

**BEIJING,  
THE TWENTIETH WORLD HISTORY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE,  
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The World History Association (WHA) held its Twentieth Annual Conference at the Global History Center of Capital Normal University (Beijing) from Thursday afternoon, July 7, 2011, through the early afternoon of Sunday, July 11. The conference themes, '*China in World History*' and '*World History from the Center and the Periphery*', drew 600 participants from 36 countries, including 200 scholars and teachers from the People's Republic of China.

President of the Capital Normal University Liu Xincheng offered the conference's initial keynote address, 'Global History in China'. This paper was an attempt to trace the emergence and development of global history in China. Meanwhile, it treated the varying receptions and responses to global history and the underlying causes for such receptions and responses. Finally, it made an anticipation of the future prospects of global history in China.

The panel '*World History, Globalization, and World Systems Analysis*' was of special interest for the present journal. The students of the world history continue discussions on the timing of the start of globalization (whether it has been going on since the third millennium BCE, the Axial Age, the end of the first millennium CE, 1500 CE, 19th century, 1918, 1945, or since the late 1980s). World-systems analysis studies and discusses the processes of globalization and intersocietal integration throughout a world history. Although there are many views on the emergence of world-systems in general, and the Afroeurasian world-system in particular, there are many markers of globalization: the formation of the West Asian center of agricultural production, the start of the Urban Revolution in Southern Mesopotamia, emergence of the 'imperial belt' (belt of empires stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific) in the 1st millennium BCE, formation of transcontinental trade route in the late 2nd century BCE, emergence of a network of particularly intensive trade and cultural links throughout the major part of Afroeurasia in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, formation of the planetary world-system in the long 16<sup>th</sup> century, industrial and communication revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that linked the world and transformed it in a rather radical way. Each of those stages was accompanied by immense changes in the ways of life, culture, political organization, and so on.

The panel '*World History, Globalization, and World Systems Analysis*' brought together historians (especially world historians), historical sociologists, political anthropologists, and, of course, world-system researchers to present their ideas and studies connected with the analysis of the globalization processes throughout the world history. What are the common features of the historical and modern globalization? What are the similarities? What are the roots of the modern globalization processes?

The panel participants (Christopher Chase-Dunn, Eric Vanhaute, Leonid Grinin, Adam McKeown, Andrey Korotayev, Scott Frey and others) identified some world-system approaches to this issue. However, they hasten to add that world-systems analy-

sis serves as a theoretical foil for discussing many different ways to examine globalization and ask what, if anything we may learn about the contemporary globalization for examinations of past patterns of ‘globalization’. A World-systems transition to a new phase produced an effect of diffusion (through borrowing, modernization, coercive transformation, incorporation, *etc.*) of the respective innovations throughout territories that turned out to be unprepared for the respective independent transformation. This can be seen in many of those processes that supported world-systems development, such as the diffusion of statehood, or world religions. When we analyze the present-day results of globalization (as earlier with respect to the processes of industrialization and modernization) we observe similar processes. So a critical eye might see that the present day world to a certain degree faces the systemic tasks similar to the ones encountered by the archaic societies, namely: to increase and integrate and still preserve own identity and image. In the distant past the process was also going on which can be named using the modern popular word a globalization. For instance was the transformation of the previously autonomous territories into a part of huge empires a form of globalization? Huge and sometimes dramatic changes happen nowadays. Alien cultures and consciousness, new, yet amorphous, but already authoritative principles are imposed against one's will. What is good? What is bad, what can be welcomed and what can be fought against? These questions do not have simple answers, but an appeal to historical analogues has always helped in search for answers. Namely the periods of state formation and the emergence and collapse of empires, decentralization and integration of powers undoubtedly let us better understand some modern processes.

For example, transfer to first complex polities – chiefdoms and their analogues – and then to early states (and their analogues) is often accompanied by dramatic and painful destruction, strong and sharp changes in social life, rupture with many previous and well-established things and traditions. And at the same time new ideas and guidelines were not always better in moral and spiritual aspect. It is easy to imagine how painful the destruction of an ideology, based on local ‘patriotism’ and ancestral religion and lifestyle might have been. One can surmise that people were angered by a breach of morality, a shift of familiar virtues based mostly on political power. The gathering of crown lands and feudal provinces into a centralized state no doubt also produced strong reactions. Thus, within all those processes of integration, unification, etc., which went on for millennia, one can detect a number of processes that are rather similar to the modern globalization processes, especially – as regards their influence upon the changes of the ways of life, social psychology, human reactions to global changes, and so on. Benedetto Croce, among others pointed out that any historical assumption is rooted in practical necessities. This still applies to a modern history because in reality it is oriented to the modern necessity, to some modern state which makes these facts become important. The better understanding of the past allows a clearer understanding of the present day phenomena and finding the way to weaken the negative processes of breaking national cultures, traditions, self-identity, as well as making modern tendencies serve each country's interests and the human race as a whole. Thus there are many similarities between ancient and modern times.

