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1

Introduction

THE STAKES OF REHISTORICISING EUROPE

JAPAN'S RISE to power in 1905 marked the 'most important historical event which has happened, or is likely to happen, in our lifetime', wrote the British theorist of world order Alfred Zimmern in 1926.¹ The study of world order, presently in vogue, seems never to have gone away. That scholars today of diverse disciplinary origins should coalesce around an aspiration of such panoramic magnitude as world order may be a mirror reflection of the disorder of our times. But how to study world order? This is a question that yields more intellectual disunity than unity. The basic premise of this book is that, whatever else it may entail, world order finds existence as realised and unrealised *visions*. At a fundamental level, visions of world order—whether historical or contemporary—are ideas and blueprints about appropriate ways of ordering and reordering the world. They are visions about how relations should be arranged between different groups in the world—be they nations, empires, races, civilisations or regions, or indeed all these categories in the case of the rising power of Japan—and how power should be distributed between these groups. The pursuit of world order, understood as the direct antonym of disorder, can also more specifically imply a mission for a world free of strife and chaos, or a quest for what is typically referred to as 'global stability' (meaning, for those in the driving seat, the preservation of power and influence without inviting conflict). Hence Zimmern's recognition that the rise of a non-Western power was epoch-making precisely for reshaping—and indeed, from a British standpoint, undermining—the global status quo. More basically, visions of world order may be understood as syntheses of three possible types of observation about the world: the world

1. Alfred Zimmern, *The third British empire: being a course of lectures delivered at Columbia University, New York* (London, 1926), 82. Zimmern was speaking of Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), 'the victory of a non-white people over a white people.'

as it is; the world as it is likely to be; and the world as it ought to be. And since there is no vision that was not once conceived or held in the mind, the study of world order belongs to the realm of intellectual history.²

Rival Civilisations is an intellectual history of one of the central fault lines of thinking about world order: the issue of convergence and difference. Key questions that have risen time and again on this issue include: Is the world one or many? Will the global expansion of modernity generate a convergence in political, economic and cultural development across the world, and, if so, with what implications for its members? Or can and should multiple civilisations coexist (equally)? *Rival Civilisations* charts the history of how Britain, the foremost global power at the start of the twentieth century, rethought these essential questions about world order when confronted with an ascendant Asian power: Japan. At the core of the book thus lies a fundamental reversal of intellectual impact between the West and non-West: this is a history of how Japan remade British ideas.

Civilisation and the Eurocentric World Order

‘Civilisation’ is of the essence in this history. In the second half of the nineteenth century, before the rise of Japan, the British held a distinctive—and particularly consequential—set of answers to the questions about convergence and difference. This world-view found expression in the concept of ‘civilisation’. Such a British viewpoint was consequential because it bore a direct ideological relationship to Britain’s geopolitical status at the time: the global hegemonic power with the largest empire in the world.

‘Civilisation’, in its nineteenth-century uses in Britain, predominantly denoted an ethnocentric hierarchical understanding of human difference and an ideology of progress.³ The concept first entered English and French political discourses in the eighteenth century, and developed within the intellectual

2. For a recent overview of intellectual-historical approaches to the study of international relations (including world order) and their analytic payoffs, see Duncan Bell, ‘International relations and intellectual history’, in Mlada Bukovansky, Edward Keene, Christian Reus-Smit, and Maja Spanu, eds., *The Oxford handbook of history and international relations* (Oxford, 2023), 94–110. For an explicit call to study world order in terms of ‘visions’, see John Bew, ‘World order: many-headed monster or noble pursuit?’, *Texas National Security Review*, 1/1 (2017), 14–35.

3. This paragraph and the paragraph to follow draw on Brett Bowden, *The empire of civilization: the evolution of an imperial idea* (Chicago, 2009), 23–34; Duncan Bell, *Reordering the world: essays on liberalism and empire* (Princeton, 2016), 94–101, 259, 299; Jean Starobinski, ‘The word civilization’ in *Blessings in disguise; or the morality of evil*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer

and experiential context of the European Enlightenment and thus in close intimacy with the idea of progress. In nineteenth-century Britain, the exact definition of civilisation was fluid and varied in substance and emphasis, but it typically denoted some combination of attainments based on the model of European development—in political institutions, diplomatic practice, technological and economic advancement, the structure of gender relations, religious orientation, perceived racial characteristics, and intellectual and moral capacity. Thus when according priority to transformation in political, economic and scientific organisation, ‘civilisation’ could entail a meaning close to what might be conventionally referred to as ‘modernity’ today.

Importantly, what connected the concept of civilisation to empire was the justificatory logic it provided for the project of liberal imperialism. In the bifurcated world-view of ‘civilised’ versus ‘uncivilised’, the advanced peoples had a right and even a duty to spread the fruits of their progress—to ‘civilise’ the backward peoples. This logic of the ‘civilising mission’ thus entailed two key assumptions about civilisation: it was European in origin, and universal in application. Put differently, a faith in the possibility and desirability of humankind’s convergence along European lines was the guiding principle of nineteenth-century British visions of world order. It supplied imperial conquest with a pretext and a moral sense of purpose; more broadly, it fostered and legitimised a deeply hierarchical view of world order.⁴

Around the turn of the new millennium, scholarship on the ‘new imperial history’ of Britain did much to examine the constitution of this civilising subjectivity. Historians working in this mode examined—and in most cases emphasised—the extent to which the British empire shaped, and came to rest upon, a metropolitan sense of superiority during the second half of the nineteenth century. Opinions were (and still remain) divided over the exact conceptions of this difference: some historians identified a dominant belief in

(Cambridge, 1993), 1–35. For a general history of the concept, see also Bruce Mazlish, *Civilization and its contents* (Stanford, 2005).

4. For an account of how such ‘ideologies of progress’, together with the rise of rational statehood, industrialisation and technological innovation amounted to a global transformation that produced a hierarchical core-periphery international society in the long nineteenth century, see Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The global transformation: history, modernity and the making of international relations* (Cambridge, 2015). This work, co-authored by two scholars of international relations, exemplifies the growing interdisciplinary synergy between historical international relations and global history; on this synergy, see George Lawson and Jeppe Mulich, ‘Global history and international relations’, in Bukovansky, Keene, Reus-Smit and Spanu, *Oxford handbook of history and international relations*, 79–93.

permanent biological difference underpinned by emergent scientific racism; others underscored a sustained British belief in the superiority of its cultural civilisational attainments.⁵ (The historical context and contours of this debate will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 2.) What is crucial to note for now are the underlying arguments about the historical prominence of Saidian ‘othering’ that connected these various characterisations of British imaginings of non-European inferiority.⁶

In more recent years, there has been a growing awareness that such assumptions of non-European inferiority were by no means confined to the nineteenth century. Much of the burgeoning scholarship on British and other European visions of world order—and especially work on the intellectual and institutional history of liberal internationalism centred around the League of Nations—has made its mark by stressing the enduring significance of underlying hierarchical racial and/or civilisational views into the twentieth century.⁷ Nothing, indeed, epitomised this continuity more clearly than the establishment of the League’s mandates system as a ‘sacred trust of civilisation’.⁸ The common thread running through this history of internationalism and that of nineteenth-century imperialism was the ideology of liberalism, expressed as a universalist belief in civilisational progress.⁹ This tenacious ethnocentric universalism is known to us today as the problem of ‘Eurocentrism’.

