set of philosophical theory and worry that this historiography will erode the basis of the Marxist historical materialism. So, after correctly pointing out that global history is preoccupied with the connections between various human communities but neglects the inner drive behind intracommunity development, they would explicitly and steadfastly proclaim that “adhering to and developing historical materialism remains the

⁴³ Remarks of Zhang Xudong, quoted in Wu, “Do We Really Need a ‘Global View of History?’” p. 24.

⁴⁴ Cheng, “Globalization, Global History, and History Studies in China,” p. 21.

⁴⁵ Wu, “Do We Really Need a ‘Global View of History?’” p. 24.

fundamental task for Chinese scholars.”⁴⁶ They would say that “both ‘globalization’ and ‘global history’ are Western theses, never something neutral” and that “globalization means to globalize Western values and Western benefits with all non-Western countries relegated to the periphery of a globalized world. Therefore, global history, coming out of such contexts . . . naturally seeks to theoretically validate the West’s global expansion.”⁴⁷ The result is, in their own words, that “we cannot accept such a ‘historiographical concept,’ since it contains an ideological ‘snare’ of ‘globalization,’ i.e., the end of national sovereignty, de-territorialization and de-nationalized nation states, etc. These are the products of neo-liberalism in the West.”⁴⁸ Regarding Western global historians’ claim that they would “fundamentally rethink about world history,”⁴⁹ as some argue, the Chinese scholars should respond as follows: “As China’s world history since 1950 is constructed on the basis of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, ideologically, China’s world history narrative has no need for ‘confessions.’”⁵⁰

With regard to the criticism of Euro- or Occidentcentrism, some Chinese scholars have come to appreciate intellectually that “going beyond the limit is as bad as falling short.” Some scholars stick to the position that “the worldwide process of modernization . . . begins with Western Europe, and around 1500, a number of factors amenable to institutional innovation in Western Europe finally converge and interact by way of a series of interconnected historical movements (such as the Renaissance, Geographical Discovery, the Reformation, etc.) to give rise to the necessary knowledge base, institutional milieu, and other political, economic and cultural conditions culminating in the industrial civilization,”⁵¹ while “modern Western scientific reasoning [is] something inherent to the Western Civilization.”⁵²

III

Thus far, we have seen that global history, which originated in the West, has been variously interpreted in China, and some of these inter-

⁴⁶ Wang, “A Brief Comment on the ‘Global View of History,’” p. 24.

⁴⁷ Wu, “Do We Really Need a ‘Global View of History?’” p. 23.

⁴⁸ Yu, “Global History and National Historical Memory,” pp. 23–24.

⁴⁹ Gao Shouxian, “Fact and Fantasy: The Early Modern World Economic Scene from a Global Perspective,” *Shixuelilunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 1 (2001): 127.

⁵⁰ Cheng Meibao, “Globalization, Global History, and History Studies in China,” p. 21.

⁵¹ Wang, *Shijietongshi*, p. 2.

⁵² Ma, *History of World Civilizations*, 1:13.

pretations may sound totally surprising to Western global historians. This has been a very interesting phenomenon that we cannot afford to ignore, namely that when put in different contexts, global history can stimulate serious thinking on some of the same essential issues.

As stated above, global history emerged as a critique of Occident-centrism, which are but the subbranches or offshoots of Western historiography. It is impossible to sort out the main threads if we tangle ourselves with minor offshoots. This is true of scholars of both East and West.

When I visited the United States in 2004, I heard a lot of talk about Stavrianos's *A Global History* failing to escape the influence of the Eurocentric "challenge-response" model, the idea that the West's development posed continuous challenges to all non-Western regions with the latter being forced to cope with these challenges and adapt themselves in the process. Chinese scholars are equally sharp: "Stavrianos's structure is itself Eurocentric,"⁵³ as one scholar comments; his "theory of modern civilization" "equivocates," in fact, it "portrays modernization as a one-way Europeanization or Westernization process," as comments another.⁵⁴

It is equally revealing that both Chinese and Western scholars have attributed the problem of Eurocentrism that historians like Stavrianos suffered to methodological problems. As Barraclough once said, those who crave an objectivist account will ultimately fail to break out of the "cage" of Occidentcentrism simply because "the whole box of tools they have at hand is purely Europe-made, something that it is perhaps impossible to replace at the moment."⁵⁵ This "box of tools," as some Chinese scholars point out, contains "a host of key concepts for history studies [in the West], such as the industrial revolution, modernity, capitalism, individual freedom," and the like, and it was just "these key concepts born out of European experience" that Western historians took up to "clarify how Europe came to dominate the modern world and how world history evolves."⁵⁶ This methodological limitation, however, seems to have cast a spell on modern scholarship: not

⁵³ Huang Yang, "The Pitfalls of Global History," *Guangming Daily*, 18 March 2006, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Gao Yi, "Stavrianos' Optimism and Hesitation," introduction to *Quanqiu Tongshi* [A Global History], vol. 1, edited by L. S. Stavrianos (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005), p. 15.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Barraclough, *Dangdai Shixue Zhuyao Qushi* [Main Trends in History], trans. Yang Yu (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press, 1987), p. 155, quoted in Ren Dongbo, "Euro-Centrism and the Study of World History," *Shixuelilunyanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 1 (2006): 44.