In this note we would also like to pay a special attention to the Big History panels of the 20<sup>th</sup> WHA conference. At the WHA conference in Beijing in July 2011, scholars from around the world presented their research on Big History in eight panels. They

outlined Big History's possible research agendas, explained the development of Big History curricula, and argued for the field's potential impact in politics and society.

Big History is a relatively new field that is just becoming organized. The American Historical Association (AHA) was founded in 1884 and the World History Association in 1982. In the first Big History panel in Beijing, David Christian, Fred Spier, Craig Benjamin, Cynthia Brown, Barry Rodrigue, and Lowell Gustafson discussed the founding of the International Big History Association in 2010. The IBHA defines its purpose as seeking to understand the integrated history of the Cosmos, Earth, Life, and Humanity, using the best available empirical evidence and scholarly methods.

The Australian, Italian, Dutch, and American scholars who founded the IBHA recognized that many other scholars in other countries were also already researching Big History, Deep History, Cosmic History, and other closely related approaches in many disciplines. In a panel on Big History and Theory, Andrey Korotayev of the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow explained the biological and social phases of Big History. David Blanks of the American University in Cairo, Egypt drew on cultural and philosophical theories of post-modernism to analyze Big History. Barry Wood of the University of Houston presented on how narrative within the literary field can deliver the story of Big History.

In another panel on the Theories of World History and Big History, the University of Michigan cosmology doctoral candidate, Cameron Gibelyou expanded on the theme of narrative. The universe, Earth, life, and humanity, he argued, all have their own 'histories' as chronicled by the disciplines that investigate them. Each one of these histories presents unique puzzles, and seeing how those histories fit together is yet another puzzle and a challenge in its own right. This is, at least in part, the project of Big History—figuring out how the pieces, these various natural and human histories, might be put together on the broadest of scales, and making a story out of it.

Not every piece of research within Big History must cover the entire field, of course. In a panel on Little Big Histories chaired by Ross Dunn, particular events were analyzed within a Big History perspective by Craig Benjamin on Jericho, Jonathan Markley on grass, and Esther Quaedackers on Tiananmen Square. At a panel on Big History research agendas, David Christian proposed a series on Little Big Histories.

In the panel, Big History across Boundaries, scholars demonstrated how Big History is as related to other fields as it is to History. Daniel Stasko discussed corpuscles, aether, and phologistan as productive mistakes within biology and astrophysics. Tom Gehrels, in his last scheduled presentation before his untimely passing shortly after the conference, drew on astronomy to discuss the Chandra Universe. Melysa Cassidy of the University of Southern Maine traced information through the prism of Big History.

In addition to conducting and presenting research on Big History, those in the new field are also developing courses and curricula in teaching about it. In a panel on Big History and Education, David Christian explained the Big History Project, funded by Bill Gates, which is constructing a curriculum for secondary schools. Cynthia Brown and Mojgan Behmand of Dominican University in California discussed the Big History sequence of courses now required of all first year students there. Christian Jennings showed how to link Big History to the historiographic mainstream.

Big History has significant applications and political implications as well as offering a productive research agenda and teaching opportunities. Fred Spier pushed deep historical trends beyond the present to analyze humanity's future. Barry Rodrigue of the

University of Southern Maine investigated the implications of big history for addressing pressing current dilemmas. Akop Nazaretyan of the Oriental Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, followed the evolution of non-violence in the context of Big History and complexity studies. Also presenting was Leonid Grinin, a philosopher of history and sociologist, and co-founder of the Center in Moscow for the study of Big History and Systems Forecasting as a part of the Institute of Oriental Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences), directed by Dr. Vitaly Naumkin. Professor Grinin demonstrated Big History's importance for globalization studies, economic cycles, the long-term trends in cultural evolution, and in the evolution of technologies.

Immediately after the conference, Barry Rodrigue represented the IBHA at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, China, where he addressed other scholars interested in the research, teaching, and implications of Big History. Scholars of Big History are invited to the first international conference expressly dedicated to the field in July of 2012. Details about this conference may be found at <http://www.ibhanet.org/>.