

HIST3029 Transnational History: A New Perspective on the Past
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Dr Birgit Schneider

First Reflective Essay Assignment

Adelaide CHAN Hiu Chung

Throughout these two weeks, I have acquired a deeper understanding on what world history is. I have understood how it differs from other areas of historical studies, why it matters to study world history as a History major, and the relevance of conducting a book and journal review.

Through the readings assigned, I have discovered that world history is a study which is conducted on the international level. I agree with Schissler that “world history conveys an idea of connectedness and exchange between people on local and global levels.”¹ However, it was interesting when she noted that “world history ... does not render the nation-state irrelevant.”² Instead, world history investigates how nation-states respond to the on-going process of globalization and their ways of controlling and altering it. Thus, I understand now that world history deconstructs national history, contextualizes it and draws connections with and between other related historical narratives.

As discussed in class, studying world history requires another pair of lens when compared to studying other disciplines. For example, national history differs in that it focuses on the nation itself rather than the global. Nation states typically promote “a certain level of abstraction” and ignore “points of view that (are) not compatible with it”, which results in the doing-away of perspectives and knowledge that are irrelevant for, or do not fit with, the desired image of the nation-state.³ Therefore while world history is multi-faceted, multi-layered, unstable and ever-changing, national history is typically used as a tool to create national identity and patriotism. The examples given in Martin’s work provided a very comprehensive picture of how studying world

¹ Hanna Schissler, “World History: Making Sense of the Present” in *The Nation, Europe, and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition*, ed. Hanna Schissler and Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 237.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 234.

history uses a different approach compared to other areas in history.⁴ For instance, when studying the history of plantations, world historians will not merely examine parts of the plantation but see it as a whole.⁵ Not only focusing on a certain geographical location's function within the plantation complex, they have a broader view of the entire entity. This example deepened my understanding of how world history differs from other approaches in that it not only focuses on one aspect of an object or event, but rather zooms out and takes into perspective the whole picture, figuring relations between different entities. This difference in thought and perspective are, I believe, a key difference between studying world history and other areas in history.

As a History major, it is important that I acquire the skills needed for studying world history. No matter what area of history I wish to focus on in the future, honing the relevant techniques for world history are essential to excel in my studies. As Martin stated, world historians focus on identifying relations and connections as the basis of their analysis.⁶ They break down complicated processes into component parts which are inter-related and are able to connect the local with the global, and vice versa. The ability to answer global questions is also key in their field. With this, I hope to acquire these skills and experiences throughout the course as well. I believe it is extremely essential to think broadly yet analytically because the world we live in today is extremely inter-connected and require a global mindset. As I embark on doing my research project for the course History Without Borders, I hope to transfer the skills I have learnt here to conduct a more comprehensive research study for my personal research project. I understand that the skills I gain in this class will be extremely valuable. I hope to be able to acquire a global mindset as I enter different archives and be able to draw connections between different entities, instead of focusing narrowly on one only.

Regarding the book and journal review, I firmly believe their importance lies in enhancing our ability to review and evaluate academic texts, understanding and relating others' opinions of the text to our own, and developing a greater understanding on how historians in the academic field position themselves in the field of world history. Doing the book review will be incredibly helpful for us as young learners, because we often find it difficult to understand an academic work very thoroughly. Now that we have guidelines on how to deconstruct a book and have objectives to keep in mind regarding learning about world history, we will be able to understand our selected books more thoroughly. We will also have to research different scholars' reviews of our

⁴ "World History as a Way of Thinking," Eric Lane Martin, accessed September 13, 2015, <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/2.2/martin.html>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

books, thus exposing ourselves to an additional layer of understanding and analysis of the academic work at hand. Meanwhile, this applies to the journal presentation as well. Reading more scholarly material and understanding how other seasoned historians review and critique them will increase our understanding on how to approach world history and be familiar with the work that has already been done in this field. The ability to understand and appreciate their arguments and perspectives is essential in broadening our thinking and making ourselves more open-minded.

I am incredibly excited to embark on this journey of studying world history. I am confident this course will help me look at history from a different perspective, and implement a skillset that is unique on its own. Through discussions and book and journal reviews, I am confident I will gain a deeper sense of appreciation for the study of world history.

