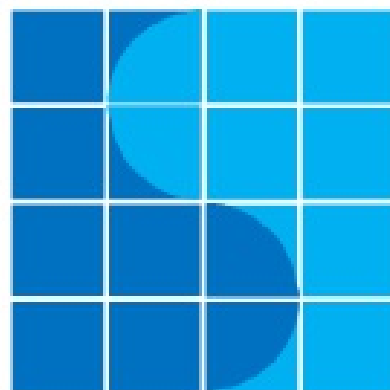


Trajectories

Newsletter of the ASA
Comparative and Historical Sociology Section
Vol 28 No 2 · Winter 2017



Global Transformation in the Context of Historical Sociology

Editor's Note: The following is based on remarks delivered by Wolfgang Streeck, Ho-Fung Hung, Mishaal Al-Gergawi, and Monica Prasad at the Gaidar Economic Forum in Moscow on January 14, 2017. Trajectories thanks Fiona Greenland for editing their remarks, which first appeared on the section's blog, Policy Trajectories (<http://policytrajectories.asa-comparative-historical.org/>).

Introduction: A Russian Twist on Davos

Georgi Derluguian
New York University, Abu Dhabi

The Gaidar Economic Forum in Moscow is a splendid occasion to practice the ethnography of ruling elites. Every January it convenes a crowd of several hundred people including acting

Section Officers

CHAIR
Kim Voss
University of California, Berkeley

CHAIR-ELECT
George Steinmetz
University of Michigan

PAST CHAIR
Monica Prasad
Northwestern University

SECRETARY-TREASURER
Colin J. Beck
Pomona College (2017)

COUNCIL
Cedric de Leon
Providence College (2017)
Anne Kane
University of Houston (2017)
Stephanie Mudge
University of California, Davis (2018)

Robert Jansen
University of Michigan (2018)

Melissa Wilde
University of Pennsylvania (2019)

Tasleem J. Padamsee
Ohio State University (2019)

Diana Rodríguez-Franco
Northwestern University (Student, 2017)

WEBMASTER
Şahan Savaş Karataşlı,
Princeton University (2015)

NEWSLETTER EDITORS
Matthew Baltz
University of California, Los Angeles (2014)
Marilyn Grell-Brisk
Université de Neuchâtel (2016)
Victoria Reyes
University of Michigan (2016)
Yibing Shen
Brown University (2016)

CONTENTS

Book Symposium

Page 12 Ho-Fung Hung's *The China Boom*

Features and News

Page 26 Conference Report: Digitized (Big) Data and Comparative Historical Sociology

Page 38 Op-Ed Corner: Evans, Shefner, and Duina on Trump, Trade, and Economic Nationalism

Page 44 Spotlight: Section Working Groups

Page 46 Tribute: William H. McNeill (1917-2016)

Page 51 Section News

and former politicians, central bankers, business journalists, corporate executives, provincial governors, and us, the academic experts'. What makes it different from the bigger event in Davos is, of course, the peculiarity of Russian politics: both the awkward international marginalization of a former superpower and the long-running internal division of Russian elites into liberal modernizers and hardliners. Yet these conventional labels stand for more complex historical genealogies that one might think.

The Forum is named after the late Yegor Gaidar, a key market reformer in the chaotic aftermath of Soviet collapse. This family name is legendary to all former Soviets. Arkady Gaidar, the economist's grandfather, was only eighteen when he commanded a Red Army regiment during the civil war (1918-1921). Later in the 1920s he wrote the romantic revolutionary tales for children that, next to the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky, powerfully imagined the new Soviet identity centered on the heroic defense of a socialist future for the whole of humankind. His son, Rear Admiral Timur Gaidar, in 1961 was Soviet adviser in Cuba helping to repel the Bay of Pigs invasion. Yegor Gaidar, a grandson of the revolutionary dynasty, remembered how in those days he received a pistol from Che Guevara himself. Yet by the age of thirty Yegor Gaidar, already chief economics editor at the *Kommunist*, the theoretical journal of the Party, was led by his own Marxist analysis to the realization that sheer ideological will could not violate the logic of historical stages. Russia would have to have its bourgeois revolution, after all. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 ushered this clandestine ideological debate into the brutal realm of revolutionary policy. The momentarily disorganized nuclear superpower suddenly faced wholesale bankruptcy, provincial separatism, and starvation in its biggest towns. Free markets introduced in a bang were then seen as both an economic

solution and a political weapon against the bureaucracies of the old regime.

All three Gaidars were famously charismatic. Yegor gathered around himself a group of young enthusiastic reformers, and in 1991 they decided to seize state power, much like the Bolsheviks did back in 1917. The outcome of their revolutionary project remains as controversial as the outcome of the 1917 revolution. This brief historical overview helps to explain why Gaidar's revolutionaries still gather to debate policy options, although by now many of those revolutionaries look more like cosmopolitan technocrats. Still, a senior Kremlin official admitted with a sly grin that to unwind at the end of the day he watches David Harvey's lectures on *Das Kapital* on his iPad. In another big office I saw Russian translations of Charles Tilly, Randall Collins, and Richard Lachmann on the bookshelves.

Immanuel Wallerstein was first invited to the Forum a few years ago. Addressing in their respective languages the prime ministers of Spain, France, Australia, and Russia, Immanuel proceeded to admit with supreme calm: I am a sociologist and not a politician, not even a former politician (a slight nod to Romano Prodi); therefore optimism is not in my job description. I can analyze only what you already mostly know. After 2008 you threw a lot of money at the crisis. Governments make money in three ways: tax, print, or borrow. Each of these ways, as you know, creates problems down the road. States can also use repression but that comes with its own escalating costs. These structural conditions in the coming 10-15 years will be severely limiting to all politics in the world-system. You can do relatively little but at least we should try to minimize the pain.

Interestingly, the Russian hosts, at least privately, seemed thrilled with Wallerstein's no-nonsense approach, and we received more invitations to bring historical sociologists. This

year Wolfgang Streeck, Ho-Fung Hung, Mishaal Al-Gergawi, and Monica Prasad demonstrated their analyses of the four world regions: the European Union, China, the Middle East, and the United States.

“Great Disorder under Heaven”: The Crisis of the Global State System

Wolfgang Streeck

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies

The progress of capitalism, globally and socially, accompanied as it has been for decades now by increasing debt, rising inequality and declining growth, especially but not exclusively in capitalism's core countries, has caused a deep crisis of the modern state system, which translates into a crisis of political-economic governability. New problems – political conflicts over interests, values and identities, as well as technocratic puzzles and impossibilities – are appearing almost by the day, without the old ones having been in any way resolved. Cumulative systemic malfunctions subject the social order of capitalism to a syndrome of multimorbidity, where the diseases that have befallen it are all in equally urgent need of treatment but are too many to be treated simultaneously, also because nobody knows exactly how they might hang together. As a result there is now a growing literature on the “end of capitalism”, even in the absence of organized anti-capitalist political forces that could replace capitalism with a new and better order. One concept that has been suggested for what is shaping up as an era of high uncertainty is that of *interregnum*: a historical period in which much of what had previously been taken for granted and treated like a constant has turned, and is continuing to turn, into variables, without new constants crystallizing as yet.

I begin at the global, macro level. Declining American hegemony deprives global capitalism of the enforcer of last resort that capitalism has historically needed for its progress. The decay of American dominance accelerated with the lost wars of the early twenty-first century, following and in turn reinforcing a loss of strategic orientation, and with the domestic political-economic turbulences associated with de-industrialization and financialization. Global disappointment and domestic decay co-produced the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, with his turn to protectionism-cum-isolationism: “America first!” (As to isolationism, Trump no more than ratifies a trend that was present already under Obama, with his refusal to send ground troops to Libya and Syria, his inaction with respect to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, his withdrawal from Iraq making space for ISIS, his attempted withdrawal from Afghanistan etc.).

As Arrighi reminded us, capitalism has always needed a carrier nation that provided it with internal stability, especially with a reliable money and with imperial peace on its periphery, where obedient regimes were required for delivery of cheap raw materials and the opening up of new markets for the products of the center, replacing traditional with modern economic practice. That role, having successively been performed by Genova, the Netherlands, and Britain, was taken over by the United States in 1945, after a disastrous global rivalry in the 1930s between the two Anglo-American democracies and Nazi Germany and Japan for the prerogatives and benefits of hegemony (“*seigneurialism*”). Today a vacuum is developing that may make China claim a share in the responsibility for the maintenance of global order. There is no historical precedent, however, of a peaceful co-directorate of the capitalist global economy. If it is true that the Trump administration is planning to end Obama's phony cold war with

Russia, the motive behind this may be to get ready for an impending confrontation with China.

Moving on to the level of what are still called nation-states, “globalization” has meant a deep penetration of nationally constituted societies by increasingly international markets and corporations. The center-left consensus of the past two decades had been that national political economies had to be opened up to the world, to be inserted in the increasingly global markets of contemporary capitalism, in order not to fall back hopelessly in global competition. This involved deregulation of social protection – or better, re-regulation for the purpose of increasing the “competitiveness”, external as well as internal, of the respective national economic societies. In the process, the number of “losers” in the widest sense – economic as well as cultural – kept growing slowly but continuously, until it reached a threshold where it became politically potent. That moment occurred more or less simultaneously across advanced capitalist societies when it transpired that the promised fast recovery from the global crisis of 2008 was a chimera, and when post-crisis growth was found to be even more unequally distributed – in some countries, limited to the top one percent – than had been the case before the financial breakdown. Politically, rising electoral participation in a large number of countries benefited, not the established center-right and center-left parties that had long joined the internationalist consensus. Instead voters turned to new, no-longer-centrist and increasingly radical parties, or movements, from both the left and the right, summarily called “populist” by their older, up to then safely institutionalized rivals. Where the left was unable to offer the new countermovement against capitalist expansion a class-theoretical explanation of their perceived and actual exclusion from the new kind of capitalist progress –towards a de-industrialized, “post-

industrial” “knowledge society” or “service economy” – what typically remained for it was recourse to a language of nationalism and even nativism.

Right-wing “populism” has not yet been able to achieve a governing majority in any country, except perhaps the United States. But it is now strong enough almost everywhere in the Western world to make forming a government difficult if not impossible for traditional democratic parties. Even where this is not or not yet the case, traditional governments find themselves increasingly forced to be in some way responsive to the concerns of the new

The new political and social cleavage that seems about to immobilize the politics of advanced capitalist democracy tends to come with, and to be reinforced by, a growing division between the big, often “global” cities on the one hand and their surrounding countryside on the other. That division is not only about incomes, with cities being the new growth pole of post-industrial society, but also about cultural and social values.

opposition and its constituents. Uppermost among these are limitations on free trade and controls on immigration, to protect the economic position of the resident population from decline, and their social life from disintegration. The new political and social cleavage that seems about to immobilize the politics of advanced capitalist democracy tends to come with, and to be reinforced by, a growing division between the big, often “global” cities on the one hand and their surrounding countryside on the other. That division is not only about incomes, with cities

being the new growth pole of post-industrial society, but also about cultural and social values. While global cities' lifeworld is "cosmopolitan" and "liberal", in the sense of accepting global competition and exchange, including migration across national borders, people in the rest of the country, who often had to move out of the cities because they could no longer afford living there, tend to feel left behind and abandoned, excluded from the new wellsprings of prosperity, and betrayed by a state that no longer regards it as its duty to save its citizens from foreign competition.

The crisis of the modern state system is omnipresent, not just in the advanced centers of capitalism but also on its periphery. There, BRICS democracies are sinking into corruption and stagnation (Brazil, Russia, South Africa), and the number of "failed states" is growing almost every day, from West Africa to Pakistan. An important regional manifestation of systemic failure is the ongoing disintegration of what once presented itself as an "ever closer union of the peoples of Europe". Brexit must be seen as one of many symptoms of a crisis of political-economic governability, a crisis which is essentially about the appropriate scale of governance in a globalized capitalist economy. For the British electorate, organized "Europe", in the form the European Union, seemed too big to be responsive to their specific concerns and interests. Shortly before they had voted to leave the EU and place their hope on a renewal of "national sovereignty", the Scots had almost voted to leave the UK because to them it seemed too big as well. At the same time, Scottish "nationalists" intended and still intend to stay in the EU in case of Scottish independence, and indeed to join EMU, the European Monetary Union, presumably because they felt an independent Scotland to be too small for specific economic purposes. The situation is similar in Spain, where Catalonia and, perhaps, other regions regard themselves as "nations" that, however, want to belong to

integrated "Europe" if they were to become independent.

Problems of state formation, and indeed re-formation, are most pronounced in Europe with respect to EMU, where the general crisis of governability and political cohesion looms particularly large. In the years since 2008, it has become increasingly clear that the imposition of a one-size-fits-all hard currency regime on a collection of sovereign nation-states with distinctly different economic institutions and traditions has detracted from political-economic governability rather than restored it. Like most other political entities in the era of globalization, economic disparities within Euroland have grown for more than a decade now, giving the lie to "narratives" about economic convergence through free markets and sound money. Prescriptions of neoliberal institutional "reform" for lagging countries, especially in the Mediterranean, so as to make them compatible with monetary stability, amount to large-scale replacement of social solidarity with economic competition, and of collective citizen entitlements with individual economic achievement. Not only are such reforms of doubtful effectiveness economically but they have turned out to be unacceptable socially and politically, fueling the growth of "populist" "anti-Europeanism" and thereby paralyzing "reform-oriented" government. Meanwhile Germany, long used to hard currency constraints and having learned to live with them, is becoming the economic capital of Euroland, without there being any political possibility of effective international redistribution or regional policy. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that the euro will very soon have to undergo fundamental reform, returning some degree of monetary sovereignty to less "competitive" countries. Without it, it will break apart in the next five years or so in an economic and political disaster for the countries involved as well as for Europe as a whole.

European uncertainties about political scale powerfully manifest themselves in the unending complexities of the relationship between Brussels and national capitals, as well as between Brussels and Barcelona, Brussels, London and Edinburgh, the EU and its nonmembers, like Norway and Switzerland, or EMU and its nonmembers Denmark and Sweden. All these have to do with the unsolved question of what is better for a resident political community in the global economy of today, being small or being big, and how small and how big. Ultimately, the issue at stake here is the function of nation-state borders under globalization: how much control over their borders organized political communities (still) need in order to serve their citizens; how big those communities are to be; and of what kind the cross-border movements are that should (still or again) be subject to “national” control. (This same issue has, in somewhat different form, from the first day been paramount in the policies of the new American administration, from immigration to free trade agreements.) In Europe, it is the complexities associated with the governance of internationalized capitalism that underlies the refusal of the “European” establishment to debate publicly what the French call the finalité of the European Union: the final state of the European state, as it were, and the role the historical nation-states of Europe within it. Will “Europe” be better off with a big-size centralized super-state? Or should it rather be a loose association of smaller, more agile and more responsive nation-states, sovereign under a modernized Westphalian international regime? In a fundamental crisis of statehood, caused by an accelerated widening and deepening of capitalist development, this question may for a long time be impossible to answer, notwithstanding the growing political and economic risks associated with leaving it open. When the Chairman observed “great disorder under heaven”, he took the view that “the

situation is excellent”. On the latter we may not necessarily agree with him.

Can We Have Globalization without the US?

Ho-Fung Hung

Johns Hopkins University

Anti-Globalism is on the rise. The US has just elected a new president running on an anti-globalization platform, promising to withdraw the US from major multilateral trade deals, force US companies to move their manufacturing operations overseas back home, and raise high tariffs against foreign imports. All of a sudden, the US, which has been a world leader pushing for globalization over the last three decades, is on the way to becoming the champion of de-globalization. What might this mean for China?

Many commentators’ knee jerk reaction to US retreat from globalization is to ask whether China, the second largest economy in the world and the greatest beneficiary of globalization, would take the lead to become the new leader of globalization. Many claim that America’s inward turn offers China the best opportunity to assume global leadership. Fareed Zakaria wrote that “Trump could be the best thing that’s happened to China in a long time,” Washington Post ran an article titled “Trump kills TPP, giving China its first big win.” The globalization to follow will be conducted under the rules written by China, not the US, they say.

The question is, can China really take the place of the US to lead globalization? Can we have continuous globalization without US leadership? The answers to both questions are no. Expansion of global free trade since the 1980s has been largely driven by American consumerism. Globalization will be hard to

move forward without this consumerism and without US maintenance of its market openness to the world.

For decades, the US has been running the largest trade deficit with the world, while every other major economy (Europe, China, Japan, etc) has been running surpluses of different sizes. Since the 1980s, the US has been leading the world into globalization through opening its own market for foreign manufactured exports in exchange for its trading partners' openness to US investment. The result is a massive exodus of US manufacturers to low wage countries like Mexico and China, manufacturing consumer goods there and exporting them back to the US.

