World History for our Time and Place:
The Historian's contemporary Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

Modern History was born and developed in the era of nationalism. Ashis Nandy has argued that the modern nation-state and modern history arose together, and served each other, effectively marginalising or silencing in our history-writing the peoples who pre-dated or fell outside the state.

Historians of earlier periods, like Sima Qian (c.145–86 BC) or Herodotus (c.484–425 BC), though today claimed as ancestor-figures by the historians of China and Europe respectively, in fact believed they were writing universally. Putting them in the box of "China" or "Greece" is the modern bias of people who think in nation-states; they themselves were recording all that they knew about the world as they understood it.

Today we live in a world aware that it has moved beyond national boundaries, and can no longer afford the parochialisms of nationalist history. Historians had a large role in leading modern thought into a nationalist direction; but they have not so far played a comparable role in leading beyond it. This lecture will consider some Southeast Asian lineages of both nationalist and trans-nationalist history, in an attempt to understand better where the profession may, or should, be heading.

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A conference in Osaka nearly cancelled by the threat of a swine flu from Mexico does not need to be reminded that we live in an era of globalisation. Around the world our budgets have been cut, our pension funds reduced, because of some toxic housing debts in the US.

Even more profound a threat than financial and disease pandemics is what humanity is doing to the climate and environment of our small planet. Only in the past decade have we begun to be able to understand the consequences for the planet of the path of relentless economic growth on which the world embarked in the 18th century. Only now can we see how completely our fates are intertwined, so that the need for common action is inescapable. Fortunately many academic disciplines, led by the sciences, are themselves taking a more

global perspective worthy of the times. How far behind can the historians afford to be?

I am afraid when we each look at the pattern in our own countries, we must concede that most of our teaching and much of our research is still locked in a national paradigm that was created for a completely different era. Nationalist history advanced with the nation state itself; often it was the nationalist historian who blazed the trail, as it were, making the case for an historic nation. Now firmly into a new millennium, we can look back to see the 20th century as the apogee of the nation-state as the dominant form of social and political organisation, and of nationalist history as its handmaiden. More exactly we might regard the period 1870–1950 as the peak of nationalism in Europe, with Japan and the Philippines almost keeping pace in Asia, while the remainder of eastern Asia were more delayed both in mastering the trend and in getting through it.

Pre-nationalist and religious history

Historians of earlier periods, when they aspired beyond tracing the history of a particular dynasty, were our worthy ancestors as world historians. Thus Herodotus (c.484–425 BC), often declared the "father" of the European historical tradition and inventor of its name — *historia* — was an avid collector of sources and stories from the whole world that he knew, and related the histories of Egyptians, Persians, Scythians and Babylonians as well as Greeks.

On the other side of the world and a little later, Sima Qian (c.145–86 BC) also believed that he was writing about the whole known universe, as indeed did most of his successors in the Chinese tradition. A recent article in the *Journal of World History* (Stuurman 2008) in fact compares the cultural relativism of Sima Qian and Herodotus, both using the contrast between settled agriculturalists and nomadic herders to show the rationality of different cultural systems.

Islamic historians, from the Persian Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (838–923) to the Arab Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233) to even the Andalusian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), and Central Asian al-Biruni (973–1050) strongly upheld a tradition of writing universal history from the creation of the world down to our times, though focussing of course on the Prophet and rise of Islam as fulfilment of this history — just as Eusebius (c.263–339), Bede (672–735) and other Christian historians of a similar period saw the story of the universal church as a fulfilment of human history. This Islamic universalist pattern was followed in Southeast Asia by historians such as Nurud-din ar-Raniri (d.1658), whose universal history led relentlessly to the dynasties of Melaka, Pahang and Aceh, whose descendents were his patrons.