5. Key works on race include Catherine Hall, *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002); Bill Schwarz, *The white man’s world* (Oxford, 2013); Paul B. Rich, *Race and empire in British politics* (Cambridge, 1986); and on civilisation, Peter Mandler, ‘“Race” and “nation” in mid-Victorian thought’, in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *History, religion, and culture: British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 224–44; Peter Mandler, *The English national character: the history of an idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven and London, 2006), 72–86. For an overview of this debate, see Simon J. Potter, ‘Empire, cultures and identities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain’, *History Compass*, 5/1 (2007), 51–71.

6. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

7. Mark Mazower, *Governing the world: the history of an idea* (London, 2012); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013); Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without swords: idealist liberalism and the spirit of empire* (Princeton, 2005); Rose Parfitt, *The process of international legal reproduction: inequality, historiography, resistance* (Cambridge, 2019); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after empire: the rise and fall of self-determination* (Princeton, 2019).

8. On the prominence of civilisational thinking in the League of Nations’ mandates system, see Susan Pedersen, *The guardians: the League of Nations and the crisis of empire* (Oxford, 2015).

9. For an overview of scholarship on the relationship between liberalism and empire, see Jennifer Pitts, ‘Political theory of empire and imperialism: an appendix’, in Sankar Muthu, ed., *Empire and modern political thought* (Cambridge, 2012), 351–87.

Britain and the Awakening of Asia

The aim of this book is not to add to criticisms of this familiar European world-view. Rather, I challenge the prevailing historiographical assumption of the stability of such a European world-view. *Rival Civilisations* elucidates the hitherto-overlooked impact of the ‘awakening of Asia’. Of fundamental importance here is the emergence of modern Japan, the first non-Western nation to rise to modernity and imperial power. In the late nineteenth century, Japan, one of the few non-European societies to retain their nominal independence from the West, embarked on a defensive modernisation drive. By incorporating ideas, institutions and technology from the West at breakneck speed, Japan sought to retain its sovereign independence.¹⁰ As a result of this unprecedented development, modernised Japan not only succeeded in keeping European

10. For classic works highlighting Britain’s instructional role in these processes (including the role of British advisers hired by the Tokugawa shogunate and the Meiji government), see *inter alia* Shinohara Hiroshi, *Kaigun sōsetsushi: Igrisu gunji komondan no kage* [A history of the making of the Japanese navy: the shadow of British military advisers] (Tokyo, 1986); Sugihara Shirō, ed., *Kindai Nihon to Igrisu shisō* [Modern Japan and British thought] (Tokyo, 1995); Olive Checkland, *Japan and Britain after 1859: creating cultural bridges* (London and New York, 2002); Grace Fox, *Britain and Japan, 1858–1883* (Oxford, 1969). Conversely, more recent works have challenged such Eurocentric, one-directional and diffusionist narratives of Meiji Japan’s emergence by adopting approaches that foreground encounters and exchanges between Japanese and non-Japanese/Western individuals. A representative work is Catherine L. Phipps, ed., *Meiji Japan in global history* (London, 2021), whose chapters all show, in Phipps’s words, that ‘Japan’s modern era was not overdetermined by Western powers entering East Asia but was instead created by individuals who both shaped and were shaped by global processes’: Catherine L. Phipps, ‘Introduction: Meiji Japan in global history’, 3. In a related vein, Lewis Bremner, Manimporok Dotulong, and Sho Konishi, eds., *Reopening the opening of Japan: transnational approaches to modern Japan and the wider world* (Leiden and Boston, 2024) shifts the focus from state actors and international relations to ‘non-state historical actors and non-imperial encounters’, recasting the opening of Japan as a moment involving ‘cultural transformations and transfers of knowledge in multiple directions’ (2–3). See especially Natalia Doan’s contribution to the volume, which addresses the themes of race and civilisation: Natalia Doan, ‘The 1860 Japanese Embassy and the opening of American civilisation: samurai, interracial romance, and Southern print culture’, 21–58. *Rival Civilisations* shares with these recent works the fundamental goal of transcending the one-directional narrative of the East being transformed by the West. But methodologically, it pursues this goal less by examining transnational lives and exchanges as has become prominent amongst historians of Japan, and more by analysing the intellectual significance of the emergence of modern Japan in reshaping British international thought. On the implications of adopting this alternative focus for questions of agency, and for rethinking the relationship between European and global history, see my discussion in this Introduction.

imperialism at bay, but even emerged as an imperial power in its own right following its victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). In adapted emulation of European imperialism, the ascendant power in East Asia envisaged its imperial activities as the ‘yellow man’s burden.’ Yet if Japan as an imperial power claimed to be an agent of ‘civilisational spread’ in East Asia, by turning to military aggression during the 1930s, Japan also became a part of the rising challenge posed by disgruntled ‘have-not’ powers. Militarist Japan thus drastically undermined the emerging new liberal internationalist order after the First World War which found expression in the League of Nations.

This book shows how Japan’s trajectory thus outlined led British elites to rethink fundamental questions about human difference and world order: whether civilisation was singular or plural; whether Western civilisation was a monopoly of the white race and whether the West could retain its pre-eminence; whether an ‘Asiatic race’ might (more) successfully undertake a civilising mission in Asia; whether non-Christians could be moral; and whether a world converging along Western lines was likely and even desirable for Britain and the world from a cultural and geopolitical standpoint. This alternative history of British Eurocentrism reveals a Britain (from ca. 1905 to the 1930s) that no longer took its civilisational pre-eminence for granted.

In place of a stable assumption of civilisational superiority, the cumulative result of the Japanese challenge was a fragmentation of British civilisational thought into competing strands. One such strand, which forms the focus of some of the chapters to follow, amounted to an emergent pluralist civilisational perspective. I examine instances where Britain looked towards Japan as an alternative, even superior, form of modern civilisation, whether in a moment of moral panic about Britain’s own imperial future in the wake of the South African War (1899–1902) and Japan’s sensational success in the Russo-Japanese War, or in the case of British civilisational theorists who sought in Japan a model for the cultural-spiritual renewal of the industrial capitalist West. Such emulative attitudes are significant because they challenge the assumed one-directionality of ideational impact between the West and non-West that continues to underpin conventional world-historical narratives of modernity and modernisation. Many historians, to be sure, have already complicated and refined these one-directional narratives by highlighting how non-Western societies in fact adapted or deviated from Western models.¹¹ In a

11. For an example of this historiographical development in the context of modern Japanese history, see Carol Gluck’s promotion of the metaphor of ‘blended modernities’ in ‘AHR roundtable: the end of elsewhere: writing modernity now’, *American Historical Review*, 116/3 (2011),

related vein, global intellectual historians have gone beyond older historiographies of ‘diffusion’, ‘reception’ and ‘transfer’ by foregrounding non-European agency, demonstrating how non-European intellectuals creatively and strategically reinterpreted (and retranslated) European texts to suit their particular situation.¹² Where my book differs from these efforts is that it emphasises a more fundamental reversal of intellectual impact: I show how a rising Japan reshaped British ideas of modernity in the early twentieth century.