It is how the global supply chain network, the bedrock of globalization, was born. Export-oriented economies like Japan and China import raw materials and components from around the world, and then they turn these ingredients into final consumer products like cell phones and toys to be sent to the US and other consumer markets. The US is always "the consumer of last resort" for the global economy. Without US consumers, there will be no globalization.

This special role of the US consumer market in the global economy is not accidental. It is the outcome of two historical developments dating back decades or even a century ago. First, as Monica Prasad points out in her *Land of Too Much*, American political economy is unique compared with other advanced capitalist economies. The US tax system promotes consumption and represses savings through the absence of heavy federal-level sales tax and myriad tax deductions for specific kinds of consumption. In contrast, tax systems in France, Germany, and Japan have been promoting savings and export, and repressing consumption through heavy value-added taxes. The uniqueness of the US fiscal structure can be traced back to its late-nineteenth-century

high agricultural productivity (and hence overproduction problem), as well as the importance of agricultural states' voters in the political system.

While American capitalism has been uniquely biased toward consumerism, the role of the US dollar as the global reserve currency since 1945 allows and necessitates the US to run large current account deficits with the world. To maintain the dollar's grip on the world economy—and to continue as the default currency of international transaction and denominator of foreign exchange reserves across the world—the US has to provide the world with sufficient liquidity through a massive outflow of its money. This foments a

If the world is resolved to pursuing globalization without the US, we will need to first find consumers to replace American consumers...To push for globalization without the US, many export-oriented countries will have to undertake fundamental economic restructuring to lift the consumption share of the economy.

chronic and large current account deficit by the US with its global trade partners. As such, a large and expanding trade deficit is tolerable, if not necessary, to the functioning of the American economy.

The dual uniqueness of the US political economy has enabled the US to lead the process of globalization over the last few decades. If the world is resolved to pursuing globalization without the US, we will need to first find consumers to replace American consumers. Yes, consumption has been rising in many emerging economies like China. But

the increase in production capacity in these countries often outpaces the increase in consumption, bringing forth a chronic excess capacity that has been digested by the US and other deficit countries. To push for globalization without the US, many export-oriented countries will have to undertake fundamental economic restructuring to lift the consumption share of the economy. This cannot be done easily over the short term. So no, we can't advance globalization without the US, as least not for now.

A Road to Peace in West Asia

Mishaal Al Gergawi

Delma Institute, Abu Dhabi

The situation in West Asia may seem hopeless. Syria is in a civil war that has turned the country into a global breeding ground for extremism. Iraq continues to struggle under sectarian and secessionist tensions, weak governance and high levels of corruption. A resolution to the conflict in Yemen remains elusive with a looming humanitarian crisis. Bahrain's internal tensions are far from resolved. Lebanon may have finally been able to agree on a president, but it's unclear what its path for normalisation is. There is an overarching theme in the region, the resolution of which would have far-reaching consequences. While all of these countries' challenges have genuine domestic roots, the so-called Sunni-Shia crisis continues to accentuate it. The resolution of that crisis would go a long way towards peace in West Asia – at least its Arab parts. Here's what the road to that peace between Iran and the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, looks like.

Every revolutionary state by nature of its aims is viewed as illegitimate by its neighbours. Discerning embattlement, that sense of heterogeneity quite quickly drives that

revolutionary state to expand. America, in early steps towards manifest destiny, defied the British by expanding westwards beyond the proclamation line of the Appalachian Mountains. France did similarly in its first revolutionary wars against Britain, Austria and other monarchies, and later during the Napoleonic wars across Europe. Russia charted its own expansionary course west towards Poland, south towards the south Caucasus and Central Asia, and South East towards Mongolia.

The Iranian revolution, feeling no less embattled than previous revolutions, is no different. However, unlike the earlier three, Iraq's Saddam Hussein interrupted it from immediately expanding in the same way. Locked in a war for eight years, except the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, Iran wasn't able to significantly expand its revolutionary footprint. Due to mere incompetence, Saddam, much better armed and supported by the West and Gulf countries, failed to win the war and invade Tehran. For the fledgling Iranian regime, the survival of the war was a huge victory, even providential. Muslim Shias' political memory is one of victimhood and usurpation of rights. So in many ways, the survival of the war was viewed as confirmation that God blessed the revolution. However, it also left a huge trauma within the leadership of the revolution. This applies across the spectrum today from President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif to Parliament Speaker Larijani and head of Quds Force Soleimani. For them, I suspect, they never forgot that the West and GCC countries supported Iraq in the war. While the West cannot be trusted but has things to offer such as markets and technology, the Arab Gulf states are viewed less crucially.

Following the September 11 attacks, the American invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan opened up the region for Iran. It is now finally having that belated expansion that is necessary

for revolutions. Iran today has significant activities of varying degrees in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It also regularly opines on the state of Shias in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In many ways, Iran is no longer a revolutionary power but rather a status quo power. For Iran, Waterloo is not lost. And so for them, the survivors of the Revolution and the wars of the eighties, it's hard to seek peace and reconciliation with Gulf countries. An older generation must pass, and a new one must come to power with a more contemporary memory. That is the challenge on that side of the gulf.

For Gulf countries, their challenge is to demonstrate to Iran, and the world, that they are not cities of salt. Because, like Singapore and South Korea, they are ahistorical. They must show that they will continue to defy the gravity of history. The Iranians believe the Gulf will fail. I think their regional strategy is to ultimately replicate Syria in West Asia as a whole. Effectively, this presents the world with a stark choice between a pro-Iran camp and radicalisation. In the case of Syria, European countries, on the whole, have become resigned to the survival of the Ba'ath Party regime, with Bashar Al Assad eventually being removed as a fig leaf of change. The Iranians believe that the Gulf will fail because of its generous welfare state, its dependency on oil and inability to diversify, and its absence of comparable millennia-old civilisation. Fundamentally, these factors drive a perception of the Gulf States lacking resilience. Hence, with Turkey effectively preoccupied with its internal reordering, the world should depend on Iran for delivering this region to them. In this context, the Gulf must embark on a radical transformation. This would probably include some version of NATO (possibly with Egypt and Jordan), genuine and sustained diversification of the economy, restructuring of the welfare state, and massive improvement in the state of education and the labour force. It is

in this light that one should view the young and ambitious deputy crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Bin Salman; he is fighting history: an arc that bends not necessarily forward but against this desert.

If Iran's leadership undergoes a generational change and the Gulf succeeds in its transformation, then there is no reason why a grand understanding or a final conversation can't be had. Together, they could build an economic bloc worth \$3 trillion dollars. Iran boasts human capital, though it suffers a constant brain drain, which regularly does well in Europe and America. It also has a beautiful geography and climate, which could be attractive for tourism. Gulf countries boast capital, excellent infrastructure, and (primarily led by the UAE) effective governance systems. Most significantly the Gulf can offer Iran a state of normalisation. Revolutions do not have finish lines and rarely exit paranoia without feeling intellectually empty. Gulf countries exist in a normalised state where they are broadly reconciled with the world.

This is why I believe peace is possible. All we need is time. Time for Iran to move on and for the Gulf to move up. Once both sides of the Gulf can bridge their gulf, the rest of the region's local issues, though they will remain, will become much less entangled.

Collective Investment, Neoliberal Fragility, and the United States

Monica Prasad
Northwestern University

I am going to focus on the U.S., and I will make three arguments: first, that there's nothing wrong with the American economic system, but the politics are a disaster. Second, the central problem with the politics is that it

has turned away from collective investment. And third, and this is my main point, that this turn away from collective investment is fragile, and is not deeply rooted in the society. In other words, the problems are not inevitable.

So first, on the point that there's nothing wrong with the economic system: recently two very strong arguments have been made that there is something deeply wrong with the economic system, by Wolfgang Streeck and Robert Gordon. Both of them point to causes such as rising inequality, the rise of public and private debt, poor education, deteriorating infrastructure, and financialization. But if you examine these arguments carefully, they come down to politics. The rise of inequality can be addressed by higher taxes and by increased spending, as can the rise of public and private debt. The problem of poor education and infrastructure can both be addressed by investments into education and infrastructure, and if you address these issues you will have gone a long way towards bringing back economic growth. Financialization, many scholars have argued, was itself precipitated by the rise in inequality, and can therefore be addressed by addressing inequality.

In short, if you don't educate your people well and you saddle them with debt and crumbling infrastructure, you probably shouldn't expect a populace that is capable of doing much innovating, and therefore you shouldn't expect much economic growth. But all of these problems—investments in infrastructure, public education, redistribution—these are known and solvable problems. They are all problems of making collective investments into the country. The real problem behind all of these problems is that there has been a rightward turn in politics since the 1980s, which has made collective investment into American public institutions more difficult.

Let's be clear: we are talking about neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is the movement

to lower taxes, deregulate, cut social spending, and in general reduce the role of the government in the economy that took off in the 1970s and 1980s, and what we are seeing today is its fruits.

So those are my first two points: that it's not the economics that is the problem, it's the politics of having abandoned collective investment.

My third point is that this politics of neoliberalism is fragile. I suggest this for three reasons.

First, neoliberalism is recent. In fact throughout its history the American government has intervened in the economy often, heavily, and in redistributive directions. The U.S. is the country that pioneered progressive taxation, for example, and the U.S. had much heavier regulation in the market than European countries until 1980. Neoliberalism is not deeply rooted in American history, it is a departure from American history—although neoliberal politicians have been very successful at making it seem as if neoliberalism is deeply rooted in American history.

The second reason for arguing that neoliberalism is fragile has to do with the origins of neoliberalism. The rise of government intervention did not depend on the rise of labor unions, and the fall of government intervention did not depend on the fall of labor unions. Nor does it have much to do with business interests. In both cases, both the rise of government intervention and the decline of government intervention, the policies were a populist political response to real economic problems that were widespread in the country. In both cases, the responses did not actually solve the problems—in both cases it seems to have been heavy military spending that provided the stimulus that reinvigorated the economy—but this does suggest that at least from the 1930s to the 1980s, the American

system had the capacity to listen to and attempt to solve problems that were causing distress among the public. What the people think matters.

So what do the people think? Interview and survey research finds that there is no deep constituency for free market policies in this country. A majority of Americans consistently answer that government has a major role to play in areas as diverse as reducing poverty,

...I argue that the main problem causing lower economic growth is neoliberalism, that what the people think matters, and that the people do not like neoliberalism.

protecting the environment, and ensuring access to education and health care, and this has been true for decades. Americans do like tax cuts for the middle classes, but they have not signed on to an anti-environmental agenda, or to attempts to cut social spending or disinvest in infrastructure. The rise of neoliberalism was the result of Republicans anchoring their broader agenda in aspects of it that were politically popular (particularly tax cuts) but they have never been able to persuade the public to support the broader agenda.

So to sum up, I argue that the main problem causing lower economic growth is neoliberalism, that what the people think matters, and that the people do not like neoliberalism.

But there is an important caveat: what the people think matters, but what the people think is contradictory. They want tax cuts and they want more spending. This leaves a lot of room for maneuver for politicians who can reasonably claim that they are responding to

democratic demands no matter which side of the equation they pursue, and this is why the neoliberal agenda has been so successful despite the unpopularity of its broader components.

One answer to the contradiction has been for politicians to simply abandon reality. Republicans have long promised that tax cuts would not lead to higher deficits because they would unleash great economic growth. Democratic politicians have generally been more cautious in their claims, but last year in the Democratic primaries we saw one politician attain a measure of success by suggesting that greater government spending would lead to rates of economic growth that no economist thought possible. Trump is the apotheosis of this urge, cheerfully promising to maintain Social Security and Medicare even as he cuts taxes. And neoliberalism can continue as long as this politics continues, that is, as long as politicians can hide the fact that tax cuts mean cuts in collective investment.

But there is only so long that even the most successful demagogue can deny reality. As economic growth stalls, as unemployment increases, as discontent spreads, eventually someone is going to start arguing for the strategies that worked at mid-century, even if it means raising taxes.

We have to be modest in our predictions—especially after our community failed so badly in predicting Trump. Still, prediction helps us orient ourselves, and so with that more modest goal in mind, I think what we ought to pay attention to is whether there are countervailing forces that can translate absence of support for free market policies into government—or, to put it another way, whether America is still democratic. If it is, then we do not have to worry about its economic future. And if it is not—then we have a lot to worry about.

The China Boom

Why China Will Not Rule the World

Columbia University Press

Ho-Fung Hung

Editor's Note: The following text is based on an Author-Meets-Critics session held at the Social Science History Association Annual Meeting in November 2016. My thanks go out to Jack Goldstone, Richard Lachmann, James Mahoney, Dingxin Zhao, and Ho-Fung Hung for contributing their comments to the newsletter. -MGB

China's Coming Crisis

Jack Goldstone

George Mason University

Ho-fung Hung has written a book to confound those who see China's rise as leading to a new global order in which China becomes dominant. China's rise is not subversive of the U.S.- led international economic order. Rather, Hung shows that through its dependence on international trade and investment, and its reliance on the dollar economy and U.S. Treasury bonds as assets, China's rise has been fully part of that order.

Yet Hung's study of China's economic growth pattern since late Imperial times raises another prospect, which is that China is the greatest threat to the existing world economic order. But that is not because its strength will bend that order to its will; rather it is because

China's economic growth has depended on a set of imbalances that are unsustainable. While Hung believes China may still be able to rebalance its economy, my view is that China has had no choice but to double-down on those unsustainable pathways, and that China will crash the global economy through its own excesses.

Hung treats capitalist economic growth as dependent on the accumulation of capital and its deployment to develop industrial capacity. In Europe, this was done by private entrepreneurs who were supported by a state that supported the squeezing of workers and consumers by profit-minded landlords and industrialists. In China, this could not happen under the Empire, which intervened to maintain harmony among peasants, workers, landlords, and merchants by preserving peasant tillers and supporting workers, and by keeping officials socially dominant by limiting the aspirations and accumulation of private capitalists.

In my view, this class-based explanation is not right; I believe landlords and merchants accumulated plenty of capital – indeed more than their private merchant counterparts in Europe. But they could not deploy that capital in mechanized factories and new industries because of cultural and intellectual constraints

(Goldstone 1996, 2012). Nonetheless, Hung and I agree that as the Empire's control began to break down in the nineteenth century, the processes of factory-building and capitalist accumulation through trade were accelerated by international interventions, but then were repeatedly set back by the political disruptions, as civil wars and rebellions reversed progress and drained capital. This cycle continued through the early twentieth century, as Japanese investments in cities and in Manchuria built up industrial capacity, but Japanese invasion and war then devastated China's economy.

Only after Mao's communist party took full control over China and embarked on a program of collectivization of agriculture and forced industrialization did capital start to flow out of the countryside and into industry again. Yet Mao's reign too was marked by reversals, as the disastrous policies of the Great Leap Forward and Proletarian Cultural Revolution again destroyed progress and left China quite poor in the late 1970s.

China's fortunes only began steady improvement when Deng Xiaoping determined that China should not isolate itself from the global economy, but take advantage of global capital flows and consumption patterns. Allowing foreign investment and the creation of firms that exported goods to rich Western countries, China began to develop into an international manufacturing powerhouse. Other changes, including privatization of land ownership and support for township and village enterprises (TVE's) were also necessary to ignite commercial and capitalist growth.

These changes, however, were predicated upon a specific constellation of factors that had built up in the 1950s-1970s: Mao's creation of a vast literate, healthy and well-disciplined but very poor labor force in the countryside that could be transferred to urban factory production; the consumer demands of a growing middle-class

in Europe and North America who had the means and desire to increase material consumption but disdained labor-intensive work; and the technology of low-cost transportation through shipping containers and air freight that knitted global supply lines and boosted import/export trade based on webs of lowest-cost production.

Altogether, these conditions allowed China to deploy its vast labor force in low-wage factories to become the world's leading supplier of manufactured goods, ranging from bulk steel and textiles to shoes, toys, clothing, electronics, and furniture. Meanwhile, the richer countries of Asia, Europe, and North America specialized in design, marketing and higher-value-added products such as autos and airplanes, the complex capital goods for construction, transport, farming and manufacturing, and medical and financial and other services and entertainment.

This happy arrangement fueled a global trade boom and strong economic growth in China and the world from the early 1980s through the late 2000s, a period of almost thirty years in which China enjoyed incredible growth in incomes, reducing global inequality and seeing the rise of China's own upper class of millionaires and billionaires (in dollar terms). Yet China's political system did not change, despite challenges such as the Tiananmen revolt of 1989 and other scattered but smaller protests. Rather, the Communist Party retained control in myriad ways, ranging from incorporating leading private entrepreneurs into the party; to building a vast security apparatus to monitor and control information and dissent; and to keeping state ownership or control of a vast portion of the economy such as banking, mining, insurance, transportation, land sales, military production, energy and metal production, telecommunications, and even hotels, commercial real estate and trading enterprises.

