

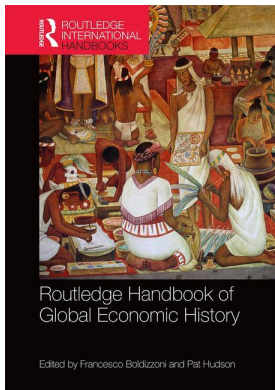
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 27 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History

Francesco Boldizzoni, Pat Hudson

Global Economic History

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315734736-1>

Francesco Boldizzoni, Pat Hudson

Published online on: 14 Dec 2015

How to cite :- Francesco Boldizzoni, Pat Hudson. 14 Dec 2015, *Global Economic History from:* Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History Routledge

Accessed on: 27 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315734736-1>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

1

GLOBAL ECONOMIC HISTORY

Towards an interpretive turn¹

Francesco Boldizzoni and Pat Hudson

This Handbook differs from a conventional set of essays on global history. Rather it aims collectively to document, evaluate, and hence to relativize, varied ideas, frameworks and methodologies that have characterized economic history as it has emerged in different parts of the world. By introducing an eclectic and rich repertoire of traditions past and present, and particularly by exposing insights that are ignored or sidelined in the English-speaking literature, it is hoped that the volume might encourage greater pluralism of approaches in the subject and promote an interpretive framework that is, above all, sensitive to time and place. The specific purpose of the Handbook, and the focus on economic and social history, makes it complementary to earlier and concurrent projects such as Iggers and Wang (2008), Sachsenmaier (2011), Woolf (2011), Barnett (2015) and the *Oxford History of Historical Writing* (2011–15).

Historians have a tendency to view global history merely as an extension of the *geographical range* of their studies. Employing a restricted toolbox of concepts and methods to various regions of the world, they see comparative and connective histories as global research, simply because they draw evidence from more than one world region.² But the frameworks and methodologies employed are often too ethnocentric or anachronistic to make one confident of the value of the endeavour. The approach favoured here, one we hope that the Handbook might promote, interrogates the historical experience of far-flung continents, nations and regions, together with their associated historiographies, in order to highlight the genesis and wealth of alternative, and often appropriate, tools of analysis that might be more widely employed. Varied ecological, economic, political and cultural contexts have given rise to fundamentally different challenges in the long-term quest for food security, material comforts and social development. These challenges have moulded the definitions and the parameters of social science and the humanities in the course of their evolution. An appreciation of the global history of a discipline, on the border between humanities and social science, highlights not only the shortcomings of certain frameworks and the dead-end nature of some approaches, but also the potential that lies hidden in literatures that are little accessed because of linguistic, cultural and ideological barriers and prejudices.

The contingent and contested nature of the emergence of dominant anglophone approaches, their potential and their weaknesses, are best revealed by considering their evolutionary context and by comparing them with contrasting ideas and methodologies conceived within, and in relation to, other very different world contexts. A first step in

recognizing where a truly global approach to history might lead is to rediscover, and to be reflexive in our appreciation of, the ideas and literatures that have populated our global past.

Globalization and the historical imaginary

These are interesting times for history-writing. The end of the Cold War, the rise of new powers such as China, India and Brazil and the acceleration of the globalization process have followed one another rapidly during the last few decades. It is no longer easy to view the processes of industrialization and modernization as congruent, nor to view economic development as a unilinear phenomenon. Debates surrounding the socio-economic and political impact of contemporary globalization in different world contexts have stirred parallel interests about global economic dynamics in the past. Contemporary concerns, amongst other things, about growing intra- and inter-national inequality of wealth and income; about the problems of modern measures of comparative economic success or well-being; about free markets and the role of state intervention; and about the effects of consumerism upon the environment, demand a response from historians.

At the same time, an accelerated globalization of higher education and training, and of intellectual ideas, has also taken place, fostered by the revolution in international communication, the expansion of the internet and the wider availability of electronic resources. This has of course meant that widely accepted approaches are more readily exposed to critiques arising from different global political and cultural viewpoints than in the past. However, these critiques are often ignored, especially when they come from the periphery. The globalization of scholarship has in fact endorsed the power of North Atlantic academic orthodoxies through control of major journals, conferences, funding for research and global intellectual prestige. Some alternative traditions have been insulated more fully from leading paradigms than have others and western perspectives have not been passively received elsewhere, rather they have undergone processes of acceptance, modification and rejection. In addition, the 'western canon' has indeed incorporated valuable insights from other global predispositions, although these have often been radically changed in the process, in ways that are not always acknowledged (see chapter 26). Overall, as far as economic history is concerned, alongside a widening geographical range of work, the globalization of academia has, perhaps paradoxically, also brought a narrowing of the main focus of transnational scholarship. As in the past, but more so, the nature and timing of western 'primacy' and whether or not this was an inevitable outcome of precocious human proclivities in favourable environments, dominates the literature. The motivations and long-term goals of economic action, and the ecological penalties of energy-intensive and materially wasteful economic growth are seldom questioned by economic historians these days, although they have been a major concern for such historians in the past and figure prominently in several of the narratives in this volume. A number of scholars, sensitive to the attraction of other cultural perspectives, have attempted to challenge the canon from within.³ But, despite the disagreements that characterize what is a deeply divided field, it remains the case that the main story in global economic history has thus far been, and is increasingly, constructed around the rise of the West.