Other British interpretations of Japanese civilisation during the same period conversely equated Japan’s transformation with Westernisation. This more Eurocentric strand of British civilisational thought is also important to this book. Indeed, when interpreted as successful Westernisation, Japan’s transformation could boost British self-confidence in Western civilisation and its universal applicability. But if a significant number of commentators found in Japan reasons for renewing the belief in the possibility of a world dominated by Western civilisation, there were also increasing disagreements as to whether such global convergence along Western lines presented a cause for celebration or lamentation. In the case of classicist and leading civilisational theorist Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, for instance, the experience of witnessing during his travels the sheer extent of Japan’s industrialisation led him to adopt a highly despondent Eurocentric universalist perspective, shattering his previous hope

676–87. For a recent work in this vein, see Jon Thares Davidann, *The limits of Westernization: American and East Asian intellectuals create modernity, 1860–1960* (London, 2018). Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell have challenged one-directional diffusionist narratives by highlighting the ‘co-productions’ of knowledge that result from the global circulations of ideas; see their ‘Introduction: history from between and the global circulations of the past in Asia and Europe, 1600–1950’, in Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell, eds., ‘Uses of the Past Between Europe and East Asia’, Special issue 1, *Historical Journal*, 64/1 (2021), 1–16. See also my discussion in n. 10 in this chapter.

12. For analyses in this vein that focus on Japan, see Martin Dusinberre, ‘J. R. Seeley and Japan’s Pacific expansion’, *Historical Journal*, 64/1 (2021), 70–97 in the special issue cited here edited by Jenco and Chappell; and for changing Japanese uses of Seeley across time, see Takuya Furuya, ‘J. R. Seeley in Japan, 1880s–1940s’, *Historical Journal*, 66/2 (2023), 392–412. Both works exemplify efforts to move beyond older historiographies of ‘diffusion’, ‘reception’ and ‘transfer’ by emphasising Japanese agency in the form of strategic, creative and context-specific exploitations of European texts. Recent scholarship on the global history of international law shows a similar commitment to challenging diffusionist narratives by emphasising ‘co-production’ and the strategic dimensions of non-European engagement with European norms and ideas; see for example the work of Arnulf Becker Lorca and Tomoko Okagaki cited in Chapter 2, n. 28 of this book. The same is true of recent scholarship on circulations of imperial knowledge; see work discussed in Chapter 5 of this book, especially Christoph Kamissek and Jonas Kreienbaum’s conception of a shared ‘imperial cloud’.

that the East might hold lessons for the spiritually impoverished West. Even Eurocentrism, then, was undergoing a transformation to exist in multiple forms: despondent as well as triumphant.

Rival Civilisations is a work of British intellectual history that sheds light on the cumulative intellectual impact of the rise of Japan. It captures the history of the decline and diversification as well as the renewal of Eurocentric thought in metropolitan Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. Alongside newspapers and periodicals, my main sources are the writings of the large number of British women and men—many of them imperial and international thinkers—who ruminated on the meaning of Japan, either from the armchairs of their offices in London or Oxbridge, or in some cases by travelling to East Asia and making first-hand observations. For the most part, these authors were not specialists on Japan (they were not Japanologists or members of sustained Anglo-Japanese networks, or those with direct vested interests in the region).¹³

13. This book thus shifts the focus away from actors who have traditionally taken centre stage in Anglo-Japanese diplomatic history, the main genre through which joint considerations of Britain and Japan have taken place to date when engaging with international politics. Amongst many works that have studied the diplomatic and interimperial relations between these two ‘island empires’ and (for some time) diplomatic allies, oft-cited works include Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: the diplomacy of two island empires, 1894–1907* (London, 1966); and William Roger Louis, *British strategy in the Far East, 1919–1931* (Oxford, 1971). My choice of individuals and source materials more broadly reflects a difference between diplomatic histories focused on explaining high-political decision-making and intellectual histories focused on understanding ideas. Although the influence of the ‘cultural turn’ has generated in the last few decades diplomatic histories integrating considerations of ‘cultural perceptions’ (including human differences such as race), an important distinction remains between such culturalist diplomatic histories and the present book. In the case of the former, the continued primacy given to ‘explanation’ is such that ideas are typically evaluated in terms of their influence on policymaking. Histories that merely seek to ‘understand’ ideas without relating them to policy outcomes have consequently not gone without disparagement for their failure to address causality. See the discussion by David Reynolds, ‘International history, the cultural turn and the diplomatic twitch’, *Cultural and Social History* 3/1 (2006), 75–91; Antony Best, ‘The “cultural turn” and the international history of East Asia: a response to David Reynolds’, *Cultural and Social History* 3/4 (2006), 482–89; Joseph Anthony Maiolo, ‘Systems and boundaries in international history’, *International History Review*, 40/3 (2018), 576–91. (Note here the continuing evolution of the field; Best’s most recent monograph, *British engagement with Japan, 1854–1922: the origins and course of an unlikely alliance* (Abingdon and New York, 2021), considers the perceptions and interests of a wider range of actors—with varying degrees of influence—including business communities, missionaries, travellers and royal courts in explaining the rise and fall of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.) The difference in intent may be understood as a division of labour. The essential premise of my book is that by taking an intellectual-historical

And yet, as exemplified by Alfred Zimmern's remark with which I opened this Introduction, the sheer significance of the Japanese ascendancy as it appeared in their eyes compelled them to comment on the phenomenon—and generate a variety of civilisational narratives in consequence.

Some of the chapters to follow provide a bird's-eye view of evolving British civilisational thought; others offer a close reading of texts by leading civilisational thinkers. To be clear, this book is not intended as a work of Japanese or Anglo-Japanese comparative intellectual history. My focus is on British debates. But at regular intervals the book turns to Japanese voices and sources with the following two specific aims: to elucidate the shared global conditions that made Japan relevant for Britain, and to highlight blind spots in Britain's wide-ranging anticipations of the future of Japan and the world.¹⁴

A further elaboration on the term 'impact' is in order. A book of the present kind naturally raises the question of how far 'intellectual impact' reflected direct Japanese 'influence' (i.e. the agency of Japanese individuals), and how far 'impact' conversely represented independently formed British responses to Japan (i.e. the interpretative agency of British individuals). Where evidence is available, I endeavour in this book to indicate likely Japanese influence and reconstruct exchanges between British and Japanese individuals. But the question of influence and exchange is also one that I approach with caution. First, substantively, not all transnational encounters automatically proved intellectually transformative. (We will see this most clearly in Chapter 2 in the anticlimactic meeting between H. G. Wells and Nitobe Inazō.) Second, methodologically—and this challenge is more persistent—my analysis cannot escape the archival reality that many potentially significant transnational conversations were not recorded in detail, or indeed recorded at all. (This will be especially evident in Chapter 3 in my study of British intellectual travellers to Japan who are known to have engaged with local interlocutors during their visit.)

approach (i.e. critiquing how and why thinkers and commentators arrived at particular ways of seeing the world), we can refine and expand the narratives and conceptual frameworks with which we understand, and rethink, world politics in the past and the present.