This state control created drags on the economy. By keeping interest rates low and pushing credit to state-directed firms, the state could continue to squeeze consumers while supporting less-profitable but useful companies that provided employment and income to local governments. This did, however, depress private consumption and the overall profit rate in the economy. None of this mattered much when China's economy was still growing at roughly ten per cent per year.

However, in 2007 the excessive consumption and borrowing in the United States came crashing down, triggering a decade of slower economic growth across all of Europe and North America, and affecting emerging markets as well. China's exports plummeted, and to maintain its expected levels of high economic growth, China's government turned to a massive credit-fueled stimulus program, directing banks to lend for fixed capital investments. High-speed railroads, airports, highways, residential and commercial real-estate, and state office buildings and universities all gained from new construction. As Hung shows (Figure 6.4 on p. 162), exports fell from nearly 40% of GDP in 2007 to 25% by 2012, while fixed capital investment rose from one-third of GDP in 2002 to nearly one-half a decade later. Meanwhile, household consumption, though rising in absolute terms, continued to decline as a share of GDP, from 50% in the 1980s to 40% in 2002 and then to 33% in 2012. Even more worrying, as the volume of state-directed fixed capital investment grew and was directed into ever less profitable investments, the GDP growth generated per unit of fixed capital investment plummeted from roughly 1% in the early 1990s and 0.3% in the early 2000s to 0.15% since 2008 (Hung, Figure 6.5, p. 162)

As China enters 2017, it thus faces trends that are major headwinds for growth: exports and household consumption have both fallen as contributors to GDP; growth is therefore now

heavily dependent on continued fixed capital investment. Yet each unit of such investment is yielding smaller returns to growth. To keep up employment and growth, the state has had to double-down on its policy of directing credit to

To avoid disaster, China would have to let state-directed firms fail, redirect credit to private enterprises, reduce ineffective state investments, and encourage private consumption. Yet this is impossible while maintaining strict central government control, as the resulting unemployment, discrediting of state firms, and pushing economic activity out of state hands would undermine the Communist regime.

inefficient state-directed enterprises, which continues to depress consumer spending growth and reduces profitability in the economy as a whole. Since repayment of this burgeoning debt ultimately depends on profits, this pattern of rapidly rising debt and falling profits can only end in disaster.

To avoid disaster, China would have to let state-directed firms fail, redirect credit to private enterprises, reduce ineffective state investments, and encourage private consumption. Yet this is impossible while maintaining strict central government control, as the resulting unemployment, discrediting of state firms, and pushing economic activity out of state hands would undermine the Communist regime. So the government continues to talk about the need for reform while in practice pursuing the opposite course, namely staying with a regime of pushing credit to weak firms and encouraging investments regardless of their profitability or costs.

All of this is reminiscent of the debt trap that led the U.S. into triggering the global recession of 2007. Ever larger sums of credit were poured into investments in residential housing to fuel growth until the debt pyramid collapsed when the underlying income stream could not service the accumulated debts. While Chinese leaders can hope that they need only buy time until global growth, perhaps led by the U.S., will revive so that exports can again power China's economy, or that by exporting its overcapacity through the "New Silk Road" construction projects throughout Asia, China will be able to return to a stable growth path, I fear these hopes are poorly placed. The demographic reality in Europe and the U.S. is that these are now mature, aging societies unlikely to experience rapid growth and consumption binges like those of the years from 1980 to 2000. And the economic reality is that vast transportation and infrastructure investments in most of central and south Asia are not likely to be profitable for many years, as their populations are too small or their economies too inefficient compared to those of China and the West to produce returns comparable to those provided by Chinese and Western growth in past decades. Thus China too is facing a future in which ever larger sums of credit are being poured into investments whose debt payments cannot be supported by plausible increases in profits and income.

Sadly, when the crash of China's economy comes—as it will as long as the Communist Party seeks to tighten its grip ever more firmly—it too will drag the entire global economy into recession. The end of the "the China Boom" will likely mark a coda to the half-century of global capitalist growth since WWII, and usher in a new global economic order. Whether new technologies pioneered by the West such as driverless cars, artificial intelligence, and the internet of things, will then usher in a new era of fast growth and prosperity, or the world will descend into a

"Blade Runner" future of ever greater inequality amid environmental decay, remains to be seen. Either way, Hung is right that China will not rule the world, at least not in the next few decades.

References

Goldstone, Jack A. 1996. "Gender, Work, and Culture: Why the Industrial Revolution came Early to England and Late to China," *Sociological Perspectives* 20: 1-22.

Goldstone, Jack A. 2012. "Divergence in Cultural Trajectories: The Power of the Traditional within the Early Modern." In *Comparative Early Modernities 1100-1800*, edited David Porter (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan), pp. 165-192.

On The China Boom

Richard Lachmann

University at Albany - SUNY

What are the sources and limitations of China's remarkable economic development? Is China posed to replace the U.S. as the world economic hegemon or will the contradictions in China's economy doom its leaders' hopes of continued growth? In this book Ho-fung offers us the clearest analysis we have of the historical origins of China's economic model and for its future prospects. Ho-fung's work is political economy at its best. He shows how change in state policies, and in the class relations and levels of mass mobilization that underlie governmental decisions, shape Chinese economics and have locked China onto a trajectory that is likely to lead to severe recession, financial collapse, and limit China's chances to shape the global economy and geopolitics.

Ho-fung begins with a masterful explanation of China's failure, despite its economic dynamism in earlier centuries, to develop capitalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He brings clarity to a large and often contradictory literature. Ho-fung shows that the Qing state's paternalist protections for peasants undermined

gentry-led economic development. The imperial pattern was decisively broken under Mao, whose government created mechanisms that funneled the agrarian surplus into state-managed industrialization. At the same time, Mao's policies created a healthy and relatively well-educated workforce. Mao's investments formed the bedrock of later Chinese economic growth. Ho-fung sees development as more a matter of state capacity than ideology: He finds that the Nationalist government pursued a similar state-centered developmental policy in the areas of China it controlled in the 1940s and, of course, later in Taiwan. Ho-fung's emphasis on state capacity complements Vivek Chibber's (2003) analysis of Korean and Indian development. Coming from different theoretical approaches, Ho-fung and Vivek's histories of developmental states give primacy to politics. They differ over whom they identify as the crucial actors, and over the long-term consequences of the coalitions that fostered and were cemented into power by development.

China's industrial might was concentrated in state-owned enterprises. The 1980s conversion of state-owned enterprises into for-profit firms, and the granting to those firms a high level of autonomy, served to create a "bureaucratic constituency for market reform" (p. 55). Ho-fung shows that a growing majority of Chinese leaders in recent decades have come from coastal regions that are dominated by export-oriented firms rather than inland areas focused on agriculture. State policies withdrew resources from the countryside, encouraging peasants to move to cities where they became a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap labor that gave China a decisive competitive advantage against firms in both rich and other poor nations. The state's willingness to force peasants and the rural sector to subsidize urban and industrial development is a policy preference that has continued without interruption from Mao through the otherwise quite different administrations of the

subsequent four decades. Ho-fung notes that Mao's emphasis on self-reliance saved China from loading up on foreign debt, thereby preventing a halt to growth that afflicted most of the developing world in the 1980s.

China's development strategy has been among the most successful over the long-term in the history of world capitalism, matched only by the much smaller East Asian Tigers (and by the USSR under Stalin). China's rapid growth has served to reduce global inequality, a finding so robust that it survives even when Ho-fung, in a shrewd analytic move, treats each province as an individual country. However, as China's per capita income surpasses the global mean then China will contribute to global inequality, a development that will be sharpened by the still growing differences between urban coastal and rural interior provinces.

China's model, of strong state control over workers and peasants combined with a high degree of autonomy for local governments to compete for capital and pursue their own developmental projects, made possible the rapid and sustained growth of the export sector from the 1980s on. However, this structure gives private capitalists and self-dealing managers in state-owned enterprises disproportionate power to set China's labor and currency policies. At the same time, local autonomy prevents the sort of strategic allocation of capital and the selection of 'winners' by the state that allowed South Korea and the other East Asian Tigers to prevent the waste of capital on redundant factories that contribute to oversupply and falling prices. As a result, China is not moving up the ladder of more technologically complex and more profitable products. It also prevents the shift toward domestic consumption that could take the pressure off the need to continually increase exports.

Ho-fung shows the limits and contradictions of the export-oriented strategy China has

employed in recent years in an effort to sustain its high rate of growth by undercutting international competitors with low wages and a lack of environmental laws. China's huge and persistent trade surplus can be sustained only as long as its currency remains artificially low, which in turn requires exporters to "sterilize" the surplus by trading dollars and other foreign currency for RMBs. The government's control of what has become a multi-trillion dollar currency reserve allows it to extend credit to state-owned banks, despite their negative equity. The banks, in turn, rollover their loans to state-owned enterprises that are kept in business producing more goods than domestic or international markets can absorb because if banks were to acknowledge that those state-owned enterprises would never again become profitable, they would have to write-off their loans.

Ho-fung notes that there was some rebalancing of China's economy under Hu Jintao, but that effort was undercut by the use of most of the 2009 stimulus to encourage a new wave of lending by banks for yet more redundant factories, shopping malls, real estate developments, and rail lines. Whether the central state can summon the unity and political power to challenge local governments and state-owned enterprises and continue to move resources toward domestic consumption fast enough to prevent a wave of domestic bankruptcies or a collapse of global prices for manufactured goods, remains to be seen. Regardless of China's future trajectory, Ho-fung clearly shows that China's dominance of East Asia differs from that of the pre-modern Sino-centric world. Confucianism, with its expectations of reciprocity, molded China's relations with vassal states. Now China interacts with other countries to secure economic and geopolitical advantage, and in any case it is not the single regional hegemon since it is counterbalanced by the US's military and economic position in East Asia.

The RMB is minor player in global currency markets, mainly because China refuses to open its banking sector to global markets. Such liberalization would sap the party-state's ability to use credit to control the economy. China's investments in the developing world do strengthen those countries' leverage against the US by creating a new source of credit, which China offers on better terms than US or European banks, governments and international agencies. However, while China helps to shift the balance of power from the First to the Third

Ho-fung shows the limits and contradictions of the export-oriented strategy China has employed in recent years in an effort to sustain its high rate of growth by undercutting international competitors with low wages and a lack of environmental laws.

World, China has not yet made the military investment that would allow it to challenge the world system that the US created and undergirds with its ability to project military force anywhere on Earth. Ho-fung's hardnosed analysis of China's weak basis for asserting hegemony challenges more hopeful views of growing room for Chinese-led Third World challenges to the US. Kristen Hopewell's (2016) *Breaking the WTO* asserts that an alliance of China, India and Brazil has stalemated the World Trade Organization, preventing the US from continuing to liberalize world trade on bases that favor US interests. While Hopewell's case is persuasive, it does not follow that the stalemate will be sustained or if it is that it will be followed by Chinese hegemony or a shared BRIC dominance in the WTO. Ho-fung explains why Chinese leverage in international organizations and in the global economy will remain limited.

China and the US thus remain in a symbiotic relationship. China represses labor costs, mainly by limiting the mobility and rights of rural residents. China's undervalued RMB and the low interest paid on savings also serve to transfer income from workers and consumers to the state and large firms. Those savings partly go to build infrastructure and new factories in China, but much of it is exported to the US. However, China's competitive advantage in so many manufacturing sectors means that it would be a poor investment to use that capital inflow for industrial investment in the US, so it is diverted to underwriting the perpetual Federal budget deficit and it fueled the real estate boom that collapsed in 2008. Ho-fung's prognosis is grim: China and the US both are likely to endure frequent recessions and financial collapses in a world system in which Chinese domestic power relations ensure that the world's most populous country makes no serious effort to supplant America's dollar and military hegemony. Only popular mobilization within China can reorient its developmental policy in a more sustainable and egalitarian direction.

References

Chibber, Vivek. 2003. *Locked in Place: State-Building and Late Industrialization in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hopewell, Kristen. 2016. *Breaking the WTO: How Emerging Powers Disrupted the Neoliberal Project*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

China in Latin Americanist Perspective: Three Exercises in Comparison

James Mahoney
Northwestern University

Ho-fung Hung's *The China Boom* is a readable and fascinating book, easily accessible to non-specialists who are interested in comparative development. It addresses some of the most

important questions about both historical and contemporary China. Since I am not an expert on China, I cannot realistically evaluate its arguments on the basis of good knowledge of the case under study. Instead, in this essay, I consider these arguments in light of existing comparative-historical work on Latin America. I carry out this exercise in comparison across three major themes in the book: creating capitalism, sustaining high growth, and reducing world inequality.

Creating Capitalism

A central problem in the new historiography of China involves explaining why an industrial revolution did not occur during the eighteenth-century Qing dynasty (unlike in Europe at the same time). It is puzzling because, on many measures, China was more commercially advanced than Europe. To address this puzzle, Hung offers an argument that melds neatly with explanations of economic take-off during the late colonial period in eighteenth-century Spanish America.

Hung argues that China lacked a substantial core of entrepreneurial elites who could translate wealth in the agrarian sector into urban-industrial growth. As a result, unlike in England, agrarian surplus remained trapped in the countryside. The absence of entrepreneurial elites, in turn, is linked to state policy: the Qing government was hostile to capitalist merchants. This hostility was rooted in the government's paternalistic sympathy for the peasantry.

The parallel with late-colonial Spanish America is intriguing: Those regions with a core of prominent liberal merchants became the most urban and prosperous. These were places like the River Plate territories of Argentina and Uruguay. By contrast, regions lacking entrepreneurial elites languished in rural poverty (e.g., Bolivia, Ecuador). And the explanation for this difference was rooted in

colonial policy: A core of colonial entrepreneurs emerged when colonial authorities created institutions that allowed market-oriented merchants to gain access to surplus that previously had been monopolized by protected commercial actors and landed elites.

Hence, when seen in a Latin Americanist perspective, Hung's work suggests a broad hypothesis about the importance of state policy and institutions for the creation of entrepreneurial elites during historically critical moments. Effective capitalism may well require a bourgeois actor to spur it forward. But that actor is born out of institutions created by the state at an appropriate historical time.

This hypothesis suggests that the key to successful capitalism is the creation of a strong bourgeois actor. State policies that support the market are, in turn, the key to the creation of this actor. I would be curious how Hung reacts to the assertion that broadly market-oriented policies propagated by the state stimulated the birth of capitalism and, by extension, economic prosperity.

Explaining Sustained High Growth

Hung offers a fascinating conjunctural explanation for the capitalist boom in China from 1980 to 2008. He argues that this boom was a product of: (1) the creation of an educated and healthy rural sector under Mao; (2) the rise of exported-oriented and labor-intensive manufacturing in the East Asian Tigers; and (3) the rise of global free trade after 1980. All three of these conditions were necessary ingredients for the sustained high growth in China.

When viewed from a Latin Americanist perspective, Hung's explanation suggests why a similar growth miracle did not occur in Central and South America. Most basically, no Latin American country featured the massive

educated surplus labor force of the Chinese countryside. Those Latin American countries with healthy and educated rural sectors (e.g., Costa Rica) are small in population size. And those countries with larger rural sectors in the region (e.g., the Andean countries) are composed of ethnically marginal peasant producers who are historically isolated from urban sectors.

This last point suggests the importance of ethnic divisions—or the lack thereof in China—for sustained economic growth. From a Latin Americanist perspective, the comparative absence of ethnic divisions in China may have allowed for the education and health policies under Mao in the first place.

Nor could Latin America benefit from the sustained growth of nearby economies in the way that China could with Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Chinese capitalists were part of the economic foundation in the newly industrializing countries of East Asia. This

...when seen in a Latin Americanist perspective, Hung's work suggests a broad hypothesis about the importance of state policy and institutions for the creation of entrepreneurial elites during historically critical moments. Effective capitalism may well require a bourgeois actor to spur it forward. But that actor is born out of institutions created by the state at an appropriate historical time.

position poised China for its own take-off once capitalist reforms were launched. In highly dependent Latin America, by contrast, the turn toward capitalism after 1980 afforded no

similar opportunities. Instead, the capitalism was a harsh remedy for economic downturn imposed in significant measure by the United States and its organizations.

