

Approaches to Global History and the Question of the “Civilizing Mission”

Jürgen Osterhammel

University of Konstanz, Germany
juergen.osterhammel@uni-konstanz.de

I Introduction

Everyone who nowadays talks about “world history” or “global history” should try to clarify what he or she means by these terms. He should also at least indicate which particular background influences this understanding. Coming from an academic environment where world history used to be fairly important, but later fell into a steep decline, I should begin with a few general remarks about the study of global history in Germany. After all, one of main challenges facing us at the moment is to bring together different national perspectives on global history. This sounds like a paradox: How can a global or transnational content be conceptualized within national forms? When, to give a personal example, more than twenty-five years ago, I wrote a book on Sino-British relations in the 1930s,¹ I did not consciously mean to deal with that subject from a peculiar German point of view. And yet, in spite of a growing ecumene of scholars, there remain differences between national styles of doing global history. These differences are due to

- (1) specific historiographical traditions,
- (2) varying positions of global history within the organization of the historical profession, and
- (3) particular definitions of central problems in the contemporary world to which global history, like all history, ought to respond.

The result is not national bias, but a difference of perspective. Although historical truth is not, as some postmodernists believe, relative to each individual commentator (and, therefore, no longer truth, but mere personal opinion),² it is obvious that an entirely “neutral”, neither Euro-centric nor

¹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Britischer Imperialismus im Fernen Osten. Strukturen der Durchdringung und einheimischer Widerstand auf dem chinesischen Markt 1932-1937* [British Imperialism in East Asia: Structures of Penetration and Indigenous Resistance in the China Market], Bochum 1983; see also id., “Imperialism in Transition: British Business and the Chinese Authorities, 1931-1937”, in: *The China Quarterly* 98 (1984), pp. 260-286.

² See for a thoughtful discussion of historical postmodernism: Ernst Breisach, *On the Future of History: The Postmodernist Challenge and Its Aftermath*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2003.

America-centric or Asia-centric (etc.) world history is as impossible as it would be sterile and boring.³ World history writing is nowadays dominated, in quantitative and probably also in qualitative terms, by historians and historical sociologists from the United States.⁴ It would be silly to accuse them sweepingly of being mouth-pieces of American hegemony. Many of them are vociferous critics of all kinds of imperialism and colonialism. Yet, to give a simple example, the very fact that many of those U.S. authors ignore any research that has been published in languages other than English, should cause concern. World history is in danger of a kind of anglophone closure, of turning into a self-referential system of Anglo-American scholarship and “discourse”.⁵ Therefore, smaller, but by no means negligible academic cultures such as the French or Italian, German or Japanese ones, should try to assess their own strengths and weaknesses in particular fields and should discuss what specific contributions they are able to make to the global enterprise of global history.⁶

What is “global history”? This question deserves a pragmatic answer, not a dogmatic one. An admirably clear definition has been offered by Akita Shigeru in the introduction to his edited volume on *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History*: global history, he says, is the history “of the formation and development of a capitalist world-economy”.⁷ We recently used a similarly narrow approach in a little book on globalization, co-authored with Dr. Niels Petersson.⁸ A somewhat wider definition is to be found in the subtitle of a collection of my theoretical essays: *Historiography Beyond the Nation-State: Studies in Connections and Intercultural Comparison*.⁹ Akita Shigeru quotes Patrick O’Brien to the same effect:

³ On this problem of “centred-ness” see Jürgen Osterhammel, “‘Weltgeschichte’: Ein Propädeutikum” [World History: A Basic Guide], in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 56 (September 2005), pp. 452-479. Very helpful remarks on this topic can be found in numerous publications of Arif Dirlik, especially: “History without a Center? Reflections on Eurocentrism”, in: Eckhardt Fuchs and Benedikt Stuchtey (eds.), *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in Global Perspective*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2002, pp. 247-284.

⁴ See the overview in Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past*, New York: Palgrave 2003 (where little non-English literature is mentioned). For a broader survey see Benedikt Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs (eds.), *Writing World History 1800-2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003.

⁵ To cite as an example a book combining all those vices: Milo Kearney, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, New York and London: Routledge 2004.

⁶ We need more critical surveys like Lutz Raphael, “The Idea and Practice of World Historiography in France: The Annales Legacy”, in Benedikt Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs (eds.), *Writing World History*, pp. 155-171.

⁷ Akita Shigeru, “Introduction: From Imperial History to Global History”, in: id. (ed.), *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002, p. 2.

⁸ Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History*, translated by Dona Geyer, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2005.

⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats. Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001. For discussion of this book see the review by Georg G. Iggers in *History & Theory* 2004, and Helmut Walser Smith, “For a Differently Centered Central European History: Reflections on Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft Jenseits des Nationalstaats*”, in: *Central European History* 37 (2004), pp. 115-136.

“comparisons and connections are the dominant styles of global history”.¹⁰ An even more general approach refuses to draw a neat and tidy line between “global history” and “world history”.¹¹ The most recent example is C. A. Bayly’s masterly book on the nineteenth century where one finds profound observations on myriads of subjects, but very little on the emergence of the capitalist world-economy.¹² That book has something of a German ring. The point to note is that in Germany, up to the present day, “global history” has failed to struggle loose from “world history” in a very wide and ambitious sense of the term.

One of the reasons for this is the strength of a national tradition. After all, Germans can justly claim to have, a long time ago, co-invented world history. Let me, therefore, briefly remind you of classical German contributions to the study and writing of world history.

II Classical German Contributions to World History

Although there was no German historian of the Enlightenment in the class of the incomparable Edward Gibbon, a few German historians developed visions of global interconnectedness. Names which come to mind are, for example, August Ludwig Schloezer or Johann Georg Gatterer at the University of Göttingen in the late eighteenth-century.¹³ These scholars were not only familiar with ancient and biblical history; they also read every travel report they could get hold of. A favourite of them was Engelbert Kaempfer’s great work on Japan, published for the first time in 1727.¹⁴ Schloezer, in particular, thought deeply about space and time in world history and about the ways Europe related to other parts of the world.¹⁵ Unfortunately, these people wrote entirely unreadable books, and this the reason why they are now forgotten even in Germany. Their contemporary, Johann Gottfried Herder, who cared less for connections than for the individual characters and national peculiarities of a great number of peoples on earth, is the only author of this period still present in historical memory.¹⁶

A different kind of a vision was developed by cosmopolitan thinkers of the same period, above all Immanuel Kant and the brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt. None of them was a professional historian, but they were highly critical of European colonialism and they had

¹⁰ Akita, “Introduction”, p. 2.

¹¹ If one insists on that line, Mazlish’s arguments will do: Bruce Mazlish, “Comparing Global History to World History”, in: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28 (1998), pp. 385-395.

¹² C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, Oxford: Blackwell 2004.

¹³ See the excellent discussion in Andreas Pigulla, *China in der deutschen Weltgeschichtsschreibung vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* [China in German World History Writing, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries], Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1996.

¹⁴ Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan* [...], translated by J. G. Scheuchzer, 2 vols., London 1727.

¹⁵ Especially in August Ludwig Schloezer, *WeltGeschichte nach ihren HauptTheilen im Auszuge und Zusammenhang*, 2 vols., Göttingen 1785-89.

¹⁶ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 vols., Riga 1784-1791.

enormous respect for the cultural achievements of peoples outside Europe. They were as free from “eurocentrism” as one could possibly be in the years around 1800. Alexander von Humboldt, who died in 1859 at the age of 90, preserved such an open-minded attitude far into the nineteenth century.¹⁷

Alexander von Humboldt became more and more of an outsider in Germany and in Europe as a whole. The historiographical revolution which we call *Historismus* (or historicism) and which meant the birth of modern critical scholarship in the study history, was accompanied by a dramatic loss of attention for the non-European world. German historians contributed decisively to this general narrowing of the historiographical vision to what came to be called “the West”. The most prestigious leader of the German school, Leopold von Ranke, at least envisaged the whole of Europe, its state-system and its common Latin heritage. He even wrote a short book about the Ottoman Empire. Very late in his life, he dictated a huge “World History” in 16 volumes, published between 1881 and 1888.¹⁸ But when you open those volumes, you will see that after a brief chapter on ancient Egypt, Ranke loses interest in the extra-European world. His “World History” basically is a history of Europe since Charlemagne.¹⁹

Thus, Ranke and his contemporaries were even much more “eurocentric” than the great philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel had been earlier in the century.²⁰ In his famous lectures on the philosophy of world history, delivered in the 1820s, Hegel said many things about the so-called Orient which a lot of people today would find offensive. But Hegel took the Eastern civilizations very seriously, he knew as much about them as he could find in his Berlin library, and he did by no means exclude them from world history the way Ranke did.²¹

At this time of eurocentric eclipse of the greater part of mankind, however, German geography preserved a much wider concept of cultural diversity and of the varieties of life in the present and in the past. Beginning with Herder, there was a strong tradition of German historical geography, a field of discourse where global concerns “survived” throughout the nineteenth

¹⁷ See Jürgen Osterhammel, “Alexander von Humboldt: Historiker der Gesellschaft, Historiker der Natur”, in: *Archiv fuer Kulturgeschichte* 81 (1999), pp. 105-131.

