

Historiographic Reminiscences

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The history of history – that is, the development of the study of history – has recently become a particularly active subject among historians. It is no exaggeration to say that they are now far more “self-conscious” than their predecessors, reflecting the fact that historiography, namely scholarly traditions and changes, has become very much part of the study of history. Obviously, we do not want simply to repeat what others have written. There must be something innovative about the subject one researches on and writes about, the conceptual framework in which it is discussed, the methodology used, and, above all, the work’s relevance to the future of the field of study.

This, of course, has always been characteristic of scholarship. Whether in science or the humanities, one tries to “go beyond,” “add to,” or “revise” the existing knowledge and perspective. Without such self-consciousness, there will be no advance in scholarly work. Historians have been no exception. They have always been interested in making an original contribution to scholarship, each speaking with an original voice, so to speak, so that altogether the chorus will be the richer.

The historiographic chorus has become not only richer but more divergent and even assertive in the last decades. This can be seen in the frequency with which words like “global,” “transnational,” and “hybrid” are used in the titles of books and articles. We may also note the popularity of themes like consumption and memory, the former referring to what people consume and the latter to how they remember the past. These are disparate subjects, but they all enrich our understanding of history, inducing us to pay closer attention than scholars used to do both to global interconnections and to individual “agencies.”

Before describing these recent historiographic developments, however, I would like to give a personal overview of what the study of history has meant since I first became interested in the subject nearly seventy years ago.

The realization that history is malleable, that there is no one “past” that everyone can accept as the truth was brutally brought home to me when the Asian-Pacific War ended in August 1945. Until then, history was what one learned at school. At least that was my perception – and I believe that of most people of my generation. For those, like me, who had been born during the 1930s, the first years of life coincided with the war that began in China in 1931 and lasted for nearly fourteen years. The long conflict was the background in which we went to school where we learned the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Somewhere during our primary school years, we also studied history. But to me and our classmates, who were in first grade in 1941 and fifth grade four years later, history almost exclusively

meant Japanese history, and Japanese history consisted of the list of emperors, going back to the legendary Jimmu emperor who had ascended the throne, so we were told, in the year 660 BC. We tried to memorize the names of all the emperors who followed him, little aware that they were all fictitious characters and that the first imperial line was not established till more than a thousand years later. But no one, not even our teachers, questioned the “unbroken line” of the imperial institution, something that made the country unique – and invincible. If this was “history,” it was little different from propaganda.

One of the major developments after Japan’s defeat was to make us – school children as well as teachers and others – realize this, that the country’s past was not exactly what wartime propaganda had taught us. School textbooks were rewritten, and passages offensive to the occupation authorities – such as those stressing Japan’s unique history – were cut out by scissors. We were to learn history from scratch. In a sense the new history was also reflective of the higher authorities’ perspective. The U.S. government, through the General Headquarters under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, was intent on democratizing Japan, politically as well as culturally, and the rewriting of textbooks was one way of doing so. Instead of a history that almost exclusively focused on the emperors, we were given textbooks that stressed “people’s” lives. This was social history with a vengeance, history “from the bottom up.” But it was combined with a new geography that introduced the whole globe to pupils who had been accustomed to viewing the world with Japan at the center. In middle and high schools, we studied the new history and the new geography, and there is little doubt that they gave us a fresh understanding of the evolution of Japan as a country among countries, a country that consisted of all its people, not just the emperors and their entourages. Our liberation from wartime ignorance was for me and my classmates the most important achievement of the occupation. Of course, the occupation-introduced history was itself just one version of the subject, in replacing one kind of official history with another. But there is little doubt that the new version was liberating to school children hitherto accustomed to a much narrower perspective. In pitting an American view of the past against the Japanese, as these were reflected in school textbooks, there is little question that the former was more conducive to opening the students’ eyes to both the wider world and to more divergent groups of people in society than the latter.

It is interesting to note, at the same time, that, in the United States at that time, social history and world history – the two perspectives the occupation authorities in Japan emphasized – were far from being fully accepted into the nation’s own school curricula. Professional historians were overwhelmingly pursuing traditional subjects that focused on political affairs, both within and across nations. In American history, presidential elections and political parties remained primary objects of scholarly attention, and in British history constitutional developments were still the key focus of research and teaching. Political and constitutional turning points provided the chronological framework for recounting national history not just in these countries but also elsewhere. To the extent that the world at large came into focus, it was examined primarily in terms of diplomatic history and international relations. These were traditional fields of study, focusing on interchanges among states and examined through multi-archival research.

I had my formal training in history in the United States during the 1950s, and historical study at that time exemplified these tendencies. Briefly stated, I was introduced to the discipline of history through British history, in particular seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century English constitutional history. This was a very traditional subject, and for this reason I was able to develop an understanding of what it meant to study history. In graduate school, I moved from English history to U.S. history and Chinese history, but there, too, the centrality of political and diplomatic affairs remained. To study the past was to examine how various countries had evolved politically, and how they dealt with one another through diplomacy. In retrospect, the 1950s were a decade when U.S. “exceptionalism” was stressed,

scholars such as Oscar Handlin, David Potter, and Daniel Boorstin publishing volumes in which certain unique characteristics of the nation's development were demonstrated. In the meantime, studies of foreign affairs dealt with diplomacy and, when it broke down, with war. There was a venerable tradition of diplomatic history exemplified by the work of William Langer and younger historians such as Richard Leopold, Robert Ferrell, and Ernest May. My formal training as a historian, which involved four years of graduate study (1957-1961), took place while these features dominated the historiography.