More generally, the looming presence of the United States has historically prevented social revolutions in Latin America from making the kinds of health and education gains that China enjoyed. Social revolutionary cases such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Bolivia have made social gains, but they also have invariably faced harsh economic sanctions from the United States (or much worse), which have undermined wellbeing in other ways. Hence, from a Latin Americanist perspective, China is distinctive in that socialist revolutionary consolidation could unfold—for better and for worse—without being totally distorted by outside interference.

Reducing Global Inequality

Hung makes it clear that the question of whether China's recent growth has decreased global inequality depends on the extent to which internal inequality within China has offset growth in the country as a whole. To date, he finds, internal inequality has not offset the gains of rapid growth for reducing global inequality. China's growth across the country has, for the moment, been higher than the global average and thus has reduced global inequality.

As China continues to grow, however, it will soon exceed the global average for wealth and thus begin to contribute to global inequality. Reducing global inequality will then depend on the growth of other countries that are below average wealth. Included here will be many of the countries of Latin America.

The extent to which Latin American growth has been dependent on China is notable. Latin American primary product exporters have been growth beneficiaries of a surging China. This growth has helped to sustain democracy, which

in turn has been associated with some social gains under leftist administrations.

Yet there is reason for pessimism about sustained high growth in Latin America. For one thing, Hung's analysis makes clear that we should be pessimistic about high growth in China over the long run; and a slowdown in China will undercut Latin American exports. Moreover, the contemporary phase of primary product exporting in Latin America carries some of the same problems of dependence as during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Certainly, this history does not give us reason to believe that the gains from primary product exporting will translate into an endogenous growth pattern that can sustain itself.

The lesson for Latin America from China may be the importance of achieving gains in health and education while export-led growth remains viable. These gains are worthy in themselves. And they may provide a stronger foundation for broad-based development in the future, much as social achievements under Mao provided a foundation for sustained growth in China in our times.

On The China Boom

Dingxin Zhao
University of Chicago

Ho-Fung Hung's book examines the historical origins, scope, and consequences of China's recent economic boom. It also analyzes, with great nuances, the positive and negative unintended consequences of this boom, and the deep problems that China needs to tackle for such a boom to last a bit longer.

It is a book of many insights. Readers can learn a great deal from the book, particularly its analysis of how the Chinese economy depends on the neo-liberal order of the world, how the

US and Chinese economies are deeply entwined, how the China boom has helped to maintain the hegemony of the US, and what are the weaknesses of the Chinese economy and the challenges that it faces.

I want to make clear at the onset that I agree with most of the arguments and conclusions of the book. I agree with Hung that China did not have a chance to have an indigenous development of industrial capitalism, despite of its great economic prosperity in the 18th

In many ways, this is a timely book because China is currently facing a serious and prolonged economic slowdown and some “predictions” of the book have already become a reality. If I were compelled to offer a critique, I would say that Hung’s book has neglected the role of ideologies and culture in the analysis.

century. With Hung, I also do not think that China’s economic boom is reversing the long-term economic polarization between the industrialized West and the industrializing rest, that it constitutes a new model for developing countries to follow, and that China is challenging or even replacing the US domination.

In many ways, this is a timely book because China is currently facing a serious and prolonged economic slowdown and some “predictions” of the book have already become a reality. If I were compelled to offer a critique, I would say that Hung’s book has neglected the role of ideologies and culture in the analysis.

One of the most important prerequisites for a successful late economic development is modern state building and nation building. Yet,

successful state building and nation building would be hard without the existence of a homogeneous culture and identity. It is important that an analysis of China’s recent economic boom does not overlook the historical legacies of Confucianism and the social institutions that supported it. Although the dominance of Neo-Confucianism and alliances between the state elite and the Confucian gentry in late imperial China had precluded the rise of bourgeois power and an indigenous rise of industrial capitalism, the shared elite culture and a strong state tradition that Confucian culture and institutions had helped to create are very beneficial to the building of a modern nation state. In fact, thanks to the existence of a sustained pre-modern state and culture building, all East Asian countries with the exception of North Korea have enjoyed successful economic development.

Hung argues that the market reform after Mao is as much an outgrowth of the Maoist path of development as a break from it (p.43). To this argument I can only agree partially. While the land reform, mass education, public health programs, infrastructure build-up, and construction of an extensive network of state-owned industry during the Mao era had contributed to the post-1978 economic success, without the fundamental shift from Mao’s ideological fantasy and the disastrous Cultural Revolution to Deng’s pragmatic approach, China will be another North Korea and China’s current economic achievement is impossible.

Moreover, do we really need to add Mao’s social engineering projects to explain China’s economic success? I personally think we do not. When the world had its most devastating economic crisis in the 1930s and foreign capital withdrew from China, China was experiencing an economic boom. Had China’s modernization not disrupted by the Japanese invasion and subsequent civil war and rise of Communism, I strongly suspect that the Chinese economy

could have risen during the Republican era. In other words, China's economic success is over-determined, and this over-determination is the result of a tradition of strong state and homogeneous elite culture.

In explaining China's current economic slowdown, Hung may have put too much emphasis on economic reasons. All the economic reasons cited by Hung are more or less true. What I want to add are another two important reasons behind the current economic slowdown, that is, Chinese officials are no longer as motivated to work hard to promote the local economy as before and China's businessmen have become more worried about China's political situation. Ever since the 1980s, pundits have never judged the Chinese economy as healthy and the "coming collapse of China" has been a perennial prediction. China was nevertheless able to struggle through the difficulties largely thanks to the existence of hard working (yet corrupted) cadres and highly motivated entrepreneurs. But now, Chinese officials are discouraged by Chinese president Xi's rigorous anti-corruption campaigns, and businessmen are disheartened by Xi's leftist rhetoric. Both the anti-corruption campaigns and the leftist rhetoric are manifestations of Xi's ideological orientation.

Finally, unlike Hung, I see no sign of major social unrest even though China is experiencing a serious economic slowdown. In the last ten years or so, hundreds of millions of Chinese became millionaires overnight largely thanks to the great urban expansion (a phenomenon that Hung has not paid much attention in his book). These Chinese live off the rent and enjoy enormous wealth. This is why close to 117 million Chinese traveled abroad in 2016, and their spending has caught wide media attention. So far, China's economic slowdown has affected business and state tax much more than the lives of the ordinary people. More importantly, Chinese today is ideologically

highly divided, liberal democracy is no longer the only dominant ideology in China, and above all, the rest of the world no longer provides "better" alternatives to inspire the Chinese as it has done in the past. All this precludes China from having another revolution-like social unrest of 1989, at least in the near future.

From Boom to Bust to Blade Runner?: A Response to Critics

Ho-fung Hung
Johns Hopkins University

I have to thank Goldstone, Lachmann, Mahoney, and Zhao for their close reading and thoughtful critique of *The China Boom*. Each of them summarizes certain aspects of the book in a way that is much more effective than what I could have done. With different levels of research specialty on China, they are all macro-historical sociologists. Their insights show how comparative historical perspectives could offer us the capabilities to see the "big structures and large processes" in our world (à la Charles Tilly). These capabilities are what many traditional area specialists need badly. Employing such a perspective to explicate the deep roots and project the future trajectory of China's recent stellar development is exactly what *The China Boom* is intended for.

In *The China Boom*, I am pessimistic about the short- and medium-term prospects for Chinese development (and somewhat optimistic about the long term). My assessment is that China's slowing and debt-burdened economy is entering a prolonged period of stagnation like what Japan experienced after the 1990s.

When I just completed the first draft in 2014, China still appeared to be a roaring economy on the surface. My investigation of China's long-term growth pattern in comparative perspective, on the contrary, generates a much

less sunny projection of the Chinese economy. My view was a heretic one among many observers of Chinese political economy back then. After the 2008 global crisis, the financial sector in the US, together with the many authors and media outlets tied to it, were earnest in selling the Chinese goldmine story. They tried to lure investors into all kinds of China-related investment products, with the Goldman Sachs' BRIC fund as one example. My historically informed analysis is like an uphill battle against many scholars and commentators who tend to see the exuberance of the present as eternal. A *New York Times* front page story, titled "China Politics Stall Overhaul for Economy" in 2012, cited my view about the imminent trouble of the Chinese economy.¹ It did not fail to draw criticism from my fellow China specialist friends, who often complained that I focused too much on problems and did not emphasize enough the bright side of the Chinese economy (like the government propaganda machine always does).

After the more than 40 percent dive of Shanghai Composite Index, capital-flight-driven devaluation of the currency and evaporation of 25 percent of foreign exchange reserve from their peaks in 2014/15, a new consensus about the end of the Chinese miracle emerged in 2015/16, right at the time when *The China Boom* was published. Many expect China's economy will continue to decelerate when it struggles to clean up the still rising pile of debts after more than a decade of debt-fueled turbo growth. Goldman Sachs silently shut down its hemorrhaging BRIC fund in November 2015. With a few exceptions who are unbelievably adamant in pretending there is still a debate about the sustainability of the "China model," most analysts, including the Chinese leaders themselves, now recognize that the model has served its purpose and has become a burden. A challenging economic restructuring is needed for the Chinese economy to move forward. When *The China*

Boom came out, Forbes magazine excerpted part of it with an introduction titled "China's Struggle as the New Zeitgeist."²

All of a sudden, my projection of a "Japan-style long stagnation" scenario seems mild and optimistic in comparison with many latest predictions. Goldstone's more pessimistic analysis of the Chinese economy in this symposium is intriguing. He sees that China might be heading toward a "Blade Runner" dystopia of economic collapse, huge inequality and environmental decay, and that China's economic crash will drag the world into global recession. I really hope his grimmer assessment is less correct than mine. But unfortunately, there are already signs showing he might be right. At the time I am writing this, most of China was engulfed in the largest, longest, and most toxic smog (known as "Airpocalypse") in recent world history. Latest data show that the recent small gain in internal inequality reduction, attributable mostly to the boost in inland and rural investment under the Hu-Wen administration in 2002-2012, has started to unravel when rural inland areas were hit harder by the economic slowdown. The downward pull of a China's slowdown has been felt in many economies from Brazil and Venezuela to South Korea and Singapore. While these economies have had a long good time and weathered the global crash of 2008 through China's growing demand for their raw materials and manufactured components, they are now the victims of a faltering China market.

The General Conditions for Takeoff

While my book is mainly focused on the empirical question about the dynamics of China's and global political economy, I am grateful that Mahoney distills some of the book's arguments into testable hypotheses about general conditions for development. The first hypothesis is that successful capitalist takeoff requires policies and institutions favoring the growth of strong entrepreneurial

elites at historically critical juncture. The second is that the initiation of export-led growth requires healthy and educated rural labor, coupled with capital from nearby economies. Mahoney finds that these hypotheses converge with the developmental experiences of Latin America. For example, Argentina's and Uruguay's relatively high level of postcolonial development can be explained by the strength of liberal merchants there in the late-colonial period.

As for the second hypothesis, Mahoney points out that among the many Latin American countries, Cuba is the exception that achieved rising education and health of its rural population like China. But US sanctions prevented it from obtaining capital from nearby economies, hence a China-style boom did not happen. Extending this argument, it will be interesting to see whether the opening up of Cuba (assuming there is no reversal) will finally allow foreign capital to take advantage of the healthy and educated workforce there to fuel a capitalist boom in the coming years. Such mini-repetition of China's success is not unheard of. The rapid economic growth of Vietnam in the recent two decades is a good example.

Mao and Culture

On Mao's legacy, Zhao contends that the China boom was not an outgrowth of Maoist development. He argues that Mao China would have descended into a North Korea-like backwater had Deng not started the market reform. He is certainly right, and my argument is in fact not much different from his. What I argue is that while Mao-era development equipped China with an educated, healthy rural workforce, decent infrastructure and industrial base, as well as low external debt, it was China's global and neoliberal turn in the 1980s that drew foreign capital into China to take advantage of these Maoist legacies, unleashing

a capitalist boom. Without such a turn, the Maoist legacies alone would not have created the boom. But without such legacies, China's neoliberal and global turn alone would not have

...while Mao-era development equipped China with an educated, healthy rural workforce, decent infrastructure and industrial base, as well as low external debt, it was China's global and neoliberal turn in the 1980s that drew foreign capital into China to take advantage of these Maoist legacies, unleashing a capitalist boom.

generated a boom that big and long, and China's growth performance would have not been much better than many other developing countries that also embraced globalism in the 1980s and 1990s.

Zhao also criticizes that the book is mostly focused on economic analysis, and it falls short of addressing the significance of cultural and ideological forces. I agree with him that the Confucianist ideology shared by the state-building elite had a lot to do with early modern and twentieth-century state making in China. I am glad that Zhao brings this up. In fact, I have demonstrated in my previous book, *Protests With Chinese Characteristics*, that the resilient ideology of paternalistic-authoritarianism, Confucianism style survived the imperial collapse and continued to shape the trajectory of state-making in the Mao period and beyond. In another venue, I extend the argument to project that even with a sustained economic slowdown, China's authoritarianism might well survive and even harden into a "North Korea lite" regime. I therefore share Zhao's pessimism about the prospect for political liberalization in China.

China and US Global Power

Moving from China's domestic future to the future of US-China relations, Lachmann highlights my view that China has been in a symbiotic relation with the US. As I show in the book, the Chinese political economy has been highly dependent on the US market and US Treasury bonds as a store of value of its surplus. China has little reason to challenge the global neoliberal order. Lachmann is right to contrast this view with other authors' view that China is part of a developing countries group that is trying to usurp US's power in global governing institutions such as the WTO. My view and this other view appear to be

...there are two reasons why China will not rule the world. At the global level, China lacks the will to pursue this role. At the regional level, China has the will to rule but lacks the necessary capacity to do so. China's pursuit of regional hegemony despite its limited capability is going to be a source of geopolitical tension in Asia.

contradictory. But in fact, they can be quite complementary. I point out in *The China Boom* that though China often supported other developing countries which actively challenged the power of Western countries in global institutions, it rarely takes the lead. It is often a passive supporter and lets others, like Brazil and India, lead the efforts. As it turns out, what threatens the neoliberal global status quo most is the surging protectionism and nationalism in the US and other advanced countries. It is interesting to see how China would respond if the Trump administration really dares to significantly de-globalize the US economy. Some already speculate that China may become

a keen defender and rescuer of the globalization project.

On a related note, *The China Boom* does point out that China's subservience to US global leadership does have a limit. Under the weight of geopolitical security concerns and historical memory, the Chinese state elite has been very enthusiastic in reviving China's regional hegemony in East Asia, even at the cost of confronting the US and its allies in the region. But whether China could achieve such regional hegemony is far from certain. I argue that Chinese neighbors' deeper economic integration with China and China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea, as well as other areas with territorial disputes, has invoked a sense of insecurity among smaller states in the region. This urges these states to seek a stronger US presence in Asia to counter-balance China. As such, there are two reasons why China will not rule the world. At the global level, China lacks the will to pursue this role. At the regional level, China has the will to rule but lacks the necessary capacity to do so. China's pursuit of regional hegemony despite its limited capability is going to be a source of geopolitical tension in Asia. The recent rise in rivalry over the South China Sea attests to this.

I am humbled by the comments from the four great comparative historical sociologists in this symposium. Their extension, generalization, and criticism of the arguments in *The China Boom* further stimulate our macro-historical imagination about where China and the world are heading. This power of thinking big is what *The China Boom* emulates. This is the power we need most now, in a world poised to facing greater chaos, conflicts, and uncertainties.

Endnotes

1. Jacobs, Andrew. 2012. "China's Politics Hinder Effort to Shore Up Economy." *The New York Times*, September 26.
2. See: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/timferguson/2016/01/27/chinas-struggles-are-the-new-zeitgeist/>

Digitized (Big) Data and Comparative Historical Sociology

Editor's Note: Trajectories thanks Laura Nelson and Kim Voss for organizing this feature for the newsletter. It is based on an invited session that was organized for the 2016 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Seattle, WA.

Introduction

Kim Voss

University of California, Berkeley

Laura K. Nelson

Northeastern University and University of California, Berkeley

The collection of essays included in this special section of *Trajectories* grew out of a Comparative-Historical Sociology invited session at the 2016 annual meeting in Seattle, titled “Digitized (Big) Data and Comparative Historical Sociology.” The session was inspired by our belief that the emergence of the digital humanities and “big data” techniques offer comparative-historical sociologists the ability to pursue fundamental questions in new ways. To us, the contemporary moment resembles that of the 1970s and 1980s, when the new “social history” helped to reinvigorate comparative-historical sociology and reestablish its significance within the larger discipline.

The presenters and discussant on the panel explored different ways the increase in access to digitized data is changing, or not changing, comparative historical sociology. The authors all agreed that we as a discipline can no longer debate *whether* to incorporate new sources of data and methods into our craft, but *how best to do it*. The success of the panel, and the important issues and debates explored, convinced us that this subject deserves more sustained discussion among the Comparative-Historical Sociology section as a whole. What better place to do this than in the pages of our section's newsletter?