¹⁸ Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, 16 vols., Leipzig 1881-1888.

¹⁹ The best book on Ranke in English is still Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago 1977. See also Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Universalgeschichte und Nationalgeschichte bei Leopold von Ranke” [Universal History and National History in the Work of Leopold von Ranke], in: id. (ed.), *Leopold von Ranke und die moderne Geschichtswissenschaft* [Leopold von Ranke and Modern Historical Scholarship], Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1988, pp. 37-71.

²⁰ See Ernst Schulin, *Die weltgeschichtliche Erfassung des Orients bei Hegel und Ranke* [The Orient in Hegel’s and Ranke’s World Histories], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1958.

²¹ An attempt to place Hegel’s views on Asia within a wider context is Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1999. See also Reinhard Leuze, *Die ausserchristlichen Religionen bei Hegel* [Hegel and the Non-Christian Religions], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1975.

century. The most important name in this context is that of the geographer Carl Ritter who taught at the university of Berlin and was a close friend of Hegel’s. Ritter himself hardly ever left his armchair and his desk. He was perhaps the most industrious reader ever of travel reports in all possible languages, he corresponded with experts all over Europe and he sent his students away on expeditions to many distant parts of the world. His principal achievement is a geography of Asia in 21 fat volumes, basically also a compilation and analysis of historical and ethnographic knowledge about all parts of Asia including Japan.²² Not surprisingly, the second “founding father” of modern German geography, Alexander von Humboldt, shared the same outlook and interests. The closeness of geography and world history is one of the most important German legacies in the field, unknown, for example, in Britain. Whereas German geography after Ritter and Humboldt re-invented itself as a natural science, historical and cultural geography became influential in France. Fernand Braudel squarely stands in that tradition, and so does, in a way, Immanuel Wallerstein with his spatial model of a world-system.²³

A different tradition was that founded by Hegel’s most famous follower, Karl Marx. Marx, of course, was German by birth. But it is debatable to what extent Marxism may be called a German doctrine. Basically, it developed as an original body of thought, based on classical German idealism (Hegel), Scottish and English political economy and materialist evolutionism. “Historical Materialism” went through many metamorphoses and it resonated around the world. One does not have to be a Marxist to admit that some of the most stimulating analyses of world history up to the present time have at least been inspired by some of Karl Marx’s ideas. It is interesting to note that Marxism as a doctrine has fallen into disrepute since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, while a Marxist author of a highly individualistic orientation like Eric Hobsbawm continues to be quoted and revered as one of the foremost practitioners of world history.

Max Weber’s contribution cannot be seen without the background of Marxism to which Weber himself paid a good deal of attention. Weber’s own approach, however, is by and large original. There is no need to introduce Weber to a Japanese audience. Suffice it to say that there are several ways of dealing with Max Weber’s enormous work. One way is to reconstruct it as carefully as possible and to establish what Weber “really meant”. A second way is to link up with Weber’s numerous “*Fragstellungen*”, with the problems he formulated in such a masterly fashion. Thus, much of what Weber said about the “oriental city” is manifestly wrong (how could it be otherwise, given the embryonic state of research in Weber’s lifetime), but it remains a

²² Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde im Verhaeltniss zur Nature und Geschichte des Menschen* [...], 2nd ed., Berlin 1832-1847.

²³ See Jürgen Osterhammel, “Geschichte, Geographie, Geohistorie” [History, Geography, Geohistory], in: Wolfgang Kuetler, Joern Ruesen and Ernst Schulin (eds.), *Geschichtsdiskurs* [The Discourse on History], vol. 3: *Die Epoche der Historisierung*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1997, pp. 257-271.

benchmark from which to develop current interpretations. Thirdly, there is, nothing wrong with using Weber's writings as a "quarry", as a vast repertoire and storehouse of concepts and "ideal types", almost as a glossary and lexicon of world-historical analysis. The language of much of the best world-history writing continues to have a strong Weberian component.²⁴

This is the point where we may safely drop the story. Max Weber died in 1920. And even without the slightest penchant for hero-worship it has to be admitted that German contributions to world history did not retain Weber's level of sophistication. The only exception from that verdict is Ernst Troeltsch, the theologian and philosopher of history, a close friend of Max Weber's. But Troeltsch died in 1923, leaving, like Weber, much of his own work uncompleted.²⁵ When one opens the works of authors like Karl Lamprecht, Kurt Breysig, Oswald Spengler, Hans Freyer or Max Weber's brother Alfred, all of them very famous during the first half of the twentieth century, one will probably find them narrow and ill-informed, prejudiced and dogmatic. Germany's leading role in theorizing and writing world history ended around 1920.

And yet, there is an exception from that general rule: In Max Weber's time German economic history and economic analysis was of a very high quality, and it remained so during the Weimar Republic. At that time, economists reared in the famous German Historical School still cared more about the real world than about mathematical models. They were keen observers of the dynamics of early globalization as it unfolded during the half-century before 1914. When one studies, for example, the structure of the international economy around 1900 the best authorities to turn to are still German (and not, as one might have expected, British) economists of the period. Their work on trade and investment, traffic and tele-communications has hardly ever been surpassed.²⁶

²⁴ There is no substitute to reading Max Weber's original texts. However, a few works from among the huge literature on Weber are particularly useful to historians: Richard Swedberg, *Max Weber and the Idea of Economic Sociology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998; Edith Hanke and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (eds.), *Max Webers Herrschaftssoziologie. Studien zu Entstehung und Wirkung* [Max Weber's Political Sociology: Studies on Its Origins and Reception], Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001; Fritz K. Ringer, *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1997; Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Schwentker (eds.), *Max Weber und das moderne Japan* [Max Weber and Modern Japan], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999.

²⁵ Troeltsch's most important work as far as world history is concerned, is *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* [Historicism and Its Problems]. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1922.

²⁶ An example is Paul Arndt, *Deutschlands Stellung in der Weltwirtschaft* [Germany's Role in the World Economy], 2nd ed., Leipzig: Teubner 1913.

III World / Global History in Germany Today

What is the current state of world history and global history in Germany like?²⁷

World history is still struggling hard to win acceptance in the German academic world. While, in the face of manifest globalization and its immediate consequences, many historians have come to pay lip-service to the need of a global, or at least a “transnational” perspective, very few of them have committed themselves. It must be granted that not all the results have been encouraging. Too many recent books in a global-history mode have been merely encyclopaedic or descriptive.²⁸ Only two new works written in German can be said to have been innovative and intellectually stimulating, and both of them are the works of retired scholars with long careers in other field of historical studies behind them. Both also have in common that they define their problems very carefully.

One is a book by Michael Mitterauer, an Austrian economic historian and medievalist.²⁹ Mitterauer takes up the classical question of Europe’s special path in history. He arrives at a fairly conventional answer – there was such a special path –, but he traces its roots further back than earlier authors have done, namely to the Middle Ages, and he comes up with a number of interesting comparative observations. This is not global history in the sense of a vision of relationships and networks, but a strictly comparative approach, if only more sophisticated than a simple “the West versus the rest” dichotomy in the manner of David Landes and other prominent authors.³⁰

The other book was published last year by Gottfried Schramm, a well-known historian of Russia and Poland and a great specialist in the history of early medieval Albania, now in his mid-seventies. Few people knew that Schramm was interested in very big questions, and because it came as such a surprise, this book by an unexpected outsider was largely ignored by the tiny German world-history fraternity. Yet, it is a major achievement. Gottfried Schramm is guided by a very simple, but ingenious idea: Innovation in world history occurs in dramatic situations of rupture and decision. History is structured by cross-roads or bifurcations, and at some of these cross-roads not the broad and obvious routes have been taken, but small groups of human beings opted for new departures. Schramm identifies five such bifurcations: the rise of monotheism in

²⁷ The most recent collection of programmatic statements is Margarethe Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund and Wolfgang Schwentker (eds.), *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte* [Globalization and Global History], Vienna: Mandelbaum 2005.

²⁸ For example Hans-Heinrich Nolte, *Weltgeschichte: Imperien, Religionen und Systeme. 15. – 19. Jahrhundert* [World History: Empires, Religions, Systems], Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Boehlau 2005. Exempt from this critique should be an excellent and highly useful series of volumes published under the title *Edition Weltregionen* by Peter Feldbauer, Wolfgang Schwentker and others.

²⁹ Michael Mitterauer, *Warum Europa? Mittelalterliche Grundlagen eines Sonderwegs* [Why Europe? Medieval Foundations of a Special Path in History], Munich: Beck 2003.

³⁰ David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor*, New York: Norton 1998; my critique in Osterhammel, “ ‘Weltgeschichte’ ” (op. cit.).

ancient Egypt and early Judaism, the origins of Christianity, the European Reformation of the early 16th century, the American Revolution after 1760 and, finally, the emergence of a radical and violent brand of revolutionary socialism among Russian intellectuals and political activists of the 1860s to 1880s. It would be easy to suggest more and other similar situations of world-historical choice. What matters is Gottfried Schramm's original problem and his attempt to specify general conditions under which historical innovation is likely to happen.