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Jacob GOLDMAN

World history is a subject with which I never imagined engaging in before. As an Economics and Computer Science student, the only chance I have to study history is in my spare time. Consequently, my knowledge of the subject is somewhat limited. However, after the first few classes of Transnational History, I have begun to understand what world history is and why it is important to study.

The discipline of world history examines the world as a whole and not merely as a collection of unique nations. Unlike national history which examines the perspectives of a single national or ethnic group and renders all other nations 'others,' it is inclusive and attempts to uncover the motivations and perspectives of all actors. Not being bound by role of a single nation, world history is free to explore themes like feminism and military advancements in a global context and

to highlight the similarities between peoples, rather than focusing only on their differences. This makes world history both complicated and messy – there is no simple hereditary lineage of kings or evolutionary path of a single language to follow. One must instead consider multiple disciplines simultaneously, for instance Chinese and Greek philosophy, in order to uncover the motivations of different nations. One may even be forced to read primary sources in languages as diverse as Aramaic and Sanskrit.

Yet, world history is as rewarding as it is difficult. By looking beyond petty national feuds, a world historian can gain a deep understanding of the world. Whether she examines centuries of history to follow a specific theme through time, or examines the effects of a single incident on the world over a short number of months or years, a world historian is able to note not only the reactions, but potentially also the motivations of more than a single nation. By doing so, she is able to remove some unfortunate biases from her thinking and give a richer and fuller history, rather than simply labelling an opposing army as “evil.” This not only allows the views of the weak to be put on a level playing field with those of the strong, but also allows views outside of those of the traditional Western nations to be examined more carefully. Undoubtedly, studying world history is a worthwhile pursuit.

By studying world history, I will be given the opportunity to examine my own biases towards the past. Growing up, like most other students, I was taught history from my nation’s perspective. This became most clear to me when I was having a discussion with my American cousins over lunch. I claimed strongly that we as Canadians are a superior people to the American because we won the war of 1812, our last major military conflict with them (though in reality, it was the British and Jamaicans who did most of the fighting for us). My cousins, however, disagreed. They learned in school that America unambiguously won the war. I claimed we burnt down the White House, they claimed they burnt down Toronto. Without a doubt, each of our nation’s schools taught the story they wanted to tell. Learning world history will help me examine what I have been told. It will allow me to gain some understanding into the way other people perceive their past and will help me decipher what parts of the history I learned as a child were told in more nationalistic terms. This will aid me in discovering my own identity as a Canadian – if winning the war of 1812 is part of what makes me proud to be a Canadian, knowing that not everyone sees the war in the same light not only makes me wonder why I was taught such a linear story, but also what parts of my identity were forged by narratives like this.

In this class, I hope to learn history in a new way. I want to see the world, not as a Canadian looking out, rather as a collective heritage of all of the people on earth. I want to find themes across national boundaries and see how different peoples reacted differently and similarly to stimuli. Finally, I want to see how neighbouring nations can view similar events in vastly different lights. I am especially excited to see how war is discussed from a world history perspective. Not only do I want to discover how successful different historians are at shedding their own national perspectives (I imagine this to be especially difficult when examining certain groups, such as Germans and Japanese, who committed mass atrocities so recently), but I also want to learn what drives different groups to conflict, especially if it is likely going to be only advantageous for one side. Furthermore, I am excited to write the book review. By taking the time to carefully analyze all aspects of an author's world history I will be able to both understand world history better and improve my reading and writing skills.

Through this course, I look forward to not only challenging certain historical beliefs and being able to piece together parts of history I never imagined could be combined, but also to improving my writing, reading and argumentation skills. My study of world history will hopefully lead to a clearer understanding of the past and present.

Zahra KAMARUDDIN

The discipline of World History as I have come to understand it, at the time of writing, is as complex and abstract as the concepts, historical periods and subjects it aims to incorporate and examine in its body of literature. Defining World History will be eclipsed by the enormity of the task and any definition I hope to provide will be overly simplistic. Prior to taking *Transnational History: A New Perspective on the Past*, I had never thought to define or question the nature of History, let alone World History, even though the subject is one of my major areas of study at University.