Charles F. Seguin, Christopher Muller, Bart Bonikowski, and Laura K. Nelson contributed essays to this special section. Julia Potter Adams, who presented a fantastic paper at the panel, was unable to submit an essay but she sent along her support for this special section and her enthusiasm for the ASA panel, and the subject in general. The four essays here address different aspects of digitized data and new techniques developed to integrate digitized data into research. Together, we hope these essays will spark a larger discussion about how to best incorporate digital humanities and “big data” techniques into the subfield of comparative historical sociology.

A Nail Gun or a Machine Gun? Will Big Data Tools Radically Reshape Historical Sociology?

Charles Seguin
University of Arizona

Sociologists, comparative historical sociologists included, have been increasingly borrowing a set of digital tools that can be loosely grouped under the heading of “big data” or “computational” methods. These methods are letting us do some new things, but mostly they are letting us do old things faster than was previously possible, and therefore also on a larger scale. Web scraping, for instance, allows us to gather massive amounts of information, often in digitized historical archives, from the web. Machine learning methods for text analysis allow us to partially automate the coding or exploration of texts. By now I believe there is little question whether these tools will become part of our toolkits, indeed they already are. Taking as given that these tools are here to stay, I want to ask whether big data tools will be truly transformative of the way we do scholarship, or whether they will instead improve things at the margins—larger samples, more sources of data, etc. I’ll explore this a little with a comparison to two tools: the nail gun and the machine gun. Both allowed their users to do existing tasks faster but only one was truly transformative.

Nail guns, similar to big data tools, let the user accomplish some goal—driving a nail—much faster than they were able to before. Nail guns are now ubiquitous on construction sites, as they considerably speed up the process of pounding nails, applying shingles, and putting up 2x4s, but they haven’t otherwise changed how construction occurs. Houses are larger now than they used to be, and presumably this has something to do with the nail guns’ greater efficiency. Thus, like the nail gun, we could ask whether big data techniques might make us more efficient, but otherwise do little to alter

either the ground rules for producing our products, or the finished products themselves.

Tools sometimes fundamentally alter the basic ground rules of the field they are introduced into. Military history is full of examples of new tools of warfare changing the basic logic of war. The longbow, for instance, was capable of piercing the armor of mounted knights, providing much of the impetus for the move to mass armies. The machine gun is another such example. Soldiers had been shooting at one another for centuries; with the advent of the machine gun, its rate of fire radically transformed warfare and military tactics. Light machine guns, for instance, turned WWI into a defensive war, where trenches were the infantry’s only defense against their withering fire. Thus, taking a cue from military history, we might ask whether big data will change the fundamental rules of our field—the tactics, strategy, and products of historical sociology.

So then, are these digital techniques likely to be more analogous to the nail gun or the machine gun? Many, both within and without sociology, are anticipating sweeping changes to the practice of social science generally, and thus perhaps in historical sociology in particular. While some have gone so far as to suggest that big data will spell the “end of theory” (Anderson 2008), others have suggested that “using most of the new techniques won’t be easy unless we radically shift what counts as a contribution, or, more modestly, shift how we evaluate our theories” (Caren 2015). It makes sense that many would think that big data will be transformative, and it would not be the first time that the introduction of a new technique changed the way we did research, or even thought about the social world (Abbott 1988).

My guess, however, is that the trajectory, at least in the near term, will be more that of a nail gun. Digital tools will largely help us to do the kind of things we’ve already done before more effectively. Like a nail gun, digital tools

will allow us to accelerate some of the more routinized parts of the job, but will not replace the tools already employed. Just as the nail gun only supplements a hammer, digital tools will not replace the need for scholars to immerse themselves in deep reading or think deeply about research design. However, digital tools will also not require scholars to radically rethink how to do good historical research. Rather, it will require some careful thought on how best to integrate these tools to improve our current practices. The “proof” of this is in the papers that were submitted to this panel.

The essays submitted here are all good examples of using computational techniques as ways to accelerate or extend more traditional research practices. Muller discusses using digital methods to link historical records, something we as historical researchers have been doing for a long time, but can now be done much faster. As Muller puts it discussing his own work, “what would have taken me weeks took only two days in the archive.” Bonikowski points out that many of the concerns about big data research apply just as strongly to traditional forms of research. Julia Adams finds that while Wikipedia was able to build a massive and superior encyclopedia than those in print, their larger radical social project found familiar social forms like hierarchy creeping back in. Laura Nelson’s contribution here states the point most directly: “[computational methods] should be used to enhance, not replace, what we already do.”

I could, of course, be wrong. Perhaps computational techniques and the big data deluge associated with them will eventually render current practices obsolete, or perhaps the use of these techniques will be merely ephemeral. Because these techniques are already widely in use, making a lot of the work we already do easier, it is likely they are here to stay. Whether computational techniques will change how we do things in more fundamental ways remains to be seen. My bet is that

realizing the potential of computational sociology in general, and in historical sociology in particular, will involve a steady piecemeal incorporation of computational methods to meet the goals we already have and augment the methods we already use. Of course, many

My bet is that realizing the potential of computational sociology in general, and in historical sociology in particular, will involve a steady piecemeal incorporation of computational methods to meet the goals we already have and augment the methods we already use. Of course, many soldiers have died because their commanders did not understand what the new hardware could do, or were tied to old techniques out of nostalgia, “fighting the last war.”

soldiers have died because their commanders did not understand what the new hardware could do, or were tied to old techniques out of nostalgia, “fighting the last war”. Fortunately, if computational science catches us off guard, we will have time to regroup. In the meantime, I propose we keep integrating these techniques into our standard practice wherever they prove useful.

References

- Abbott, Andrew. 1988. “Transcending General Linear Reality.” *Sociological Theory* 6(2):169–86.
- Anderson, Chris. 2008. “The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete.” *Wired*, June 23. Retrieved January 13, 2017 (<https://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory/>).
- Caren, Neal. 2015. “The Path to Big Data Sociology Isn’t Obvious.” *Mobilizing Ideas*. Retrieved December 28, 2016 (<https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2015/04/02/the-path-to-big-data-sociology-isnt-obvious/>).

Big Data: Challenges and Opportunities for Comparative Historical Sociology

Bart Bonikowski
Harvard University

Large-scale digital data and related computational methods—often grouped under the catchall label of “big data”—have recently become a focus of active debate in our discipline. In academic conference panels, special journal issues, and graduate admissions and hiring committees, sociologists are weighing the pros and cons of these new approaches to empirical analysis. The exchanges are frequently enlightening, but just as often, they reveal tensions between impassioned views typical of early stages of innovation: proponents promise that big data will revolutionize social science and detractors warn that it will encourage method fetish and privilege theoretically uninteresting research questions.

Yet, the choice between embracing and rejecting these new developments is a false dichotomy: big data is already a reality in the social sciences and humanities, and its importance is only likely to grow. It is time for sociology, which has lagged behind other fields in adapting to this reality, to move past abstract programmatic debates and begin developing best practices for carrying out and evaluating big data research. Comparative historical sociology in particular stands to gain much from these developments, as massive volumes of digitized archival material become increasingly accessible. Moreover, this subfield’s experience with non-random samples, data shaped by substantively important historical processes, and the difficulties associated with cross-case comparison and the temporal continuity of units of analysis—as well as a wealth of case knowledge—place comparative historical sociology in an advantageous position for

interrogating big data research on conceptual and substantive grounds.

Even though comparative historical sociology is often identified with small-N qualitative research, scholars in this field have been actively making use of large-scale digital sources. This has enabled analyses of such wide-ranging topics as social network formation in early-modern overseas trade (Erikson 2014); the reshaping of mainstream discourse by radical movements following national crises (Bail 2014a); long-term shifts in the contours of national political discourse (Rule, Cointet, and Bearman 2015); the role of nation-state formation in promoting military conflicts (Wimmer and Min 2006); fluctuations in populism among U.S. presidential candidates (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016); and local variation in belief structures within the women’s rights movement (Nelson 2015). While the analytical strategies employed in these studies vary, they all make use of the affordances of big data: the ability to compile

It is time for sociology, which has lagged behind other fields in adapting to this reality, to move past abstract programmatic debates and begin developing best practices for carrying out and evaluating big data research.

large compendia of micro-level observations, link records across sources, aggregate the data to various desired levels of analysis, inductively detect empirical patterns otherwise hidden to the researcher, and carry out these complex operations more quickly and at a larger scale than would have been possible using traditional methods.

These approaches are not without limitations, of course. Whether the data take the form of political texts, as in studies of discourse, or of

behavioral traces, as in studies of network interaction and institutional practices, powerful computational algorithms are able to produce results quickly and efficiently. This can create disincentives for delving deeply into case knowledge and verifying the validity of the automated output. It is precisely this kind of analytical reflection and painstaking validation that separates high-quality research from methodological ostentation. As Grimmer and Stewart (2013) repeatedly remind us in their excellent overview of computational text analysis, big data methods are not a replacement for scholarly elbow grease: without extensive validation, algorithms cannot be trusted (I would add that the data themselves should be viewed with equal doses of healthy suspicion). It is up to the peer review process to ensure that researchers do not take shortcuts when working with big data, particularly when exciting new methods can serve as a distraction from rigorous scholarship.

Big data raises two other challenges that are relevant to comparative historical research. The first concerns the question of what constitutes a unit of observation (Wagner-Pacifci, Mohr, and Breiger 2015). Big data scholars work with massive samples—and often entire populations—which can create the appearance of exhaustiveness and with it, empirical legitimacy (even as it creates problems for standard statistical inference methods). But it is worth remembering that these large data sets often originate in very specific organizational settings that may not generalize to other contexts. For instance, should we think of millions of tweets as representing millions of cases of public speech or as a high-resolution view into a single case, that of Twitter? Are 100,000 political speeches from the European Parliament, as in my ongoing research on populism in legislative discourse, representative of European politics or of the Parliament as a particular institution? The extensiveness and precision of large-scale digitized data is all-too-

easily mistaken for an unmediated representation of entire domains of social reality, when in fact the data are likely to bear a strong imprint of their particular conditions of production (Adams and Brückner 2015; Bail 2014b).

Second, one of the advantages of big data is that it lends itself to inductive inquiry. But this raises an epistemological question: who (or what) is the better judge of the validity of the patterns inductively observed in data, the algorithm or the analyst? The call for extensive validation of automated methods (Grimmer and Stewart 2013) assumes that human coding is the gold standard that algorithms can at best approximate, because of human coders' sensitivity to nuance and context. And yet, human coding is prone to extensive biases that are less likely to affect algorithmic estimates, especially those generated by unsupervised models (DiMaggio 2015). This has led Lee and Martin (2015) to propose that formal methods—ideally those that reduce the complexity of the data without resorting to arbitrary coding schemes—be privileged over hermeneutic approaches to text analysis. These are provocative claims, but the cartographic approach advocated by Lee and Martin (2015) cannot do away with interpretation altogether (even if it does make it more transparent), and so the quandary remains: if there is no such thing as an analytically neutral position vis-à-vis data, how should we evaluate our models?

These and other critiques are often leveraged against computational approaches to large-scale digital data, but it is important to realize that similar doubts about the completeness of data, the conditions of their production, the choice of units of analysis, the challenges of induction, and the non-representativeness of samples can be raised against more traditional research designs, from surveys and archival work to interviews and ethnographies. That we often do not question these approaches is less a

reflection of their robustness than their extensive institutionalization (but see Biernacki 2012; Jerolmack and Khan 2014). The fact that recent advances in data collection and analysis are challenging our taken-for-granted assumptions, therefore, should not be seen solely as a problem for big data research, but also as an opportunity to critically reflect on the shortcomings of all forms of empirical research. This, in fact, may be one of the most valuable unintended consequences of the big data revolution.

I started this essay by arguing that hand wringing about the potential pitfalls of big data should give way to the positive development of best practices for research. What might those look like? Scholars are still working out informal guidelines, but I would tentatively suggest six, three for data collection and three for analytical methods. First, given that most big data is found data, published work should explicitly consider the organizational and technological conditions of the data's production and how those conditions affect what the data are able to reveal about the social world. Second, because data curation (i.e., their collection, cleaning, and organization) is the most arduous aspect of big data research and one that involves considerable researcher discretion (Diesner 2015; DiMaggio 2015), every step in the curation process should be documented and presented to readers in methodical appendices. Third, caution should be taken with generalization based on populations of observations produced in highly specialized settings; such limitations should be clearly reflected in statements of studies' scope conditions. Fourth, while big data can reveal new empirical patterns, it should not serve as a source of methodological hubris; all methods obfuscate aspects of social reality and triangulation across multiple approaches remains the best remedy against analytical myopia. Fifth, scholars should be careful with and forthright about the interpretive steps

involved in inductive inquiry (Lee and Martin 2015); openness to being surprised by data is a virtue, but getting duped by faulty algorithms is not. Careful and honest abduction—whereby surprising patterns observed in data are used to revise theory and then the updated theory is brought back to bear on the data—may offer one solution, however imperfect, to this problem (Goldberg 2015; Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Finally, there is no such thing as free lunch in empirical research: while computational methods may process millions of observations with unprecedented speed, they are no substitute for painstaking and time-consuming validation, the results of which should be carefully documented and reported (Grimmer and Stewart 2013).

For all its significant limitations, big data offers us unique opportunities to study old problems in new ways, to occasionally pose new, previously unanswerable questions, and to carry out research more efficiently than in the past. This suggests that one concern often expressed by detractors of these approaches is largely misplaced: big data does not inherently produce atheoretical research that tackles uninteresting questions. Bad research is not a function of types of data or methodological approaches; faulty and uninteresting studies can be found in every subfield and in every research tradition. While early attempts at big-data sociology may have been preoccupied with showcasing methods for their own sake, this research approach has matured and is increasingly producing sophisticated, interesting, and important studies. It is up to the scholarly community to encourage this trend by acknowledging the tremendous potential of big data, while holding its practitioners to the same exacting theoretical and empirical standards expected of other traditions. In the meantime, we would all do well to use the discussions surrounding big data to question the thoroughly institutionalized practices of other methodological approaches, both qualitative

and quantitative. Comparative historical sociology and the discipline as a whole will be better off as a result.

References

- Adams, Julia, and Hannah Brückner. 2015. "Wikipedia, Sociology, and the Promise and Pitfalls of Big Data." *Big Data & Society* 2(2):1–5.
- Bail, Christopher A. 2014a. *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bail, Christopher A. 2014b. "The Cultural Environment: Measuring Culture with Big Data." *Theory and Society* 43:465–82.
- Biernacki, Richard. 2012. *Reinventing Evidence in Social Inquiry: Decoding Facts and Variables*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bonikowski, Bart, and Noam Gidron. 2016. "The Populist Style in American Politics: Presidential Campaign Rhetoric, 1952–1996." *Social Forces* 94:1593–621.
- Diesner, Jana. 2015. "Small Decisions with Big Impact on Data Analytics." *Big Data & Society* 2(2):1–6.
- DiMaggio, Paul. 2015. "Adapting Computational Text Analysis to Social Science (and Vice Versa)." *Big Data & Society* 2(2):1–5.
- Erikson, Emily. 2014. *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Goldberg, Amir. 2015. "In Defense of Forensic Social Science." *Big Data & Society* 2(2):1–3.
- Grimmer, Justin, and Brandon M. Stewart. 2013. "Text as Data: the Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts." *Political Analysis* 21:267–97.
- Jerolmack, Colin, and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk Is Cheap." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43:178–209.
- Lee, Monica, and John L. Martin. 2014. "Coding, Counting and Cultural Cartography." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 3(1):1–33.
- Nelson, Laura K. 2015. "Political Logics as Cultural Memory: Cognitive Structures, Local Continuities, and Women's Organizations in Chicago and New York City." Working Paper. Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Northeastern University.
- Rule, Alix, Jean-Philippe Cointet, and Peter S. Bearman. 2015. "Lexical Shifts, Substantive Changes, and Continuity in State of the Union Discourse, 1790–2014." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112:10837–44.
- Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2012. "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 30:167–86.
- Wagner-Pacifici, Robin, John W. Mohr, and Ronald L. Breiger. 2015. "Ontologies, Methodologies, and New Uses of Big Data in the Social and Cultural Sciences." *Big Data & Society* 2(2):1–11.
- Wimmer, Andreas, and Brian Min. 2006. "From Empire to Nation-State: Explaining Wars in the Modern World, 1816–2001." *American Sociological Review* 71:867–97.