A few years ago, Amartya Sen argued that western historians and social scientists these days generally write from the perspective of the 'end of history'.⁴ In other words they think within the assumption that liberal 'capitalism' and associated traditions of 'freedom' and 'democracy' have so triumphed globally that alternative paths or patterns of economic, political and cultural change, and the insights that these may have generated, are generally inferior and have little to offer to current intellectual endeavour. In an era marked by the

dominance and confidence of such perspectives, we have tended both to ignore alternative approaches and traditions and to lose sight of the idea that history (and other disciplines), as well as 'society' itself, will inevitably look different if observed from a diversity of cultural and political viewpoints, past and present.

The western canon in global history

A considerable portion of the 'rise of the West' literature has a Whig character and carries a triumphalist, teleological agenda. Strong claims are made about western exceptionalism, the origins of which are traced back to the Enlightenment, the Glorious Revolution and sometimes to the Middle Ages or even Antiquity. Whig accounts often rely on peculiarly West European if not British culture, institutions or rationality promoting improvements and inventions and/or the rise of bourgeois virtues, first in North-western Europe but spreading elsewhere thereafter (with leads and lags), changing the nature of society globally (Landes 1999; Jones 2003; Clark 2007; McCloskey 2010; Mokyr 2010; Jacob 2014). Although W. W. Rostow's 'non-communist' stage theory of growth, which was designed to be universally applicable, is now largely discredited as a legacy of the Cold War (at least in its detailed specifications), his underlying assumptions still frequently surface in the literature, if only implicitly. The master path remains one of market-driven capital-intensive growth in capitalist-liberal states, as pursued by the West over the past two or three centuries, and this is seen as the *natural* path towards development and modernization. Qualitative and quantitative differences in the structure and performance of other parts of the world are seen as resulting largely from institutional constraints and distortions that have prevented them from following the normal route of development (North 2005; Greif 2006; North et al. 2009; van Zanden 2009a; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

But the more we talk about the constraints on human behaviour the more we implicitly accept that there is some invariable human nature (across the world and across cultures, as well as over time) to be constrained. This is clearly an illusion (Sahlins 2004a and 2008; Halperin 1994; Archer 2000). Claims about 'superior' western values or rationality similarly betray an old essentialist belief at odds with what anthropologists have taught us about cultural diversity as an adaptive response to different environmental circumstances. Many forms of economic conduct deviate from the pursuit of utilitarian goals within individualistic societies dominated by materialist concerns. These forms of conduct correspond to an amazing historical variety of transactional modes and sorts of societal organization past and present (Polanyi 1957; Gudeman 2001; Granovetter 2005; Hann and Hart 2011) but they are too often dismissed by economists and historians as second-best solutions to the 'problem of scarcity' or a distraction from the pursuit of ever more rapid growth. The western fallacy of 'particular universalism' ascribes to societies far away in time and space the values of a rationalist, acquisitive individualism that is alien to them and at the same time lambastes them when they do not fulfil the expectations.⁵

In recent decades, rational choice theory, sophisticated and bolstered by the new institutional economics, has strengthened the authority of neoclassical analysis of markets and of endogenous growth theory, the assumptions of which are repeated as axiomatic in undergraduate and graduate teaching at most of the West's major academic institutions (Marglin 2008). Growing efficiency, the removal of constraints upon action and performance, and increasing incentives to profit-seeking and innovation can be appealing goals. But whilst they occupy the centre ground in research, assumptions about the culture and purposes of economic activity lie unquestioned. Little outside of the box of endogeneity gets considered

and the highest prestige work earns its points for employing in formal models, in game-theoretical or in discursive forms, a limited number of tautological ‘buzz’ concepts surrounding variations in transaction costs – moral hazard, agency problems, asymmetric information – that are seen to distort what is accepted as natural market behaviour.