14. For specialists in Japanese history, the weight given to Japanese voices in this book may feel too modest. Readers eager for a study of British ideas may conversely find it more than sufficient. No reader, then, may be left entirely satisfied. But my hope is that all readers will read this book as an experimental kind of British intellectual history—one that invites reflections on how the incorporation of non-European sources can not only illuminate non-European histories but also enhance (rather than distract from) our understanding of European pasts, such as British history, and on what new insights about world order might in turn be made possible by taking such a less-trodden approach to the study of European international thought.

Third, analytically, it is essential to recognise that regardless of the availability of informational resources provided by the Japanese, British observers typically moulded the idea of ‘Japanese civilisation’ (and any relevant intellectual resources) to their own strategic ends—to suit (what they perceived to be) the particular situation facing Britain and the world. The result is that *Rival Civilisations* captures a variety of views on Japan across time and across individuals. In this sense, much of what will be examined in this book are British intellectual uses of Japan. This is unsurprising, not least in light of the aforementioned global-intellectual historical scholarship that has insightfully foregrounded non-European agency, underscoring non-Europeans’ strategic, creative and context-specific exploitations of European intellectual resources.¹⁵ If we take seriously the idea advanced in this book that there was also intellectual impact in reverse—that is, Japan bore significance for British ideas of modernity—then perhaps we would expect that British observers, too, exercised substantial creative interpretative agency in capitalising on Japanese resources—and even the very idea and foil that was ‘modern Japan’. But does such strategic discourse imply that ‘Japan’ was nothing more than an abstract and fluctuating British idea—subject only to British intellectual contingency? My understanding is different. For what, after all, was the historical precondition that made debates about Japan and civilisation imperative, and attention to (and capitalisation on) Japanese voices productive, for the British during the first half of the twentieth century? That essential precondition for all discussants was the emergence and ascendancy of modern imperial Japan. There was, in this sense, a material baseline at all times from which to proffer more specific arguments and judgements about civilisation and world order; the contours of this material baseline took the form of Japan’s core historical trajectory I summarised earlier. Accordingly, when I write of the ‘intellectual impact’ of a rising Japan, I am referring first and foremost to ideas arising from this combination of Japan’s actual rise *and* the strategic interpretative opportunities-cum-challenges that this rise opened up in Britain.

The Project of Rehistoricising Europe

It may be obvious to most readers by now that this is not a book that presents a neat narrative arc. The overall history I chart is not one of a discursive shift from A to B, from, for instance, British universalist confidence to a self-reflexive civilisational pluralism and thus the end of Eurocentrism thanks to the rise of Japan. Instead, *Rival Civilisations* necessarily uncovers—and places

15. See n. 11 and n. 12 in this chapter.

at the heart of its analysis—intellectual variations in British interpretations of Japanese ‘civilisation’. The stakes of recognising this necessity are both empirical and conceptual. I will elaborate on the empirical dimension in a later section of this chapter. For now, I will focus on the conceptual stakes.

The conceptual stakes relate first and foremost to an idea that I advance in this book as the project of ‘rehistoricising Europe’. This agenda, and its naming, are in direct response to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s much-quoted thesis of ‘provincializing Europe’.¹⁶ Originally published in 2000, his book *Provincializing Europe* was part of a shifting intellectual landscape since the late 1980s and 1990s that saw both ongoing attacks on universalist modernisation theories in the Anglophone social sciences, and the ascendancy of postcolonial theories within the humanities offering critical perspectives on European categories of knowledge.¹⁷ Today, Chakrabarty’s intervention, and still more the scholarly trends that his argument (and the inimitable pithiness of his phrase) has helped to stimulate, collectively bear witness to the present dominance of postcolonial perspectives in the Anglophone historical discipline. Broadly speaking, there are two historiographical developments of significance. The first is the growth of scholarship elucidating non-European lived and intellectual experiences. ‘Provincialising’—meaning, in this case, ‘decentring’—European attainments as the universal benchmark of progress has enabled our appreciation of the multiplicity of modernities beyond the European model; it has fostered our recognition of the salience of intellectual voices and political projects beyond the Western canon.¹⁸ ‘Provincialising Europe’, undertaken in such a mode, has had emancipatory implications as an escape from the epistemic shackles of Eurocentrism. The second development of note is the aforementioned surge of works on the history of European international

16. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton and Oxford, 2008).

17. On this broader context, see Christopher L. Hill, ‘Misreading *Provincializing Europe*’, *Práticas da História*, 11 (2020), 53–61, at 55. Other important postcolonial reflections on European categories of knowledge include Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse* (Minneapolis, 1986). On the relationship between liberalism, Eurocentric universalism and imperialism, a key work is Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and empire: a study in nineteenth-century British liberal thought* (Chicago, 1999) (see also n. 9 in this chapter).

18. On the study of ‘non-Western thought’ under the ‘global turn’, see amongst others Andrew Sartori and Samuel Moyn, eds., *Global intellectual history* (New York, 2013); John Dunn, ‘Why we need a global history of political thought’, in Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky, Sophus A. Reinert, and Richard Whatmore, eds., *Markets, morals, politics: jealousy of trade and the history of political thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 285–307; Danielle Charette and Max Skjölberg, ‘State of the field: the history of political thought’, *History*, 105/366 (2020), 470–83.

thought, advancing criticisms of the Eurocentric attitudes of past (liberal) agents and their imperialist implications (e.g. the ‘civilising mission’). ‘Provincialising Europe’—meaning, in this case, unmasking the enduring ethnocentric universalism of European international thought and its spectres—has enabled historians to speak truth to power.¹⁹

From intellectual and political standpoints alike, the immense value of both these sets of scholarly contributions is irrefutable. And yet these historiographical developments cannot be our only affirmative responses to the post-colonial turn. For there is scope for asking still: where do we go *after* post-colonialism? Here, it is relevant to note one existing criticism of *Provincializing Europe*—that the book has reduced European thought to a monolith. In emphasising non-European difference and underscoring European universalism, the book has effectively presented Europeans as timeless Eurocentrists.²⁰ To borrow Frederick Cooper’s ironic reformulation of Eric R. Wolf’s *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), Europeans have as a result become the new ‘people without history.’²¹ For Chakrabarty, it appears, the imperative of critique outweighed the pursuit of developing a nuanced and comprehensive account of European thought. But does nuance not enhance the postcolonial project? One precondition for the postcolonial project to achieve epistemic emancipation must surely be the ability to account for the fluidity of Eurocentrism and the plurality of European thought. Eurocentrism, it follows, must also be deconstructed *within* European intellectual history.²² Resolving the afore-recognised limitation of *Provincializing Europe* in this way, then, might

19. On the ongoing political legacies and spectres of European Eurocentric universalism (and the idea of the ‘civilising mission’), see Mazower, *Governing the world*; Bell, *Reordering the world*; John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric conception of world politics: Western international theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge, 2012); Jeanne Morefield, *Empires without imperialism: Anglo-American decline and the politics of deflection* (New York, 2014); Anthony Pagden, *The burdens of empire: 1539 to the present* (New York, 2015); Ntina Tzouvala, *Capitalism as civilization: a history of international law* (Cambridge, 2020); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the future: modernization theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003).