Both scholars, Michael Mitterauer as well as Gottfried Schramm, are not really interested in global history in the sense of establishing real-life connections and causations, let alone in the development of the capitalist world-economy. They prefer alternative styles of world history: in Mitterauer's case a strict comparativism in the tradition of Max Weber, in Schramm's case a quest for the sources of progress and retrogression (the Russian case) in history. Both authors are unashamedly eurocentric in their basic attitudes: Mitterauer has no ideological preference for an alleged superiority of the Occident; he simply takes it for granted empirically, and he looks for explanations. Schramm, in turn, ranges from pharaonic Egypt to eighteenth-century Philadelphia, but he never discusses Asia East of Palestine. Both authors practice a "deep" and topical kind of world history, not a "broad" and panoramatic one.

This is the best kind of work German-language scholarship has so far to offer in the field of world history in the grand manner. There are, of course, more modest conceptions of world history. One of them is global history in the sense of the history of interactions over long distances and across cultural boundaries. Here, Germany can contribute, above all, valuable research on migration. In addition, slowly but steadily a new kind of history of international relations beyond old-style diplomatic history is developing in the German-speaking countries. Its hallmark is multi-archival, multi-lingual research and an openness for what is now called "transnational" history.

Otherwise, German historiography is still quite backward as far as world history and global history are concerned. Why is this the case? It is possible to discern four reasons.

(1) The core of global history ought to be economic history. Economic history, however, is rapidly disappearing from German universities. If chairs of economic history are located within departments of economics, their chances of survival are slim: Economists no longer care for history. If, on the other hand, economic historians work in history departments, they are under strong pressure to adapt to the culturalist mainstream. This means that they are expected to focus on the cultural aspects of economic life at a micro level: on trust within enterprises, for example. There is little room for international economic history, a field which is widely considered to be

out of date. No active historian has the ambition to continue Wolfram Fischer’s pioneering work on the evolution of the world economy.³¹

(2) Lacking a really significant colonial past, Germany cannot boast a fully developed “imperial history” which could serve as a basis for global history. In the Anglo-American world and in Japan, historians of colonialism and imperialism like Tony Hopkins, Chris Bayly or Akita Shigeru have emerged as leaders in the field of global history and have explained how imperial history and global history relate to one another. Nothing similar has taken place in Germany, although the short-lived German colonial empire (1884-1918) has recently attracted much attention from advocates of “post-colonial studies”.³² There is no direct route from the Imperial to the Global. German historians are better in understanding local colonialism than the mechanics of empire. Germany’s second quest for world power after 1939 and the German wartime empire in Eastern Europe are rarely discussed, as they might, in terms of imperial history.³³ The same argument also worked the other way round: Since Germany had launched two unsuccessful and extremely devastating quests for “world power” during World War I and II, German historians after 1945, especially those on the democratic left, were extremely wary of any grandiloquent rhetoric of globality. Anything “global” carried highly unpleasant connotations, and world history for some time seemed to be a project of the Right or, more precisely, of those conservatives who envisaged the rehabilitation of the Germany as part of a newly-reconstructed “Occident”, “West” or *Abendland* in the emerging Cold War.

(3) Marxism, still of some potential use in global history, is even less influential in Germany than elsewhere. The obvious reason is the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, a state where up until 1989, Marxism was the official doctrine, binding also for historians.

(4) Most scholars who nowadays consider themselves as world historians, are specialists in one or the other field of non-European history. For a long time, these fields – Chinese, Japanese or Indian history, Middle Eastern History, African history, Latin American History, etc. – were regarded as marginal to the profession.³⁴ Only the biggest universities saw a need to include them in their syllabus. To this day, the average history student in Germany is unlikely to learn anything about Asian history. In this situation, the label “global history” provides dignity

³¹ Wolfram Fischer, *Expansion, Integration, Globalisierung. Studien zur Geschichte der Weltwirtschaft* [Expansion, Integration, Globalization: Studies on the History of the World Economy], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1998.

³² See Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914* [Transnational Aspects of the German Kaiserreich: Germany in the World, 1871-1914], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2004; Dirk van Laak, *Ueber alles in der Welt. Deutscher Imperialismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [German Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], Munich: Beck 2005.

³³ But see Goetz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* [Hitler’s Popular State: Plunder, Racial War and National Socialism], Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 2005; Michael Wildt, “Voelkischer ‘Lebensraum’-Imperialismus”, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 2006, no. 1 (February).

³⁴ See Jürgen Osterhammel, “Aussereuropäische Geschichte: Eine historische Problemskizze”, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 46 (1995), pp. 253-276

and importance to the embattled minority of non-European historians. Yet, a new label does not automatically alter the content of an old bottle, and it is not easy for an historian of, say, China who has never done anything else than to deal with Chinese sources on Chinese history, to reinvent himself or herself as a global historian. The global historian should be able to “walk on two legs”. He or she should be thoroughly familiar with at least two major civilizations. This is rarely the case. To put it bluntly: German Europeanists care little for non-Western history, whereas experts on Asia or Africa often do not know enough about Europe.

Fortunately, a dialogue is now beginning. Chances seem to be most promising when a theory or an interpretative framework provides a common focus. The fruitfulness of the Cain-Hopkins interpretation of empire (which has found little interest in Germany) or of the Pomeranz thesis is obvious. In a similar way, European and Chinese historians have initiated a joint project using the theory of court society developed by the sociologist Norbert Elias as a basis for a comparison between early modern Europe and Qing China. Or, to mention another example, Wolfgang Schwentker (with Michael Mitterauer and Peter Feldbauer) has edited an excellent volume of articles around the subject of the pre-modern city in Asia and Europe.³⁵ Given the fragmented nature of the German (and Swiss and Austrian) historical profession and the fact that history departments usually do not assemble broad expertise on non-Western history, *this* seems to be the best strategy for promoting global history: as comparative world history. By contrast, global history in the more precise sense outlined above is unlikely to prosper in the near future. A final point should be added: Historians in Japan and China are nowadays re-defining “East Asia” as an arena of economic and political interaction, as a sub-system of enveloping global structures. This is not really global history “in the grand manner”. An analogous development is the rediscovery of Europe by European historians. In a sense, the “Europeanization” of history is a project much closer to the heart of German historians and receiving much more support by funding agencies than global history.³⁶ Almost all examples for the much-vaunted “entangled history” are case-studies on the relations between neighbouring European countries. In a sense, a kind of contextualized European history is also a form of global history.³⁷

³⁵ Peter Feldbauer, Michael Mitterauer and Wolfgang Schwentker (eds.), *Die vormoderne Stadt. Asien und Europa im Vergleich* [The Pre-modern City: Asia and Europe Compared], Munich: Oldenbourg 2002.

³⁶ Ute Frevert, “Europeanizing German History”, in: *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington*, no. 36 (spring 2005), pp. 9-24.

³⁷ See Jürgen Osterhammel, “Europamodelle und imperiale Kontexte” [Models of Europe and Their Imperial Contexts], in: *Journal of Modern European History* 2:2 (2004), pp. 157-181.

IV For a “Global” Intellectual History of the Modern World

The question of the “centered-ness” of world history, mentioned earlier, cannot be decided by theoretical reasoning alone. And yet, it is hard to avoid. One of the main achievements of the past two decades has been to restore “agency” to people in various parts of the world who were conventionally seen as passive recipients or victims of European and North American expansion. A few authors have dramatized this shift of emphasis and are insisting that almost *everything* which had hitherto been credited to the West was actually of Asian origin. The major scholarly contributions are, of course, much more subtle and balanced. Japanese historians have come up with entirely new interpretations, well grounded in empirical research, of the Asian section of the early modern world economy, of the Chinese tributary system and of the international order in East Asia during the early twentieth century.³⁸ What these interpretations have in common is to correct the idea that throughout the modern period the “West” was the sole fountain of historical initiative and innovation. Eurocentric world history is replaced by a polycentric vision which fits very well with the notion of multiple modernities advocated by S. N. Eisenstadt and other sociologists.

However, “Eurocentrism” should not be used as a term of opprobrium and general vilification. We should rather differentiate between

- (1) an unconscious (ethnocentric) Eurocentrism which is unaware of anything else,
- (2) an openly ideological Eurocentrism which positively (and oblivious to empirical evidence) affirms the superiority of the Occident,
- (3) a moral or normative Eurocentrism which sees Europe as the originator of certain universal standards of justice and welfare – standards that can be turned critically against the West, if the West violates its own norms and values;
- (4) an analytical Eurocentrism.

Historians are mainly interested in this fourth type of Eurocentrism. They inquire into Europe’s relative weight in the world during various historical periods. This relative weight changed enormously. Thus, it would be foolish to write a Eurocentric world history of the so-called “Middle Ages”, one which concentrates on the Christian West and relegates China, Japan or the Muslim World to the sidelines. By contrast, the history of the “long” nineteenth century would be ill-conceived if one would deny that this was a (brief) period in which some European societies (not all of them) were in the vanguard of creating global networks of communication and migration, commercial exchange and cultural transfer. Attempts to assert the marginality of Europe in the 19th century are, therefore, highly problematic.³⁹ Asian critics may think that C. A.