Alongside the preoccupation with modern economic growth, defined to replicate the western pattern of capital-, energy- and consumption-intensive development, there has developed a craze within the ‘western canon’ for measuring comparative rates of growth transnationally even though the pitfalls of such exercises are legion and their value, beyond very restrictive purposes, shaky. One of the drivers of this trend is the perceived need to identify the extent to which various parts of the globe were ahead or behind in terms of levels of per capita gross domestic product (GDP), or average real wages at particular points in time (e.g. Maddison 2007; van Zanden 2009b; Allen 2009; Broadberry et al. 2015). Leaving aside the contentious implication that comparative development is best viewed as some sort of race, the major measurements used in time series and comparative panel data have fundamental problems when applied retrospectively and comparatively. This is unsurprising given that they were originally conceived as a guide to economic planning by western governments in the interwar period and not as tools of cross-cultural or cross-temporal comparison. Neither were they originally intended as measurements of the success or failure of economies (Kuznets 1953; see Speich 2011). Inadequate evidence and lack of commensurability of data across time and space compromise comparative figures. Data is always drawn from the recorded economy which means that conventional yardsticks of growth are most seriously distorting for economies with a large informal or (inadequately recorded) self-employment sector (Jerven 2014; Coyle 2014: 106ff.). Information is likely to be fuller for economies where the state is strong and keeps good records for fiscal and other purposes. This leads to the problem of circularity in that measures such as GDP and real wages are sometimes a better indicator of the strength of the state than of real economic change.⁶

The impact of these approaches, concepts and measures on history-writing has proven irresistible especially in the United States where they largely originated and where they have been absorbed to the point of appearing as common sense on the part of a large proportion of academics in the discipline (Boldizzoni 2011; Lamoreaux, chapter 3 in this volume).⁷ They have also had a considerable influence in parts of Western Europe, particularly in Britain and the Netherlands. Such frameworks and paradigms have not however been easily adopted by those wishing to demonstrate the progress of ideas and of the discipline in other parts of the globe. For example, as early as 1979, in a collection of abstracts and assessments of major works and schools of Japanese economic history, the original structure of the volume that had been suggested by Bert Hoselitz (possibly the most eclectic member of the Chicago economics department at the time), turned out to be unworkable: ‘the concepts of development and of quantitative economic history as taught in U.S. colleges and universities [did] not provide a useful editorial framework for the organization and presentation of the . . . book’. Instead the emphasis had to be placed upon ‘the structure and dynamics of the entire societal system’: a ‘system consciousness’ in which the *raison d’être* of economic history lay in its contribution to a better understanding of politics and culture as well as the economy (Sumiya and Taira 1979: x).

Post-Californian approaches and their limits

The most prominent globally cited alternative to the ‘rise of the West’ accounts has grown out of the work of the California school which spread to Europe via the LSE-based Global Economic History Network (GEHN), its continental offspring, the European Network in

Universal and Global History (ENIUGH) and the more material- and trade-history oriented Warwick Centre for Global History.⁸ The Californian and post-Californian response to Whig scholarship, since Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (2000), has attempted to minimize the importance of precocious western cultural factors, emphasizing instead geographical elements or factor endowment constraints that prevented other economies from keeping pace with the West. Outright rejection of the institutional explanation, which at the beginning was a hallmark of this approach, has in time given way to a more ambivalent attitude on that front. The post-Californians have also downplayed the significance of the first industrial revolution and reconceptualized it as a transitory phase of primacy or just one of the many efflorescences experienced by the world's civilizations over the long term. The economies of China, India and Europe, it is argued, were comparably advanced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and, after an interlude, the gap is now closing again. This perspective has the potential to dislodge the western breakthrough to modern economic growth from its determining place in the literature.

Central to the approach is the methodology of 'reciprocal comparison' proposed by R. Bin Wong, applied by Pomeranz and subsequently taken up by many others. The idea behind reciprocal comparison is that both sides of the comparison (for instance, the British and Chinese economic trajectories) should be viewed 'as "deviations" when seen through the expectations of the other, rather than leaving one as always the norm' (Pomeranz 2000: 8). The contribution of some scholars to opening up the field to new perspectives, based on this premise, has been substantial. Particularly inspiring has been Patrick O'Brien's (2010) invitation to treat British industrialization as a conjuncture (one of many) in global history. He joins Chakrabarty (2000) in suggesting that European thought on the subject of development must be deprovincialized by exploring the experience of regions well removed from the early industrializing core. In this perspective, 'delays' of decades or even centuries between national experiences of 'take-off', and the analogy of a competitive race, lose much of the importance traditionally attached to them. Differences in initial conditions as well as in the perceived nature of constraints upon development also lose some of their explanatory value. Moreover, by questioning East-West dichotomies such as state-led versus stateless growth (Vries 2015), or unfree versus free labour (van der Linden 2008; Stanziani 2014), the 'new global history' has exposed a number of weaknesses that undermine the foundations of Whig grand narratives.

