

"A truly global history, a work of great richness and jaw-dropping erudition that ranges effortlessly across the continents, laying out a complex, multifaceted picture of modernity ... the book's rich and profuse detail cannot hide its author's determination to set a standard for a certain sort of new history ... A brilliantly told global story."

John Brewer, The Sunday Times

"'Globalization' may be a new term, but celebrating or lamenting its effects is clearly an old occupation. It is unfortunate, therefore, that no key figure in debates on globalization is a historian. Luckily, that will soon change – if C. A. Bayly's ambitious, masterfully executed new book gets the attention it deserves ... Though Bayly rarely directly underscores the contemporary relevance of his arguments, his book resonates deeply today."

Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Newsweek

"Bayly rises above the regional or national approach to present a history that 'reveals the interconnectedness and interdependence of political and social changes across the world well before the supposed onset of the contemporary phase of "globalisation" after 1945'. It is not the first time that such an approach has been attempted but his work is awe-inspiring in its breadth and authority ... Readers will enjoy an invigorating and enriching experience."

Philip Ziegler, The Telegraph

"Bayly's erudite and engrossing account of the global birthpangs of modernity is not only a landmark contribution to historical literature but, indirectly ... a pertinent addition to contemporary debates about globalization and the world order. This is a book that historians, foreign policy elites, and protagonists on both sides of the debate need to read ... Bayly has produced the most compelling and significant historical synthesis to appear for many years."

Colin Kidd, London Review of Books

"[A] bold and often brilliant book ... Empire and genocide, nationalism and modernity – these are grand themes enough for many a work of history, but they do not exhaust the range of Bayly's ambition and erudition. *The Birth of the Modern World* is as much about the writing of history as about that history itself ... It is a tribute to Bayly's skill that his discussion can be read with as much profit by those who are familiar with the historical debates he engages with as by those previously innocent of them ... [A] remarkable achievement."

David Arnold, Times Literary Supplement

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is a thematic history of the world from 1780, the beginning of the revolutionary age, to 1914, the onset of the First World War, which ripped apart the contemporary system of states and empires. It shows how historical trends and sequences of events, which have been treated separately in regional or national histories, can be brought together. This reveals the interconnectedness and interdependence of political and social changes across the world well before the supposed onset of the contemporary phase of “globalization” after 1945. On the one hand, the reverberations of critical world events, such as the European revolutions of 1789 or 1848, spread outwards and merged with convulsions arising within other world societies. On the other hand, events outside the emerging European and American “core” of the industrial world economy, such as the mid-century rebellions in China and India, impacted back on that core, molding its ideologies and shaping new social and political conflicts. As world events became more interconnected and interdependent, so forms of human action adjusted to each other and came to resemble each other across the world. The book, therefore, traces the rise of global *uniformities* in the state, religion, political ideologies, and economic life as they developed through the nineteenth century. This growth of uniformity was visible not only in great institutions such as churches, royal courts, or systems of justice. It was also apparent in what the book calls “bodily practices”: the ways in which people dressed, spoke, ate, and managed relations within families.

These rapidly developing connections between different human societies during the nineteenth century created many hybrid polities, mixed ideologies, and complex forms of global economic activity. Yet, at the same time, these connections could also heighten the sense of *difference*, and even antagonism, between people in different societies, and especially between their elites. Increasingly, Japanese, Indians, and Americans, for instance, found strength in their own inherited sense of national, religious, or cultural identity when confronted with the severe challenges which arose from the new global economy, and especially from European imperialism. The paradox that global

forces and local forces “cannibalized” or fed off each other, to use words of the social theorist, Arjun Appadurai, is well known to the contemporary human sciences.¹ But this ambivalent relationship between the global and the local, the general and the specific, had a long history before the present age. So, in the nineteenth century, nation-states and contending territorial empires took on sharper lineaments and became more antagonistic to each other at the very same time as the similarities, connections, and linkages between them proliferated. Broad forces of global change strengthened the appearance of difference between human communities. But those differences were increasingly expressed in similar ways.