³⁸ See several articles in Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita and Mark Selden (eds.), *The Resurgence of East Asia. 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives*, London: Routledge 2003.

³⁹ An extreme “marginalizer”, often transcending the boundaries of empirical accuracy, is John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004

Bayly's recent world history of the 19th century, of course the work of an historian of India, should be less Eurocentric than it actually is. From a different point of view, it could be argued that Bayly has come very close to finding the right distribution of importance and agency between Europe and the rest of the world. Perhaps Africa and Latin America (and perhaps even Japan) are a little under-represented, but the overall balance is more convincing than in any previous work. This is one of the most attractive features of Bayly's admirable book.

There is one point, however, where Bayly misses his own goal of providing "a history of connections and processes without retreating to a simple view of the diffusion outward of modernity from a dominant, 'rational' European or American centre".⁴⁰ This is the realm of ideas (apart from religion, where Bayly is very good) and of the arts. Here, he has only a few scattered remarks to make.⁴¹ He has interesting things to say about, for example, museums and the arts market. But the names of thinkers and artists he mentions are mostly Western names, and it remains unclear how non-Western political and intellectual elites responded to Western concepts of world order.

I am taking up this subject not in order to fill in a blank in Bayly's vast canvas. The purpose is rather to do three different things at once: (1) to argue in favour of a non-additive global history of intellectual attitudes and outlooks; (2) to discuss the question of centered-ness, and (3) to find a unifying theme for the nineteenth century. In other words: Was there in that era (which begins sometime before 1800) a master theme of almost global reach and impact? Chris Bayly rightly identifies liberalism as such a master theme. No doubt, liberalism has been the most successful economic ideology of modern times. It has survived the challenge of totalitarian economic planning and is now, in its radical versions, undermining the foundations of the welfare state. But on closer inspection, liberalism even in the nineteenth century had a mixed record. Very few countries in the world were actually governed according to the principles of liberal democracy, and even in international economic relations free trade became seriously curtailed from the late 1870 onwards, that is, not long after its initial victory in Europe. To put it differently: Liberalism with its component ideas of freedom, property and the rule of law may not be the best possible candidate for a master theme. A better candidate, that is the central thesis of this lecture, is the idea of "civilization".

Here we have at once to distinguish between two different uses of the term "civilization". The first meaning is a descriptive one: In that sense, a civilization is a very large community of shared beliefs and cultural practices. This is an old concept of world-historical analysis, revived and made popular by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee and brought to a peak of refinement by S. N. Eisenstadt. Today, it is common parlance to speak of "Japanese civilization", "Islamic

⁴⁰ Bayly, *Birth*, p. 4.

⁴¹ But in a recent lecture, given at Harvard University, Professor Bayly addressed the question "European Political Thought and the Wider World in the Nineteenth Century" (unpublished paper, 2005).

civilization” or “European civilization”, although it remains notoriously difficult to demarcate the concepts of “civilization” and “society”, to discover what guarantees the cohesion of a civilization in age when we can no longer be sure that religion is the most fundamental glue, and to tell where, on a map and in reality, one civilization “ends” and a neighbouring one “begins” (theories of “hybridity” have responded to this difficulty).

For our purposes, we do not need this descriptive concept, but rather the second one which might be called normative. It basically implies that it is a desirable thing to be “civilized” and that “civilization” means to leave brutish nature behind and construct societies according to shared values and ideals. A number of keywords of the modern age, though originating locally (mostly in Western and Central Europe), have had a universal resonance. Their meanings have taken on lives of their own, not completely tied to their historical origins. Thus Occidental “modernity” has split into “multiple” modernities in the various parts of the globe, each with its own characteristic solutions to general problems of social organization and cultural interpretation.⁴² Other concepts are universal in an even more fundamental sense. They came into being, polygenetically as it was, in different and unconnected circumstances. Most human communities, for example, have a sense of “justice” and “responsibility” and many know how to distinguish “rational” behaviour from its opposite. Such notions are in a sense specific and culture-bound. But they are, at the same time, translatable and suited to mutual recognition. To put it in the crudest possible terms: Chinese, Japanese or European ideas of justice or rational inquiry may, at any given time, differ enormously. Yet, they all answer recognizably to common questions about a good order or an adequate explanation of natural phenomena.⁴³

V Theory and Practice of the “Civilizing Mission”

“Civilization” – in the normative sense of “being civilized” – is one of those genuinely universal concepts.⁴⁴ We find semantic equivalents in classical Chinese or Arabic, and perhaps everywhere

⁴² S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities”, in: *Daedalus* 129: 1 (2000), pp. 1-30.

⁴³ Jack Goody, *The East in the West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

⁴⁴ Joerg Fisch, “Zivilisation, Kultur”, in: Otto Brunner et al. (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* [Basic Concepts in History], vol. 7, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1992, pp. 679-774; Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The American Spirit: A Study of the Idea of Civilization in the United States*, New York 1982 (first publ. 1942), esp. pp. 19-93. On “civilization” as an analytical category see the masterly article S. N. Eisenstadt, “Civilizations”, in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 3, Amsterdam: Elsevier 2001, pp. 1915-1921. See also Johann P. Arnason, “Civilizational Patterns and Civilizing Processes”, in: *International Sociology* 16 (2001), pp. 387-405; Jeremy C. Smith, “Theories of State Formation and Civilisation in Johann P. Arnason and Shmuel Eisenstadt’s Comparative Sociologies of Japan”, in: *Critical Horizons* 3 (2002), pp. 225-251.

over and above a certain density and intensity of courtly and urban life.⁴⁵ The idea of different degrees of “brutishness” and “refinement” is wide-spread. Warrior classes, their task accomplished, have often sheathed their swords and re-invented themselves as gentlemen, and guardians of the word (priests, scribes, secular teachers or others) have usually seen their professional purpose in the domestication of other segments of society. The trouble with “civilization” is that it is meaningless without an inferior counterpart. Much more than “justice” or “rationality”, it is what the German historian Reinhart Koselleck calls an “asymmetric counterconcept”: a concept in need of its less-valued opposite.⁴⁶ Any ideal of civilization depends on what it is not: savagery, barbarism or even a different, but deficient manner of being civilized.

If such contrasts were to remain static and immutable, the idea of civilization would be much less worrying than it actually is. In fact, however, it is rare for those who glory in their own cultural perfection to enjoy its fruits in tranquil self-sufficiency. The presumed barbarians rattle at the gates; achievement is threatened by exhaustion, routine and the loss of virtue; and sometimes the civilized take the offensive: They develop a passion (or a rational strategy) to de-barbarize the barbarians. Thus is born civilization’s unruly twin: the “civilizing mission”. From its very origin, the idea of civilization as an ideal standard of collective life was coupled with the notion that civilization ought to be propagated. As a starting point, we need a preliminary definition. It might run like this:

The “civilizing mission” is a special kind of belief with, sometimes, practical consequences. It includes the self-proclaimed right and duty to propagate and actively introduce one’s own norms and institutions to other peoples and societies, based upon a firm conviction of the inherent superiority and higher legitimacy of one’s own collective way of life. Note that “mission” here is not restricted to the spreading of a religious faith. It denotes a comprehensive sense of active superiority.

“Civilizing mission”, thus defined, is, of course, a core element in the ideology of modern imperialism. Yet, it has endured beyond the age of imperialism and empire. The civilizing mission persists in numerous genetic mutations. Its rhetoric flourishes, and it evokes strong reactions for and against. It is, of course, of the utmost importance and urgency today. Foreign interventions –

⁴⁵ For analogous developments in Japan see Carmen Blacker, *The Japanese Enlightenment: A Study of the Writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1964, p. 32. On Japan see also Douglas R. Howland, *Translating the West: Language and political reason in nineteenth-century Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2002, esp. pp. 114 seq. From Japan, these concepts were transferred to China (“enlightenment” = *qimeng*, “civilization” = *wenming*), where their discussion really began only after the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898. Cf. Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1986, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, “The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts”, in: id., *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe, Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 159-197.

from that of NATO on the Balkans to the second Iraq War – have been justified in terms of a civilizing mission. The declared American goal to introduce democracy to the Middle East is exactly such a mission.

But is the civilizing mission a European invention and a unique expression of Western arrogance? Yes and No. Certainly there is no precedent in history for the West’s success in disseminating its own mores and cultural models. At the same time, other cultures accomplished durable forms of “cultural hegemony” over vast stretches of space and time. The closest runner-up behind the West was China.⁴⁷ It is nowadays developing its own kind of modernity and is turning itself from a victim into an agent of globalization. For many centuries, China dominated its own Asian sphere of influence through a shrewd mixture of military coercion and cultural persuasion. The modern concept of “civilization” was introduced to China only in the late nineteenth century via Fukuzawa Yukichi who in turn adopted and developed it from popular European authors like François Guizot and Henry Thomas Buckle. But something similar was known to classical China: a highly developed idea of what it meant to have language and script, rituals and moral rules, refinement in the conduct of life, and the benevolence of sage kings and emperors. The major difference from modern Western notions of civilization is the lack of connotations of the city and citizenship. The relentless urge of the Chinese elite to civilize others was directed at the peasantry, at non-Han-Chinese within the realm and at so-called “barbarians” along its borders. Since, more often than not, the barbarians were at least as strong as the empire itself, it was a matter of policy and sometimes survival to soften their fierceness and to pacify them through gentle moral authority.