History “is the [narrative] we tell to represent the past;”¹ constructed by historians using a wide range of conventional and non-conventional primary and secondary sources. Most historical scholarship in the nineteenth century was written using a micro-history approach, using nation-

¹ Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What Is Global History?* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2008), 105.

states as the main unit of analysis.² This then produced national histories of specific countries. However, since the 1960s World History has become more popular as a discipline,³ and through this course I would like to understand why.

World History is different from the traditional ways of writing history that focus on nation-states as their main unit of analysis. This is because the concept of mobility lies at the heart of World History.⁴ Mobility refers to the examination of the story of humanity, human phenomena and discrete entities⁵ both intangible, e.g. social constructs, as well as tangible, e.g. war and disease, across geographical regions. The narrative of humanity and human phenomena is imperative to understanding who we are, how we know what we know, and what the future can hold. To some extent, the idea of mobility dismisses previous narratologies of history, which have been concerned with the rise and fall of great powers and men. To examine human history along national lines is to deny the possibility of assessing global interdependencies, the causes and effects of global phenomena along with the existence of commonalities.

The concept of mobility is significant because in a globalised world, almost nothing is static. Under the umbrella of World History, historians can analyse a diverse range of topics including but not limited to the environment, ideologies, political thought, war, migration and gender. The common thread that exists between these topics is that they occur in a setting or context that transcends the borders of sovereign states. Analysing each of these topics in isolation or solely in a specific country will inhibit us from exploring trans-regional impact.

Therefore, my definition of World History is that it is a method used to create a narrative using a macro-history approach that follows the story of humanity, focusing on the movement of human phenomena and other related entities from their origins to the present day, based on the political, economic, social and ideological factors at play. This definition is rather basic and further questions arise from it. For example, what kinds of historians write this history? Where are they from? What kinds of perspectives and people do they include in their narratives of the past? How do they connect abstract concepts such as citizenship or modernity to human societies across

² Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Studying History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 96.

³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴ Douglas Northrop, *A Companion to World History* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 374.

⁵ For the purpose of this essay, humanity can be taken to mean everyone and everything on earth as well as the process of globalisation. Human phenomena can be taken to mean tangible and intangible human creation, e.g. goods, capital, or ideas. The term “discrete entities” has been used as I found it difficult to categorise topics such as war and disease under one overarching term.

geographical regions and periods? I would like to explore these questions over the course of the semester.

In my opinion, World historians choose to be inter-disciplinary because drawing on questions from other disciplines gives them more scope and enables them to make commonalities and differences explicit. This by no means suggests that World History is whiggish⁶ because the narrative does not necessarily need to follow a smooth or linear progression; instead the method helps us develop more questions about ways to think about the past. I like this multi-disciplinary approach because it allows individuals to learn about the history of another subject, without needing to understand all the relevant technical terms in too much detail.

Despite its benefits, World History as a method can be problematic because it is riddled with complexities and ambiguities. It attempts to be all-inclusive, encompassing diverse themes and perspectives. Without period constraints, historians would have great difficulty in dealing with the enormity of the subject area because it would be impractical to map out all the important changes in human history.⁷ Similar to other historians, World Historians can be limited to translated documents, which slightly disconnect them from certain processes.⁸

That said, World History remains an essential, growing discipline. I think one of the best ways to understand World History is to assess a World History book that aims to draw links between divergent subjects and countries. I have chosen to read *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* by Andreas Fahrmeir, in order to do this. The concept of citizenship is fascinating as mass-migration has fashioned new citizenship laws and produced transnational citizens. It further promulgates ideas of identity politics as individuals can have multiple identities. The book uses a comparative approach by considering seven distinct periods and four countries to analyse the formation of citizenship, its dimensions and effects. It links the concept of citizenship and naturalisation rights to migration, war and ethnicity.⁹ As a cross-disciplinary book combining history and politics aiming to provide a macro-level analysis, it will help me examine if and how a potential World historian is able to answer his own proposed questions.

⁶ Bruce Mazlish, "Comparing Global History to World History," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 3, Winter 1998, 392.

⁷ Crossley, *What is Global History?* 2.

⁸ Harriet T. Zurndorfer, "Introduction: The Discipline of World History and the Economic and Social History of the Orient: A New Fashion in an Old Hat? Further Reflections on Forty Years of Jesho," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998), 244.