20. For the criticism that *Provincializing Europe* ‘depicts “European” thought as a relatively unchanging unity that is rooted in the paradigms of Enlightenment reason’ and thus ‘fails to bring out the dialogic and continually evolving nature of such thought’, see David Hardiman’s review of the book in *Social History*, 27/1 (2002), 64–66. In Hardiman’s words, Chakrabarty ‘tends to simplify and dehistoricize what stands for “Europe”’ (65).

21. Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, 2005), 6.

22. Cooper has advanced a theoretical criticism of the way ‘unchanging and unmediated images’ of universality have come to obscure a ‘much more convoluted trajectory’ (*Colonialism in question*, 6). But empirical explanations for such convolution remain unexplored.

open up a path beyond and after the efforts of postcolonialism to advance a fuller understanding of Eurocentrism as an operation of thought.

A relevant analogy here—and indeed a direct source of stimulation for my own agenda—can be found in developments within another major field concerned with identity and power: gender history (early modern gender history in particular).²³ Essential to me here is the way in which what began as a feminist-inspired project of women's history, committed to recovering women's experiences (similar to current scholarly efforts to recover non-European voices and experiences)²⁴ and criticising patriarchy (similar to current criticisms of Eurocentrism) later evolved into a more expansive gender history. An integral part of this gender history was the rise of the history of masculinities—an effort by historians to develop a more nuanced understanding of the gender order by thinking about patriarchies in the plural, and to do so by moving beyond the idea of women alone as being gendered beings to consider also the norms and experiences of being 'male.' Such a historiographical development effectively restored the study of men, but in a novel form that became the history of masculinities. On a conceptual level, this book aims to provide the equivalent of masculinities history for the field of global intellectual history. In so doing, it seeks to re-situate the West in global intellectual history without reverting to the Eurocentric narrative of 'the West and the Rest.'²⁵

In the case of early modern gender history, an important historiographical development that helped to pave the way from a feminist women's history to a history of masculinities was a revised approach to the study of the patriarchal gender order. Most notably, historians of early modern England went beyond the established feminist focus on criticising patriarchy (as a structural system of inequality subordinating women to men) to newly highlight variations within men's relationships to patriarchal norms.²⁶ Put simply, such scholarship

23. See n. 26 of this chapter on the particular relevance of early modern gender history.

24. Within the history of international thought, an important recent development in this regard has been the emergence of scholarship committed to writing women back into the history of international thought. See for example Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, Kimberly Hutchings, and Sarah C. Dunstan, *Women's international thought: towards a new canon* (Cambridge, 2022); Patricia Owens, *Erased: a history of international thought without men* (Princeton, 2025).

25. On the inconclusive state of the field regarding the implications of the global turn for European intellectual history, see Sam Moyn, 'European intellectual history after the global turn', in David Motadel, ed., *Globalizing Europe* (Cambridge, 2025), 56–65.

26. A key model for the present study is Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of manhood in early modern England* (Oxford, 2006). For an overview of the field, see Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, 'What have historians done with masculinity? Reflections on five centuries of British history, circa 1500–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44/2 (2005), 274–80. These debates within

demonstrated that not all men in early modern England did or could exhibit patriarchal manhood (for reasons concerning social and economic status). And importantly, it highlighted the existence of alternative, competing codes of masculinity that were not primarily defined in terms of patriarchal principles. The precise historical reasons for these social variations or the substance of these diverse masculine norms need not bother us here. The essential insight arising from this body of literature is that historians of early modern English masculinity were able to demonstrate that men, too, had a gender history. And importantly, these historians did so by attending to variations and variability on the men's side—in men's relationship to patriarchy (i.e. recognising historical contingency) and in the form of many, rather than singular and fixed, norms of masculinity (i.e. recognising cultural plurality and fluidity). As a result, they restored the study of men to gender history without regressing to a prefeminist, nonreflexive 'his-story' mode of assuming that history is naturally and exclusively about men.

How might we then transpose such a historiographical development to global intellectual history, with a view to reintegrating European intellectual history? And doing so, crucially, without regressing to the pre-postcolonial narrative of 'the West and the Rest'? If Eurocentrism for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century civilisational hierarchy can be understood as the functional equivalent of the principle of patriarchy for the hierarchical gender order, by the same token, taking a revised approach to the study of Eurocentrism surely becomes key for such a transposition. My proposed project of 'rehistoricising Europe' (*contra* 'provincialising Europe') thus begins with the proposition that we must go beyond the established postcolonial focus on criticising Eurocentrism, to newly pay attention to variations and variability in European intellectuals' engagement with Eurocentrism—or 'Europe' as a category, to use Chakrabarty's formulation. Writing this alternative, post-postcolonial history of Eurocentrism means, in other words, deconstructing Eurocentrism within a European intellectual context. (The rationale behind the choice of the term

early modern gender history form a part of a broader historiographical effort within the field of gender history (including modern history) to develop a more nuanced understanding of the gender order by thinking about patriarchies in the plural and paying attention to power relations between men as well as between women and men; see for example John Tosh, 'What should historians do with masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), 179–202; John Arnold and Sean Brady, eds., *What is masculinity? Historical dynamics from antiquity to the contemporary world* (Basingstoke, 2011). My choice to draw on the study of early modern gender, and on Shepard's model in particular, is due to Shepard's explicit focus on historicising patriarchy and thus the very direct parallel it offers to my efforts to historicise Eurocentrism.

‘post-postcolonial’ will be explained further in the Conclusion. What is important to note for now is the proposed shift in focus to historicising Eurocentrism within a European intellectual context.)

Specifically, ‘rehistoricising Europe’ requires attending to what enabled certain European individuals at specific times to claim, or reject, the universality of their European civilisation—that is, attending to historical contingency, defined here as conditions of possibility. It also requires assessing intellectual alternatives to triumphant Eurocentrism, be they civilisational pluralism or, indeed, despondent Eurocentric universalism—that is, recognising intellectual plurality and fluidity. Above all, writing this alternative history means acknowledging anew that Eurocentrism is not a timeless European axiom (and European intellectuals are not timeless Eurocentrists), but rather that Eurocentrism has a non-static, multifaceted and contradictory history in Europe, with all that such a history may reveal about European intellectual history, and about its interactions with its broader global structural and ideational contexts. Writing such a history, then, allows us to work with and against the recent historiographical trends to rethink the relationship between European and global history. Specifically, such a history offers a model, distinct from postcolonial analysis, for reintegrating European intellectual history into global intellectual history, and for doing so without reverting to the framework of ‘the West and the Rest’. These are the key aims and premises of the project of ‘rehistoricising Europe’.

Rival Civilisations uses the optic of British debates on Japan to pursue this project of rehistoricising Europe. It traces Britain’s wide-ranging and changing interpretations of ‘Japanese civilisation’—across time, individuals and situations—to consider the internal variability of British civilisational thought, and thus to understand the ebbs and flows of triumphant Eurocentric thought and its alternatives. To this end, my book focuses primarily on moments when ideas of Japan and civilisation underwent a reformulation—on moments of intellectual shifts towards or away from Eurocentric universalism. In this way, I investigate the specific conditions of possibility for universalist/pluralist thinking.