The Chinese were so deeply convinced of their own cultural superiority and they had such a firm belief in the basic goodness of the barbarians, that simply upholding the brilliant model of Chineseness seemed to be enough to prompt everyone to strive for improvement. The Chinese empire conducted no crusades, dispatched no missionaries and rarely supported forcible sinicization. The confidence of the Chinese *literati* in the attractiveness of their own culture was strengthened by a memory, kept alive through the classical literary canon, of the Chinese people’s own barbarian past. The Chinese had struggled very hard to outgrow their humble origins. Civilization was an achievement, and others were encouraged to make a similar effort. This was the Chinese “theory” of the civilizing mission. It was practiced as late as the eighteenth century when a formerly “barbarian” dynasty, the Qing, by then firmly entrenched at the apex of the Chinese empire, applied the well-proven methods of exhortation and imperial control to their Mongolian and Tibetan subjects.

⁴⁷ Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese Urge to Civilize: Reflections on Change”, in: *Journal of Asian History* 18 (1984), pp. 1-34, here p. 9.

The Chinese urge to civilize was non-colonialist and detached from religious objectives. Nonetheless, it derived from a strong sense of mission, it was based on secular and inner-worldly standards of cultural perfection, and it was driven by a belief in the inherent magnetic power of one's own civilization. The barbarians were expected to *lai-Hua*: literally: to "come to China", to turn their hearts and minds towards the shining culture at the centre of the known world. In a strikingly similar way, today's Western proponents of a soft and peaceful civilizing mission put their trust in the intrinsic virtues of democracy, the rule of law and free enterprise. At least, developments in Central and Eastern Europe west of Russia since 1991 seem to support such a non-obtrusive understanding of the civilizing mission. The virtues of Western Europe, so the argument runs, speak for themselves.

For lack of time and knowledge, let me skip the complicated genealogy of ideas about civilizing in the Occident.⁴⁸ Early modern overseas empires were rarely carriers of civilizing missions. Apart from the Spanish monarchy, nobody even dreamt of creating a homogeneous imperial culture.⁴⁹ For the English and the Dutch, *imperium* was a commercial venture with little need of "moral regulation". Missionary zeal would only have disturbed business. Moreover, until the closing decades of the eighteenth century, a kind of power-political and cultural equilibrium prevailed between Europe and Asia. European elites did not yet rank mankind on a static scale of civilization, with themselves at the top, the Japanese at second position and the others distributed across the lower rungs.

So where did the idea of the civilizing mission come from? There is a special step to be taken from a pride in one's own civilization to the belief that the world was a better place if others would abandon their own ways and share in the superior culture.

Such a step was taken during the all-important age of turmoil and transformation that began in the 1760s and lasted until the 1830s. This was an age of practical implementation. New sources of a heightened European self-confidence were not missing: military victories over a broad range of peoples from the Indians in North America to the Indians in South Asia, scientific and technological break-throughs, the discovery of the nation as an energizing principle. The Enlightenment added the belief that truth, once discovered, was there to be taught and applied. Another important discovery of the Enlightenment was the process of civilization, cast into a

⁴⁸ Anthony Pagden, "The 'Defence of Civilization' in Eighteenth-Century Social Theory", in: *History of the Human Sciences* 1 (1988), pp. 33-45; Peter J. Marshall, "Taming the Exotic: The British and India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in: G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds.), *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 1990, pp. 46-65; Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660 – 1840*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.

⁴⁹ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500 – c. 1800*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1995, pp. 79 seq.

model of mankind’s rise through stages of material subsistence and intellectual awareness by Scottish and French thinkers, above all by Adam Smith, Turgot and Condorcet.⁵⁰

The message to would-be practitioners of the civilizing mission was ambiguous. It depended on one’s patience and one’s confidence in the natural course of things. You either calmly watch societal evolution unfold undisturbed; then you need no civilizing mission. Or else evolution requires prodding and encouragement. In that case, those peoples groaning under despotism and the debris of dead traditions would be grateful for a little help from their friends.

The first state in world history to claim a model status for the rest of mankind were the United States of America, founded in 1783. Especially their most eloquent spokesman, Thomas Jefferson, left no doubt that the new republic was an embodiment of reason, surpassing by far all kinds of “despotism” in Europe and Asia – a view which failed to mention American slavery. However, the United States, at that time a modest country of less than three million white inhabitants, did not possess the physical means to export its own political and social order. This was quite different in the case of France. For some time, France had provided elites all over Europe with a cultural model eagerly imitated. With the decline of Latin, French became the dominant idiom of elite communication everywhere on the continent. Not before the revolution of 1789, however, did it occur to Frenchmen that their system in its entirety was worth exporting abroad. This idea initially developed in the turbulent context of the early Revolutionary War. From November 1792 onwards, the official rhetoric of the French Republic was that it would lend military support to all peoples desirous to “recover their liberty”.⁵¹

The true implementation of a civilizing mission came with Napoleon Bonaparte. When in 1798 the young general invaded Egypt, ruled by the Mamluks under Ottoman suzerainty, he promised to remove tyranny, to fight “superstition” (in other words: those aspects of Islam which were offensive to enlightened European sensibilities) and to bring prosperity to the people on the Nile. None of this materialized, and after three years the French were forced out of the country.⁵² But thanks to a marvellous propaganda effort, the legitimacy of “civilizing” interventions was established in the European mind.

Napoleon was much more successful in occupied Europe after 1799, especially in the Netherlands, Belgium, Western and Southern Germany and Northern Italy. Here, French rulers and civil servants, with the cooperation of local elites, implemented a novel kind of state. These regions (which, characteristically formed the nucleus of European integration after the Second

⁵⁰ See Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate*, London: Profile Books 2004. A classic account still is Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976.

⁵¹ Timothy C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars 1787-1802*, London: Arnold 1996, p. 92, quoting from the declaration of the National Convention of 19 November 1792.

⁵² See Henry Laurens, *L’Expédition d’Égypte 1798-1801*, Paris: Point 1989; Yves Laissus, *L’Égypte, une aventure savante: Avec Bonaparte, Kléber, Menou 1798-1801*, Paris: Fayard 1998.

World War) were not subjected to colonial domination. Instead, within a very brief period of time, they were re-organized in a way very similar to the French heartland itself. The Napoleonic state was not the kind of authoritarian aristocratic regime which Chris Bayly considers to be typical for the decades around 1800.⁵³ It was a revolutionary new creation, based on the idea of legal equality, general taxation, reduction of feudal privilege, protection of property, an independent judiciary and administration by educated and professional bureaucrats along the lines of rational procedures. The attitude of French officers and civil servants in the occupied areas of Europe was of a startling arrogance. They despised tradition and took forceful action against popular religion and local customs.⁵⁴ This could not fail to provoke resistance, as it did, above all, in Spain. Yet, it brought a considerable measure of progress, and the basic forms of the new state were generally retained after the end of French occupation and, to some degree, adopted by a big state like Prussia.

On the whole, Napoleonic France was the first major manifestation of the civilizing authoritarian state (if we disregard the specific case of Petrine Russia).⁵⁵ The state was considered the instrument of a planned transformation of degenerate *ancien régimes* at home and abroad. The purpose of reforms was no longer the redress of specific grievances, but the realization of an entirely new order. France deliberately exported “civilization”. In the period around 1800, this did no longer mean language and the arts, but administrative organization and the rule of law, supported by the high prestige of French science in the early nineteenth century. Administration was supposed to follow the general rules of rationality. In that sense, it had some kind of scientific clarity and precision.

This French model of civilizing intervention did not remain a national peculiarity. Later in the century, French colonial policy (in Algeria, for example) did not always follow Napoleonic precedent, whereas British policy, unwittingly, sometimes did. Lord Cromer, as the near-almighty ruler of Egypt after 1882, can be seen as some kind of Napoleonic figure: the embodiment of cold administrative rationality – with the important difference that any ambition to “liberate” the indigenous population had by now disappeared. The “civilizing” of Egypt served no other interests than those of the occupying power, and it was devoid of any revolutionary intentions.⁵⁶

⁵³ C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830*, London and New York: Longman 1989.

⁵⁴ Michael Broers, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796–1814*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp. 245 seq.; see also id., *Europe under Napoleon 1799-1815*, London: Arnold 1996, esp. chapter 5.

⁵⁵ On Russia see James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, Cambridge; Mass.: Harvard University Press 2003.

⁵⁶ See Roger Owen, *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1991.