Tools for Historical Sociologists

Christopher Muller
University of California, Berkeley

There is no substitute for the intuition for a historical period you can get by immersing yourself in primary and secondary source material. Robert Fogel (1982: 51) was right to acknowledge that "No amount of mathematical wizardry or computer magic can shortcut this process." But one of the distinct advantages of historical sociology relative to historical research in other social sciences is that it recognizes the importance of both primary-source qualitative work and historical data analysis of other kinds. Learning a little bit about some new tools for historical data collection and analysis can both speed up your archival research and allow you to supplement more traditional archival work with data that only recently would have been too laborious to collect or construct. In this essay, I will describe some ways historical researchers have extracted data from maps and linked people across multiple records. I'll then offer some brief thoughts on why I believe these tools and the approach to studying history that they facilitate are important.

One problem historical researchers often encounter is finding high-quality representative data about the past. Where data of the kind we are used to working with—censuses, surveys, events, and so forth—are unavailable, we can sometimes find helpful information in maps

instead. Take a recent paper by the economists Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou. Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016) were interested in the effects of the “Scramble for Africa” among European powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They argue that European powers divided up Africa with little regard for the shape or politics of the societies on which they imposed colonial borders. The design of their paper is very simple. First, they used a georeferenced version of George Peter Murdock’s (1959) Ethnolinguistic Map, which depicts the territory of African ethnic groups at the time of European colonization.¹ Then they projected onto the Murdock map a map of the national borders that divided up the continent. This allowed them to divide ethnic groups into those that were split by a national border and those that were not. Finally, they added data on the locations of civil conflicts that took place in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They find that ethnic groups whose historical territory was partitioned by a colonial border experienced more, longer, and more devastating political conflicts.

Another example is Neil Fligstein’s (1981) *Going North*. Fligstein’s book is a sociological account of the causes of the Great Migration. To assess the claim that the boll weevil infestation of 1892-1922 inspired African Americans to leave the South, Fligstein hand-coded a map of the boll weevil’s migration published in a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report. Looking decade by decade, he finds that infested counties generally had higher rates of black outmigration. Using georeferenced versions of the USDA boll-weevil maps and data on historical county borders (Minnesota Population Center 2016), Deirdre Bloome, James Feigenbaum, and I estimate the infestation’s effects on other dimensions of the South’s economy and demography (Bloome, Feigenbaum, and Muller Forthcoming).

Both of these examples show how historical sociologists can use maps to turn data-sparse historical periods into data-rich ones. In both cases, the most important source of data was neither numbers nor text, but the simple intersection of two geographical boundaries. Using maps in this way is not new, as the publication date on Fligstein’s book shows. But creating georeferenced historical maps and combining them with the growing library of maps produced by other researchers makes it a lot faster and easier than it used to be.²

Sociologists have also been linking data for a very long time. Finding the same person in two records often allows you to learn more about them than you could by consulting one record alone. In the past, researchers did much of this work by hand, moving, person by person, from one list to another. Simple string-matching algorithms let you do this kind of work much more quickly.

Despite their fancy name, string-matching algorithms are straightforward. At their most basic, they compare two strings of characters and penalize the substitutions, deletions, transpositions, and so forth needed to turn one string into the other.³ Different algorithms give weight to different things, like where in the strings a discrepancy appears or whether certain letters sound like others.

Knowing just a little bit about string matching can help you even if you never plan to do any quantitative analysis. In my dissertation research, I was interested in knowing about the circumstances under which people confined in Georgia’s convict lease system in 1880 were apprehended. Luckily, the Georgia Archives had a collection of all of the pardon requests sent to the governor from 1858 to 1942. The only problem was that the information about the convicts who had sent requests was limited to a webpage that listed them alphabetically, with no additional information except for their county of commitment. In the past, I would

have had to compare my list of prisoners to this list of over 10,000, one by one. Instead, I wrangled the data on the webpage into a machine-readable format, used the `sdist`s() package in R to construct a list of possible matches, then wrote to the Archives asking them to pull about 200 boxes so that they would be ready when I arrived. What would have taken me weeks took only two days in the archive.⁴

Looking for a prisoner in two lists is much easier if both lists only contain prisoners. What if instead we wanted to match everyone in the 1920 U.S. Census to everyone in the 1940 U.S. Census? We are still working on solving that problem, but we are getting better at it. The economist James Feigenbaum has a new paper in which he describes some ways to use machine learning to link census records. Feigenbaum (2016) hired a research assistant to link a small sample of people across two censuses. Then he taught an algorithm to replicate how the assistant created the links. He found that most of the gains from using the algorithm came after the assistant had linked only about 500 records. We are still a long way from creating a census-based genealogy of the entire U.S. population, but we are starting to make some impressive advances in our ability to link large numbers of people across multiple sources.

These are just two examples of ways historical researchers are creating new sources of data about the past. But why would we want to create datasets like this in the first place? One answer is that data of the kind I have described can help us to get a better handle on foundational questions not only in historical sociology but in the discipline more broadly.

Data linked over long stretches of time, for instance, can reopen research on the topic of historical persistence (Abbott 2005; Patterson 2004). The economist Nathan Nunn (2008) has shown that the countries in Africa that had the

greatest concentration of people who were forcibly removed and enslaved have the lowest average income today. Nunn's paper provides compelling quantitative evidence about a question historians have long debated, and it helped to spawn a whole literature on the effects of historical institutions on economic development today. But one notable feature of this literature is that it tends to use geographical territories as its units of analysis. With linked

What would have taken me weeks took only two days in the archive.

multigenerational data, historical sociologists could begin studying how historical events and institutions affect not just the aggregate statistics of geographical territories, but also lineages of people, some of whom moved away from the territories of their ancestors. This kind of work could create a bridge between historical sociologists and demographers studying multigenerational mobility.

With tools like the ones I have described, we can also uncover missing data that could change our understanding of contemporary problems. It is easy to find examples of errors social scientists have made by studying too short a time period. The first graph in Thomas Piketty's (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, for instance, shows how Simon Kuznets built a theory about the relationship between economic growth and inequality based on a narrow slice of a time series. This wasn't entirely his fault: he was dealing with the data he had.⁵ But it offers a cautionary tale for all of us: it is very easy to build grand and sweeping theories based on anomalous periods of history. We need to have more humility about this. The future can always confound us, as when Blumstein and Cohen (1973) developed a theory about the stability of imprisonment in

the early 1970s, right before the U.S. imprisonment rate exploded. But, with the increasing availability of historical data, we have a much weaker excuse for letting the past do the same.

Endnotes

1. Maps that are “georeferenced” are encoded with coordinates allowing them to be combined with other maps. Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016: 1812) discuss how imperfections in the Murdock map could affect their analysis.
2. Harvard University's World Map is one example of such a library.
3. For an introduction to the `stringdist()` package for string matching in R, see van der Loo (2014). Another useful function for string matching in R is `sdist()`.
4. Of course, during other phases of historical research this kind of efficiency is not desirable. See, for instance, chapter 6 of Abbott (2014).
5. Taking a longer historical view, Milanovic (2016) introduces the idea of “Kuznets waves.”

References

- Abbott, Andrew D. 2005. “The Historicity of Individuals.” *Social Science History* 29:1-13.
- Abbott, Andrew D. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bloome, Deirdre, James J. Feigenbaum, and Christopher Muller. Forthcoming. “Tenancy, Marriage, and the Boll Weevil Infestation, 1892-1930.” *Demography*.
- Blumstein, Alfred and Jacqueline Cohen. 1973. “A Theory of the Stability of Punishment.” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 64:198-207.
- Feigenbaum, James J. 2016. “A Machine Learning Approach to Census Record Linking.” Working Paper, Princeton University.
- Fligstein, Neil. 1981. *Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South, 1900-1950*. New York: Academic Press.
- Fogel, Robert William. 1982. “‘Scientific’ History and Traditional History.” *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics* 104:15-61.
- Michalopoulos, Stelios and Elias Papaioannou. 2016. “The Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa.” *American Economic Review* 106:1802-1848.
- Milanovic, Branko. 2016. *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Minnesota Population Center. 2016. *National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 11.0* [Database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Murdock, George Peter. 1959. *Africa: Its Peoples and their Culture History*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Nunn, Nathan. 2008. “The Long-Term Effects of Africa’s Slave Trades.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123:139-176.

Patterson, Orlando. 2004. “Culture and Continuity: Causal Structures in Sociocultural Persistence.” Pp. 71-109 in *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice*, edited by John Mohr and Roger Friedland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

van der Loo, Mark P. J. 2014. “The stringdist Package for Approximate String Matching.” *The R Journal* 6:111-122.

Computational Methods, Meaning, and Comparative Historical Sociology

Laura K. Nelson

Northeastern University and University of California, Berkeley

Larry Irving—widely credited with coining the phrase the “digital divide”—recently commented on the relationship between sports analytics and Black fans: “Sports is emotional. And analytics represent the absence of emotion, the antithesis. Nobody gets into sports to be dispassionate. And it just seems to me we are the feel it, smell it, touch it people.”¹ In discussions I have had with sociologists, particularly qualitative sociologists, this comment rings true. Instead of emotion, many sociologists care about meaning and interpretation, and believe analytics represent the absence of meaning. And, of course, nobody gets into sociology to be dispassionate.

Comparative historical sociology has historically tackled the big questions—democracy versus totalitarianism, the causes of revolution, the formation of the state, the causes of inequality. These topics elicit a great

deal of passion from scholars and, as evidenced by the recent “Can comparative historical sociology change the world” forums,² topics that can carry a lot of social and policy weight. Comparative historical sociologists also care deeply about historical context. If analytics is the antithesis to meaning, often its extreme abstraction makes it the antithesis to historical nuance. Indeed, some scholars who have embraced computational methods claim that the era of “big data” allows us to measure things previously unmeasurable, to identify universal processes that apply across time and cultures, and as a result, it means the demise of social theory. If analytics and computation indeed mean abstracting out meaning, historical context, and theory, these methods represent the exact opposite of the goals of most comparative historical sociologists.

Through years of working with these methods on empirical historical issues, I have come to the opposite conclusion. These methods, when grounded in the theoretical and methodological knowledge built by sociologists, can increase our understanding of the historical embeddedness of processes and practices, they can open up new avenues to interpretive understandings of meaning, and they can preserve the passion in our craft—both in our object of study and ourselves.

Computational methods and machine learning consist of many techniques that can be used on multiple forms of data. Network analysis is probably the most common technique used in sociology to date, but techniques in natural language processing and text analysis are becoming more popular. Text analysis in particular allows us to dig deeper into interpretation and meaning, making it an increasingly popular tool for sociologists of culture.³ These tools remain vastly underutilized in comparative and historical sociology. Without getting into technical details, I hope this essay convinces some that these methods have much to offer us.

Importantly, much of the data available for historical analysis are stored in the form of text. Newspaper articles, newsletters, journals, magazines, transcribed speeches, letters, diaries, etc., are the recorded material that comprise the data for much historical analysis. These texts can be used to extract objective information such as dates of events, demographics, and economic numbers, and natural language processing and machine learning are designed to do exactly this. For

These methods, when grounded in the theoretical and methodological knowledge built by sociologists, can increase our understanding of the historical embeddedness of processes and practices, they can open up new avenues to interpretive understandings of meaning, and they can preserve the passion in our craft—both in our object of study and ourselves.

this reason alone these methods can make our research more efficient. Some historical texts can also tap into subjective understandings of historical periods. It is here where I think computational techniques in text analysis can shine.

Text analysis in the social sciences has a long history, but debates about how to extract meaning from text are ongoing.⁴ Philosophical and methodological debates notwithstanding, practically speaking it takes a long time to read, code, or analyze text, so scholars embarking on a text analysis project can only work with small samples. This limits the breadth of the text we can analyze. Texts are also particularly convoluted forms of data, with layers of meanings and interpretations. How do you convince others that your reading and

interpretation of a text is correct, or accurate, or appropriate? Computational methods can bolster (but definitely not replace) the work we already do, to make text analysis more reproducible, reliable, and scalable, but they can also help us look at our data in new ways that can promote novel theory-building research.

I claim three main benefits of text-based computational and computer-assisted techniques for comparative historical sociologists. First, computational methods can reduce large, complicated bodies of text into interpretable groups of words. These methods abstract words from the complete sentences read by humans, placing words together that occupy similar structural spaces in the text but are not necessarily read together in the same sentence. Juxtaposing words in this way can allow us to discover patterns within the text we may not have seen by reading through the text on its own. In short, computers can help us see our data in new ways, similar to the way a map helps us see the geography of an area from different perspectives.

Second, while deep reading is essential to interpreting and extracting meaning from historical sources, sustained close reading is difficult to do on a large scale. Machine learning techniques can structure the text in a way that enables *targeted* deep reading. Instead of reading everything, we can computationally identify the most representative texts of a particular theme and target our close reading at those documents. This allows us to dig deeper into common patterns in the text, but it also allows us to identify and interpret marginal or uncommon patterns. By placing common and uncommon themes within a “map” of the larger meaning space, we can situate different patterns and meanings in their wider historical context.

Third, we can use computational methods to confirm patterns we identify within and across texts, providing further support for our claims.

Natural language processing, crowdsourced word lists, and expert-made dictionaries give us the tools to count different types of words in order to confirm (or disconfirm) identified patterns. Like hand-coding text, this allows us to convince others that identified patterns are real, but unlike hand-coding, computer-assisted coding is completely reproducible and scalable.

In short, these methods can give our analysis both breadth *and* depth. They can help us see our data in the abstract, but also enable digging deep into individual texts, zooming in and out of our data as needed to better understand general and particular patterns within and across historical periods.

Of course, these methods come with standard methodological caveats. They are not magic, they should not be used for the sake of using the newest or trendiest tool, they do not remove the need for careful research design, and they are certainly not appropriate for every question. These techniques should be used to enhance, not replace, what we already do, and they should build on the methodological foundations built by comparative historical sociologists. But why wouldn't we want to use all tools available to carry out the best comparative historical sociology possible?

Endnotes

1. Quoted in Wilbon, Michael, 2016. “Mission Impossible: African Americans & Analytics.” *The Undeclared*, May 24. Accessed January 9, 2016. <<http://theundeclared.com/features/mission-impossible-african-americans-analytics/>>
2. See http://asa-comparative-historical.org/saving_the_world.php
3. See, for example, the December 2013 issues of *Poetics*.
4. See, for example, the article by Monica Lee and John Levi Martin, “Coding, Counting and Cultural Cartography,” and responses from Issac Reed, Richard Biernacki, and Lyn Spillman, in the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 3 (3), 2015.

Trump, Trade, and Economic Nationalism

Editor's Introduction

Victoria Reyes

University of Michigan & University of California, Riverside

In this issue's Op-Ed Corner, we continue our collaboration with *Policy Trajectories* (<http://policytrajectories.asa-comparative-historical.org>) on Trump's election with an effort to understand his first 100 days in office. In these first days, Trump signed into law Executive Order 13769, which restricted immigration to the U.S. from people whose country of origin include Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Trump also formally withdrew the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and made clear his intentions to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Policy Trajectories will be tackling the executive order known as the Muslim ban in the spring. This installment of the Op-Ed Corner focuses on Trump's trade policies. Peter Evans shares his doubts that Trump will be able to significantly renegotiate NAFTA and speculates on the possible unintended consequences of Trump's economic nationalist rhetoric. Jon Shefner historicizes NAFTA's negative consequences in terms of the broader forces that predate its signing and argues that renegotiations conducted by the Trump administration will likely result in diminished

rights for U.S. workers. Finally, Francesco Duina provides us with seven points we need to consider before understanding any trade agreement.

Trump's Economic Nationalism

Peter Evans

University of California, Berkeley (Emeritus) & Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University

The major trade initiatives envisaged in Trump's "economic nationalism" will not happen. When it comes to substance, global capital will continue to rule the roost and congress will follow capital's lead. Capital will not give up the profits it makes from the \$500 billion of merchandise trade between the U.S. and Mexico generated as result of NAFTA, not to mention \$500 billion dollars of trade between the U.S. and NAFTA's other signator (Canada). Bribing Carrier with Indiana's public funds to refrain from shifting a few hundred jobs to Mexico is within the President's negotiating ability. Renegotiating NAFTA is not. Disrupting the flow of \$500 billion worth of goods from China that include the products of U.S. subsidiaries, key inputs to American manufacturing and a range of goods at prices U.S. consumers have come to expect, is no more likely than a renegotiation of NAFTA. Trump's executive order withdrawing

from the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) might be considered real substance, except for the fact that the TPP was politically dead on arrival well before the November election.