These conditions include the significance of geopolitical shifts such as the Russo-Japanese War in challenging Western universalism (Chapter 2), and the subsequent rise of Asian nationalism, which were conversely interpreted by some British liberals—restoring their Eurocentric confidence—as the universalisation of Western political modernity (Chapter 4). They also include epistemic differences made by travel and first-hand observations of an ‘authentic’ Japan in the search for a civilisational alternative (Chapter 3); the engendering of a shared transimperial imaginary underscoring the universal normalcy of possessing an empire (Chapter 5); and normative, universalist reassertions of a single telos in pronouncements of ‘crisis’ (building on the conceptual work of Reinhart Koselleck; Chapter 6). I consider both alternatives to triumphant

Eurocentrism *and* how such Eurocentric confidence, under other circumstances, was sustained and even reinvigorated. This full assessment of change and continuity, and of the precise conditions of possibility for each, constitutes the complete scope of the alternative history of Eurocentrism that I present in this book.

My choice of optic for tracing British Eurocentrism—debates on Japanese civilisation—is deliberate. The project of rehistoricising Europe, as executed in this book, places a constant emphasis on the impact of non-European historical developments on European intellectual trajectories. This is because if a key dividend of the project of ‘provincialising Europe’ has been to liberate past non-Europeans from the ‘waiting room of history’ (that is, from the charge of being ‘not yet’ modern or civilised), my aim in ‘rehistoricising Europe’ is to highlight that Europe, as a place in the twentieth century, was not a stockroom of homogenous and dried-out ideas.²⁷ Rather, Europe’s all-important ideas about progress and civilisation underwent shifts too, and fundamental to the remaking of this European intellectual history were the period’s defining historical developments in the non-European world—not least what British contemporaries called the ‘awakening of Asia’. Both these perspectives—of provincialising and of rehistoricising Europe—are thus necessary for the fullest assessment of the history of ideas in the global twentieth century. Both demand that we take seriously histories happening in the non-European world.

Towards a Both/And Thinking about Global Modernity and World Order

On one level, the project of rehistoricising Europe, with its focus on uncovering variations in and around British Eurocentric thought, lends itself to an emphasis on ‘splitting’. This is the defining mode of this book. But out of the splitting, we will cumulatively see the emergence of a new ‘lump’. This book newly brings to light an important intellectual pattern, distinct from ethnocentrism, that characterised British civilisational thought: Almost all commentators thought about ‘civilisation’ in binary terms. That is, they identified and anticipated the future of Japan as *either* a ‘Westernised’ civilisation (total

27. Here, my book shares some aims with Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent empire: anticolonial resistance and British dissent* (London, 2019), which advances a critique of postcolonial approaches by underscoring the instability of British liberal thought—in Gopal’s case, by emphasising the influence of non-European anticolonial insurgency and agents on the development of more critical attitudes towards imperialism in the metropole.

convergence) or an alternative civilisation (total divergence). This book argues that this *either/or* approach inescapably entailed blind spots for thinking about world order in an age of emerging global modernity.

In Chapter 2 ('The Weary Titan Looks to Hypermodern Japan'), for example, we will see how Edwardian champions of 'national efficiency' admired Japan's civilisational uniqueness after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War. The chapter notes how such an emphasis on civilisational plurality overlooked another concurrent source of Japanese success and its implications: the global dissemination of Western military technology and its consequences for global order. Chapter 3 ('Japan's Special Path in the Age of Global Capital'), focusing on the aforementioned civilisational thinker Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, will highlight how Dickinson was unable to anticipate Japan's political deviation in the form of the development of 'Japanese fascism'. *Either/or* thinking led Dickinson to presume instead a total convergence: Japan's economic convergence with the West (i.e. the rise of industrial capitalism) would inevitably also result in its political convergence (i.e. the adoption of liberal democracy).

This book contends that such binary civilisational thinking necessarily generated blind spots because the defining condition of global modernity, as the most compelling accounts of global history have shown, is its paradoxical nature. With the deepening of globalisation, the world becomes more alike *and* more divergent at the same time. This paradox was central to C. A. Bayly's seminal analysis of the making of the modern world, a history that he associated with the rise of 'global uniformities' (in the state, political ideologies, economic life and bodily practices) on the one hand and, on the other, with the fact that 'yet at the same time, these connections could also heighten the sense of difference, and even antagonism, between people in different societies, and especially between their elites.'²⁸ As the challenge of Japanese ascendancy (as described in the chapters to follow) attests, it is this paradoxical co-production of convergence and difference (including the desire for and sense of difference) that has created some of the greatest challenges for modern world politics.²⁹ And yet it was precisely the corresponding need for anticipatory—*both/and*—thinking about this unfolding global modernity that British civilisational discourse could not fulfil.

28. C. A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons* (Malden and Oxford, 2004), 1–2. 'Bodily practices' for Bayly refers to 'the ways in which people dressed, spoke, ate, and managed relations within families' (1).

29. Note that my use of the term 'convergence' does not imply a diffusionist conception of Japan's transformation that negates Japanese agency; I view Japan's growing alignment with the modern West as an outcome of Japan's strategic adaptation. I elaborate on this point in Chapter 2 of this book, esp. n. 164.

This is an apt moment at which to return to a point I made earlier in this chapter—that *Rival Civilisations* necessarily underscores intellectual variations in British interpretations of Japanese ‘civilisation’, and that the stakes of recognising this necessity are empirical as well as conceptual. The empirical stakes pertain to the paradoxical nature of global modernity that I have just outlined. Some British observers perceived in modern Japan a case of convergence along Western lines; others identified a civilisational difference. Such interpretative variation necessarily emerged because modern Japan, as a constituent part of the unfolding global modernity, exhibited both convergence and difference. And in this sense, both Eurocentrists and pluralists got *something* right. But neither could be *entirely* right, because they each saw one facet, but not the other, of the mutually reinforcing globalising process in which Japan’s integration into the world and convergence along Western lines simultaneously compelled Japanese elites to establish and feel their difference from the West. In consequence, as we will see, Britain’s proclivities for either/or thinking about Japanese ‘civilisation’ foreclosed anticipations of the essential global challenges ahead, be they the global dissemination of Western military technology (Chapter 2); intensifying global competition over the same resources and territories, which paradoxically reinforced a sense of difference between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ (Chapters 4 and 6); the rise of ‘fascism’ fuelled by global capitalism and an accompanying search for cultural authenticity (Chapter 3); or emerging tensions between non-European post-Western claims of difference and renewed Western universalism at the close of the Second World War (Chapter 7).