⁵⁶ Ren, "Euro-Centrism and the Study of World History," p. 44.

only Western scholars but also non-Western intellectuals educated in the West find it difficult to transcend. And it is here that Chinese and Western scholars reach another consensus, namely that “if we invest too much in it, we are in effect affirming the hegemony of Western discourse that is already in place.”⁵⁷

As Georg Iggers and Q. Edward Wang point out, “Western historiographical methodology originated in the rationality and scientific induction of the Enlightenment, which have, over a long period of time, been regarded by both Western and non-Western scholars as the best or even the only means of human understanding, whereas all other rules and methodologies have been denounced as irrational or non-scientific” and are therefore to be rejected.⁵⁸ Why, then, do rationalism and science “refuse to go away” from us? The roots lie in the monistic Western notion of material progress: since science and rationalism propelled human progress, they were naturally deified as standards for evaluation. So once again we see that methodological problems are only problems on the surface while the real issue is value standards. A good question to ask is, had the Eastern people followed their own traditions in history writing, would current global histories have been so full of materialistic aspirations?⁵⁹

That may be why world historians in and outside China have been earnestly calling for the establishment of a set of unified value standards.⁶⁰ Arnold Toynbee said in his later years that a true understanding of global issues called for a “world state” and the reestablishment of human values. Chinese scholar Qi Shirong has argued likewise that only “when scholars of different countries . . . rid themselves of nation-state and nationalistic prejudices and collaborate wholeheartedly for long periods” “can they . . . give true expression to the contributions of different states and different nationalities in the history of the world and duly reflect their interrelationships.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, “Cross-Civilizational Exchanges and the Orientation of Modern Historiography,” *Shandong Social Science* 1 (2004): 17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ William A. Green quotes Andre Gunder Frank as arguing “whether world history written from an Asian perspective would not be substantially less materialist” and then agrees with the former. See William A. Green, “Periodizing World History,” in “World Historians and Their Critics,” theme issue, *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (1995): 111, quoted in Roxann Prazniak, “Is World History Possible? An Inquiry,” *Shijie Lishi* [World History] 1 (2006): 56.

⁶⁰ See Arnold Toynbee, *Yige Lishi Xuejia de Zongjiaoguan* [A Historian’s Approach to Religion] (Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 1990).

⁶¹ Qi Shirong, “On the Need for a Concise World History in Our Time,” *Quanjishu Pinglun* [Global History Review] 2 (2009): 147.

Yet it is of course not easy to establish universal human values. For one thing, “Who are entitled to create standards for the world citizens?” and “Who is eligible to tell the human story?” Confronting questions like these, Western scholars have begun to ask, “Is world history possible?”⁶² Chinese scholars are equally skeptical, arguing that since historians live in different cultural contexts it is very hard for them to reach consensus as to the role of a country or a nation in a specific era, to say nothing about issues of the laws of world history. Yet so long as each sticks to his or her own positions on value standards, really satisfactory world histories are difficult to come by in the short term.⁶³ More pessimistic scholars believe that “at the current stage of human social development, discussions about ‘common values standards’ are but empty talk.”⁶⁴

Confronting this dilemma, while some Western postmodernists have opted for a “nihilistic” pessimism, quite a number of Chinese historians are earnestly looking for ways to “cheer themselves up.” Since unified value standards are hard to come by, they argue, why do we not simply give up so-called guiding narratives so as to allow different localities and different peoples to come up with their histories following their own cultural traditions, in other words, let each construct his or her own global histories.⁶⁵ This comes very near to the Daoist injunction “by inaction, you leave nothing undone.” Other scholars argue that in fact, “each person (consciously) constructs his or her own world histories . . . we can never expect them to transcend their egoistic selves in telling world histories, or to write a world history in other people’s shoes.” Yet on the other hand, just as each person “wants to give expression to his or her own values . . . whether such values can become universal or not depends on readers’ reception.” Following this logic, “the significance of world history reconstruction . . . simply lies in offering the world a richer collection of world history texts so that readers can make progressive choices on the basis of their own needs in fostering their world views.”⁶⁶

⁶² Prazniak, “Is World History Possible?” pp. 47–57.

⁶³ Remarks of Ma Keyao, quoted in Bo Jieping, “Civilization History, World History, and China’s World History Research,” *Guangming Daily*, 14 December 2000, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Chen Zhiqiang, “Contemporary Background of China’s World History Research and Its Development,” *Shixue Jikan* [Collected Papers of History Studies] 3 (2004): 93.

⁶⁵ Huang, “The Pitfalls of Global History,” p. 6.

⁶⁶ Chen Xin, “Reconstructing World History in the Age of Globalization,” *Xueshu Yanjiu* [Academic Research] 1 (2005): 26.

Whether pessimistically lamenting or optimistically constructing, this has been contemporary Chinese historians' serious effort at coming to terms with macro world histories, and their seriousness and earnestness well deserve our respect. No matter what, I believe we cannot afford to neglect the essential target of world history, namely the study of the universal quality of the human past. It is this nature of the endeavor that has lent world history its academic legitimacy, without which this academic discipline would come to nothing. It is perhaps more realistic for us to start from the current discourse structure (despite its strong Western orientation) and make piecemeal corrections and amendments so that we can come nearer to consensus. At the moment, if we can keep abreast of the times and keep all facets of the dilemma of modern civilization in view, if we care to rethink such a fundamental thesis as "what is the good life" and possibly add such value dimensions as have always been stressed in Chinese historiography, perhaps we are in a better position to write really good world histories and to contribute to the making of a more harmonious world.