⁹ Andreas Fahrmeir. *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), v, vi, 12.

World History matters to me because it enables individuals to become better global citizens and I hope to be someone with such an international outlook. I should attempt to study World History because it can teach me how to explore the commonalities and differences between seemingly disparate topics. It will inform me about how and why mobility in human history has caused rapid changes and created new human phenomena, while also shedding light on what mobility means for the future.

Studying the constant movement of social constructs, communities and discrete entities is an important development in historiography, elucidating how nation-states are not the only powerful actors in history nor are they the only entities that can transform the world.

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Eric LAU Fai Ching

World history has been a new approach to studying history since the late twentieth century. I had never heard of this term before enrolling in this course, "Transnational history: a new

perspective on the past.” It puts the focus on the flow of ideas and events at a global level and studies how people interacted. Various topics are studied in world history such as gender, environment and imperialism. In the following, I will address my impression of world history as a field of study, and this will be followed by the importance of world history. In the last part I will address my expectations for the book review project and my motivation for taking this course.

World history is a very special and challenging field of study given the fact that it uses a multi-layered, large-scale approach which is sometimes even interdisciplinary. World historians always think big. They focus on the “historical complexes,” which are defined as “large-scale, overlapping historical processes.”¹ In order to understand history in a more thorough way, world historians may have to absorb knowledge from other disciplines such as ecology, sociology and geography. They also have to familiarize themselves with scholarly works from different fields when conducting research projects. For example, one may have to combine studies of Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America in order to conduct research on colonization. Besides, world historians do not merely compare different regions, but they have to understand how histories on different levels, such as the local, or the cross-national level, interact with and shape each other. Therefore, doing world history is very challenging since not only does it require the researchers to be capable of thinking “big,” but they should demonstrate the ability to cope with histories on different levels and to absorb knowledge from other disciplines.

In my opinion, world history has emerged because people started to ask more questions about the connections between people when the world became much more closely connected in the late twentieth century. The world is now globalized, people are more connected to each other, and hence we are eager to know more about this interconnected and globalized world. As a result, some historians have started to ask questions about how people were connected or interacted in the past. They try to re-examine the history on a cross-regional, transnational or even global level to find out the answers. For instance, if one wants to know the whole picture of the influenza pandemic in the early twentieth century, then a large and multi-layered approach is needed since this influenza pandemic was spread around the world and had different impacts on different regions. Generally speaking, world history appears because of the historians’ growing interest in understanding how people interacted and connected in the past.

¹ Marshall Hodgson, "Historical Method in Civilizational Studies," in *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 256-257, quoted in Eric Lane Martin. "World History as a Way of Thinking," *World History Connected* 2, no. 2 (May 2005), <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/2.2/martin.html>

I started to be interested in world history after I had played the game “Age of Empire.” The player needs to choose one civilization and to develop it. The goal is to defeat other players. One of the gimmicks of the game is that the civilizations available in the game either once existed or still exist today. The game publisher certainly put some effort in conducting research before they published the game. When I played the game I found that different civilizations have hugely different features in terms of weapons or costumes when they are in less developed stages, but once they enter the “modern period,” most of their features become similar. Although this game cannot truly reflect reality, it actually hints to me that our world has become more connected nowadays. As a history major, I am never satisfied with only knowing the present. There are many questions that come to my mind. How and why did this connection between different people grow stronger? What are the impacts of it? Did people feel excited about it? Were they dissatisfied with it? That is the reason for me to choose this course. I believe this course can shed light on how people became much more inter-connected and may also help me to find out the answers.

I think I can benefit a lot from the book review project, though it is going to be tough as my book is about energy history which I seldom encounter. Definitely I can learn more about energy history at first, which is vitally important in human life especially since the industrial revolution, when demand for energy rose to an unprecedented level. I can also learn a little more about how world history research is conducted through reading the book. Besides, the project asks us not only to evaluate the book, but to integrate other scholars’ reviews in our own review. I believe this project can help me to learn about how to approach academic books and articles, and to train my writing, critical thinking and analytical skills when I need to evaluate an academic book and incorporate other professionals’ ideas in it.