This notwithstanding, post-Californian approaches have serious limits. Despite the best of intentions, some of these limits are inherent in the concept of reciprocal comparison. As Prasannan Parthasarathi has noted, while 'this procedure [of comparison] denaturalizes the European path of development . . . , it continues to operate within the framework of presences and absences, of things that Europe possessed but Asia did not'. Capital-intensive industrialization is still seen as the master path 'unless it is prevented from emerging', and 'the plural possibilities for change that existed in the eighteenth century' are not taken into account (2013: 76). Another issue is the casualness with which tools from western social science are advocated for and sometimes applied to the Global South in order to make the analysis of such regions more congruent with the theoretical mainstream. For example, Gareth Austin (2007) applauds the application of both public choice theory and the new institutional economics to the African past. By claiming that *homo oeconomicus* was indigenous to Africa, global historians wish to liberate the continent from 'condescending' colonial stereotypes but there is a danger that they also do a disservice to African history. Although adoption of these frameworks may increase the relevance of African history to broader global social science debates, the approach is in thrall to the 'western illusion of

human nature' and other deterministic assumptions underlying the supposed universal applicability of tools and outlook.⁹

The main problem at the root of such shortcomings lies in the positivist understanding that Californians and post-Californians share with their predecessors about the comparative method. There are no clear criteria for determining whether or not a specific theoretical tool is suitable for application to a certain problem, area or epoch. The historian is supposed to be an external observer who is in the position to detect 'absences', 'accidents', 'obstacles' and 'blockages' precisely because of his or her third-party condition. But historians inevitably project onto the past their own values and categories *unless* they are committed to a *reflexive interpretation* of the social and cultural systems of which they are part as well as of those that form the object of their enquiry. (We return to this aspect in the following section.) A related problem lies in the fact that global history is still very much a western enterprise. It is written by western historians (mostly from Anglo-American universities), and published in journals whose editorial board is made up of the same scholars. Not surprisingly, debates tend to be self-referential. As Dominic Sachsenmaier (2011: 109) observes,

most global historical scholarship published in other languages and countries is hardly even recognized by its peer group in the United States. Although the declared aim to 'let others speak' may have been applied to the study of the past, there are strong indications that our international academic communities remain as hierarchical, Western-centric, and imbalanced as they were a hundred years ago.

This situation has generated dissatisfaction in the West itself but, above all, in the developing world. As research and historical analysis in and of Latin America, Asia and Africa continues to grow, scholars from the Global South and East would like to see their contributions recognized more centrally by the profession, rather than finding their work confined to footnotes or used as a source of figures and information (Olukoju, chapter 23 in this volume). In a recent article, Erik Green and Pius Nyambara (2015) argued that, although valuable research in the field has been carried out at sub-Saharan universities, only a tiny fraction of this work gets published in western journals because of irreducible differences between the way the discipline is conceived in Africa and in the English-speaking world. African historians, as opposed to Anglo-American Africanists, are uninterested in applying theoretical insights from mainstream economics and their work is devalued partly as a result. The strength of indigenous research lies in its interdisciplinarity, the employment of unorthodox political economy, and the use of multiple local sources including non-documentary evidence (Olukoju, Freund, Manning, chapters 23, 24, 25, respectively, in this volume).¹⁰ The counterargument that indigenous African research is less abundant and of a lower quality, if not merely descriptive, because of the poor financial circumstances and resources of local universities (Austin 2015), is unsatisfactory given the range and quality of research being produced, especially if one takes a broader and less ethnocentric definition of the field. This reaction in any case misses the point by implying that if indigenous scholars had better economic resources, they would be willing to embrace North Atlantic theory and enthusiastically reframe their own research within fashionable western templates. This has not inevitably happened in better resourced parts of the non-western world, nor even within large parts of Western Europe, as many chapters in this volume demonstrate. The Global South has its own lively and thought-provoking theoretical traditions (Connell 2007) but they receive limited recognition in the metropole.

The case for an interpretive turn

A thought experiment may be useful at this point. Suppose that two subjects, *A* and *B*, are observing the behaviour *x* of another subject *C*. Observer *A* characterizes *x* as wrongdoing and declares that *C* is ‘corrupt’ or ‘deformed’. *B*, on the other hand, although viewing the behaviour as wrongdoing, rejects the moral judgement of *A* and endeavours to find some extenuating circumstances: for example, *C* was ‘forced by someone or something’, ‘acted in self-defence’, or again: ‘it was not *C*’s fault that she received the wrong education’. What eludes both *A* and *B* is that *C* (and possibly also *D*, *E*, *F*, . . .) may not herself view behaviour *x* as wrong at all. She sees nothing strange about it. *A* and *B* have no way to find this out unless they respectfully interrogate *C*. However, they are reluctant to do this and uninterested in listening to the answers. *A* has fundamentalist views about how the world should work and the civilizing mission of her culture. *B*, for her part, is content to ensure that *C*, for whom she feels sympathy, is not labelled ‘corrupt’ or ‘deformed’. *C* is too busy trying to get her own voice heard to challenge external ethnocentric impositions.