One only needs to turn to our more recent histories of world order forecasts to recognise the recurrence of such binary thinking and its blind spots. The limits posed by entrenched either/or thinking were, in this sense, neither unique to British civilisational discourse nor, contrary to what we might be predisposed to think, reflective of any exceptional complexity pertaining to modern Japan. In our contemporary history, this recurrence is exemplified by Western discourse on the rise of China, and especially by narratives on world order advanced in the United States, the current hegemonic power occupying the position once held by Britain. In the 1990s, signs of growing capitalism in China led political and intellectual voices in the United States to anticipate, with palpable relief, the country’s corresponding political evolution towards a more democratic system based on the rule of law.³⁰ But China’s trajectory in

30. See for example Henry S. Rowen, ‘The short march: China’s road to democracy’, *National Interest*, 45 (1996), 61–70, which begins with the ‘mini teaser: When will China become a democracy? The answer is around the year 2015.’ In 1997, Bill Clinton famously predicted that

ensuing years demonstrated that such a *total* convergence was not to be. The discursive pendulum has accordingly swung to the other side of binary thinking. In the face of an increasingly assertive, politically illiberal China, many U.S. pundits now perceive China as a deviant other, linking its ascendancy to the crisis of the U.S.-led liberal international order.³¹ Within this revised narrative lies little scope for concurrent reflections on convergence. In light of the arguments I advance in this book about the limits of binary civilisational thinking, the essential questions arising from America's oscillating binary discourse on China are these: What might we be missing when we are only seeing

China's political liberalisation would be 'inevitable, just as inevitably as the Berlin Wall fell' because the 'impulses of the society and the nature of the economic change will work together'; see *New York Times*, 29 January 1997, p. A6. But by 2007, such a widespread assumption was dismissed as fantasy; see James Mann, 'America's China fantasy', *American Prospect*, 18/3 (2007), 12–16, and its book-length version, *The China fantasy: why capitalism will not bring democracy to China* (New York, 2007), promoted by Penguin as the 'book that got China right'. For a recent articulation of the view that Westerners should not expect China to follow the same historical trajectory as their own, see Rana Mitter and Elsbeth Johnson, 'What the West gets wrong about China', *Harvard Business Review*, 99/3 (2021), 42–48. For the argument that a distinctive 'smart authoritarian' model enabled China's successful rise, see Jennifer Lind, *Autocracy 2.0: how China's rise reinvented tyranny* (Ithaca, 2025); for explications of China's alternative vision of world order, Steve Tsang and Olivia Cheung, *The political thought of Xi Jinping* (Oxford, 2024); Dawn C. Murphy, *China's rise in the global south: the Middle East, Africa, and Beijing's alternative world order* (Stanford, 2022).

31. Recent examples (in their ideological and theoretical variety) include: Graham Allison, *Destined for war: can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?* (Boston and New York, 2017); John J. Mearsheimer, 'Bound to fail: the rise and fall of the liberal international order', *International Security*, 43/4 (2019), 7–50; Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, *Exit from hegemony: the unravelling of the American global order* (New York, 2020); Amitav Acharya, *The end of American world order* (Cambridge, 2018); Fareed Zakaria, *The post-American world: release 2.0* (New York, 2012); Gideon Rachman, *Easternisation: war and peace in the Asian century* (London, 2017). Cf. G. John Ikenberry, 'Why American power endures: the US-led order isn't in decline', *Foreign Affairs*, 101/6 (2022), 56–73; Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: why America will remain the world's sole superpower* (Ithaca, 2018). A related development is the recent surge of scholarship in international relations that foregrounds civilisational geopolitics, including rising powers' claims of civilisational difference. See *inter alia* Gregorio Bettiza, Derek Bolton, and David Lewis, 'Civilizationism and the ideological contestation of the liberal international order', *International Studies Review*, 25/2 (2023), viadoo6; Martin Hall and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, eds., *Civilizational identity: the production and reproduction of 'civilizations' in international relations* (Basingstoke, 2007). For a discussion by a historian, see Paul Betts, 'Civilization and the threat of liberal internationalism', *Past & Present*, 264/1 (2024), 294–304. See also Chapter 7, n. 96 of this book.

deviation and deviance? And what anticipations of future world-political developments might we be foreclosing in consequence?

One explanation for the persistence of such binarism that will emerge from this book is the relationship between crisis and binary thinking. As will be elaborated conceptually in Chapter 6 ('Narrating the Manchurian Crisis: What Is In Crisis?') and the Conclusion ('The World as We Narrate It'), crisis must be understood not merely as an event or an objective condition, but also as a narrative device. As the chapters to follow will demonstrate, discussions of civilisation and world order in Britain (as in the United States and elsewhere today) were very typically grand narratives grounded in a sense and identification of *crisis* (or its psychological twin, *triumph*). Narrated and dramatised to mark out an inflection point between catastrophe and salvation, crisis discourse, we will see, reveals a sustained bias towards either/or thinking about civilisation and world order. Crisis discourse, in other words, reveals a recurrent incompatibility with an appreciation of the both/and paradox as the defining empirical reality of global modernity.

Importantly, furthermore, such proclivities for binary thinking (and the accompanying reverberations of crisis and triumph) are not confined to debates on world order. They have also been a feature of our own world of academic history writing. In the last few decades, the field of modern history has seen two path-defining approaches to writing the history of global modernity. On the one hand, scholars operating under the broad banner of 'global history' have advanced panoramic and granular accounts of the globe becoming one. The essential stimulus for this intellectual orientation was the accelerating process—and the (largely optimistic) burgeoning talk of—'globalisation' that marked the post-Cold War era of the triumphant 1990s.³² Historians thus took to recovering earlier—and especially late

32. Representative examples of the 1990s' globalisation discourse include: Ken'ichi Omae, *The borderless world: power and strategy in the interlinked economy* (London, 1994); Martin Al-brow, *The global age: state and society beyond modernity* (Cambridge, 1996); Richard O'Brien, *Global financial integration: the end of geography* (London, 1992); and from the new millennium, Thomas Friedman, *The world is flat* (New York, 2005). For a historical assessment of this over-confident discourse, see Jan Eckel, 'It's globalization, stupid. Explaining the world in the 1990s', *Past & Present*, 264/1 (2024), 318–27; Duncan S. A. Bell, 'History and globalization: reflections on temporality', *International Affairs*, 79/4 (2003), 801–14; G. John Ikenberry and Peter Trubowitz, eds., *Rethinking the 1990s: liberal world-building in the aftermath of the Cold War* (New York, 2025). Note, however, that even in the 1990s, globalisation already had its high-profile critics and sceptics, exemplified by the sociologist Saskia Sassen in *Globalization and its discontents* (New York, 1998), and the economist Dani Rodrik in *Has globalization gone too far?*

nineteenth- and twentieth-century—histories of global ‘integration’, ‘connections’ and ‘convergence’.³³ According to this particular founding view of ‘global history’, the defining condition of the modern global was a proliferation of similarities, not of difference. On the other hand, historians adopting a post-colonial outlook, many preceding and others galvanised by the catchword of ‘provincialising Europe’, took to capturing a world of multiplying ‘alternative’ modernities in which European liberal-capitalist modernity was now to be viewed merely as one possibility amongst myriad others.³⁴ From this viewpoint, the defining condition of global modernity was an irreducible diversity, not expanding similarities. The sheer volume of scholarship that has emerged in the last few decades, embracing each of these two modes, testifies to the analytic draw and normative pull (at least until very recently) of seeing the world as one, and of seeing the world as many. And yet it is also clear that these two historical perspectives are not, and have not been, so readily compatible. Dividing them has been a fault line between those who see ‘connections’ as

(Washington, DC, 1997). But historians appear to have been slower to incorporate these critical perspectives into the mainstream of their field.