A particular word needs to be said about the remarkable tradition of history-writing in Theravada Buddhism, modelled initially on the great *Mahavamsa* of Sri Lanka. This classic of

Pali literature was first compiled into a single narrative in the 5th Century of our era, to chronicle the story of the establishment and spread of Buddhist teaching from the time of the Buddha to the patrons of its monk-authors, the Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka. Each chapter ends with the reminder that it was "compiled for the serene joy and emotion of the pious", but it also told a universal story in the form of continuous narrative — albeit one of "relentless deterioration" within the fixed time-span of 5,000 years from the Buddha's death. Like its Christian or Muslim analogues, it made clear that the holy land where the founder lived was elsewhere, and indeed that the greatest of Buddhist rulers was not one of the kings of Sri Lanka who occupied centre stage in the more recent part of the narrative, but the great Mauryan ruler of India, Asoka (translated as Geiger 1912).

The *Mahavamsa* was in turn emulated by monks in Siam, Burma and Cambodia, each repeating the canonical story of Gautama's life and teachings, King Asoka's glorious reign in India and the several Buddhist universal councils. The central narrative then moves along with Buddhism itself to the country in question. Thai *tamnan* (pious chronicles) in this tradition, notably the influential Pali text of 1516, the *Jinakālamāli* written by a monk of Chiang Mai, include stories about the Buddha's miraculous travels to the northern Thai area. But as Charnvit points out, even these stories concede that Gautama is from another place, Jambudwipa, and speaks another language, so that it is only by his miraculous mastering of the local vernacular that he can be understood (Kasetsiri 1979: 157-8).

Although Buddhist historical writing appears to have been less influential in the Mahayana countries, notably China with its already established dynastic pattern of writing, a massive decentering was also at work there. The acceptance of this Indian religion in the centuries after the fall of the Han meant the acceptance of a new kind of universalism totally at odds with earlier Chinese thinking, and arguably with no parallel until the triumph of communism.

This Buddhist universalism weakened by the end of the 18th century, however, even in Southeast Asia, with court-centered dynastic histories dominating the rest of the period before the rise of nationalism.

The nationalist phase

The enlightenment writers of the 18th century, including such universal historians as Montesquieu (1689–1755), Abbe Reynal (1711–96), and Edward Gibbon (1737–94), devoured the published voyages of discovery and the Jesuit letters in order to understand a broader world, the causes of Europe's astonishing success within it, and the nature of power, civilization and the human condition within an essentially secular, yet still universal,

framework. For Montesquieu (1734) and Gibbon (1776–88), in particular, it was the rediscovered Roman Empire that became the key to understanding the world in this secular mode. It also provided a counter-case against which to judge the competitive nationalism that was beginning to emerge in a fragmented Europe.

The successors of these universalists in the 19th century became both less confident and less generous in seeking to explain the nature of human society. In part the modern dilemma of knowledge overload began to affect them, so that it became much harder to claim to understand the whole system. On the positive side, the French revolution also unleashed a wave of enthusiasm for 'the people' as the engine and purpose of history, while the German Romantics inspired by J.G. Herder (1744–1803) sought the particular genius of each people in their language and their folk customs. The universalist enlightenment project of understanding the whole of history in a sense passed to sociology and political economy, expressed most programmatically by Marx and Engels, and perhaps most profoundly by Max Weber. History as a distinct discipline and profession, on the other hand, became steadily more caught up with explaining and justifying the nation state. Starting with Jules Michelet's enormously influential *Histoire de France* (1833–67) every country in Europe and its offshoots in the Americas developed its nationalist history, which became in turn the basis of the new mass education in schools (Bancroft 1834–74; Stubbs 1874–8). The historians were in the forefront of the project to turn 'peasants into Frenchmen', to use Eugene Weber's phrase, and to provide a source of pride and identity to the people of each nation-state. Leopold von Ranke is often seen as the father of modern empirical history, but he is also by way of being the last of the great universal historians of the old Europe, defiantly writing a world history (1881–8) at the end of his career, when the fashion had already moved against him.

