

Benjamin Elman, Jenny Liu and Chao-Hui (eds.). *The "Global" and the "Local" in Early Modern and Modern East Asia*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018.

Mariana A. Boscariol
CHAM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

In the past few years studies on Modern History from a global perspective came to be more common, gaining space in many research centres around the world. Even so, this kind of proposal still struggles to overcome a dominant eurocentric point of view, as well as a too fragmented understanding of the period. In this scenario, from the early modern age to nowadays subjects, historiography seems to be attached to a not much diverse perspective that sustain the "raise of the West" as a conduct line of the globalizing process, not truly considering the protagonism of other regions and peoples involved in all its complexity.

Facing this problem, some recent projects and individual researchers started to directly confront this restricted narrative, aiming to reach a better understanding a better understanding of the global panorama from a more diverse analysis. One of these contributions is the book *The "Global" and the "Local" in Early Modern and Modern East Asia*, printed by Brill in 2018. This volume was organized from fifteen articles that are focused on the discussion of the aplicability of a global approach in what concerns the history of Early Modern and Modern East Asia.

Being a contribution a contribution of many authors, as it was punctuated by its editors, the purpose of this work was to help discuss a global historiography and to clarify some problems of a global and transnational perspective (p. 246). By seeking to genuinely be a diverse work, the authors come from distinct origins, as among them there are Chinese, Japanese, and American scholars scholars from Princeton University, Fudan University, and the University of Tokyo (Tôdai). This initiative reinforces their intention to develop a project from multiple eyes, emphasizing the existing differences in what concerns the perception of what is global history and how it could be effectively implemented. As it was described in the first part of the book, "globalized learning begins to take place when we have steady, working relationship with our global colleagues" (p.7).

This work underlies the understanding that there is a deep difference between the Western and Eastern way of perceiving globalism, through which the East would held the notion of an interactive world whereas the West would see the world history as a concatenation of regional events. These are two very distinct points of view. Distinctions that inevitably have conditioned the way historiography built the crompehension of the

globalized world, or even of the world as a whole, dictating the peoples and topics to receive more protagonism among its many narratives.

The world is necessarily formed by many parts that individually hold a particular history and characteristics. These many parts constitute the world the way it is, but in the narrative that was elaborated on a World History it is noticeable that Europe and the European people took the guidance to coin it from their point of view (p.53). In this sense, as exposed throughout the book, it is unavoidable that an eurocentric shaping of the world history came to deeply mark the contemporary historiography, since this overview dominates the manner all regions are connected (p.2).

From the 16th century onwards there were produced maps, drawings, and documents based on the image of Europe as the "Old World." This conception started to build a worldwide dynamic that was necessarily projected from the perception the Europeans had of themselves, as well as of other peoples - the other, the exotic and the strange was usually the non-European one. Therefore, the European reference came to be the normative to measure, classify and qualify the many worlds of the world, and this filter conditioned - and still conditions, in many senses - the understanding of the world in its global dimension.

Having these issues as its guideline, this book was originated from a partnership between the above-mentioned universities. This collaboration was consolidated after a conference in 2011 hosted by the University of Tokyo, on the theme "Local History in the Context of World/Global History", a second one by the Fudan University, under the title "The Place of East Asian in World/Global History", and a third conference, promoted by the Princeton University in 2013, which had as main purpose to work on "Differing Regional Perspectives of World History".

Thus, the publication of these articles was a result of the discussions raised in these conferences, having also been published in Chinese and Japanese (p.76). Measure that once again emphasises the authors' intention to make this work truly diverse, being able to reach the production of history around the world. This effort demonstrates the interest of its collaborators to bring a multiple analysis that could come to surpass a still fragmented and in some sense even frozen comprehension of the role each country took in the globalizing process.

The panorama that was being shaped and spread from the ending of the 16th century forces us to consider the many spheres of this process. We not only need to deal with a large scale that until that moment had never been experienced, but also with a local and a regional dimension that held many particular characteristics and features - even though were completely attached to it. What is to say that both local and global dynamics constitute the world history, one of the main ideas of the book.

In this sense, as showed in many of its articles, at the same time that is mandatory to consider the singular attributes of a specific region it is impossible to understand its development and culture completely apart from the circulation of ideas, peoples, products and institutions inherent to the modern world, which was gradually coming

to be more interconnected – as vice versa. What is to say, the effects of something that occurred in a certain territory could have a direct impact on a distant region, as the contrary, some event to happen far away could have an influence on measures that would be taken locally.