33. The most influential programmatic intervention in this vein is Sebastian Conrad, *What is global history?* (Princeton, 2016); see esp. 101 (on global integration being a ‘defining feature’ of global history) and 60–61 (for a problematisation of the ‘multiple modernities’ framework). Lynn Hunt’s *Writing history in the global era* (New York, 2014) promotes ‘globalisation’ as a ‘paradigm’ of historical research appropriate to the global age for understanding a world that ‘gradually’ became ‘interconnected’ and ‘interdependent’. For one of the earliest historical studies of ‘globalisation’ triggered by the developments of the 1990s, see A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history* (London, 2002). For a retrospective observation that ‘global integration’ was the implicit ‘telos’ underpinning the study of global history before the 2020s, see Stefanie Gänger and Jürgen Osterhammel, ‘Introduction: rethinking history, globally’, in Stefanie Gänger and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Rethinking global history* (Cambridge, 2024), 1–19. For the criticism that global history neglects attention to war and conflict, see David Bell, ‘This is what happens when historians overuse the idea of the network’, *New Republic*, 26 October 2013.

34. This scholarly development is best exemplified by the rise and widespread use of the concepts of ‘alternative modernities’, ‘multiple modernities’ and ‘global modernities’, all casting ‘modernity’ in the plural; see for example Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alternative modernities* (Durham; London, 2001); and the special issue of *Daedalus* on ‘Multiple modernities’, edited by S. N. Eisenstadt, 129/1 (2000). According to Google Scholar, Eisenstadt’s introductory article to the special issue had 5,972 citations as of 27 October 2024. For an analysis of Japan in this vein that characterises post-war Japan as a ‘nonconvergent society’ vis-à-vis the Western (especially American) model of modernity, see Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan in the American century* (Cambridge, MA, 2018).

inherently progressive, and those who see (recognition of) ‘difference’ as intrinsically emancipatory.³⁵ What they have consequently held in common is that they have both exhibited an inclination for a binary thinking that has marked out either the *one* or the *many* as the essential—and most attention-worthy—condition of global modernity.³⁶

In such a bifurcated intellectual landscape of the ‘global’ versus the ‘post-colonial’, historical arguments that identify the very coexistence of convergence and difference as the central problematic—that consciously advance a both/and thinking—have been overshadowed.³⁷ Yet now, as the field of global

35. For reflections on the underlying (or at least the founding) normative orientations of the global and postcolonial turns respectively, see Jeremy Adelman, ‘What is global history now?’, *Aeon*, 2 March 2017; Vasant Kaiwar, ‘On Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* and Ranajit Guha’s *Dominance without hegemony: history and power in colonial India*’, *Historical materialism: research in critical Marxist theory*, 12/2 (2004), 189–247.

36. In this connection, see also Frederic Jameson, ‘Notes on globalization as a philosophical issue’, in Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The cultures of globalization* (Durham, 1998), 54–77, at 64 and 66, which provides an early observation of the two antithetical views of globalisation advanced outside historical debates—as ‘unification and standardization’ or as ‘a decentring and a proliferation of differences’. Jameson conversely stressed the co-production of unification and difference as the defining feature of globalisation.

37. Bayly’s aforementioned *Birth of the modern world* is one such example; it may be that the paradoxical nature of global modernity has been more widely recognised in the social sciences, as suggested by Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization* (Minneapolis and London, 2000), which Bayly cites as a direct influence on his work. Focusing on the concept of ‘distance’, Jeremy Adelman has more recently drawn attention to the paradoxical intensification of ‘social distance’ (i.e. estrangement and alienation) generated by forces of global integration (i.e. the eclipse of physical distance); see Jeremy Adelman, ‘On distance: a problem in global history’, in Gänger and Osterhammel, eds., *Rethinking global history*, 210–34. In a perceptive article, Sebastian Conrad has also explicitly noted the ‘simultaneity of global integration and the production of difference’; but because Conrad is consciously writing to push back against the postcolonial emphasis on difference, his own research foregrounds the expansion of similarities such as the global co-production of ‘universal standards’. See Sebastian Conrad, ‘Greek in their own way: writing India and Japan in the world history of architecture at the turn of the twentieth century’, *American Historical Review*, 125/1 (2020), 19–53, at 21; and for a similar intervention, Sebastian Conrad, “‘Nothing is the way it should be”: global transformations of the time regime in the nineteenth century’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 15/3 (2018), 821–48. In addition to the works listed in n. 41 of this chapter, other important works that have recognised the co-production of convergence and difference include: Christopher L. Hill, *National history and the world of nations: capital, state, and the rhetoric of history in Japan, France, and the United States* (Durham, 2008); Sebastian Conrad, ‘Enlightenment in global history: a historiographical critique’, *American Historical Review*, 117/4

history is seen by some to be at a crisis point, signs of a ‘disintegrating’, ‘deglobalising’ contemporary world are prompting some global historians to rethink their foundational historical assumption of the world becoming one.³⁸ Under these shifting conditions, the hitherto-marginalised both/and perspective cannot but acquire a renewed analytic relevance.³⁹ For it is precisely such historians as Michael Geyer and Charles Bright who demonstrated exceptional perceptiveness as well as prescience when they argued as early as 1995 that the defining condition of ‘globality’ was ‘accelerating integration and proliferating difference’, and that the key to gaining a conceptual hold on the present global age was understanding the world history of the “long” twentieth-century.⁴⁰ In their own words: ‘The progress of global integration and the attending struggles among would-be hegemonies have persistently set loose contests over identity . . . and for autonomy that, time and again, have renewed difference in the face of integration and thus continued to fragment the world even as it became one.’⁴¹ At a fundamental level, such a self-consciously dialectical, both/and perspective points towards an alternative interpretative possibility to binary thinking: that of viewing the lived contradictions of global modernity as amounting to an analytically coherent history, and recognising the pitfalls of not doing so.

(2012), 999–1027; Jürgen Osterhammel, *The transformation of the world: a global history of the nineteenth century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, 2014); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the world: Chinese nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century* (Durham, 2002). See also Chapter 3, n. 174 and n. 175 in this book.

38. Adelman’s ‘What is global history now?’ and Osterhammel and Gänger’s *Rethinking global history* exemplify this trend amongst the field’s leading practitioners.

39. In *Rethinking global history*, Jan C. Jansen’s chapter ‘Tacit directionality: processes, teleology and contingency in global history’, for instance, proposes that scholars ‘avoid reifying “global integration” teleologically’ by paying more attention to ‘interceding and countervailing processes, dialectical developments, tipping points, uncertainty and . . . the interplay of necessity and contingency’ (209).

40. Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, ‘World history in a global age’, *American Historical Review*, 100/4 (1995), 1034–60, at 1042–43.

41. Geyer and Bright, ‘World history in a global age’, 1044. Their arguments are developed further in Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, ‘Regimes of world order: global integration and the production of difference in twentieth-century world history’, in Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Anand A. Yang, eds., *Interactions: transregional perspectives on world history* (Honolulu, 2005), 202–38. For a similar perspective, see also the work of Arif Dirlik, especially his penetrating essays, ‘Globalization now and then: some thoughts on contemporary readings of late 19th/early 20th century responses to modernity’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 4/2 (2006), 137–57; and ‘Global modernity? Modernity in an age of global capitalism’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 6/3 (2003), 275–92.

To debate the meaning of Japanese civilisation in twentieth-century Britain was to debate visions of the modern world: the world as it was, the world as it was likely to be, the world as it ought to be. In their stakes, fault lines and blind spots, such debates foreshadow our present musings on the future of world order and ongoing arguments over the globality of our past.

Their debates are our debates.

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