
REVIEWS AND NOTES

GLOBALIZATION THROUGH THE PRISM OF BIG HISTORY

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A review of a collective monograph ‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System’ by Julia Zinkina, David Christian, Leonid Grinin, Ilya Ilyin, Alexey Andreev, Ivan Aleshkovski, Sergey Shulgin, and Andrey Korotayev. Springer, Cham. 2019. 284 p.

Historicism as one of the main principles of scientific rationality opens great horizons for expanding our knowledge of globalization. At the end of the twentieth century a historical dimension of globalization was discovered by world-system scholars. Immanuel Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank, Giovanni Arrighi, George Modelska and others who worked in the world-system paradigm, based methodologically on the works by Fernand Braudel, showed a systemic development of economic, political, social and cultural interconnections of the humankind in historical dynamics. Almost without using the term ‘globalization’ until the mid-1990s, the authors described and revealed a few essential patterns of the process based on historical and systemic approaches. After the ideological clash between two systems and the following crisis of social studies came to an end, the concept of globalization became the core aspect of new social theories. In the first decade of the twenty-first century that witnessed an outburst of works on globalization, the concepts of many social theories were interpreted in a new way, and the structure of many social disciplines was reorganized. In the introduction to one of the best collection of works on historical aspects of globalization, Barry Gills and William R. Thompson wrote, ‘Many more studies will be needed to specify further the historical processes of global (and globalizing) network construction and intensification. We have no doubt they will be forthcoming’ (Gills and Thompson 2006: 15). They were right. By the end of the 2010s, multifarious aspects of globalization were deeply investigated. It was numerously pointed out in historiographic research, book and journal publications that nowadays it is quite difficult to find the angle from which the globalization has not yet been analyzed. Thus, it seems more valuable and interesting to have this monograph published.

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The collective monograph ‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System,’ published in 2019 by Springer, was written by the authors Julia Zinkina, David Christian, Leonid Grinin, Ilya Ilyin, Alexey Andreev, Ivan Aleshkovski, Sergey Shulgin, and Andrey Korotayev. It presents a totally new approach to globalization through the prism of two relatively new scientific trends – that of Big History and of Globalistics. Big History, as is mentioned by the authors themselves, allows investigating globalization as a chapter in the history of the Universe, revealing the mechanisms underlying the forming bonds and structures of our world (*‘chapter in a deep history, reaching back through the entire history of our universe, in which we see existing entities linking up to create new structures, new forms of complexity, even new forms of beauty’*). Globalistics provides unique opportunities for the interdisciplinary synthesis that can help create a multidimensional model of global dynamics.

One should note that the monograph under study opens the editorial series by Springer on macroevolution and historical macrodynamics. The collective monograph under the title of ‘The Twenty-First-Century Singularity in the Big History Perspective: An Overview,’ which is closely related to the work in question, was published in 2020 under the editorship of Andrey Korotayev and David LePoire (Korotayev, LePoire 2020).

‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System’ is an original work which meets the intellectual challenges of the twenty-first century. The methodological basis of the monograph constitutes its main value. An attempt to find a new path in science always deserves respect, especially if it is a successful one. The authors managed to extract ‘a useful product’ out of an experimental historical rhetoric, which combines traditional determinative text with quantitative inclusions, not only supporting and illustrating the conclusions, but also retaining its own analytical value.

The approach has proved itself in the macrohistorical and global research. The works by George Modelska, Barry Gills, William R. Thompson, Christopher K. Chase-Dunn, Patrick O’Brien, Janet Abu-Lughod, Leonid Grinin, Andrey Korotayev, Sergey Malkov and others follow the same strategy. The *Foreword* to the monograph ‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System’ is written by one of the most respected authors in the modern social and historical theory, a great researcher in world-systemic analysis Christopher K. Chase-Dunn. He writes,

‘The Big History of Globalization’ is a large and important book. It is rigorously argued and superbly written and will deepen and enrich discussion about the immensely important theme of globalization... It places the notion of globalization within a much wider scholarly context than usual (Chase-Dunn 2019: v).

The main ‘useful product’ of the work is the trends of historical macrodynamics singled out by the authors, shown in the context of modern approaches to understanding mechanisms of forming structural bases for institutional interrelations in the human society, from the Neolithic revolution to the beginning of the twentieth century. The monograph deals with economic, political socio-cultural trends of historical macrodynamics,

which reveal the main logic of globalization and allow modeling the structure of social development in future.