It is clear that, if *A* represents the Whig-type, *B* the post-Californian, *C* and *x* the actors and processes of global economic history, conspicuously absent from this picture is a concept of culture that allows one to evaluate the actors’ behaviour, and its outcome or performance, against the actors’ own ends. For Marc Bloch, historical comparisons require ‘a certain similarity between observed phenomena’ and ‘a certain dissimilarity between the environments in which they occur’ (1928: 17) but these superficial resemblances (‘au premier coup d’œil’, as he writes) cannot, per se, suggest explanations. Facts, which are the result of actions, do not contain information about ‘causes’, nor does the historian possess some form of intersubjective knowledge. If they are not to be baseless, arbitrary exercises, comparisons must be made, and conclusions drawn, only after a preliminary *interpretive act* aimed at grasping the *meaning* of actions to those on the ground (rather than to those sitting on the jury or the referees’ bench). To Clifford Geertz we owe awareness that ‘man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun’; those webs form the culture in which human action is embedded. Hence the analysis of culture should not be ‘an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning’ (1973: 5).

Max Weber first envisaged the idea of webs of significance but the concept of interpretation was rooted in German hermeneutics from at least the late nineteenth century and the work of Wilhelm Dilthey. The latter theorized the distinction between *Erklären* (causal explanation), as the guiding principle of natural sciences, and the *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) at the basis of humanistic enquiry, with various degrees of combination between the two being necessary in different contexts (see Makkreel 1992). By the interwar period, the interpretive method had spread across the humanities and social sciences and was common, if debated, in political economy and in nascent economic history throughout Europe (see Parts II and III of this volume). When Werner Sombart published his *Drei Nationalökonomien* (1930), he described the knowledge based on *Verstehen* as the highest form of economic knowledge. In the postwar era this view was gradually, but fairly comprehensively, sidelined by the rise of American social science founded on pragmatism and logical empiricism (Steinmetz 2005: 3–25; Mirowski 2005). Yet, in the 1970s it started to re-emerge powerfully, in France, Italy as well as in the United States itself – hence the cultural turn, the rise of microhistory and the reaction against *histoire sérielle* within western historiographical traditions.¹¹

Unfortunately, the revolution did not fulfil its promise. Quite apart from the excesses of postmodernism, the *fin de siècle* anti-positivist reaction too often went hand in hand with a rejection of the economy as an object of study. Keen to avoid the ideological taint of historical

materialism, as well as disillusioned with neoliberal, present-centred economic discourse, historians often threw out the baby with the bath water. The cultural turn could have represented an opportunity to reflect on the motivational sphere underlying economic life and the limits of explanatory objectification in this field. But global economic history has been largely unaffected by these developments and thus remains shackled by an outdated idea of historical comparison. This can be traced back to the historical sociology of the 1960s and 1970s, exemplified by William Sewell’s misinterpretation of Bloch’s ‘logic of comparative history’ which he reduced to ‘hypothesis testing’ (Sewell 1967). In order to overcome the problem it is, in our view, advisable to return to Bloch’s original formulation, keeping in mind his repeated warnings against anachronism and focusing, first of all, on decoding symbols. In any society, decisions involved in production, distribution and consumption, and acts of exchange and monetary practices, embody specific conventions and rules of behaviour that must be seen as symbolic acts loaded with meaning about the ways in which historical actors view the world.¹² This way, and once the societal value structure is accounted for, it will be clear that absence of sustained economic growth does not always indicate a ‘failure’; that development, industrialization and modernization follow multiple paths; and that for some human groups, optimal adaptation to the ecosystem makes some of these transitions unnecessary.¹³ In other words, although historical processes *do* have a logic, the overarching categories derived from standard economic and social analysis have no universal meaning.

Table 1.1 contrasts the three approaches to global economic history that are described in this chapter. Each of them assigns a specific role and weight to a set of factors that are commonly invoked to explain economic outcomes. Indeed no single practitioner perfectly fits any of these definitions; they should rather be regarded as ideal types. For example, not all Whig historiography is equally judgemental about culture and not all post-Californians would subscribe to the utilitarian incentive-response view of human nature. But the table elucidates quite well the distinctive features of the interpretive approach. The ‘rise of the West’ literature sees culture (b) as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ depending on its supposed effects on economic performance. Post-Californian accounts, on the other hand, reject the concept in order to avoid these value judgements. The interpretive approach takes the opposite stance: it accepts cultural differences as foundational and considers economic outcomes to be a function of culturally determined societal preferences. It also acknowledges the pervasive influence of

Table 1.1 Modes of explanation

<i>Approach</i>	<i>(a) Human nature</i>	<i>(b) Culture</i>	<i>(c) Institutions</i>	<i>(d) Physical environment</i>	<i>(e) Power</i>
Whig/New institutional	Utilitarian, incentive-response model	Defined as positive or negative; constrains (a)	Defined as positive or negative; constrain (a)	Not relevant	Absent
Post-Californian	Substantially utilitarian, incentive-response model	Not relevant	May constrain (a)	Constrains (a)	No consensus
Interpretive	Humans mostly a product of nurture	Not subject to value judgements	Result from (b), (d), (e)	Interacts with (b)	Pervades economic life

physical environment (d) and power relations (e) on economic life. Unlike the new institutional economics, which takes institutions (c) as given and endorsed by path dependency, the approach to economic history we are advocating here sees them as shaped by all of the other forces. They are thus mutable but not subject to a unilinear trajectory.