Modern History was born and developed in the era of nationalism. Ashis Nandy was among the first to show how the modern nation-state and the modern discipline of history arose together, and served each other, effectively marginalising or silencing the peoples whose identity could not serve the national narrative or who fell outside it. In his view, modern secular history as practiced in the academies is inextricably linked as a mode of analysis with the modern nation state and its rise. History traces the lineage and legitimacy of modern states (Nandy 1995).

As long as the success of the nation-state was seen as the main purpose of history, writing and teaching national history became the main business of historians. The expansion of mass education from the late 18th Century was largely the project of the modern nation-state, a project that ensured that the state's story was taught as a central element of the curriculum. National Archives and National Libraries were the state's repository of knowledge. National Bibliographies and Dictionaries of Biography chronicled and canonized the past within the

confines of national boundaries.

Marxism became influential at around the same time as nationalism, and can be said to have represented an alternative, a rival approach that kept alive a universal explanation for historical change through the mode of production. It was appealing to many Asian intellectuals precisely because of this universality, and its more optimistic teleology that capitalism, and with it imperialism, would eventually give way to socialism. Yet the states that adopted socialism or communism in the 20th Century were the most extreme in requiring that education was exclusively the state's business, and thereby producing state-centred subjects even more effectively than other states whose ideology was more avowedly nationalist.

Asia: A late transition to nationalism

In China, Korea and Vietnam, the concept of a civilized imperial world-centre, surrounded by a periphery of tributaries and barbarians, still influenced historical writing until late in the 19th Century. The reinvention of empires as nation-states able to fit into the European world system of competing nationalisms had some attractions for Japanese and Korean reformers, who were quick to reimagine their polities as nations requiring equality of status with China and the western states. For Chinese intellectuals such as Liang Qichao (1873–1929) the task was more challenging, indeed almost overwhelming, to re-imagine an immense and millennial empire as a nation-state competing with others on the basis of equality — particularly when the Chinese polity appeared so poorly equipped for that competition. A rewriting of history was as always a first step in this intellectual transformation, making the imagined nation-state the subject and purpose of a linear narrative of progress. Liang's colleague Xia Zengyu wrote the first example of this novel kind of history in 1904, relying much on the pattern of national narrative set by Japanese historian and inventor of *Tōyōshi* (East Asian History), Naka Michiyo (1851–1908), whose influential history of East Asia had appeared in 1903 (Alitto 1998: 168; Tanaka 1993: 47-9). As with all such transitions, there was much that was liberating in the Chinese transfer to a nationalist ideological format, but also much that was dangerously limiting. In the 1920s the theme of liberation was in danger of becoming submerged by another theme of 'national humiliation', whereby the empire-become-nation played the part of victim in a nationalist narrative of the 19th and 20th centuries. When the KMT achieved national power in 1927, 9 May [evoking the capitulation to Japanese demands in 1915] was formalized as 'national humiliation day' and the most important public ritual of the KMT (Callahan 2006; Dikötter 1999: 214).

Marxism, as I mentioned, was the great dissenter throughout the period of nationalist history-writing, keeping the idea of universal history very much alive at a popular level, albeit

in forms that became strangely distorted by the needs of ruling regimes in Moscow, Beijing and Pyongyang. After the death of Mao, however, Marxist internationalism was in rapid retreat in China. As China globalised in many other ways, the nationalist narrative of the KMT came back to the classroom. 'National humiliations' were again lavishly commemorated, beginning with the 150th anniversary of the Opium War humiliation in 1990. In 2001, 'National Humiliation Day' returned to the official Chinese calendar, and the national educational curriculum was in full gear narrating national history in terms of a century of state-as-victim nationalist discourse (Zheng 2009). China's rise to leadership in an interdependent world places a heavy responsibility on its historians to move beyond these narratives to help a new generation understand the world as a total system.