Seeking to work on such an ambitious project, having as geographical focus the East Asia region, the chapters are mainly concentrate in themes as the “late imperial China” and “early modern Japan”. These two countries are considered the pillars of this region, and as such they undoubtedly dominate the image of what characterises East Asia to the rest of the world. Indeed, rather than the simple confrontation between the “Old World” with the “New World” – as was, and still is, the narrative of the contact with the American populations –, in Asia the Europeans had to face some civilizations that in many senses were considered really advanced. Millennial cultures that could not be suppressed, controlled, nor even shaped in a more European way. Even so, the narrative that came to be promoted fed the idea of this region as exotic, not being effectively understood as other way possible of human organization.

The different evolution of the many regions made emerge distinct ways of interaction between the countries, as well as of identity within a country’s boundaries – what directly has to do with historiography.

From the 19th century the East Asian countries came to considerably improve their economic and technological knowledge, what confronted the Western countries with the image that until that moment they nurtured about the region. However, as defended by the authors the authors, both China and Japan gradually became distinct cases within the East Asian region, as something apart from the other peoples and lands that compose it. In fact, this vision can be detected since the 16th century, what can be verified, for example, in Jesuits letters that described the Chinese and the Japanese as the “highest people from all those we got in contact with” (*gente alta*).⁹ What is to say, in the classification of all peoples made from an European perspective there were the “savages”, as those from America were considered, and the “civilians”, in reference to the people from China and Japan (p.15).

Since the 16th century the massive structure of China, Japan, and India – which counted with a distinct economic, political and social organization –, forced the Europeans to reevaluate their own system. Seen in these terms, the contact and interaction that then started caused changes in the Western world as much as in the local populations of these territories. Thus, for example, we can identify asian products circulating in Europe,

⁹ Francis Xavier wrote in 1549: “Todos os trabalhos que com elles se tomão sam bem empregados, e assi viuo em muita esperança, que vossa santa caridade mandará de lá santas pessoas para Iapão, porque entre todas as terras descubertas, destas pares, só a gente de Iapam está para se nella perpetuar a Christandade: Bem que isto há de ser com grandissimos trabalhos.” In *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Iesus escreuerão dos reynos de Iapão & China aos da mesma Companhia da India, & Europa, des do anno 1549. até o de 1580*. Primeiro tomo, nellas se conta o principio, soccesso, & bondade da Christandade daquellas partes, & varios costumes, & idolatrias da gentildade... Em Euora por Manuel de Lyra. Anno de M.D.XCVIII. [2 vols.: 1º 1549-1580, 481 fls.; 2º 1581-1588, 267 fl.], f. 22v.

gaining space in the market by the curiosity they raised, but we can also find in the asian territories new behaviours and tastes (p.72).

Starting from the discussion about the applicability of a World History to the study of this period, the book put attention in some specific questions. One of these questions is the appropriate use of terms when approaching this geographical circuit. Another one is the possibility of a history of the ideas from a global perspective, taking in consideration the differences, and even opposition, of most part of the social symbols, customs and ideals that were involved.

With this approach, the authors not only intended to bring a contribution to the history of East Asia as a particular area but to a history that can truly claim to be global. What means a history that takes in count different perceptions of the same reality and the many angles to which those interactions were responding.

East Asia, as showed in the book, came to be called as so by initiative of Europeans. It held a social, cultural, and economic structure that caused much curiosity, and even admiration, but that at the same time corresponded to the European referential.¹⁰ Therefore, the authors aimed to interconnect the history of East Asia from a "local" to a "global" dimension from exploring the concept of connected history proposed by Sanjay Subrahmanyam¹¹.

The use of the concept of connected history means that we necessarily need to take in consideration the many narratives that are attached to an experience shared among different peoples. This was the authors' main interest. To put new light on the perception of a region that had historically being let apart of the history that was being told in a worldwide scale. Thereby, this kind of approach needs to be constituted by the various narratives of a world history, consisting in different perceptions of the same matter and considering the many experiences within the process as parts of the same body. The construction of this kind of history depends on the use of many sources, documents written in different languages and by the inclusion of distinct groups, being examined under the same light and understood from its interconnection (p.61)

Considering the particular purpose of the *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies*, this analysis focused mainly on the chapters that directly have to do with subjects of the Japanese history and historiography, as we can see in : 1. "Is there Still Value in National History in the Trend towards Global History?"; 2. "Is a World History of Ideas Possible?"; 4. "A New Global History and Regional Histories"; 5. "A Jointly Regional-Global Approach to Rethinking Early Modern East Asian History"; 6.