The Handbook: structure and central questions

The international team of contributors assembled for the Handbook are specialists familiar with the economic history and the historiography of their respective world regions. Whenever possible historians who were trained and/or had based their career within their indigenous culture were favoured. A distinctive contribution of the chapters therefore comes from their privileged access to sources. This is an aspect often overlooked by global historians who have got accustomed to interpretations based upon cherry-picked secondary materials and upon inadequate, partial and delayed translations. We are not suggesting that indigenous scholars are inevitably more qualified than others to interpret their native cultures although we do accept, other things being equal, that they have the opportunity to be better informed and that indigenous and external perspectives are likely to differ.

Contributors were tasked to examine the evolution of economic historiographies in each part of the world in relation to concerns dictated by local, national and international contexts, from the inception of the discipline (and its precursors) to the present. A common agenda of questions (see below) was devised in order to facilitate a better comparative analysis of the findings overall, which we attempt, in a preliminary way, in chapter 26. Authors, however, decided to interpret our agenda in a multitude of unforeseen ways. Some of the essays are built around a clear-cut thesis and the analytical focus prevails over the aim of documenting the wealth of intellectual accomplishments. Others appear to be more concerned with preserving the detail of national and institutional traditions. As editors, we have deliberately avoided superimposing an artificial uniformity over the collection. Differences in emphasis and style offer important clues about how individual historians and societies wish to represent and to understand themselves.

The agenda encouraged contributors to relate their narratives to influences derived from the trajectory of economic development in each region, the dominant sectors of the economy, the position of the society within the power relations of world trade, the nature of the polity and shifts in these factors over time. Specific questions for the project overall included: how and why do approaches and methodologies within a discipline vary between nations and cultures, as well as over time? What has been the impact of specific cultural, economic and political concerns on the definition and boundaries of economic history, as well as upon the approaches and methods of study employed? To what degree have politically and economically powerful nations, cultures and ideologies influenced the emergence and evolution of the field internationally? What impact have alternative or counter-approaches had, and upon what foundations have these been built? Why is economic history in some contexts defined largely by topic or subject matter, and in others defined largely by methodology? Are there lesser known approaches to the subject hidden away in work which is not defined as economic history in the eyes of the dominant canon? Why are these approaches marginalized and do they become more salient if one takes the sort of trans-cultural approach to the global history of the discipline that this volume has in mind?

Contributors were asked to consider the following specific factors that may have influenced the emergence and nature of the field of economic history in their location. These have obviously been relevant to very different degrees and in different combinations.

- 1 The context of the emergence of social science and statistical movements.
- 2 State formation: national and nationalistic histories, ideology, instrumentalism and associated policy imperatives.
- 3 Openness to cross-national and cross-political influences; and, conversely, the degree of internal political and intellectual repression.
- 4 State support and state policy regarding intellectual and academic development (past and present), together with funding imperatives.
- 5 Institutional factors in relation to education, science and intellectual enquiry.
- 6 The impact of past and contemporary globalization.

The volume's structure has been designed to suggest a reading itinerary that proceeds from what has been the 'core' of the late twentieth-century world system towards the 'periphery'. Our point of departure is the broad cultural area of the Anglosphere (including its accommodation in settler contexts). We then go through the hundred nuances of the continental West. Thence we turn to East European historiographies: their valuable contribution has been almost completely neglected since the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. The journey then continues towards Asia (taking the reader from the Middle East, through India, to China and Japan), Central and South America (in its Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking components) and sub-Saharan Africa (particularly Western and Southern). Much space is devoted to 'marginal Europe' and to regions of the globe often far removed from the commonly accepted intellectual core of the field. This is because we are convinced, as much as was Sidney Pollard (with respect to Europe), that 'the margin, generally pitied or despised, could be, at times, ahead of the rest, at the cutting edge of economic and social advance' (1997: 1). We are also of the view, following Chakrabarty, that global history will be best served by exploring how it may be renewed both 'from and for the margins' (2000: 16).