The British variant of a civilizing mission during the pre-Victorian age is particularly difficult to understand. In terms of intellectual history alone, the Evangelical Revival, the activist streak in utilitarian philosophy, the rationalizing arguments of the political economists and a newly assertive British nationalism combined in generating strong impulses to change the world. These impulses played themselves out mainly in India from Lord Cornwallis’s reforms in the 1790s to those of Lord William Bentinck in 1830s, if strongly contested during the famous struggle between Anglicists and Orientalists.⁵⁷ The most important British arena for the civilizing mission, however, was anti-slavery.⁵⁸ This was a true British peculiarity. The Germans had no colonies and therefore no slaves. The French revolutionaries of the early 1790s were somewhat equivocal about slavery, Napoleon decided in its favour, and final abolition had to wait until 1848. The Russian ruling class had no compunction about keeping their peasantry in slave-like servitude until 1861. Cuba freed its last slaves in 1886. So, the British (and the Danes) went down a special path among the nations of Europe. The successful struggle against the slave trade and against the institution of slavery was the quintessential civilizing mission of the pre-Victorian age.

Finally, the American version. Around 1800, North America outside a few cities continued to be a place where even the most basic elements of civilized society were hard to acquire. The problem of slavery aside, the country was full of combative tribes and unruly frontiersmen. Hence, a dual process was set in motion of what historian Richard Bushman has called “the refinement of America” and also of the attempted “civilizing” of the Indians.⁵⁹ Already with Jefferson and his generation we find the idea of a civilizing mission *vis-à-vis* the Native Americans. Its core idea was to transform hunters and nomadic shepherds into settled agriculturalists and then to appropriate the land left “uncultivated” by them for the use of Euro-American settlers.⁶⁰ Such a programme never worked. Both the Indians and the land-hungry settlers refused to comply. The rhetoric of integrating the Indians into the nation persisted until the 1880s. From that time onwards, it was obvious to everyone that the civilizing mission had failed in practice and that it was discredited in theory.⁶¹ From a different perspective,

⁵⁷ See Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (eds.), *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843*, Richmond: Curzon Press 1999. On the notorious problem of Indian sati as an issue for a civilizing mission see Joerg Fisch, *Toedliche Rituale. Die indische Witwenverbrennung und andere Formen der Totenfolge*, Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus 1998.

⁵⁸ Comparative studies are: David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*, London: Verso 1988; Nelly Schmidt, *L’abolition de l’esclavage: cinq siècles de combats XVI^e- XX^e siècle*, Paris: Fayard 2005.

⁵⁹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, New York: Knopf 1992; on “civilizing” the Indians the standard account is Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 2 vols., Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press 1984.

⁶⁰ R. D. Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas 1987, pp. 85-86.

⁶¹ Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1984, p. x and passim.

Reconstruction after the Civil War can be seen as a huge attempt to civilize Southern society after the end of slavery.⁶²

VI The Victorian Civilizing Mission – and Its Limits

Let us return to the chronological benchmark of the 1830s. At around that time, a new understanding of the civilizing mission gained shape almost around the world. As a shorthand, one might call it the Victorian civilizing mission. It was characterized by a number of basic traits.

First of all, there was a revival and great upsurge of the Christian mission among the so-called heathens. Protestant churches and missionary societies took the lead, operating with private financial resources and at some distance from the colonial state.⁶³ The Christian mission also intended to be “civilizing” in an inner-worldly way. It propagated reading skills, soap and monogamy. But it was by no means coterminous with the civilizing mission as such and quite often followed its own agenda.

Second, the civilizing mission became truly universal. It was no longer directed at specific peoples, societies and groups: at Egyptians oppressed by Mamluk tyranny, at widow-burning Indians or bison-hunting American Indians. Rather, the British, as the foremost self-appointed educators of mankind, pioneered two sets of normative practices with unlimited operational scope: international law and the free market. The old *ius gentium* was transformed into a legal “standard of civilization” of general validity.⁶⁴ To this day, law is the most prestigious and probably the most potent agent of trans-cultural processes of civilizing.

In a colonial context, legislation and its enforcement by courts and police very often was a sharp weapon of cultural aggression. To ban, for example, the use of native languages and to force the indigenous population to express themselves in the idiom of the colonizers were among the most bitterly resented policies in the entire history of colonialism. Such policies invariably proved self-defeating and never had the intended “civilizing” effect.

The Victorian “standard of civilization” developed the universal and evolutionary aspect of law: universal, because it defined – not yet in the language of “human rights”! – a basic set of norms which, in sum, described what it meant to be a member of the “civilized world”. These norms cut across the various branches of law.⁶⁵ They ranged from the prohibition of “cruel”

⁶² See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, New York 1988; see also Jürgen Osterhammel, *Sklaverei und die Zivilisation des Westens* [Slavery and Western Civilization], Munich: Siemens Stiftung 2000.

⁶³ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? : British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2004.

⁶⁴ Gerrit W. Gong. *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984.

⁶⁵ See Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002.

punishments through the sanctity of property and civil contracts to decent behaviour in international relations: that a state should exchange diplomats and respect the symbolic equality of nations.

Until the 1870s European legal theorists saw the standard of civilization as a yardstick for criticizing “barbarian” practices in non-European countries rather than as a recipe for immediate action. Even the “opening” of China, Japan and Siam through war or gunboat-supported threats was justified more in terms of basic requirements of international circulation than as part of a wholesale civilizing mission directed at those countries. In this light, the early treaty port system in China was a compromise. China had to accept “extra-territoriality” (basically an early-modern legal convention, first used in the Ottoman Empire), but it was not obliged to remould its entire legal system. The westernization of Chinese law was a long drawn-out process, beginning after the turn of the century and still not completed.

Law was closely related to the market, the other great “gentle civilizer of nations”.⁶⁶ Law creates markets, and the market demands its own special kind of legal regulation. The liberal utopia of the domesticating effects of the market forms a key element of the enduring Victorian concept of the civilizing mission. Markets, this is the orthodox assumption, make nations peaceful, warrior classes obsolete and individuals industrious and acquisitive. Some of these assertions, for instance the “democratic peace” thesis, remain hotly contested even today. The new idea in the nineteenth century was that the market should be seen as a “natural” mechanism for the generation of wealth and the distribution of benefits. Free the natural play of supply and demand from foolish meddling – and you will witness human nature blossom to the maximum of its capacities. Everybody, regardless of his or her cultural background, would respond eagerly to novel opportunities. Thanks to steam transport and telegraphic communication, markets everywhere were integrated into ever-larger spheres of activity. Therefore, the impact of the mid-Victorian trade revolution was expected to be on a planetary scale. Market growth created a world market. The keener observers of social reality, of course, soon came to understand that the market did not necessarily raise the general level of morality. It civilized some, brutalized others and left a third group untouched.⁶⁷

This third group was particularly irksome to orthodox economic liberals. People who were given the helping hand of improvement, but did not respond to market “incentives” marked one of the fuzzy boundaries of the civilizing mission: freed slaves in Jamaica, for example, who fled from the plantations and reverted to subsistence agriculture, or the Chinese who stuck to their

⁶⁶ See also Niels P. Petersson, “Markt, Zivilisierungsmission und Imperialismus”, in: Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds), *Zivilisierungsmissionen. Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* [Civilizing Missions: The Imperial Improvement of the World since the Eighteenth Century], Konstanz: UVK Verlag 2005, pp. 33-54.

⁶⁷ Geoffrey R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998.

old-fashioned silver currency and did not even possess a proper coinage, carrying their money about in unminted ingots.

A realistic answer to problems of this kind was that the market needed anthropological underpinnings. The establishment of free market conditions, as John Stuart Mill and a few others already suspected, does not automatically call forth the natural instincts of a universal *homo oeconomicus*. Human beings have to be educated to master new challenges. Someone has to teach them to make use of commercial opportunities. In practice, such benevolent tutelage had to wait for the end of empire. Then it gained support under the label of “developmental aid” – an influential variant of the civilizing mission in the post-World War II era.⁶⁸ While the empires existed, however, their educative efforts as far as economic behaviour is concerned, were quite limited.

A third feature of the Victorian civilizing mission was its narrow urban and bourgeois bias. Rarely before in history had there been such a sharp juxtaposition between city and countryside as in the nineteenth century – apart from England with its lack of a peasantry proper. Social and economic modernization in many parts of the world took place in the cities. It was closely linked to urbanization, and it often occurred at the expense of the rural districts. The civilizing mission universalized the values of modern urban middle classes. Its principal spokesmen saw themselves engulfed by barbarian majorities everywhere. The growing metropolitan cities themselves were invaded by poor rustics who called forth an ambivalent mixture of rejection and philanthropy. Observers like Friedrich Engels or Henry Mayhew saw little difference between English slum-dwellers and the labouring poor in the colonies.⁶⁹ The “inner barbarians” were just as strange – and sometimes as frightening – as exotic savages.

Fourth and finally: In spite of much local (and ill-documented) resentment and resistance against civilizing projects on the spot, it is not to deny a fundamental truth: European “civilization” became immensely and genuinely popular and prestigious all over the world during the High Victorian age. Europe’s cosmopolitan discourse of modernity found an echo around the world. Visitors from many Asian and African countries travelled to Europe and the United States and reported what they saw and heard.⁷⁰ The works of leading European authors were translated into “exotic” languages: Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, François Guizot and Herbert Spencer. Non-European elites adopted, even mimicked European life-styles and patterns of consumption.