To conclude, world history is important since it offers a new perspective for us to study history and understand the world. It is definitely a challenging and special historical discipline because we have to get rid of the traditional approach such as doing national history and think broader and broader, and because sometimes, world historians also need to absorb knowledge from other disciplines during doing research. World historians have to not only be highly critical and analytical but also have to be capable of coping with the complex histories and ideas on different levels. I take the course because of my interest in world history, or to be specific, in how people are connected. I believe that the book review project can help me to learn more about world history as a field of study and train my analytical and writing skills.

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LEUNG Hui Yin

World history, as a relatively new field, is difficult but essential. Although historians are still arguing about a precise definition of world history, I think that the most important element is the interconnectedness. World history research should address the contacts between places and investigate into the influence of physical or intangible exchanges, including cultures and thoughts, between places. In the following paragraphs, I will share my views regarding the difficulty and importance of conducting research in world history, the motivation for taking the course and my expectations towards the course.

It is never easy for world historians to do the research because it requires broad and diversified knowledge. When investigating national history, one only has to understand the development of a particular place within a usually shorter period. Although national history sometimes also deals with diplomatic aspects and the contacts between places, world historians have to look at a much wider picture for which broad historical knowledge is indispensable. A thorough consideration of what examples to be selected for discussion is also necessary. Besides, for world historians, various theories from other disciplines are needed for accounting for the development of different places. Historians specializing in regional history also cope with concepts from other disciplines. Yet, unlike world historians, usually they can rely on one or only a few sets of conceptual models because of a restricted time period of studies for the same place. Therefore, researching world history is a more challenging task.

Yet, world history is important because it can respond to current developments. Due to technological advancement, information and goods circulate around the globe unprecedentedly fast. Different parts of the world are now more connected than in the past and events from one place will spill over quickly and affect other regions. As a result, a local phenomenon may swiftly develop into a worldwide one, such as economic depression or infectious disease, which influences many agents regardless of national boundaries and the social ranks of people involved.

Since these global events often have drastic adverse impacts, people are now asking why there are such global phenomena, and most importantly, how to prevent them from happening again. In this sense, conventional approaches, limiting analysis to certain regions, cannot provide answers for worldwide events. The objective of history as a scientific subject is to learn from the past and provide hints for betterment in the future. To respond to people's questions regarding global issues, the only way is to resort to studying world history.

Not only being crucial for answering the common citizens' questions, world history carries other significant meanings to scholars, especially historians themselves. The study of world history contributes to the academia in two senses. On one hand, it can broaden the horizons of historians. I recall that one history lecturer told me that historians have to be flexible and open-minded to new knowledge and concepts. This statement does make sense because when one focuses on a small region or aspect, one may narrow their minds and unconsciously ignore some factors. As discussed above, world history is more inter-disciplinary due to the larger scope of studies. It enables historians to interact with non-arts scholars intellectually and thus they can understand the world's development from the perspectives of other disciplines. On the other hand, world history is beneficial because it may provide a chance for scholars from various disciplines to work together. It is hard for one person to have advanced knowledge in different subjects. Therefore, the urge for studying world history can provide ample opportunities for professionals from different fields to research together. For instance, in these two decades, there are quite a lot of world history projects jointly done by scientists and historians, particularly studying global diseases. I believe that in the future, there will be more cross-disciplinary cooperation between history and other fields, carrying out original research. As such, world history offers a lot of potentials to the academia especially when world history becomes more maturely developed as a discipline.

My motivation to take this course is also about the necessity for knowing the past through a global lens. I have been writing a paper about gender relationships in Hong Kong. At first I tried not to mention the foreign impetus which altered the relationship because of the difficulties involved. Yet, I gradually found that it was impossible to account for the changes without considering the external factors. Though my paper is a regional study, this experience made me believe that a bird-eye view is necessary and useful for comprehensively understanding history. Consequently I took this course to acquire some new ways of approaching history.

Through the course, I hope that I can pick up some new skills. The book review provides me with a chance to evaluate scholarly work from another perspective. When writing essays in the past, what I usually did is to criticize the sources by finding out their limitations regarding the content. However, in the book review, I will analyze the author's approach and his choice of focus, which is on a more technical level to assess their work. I expect that the book review assignments can further develop my analytical skills, which are vital for historians. Moreover, the course is mind-stimulating that it trains me to think comprehensively and deeply by considering a holistic picture of the world. As a whole, I hope that I can develop new ways of thinking as well as analytical skills instead of simply learning some historical developments.