The chapters in the Handbook are of value in and of themselves as narratives of the national and regional development of economic history, exposing much work that is little known to anglophone readers. Together the chapters constitute the first attempt at a global history of our field of study. As attempts at self-understanding, the historiographies in the volume offer precious clues to the interpretation of past economic cultures and practices making us aware of the power of contemporary western intellectual templates and filters. The point of this exercise is not to explore regional details just for their own sake. The purpose is rather to conceive a history of the whole in and from its details – a *Detailgeschichte des Ganzen* (Medick 1996: 23–4). Hopefully our project will form a first step away from an old global history seen as standing above national and regional histories and towards a new one that rebuilds our knowledge from understandings found on the ground and, to an important extent, reflected in the rich writings of our forebears.

Notes

- 1 Some of the concepts we introduce here have been elaborated more thoroughly on two recent occasions: Pat Hudson's Tawney lecture on 'Industrialisation, Global History and the Ghost of Rostow', University of Warwick, 30 March 2014; Francesco Boldizzoni's AMHE lecture 'Do Nations Really Fail? Reconceptualizing the History of Development', El Colegio de México, 17 February 2015. A recording of the former, and the text of the latter, are available respectively at <http://www.ehs.org.uk/multimedia/tawney-lecture-2014-industrialisation-global-history-and-the-ghost-of-rostow> and http://www.amhe.mx/jornadas/docs/Colmex_lecture.pdf. (Sites accessed 29 May 2015.)
- 2 This approach is well summarized in Bayly's (2004) textbook. For his own critical take on global economic history, see Washbrook (2013).

- 3 For example, Fernández-Armesto (1995), Frank (1998), Hobson (2004), Goody (2004).
- 4 Michael Portillo's series on Democracy, BBC Radio 4, 18 May 2010. The original statement regarding the end of history in this sense is Fukuyama (1992).
- 5 The concept of 'particular universalism' was introduced by Bruno Latour (1991: 105).
- 6 GDP in many economies is also less appropriate for growth measurement than gross national product (GNP) which is net of the earnings of foreign direct investment. Difficulties also arise in applying a transnationally acceptable deflator. For GDP the 1990 Geary–Khamis dollar is generally used and, for real wages, a silver standard: both add further and unequal distortion to the appearance of temporal and spatial differences.
- 7 On 'rationalist individualism', and its embeddedness in American culture, see Wagner (2000).
- 8 Their main journal is the *Journal of Global History* (founded 2005) which adds to the *Journal of World History* (founded in 1990, restructured in 2003).
- 9 On this anxiety about being relevant to social science debates, see Hopkins (2009), who also introduced his fellow Africanists to the approaches of mainstream economics – with a word of warning. The rather frustrating outcome of the attempted conversation is testified by the economists' contemptuous reaction (e.g. Fenske 2010).
- 10 The use of non-written sources was pioneered by the Nigerian sociologist Akinsola Akiwowo. West African scholars have often drawn on radical political economy syncretically merged, in French-speaking countries, with the critical philosophy of Paulin Hountondji.
- 11 See Hudson (2010); Boldizzoni (chapter 8); Grenier (chapter 7) in this volume.
- 12 Symbols and meanings were introduced into western anthropology by Marcel Mauss (1914, 1923–24) who overcame Durkheimian functionalism. They entered historical research with Bloch's (1924) study of the 'royal touch'.
- 13 Classic examples are given by Boserup (1965) and Sahlins (2004b) in their studies of pre-agricultural societies.

References

- Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2012. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Allen, Robert C. 2009. *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Archer, Margaret S. 2000. 'Homo Oeconomicus, Homo Sociologicus and Homo Sentiens', in Archer and Titter (2000), 36–56.
- Archer, Margaret S. and Jonathan Q. Titter, eds. 2000. *Rational Choice Theory: Resisting Colonization*. London: Routledge.
- Austin, Gareth. 2007. 'Reciprocal Comparison and African History: Tackling Conceptual Eurocentrism in the Study of Africa's Economic Past' *African Studies Review* 50.3, 1–28.
- Austin, Gareth. 2015. 'African Economic History in Africa' *Economic History of Developing Regions*, DOI: 10.1080/20780389.2015.1033686.
- Barnett, Vincent, ed. 2015. *Routledge Handbook of the History of Global Economic Thought*. London: Routledge.
- Bayly, C. A. 2004. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Berg, Maxine, ed. 2013. *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bloch, Marc. 1924. *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.
- Bloch, Marc. 1928. 'Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes' *Revue de synthèse historique* 46, 15–50.
- Boldizzoni, Francesco. 2011. *The Poverty of Clío: Resurrecting Economic History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boserup, Ester. 1965. *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Broadberry, Stephen, Johann Custodis and Bishnupriya Gupta. 2015. 'India and the Great Divergence: An Anglo-Indian Comparison of GDP Per Capita, 1600–1871' *Explorations in Economic History* 55.1–2, 58–75.

- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Clark, Gregory. 2007. *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Connell, Raewyn. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Coyle, Diane. 2014. *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fenske, James. 2010. 'The Causal History of Africa: A Response to Hopkins' *Economic History of Developing Regions* 25.2, 177–212.
- Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. 1995. *Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years*. New York: Touchstone.
- Frank, Andre Gunder. 1998. *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goody, Jack. 2004. *Capitalism and Modernity: The Great Debate*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 2005. 'The Impact of Social Structure on Economic Outcomes' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19.1, 33–50.
- Green, Erik and Pius Nyambara. 2015. 'The Internationalization of Economic History: Perspectives from the African Frontier' *Economic History of Developing Regions*, DOI: 10.1080/20780389.2015.1025744.
- Greif, Avner. 2006. *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gudeman, Stephen. 2001. *The Anthropology of Economy: Community, Market, and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Halperin, Rhoda H. 1994. *Cultural Economies: Past and Present*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Hann, Chris and Keith Hart. 2011. *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hobson, John M. 2004. *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hopkins, A. G. 2009. 'The New Economic History of Africa' *Journal of African History* 50.2, 155–77.
- Hudson, Pat. 2010. 'Closeness and Distance: A Response to Brewer' *Cultural and Social History* 7.3, 375–85.
- Iggers, Georg G. and Q. Edward Wang. 2008. *A Global History of Modern Historiography*. London: Pearson.
- Jacob, Margaret C. 2014. *The First Knowledge Economy: Human Capital and the European Economy, 1750–1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jerven, Morten. 2014. *Economic Growth and Measurement Reconsidered in Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia, 1965–1995*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, Eric. 2003. *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*. 3rd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuznets, Simon. 1953. 'International Differences in Income Levels: Reflections on Their Causes' *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 2.1, 3–26.
- Landes, David S. 1999. *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. New York: Norton.
- Latour, Bruno. 1991. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- McCloskey, Deirdre N. 2010. *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Maddison, Angus. 2007. *Contours of the World Economy, 1–2030 AD*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Makkreel, Rudolf A. 1992. *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Marglin, Stephen. 2008. *The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1914. 'Les origines de la notion de monnaie', in *Œuvres*, vol. 2: *Représentations collectives et diversité des civilisations*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969, 106–12.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1923–24. 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques' *Année sociologique* (n.s.) 1, 30–186.
- Medick, Hans. 1996. *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen, 1650–1900*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

- Mirowski, Philip. 2005. 'How Positivism Made a Pact with the Postwar Social Sciences in the United States', in Steinmetz (2005), 142–72.
- Mokyr, Joel. 2010. *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1850*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- North, Douglass C. 2005. *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- North, Douglass C., John J. Wallis and Barry R. Weingast. 2009. *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Brien, Patrick. 2010. 'Deconstructing the British Industrial Revolution as a Conjunction and Paradigm for Global Economic History', in *Reconceptualizing the Industrial Revolution*, ed. by Jeff Horn, Leonard N. Rosenband and Merritt Roe Smith. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 21–46.
- Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011–15.
- Parthasarathi, Prasannan. 2013. 'Comparison in Global History', in Berg (2013), 69–82.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1957. 'The Economy as Instituted Process', in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, ed. by Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg and Harry W. Pearson. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 243–70.
- Pollard, Sidney. 1997. *Marginal Europe: The Contribution of Marginal Lands since the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pomeranz, Kenneth. 2000. *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sachsenmaier, Dominic. 2011. *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 2004a. 'Preface to New Edition', in Sahlins (2004b).
- Sahlins, Marshall. 2004b. *Stone Age Economics*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 2008. *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm.
- Sewell, William H., Jr. 1967. 'Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History' *History and Theory* 6.2, 208–18.
- Sombart, Werner. 1930. *Die drei Nationalökonomien. Geschichte und System der Lehre von der Wirtschaft*. Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot.
- Speich, Daniel. 2011. 'The Use of Global Abstractions: National Income Accounting in the Period of Global Decline' *Journal of Global History*, 6.1, 7–28.
- Stanziani, Alessandro. 2014. *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Berghahn.
- Steinmetz, George, ed. 2005. *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and Its Epistemological Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sumiya, Mikio and Koji Taira, eds. 1979. *An Outline of Japanese Economic History, 1603–1940*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.
- Van der Linden, Marcel. 2008. *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History*. Leiden: Brill.
- Van Zanden, Jan Luiten. 2009a. *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution: The European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000–1800*. Leiden: Brill.
- Van Zanden, Jan Luiten 2009b. 'The Skill Premium and the "Great Divergence"' *European Review of Economic History* 13.1, 121–53.
- Vries, Peer. 2015. *State, Economy and the Great Divergence: Great Britain and China, 1680s–1850s*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wagner, Peter. 2000. 'The Bird in Hand: Rational Choice – the Default Mode of Social Theorizing', in Archer and Titter (2000), 19–35.
- Washbrook, David. 2013. 'Problems in Global History' in Berg (2013), 21–31.
- Wolf, Daniel. 2011. *A Global History of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This page intentionally left blank