Indonesia

But I am on dangerous ground speaking of China, and should turn to Indonesia for my chief example of the nationalist 'moment' in historiography. In our over-specialised world of professional historians I am at best licensed to speak on one or two countries on which I have done the homework, or paid my dues, as it were. Indonesia's experience of the transition to nation-state-dom is at an opposite extreme from China's. If China's court historians had seen the empire as central and self-sufficient, Indonesian writers knew they inhabited a commercial and cultural crossroads, which judged success by the number of foreign ships in the harbour. Older writers, whether Islamic chroniclers like al-Raniri already mentioned, or the Javanese chronicler Prapanca, often included all they could of the known world. But the Archipelago was neither much given to keeping written records, nor climatically favoured for preservation of what was written, so outsiders play a disproportionate role in compiling its history.

It was Dutch colonial writers who began the pattern of chronicling the boundaries of what we now call Indonesia as a triumphal story, because they were purely Dutch boundaries at this stage, negotiated with other European powers and initially meaningful only to them. It was Dutch nationalist textbooks about Netherlands India and the unfolding of Holland's destiny there that educated young Indonesians in the 1910s to 1930s about the geography and history of the area within those boundaries, and the way Dutch authority gradually filled out the whole space.

Indonesians only saw their own ancestors in these colonial history books in two ways: 1) through the Kings and Queens of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, who were centre-stage in the few chapters devoted to the time before the Europeans arrived to usurp the central colonial narrative, and 2) in the modern period after 1600 mainly as "rebels" who were the last obstacle to the establishment of Dutch authority in one place or another. The first generation of (Dutch-trained) Indonesian nationalist historians built their national history scarcely at all on

the remembered traditions of the different peoples and states of the Archipelago, but rather inverted the Dutch nationalist scheme to make the theme of Indonesian history one of resistance to the Dutch. The antagonists of the Dutch became prophetic heroes of the future imagined community.

The next generation of Indonesians were educated in the opposite direction, with a syllabus designed to convince an extremely diverse people that they were Indonesians. Mass education exclusively in the national language was the great success of the Sukarno period, vastly expanding the narrow and elitist Dutch system to one in which the great majority of children by the 1970s had at least primary education. The history textbooks taught in these new schools throughout the vast Archipelago were all "drearily the same" according to Indonesia's first professional historian, Mohammad Ali, because their whole purpose was the already outmoded one of the nationalist struggle, "to arouse the spirit of struggle and strengthen our self-respect as a people, and eventually to eliminate our inferiority complex towards the Dutch." (R. Mohd Ali 1963, cited Reid 1979: 291, 298). Indonesian rulers were always benign, and failure was always the fault of the Dutch. Sukarno reinforced the pattern by creating a system of official heroes (*pahlawan nasional)* proclaimed by Presidential decree as central figures of Indonesia's past. The list began in 1959 with the princes and Islamic jihadists who fought the Dutch in the 19th Century, and gradually extended to some earlier mighty kings, and then an increasing number of 20th century nationalists. Under Suharto military figures came to dominate this list, the history syllabus was made more uniform and centralised, and those minority peoples (notably including the Toraja, Nias, Papuan, Dayak groups) who did not have an officially sanctioned "hero" status effectively had no history (Schreiner 1995; McGregor 2007).

The well-known stereotype of growing up under imperial control is that the new educated elite was forced to study someone else's nationalist history. Just as the Vietnamese were famously forced to memorize texts beginning "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois…" [Our ancestors the Gauls…], older elite Indonesians can still recite in Dutch all the rivers of Holland. I am old enough to have studied undergraduate history in New Zealand at the time when the syllabus had zero content on New Zealand, but every period of British history from the Normans to World War II. This was profoundly irritating, and fed the nationalist enthusiasm of that generation to turn the pattern around 180º. Taiwanese have had to endure the switches twice, from absorbing nationalist Japanese history, to nationalist Chinese history, before finally getting the chance to erect their own nationalist Taiwan history. Filipinos have had the same experience from Spanish to US to Filipino. Looking back on those tormented generations from the nationalist era, however, they had a wonderful cosmopolitanism about them. [And I forgive the teachers who gave me so much English history of the Normans and Plantagenets, Tudors

and Stuarts, because they at least demonstrated that New Zealand was not the centre and sum of the world.]