We care about Trump's economic nationalism, not because of its likely trade effects, but because of its potentially powerful political and ideological effects, both domestically and internationally. It is not by chance that Steve Bannon calls economic nationalism one of the three pillars of the Trump/Bannon agenda.¹

Domestically, Trump's rhetorical invocations of "Made in the USA" have proved politically seductive. Even progressive commentators admit to being temporarily seduced by the rhetoric of economic nationalism.² Most important, it divides the labor movement, especially in combination with the promise that

We care about Trump's economic nationalism, not because of its likely trade effects, but because of its potentially powerful political and ideological effects, both domestically and internationally.

\$1 trillion will be invested in unspecified infrastructure projects. Militant workers of color fighting for \$15 an hour are unlikely to be even temporarily lulled by "Made in America," especially since they work in the service sector. But, unions whose members have jobs in manufacturing or construction can't help but be attracted.³ If the most militant workers are divided from older established unions, "Made in America" is a political success.

Globally, as domestically, enhancing the opportunities for corporate profits, not restructuring flows of goods or creating new productive capacity, will be the real substance of Trump's economic agenda. The agenda is economically "nationalist" only in the sense

that a large share of the capital that will benefit is based in the U.S.. Political and ideological effects on the other hand, are likely to be consequential.

Trump's worldview is not the classic neoliberal one in which politicians are supposed to be acolytes of "free markets." Based on his personal experience and predilections, Trump sees capitalism in an optic more similar to that of the eminent historian Fernand Braudel. For Braudel, capitalism was not primarily about markets. To the contrary it was "the zone of the anti-market, where the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates" (Braudel 1982: 230). Likewise for Trump, capitalism is about cunning and power, the ability to make "deals" and capture resources from others. Adding Steve Bannon's Manichean geopolitical vision shifts the protagonists in this vision from other capitalists to other nations. The shift resonates with both Trump's combativeness and his sense of what is politically marketable at home. Once "us" is defined by the chant "USA, USA, USA" and "them" is defined as foreign powers, cross-class political applause ensues within the U.S.

The change should not be dismissed as simply an opportunistic reworking of window dressing. Throughout the "neoliberal era," the United States portrayed itself as the defender of a universalistic global economic system that brought Ricardian gains to all nations, that is as a "hegemon." This stance was central to securing recognition of its role as the organizational center of global capitalism.

Giovanni Arrighi elegantly captured the analytics of creating, sustaining, and losing hegemony (e.g. 1990, 2005). Translating Gramsci to the global level, Arrighi argued that if hegemons cannot put forward some credible claim to be exercising international power in the service of universal interests shared by other countries, they are no longer hegemons. They are no longer blending consensus and

coercion but are reduced to trying to enforce domination. The Trump/Bannon version of economic nationalism can be seen as precisely this sort of retreat. Hegemony is no longer the project. Domination built on a foundation of coercive power is the aim.

Having the U.S. abandon hegemony gives other countries an opportunity to make claims to be promoting the general interest. This is one way of understanding Xi Jinping's opening plenary address at this year's Davos meeting. Sounding like earlier U.S. Presidents, President Xi told the assembled global economic elite:

We must redouble efforts to develop global connectivity to enable all countries to achieve inter-connected growth and share prosperity. We must remain committed to developing global free trade and investment. . . . Countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are all equal members of the international community. . . . entitled to participate in decision-making, enjoy rights and fulfill obligations on an equal basis.⁴

If the only likely result of Trump's economic nationalism was a shift in the locus of global hegemony, some might argue that it had geopolitical advantages. Unfortunately, when the world's dominant military power abandons the quest for exercising hegemony and takes up a strategy that privileges a "law of the jungle" logic, the instruments of political and military contestation are likely to come to the fore. This makes the Trump/Bannon vision of "economic nationalism" a very perilous geopolitical doctrine.

Endnotes

1. <http://time.com/4681094/reince-priebus-steve-bannon-cpac-interview-transcript/>

2. See, for example, John Judis: <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/edblog/--100911>.

3. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/economy/trump-labor-unions.html> and also Naomi Klein's *New York Times* op.ed.: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/opinion/labor-leaders-cheap-deal-with-trump.html?_r=0.

4. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

References

Arrighi, Giovanni. 1990. "The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism," *Review*, XIII, 3, 1990.

_____. 2005. "Hegemony Unraveling—I." *New Left Review* II/32 (March-April 2005).

Braudel, Fernand. 1982. *The Wheels of Commerce: Civilization & Capitalism 15th-18th Century, Volume 2* New York: Harper and Row.

Don't Believe the Hype: Trump Will be No Friend to Labor

Jon Shefner

University of Tennessee

Donald Trump's populist push for the presidency included his promise to withdraw from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and re-negotiate NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). The former he has done, the latter is on hold as is much of his legislative agenda. What effects has NAFTA had on US and Mexican workers, how would such a re-negotiation impact those workers, and how might a renegotiation fit with Donald Trump's larger corporate government agenda?

Since NAFTA was implemented in 1994, economic conditions for Mexican workers have worsened. Growth in GDP in Mexico has ranged in the bottom half to bottom quarter of Latin American countries, and recent poverty statistics find a larger percentage of poor Mexicans in 2014 than prior to NAFTA. Wages have grown very slowly in that time, about 4% in twenty years. Whole sectors of work have been largely wiped out, as the ability of small corn growers to survive yielded to

multinational producers enjoying subsidized production. The shrinking of local corn production further increased reliance on foreign foods in Mexico, leading to the food price protests of the early 2000s. Many analysts find NAFTA's impact on Mexican wages and employment opportunities as one of the main reasons that immigration spiked in the 2000s.

US workers fared poorly also. The Economic Policy Institute found that the cost of NAFTA included 700,000 manufacturing jobs lost within the US, the strengthening of corporations to impose the threat of exit during negotiations with both labor and the locales housing plants, and the genesis of new global corporate-labor relations which disadvantage working people.

The problem with both analyses is that we must understand NAFTA as one of many forces that have assaulted US and Mexican workers, many of which predate NAFTA, and others which came later. The breaking of the US capital/labor accord dates back to deindustrialization decisions beginning in the 1970s, and the diminishing of Mexican living standards began with Mexico's capitulation to neoliberal austerity policies beginning in 1982. With China's and other low-wage and low-regulation producers' movement into the US and Latin American markets, Mexican sales to the US diminished and exerted further pressure on Mexican labor even while US workers felt the squeeze. As China's share of US import market has grown, Mexico's has shrunk, closing factories as a result. One exception has been autoparts manufacturing, which has grown in this century; by 2010, Mexico's share of auto parts and automobile exports to the US was over 21%, behind only Japan and Canada. Simultaneously, autoworkers in the US saw their wages decline, again because of the threat of exit. So we know that NAFTA has been corrosive, but so too the now 40-year pattern of neoliberal capital-labor relations.

Would renegotiating this 23-year old trade deal help reinforce US and Mexican workers' salaries and security? Perhaps—if someone else were doing the renegotiating. Trade deals like NAFTA have evolved over time, finding ever new ways to penetrate protected markets of weaker economies, and privileging corporate rights over those of labor or the environment. For example, the TPP, like recent predecessor agreements, focused increasingly on intellectual property rights that benefit large corporations, including establishing patents on local products like seeds. With TPP dead, it is likely that any Trump re-examination of NAFTA would further introduce elements that would further devastate Mexico's agricultural and industrial sector as well as foster new innovations in cross-border anti-labor policy.

It is certainly possible that labor rights will be subject to some of the inconsistencies of the Trump administration, which appears to be a marvel not only of right-wing policy, but also of incompetence. For example, a real assault on immigrants will certainly hurt capital; food production in the US is already showing signs of damage for lack of that low-cost work force. Trump's own stake in the hospitality industry is also likely to suffer if immigrants flee in fear of

..we must understand NAFTA as one of many forces that have assaulted US and Mexican workers, many of which predate NAFTA, and others which came later.

the US government. Perhaps that inconsistency in labor policy will be offset by a Trump administration "deal" with Canada and Mexico that revives worker protections, but it is hard to imagine. An administration that introduced an opponent to the minimum wage as labor secretary, and a head of the EPA whose signal link to that entity was endless lawsuits in favor

of corporate flexibility, is unlikely to introduce any greater protections of workers or environment.

It is probably best to recognize that any renegotiation of NAFTA or other trade accords by a Trump administration will diminish labor rights and increase the prerogatives of capital. Trump's "Great Wall" is an apt metaphor, as it will try to further curtail labor mobility while trade renegotiations are likely to reinforce corporate privilege. This will be the greatest deceit of the Trump campaign: the willingness to assure working- and middle-class US workers that better times are coming even while labor rights erode even more.

The Great Confusion: NAFTA, TPP, and Trump's Dislike of Free Trade Agreements

Francesco Duina
Bates College

On the campaign trail, President Trump made much of his dislike of NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP). He called NAFTA "the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere" (First Presidential Debate), and the TTP a "job killer" (July 23, 2016 tweet) amounting to "another disaster done and pushed by special interests who want to rape our country" (June 28, 2016 tweet). If approved, he added, it "would be the death blow to our manufacturing" (June 28, 2016 speech). Once in place as President, he followed with quick action. In his first week, Trump withdrew American support for the TTP, effectively killing the deal altogether. Soon after, he demanded an expedited renegotiation of NAFTA—something that his Canadian and Mexican counterparts, fearful of unilateral withdrawal or other destructive actions, agreed to consider.

Free trade agreements are easy to criticize.

Negotiations often favor big business and are short on input from labor, environmental, consumer, women's rights, and other groups. Their democratic legitimacy is questionable, since officials from the executive branches of countries carry out the negotiations while national legislatures often only have ratification powers late in the game. Inevitably, these agreements expose certain domestic sectors to fierce (and often unfair) competition, with government programs (if any exist in the first place) lagging far behind in helping affected workers transition to better-performing sectors. Some trade agreements also undermine sovereignty by allowing foreign corporations to sue governments over national legislation.

These and other criticisms certainly apply, with varying degrees, to NAFTA and the TTP. But Trump's vociferous dislike of both deals and the corrective actions he has entertained so far belie a simplistic and potentially harmful perspective. Below, I would like to identify seven features of trade agreements that Trump seems to have either ignored or not properly understood. They should inform any judicious assessment of TTP, NAFTA, and any other agreement:

1. Trade deals, even if purely economic in nature, always have major geopolitical, social, and other ramifications. Obama's pursuit of the TTP was motivated by a desire to establish closer ties with countries that could otherwise fall under Chinese influence. The death of the TTP makes it much easier for China to deepen its involvement in those countries. NAFTA, in turn, has spurred closer cooperation with Canada and Mexico on migration, security, environmental problems, communication, and other areas not necessarily covered in the agreement itself. Trump has said little about all of this. When the US walks away from trade deals, what does it really give up?

2. Blanket assessments of any trade deal are seldom accurate. NAFTA has not been a

‘disaster’ for the United States, and the same would have likely been the case for the TTP. Bipartisan analyses, along with a considerable amount of academic research, have clearly shown that NAFTA has had mixed effects on its member states: some sectors (for instance agriculture in the US) have benefitted (partly through ‘unfair’ competition by way of domestic subsidies), while others have been hurt. This can be expected of any trade deal, and it is irrational to think that any country can win on all fronts vis-à-vis other countries—why would the latter agree to anything if this were the case?

3. Causality is hard to assess. What Trump has attributed to trade deals may in fact be caused by something else. Perhaps the biggest problem with NAFTA has been failure by governments to prepare impacted sectors for the transition. It takes planning and resources to adjust to competition (fair and unfair). Have steel plants in the Midwest suffered because of NAFTA? Or have they suffered because of China, a genuine lack of American competitiveness, bad state-level policies in job-training and investments, or something else?

4. The benefits of trade agreements are all too often taken for granted. Tariff removals, regulatory standardization, and orderly dispute settlement mechanisms often lower costs for consumers, improve product quality and safety, reduce processing times, provide enormous boosts to certain industries, and avoid frictions between countries. Yet, they often work quietly, away from the spotlight and media coverage. Years later, who remembers why a television costs 20% less, Chile has become a major importer of US goods, and national administrators in one country have formed close and effective cooperative ties with their counterparts elsewhere?

5. Bilateral deals will not necessarily serve America better than multilateral ones. Trump

has called for a slew of new bilateral deals to replace existing multilateral ones. Putting aside the fact that NAFTA is technically a collection of three bilateral deals, the logic of Trump’s position is very unclear. Multilateral deals are attractive because the pursuit of numerous independent bilateral deals can be very inefficient and ineffective compared to a coordinated effort. The WTO owes its existence to this very fact. Why give them up?

6. Not all multilateral trade agreements are created equal. There are major differences between multilateral agreements, and the merits and shortcomings of each should be carefully assessed. NAFTA, it turns out, broke new ground by being the first agreement to include an environmental dimension. TTP included ‘upped’ worker standards in developing countries (at least on paper). Treating all multilateral agreements categorically as ‘bad’ is both erroneous and potentially harmful.

7. Protectionism cannot be the answer. Trump has floated the possibility of a 20% tariff on Mexican products. This will not only impact costs in the United States for the average American (whom Trump has said is his top priority), but will inevitably hurt American businesses who send their products to Mexico to be finished there and reimported into the United States (a value-chain that employs 4-6 million Americans). It will also lead to retaliatory measures by Mexico that will hurt untold numbers of American businesses and consumers, and sour our relationship with one of our most important friends and allies in the world.

A smart and beneficial approach to trade agreements requires an understanding of their complexity and multi-faceted implications. Unfortunately, to date, Trump has shown little inclination to go beyond populist rhetoric. This does not bode well for America, its citizens, or other countries in the world.

Spotlight: Comparative Historical Sociology Section Working Groups

Editor's Introduction

Marilyn Grell-Brisk
Université de Neuchâtel

As part of our new recurring working group spotlight feature, in this issue of *Trajectories* we would like to bring attention to the activities of our “Terrorism” working group. On January 27, 2017 the President of the United States signed an Executive Order which was widely referred to as the “Muslim Ban”. The ban was challenged within the US court system, and a revised version of the Executive Order was issued on March 6. The President presented this ban ostensibly as a security measure. Now more than ever, the work done by our research working groups—established as part of last year’s “Can Comparative Historical Sociology Save The World?” initiative—is crucial.

There are currently eleven working groups at varying levels of organization. Most groups are accepting new members and have facilitators responsible for organizing at least one in-person group meeting, and for helping the group members stay in contact and follow up on each other’s scholarship. If you would like to become a member of an established working group—or start one of your own—please visit:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1myGINGAFSaxu4XtMfcZPCh1xUQrN7FN0n98l68cPLfI/edit>

Terrorism

There are five members, so far, of the Terrorism research group that is one of the working groups of the “Can Comparative Historical Sociology Save the World?” initiative begun by Monica Prasad during her year as section chair. So far, we met together once in Seattle and have e-mailed back and forth. Our original charge was to formulate answers to these questions: How do you solve the problem of international terrorism without resorting to drone strikes or other forms of military intervention? How can political support be built in the U.S. for such a change in policy?

We feel that one way to begin to answer those questions is to be historical sociologists and place the seeming terrorist surge in recent years in historical context. We want to compare terrorists to other non-state actors of the present-day and to non-state actors who challenged and competed with states in the exercise of violence in the past. As we undertake such comparisons we always want to be aware that states have been, and remain, the foremost practitioners of terrorism in the world, and that terrorism does not have a universal definition. Labeling someone a terrorist or something as terrorism is itself a political act.

We are developing a reading list of work on terrorism, and the cultural construction of

terrorism. One of our goals is to identify points at which academic social science research speaks to, and makes use of or critiques the work of “intellectuals” within militaries and intelligence agencies. As we seek to formulate alternatives to current US policies toward terrorism, we need to be aware of past and other current efforts to influence government policy, and of government efforts to enlist or sway academics who work on terrorism.

One member of this working group, Ori Swed, along with Thomas Crosbie is in the process of editing a forthcoming book on *The Sociology Of Privatized Security*, forthcoming from Palgrave MacMillan. Chapters in this volume place the ongoing rise of private military and security companies in historical context. Authors in this volume examine: (1) the long history of private military forces fielded by aristocrats, cities, churches and other non-state or quasi-state actors and the long efforts of rulers to suppress or appropriate those armed forces not unified with state militaries, (2) compare mercenaries of past centuries to contract militaries of the present-day, (3) analyze the extent to which states’ abilities to claim legitimacy for their armed forces can extend to the military contractors they hire, (4) the ways in which military law is adapted (or fails to extend) to private armed forces and how courts are used to discipline private soldiers and their employers, (5) the relation of reservists to full-time professional military forces. Other authors look at gender in private military and security companies, develop a profile of the range of firms involved in private military and security work, and there is a case study of black South Africans who work for private security firms.

