
LITERATURBERICHT

Between World and Nation: The long 19th Century in a Global Perspective*

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The present book is an integral part of the new major academic six-volume edition of World History, conducted by the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences upon the initiative of academician Alexander Chubarian – the editor-in-chief of this book series.¹ Stressing the aim and scope of this edition, Lorina Repina, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, emphasized some crucial aspects of this project: “This series must have definitely scholarly nature and give an up-to-date insight into world history. It must be world history with no Eurocentrism, revealing both historical and cultural specifics of each region, and centuries-old expansion, extension, and intertwining of ties among nations and cultures, aiming to combine the global and civilization approaches with the anthropologic one in order to contribute a ‘human dimension’ to history. Its structure is predicated upon a coherent combination of chronological and topical principles, including sections, which propose a comparative perspective. Each separate volume will take some chronological periods as a basis of its structure, which allows for an overview of the history of various nations in their interaction.”²

The project required a long lead time as well as the creative effort of many Russian scholars of various generations and epistemological orientations. Authors of this volume represent not only the Institute of World History but also other Russian academic institutions and universities. In a way, one may consider this publication as a collective portrait of the contemporary professional community in the field of history in Russia.

* Review of: V. S. Mirzekhanov et al. (ed.s): *The World in the 19th century: On the Way to the Industrial Civilization* (= *World History*, vol. 5, edited-in chief by A. O. Chubarian), Moscow: Nauka, 2014, 940 p. (russian).

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2 L. P. Repina, *Tsivilizatsionnaya paradigma v staryih i novyih modelyah mirovoy istorii. Istoriya i teoriya tsivilizatsiy: v poiskah metodologicheskikh perspektiv*, Vladivostok 2015, p. 14.

The narration of world history in the nineteenth century consists of three unequal parts, beginning with a detailed introduction that describes the general concept of the volume, its structure, and the main epistemological approaches (written by V. S. Mirzekhanov). The first part “The Development of Industrial Society: Globalizing Trends” consists of eight chapters, which depicts key processes of the industrializing society: “Industrial Revolution” (A. V. Revyakin, V. S. Mirzekhanov), “Economic Growth, Demographic Transition, and Mass Migrations” (V. A. Melyantsev, V. S. Mirzekhaov, S. B. Volfson), “Social Processes” (A. A. Isserov), “Languages of Culture of the 19th Century” (I. V. Kondakov, V. S. Parsamov), “Education and Science” (A. N. Dmitriev, N. V. Rostislavl-eva, M. V. Loskutova), “Medicine in the 19th Century” (A. M. Stochik, S. N. Zatravkin), “Religion and Church” (S. G. Antonenko), and “Politics and Society” (N. P. Tanshina, M. P. Aizenshtat).

The second part “World-system of the 19th Century” consists of a theoretical introduction, “Empire and Nation in ‘the long 19th century’” (A. I. Miller), and four sections. The first is about “Europe and the World: A Treacherous Path to the Global Political System,” which is divided into ten chapters; the narrative is structured along country-specific and regional topics: “Pax Britannica: Great Britain” (M. P. Aizenshtat), “Pax Britannica: Dominions” (A. A. Isserov, A. N. Uchaev), “Pax Britannica: India” (L. B. Alayev), “France: From Napoleonic Despotism to the Parliamentary Democracy” (A. V. Revyakin), “The Sunset of Spanish Empire” (I. Yu. Mednikov), “Portugal: the Decline of Great Empire” (A. P. Chernykh), “Netherlands: Minor European Country – Major Colonial Power” (G. A. Shatokhina-Mordvintseva), “Belgium: Kingdom and Empire” (A. S. Namazova), “South-East Asia” (V. A. Tyurin), and “Sub-Saharan Africa” (A. S. Balezin). The second section, “The Transition Century of Western and Eastern Monarchies: From Ancien Regime to the Modern Age,” presents the following chapters: “Russian 19th Century” (V. S. Parsamov), “Habsburg Monarchy in the 19th Century” (E. V. Kotova), “Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century” (S. F. Oreshkova, M. S. Meyer), “The Arab World: the Long Search for Renewal” (B. V. Dolgov, E. A. Prusskaya), “Iran under Qajar Dynasty” (A. I. Polischuk), and “China and the World: Contradictory Modernization Processes” (O. E. Nepomnin). There are five chapters in the third section dealing with the overall theme of the “National Idea, Emergence and Development of Nation-States”: “Japan on the Way to the Great Powers” (S. B. Markarianz, E. V. Molodiakova), “Germany: Implementation of a National Dream” (A. G. Matveeva), “Italy in the 19th Century: the Risorgimento” (Z. P. Yakhimovich, A. A. Mitrofanov), “North Europe: on the Way to Welfare” (V. V. Roginsky), and “The Formation of Nation States in South-Eastern Europe” (O. E. Petrunina). The fourth section contains three chapters: “Western Hemisphere: Continuity and Changes” (A. A. Isserov), “The USA: on the Way to Might” (B. M. Shpotov), and “Latin America: Age of Independence” (M. S. Alperovich).