Another significant result is a suggested periodization, or to be exact its criterion. As is well-known, periodization is the basis of any historical concept. With the help of periodization and its criterion the changes in the object under question are highlighted, their direction is determined, and not only the content, but also the essence of the historical process is revealed. As a criterion the authors of ‘A Big History of Globalization’ choose the level of the organization of the world-systemic structures, reflected on the scale of the institutes, characteristic of certain periods in globalization history. The periods of the Big History of globalization are large phases of expanding and shrinking of the world-systemic structures, the main tendency of which is concerned with increasing the level of interdependency within the society. The main attention is paid to the so-called phase transitions, threshold periods in the state of the World-Systems (Grinin, Korotayev 2009).

The authors say, ‘We will try not only to trace the quantitative growth of world connectivity and the chronology of encompassing new territories and regions but also highlight large-scale qualitative changes – the phase transitions of the World-System’ (Zinkina, Christian, and Grinin 2019: 16). A concept, or, to be more exact, a metaphor of phase transitions is an interesting and productive discovery allowing us to reveal the content of many concrete global and historical processes through the notions of typogenesis and typostasis of the World-Systems. Typogenesis is the formation of the institutes of systemic interactions and typostasis is their stagnation.

The authors single out five large historical periods (macroperiods) of globalization each opening with a phase transition in the structure of systemic social connections, this is a transition to a new level and scale of interrelations.

- The first period of globalization is Archaic Globalization and it refers to the formation of exchange system during the Stone Age and in ancient civilizations.
- The second macroperiod is Proto-modern Globalization, or the epoch of medieval formation, which reached its peak in the thirteenth century with the establishment of the Mongol Empire.
- The third macroperiod is Early Modern Globalization and it begins with the Age of Discovery and continues during the whole Early Modern period.
- The fourth macroperiod is Modern Globalization and it covers the long nineteenth century. The highest point of the period is the era of scientific discoveries, called by the authors ‘the First Golden Age of Globalization’ (the end of the nineteenth – beginning of the twentieth centuries).
- The fifth macroperiod is Post-modern Globalization. It is what we witness nowadays, with unprecedented speeding up of processes aimed at forming a common society on the planet.

Each of these macroperiods consists of stages. The authors define clearly the stages of the first archaic macroperiod. The beginning of the Archaic Globalization is connected with the Neolithic revolution (the 8th – 4th millennia BC) through the start of systemic relations among the societies of ancient landowners.

The next stage is the first urban revolution (end 4th – middle 3rd millennia BC), marking radical changes within the society, which turned the humanity into the state of civilization (typogenesis of the bases of the Bronze civilizations).

The third stage of archaic globalization is, according to the authors, relates to the phase of typostasis, when the achievements of the first urban revolution spread in Afro-Eurasia and lose the dynamics of innovations. Chronologically it is the middle of the third – second millennia BC.

The phasic transition to the next stage of archaic globalization (1200 BC – 150 BC) is the spread of iron metallurgy, followed by the creation of large economic areas, transcontinental trade routes such as the Silk Road.

This is followed by a ‘lost millennium’ (150–1000 BC), the typostasis of agricultural empires.

It should be pointed out here that the notions of the ‘lost millennium’ is not quite right. The authors as many other researchers believe that there was no demographic growth and an increase in the overall GDP for almost a thousand years, beginning with the mid-second century AD. Such a belief is the legacy of Eurocentric historiography of the nineteenth – twentieth centuries, which mainly relies on European sources. In global history the first millennium AD is concerned with the formation of new highly productive economics – a classical nomad economy, developed in the medieval climate optimum, determining a rapid demographic growth, which led to restructuring the whole socio-economic and ethnopolitical structure of Afro-Eurasia in the second half of the first millennium AD. That is why the Early and the beginning of the High Middle Ages can hardly be named the ‘lost millennium’.

Thus, five phase transitions and five stages (subperiods) are singled out by the authors of ‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System’ in archaic globalization.

Four other macroperiods of globalization have not acquired such well-founded division into stages yet. However, certain milestones are marked by the authors.

In general, periodization and ‘phase approach’ help give an overview of many global historical changes, which have not yet been investigated to a great extent.

It goes without saying that the monograph ‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System’ deserves high praise as an original, heuristically rich research. However, it should be mentioned that the work is characterized by some kind of eclecticism which prevents it from being perceived as a conceptually whole work. We hope that the second volume of the research will correct this impression, which is probably provoked by the complexity of perceiving such innovative elaborations, that this research is.

According to Springer Nature, the book is among the top used publications on SpringerLink that concerns one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We share the opinion of many other specialists who praised the monograph ‘A Big History of Globalization. The Emergence of a Global World System’ and we congratulate the authors on its publication and wish further success.

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