While this volume doesn’t speak, for the most part to terrorism, we feel this book will be valuable in the effort to place terrorism in the context of a broader range of non-state practitioners of violence, and to recognize that

the lines between state and non-state actors is shifting and fluid. Understanding how that line moves and blurs is vital to analyzing terrorism and to devising responses that are not as or more brutal than the original terrorist acts or that do not legitimate states that use terrorism as an excuse for repression at home and violence abroad.

Ori Swed also is also writing a book chapter on “War and Terrorism” for *Investigating Social Problems*. The chapter describes the interrelations between contemporary war and terrorism, looking at the two through the lenses of functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. It examines core trends in sociological research of contemporary armed conflict, such as combatants’ demographics, the role of non-state actors, health consequences, gender perspectives, and economic costs.

We welcome new members to this group who are interested in working either on their own or collaboratively to address the questions of who are terrorists, why do state and non-state actors engage in actions that can be described as terrorism, and how terrorism relates to other forms of violent and non-violent political action. However, these questions are not intended to be exhaustive. We are open to suggestions for ways to better develop our agenda or for new directions in which to engage with these issues.

Feel free to contact any of us with questions or expressions of interest.

Richard Lachmann (rl605@albany.edu)

Fiona Rose-Greenland
(fargreenland@uchicago.edu)

Ori Swed (oriswed@utexas.edu)

Daniel Karell (daniel.karell@nyu.edu)

Ziad Munson (munson@lehigh.edu)

William H. McNeill, 1917-2016

Editor's Note: The historian William H. McNeill passed away on July 28, 2016. In his memory, we are pleased to include in Trajectories two pieces by his colleagues and friends David Christian and Patrick Manning.
—MGB

Bill McNeill: Patron of Big History

David G. Christian
Macquarie University

Bill McNeill was born in October 1917 in Vancouver, and died in Connecticut on July 8 2016.¹ He almost made it to the centenary of the Bolshevik revolution. I heard the sad news of his death just before the 3rd IBHA [International Big History Association] conference in Amsterdam and was glad that we were able to arrange a special session at the conference to commemorate his achievements in world history and his support for big history.

McNeill spent most of his career at the University of Chicago, where he was also an undergraduate. He served in the army between 1941 and 1946, including a period in Greece during its civil war. He worked, briefly, with Arnold Toynbee. But, though inspired by the breadth of Toynbee's vision, his own work took a different direction as he rejected Toynbee's somewhat essentialist view of

distinct and separate civilizations. McNeill argued, in contrast, that the crucial forces in human history arose not within the distinctive cultures of distinct civilizations, but in the swapping of ideas and influences between different human communities. It was the sharing of ideas, technologies, even diseases that drove the most significant changes in human history.

His pioneering world history, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, was published in 1963 and was an immediate success. The English historian, Trevor-Roper, who had written scathing reviews of Toynbee's work, described McNeill's book in a *New York Times* review as: "the most learned and the most intelligent [and also] the most stimulating and fascinating book that has ever set out to recount and explain the whole history of mankind." *The Rise of the West* gave a new legitimacy to the young field of world history and remains one of world history's founding documents. Several later books, including a pioneering history of the role of disease in human history, *Plagues and Peoples* (1976), and a history of power relations, *The Pursuit of Power* (1982), developed ideas first introduced in *The Rise of the West*. But they also embedded human history within the history of the biosphere, showing the crucial role of bacteria and viruses in human history, and exploring the idea of states as "macro

oparasites.” In 2003, with his son, the environmental historian, John McNeill, McNeill wrote *The Human Web*, a history of humanity that focused on the importance of evolving and expanding webs of connections between different human communities. In 1996, he received the Erasmus Prize in the Netherlands, and in 2010, he received the National Humanities Medal in the USA.

I should confess that I refused to read *The Rise of the West* for many years because its title suggested a profoundly Eurocentric approach to world history. McNeill himself admitted in the preface to a revised edition published in 1991, that the book was more Eurocentric than he would have wished, and in particular that it overlooked the fundamental historical role of China. Nevertheless, the book really was a history of humanity, and when I finally read it I was deeply impressed by its rigor, its breadth and the coherence and elegance of its core arguments. It was one of those books that made me proud to be a historian. He managed something extraordinarily difficult: to keep sight of the underlying unity of human history without ever giving a sense that he was over-generalizing or ignoring the crucial details of particular histories and eras. Shaping his argument were theoretical ideas that combined simplicity with profundity and depth. The very simple idea that contacts between strangers created much of the synergy of human history was developed with delicacy, subtlety and power. McNeill’s combination of intellectual ambition, rich scholarship, and nuanced argumentation made him, for me as for many historians of my generation, something of an intellectual hero.

Many of his ideas have worked their way into accounts of big history, including my own. The idea that collective learning is what distinguishes humans from all other species was already prefigured in McNeill’s idea of the power of contacts between strangers. The idea that states represent a new tropic level was

already present in *The Pursuit of Power*. And McNeill was one of the few historians who took seriously the idea that it is important to try to engage, somehow, with the whole of history.

When I began working on a manuscript on big history (which became *Maps of Time*), Heidi Roupp, then President of the World History Association, encouraged me to send it to McNeill. Though daunted, I took her advice, and was surprised to find that McNeill was

The very simple idea that contacts between strangers created much of the synergy of human history was developed with delicacy, subtlety and power.

interested and excited by the big history project of constructing a coherent history that placed human history within the history of the universe. He eventually wrote a preface to my book that conveyed that sense of excitement, arguing that big history could bring together disparate disciplines with something of the power of the great syntheses of Newton and Darwin.

Since then I have realized that he always saw big history as a natural next step after his own attempts to construct a coherent history of humanity. In retrospect, I should not have been surprised by his enthusiasm for big history. He was a great admirer of Fred Spier’s early work on big history, and in 1996, he donated half of the prize money from the Erasmus prize to the support of the University of Amsterdam’s Big History course, established by Joop Goudsblom. Indeed, McNeill’s own work already contained the seeds of big history. He had long argued that: “History has to look at the whole world.” And he had always understood the extent to which human history was embedded in the history of the biosphere. In a 1998 essay, ‘History and the Scientific

Worldview', published in *History and Theory*, he wrote:

"Human beings, it appears, do indeed belong in the universe and share its unstable, evolving character. ... [W]hat happens among human beings and what happens among the stars looks to be part of a grand, evolving story featuring spontaneous emergence of complexity that generates new sorts of behavior at every level of organization from the minutest quarks and leptons to the galaxies, from long carbon chains to living organisms and the biosphere, and from the biosphere to the symbolic universes of meaning within which human beings live and labor, ..."

His son, John McNeill, has told me that big history was one of his major interests in his final years, and "he wished he'd thought of it himself ..." To another correspondent, Philip Day, McNeill wrote: "It [big history] is the wave of the future for history in general in my opinion and if I were younger I would teach it too."

For all these reasons, Bill was generous in his support of the fledgling discipline of big history and of scholars such as myself and others in the big history community. Many of us made the pilgrimage to his home in Colebrook in his final years and he was always a generous and welcoming host. I am immensely grateful to him for his support, and feel that William McNeill must count as one of the founders and patrons of our young discipline. I'm sure all supporters of big history will remember him with admiration and gratitude.

Endnotes

1. This article was first published in 2016 by *Origins: The Bulletin of the International Big History Association*, 6(8), 8-10. It is reprinted here with permission.

William H. McNeill: Lucretius and Moses in World History

Patrick Manning

University of Pittsburg

For the quarter century from 1963 to his 1987 retirement and beyond, McNeill was the authoritative spokesman on world history and on the place of Europe in world history.¹ To carry out this role, he undertook positions of institutional leadership as well as pursuing his research and writing.² He became chair of the [University of Chicago] department of history in 1961 and served until 1967; with the support of university president George Beadle he was able to increase the size of his department substantially.³ But the structure of the department did not change, except that factions emerged within it.⁴ Chicago in the 1960s underwent the unhappy transformation of urban renewal and the turmoil of 1968. McNeill moved to a different sort of institutional work when he served as editor of the *Journal of Modern History* from 1971 to 1979; here he played the role of Europeanist rather than world historian. In a high point of academic stagecraft he and the journal launched the 1972 English translation of Braudel's magnum opus, in a meeting that included Braudel, medievalist J. H. Hexter, and Trevor-Roper.⁵

A related work of synthesis, McNeill's college-level textbook, *A World History* (1967), remains too often outside the discussion of the significance of his work. This text and his secondary-school text, *The Ecumene*, broadened the ground for world history at the secondary and college levels in the U.S.⁶ McNeill's texts had authority because of their association with *Rise of the West*, and by extension gave authority to its competitors. The number of purchasers must not have been high in its early days, but when those at the political center in the U.S. agreed to add world history instruction as a near-universal requirement in the 1990s, text-books and teachers for the

course were there in sufficient numbers because of the example of this text.

In his scholarly work, McNeill took up thematic analysis. Rather than take on another large task, he wrote several small studies extending the argument of *Rise of the West*. The first, appearing in 1964, traced the closing of the steppe frontier of Eastern Europe by the advance of agriculture and bureaucratic empire.⁷ Another, addressing Venice from the eleventh through the eighteenth centuries, appeared in 1974 with a dedication to McNeill's father, "whose ecumenical view of Europe's past nurtured my own" (The elder McNeill published in the same year a book on Celtic Christianity 200–1200). Most attention, however, came to his 1976 *Plagues and Peoples*. This book developed a strikingly thematic dimension of the big book, sketching out the great patterns in disease and history. McNeill's method, as before, was to read across boundaries and think big. As McNeill acknowledges, it followed on Crosby's 1972 *Columbian Exchange*, itself arguably a response to *Rise of the West*. His interpretation brought to the Old World the parallels to tales of epidemic that Crosby had told for the Americas. More than Crosby, McNeill went beyond the stories of biological change itself to link them to political change.⁸ So also in later works did McNeill conduct thematic interpretation with gunpowder, migration, dance and drill, and environmental issues. He learned more and got more interested in these with time.⁹

McNeill was nominated and elected in 1983, and served as president of the American Historical Association in 1984–1985. The election set McNeill against Eugen Weber, a leading national historian of France whose prominence as a Europeanist made him a televised lecturer on Western civilization. In his memoir, McNeill calls his election a "fluke" because he was known to a member of the nominating committee. But his was no more a

fluke than the other such nominations, and his election (by 2041 votes to 1241) confirmed that he was widely recognized in the profession.¹⁰ For his December 1984 presidential address, McNeill chose the topic of "mythistory." His address enjoined historians to write broad interpretations of the past, arguing that such syntheses of history enabled societies to face difficult times with courage.¹¹ He accompanied his plea with a brusque critique of national and local history, especially the focus of its practitioners on finding truth by assembling

McNeill rejected the notion of abstract, eternal truth, but affirmed the existence of general historical truths that can be established, though with variability. He urged historians to get beyond their dedication to written texts, and make space for combination with myth, to get closer to historical truth. In McNeill's view, at least, the historians listened politely and gave no response.

and scrutinizing all available documents on a given topic. The address was republished in a volume also including essays defending large-scale views of Western and world history and concluding with assessments of Lord Acton, Becker, Toynbee, and Braudel as each had influenced McNeill's outlook.¹²

With this pronouncement from the pulpit of the American Historical Association, McNeill spoke firmly in his Mosaic mode. Ideas guardedly expressed in prefaces to earlier works were now trumpeted, as presented in "Mythistory," myths appear as statements about national character, and not just how we got to be who we are. He identified three levels of interpretive results: documented history,

patterns of the past, and myth or lessons from the past. McNeill rejected the notion of abstract, eternal truth, but affirmed the existence of general historical truths that can be established, though with variability.¹³ He urged historians to get beyond their dedication to written texts, and make space for combination with myth, to get closer to historical truth. In McNeill's view, at least, the historians listened politely and gave no response.¹⁴

McNeill retired in 1987; it was not a sharp transition, as he had begun cutting back on his teaching in 1977, perhaps relying on income from his textbooks. He published his biography of Arnold J. Toynbee in 1989 and his memoir of Hutchins and the University of Chicago in 1991. These respectful analyses nonetheless confirmed McNeill's intellectual disappointment with these two major figures in his life, following a pattern already set for Becker and, with greater ambivalence, his father.

Endnotes

1. This piece was excerpted with permission from an article first published in 2007 by *History and Theory* 46(3), 428-445.
2. One path that McNeill did not follow was the systematic training of graduate students in world history, though he did serve on dissertation committees. His contemporary, Philip Curtin at Wisconsin, launched a graduate program in comparative tropical history, out of which came a number of active world historians of the next generation. For Curtin's memoir, see his *On the Fringes of History: A Memoir* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).
3. McNeill's term was virtually the same as George Beadle's term as chancellor and President of the university. Beadle had won the Nobel Prize in medicine 1958 for his work in genetics; he supported McNeill's approach to history and the expansion of the department of history. The decade of the 1960s was generally a time of expansion in employment of historians.
4. In 1965 the radical U.S. historian Jesse Lemisch was denied tenure, and the department became polarized for this and other reasons.
5. William H. McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 222.
6. William H. McNeill, *A World History* [1967], 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); McNeill, *The Ecumene: Story of Humanity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), later published as *A History of the Human Community* [1986], 6th ed. (Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998). In addition, McNeill and various co-editors published twelve volumes of *Readings in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968-1973).
7. William H. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). though max Weber's work on bureaucracy was gaining renewed popularity in this time (*Economy and Society* appeared in 1956 in German and in 1968 in English) McNeill did not cite him in this work.
8. The absence of Africa in McNeill's treatment of world history is easily noted. In an interesting exception, however, this volume gives an insightful if speculative portrayal of the place of disease in early African history. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 15-56.
9. In interpreting themes, McNeill offered well-developed interpretations but stopped short of theorizing or formally modeling. For instance, *Plagues and Peoples* and *The Human Condition: An Ecological and Historical View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) adopted the term "macroparasites" to explore social exploitation, but he chose not to develop this insight in detail in later works.
10. Vote tally from the American Historical Association archives, as provided by research director Robert Townsend.
11. William H. McNeill, "Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 1-10. The address invites comparison with Carl Becker's 1931 AHA presidential address, another broad statement on the mission of historians, but one that resonated throughout the historical profession as McNeill's did not. Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *American Historical Review* 37 (1932), 221-236; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 252-260.
12. McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays*. Becker's earlier such volume included assessments of Henry Adams, H. G. Wells, and Frederick Jackson Turner. Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1935).
13. For references to "truth" in this essay, see McNeill, "Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians," in McNeill, *Mythistory*, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 21.
14. In one articulate response, Gilbert Allardyce concluded that McNeill attributed exceptional agency to historians in calling on them to construct myths. Allardyce, "Review of Mythistory," *American Historical Review* 92 (1987), 377-378.

News and Section Announcements

FULBRIGHT / EHESS POST-DOCTORAL GRANT (JUNIOR RESEARCH)

The Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), founded in 1975 in Paris, is one of the most prestigious higher education institutions that gathers 700 high-profile scholars from various disciplines and areas studies.

The EHESS trains students in all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences (history, anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, linguistics, psychology, political science, philosophy and mathematics), and focuses on methodological innovation using critical tools and new theoretical approaches.

Contact:

reponse-AAP-postdoc@ehess.fr

www.ehess.fr/en

Complete CIES Fulbright application:

<http://awards.cies.org/content/fulbright-ehess-postdoctoral-award-junior-research>

For more information:

<http://fulbright-france.org/en/fulbright-grants-us-citizens/us-scholar-program/core-programs/fulbright-ehess-post-doctoral-grants>

Deadline: August 1, 2017

FACULTY ALLIES INITIATIVE

Section member Aliza Luft (University of California, Los Angeles) and a group of colleagues have launched a website to identify faculty allies for students affected by the recent executive orders or who are at risk of future actions—for example, DACA students who fear deportation.

Their goal is to provide students with a supportive academic contact on campus to help direct them if they find themselves in need. They also hope that faculty allies will:

- help students navigate bureaucratic structures at their university or college to avoid the possible negative impacts of executive orders on their academic achievement,
- advocate for students if their university or college does not act quickly or effectively to mitigate potential harm to their academic career,
- be available to respond to future executive actions that affect students by helping to quickly escalate individual student cases to higher levels of administration, and
- identify student needs that our institutions are not yet addressing.

If you're interested in joining their efforts, visit:

<https://westandwithourstudents.org/>

***Coming up in
the next issue of***

Trajectories

**A Feature on the 50th Anniversary of Barrington Moore's
*Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy***

New book symposia on:

***Post-Colonial Thought & Social Theory*
by Julian Go**

***How Societies and States Count*
by Rebecca Emigh, Dylan Riley
and Patricia Ahmed**

***Partisans and Partners*
by Josh Pacewicz**

**And Much
More!**