The third part of the volume on “Inter-State and International Relations in the 19th–early 20th Centuries” includes three chapters: “Napoleonic Wars and the Vienna System of International Relations” (V. V. Roginsky), “World Order, Wars and Foreign Relations in the mid-19th Century” (V. V. Roginsky, V. N. Vinogradov), and “World Politics of the

Last Third of 19th Century—early 20th Century” (A. V. Revyakin). The volume ends with a conclusion, “The World in the 19th Century: the Historical Outcome and Orientation to the Future,” by V. S. Mirzekhanov, the editor-in-chief of the entire volume.

The contemporary world, which lives “in the twilight zone between the passing of the national era, and the emergence of the cosmopolitan era” (Ulrich Beck), desperately needs to reinvent an appropriate language and conceptual framework. At this level, the humanities and the social sciences reconsider the perennial epistemological questions: What is the ideal status of sociohistorical knowledge in society? What is the specific nature of historical knowledge and its approaches? What language is indispensable to represent human-scale historical reality? How to overcome an inevitable ideological and sociocultural dependence of a cognizer? And so on. By allowing the vision to be decentred, the global approach invites a historian to study geographic areas and its population thoroughly while promising advanced opportunities to study events and processes at various scales. However, as reflected by discussions in scholarly literature, those opportunities are to be gained if and only if scholars make maximum use of the most recent studies.

While reading the fifth volume of *World History*, I tried to estimate in general where the novelty of this volume lies. How, in what way, and how far did the authors of this massive volume (939 pages) succeed in changing our interest in world history in the nineteenth century?

History of the nineteenth century in a global perspective is unachievable without a reflection on the relativity of timelines. This is due not only to a multiplicity of calendar systems in the world but also to the fundamentally heterogeneous historical time frame. In the book under review, the concept of *the long 19th century* (1789–1914) is the temporal framework in which searching for coordinates in a multilayered historical matter is undertaken. The conventionality of the chronological framework chosen for the study is evident. For instance, Jürgen Osterhammel wrote that to close the nineteenth century “with a sudden fall of the curtain in August 1914” is not completely valid because “only when the war was over did humankind realize that it was no longer living in the nineteenth century.” To open a long nineteenth century with the French Revolution is also conventional as its impact on contemporaries in their present world took place only in the West.³ The constructivist nature of the concept of a long nineteenth century is balanced out in the book with the presence of many more nuanced systems of periodization within the boundaries of states, regions, and continents, included in a description of historical events and in country-specific, regional, and topic essays.