⁶⁸ See Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1997.

⁶⁹ See Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820–1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1985.

⁷⁰ William G. Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1995; Jürgen Osterhammel, “Ex-zentrische Geschichte. Aussenansichten europäischer Modernität” [Ex-centric History: Looking at European Modernity from the Sidelines], in: *Jahrbuch des Wissenschaftskollegs zu Berlin 2000 / 2001*, Berlin 2002, pp. 296-318.

Much more anecdotal evidence could be adduced to illustrate the enormous attraction European civilization exercised on all continents. All our examples were taken from non-colonial contexts. No Western government forced Asians or Latin Americans to practice ballroom dancing, to eat French food or to fancy Italian opera. Acquiring European tastes and objects was considered part of a comprehensive process of self-civilization.

This process had serious political implications and consequences. So far, no study has been undertaken to compare the various movements of nineteenth-century self-reform outside Europe’s direct orbit of influence: Egypt under Muhammad Ali between 1805 und 1848 and later under the extravagant Khedive Ismail (who steered the country into bankruptcy), Madagascar after 1810 under King Radama I. and his female and male successors, the Ottoman Empire in the so-called Tanzimat Era from 1839 onwards, Japan during the Meiji Restoration after 1868, Siam under the remarkable reforming monarchs Mongkut and Chulalongkorn. China and Persia moved into this phase shortly after 1900. It could even be argued that Russia with its Great Reforms after 1861 fits well into this overall picture.

A comparison would reveal vast differences between the individual cases, but also a number of similarities: All these movements, invariably initiated “from above”, got started in the shadow of Europe’s looming hegemony and were motivated by a desire for preventive modernization.⁷¹ They all were framed in a language of self-civilization – an important contrast to the period from about 1880 onwards when the dominant mood in Asia and Africa became that of survival and defiance in a world of Darwinist struggle. They all aimed at strengthening the central state, its military potential and its fiscal capacity. Corruption was generally seen as a debilitating evil. The importance of some kind of state-sponsored education and of basic legal guarantees for private property was appreciated. The state was called upon to support modest forms of export-led growth without surrendering the commanding heights of the economy to foreign interests. None of these self-strengthening policies were intended to introduce representative democracy, only a few of them reflected sympathy towards Western ideas of citizenship.

A final shared feature of the various reform movements mentioned (and a couple of others) was, that their promoters saw themselves as harbingers of civilization. Reacting in a preventive way to Europe’s admired civility and its dreaded civilizing mission, they all pursued civilizing missions of their own towards internal peripheries and their peoples. This was part of the very logic of civilizing. Being a “civilized” state and society seemed to demand a transformative thrust against barbarism. Thus, the Ottomans felt a duty to settle their tribal nomads, the Egyptians in Cairo and

⁷¹ See Jürgen Osterhammel, *Liberalismus als kulturelle Revolution. Die widerspruechliche Weltwirkung einer europäischen Idee* [Liberalism as Cultural Revolution: The Paradox Consequences of an European idea], Stuttgart 2004.

Alexandria saw the Sudan as an internal frontier, and even Japan seems to have used the native Ainu as objects of civilizing activities.⁷² The most spectacular case of such a secondary civilizing mission was the Tsarist empire which came to style itself as the Easternmost representative of Western civilization *vis-à-vis* Asia, especially the Muslim world.⁷³

The “civilizing mission” is usually equated with a special kind of colonial policy, especially in a French context. This is, of course, true, and only a detailed comparison of such colonial policies would yield adequate results. Colonial rule furnishes an important arena for civilizing missions, whereas it does not contain them. Colonialism can be accompanied by civilizing projects of varying kinds and degrees of intensity, and sometimes it can do totally without them. There was no room for a civilizing mission in Italian Libya and Ethiopia, in the *General-Gouvernement Polen* under German rule during the Second World War, not in King Leopold’s Congo in the 1880s and 1890s and not in South Africa under Apartheid. At the same time – and this is the central argument of this paper – civilizing missions have been pursued within a multitude of non-colonial contexts.

The great crises of modern times, whatever in individual cases (such as the French Revolution) their positive achievements may have been, were invariably connected with a loss of civility (The one exception was the peaceful dismantling of the Soviet Union and its satellite empire.) In the aftermath of wars, civil wars, and revolutions there has always been an objective need for the reconstruction of civility.

In his book “*Die Umkehr*” (*The Turnabout*), published in 2004, the historian Konrad Jarausch (who teaches in Germany and the United States) has interpreted German history after 1945 as a three-stage process of “re-civilization”.⁷⁴ The first re-civilization, obviously, was the liberation of Germany and the enforced reorientation of an occupied society after the military defeat of the Nazi system. Second, in Jarausch’s view, the 1960s were the crucial period when Germans shed their deeply-ingrained authoritarian mentality. The third phase came with reunification after 1990. After 1945, a deep break with all possible norms of civility had to be submitted to intensive therapeutic care. After 1990, the legacies of a social revolution “from

⁷² From among numerous case studies: Birgit Schaebler, “Civilizing Others: Global Modernity and the Local Boundaries (French / German, Ottoman, and Arab) of Savagery”, in: Birgit Schaebler and Leif Stenberg (eds.), *Globalization and the Muslim World: Culture, Religion, and Modernity*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2004, pp. 3-29, esp. 17-22; Birgit Schaebler, “Globale Moderne und die Geburt der Zivilisationsmission an der kulturellen Binnengrenze: Die ‘mission civilisatrice ottomane’”, in: *Periplus. Jahrbuch fuer aussereuropäische Geschichte* 13 (2003), pp. 9-29.

⁷³ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, pp. 47, 52-57; Susan Layton, “Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery”, in: Daniel R. Brower (ed.), *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1997, pp. 80-99; Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2004.

⁷⁴ Konrad Jarausch, *Die Umkehr: Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995*, Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 2004.

above” posed unprecedented challenges to the incorporating half of the nation. Especially the recasting of Germany after the twelve years of Nazi “barbarity” was a civilizing project of the greatest magnitude. Intervention from without and self-civilization went hand in hand. The victorious Western powers, returned emigrants and many democratically-minded people within the country joined forces. Parallels with Japan are hard to overlook.

Civilizing missions possess preconditions and limits. The first and most important precondition is a basic trust in the malleability of the Other. He or she who is undergoing civilizing treatment must be considered capable of being educated. For this reason, biologically motivated racism and fantasies of a master race cancel any civilizing mission.

A second precondition is the insight that others may think differently. The less objectionable civilizing missions in history have always been based on a mixture of imposition and compromise, of cultural export and import. The Anglicization of Indian education or the proliferation of Christian churches in Africa are good examples. By contrast, the (largely peaceful) spreading of the American dream has, time and again, suffered setbacks and caused disappointment, because not everyone on earth was born with a natural instinct for individualist profit-seeking - witness the abortive efforts by rash “reformers” to Americanize Boris Yelzin’s Russia.⁷⁵ A third condition, therefore, is a certain interest of the recipients in letting themselves be civilized. In the cases of conscious and strategically planned “self-civilizing” from Muhammad Ali in Egypt through Meiji Japan to post-totalitarian China since 1979 the terms have even been fixed by the “buyers” of civilization themselves who shop around for foreign knowledge and foreign capital and who use foreign advisers according to their own purposes.

But there are also limits.⁷⁶ One limit is success. Any civilizing mission is essentially mortal. Successful missions render themselves obsolete by eliminating the problem they set out to solve. According to Konrad Jarausch, West Germany had reached such a threshold in the 1960s. Or to take a colonial example: By the mid-1930s, Indian political culture had matured to a point where the chief retarding factor was not Indian backwardness, but the continuing presence of the British Raj.

A second limit has often been settlement colonialism. Whether or not they are avowed racists, settlers – not only European ones, but also, for instance, Han-Chinese in Mongolia – usually feel only a limited responsibility for the material and spiritual welfare of the so-called

⁷⁵ Thomas F. O’Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 314; Stefan Rinke, *Begegnungen mit dem Yankee: Nordamerikanisierung und soziokultureller Wandel in Chile (1898-1990)* [Encountering the Yankee: Americanization and Social-cultural Change in Chile], Cologne 2004. On early American attempts to “civilize” Russia see David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press 2003.