Young people in Indonesia are still being taught the nationalist format, and national anti-Dutch heroes are still being declared on a me-too ethnic or regional principle, even though the original purposes of this scheme are long gone. Since it has little relevance to the real world either of themselves or their parents and grandparents, they generally find it irritating, boring and propagandistic. If they want to learn about the rest of the world, let alone burning issues like the environment, poverty, corruption and violence, they never expect history to be the place to look. This kind of nationalist history teaches little about the realities even of Indonesia, let alone the world, and often paradoxically reinforces the sense of inadequacy that it was originally designed to combat. It has left Indonesia ill-equipped to cope with its tragedies and conflicts, whether the massacres of leftists in 1965–6 (never discussed in Indonesian history books), the disastrous occupation of East Timor or the terrible ethnic violence of 1998–2001. In the Aceh conflict schools were a particular target because of the loaded way they taught history, with 527 schools burned down in 1989–2002, and another 600 when the army conducted its last offensive in 2003–4 (Schulze 2006: 232). Papuans drove history teachers out of their highland village because they insisted on teaching a government curriculum in which Papuans had no place (van Klinken 2001: 323-4).

If the internal effects of a heavy-handed nationalist history format were mixed, externally they were mostly negative. Poorly educated on the world outside Indonesia except as a source of threats, the new generation of Indonesians has not on the whole fared well in international competitiveness for academic excellence. They have proved more fertile ground than previous generations for conspiracy theories purporting to explain the failings of Indonesia or the Islamic world.

The fall of Suharto in 1998 opened a marvellous chapter of democratisation in Indonesia, which despite some appalling violence has produced a very free press, fair elections and a robust competitive democracy. Some of us hoped and expected that for this democratisation to have depth there would also have to be an opening of historiography, as there was (briefly) in Thailand's radical democratization in 1973. Some of our Indonesian colleagues (Aswi Warman Adam, 2009; Bambang Purwanto 2006) have indeed been struggling to extend the agenda and correct some of the distortions of the accepted nationalist format. But the hope for a total opening of the agenda of history writing and teaching appears to be disappointed. The tired nationalist orthodoxy "remains dominant even after Suharto, though challenged from within on some details and increasingly disbelieved without" (van Klinken 2001: 326-7).

Lineages of trans-national historical consciousness in Asia

I mentioned already the older universalisms in the history-writing of Islamic, Christian and Buddhist traditions. These never entirely died, although overshadowed by nationalism in the 20th Century. Still today they represent popular and effective networks of knowledge, in some ways indeed becoming again serious rivals of nationalist consciousness in a globalised age. The millions of Asians educated in Islamic schools (madrassah), for example, learn a sacred history centred in Mecca and Madinah that is at least as persuasive as the nationalist format in state schools. Since I am concerned with the academic patterns particularly, let me focus rather on some Asia-specific ancestors of our current concern for transnational and comparative history.

Orientalism, which gradually transformed itself into Asian Studies once American social science became intellectually dominant after the War, has been another form of transnational knowledge of increasing importance. Despite Edward Said's attacks on theis tradition, it proved for Europeans from the 19th century, Japanese and Americans from about the 1920s, and almost everybody after World War II, a radical alternative to nationalist history in its demand to understand a culture different from one's own. Some of the most important institutions specializing in Asia are more than a century old, resulting from long-forgotten initiatives from governments in need of more language and other expertise, like SOAS in London, the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes (LanguesO) in Paris, the chairs of Chinese, Malay and Arabic at Leiden, the *Tōyōshi* tradition in Tokyo and Kyoto, and the Toyo Bunko (1924).