In conclusion, the difficulty of doing world history, if we see from another perspective, is in fact beneficial. It connects historians with other scholars, broadening their vision and accomplishing cross-disciplinary academic projects which can answer the questions raised by the public. By studying world history, I hope to hone my analytic skills and develop my critical thinking. Most importantly, I am sure that it will be great fun to look at the connections between different places, especially exploring the influence of socio-cultural exchanges.

Hannah SHARP

'Transnational History' is a new but exciting concept for me. As I will outline in this essay, I see transnational history as a daunting but worthwhile task for three main reasons; the excitement of looking into a huge and less widely studied area, the fact that it is a valuable thing to grasp and because of its relation to my current field of study. I also hope that this course, with its focus on a book review, will enrich my learning with new skills.

Transnational history is an enormous and extremely varied subject. Typing into google 'a transnational history of...' yields suggestions as varied as 'sexuality,' 'international institutions,' 'crime' and even 'football.' The task of studying this is clearly not going to be a straightforward one. Just typing 'defining transnational history' produces over two million results. However, compared to over seven million results for 'national' history, or 'social' history with over six and a half million, it becomes clear that 'transnational' is a far less extensively studied discipline. Whilst some may view the enormity and newness of the subject as a disincentive for studying it, I am excited because of, rather than in spite of, these aspects. Whereas usually a course will focus on detailed and in depth analysis in certain areas, I hope that this course will keep me open mind-

ed and questioning. The fact that the very parameters of the subject are up for debate inspires me to get involved far more than courses with predictable boundaries.

A second reason I would like to study transnational history, is that I think it has an inherent value because of what it can teach us about where we have come from. Transnational history offers a new way of looking at the world, as if through a 'zoomed out' camera lens. This enables us to see, but not be constrained by, the borders of nation states, and focus on interactions that go on irrespective of these arbitrary geographical delineations. We can use it to examine movements of goods, peoples, pathogens information, ideas, etc., and the ways in which all of these are interconnected and mutually interdependent. It can therefore go far beyond what national histories can achieve with their limited, internal focus and 'othering' of outsiders. A transnational understanding of humankind is vital to understanding how we have developed to where we are today, something that could never have occurred if we lived in our national 'bubbles' as some school level histories would have us believe. It is unsurprising that it is now, at a time when the interconnectedness of the world is shaping our day to day lives on an individual level, transnational history has emerged to fill in the gaps left by histories gone before.

I furthermore believe it is useful to study transnational history because it offers a criticism of, and an alternative to, older ways of examining history. This is an important exercise in itself, as any academic discipline deemed to be 'finished,' with no angles left to explore is bound to be incomplete. History needs to be assessed and re-assessed to ensure we can understand it in all its complexity. Just as the Marxist school of thought pointed out that by studying elites we miss a lot, and as the Subalterns showed that without examining minority groups we can't get a full understanding, transnationalism can spur historians into further research by pointing out that we need a supranational understanding to get the full picture of our development as a species. Transnational history is therefore beneficial to the discipline of history as a whole, as it keeps it investigative and prevents stagnation. This process of constant reassessment is necessary if we want to improve our historical understanding and learn more about the world we live in.

Thirdly, I see transnational history as a way of mapping history and international relations (my two major fields of study) seamlessly together. With a greater understanding of the complexity of the past, we can begin to see why our world is full of complicated and multifaceted issues today, such as that in Israel/Palestine, the Arab spring etc. I hope this course will broaden my understanding of the world, which will be useful when considering the international complexities that I frequently come across in my studies.

I also hope that the fact this course is focused on a book review will help me improve my skills associated with such an assignment. Book reviews are a vital part of the academic world, but are unfortunately not something that undergraduates are often encouraged to interact with. In order to write a book review, I will need to study those written by others, which I hope will encourage me to look at my book in a different way, as all reviewers will have a slightly different take on it. This will also encourage me to consider how I see it, and where I agree or disagree with others. This is a skill I have not used before and I appreciate the opportunity to practice it. In order to write a book review, I will also need to focus on being an active reader, and understanding the core argument of a text so I can analyse it. This skill is very useful, as frequently in history one has to read source documents critically in a similar way to as if we were attempting to review them. The practice gained here will therefore be useful in any history writing in the future.