The book argues that all local, national, or regional histories must, in important ways, therefore, be global histories. It is no longer really possible to write “European” or “American” history in a narrow sense, and it is encouraging that many historians are already taking this view. In the 1950s and 1960s the French “Annales” school of historical writing, led by Fernand Braudel, pioneered a form of global social and economic history for the early modern period.² The need to transcend the boundaries of states and ecological zones is even clearer for the nineteenth century. This particularly applies to the history of the imperial states of Europe, both the land-empires, such as Russia, and the seaborne empires of Britain and France. Historians such as Linda Colley³ and Catherine Hall⁴ for Britain and Geoffrey Hosking⁵ and Dominic Lieven⁶ for Russia have been in the forefront of efforts to show that the experience of empire in the broadest sense was central to the creation and form of these national states. Meanwhile, R. Bin Wong,⁷ Kenneth Pomeranz,⁸ Wang Gung Wu,⁹ and Joanna Waley-Cohen¹⁰ have begun to write Chinese history as global history, taking close account of the Chinese diasporas which predated and persisted under the surface of Western imperial hegemony.

What were the critical driving forces that account for the world’s growing interconnectedness and growing uniformity in the course of the “long” nineteenth century? No world history of this period could possibly sidestep the central importance of the growing economic dominance of western Europe and North America. In 1780, the Chinese Empire and the Ottoman Empire were still powerful, world-class entities, and most of Africa and the Pacific region was ruled by indigenous people. In 1914, by contrast, China and the Ottoman states were on the point of fragmentation, and Africa had been brutally subjugated by European governments, commercial firms, and mine-owners. Between 1780 and 1914, Europeans had expropriated a vast area of land from indigenous peoples, especially in northern and southern Africa, in North America, central Asia, Siberia, and Australasia. If the gross domestic product per head in western Europe and the seaboard of North America was, at most, twice that of South Asia and only marginally more than that of coastal China in 1800, the differential had widened to ten times or more a century later. Most parts of the world which were not directly controlled by Europe or the United States were now part of what historians have called “informal empires,” where disparities of power between locals and outsiders existed, but had not yet led to direct annexation.

Physical domination was accompanied by different degrees of ideological dependence. Social concepts, institutions, and procedures honed in the fierce conflicts and competition between European nations became controllers and exemplars for non-European peoples. Those peoples, however, were not passive recipients of Western bounty or, alternatively, simply the West's supine victims. Their reception and remolding of Western ideas and techniques for their own lives set limits to the nature and extent of their domination by European power-holders. At the beginning of the period considered by this book, the world was still a multi-centered one. East Asia, South Asia, and Africa retained dynamism and initiative in different areas of social and economic life, even if powerful competitive advantages had already accrued to Europeans and their overseas colonists. By the end of the period, following the rise of Japan and the beginnings of extra-European nationalisms, Europe's "lead" had been significantly challenged. A history of this period, therefore, has to demonstrate a number of different and apparently contradictory things. It has to chart the interdependence of world events, while allowing for the brute fact of Western domination. At the same time it has to show how, over large parts of the world, this European domination was only partial and temporary.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The Birth of the Modern World is a reflection on, rather than a narrative of, world history. Chapters 3, 4, 6, and the final chapter attempt to construct a history of world events for chronological sections within the long period from 1780 to 1914. They contrast periods of relative stability with periods of worldwide crisis. Their aim is to select and emphasize certain connections between broad series of political and economic changes. Chapter 3, for example, reemphasizes the ideological and political links between the revolutionary age in Europe and North America in the generation after 1776 and the contemporary surge forward of European dominance over non-Europeans in the "first age of global imperialism." Recent reinterpretations of the 1848 revolutions in Europe have made it possible to view other great events, such as the convulsions in mid-century China and the great rebellion of 1857-9 in India, from related vantage points. Chapter 4 considers the American Civil War as a global event, not simply as an American crisis. In chapter 6, late-nineteenth-century nationalism, imperialism, and ethnic exclusions are considered within the same field of analysis, rather than separately, as has often been the case.

These chapters reemphasize the proposition that national histories and "area studies" need to take fuller account of changes occurring in the wider world. Ideas and political movements "jumped" across oceans and borders from country to country. For instance, by 1865 the end of the Civil War allowed American liberals to give support to the radical Mexican government of Benito Juarez, which was under assault from French-backed conservatives.

