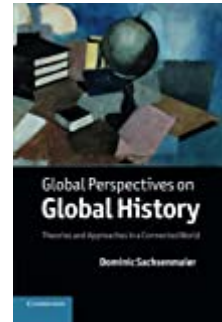


Dominic Sachsenmaier. *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 331 S. ISBN 978-1-107-00182-4; ISBN 978-0-521-17312-4.



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D. Sachsenmaier: Global Perspectives on Global History

Dominic Sachsenmaier has written a significant and illuminating study of recent historiography, utilizing what might be called the method of comparative connections. By connections, he means the growing trend of historical writing that transcends conventional geographical borders, be they national, regional, or continental. His use of the term "global history" to cover all these activities is, he admits, a shorthand, and that it is impossible to give it a precise definition or neatly to delimit it from "world" or "transnational" history. Such a conceptual dodge may seem disappointing to some, but Sachsenmaier does so to make a point: the number of practitioners who study such connections far exceeds those who think of themselves as "global" or "world" historians, as many would probably feel uncomfortable with the wide-ranging connotations of the latter terms. Thus his discussion crosses sub-disciplinary borders as well, embracing examples from economic, social, and cultural history. He views this trend as dynamic, multifarious, and evolving; for this reason, perhaps, the term "globalizing history" rather than "global" might be a more appropriate label.

The comparative aspect of the book also introduces

a significant innovation. Not long ago, comparative history was often viewed as at cross-purposes with connective history: in order rigorously to compare any two or more cases (e.g. of industrialization in different countries), one needed to treat them analytically, isolating them from their immediate environments and influences in order to focus on relevant variables. To widen the lens and take dynamic influences into account would only serve to confuse the enterprise. For example Jürgen Kocka, *Comparison and Beyond*, in: *History and Theory* 42 (2003) 2, pp. 41-42. Sachsenmaier successfully demonstrates that this need not happen: connective pursuits themselves can be the stuff of comparison. Thus while most previous surveys of this type of historiography have dealt primarily with a single literature. Sachsenmaier looks at three different countries and literatures: the US, Germany, and China. These case studies make up the bulk of the book.

Before proceeding, Sachsenmaier provides an initial chapter with an overview of the genuinely globalizing trends that are common to these and a wide variety of other cases. Here too there is innovation: he surveys

not merely subject matter and themes, but also institutional developments, showing how academic discourses crowded out and marginalized other approaches to interconnectedness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He narrates how, in the West, a Eurocentric perspective emerged through figures like Ranke, Hegel, Marx, and Weber, and how this European model accompanied the spread of universities to other parts of the world, where it still dominates. This involves him in a paradox, for it strongly suggests a process of diffusion from a Western core to non-Western peripheries. A most telling instance of this is the fact that universities in Latin America and East Asia have more exchanges of students and faculty with the West than with each other (p. 44). Yet elsewhere Sachsenmaier is at pains to refute such a diffusionist idea, insisting that Europe's development was not as autochthonous as Europeans like to think. This seems to apply primarily to the early modern period, before the spread of European-style universities. In any case, Sachsenmaier's main point in regard to this comparison is well-taken: the impact of globalizing history varies greatly from one country and region of the world to another, creating a heterogeneous and unequally distributed whole. Europeans are generally not confronted with the historical contingency of their past in the way that Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans are (p. 17). Yet he concludes the chapter with two late-twentieth-century developments which indeed migrated to the West from elsewhere: dependency theory, coming from Latin America, and subaltern studies, coming from India.

For the United States, Sachsenmaier places globalizing history in the context of the growth of government-supported area studies programs during the Cold War, as befitting America's hegemonic position in the world, not to mention the democratizing influx of students from differing social backgrounds and expansion of academic institutions in the third quarter of the twentieth century, including students and faculty from other countries. This provided the conditions not only for the rise of world history per se, but also for connective topics such as colonialism, migration, environmental and maritime history, not to mention comparative works such as Kenneth Pomeroy's *The Great Divergence*. There are a few omissions here: Atlantic history, while mentioned, is not accorded the prominence it has in fact assumed at a number of major institutions and in the discipline as a whole. Also, notably absent is so-called big history, i.e. a history of the planet going back to prehistoric times (e.g. David Christian's important work *Maps of Time*). This deserves mention if only as a foil to Sachsenmaier's

assumptions, in that big historians believe they do have a conceptually rigorous definition and research program for world history, which is at odds with the author's deliberately amorphous approach.

The case of Germany presents a marked contrast, in that globalizing history has played a small role there until quite recently. Sachsenmaier correctly locates one principal reason for this: German historians' preoccupation with overcoming their past, specifically the Nazi era. Nevertheless, since about 2000 interest has grown markedly, e.g. in colonial history, especially in the light of the controversy surrounding restitution for the Herero genocide. Sachsenmaier treats this period in great detail. Here the diffusion model is quite evident: much of Germany's interest in broader connections has been spurred by developments in Anglo-American historiography.

I find that this chapter has two major shortcomings. First, the relative provincialism of Germany's professional historians should also be traced to the pyramidal authoritarian structure of the universities themselves, which vested so much power in the Ordinarii, the full professors. This structure survived the efforts at reforming the West German university system in the 1960s and 70s, and indeed tended to promote conservatism and resistance to innovation made all the more intense by the reaction to the leftist politics of the student movement. Second, and even more surprisingly, there is no consideration of work in the German Democratic Republic, whose educational system was often compared favorably to that of West Germany, particularly when it came to promoting social mobility. Its Marxist-Leninist ideology committed it to a strong policy of anti-colonialism and was actively involved in struggles to that end, such as the independence of Namibia, the former German colony where the massacre occurred. All this had important academic ramifications: by 1960 there were institutes for the study of Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia, not to mention work on imperialism. Hans Schleier, German Democratic Republic, in: *International Handbook of Historical Studies. Contemporary Research and Theory*, ed. by Georg G. Iggers and Harold T. Parker, Westport 1979, pp. 335-36.

In the chapter on China, Sachsenmaier broadens the perspective, providing a highly readable account of China's interest in the West from the late Qing era at the turn of the last century, through the Republic, then the Maoist and post-Maoist communist eras. World History became firmly ensconced in the university curriculum after 1949, and came to designate all of history that was not Chinese.

About one third of China's academic historians were classified as world historians (p. 187). More recently, 'global' history has meant the attempt to integrate Chinese and 'world' history. This has become intertwined with the re-evaluation of China's pre-communist past, which in turn has led to debates on how modernization theory should apply to China and whether she has a distinctively nationalist approach to it and to developments such as capitalism. Sachsenmaier concludes that in China, globalization and nationalism are not seen as opposites, but as complementary. The book concludes with a brief recapitulation of the major themes, emphasizing again that there is no single 'global' approach to globalization, and that the various 'centrisms' that were present before the globalizing era are still there.

I do have one major criticism of the book as a whole,

namely its method of citation. Granted, the author's command of the literature is formidable—the bibliography runs to 78 pages! The footnotes are copious as well. But little of this redounds to the benefit of the reader, because most of the citations consist only of author names and dates, with no page references. This makes it difficult if not impossible to trace or follow up specific ideas, or to learn exactly how the cited author is being used. We know that Sachsenmaier has read a lot, but not how a particular work has influenced his thinking—short of reading the entire cited work itself. I hope this is not the result of some editorial decision that signals a new trend in citation. It greatly diminishes the value of the book as a scholarly tool. This notwithstanding, the book is a most valuable contribution to the literature on global/world/transnational history.

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