¹⁰ From the XVIth century the Europeans had to deal with a reality that caused much curiosity, admiration and estrangement, but that was "interpretable according to well known models": a recognizable political organization, a literate culture, a strong hierarchy of the society. Cf: PROSPERI, Adriano. "Il". In VILARI, Rosario (dir.). 1991. *L'Uomo Barocco*. Roma: Laterza.

¹¹ SUBRAHMANYAM, Sanjay. 1997. Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurásia. In: *Modern Asian Studies*. Special Issue: The Eurasian Context the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Ásia, 1400-1800, vol. 31, n° 3, Julho: 735-762.

"Internationalization from Within: 140 Years of Internationalization at the University of Tokyo"; 8. "From 'East Asia' to 'East Asian Maritime Worlds'": "The Pros and Cons of the Construction of a Historical World"; 14. "The Regulation of Sailors in the Maritime Trade between Jiangnan and Nagasaki in Early Qing China"; 15. "The Transnational History of Japanese Thrift".

Considering what was said about the prominence of Japan and China in what defines East Asia as a region, the way the Japanese history was explored and what its narrative expresses shows much about the way the country has been positioned in a global scale. In any case, as pointed out by Garon, to reach a truly global history we depend on documents and narratives from distinct territories. As such, in the case of East Asia that will depend on that local scholars come to explore their competences in working with languages of great difficulty to the rest of the world. The possibility of more easily accessing the archives in Japan and also of appropriately understanding the content of their documents is something that make scholars from the region to have more advantage and better conditions to work on the connections of Japan with the West, at least in comparison to those working exclusively in Europe or North America (p. 6).

As defended in the book, for us to properly achieve a transnational/global history it will be necessary that historians from East Asia come to work on this perspective and with this material, not staying as a exclusivity of Western scholars. Thus, from one way or another, would be mandatory that historians start to think more transnationally about Japan and the connections the country sustained along his history, diversifying and enriching the debate on the global interactions and on subjects of national history (p. 229).

Indeed, Japan had to continuously deal with many issues about his identity in confrontation with other countries of the region, not only with the Western world. From the global trade to the maintenance of costumes and behaviors, it is true that many countries suffered with this conflict in what has to do with a good balance between what is suitable to a national scale and what is only proper to the 'others'.

For example, in the Japanese historiography we can verify the use of terms from the European History such as Medieval and Feudal. In fact, treating elements of the national history like this result in a broken translation of its own categories, being more a substitution of them by European categories. This is clearly an operative measure, in the sense of letting the Japanese History more understandable for a larger number of people. Even so, it inflicts an adaptation, and to some extent even a reductionism, through which some of its features get lost. Unavoidably, in a worldwide dimension and facing such a variety of languages and symbols, it is hard to fully communicate some singularities in all its essence.

In the case of Japan, while we can find an adaptation and even a simplification of some of his components and aspects, as shown in the book, we can also notice that the Japanese had to deal with a esporadic feeling of inferiority to the West (p.3). This was caused in some sense by an effort to fit in the European referential, what even induced many adjustments and cultural adaptations. As stated in the book, even some characteristics that seems to be completely and "uniquely" Japanese were in fact constituted from the

interaction with other peoples and costumes. What is to say, some of their features came to be fed and exalted to punctuate differences in relation to other countries – phenomenon that can also be identified in other circuits, being fruit of the relationship between distinct nations and the formation of a national and singular identity.

What is important to reinforce is that the East Asian region was not in the periphery of the European route, but rather was an important circuit with a particular life and dynamic that for a long time was completely independent from the Western world. From overcoming his isolation and the contact with other regions we can identify in Japan two phenomenon, the reclusion and closure to itself and at the same time some adaptation and flexibility of his elements to the interaction with other countries. In other words, this flow is not about an European-to-non-European-territories-route, but rather a multidirectional and multi-interests one. Based on an interaction among many agents and from many routes, this flow necessarily made emerge different ways of perception of the world and new behaviors, knowledges, and tastes. In this sense, Japan should not be view as a simple adapter, as a place and a people that only absorbed and incorporated aspects of other cultures, but a creator, having modified many elements and generated new forms (p. 231).