The Mexican radicals had already received enthusiastic support from Giuseppe Garibaldi and other revolutionaries who had been the heroes of the 1848 rebellions against authority in Europe.¹¹ Here, common experiences gave rise to a united front across the world. But, equally, exposure to global changes could encourage literati, politicians, and ordinary people to stress difference rather than similarity. By the 1880s, the impact of Christian missionaries and Western goods, for example, had made Indians, Arabs, and Chinese more aware of their distinctive religious practices, forms of physical deportment, and the excellence of their local artisans. In time, this sensibility of difference itself also created further global links. Indian artists looked to their Japanese contemporaries as inheritors of a pure aesthetic tradition and incorporated their style into their own works. The aim throughout the book is to combine what might be called “lateral history” of this sort – the history of connections – with “vertical history,” the history of the development of particular institutions and ideologies.

Chapters 1, 2, 5, and the second half of the book, therefore, are more thematic in approach. These chapters consider the great social concepts which have been used by historians, as they were by nineteenth-century writers and publicists, to characterize the dominant changes of the nineteenth century. Among these concepts, the rise of the modern state, science, industrialization, liberalism, science, and “religion” appear to be the most important. The purpose of these chapters is to bring together material from a range of regional and national histories in order to demonstrate how these institutions and ideologies became rooted and empowered in different places and at different periods of time. They attempt to provide 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 center. Here again, the book insists on the importance of the activity of colonized and semi-colonized non-European peoples, and of subordinated groups within European and American society in shaping the contemporary world order. So, for instance, the reconstitution of the European Roman Catholic hierarchy after 1870 was part of a much wider process of constructing “world religions” which was taking place in the Hindu, Confucian, and Buddhist worlds as much as the Christian. This is not just a matter of analogy, but of direct causation. Christian churches often began to cooperate and create new organizations at home precisely because they needed solidarity in overseas mission activity, where they found themselves under pressure from a revived Islam or other religious traditions spreading amongst their formally dependent subjects.

The book ends with a view of the period before the First World War, when diplomatic rivalries and international economic changes were facing the system of states and empires with unexampled pressures. The First World War, as Hew Strachan emphasized,¹² was decidedly a world war, even if it started as a civil war within the European core of the world system. That conflict was not “inevitable,” but its explosive force, which was to echo down through the twentieth century, resulted from the flowing together of multiple local crises, many of them originating outside Europe itself.

The writing of world history raises many acute questions of interpretation and presentation. We consider three of them here, before opening the discussion by considering the growth of uniformity in one particular area, the realm of human bodily practice.

PROBLEM ONE: “PRIME MOVERS” AND THE ECONOMIC FACTOR

Most professional historians still have at the back of their minds the question of “why things changed.” Historians and philosophers who lived in the nineteenth century tended to think that history was moved along by big spiritual and intellectual changes. They believed that God, or the Spirit of Reason, or the Urge for Liberation was moving in the world. Some of them believed in a European Christian “civilizing mission.” Others thought that races and civilizations moved up and down according to natural laws of competition, survival, and decline. In the twentieth century, materialist explanations of change came to the fore. By 1950, many leading historians had been influenced by socialist theories and saw the logic of industrial capitalism as the dominant force explaining changes in human affairs after 1750. This perspective remains central. At one level, it must be true that the critical historical change in the nineteenth century was the shift of the most powerful states and societies towards urban industrialism. The desire of capitalists to maximize their income and to subordinate labor was an inexorable force for change, not just in the West, but across Asia and Africa.

The most powerfully written and consistent of all the English-language world histories in print, Eric Hobsbawm’s great four-volume work,¹³ makes this explicit, especially his *The Age of Capital*. However, as Perry Anderson remarked when Hobsbawm’s autobiography was published in 2002, the great political and intellectual developments of the nineteenth century did not necessarily work on a time scale which directly reflected the underlying growth of the power of industrial capital.¹⁴ The movements of economies, ideologies, and states were not always synchronous. They tended to be interactive. The French Revolution, the dominant political event of the period, occurred before significant industrialization had occurred even in Britain, and few historians now see the revolution as a triumph of the “bourgeoisie.” Certainly, many lawyers and “middling people” took part in the revolution, but they were hangers-on of nobles and regional assemblies, rather than incipient capitalists. Even in 1870, the high age of capital, according to Hobsbawm’s interpretation, landowners and aristocrats remained the power-holders in most societies. The later nineteenth century was indeed “the age of capital,” but even this period cannot be “reduced” to capital. It was also the age of nobles, landowners, and priests, and, over much of the world, an age of peasants.

In view of these problems, some historians towards the end of the twentieth century cast the state and “governmentality,” particularly the domineering, categorizing, Western-style state, as the “prime mover” in their historical