Although in many ways colonial rule built sharper boundaries than ever between British, French and Dutch spheres, orientalist scholarship did tend to overcome them. It was first the Germans around 1900, without their own Asian colonies to patronise, who began to talk about Southeast Asia as a unit, particularly in relation to the dispersal of material culture in such spectacular forms as "Dongson" bronze drums and Indic temples (Heger 1902; Heine-Gelden: 1923). French Indologists became excited by the marvels of Angkor at the end of the 19th century, and developed the strongest transnational institution in the region in the form of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). Established in Saigon in 1898 it moved its headquarters to Hanoi 2 years later, and celebrated the event by inviting scholars from Siam, India and the Indies. The major role of the EFEO in Ind-China was the study and restoration of Angkor, but it also extended its research and collaboration throughout Asia (Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin: 2001, 49-51).

The collaboration with Siam, and particularly with its cultural eminence and Interior Minister, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, led in 1918 to the young George Coedès moving from his work with EFEO on the Angkor inscriptions to become curator of the Vajirañana Library in

Bangkok (predecessor of the Thai National Library). Coedès moved back to Hanoi to become Director of the EFEO in 1929, where he constantly stressed the importance of cooperation with scholars in Indonesia and Malaya, as well as Siam. It was no accident, therefore, that Coedès became the great pioneer in showing the coherence of the early history of Southeast Asia as a whole, through his great synthetic work published first in Hanoi in 1944 (Coedes 1944).

French orientalism with its transnational aspirations may also claim some credit for the first indigenous scholar to clearly become a "Southeast Asianist" — Nguyen Van Hoang, later Vietnamese Minister of Education. He taught Vietnamese at the Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris (1932-35), extended his studies to Leiden and London, and learned enough Dutch and English to be able to reconceptualise the region as an ethnographic whole. His pathbreaking investigation of common patterns of house-building in the region was one of the first to use the term "Southeast Asia" in its title as well as to give substance to it (Nguyen 1934).

The early Asian transnational networks of knowledge in Chinese and Japanese were also important, but let me focus on those in English for reasons of space, and because English has proved the great facilitator of our times in enabling Asians to talk to one another and the rest of the world. The 1920s marked a remarkable flowering of "Pacific" scholarly organisations, stimulated by the confidence of new frontiers in California, British Columbia and Australia, and much idealistic optimism about the "Pacific age" of cultural interaction. The Pacific Science Association was established in 1920 to advance science and technology in the Pacific Region, and did cover anthropology and archaeology although little on history. The first Congress was held in Hawaii in 1920, the second in 1923 in Australia, the third in 1926 in Tokyo, and the fourth in 1929 in Java (Batavia/Jakarta and Bandung) — this last producing one of the earliest scholarly books in English on Indonesia (Schrieke 1929).

The Institute of Pacific Relations was even more important as an ancestor for the transnational study of Asia, and it needs to be remembered that its origins were explicitly to explore a "common basis of understanding for the Pacific peoples".

Its first conference, in Hawaii in 1925, showed its liberality by accepting "national" delegations from still-colonised Korea and the Philippines, as well as from China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. and Canada, with a "Netherlands" branch for Indonesia. Subsequent conferences were held in Honolulu (1927), Kyoto (1929), and Shanghai/Hangchow (1931), before retreating to North American venues as the depression, militarism and the Sino-Japanese conflict made things too difficult in eastern Asia. The IPR from its 1925 inception was concerned to stimulate research and publication by raising funds for specific projects. New Zealand economist J.B. Condliffe was appointed Research Secretary in 1926, and initiated a Bulletin which quickly developed into the quarterly *Pacific Affairs*

(1928-). Most of the Institute's early projects concentrated on poverty alleviation, trade liberalisation and peace in East Asia, sponsoring landmark studies on China by Richard Tawney (1932) and Owen Lattimore (1940).