Substantial features of the nineteenth century contrast with others in multivalent ambiguousness. This period is largely comprehended as a transitional one, one which prepared modernity. However, the simplicity of the notion modernity is misleading. Much depends on the research approach chosen by the scholar. If we understand modernity

3 J. Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World: a Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton 2014.

as a project of modernization (successful/ unsuccessful, finished/ delayed), like the book offers, then usual teleological thinking, inherent in the idea of evolution, inevitably creates images of a development from simple to complex. Despite paying attention to gaps, declines, and retreats, these images are still not less convincing. Although F. Braudel wrote that history moves as a Spanish procession, where each step forward is followed by two steps backward, other approaches are also available. For example, M. Foucault suggested perceiving modernity not as a chronological period with certain features but as an attitude (epistemological and ethical at once) of a researcher who studies the epoch. This perception assumes thoughtful use of a notion – representation, that is to say studying the ways of thinking/ sensing/ acting indigenous to specific persons – rather than some abstract historical process. Moreover, the theory of “multiple modernities” that is under discussion for the last 15–20 years still remains a challenge when using it with historical materials. One thing is clear; the inclusion of the “man-sized reality” is impossible without broad anthropological understanding of culture and reflexive positioning of a scholar. Alongside the idea of duration, the idea of transformations’ asynchrony in various parts of the world is of great concern to the concept of the volume. Furthermore, it is convincingly demonstrated that the choice of modernization tools depended on a ratio of economic orders as well as on a situation of state institutions and social elites in various countries.

There is no East-West division of the world in the book. Such notions and the dichotomy itself are problematized in the introduction, and their relativity is determined by the volume’s structure and the narrative organization in the synthesis chapters. In terms of space, the long nineteenth century is presented in the light of a world-system, that is to say a centre and a periphery, where colonial and continental empires played a significant role along with nation-states.

The theoretical introduction, gravid with ideas and generalizing characteristics, promises an emphasis on dynamism and divergence of the development processes, as well as a global view on occurrences, processes, events, and historical figures with due consideration of recent approaches to study world history as a history of civilizations, history of transfers, transnational history, connected history, entangled history (p. 14). The structure of this volume is organized in accordance with global and local perspectives. Its first part provides a general description of the most important phenomena of the emerging industrial world: industrial revolution, economic growth, demographic transition, mass migrations, social processes, languages of high culture, education, science, medicine, religion, church institutions, and politics. The conjunction between local and global is illustrated in the introduction and conclusion as well as in a substantial analytical chapter, “Empires and Nations in the Long 19th Century,” which introduces the second, the largest part of the volume.

National narratives described the nineteenth century as the age of nations and nationalism and imperial projects of that period as unrelated to nation-building. This book convincingly shows a strong necessity to intensely rethink the interrelations between national and imperial. Nation-building was woven into imperial practices both in the

metropole and on the periphery. This approach opens up new opportunities for understanding the nature of nationalism, integrational imperial projects at the end of the century, and the originality of the first modernity in general. Imperial projects outside of Europe and national transformations in Europe are presented side by side in the volume. It is interesting but not yet sufficient to show how they were interwoven and mutually remodeling each other. Additional perspectives and research approaches of recent studies in new global history,⁴ not included in specific sections of the volume, are crucial.

The third part examines interstate and international relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This part of the volume remains Eurocentric. International history is described in a linear fashion and within the disciplinary framework of international relations, with its typical key topics: diplomacy, wars, and geopolitics. As in many traditional studies of international relations, the world appears as the scene of international discord, conflicts, compromises, and alliances among national actors. Meanwhile, intellectual transformations of the field in recent decades – for example, interdisciplinarity due to the cultural and spatial turns, and also a renewal of social history related to them – has brought a fresh perspective. Historians have started to search for combined methods of micro- and macroanalysis on global and local levels. International relations are no longer considered as only the results of governmental actions in connected and entangled history but also as important factors in the development of nations, tightly bound with transfers of ideas, concepts, technologies, materials, civilization values, etc. Additionally, colonial aspects of international relations are naturally intertwined with European history. Everything that is written in the introduction on these problems presents a new perspective for interpretation: “formation of empires led to strengthening of national at the expense of colonial and to their active convergence”; “overlapping of universalism and nationalism, of national states and empires”; “imperial idea and colonial culture became a part of the mass culture of metropolitan countries” (pp. 16–18). However, there is not much on the mass culture of the metropolitan countries in the book. It raises, however, the question how it was perceived in colonies both on the elite and mass levels? What can postcolonial studies tell on the matter?