To conclude, I believe this course will be a difficult one, as transnational history is an ambitious topic and because I am unused to writing book reviews. However, I think these are challenges worth undertaking as they can both teach me valuable lessons: I hope that studying transnational history will provide me with new perspectives, and that the book review project will equip me with new skills.

Bobby TAM Chun

Defining ‘world history’ is not an easy task. I will begin by explaining what ‘world history’ is not. ‘World history’ should not be a narrative from a certain national perspective; it should not be confined in a national context. National history is often a conventional way of learning history for many people, especially young students. In national history, a particular nation is the center of a narrative; every major historical event is narrated from the perspective of that nation. ‘World history’ goes beyond that. ‘World history’ transcends national boundaries and identities. This may not imply that ‘world history’ is just a sum of all national histories. Instead, ‘world history’ often deals with particular themes on a global scale. Such themes could be trade, diseases, ideologies, wars, etc. Through studying such themes, world historians would look into the connections between different parts of the world or differences between them.

To me, national boundaries and identities are merely constructs. Though traditionally national history has been viewed as useful in studying our past, national boundaries and identities were not always very important in many parts of human history and are not crucial when we

study various themes. In fact, such constructs constrain ourselves when we study various themes in history. National history constrains our perspectives and flow of thinking. When we study the development of an ideology, it is impossible to just to look at it in a national context. Ideologies spread across boundaries and affect people of all kinds. When we study the migration of people, national history is not very useful; it views people as either an influx or an outflow, without following the whole process comprehensively; reasons for migration or connections between places may be ignored. In these cases, 'world history' offers us a much larger picture. Through this larger picture, we may also discover trends and patterns that cannot be found in national history.

Apart from that, 'world history' may be less prone to biases. National history, especially the history of one's own nation, may inevitably distinguish between "us" and "them." When studying about a conflict or an issue involving multiple nations, such distinction may cause a lack of understanding of the people and the situations in other countries. In the worst case scenario, we might develop national sentiments that cause biases. 'World history' does not skip controversies and conflicts in history. By studying conflicts without a national perspective and focusing on the relationships between all the stakeholders, we can gain a more inclusive and objective viewpoint.

Of course I will also face a lot of difficulties when studying or researching 'world history.' Without the concept of nations in limiting the scope of study, 'world history' is hard to organize and structure. When we study ties and connections around the globe, this study may easily lack focus. It might become fragmented and disorganized if the researcher cannot illustrate the connections well or put forward a focused argument amid all the scattered information. National history is usually a complete narrative with a clear beginning, and which centers on issues such as a regime or important figures. This delivers a certain assurance to learners and an identity to the members of this nation. On the contrary, 'world history' cannot deliver such certainty and security to them since the arguments and ideas are drawn from multiple perspectives and are often inherently non-static. But a lack of certainty should not discourage me from doing 'world history.' This leads me to the ultimate question about knowledge; should knowledge be merely used for quelling our insecure minds or should it raise more doubts and expand our minds?

The book review project will most importantly enhance my skills as a history researcher and writer, particularly in the field of 'world history.' I will certainly learn more about a particular theme in 'world history' through reading the book. But on top of that, I should be paying attention to the methodology adopted by the author. I should observe what perspectives the author chose to employ in this global topic, how the author structured his or her ideas and arguments

amid tons of information. Observing these things could improve my technique in doing ‘world history.’

Furthermore, by studying the book reviews of other readers of the book, I can see what other readers focused on. By doing so, I may know whether I was able to grasp the main ideas from the book. Of course, the book reviews are not entirely dependable and different readers could have different interpretations. But referring to them is still an essential stage to evaluate my own interpretation and remind me if I overlook ideas or not. I hope the book review project could give me insight in dealing with complicated history topics when facing abundant information and indistinct abstract ideas.

Finally, most topics in ‘world history’ are relevant to today’s world. They could be acknowledging the ties in this globalized world or raising global issues that we all face, e.g. the environment, technology, etc. By doing the book review project, I will be very likely able to study topics that relate to myself. I could reflect upon how such global issues influence me and vice versa. The project may even have an effect on my world view. I may realize that various global issues which have existed throughout history are very related to myself. Consequently, I can find my role in this complicated world where everything across the boundaries interrelates.