Researches from a global perspective (been from the concept of connected histories or by the comparison) have been gaining space, becoming a trend in the departments of history around the world. In Japan this same phenomenon is detectable, been truly popular. Even so, as can be seen in the book, scholars in the country demonstrate that putting it into practice have not been as diverse as it might suggest, taking into account that in a great extent they stay restricted to Japan. What means that the world comes to justify or to explain some of the country's features (p.24). This kind of approach is definitely not making much to renew a world history from a global perspective, and in fact it can be identified in many regions – once again, the difficulty to manage a balance between the “local”, the national, and the “global”, the processes and shared experiences.

For example, one of the essays of the book focus on the changes that were experienced in Japan in what concerns the perception of world history. To do so, it was analysed the way this kind of matter is treated in the japanese senior high school history textbooks. From this objective, the author could identify that since before the second world war the world was seem from a completely fragmented vision (West, Orient – which still had nothing to do with the Japanese –, and Japan), were Japan was considered something completely apart from the rest (p. 53). The maintenance of this kind of consciousness dictates much of the way a certain people will interact with a different group, or how they will react to issues of international interest.

Nevertheless, there are a few projects and individual researches in Japan that are working to overcome a restrictive and fragmented perception of the world and of the position of Japan in this global dynamic. For example, one current iniative is the work been developed by the Office for the Consortium for Global Japanese Studies, which is a section of the Internationl Research Centre for Japanese Studies, *Nichibunken*. This group is developing a project on the “*Literary Legacies of Kirishitan Culture: Missionary Writings in*

the Vernacular". Their proposal is to analyse the many books written in the Japanese language by foreign missionaries in Japan between the 1860s and 2000, aiming to examine their influence on modern Japanese society. As defined by the own Centre, looking to create in the territory a network of scholars, researchers and institutions, their members aim to connect the ongoing investigations on global Japanese studies, communicating their interests and results.

With this proposal the group intend to examine the writing, printing, publishing, disseminating, and reception of these books written in Japanese by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. This approach aims to reflect on the impact of these material in Japan, not just on his religion but also politics, thought, behavior, and other social and cultural aspects. As it was defined in their website, this project is justified in "order to better understand what makes them both unique and at the same time universal". What is to say, the singular and local influences it had but also the global connections that were involved.

As said before, the Western protagonism in a narrative about the global connections and the world itself let other regions, as East Asia, in a peripheral place. But this is a version of the same process, that to be overcome needs to truly consider other realities and features as genuine and legitime, not as exotic. The issue is that when the filter to evaluate all the cases is always the same, all built on Europeans standards, the non-European peoples seems to be stuck in eternal "lacks" and "failures" (p.69). In this sense, as highlighted in the book, to renew a world history will be necessary to consider both the Asian and Western history and elements, what will also demand that the countries do not stay in isolation from a global perception of the world and of their role in it.

The way the world history has been taught even in nowadays Japan would end to entrench the differences in relation to other regions and peoples, underlining the peculiarities and "uniqueness" of the Japanese people rather than a sense of global community (p.60). Therefore, to rewrite the world history and the global connections built especially from the 16th century would be mandatory to consider the distinct 'worlds of the world', as the East Asian region.

The difficulty to manage a local and a global scale, a national approach that still gives genuine attention to a worldwide dimension, is not a exclusivity of Japan. In fact all countries face many issues to find a balance from one sphere to the other, what necessarily dictates the way they put themselves into a global and transnational scenario. Even so, the case of Japan seems to be quite particular, as the country is an archipelago and lived many episodes of closing his borders to foreigners. What is to say, the Japanese people have a past of isolation from the rest of the world, or at least of an exceptionally controlled relationship other countries, and this reality inevitably conditioned the way they face their own history and identity, as well as the way they see themselves in front of the rest of the world. The world and Japan will gain a lot if this kind of nodes come to be undone. For this purpose, the approach developed by this book and the initiative carried out by its authors unquestionably gives an important contribution to overcome our still restricted understanding of global history.