Many of these inferences are still open and lively debated in world historical literature.⁵ It is a problem whether marking the *nineteenth* century as a separate period is possible at all because there is a high risk of falling into the trap of Eurocentrism, and, as this volume demonstrates, to abandon such an orientation is no easy task. It denies the fundamental role of this age in the transformation of the whole world: many factors and processes, described in the book, primarily affected Europe. For instance, an essay in the volume on culture examines only European high culture and states that it influenced the whole world (p. 19) despite that modern humanities research, including new global history,

4 See, for instance, P. Boucheron/N. Delalande, *Pour une histoire-monde*, Paris, 2013.

5 See, Peter N. Sterns: Rethinking the Long 19th Century in World History. Assessments and Alternatives, in: *World History Connected* 9 (2012) 3, URL http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/9.3/forum_stearns.html (accessed: 18 May 2015).

has gathered plenty of evidence for a mutuality of cultural influences. There are studies demonstrating that the influence of peoples outside Europe on the industrial revolution's processes, as well as on other regions and continents, was significant. Much of a stable representation of Eurocentric foreign affairs in the nineteenth century is due to the lack of attention to the global transformations in the history of international relations until recently.⁶

This volume gathered and mastered a wealth of empirical knowledge. The majority of essays are well written. It is a good, highly interesting read. However, many relatively new topics and subjects of world history are not fairly represented. Studies of memory; images; discourses; discourse structures; myths, which shaped historical memory; historical representations of the past epoch; and value conflicts in societies are not examined in the volume. The emphasis, rather, is on political, economic, and, to a lesser degree, social history. The latter only received scant attention because the sociological turn, reflected in the topic (see "Social Processes") and country-specific essays, did not inform specialists of the history of specific European and non-European countries. Social changes are comprehended in long-condemned terms and notions, and social processes are habitually only linked to economics and politics. The cultural, and therefore the anthropological, component of these processes is not represented.

Some chapters lack modern historiographic matters. For example, colonization, as the main embodiment of communicative practices of European and non-European peoples, is understood in line with traditional colonial history although the introduction argues persuasively for the need to appeal to the postcolonial historiographic tradition of the last 50 years (p. 18–19). Moreover, cultural practices, including communicative ones, could be found in traditional and renewed history of transfers in the research field of ideas and concepts, scientific discoveries and technologies, information, managerial and educational skills, etc. The volume falls short of such perspectives – as well as entangled and connected ones – as they could not be presented because of the apprehension about these approaches in the Russian historiographical tradition has only just begun.

The majority of country-specific and regional essays strictly follow the informative and impersonal requirements of conservative educational and encyclopaedic thinking. Perhaps, it is a conscious choice of the editors, which allowed various methodological preferences of authors to be combined. However, such a choice has some disadvantages, which appear noticeably in the imbalance between the ratio of the new approaches declared in the introduction and some survey essays, and the content of a considerable part of the volume.

But besides all criticism, this book is a fresh and original contribution to the debate about world history. An experienced reader can learn a lot about the history of various nations of our planet while contemplating the state of Russian modern history studies. A less informed reader, interested in the historical process, will read many pages of this

6 B. Buzan/G. Lawson, *The Global Transformation. The Nineteenth Century and the Making of Modern International Relations*, in: *International Studies Quarterly* 57 (2013) 3, pp. 620–634.

volume, including those written in accordance with the long-established rules of a historical profession and its practice of explaining “as it was in actual fact,” with pleasure. It is possible that this volume will inspire some critics to ask “simple” questions. What is capitalism? What is the difference between petite and big bourgeoisie? Why is there so little about material culture? Should we oppose culture and technologies? How has the understanding of a state and a society changed? Why is there nothing on mentality, imagination, and so on in the first part of the volume? Beyond doubt, this questioning will stimulate the next “rewriting” of history that actually allows the historical knowledge to maintain its social value as an open and truly non-complete human experience.