Even YIN Cuiwen

World history is a field of historical study that adopts a thematic approach to examine common patterns of all cultures in the world and connections among communities. The world is the ultimate unit of analysis of world history. It is mostly concerned with themes, such as the environment, trade, and migration issues, which have a broad impact on humanity as a whole and which provoke or catalyze the integration of humanity.

In my opinion, world history differs from other approaches to history in the unit of analysis, geographic scope, and time frame. In national history study, history is examined and narrated from a nation-state perspective where a certain country is the central focus, while there is no such focus in the lens of world history. The time frame of world history study is usually either very short (e.g. historical event) or prolonged (e.g. development process) while the one of national history is usually long and consecutive. Moreover, world history shares something in common with comparative history in the sense that they both deal with the history of multiple nations and cul-

tures. However, world history examines themes on a global scale and abstract commonalities of the human experience rather than emphasizing on comparison.

As a business student, this is my first time taking a history course in university. Studying transnational history is appealing to me as I have always been more enthusiastic about the connections and interactions between different communities in the world and how human civilization progresses over time in similar or very different manners. Moreover, as the world is becoming increasingly integrated and complex, events happening in one region are having greater impacts on the entire globe. Therefore, applying a wider lens to history seems imperative to understanding and solving these problems.

For example, to understand the emergence, development and impact of Daesh, it is no longer sufficient to simply look at the history of a few countries, as its operations, including recruitment and promotion, are being increasingly globalized with the help of social media. Its footprints and the terror it spreads are not confined to certain targeted countries, so the world as a whole is facing great uncertainty. The approach of world history will play an important role in demystifying how the tension between the supporters of Daesh and the rest of the world came into place so that it may contribute to the quest for future solutions or potential reconciliation. Another theme that is worth studying through the lens of world history is the human migration issue. My exchange experience and the recent migration crisis in Europe have drawn my attention to the topic of human migration across national borders. I am interested in exploring the common patterns in people's motives, mentality, and difficulties of migration. Moreover, the social inclusion problem and cultural identity issue are also topics of great interest and concern to me. I believe these two themes bear a very important role in our current world of globalization.

When I was reading the book "Why Nations Fail" by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, I learned how the critical juncture of the Black Death and the minimal difference in the relative power of citizens and feudalists shaped the future paths of institutional development and lives of populations between eastern and western Europe. This topic made me think about how critical junctures together with small differences can lead to much greater discrepancy later on in other cases. For instance, both China and Japan faced the threat of western colonization in their modern history but reacted differently. One reason that may explain the difference can be the fact that the power of citizens in Japan was stronger than the one in China when compared to the power of the feudalist rulers in each country respectively. There is similarity between the case of Japan and China's development and the case of eastern and western Europe. In fact, we may find

more common patterns in human civilization progress if we explore more of these critical junctions and the different reactions of communities. Furthermore, people commonly believe that one purpose of studying history is not to repeat past mistakes. Thinking from this perspective, utilizing the achievements of world history study, communities in the world will be able to leverage practices from a wider range of communities when facing current and future issues.

This will also be my very first time to write a book review. It is helpful to have the stage of identifying and analyzing two book reviews by scholars prior to writing mine. In this way, I will be exposed to more perspectives and be able to integrate them in developing my opinions. Through critically evaluating multiple facets of the books and articles, I hope that my critical thinking ability can be enhanced and I will be able to better articulate my argumentation as well. This is going to be a challenging but rewarding task, requiring skills beyond simple information extraction. Meanwhile, the collaboration with the journal dedicated to book reviews in world history will motivate me to write more quality work for a broader audience.

By learning about world history, I would like to equip myself with a global thinking mindset and better understand the complex world issues like the above mentioned ones. I also aim to grasp the research skill of reviewing literature and analyzing arguments so that I can develop my own thinking on “historical complexes” as named by Marshall Hodgson.¹ By the end of this course, I expect myself to be able to articulate my own understanding on the definition and significance of world history by evaluating how scholars have written about it, studying cases in which it was adopted, and having thought-provoking discussions in class.

Bibliography

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¹ Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 256-257.