⁷⁶ See a different and disturbing discussion in Claude Julien Rawson, *God, Gulliver and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination 1492–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001.

natives. The indigenous population is either displaced or pushed back behind a moving frontier (this happened in North America and Australia) or else incorporated as marginal and migrant labour at the bottom of a farming or plantation economy. In both cases, cultural assimilation is irrelevant for the proper functioning of the colonial system. A civilizing involvement with the “natives” looks like a sentimental waste of money and effort. Settlers have, therefore, often been particularly vehement adversaries of the Christian mission.⁷⁷

Third and finally, the bourgeois bias of civilizing ideologies forms another limiting factor. Aristocrats usually do not see a need to civilize each other. They share – memorably expressed by Edmund Burke in the late eighteenth century – a respect for established nobility across cultural boundaries – “ornamentalism” as David Cannadine has taught us to say.⁷⁸ Indirect rule of all kinds weakens the urge to civilize. An extreme example was Morocco under its French proconsul between 1912 and 1925, Marshall Jules-Hubert Lyautey. Lyautey was a great admirer of a feudal Orient, and he judged the civilizing mission, officially propagated by his home government in Paris, to be a great evil. He missed no opportunity to sabotage it.⁷⁹

So we end with a final irony of the civilizing mission. It is a central feature of the modern world, prominent from the eighteenth century to the present day. Apart from fascism, militant anarchism and certain forms of conservatism, all the major belief systems of modernity defined and defended standards of civility and perceived a need to promote them in practice. Wars were waged, and wars were prevented in the name of civility. Concepts of civility ranged from the desperate minimum of prevented genocide to the complete package of an ideal “civil society”. And yet: the most successful examples have been those of self-civilization: British abolitionism, the Jewish Enlightenment since the late eighteenth century,⁸⁰ South Africa’s national reconciliation after the end of Apartheid and many others.

As for civilizing others, the record is much bleaker. Historical experience shows how often well-meaning civilizing missions in practice have led to unintended consequences, how frequently they have been a cynical pretext for depriving people of their possessions, their self-esteem or even their lives, how tightly circumscribed their chances of success have been, how much depends on a pragmatic quest for compromise and shared interests and how easily civilizing missions can deteriorate into fanatical crusades.

⁷⁷ Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, p. 83.

⁷⁸ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, London: Allen Lane 2001. On Burke see Frederick G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire*, Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press 1996, and numerous publications by P. J. Marshall.

⁷⁹ Daniel Rivet, *Le Maroc de Lyautey à Mohammed V: Le double visage du protectorat*, Paris 1999, pp. 36-77; on Lyautey’s monarchism and aristocratism see Daniel Rivet, *Lyautey et l’institution du protectorat français au Maroc: 1912–1925*, 3 vols., Paris : L’Harmattan 1985, vol. 1, pp. 152-154; vol. 2, pp. 121 seq.

⁸⁰ A paradigm of “self-civilization” was the social ascendancy of great parts of the Jewish population of Central Europe within two or three generations. See on the beginnings of that process: Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004, pp. 21 seq.

VII Conclusion

What does all this mean for the study of world history or global history?

(1) The normative concept of “civilization” was the dominant ideological and mental framework for interpreting and ordering international relations at least from about 1790 to 1890. In modified forms it has survived to the present day.⁸¹ “Civilization” became the principal yardstick for arranging peoples and states on a hierarchical scale. The language of “civilization / barbarity” governed asymmetrical relations between European powers (plus the United States) and non-Western countries.⁸² The emerging “West” re-defined itself as “the civilized world” and regulated access to its charmed circle – until today, see the negotiations about the admission of Turkey to the European Union.

(2) The change from a pluralistic and “relativistic” concept of “civilization” (many civilizations of equal worth and dignity co-existing peacefully), which was characteristic for the European Enlightenment before ca. 1790,⁸³ to a monopolistic and normative concept (there is only one standard civilization) occurred in the context of the “Age of Revolution” (Eric Hobsbawm) in France and Britain and was paralleled by other intellectual shifts: the rise of “orientalism” (in the sense of Edward Said), the exclusion of non-Western cultures from political economy and “world history”, etc.

(3) The substance of what was meant by “civilization” went through many metamorphoses and could be adapted flexibly (or opportunistically) to changing circumstances. This was one of the great advantages of the concept. Recurring “core values” were: the rule of law, rational state administration, “urbanity”, a profit-seeking, acquisitive attitude, an interest in science and technology,⁸⁴ cleanliness, punctuality and sexual restraint (monogamy). Christian religion and representative democracy were often added, but formed no essential part of the ideological package of the “civilizing mission”.⁸⁵

⁸¹ See Michael Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology”, in: *Journal of World History* 15 (2004), pp. 31-63. A special episode was the claim of German intellectuals before and at the beginning of the First World War that their country represented the pinnacle of European “Kultur” and was defending itself against France’s allegedly shallow “Zivilisation”. See Kurt Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung. Die deutschen Intellektuellen und der Erste Weltkrieg* [The Mobilization of the Minds: German Intellectuals and the First World War], Berlin: Fest 2000.

⁸² As has recently been pointed out with reference to treaty-making with China and Japan: “The Europeans claimed equality as the guiding principle among nations, except in the cases where one party was uncivilized.” Michael Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, p. 16.

⁸³ See Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* [Asia Disenchanted: Europe and the Asiatic Empires in the Eighteenth Century], Munich 1998, esp. ch. 13.

⁸⁴ See in this context: Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1989.

⁸⁵ These are the “core values” derived from the discourse of the Civilizing Mission. There can, of course, be endless discussions about the quality and validity of such lists. Many of them have been provided by modern sociology, especially the theory of modernization.

(4) Not only the normative idea of civilization, but also the more specific – and more activist – notion of a civilizing mission were adopted, adapted and internalized by numerous political and social elites in non-Western countries. Those who occupied the position of “peripheries” in relation to the major “centres” in the world, defined themselves as sub-centres in relation to their own internal peripheries. The civilizing mission is, thus, much more than a mere ideological facade of “formal” colonialism.

(5) Philosophically speaking, the “civilizing mission” is not just a cynical fraud, a crude programme of the “White Man’s burden”. It answers to a genuine need. Nowadays, international “humanitarian” interventions (however, non-intervention remains the rule) for the prevention of genocide continue the tradition of a certain kind of nineteenth-century thinking about the civilizing mission (i.e. John Stuart Mill). The debate about the legitimacy of the Second Iraq War and other measures as part of the “War against Terror” (the latest US-American definition of a civilizing mission) has highlighted the urgency of the problem.⁸⁶

(6) Does the “civilizing mission” have any relevance in the context of global economic history? Two points seem to be obvious: (a) The “civilized” individual is, almost by definition, an actual or potential customer of the industrialized countries. The “civilizing mission” can, therefore, also be seen as a programme for market extension. (b) Free trade was often considered (and is again seen, by some, today) as an essential attribute of “civilization”. However, this point has always been contested in a “Listian” tradition of economic nationalism and defence, and it lost much of its attractiveness with the European return to protection after c. 1880.

Postscriptum: Towards a “Global Intellectual History”

In this paper, the Civilizing Mission has variously been described as an idea, an ideology, a programme, an outlook and an attitude. It might also have been called a “discourse”. Each of these meanings refers to the realm of intellectual activity and the verbalization of basic world-views. If we look for a heading under which the subject might be subsumed, it could be “global intellectual history”. The following remarks go beyond the special topic of the Civilizing Mission and address, in a highly preliminary and sketchy way, the question of how such a global intellectual history might look like.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The best general discussion I know of is David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004.

⁸⁷ After completing this section, I found a special issue of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (vol. 66:2, 2005), devoted to this very subject. See for example Donald R. Kelley, “Intellectual History in a Global Age” (pp. 155-167). This is where the debate should continue.

“Global” is an adjective that can be put in front of any single “hyphenated” kind of history: global economic history, global environmental history, and so on. The suitability of the various fields for a “global” treatment varies across a broad range. For example, it is much easier to conceptualize and research global economic history than to write a global social history of a given period. Global intellectual history is even more difficult to do in practice. There are three basic options:

- (1) the encyclopaedic approach (or, perhaps, UNESCO approach), looking for the plurality of cultural achievement in different settings: “Weltkultur”, “Weltliteratur” (Goethe) as a treasure house of mankind;
- (2) the common themes approach, focussing on differing treatments of topics of general and mutual interest: the ideal polity / ruler, (distributive) justice, civilizational perfection, etc.
- (3) the transfer approach: cultural mobility, learning, translation, adaptation, hybridity, synthesis and syncretism, etc.

These three approaches are not strictly exclusive. They can be combined in various ways, although this may be difficult to do in practice. Especially the transfer approach has an additional advantage: It can (and should) be linked to an analysis of the institutions for the production, distribution and reception / use of knowledge and of the cultural practices connected with these activities. Thus, we can aim at a social history of mobile knowledge, including channels and carriers of transmission, teacher / pupil relationships, the role of the media, of universities and academies, the very important question of translation.⁸⁸ A disembodied history of pure ideas and linguistic representations would mean a return to old-style idealism. What we need is the study of ideas in contexts and related to elements of social structure.

⁸⁸ There are already a number of good case studies, i.e. (just to take Japan as an example) Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720-1830*, rev. ed., Stanford: Stanford University Press 1969; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *A History of Japanese Economic Thought*, London and New York: Routledge 1989; Wolfgang Schwentker, *Max Weber in Japan. Eine Untersuchung zur Wirkungsgeschichte 1905-1995*, Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck 1998. For a general survey, one has to rely on Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2002. On the history of global media see Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society: A History from the Telegraph to the Internet*, London: Routledge 1998.