Already in the late 1930s the IPR recognised "South-East Asia" as a region of comparative and collective study, and sponsored important work on it by Rangoon University political economist J.S. Furnivall (1940; 1943), and by US-based scholars such as Lennox Mills, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff. As the war ended there was another energetic burst of commissioned volumes, which included George McT. Kahin's pathbreaking work on the Indonesian revolution (Kahin 1952) and two of the first volumes to anchor the concept Southeast Asia in academy study in English (Lasker 1944; Purcell 1951). The chronicler of the IPR has claimed not only that this organisation laid the basis for Asian Studies in the English-speaking world (which would be hard to deny), but that "Perhaps no other organization will ever match its contribution to the development of an academic field" (Hooper 1988: 98-9).

Asian Studies has been gaining strength in Asia since 1990, the same period it came under attack in the US. There was the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) in 1995, the "Asian Studies in Asia" network established at Huahin, Thailand in 1998, and the Asian Scholarship Foundation which arose partly from that in the following two years, providing funding for Asian scholars to visit other Asian countries to deepen their knowledge. The International Congress of Asian Scholars (ICAS), which began in 1998 as primarily a trans-Atlantic partnership, looked more like an "Asian Studies in Asia" operation by the time of its third meeting in Singapore in 2003. Since then it has met exclusively in Asia.

Credit should also be given to the role of universities in Singapore and Malaysia, and of Singapore's Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (1967–) in slowly building a broader transnational sense of the region and its history in English. A crucial step was the first international conference of Southeast Asian historians the History Department at Singapore convened in January 1961, attended by a hundred delegates predominately from the region. This was one of the major stimuli to the International Association of Historians of Asia, which has held sixteen subsequent conferences in the region. A plethora of other regional academic organisations and journals have since flourished in the region, helping to overcome its relatively late start in the business of global and transnational history.

Conclusion

We professional historians have an obligation to do better, if we are to serve the needs of our readers and students in the 21st century. Nationalist history achieved marvels in its time,

especially in Asia, by transforming the mind-set of a new generation and creating Chinese, Indonesians, Vietnamese and Indians out of the enormous diversity of local, religious, and dynastic identities that went before. It overcame the parochialisms and hierarchies of the older model by building a larger arena for discussion. Global history must do the same in our era, and professional historians like ourselves must show the way. Many of the most serious threats to peace in Asia today are not 'Clashes of Civilization' but clashes of history, kept alive by the very nationalist histories our children learn. The more substantial structural threats we face today are common threats to humanity.

The history of the planet needs to be conceived and retold as a piece, and our specialisms need to be defined as part of that whole. Climatic change, environmental changes, population and resource issues, the survival and adaptation of endangered cultures, global institutions and the way they regulate competition, the changing nature of the family and gender relations, are perhaps even more fundamental than global pandemics and financial crises such as we now experience. The enormous changes in technology of our own era are affecting us all in ways we barely understand, with the pace of change usually more rapid in the poor countries that make use of mobile phones and google searches than in the countries that invented these devices. Even the most local of conflicts, in Palestine, Chechnya or the southern Philippines, is instantly transformed into a global conflict by our media. We need histories that challenge and enable young people to contextualise these changes and understand the world they live in.

One can hear already the protest to such a call for globalism from many of our colleagues. Does this not represent a recolonization of history, whereby the scientific and technical triumphs (and failures) of the world-historical centre are told, but the global peripheries remain in the shadows? It is our responsibility to find ways to answer this protest, by writing stories that do not explain a technical advance without explaining the consequence. We can show for example what happened to Asian textile production and consumption when the industrial revolution took place in Britain, and what happened to global resources and their distribution as this industrial revolution proceeded. This is the kind of prelude we need to understand the intense global changes of our own era.

Historians had a large role in leading modern thought into a nationalist direction; but they have not so far played a comparable role in leading beyond it. The time is urgent for world history to take the lead not only in reinvigorating our discipline of history, but offering hope to a new generation which is ready to move beyond nationalism.

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