The picture began to change during the 1960s, when I began teaching at a number of colleges in the United States. The study of history steadily became broader than in the past, and this was due in part to such dramatic events as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War that produced massive protest movements. Many historians who were coming of age at that time were deeply affected by such occurrences in which many of them participated and partook of the "cultural revolution" that questioned many of the ideas and premises on which American politics, society, and culture had been built. An increasing number of historians in the United States asserted that the time had come to incorporate the racial minorities as well as women into their study of the past, and that American history could be fully understood only when it was put in a comparative perspective. It was from such beginnings that the discipline of history began to be more broadly defined than had been the case. National history came to embrace virtually all people: women, children, racial minorities, urban slums, the unemployed, and not just "dead white men," as the saying went. Political affairs would now be just one facet of the nation's past, which began to be understood at various levels (economic, social, cultural, and the like) so that urban history, women's history, black studies (African American history), history of sexuality, and many other sub-fields came to acquire respectability and popularity. Equally significant, national history came to be linked to developments elsewhere. Rather than viewing the nation's past as unique, historians began to compare the United States with other countries and to consider the nation as one among many, a country whose development could best be understood in the context of larger worldwide themes, be they modernization or imperialism.

As a historian specializing on U.S. foreign relations, I was fascinated and affected by these intellectual currents. Earlier, to the extent that the United States' role in world affairs had been examined, it had primarily been in terms of the nation's having been the defender of Western civilization. That was the way the Second World War and the Cold War were conceptualized, but now, in the middle of the 1960s' turmoil, some began to view other countries not just as objects of U.S. strategy, largess, or denunciation, but as equal agents in the making of humankind's destiny. How others viewed America came to be considered a subject as worthy of study as American attitudes and policies toward other countries. "America in the world" was now to be an important framework, not just "America and the world." Thus more and more historians (such as Walter LaFeber and Robert Beisner) began putting the history of U.S. foreign relations in the framework of imperialism. It was not merely that the nation's expansion abroad could be comprehended as a part of the global history of imperialism but also that its foreign policy on the whole needed to be put in the context of how it affected other people.

In some such fashion, history began to be reconceptualized and its study enriched. During the 1970s and the 1980s, the trend continued, as was evident in the teaching of history at colleges and graduate schools. Social and cultural history became popular subjects of study, as did women's studies and African American studies. Diplomatic history changed its name to international history in many colleges. The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, established in the mid-1970s, chose to call its journal *Diplomatic History*, but the articles it carried increasingly dealt with bilateral and multilateral relations, not just with U.S. foreign policy. In 1967 I published a book called *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*. It was an attempt to trace changing images Americans, Chinese, and Japanese had of one another. The book was one of the earlier examples in

which international affairs were examined through a cultural theme. Such an approach became more and more popular so that I felt justified in speaking of “international relations as intercultural relations” in a 1978 address before the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. When I published a study of the Pacific War in 1981, I gave it the title of *Culture and Power: The Japanese-American War*. The intention was to suggest that an interrelationship between the United States and Japan, and indeed any set of countries, could be examined both at the power (military, geopolitical) level and at the cultural (ideological, intellectual) level. The two, of course, interacted, but they were not always compatible. In this particular instance, I argued that while the two nations were engaged in brutal conflict militarily, they were not far apart in terms of their leaders’ thoughts about the future of Asia and the Pacific. By extrapolation, one could say that cultural relations among nations moved with their own momentum and produce a world defined at a different level from the one determined by geopolitical factors. Thus, while Emily Rosenberg’s *Spreading the American Dream* (1981) and Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) both traced the evolution of the United States as a major player in the world arena, the former dwelt on the nation’s economic and cultural influences abroad, while the latter was more concerned with power-level comparisons between the United States and other powers. Both were major historiographic achievements of the 1980s, but the former was more indicative of the future trends than the latter.

This became even clearer in the 1990s, in retrospect a major watershed in the history of historical study. We can speak of the historiographic transformation of the last twenty years as perhaps one of the most notable phenomena among scholarly writings and in higher education. As a result, history writing today is quite different from what it was before the 1990s. Although, as seen above, scholarly developments during the 1960s through the 1980s had begun to show significant signs of change, it was after the early 1990s that the transformation came to affect virtually all areas of the discipline of history.

Four broad and interconnected changes may be observed. First, global perspectives came to intrude upon the study of national and local histories. Second, in part as a reflection of this, the West became de-centered from our understanding of the past. That is to say, in periodizing the past and choosing subjects or themes to study, the West no longer served as the principal model or the key framework. Instead, it became imperative for historians to keep in mind other parts of the world. Third, transnational history emerged; transnational phenomena such as environmental problems, diseases, and human rights attracted increasing scholarly attention, and non-state actors, including multinational enterprises and non-governmental organizations as well as non-national entities like races and ethnic groups became serious subjects of research. And fourth, such themes as memory, consumerism, and hybridity gained fresh attention of historians. Today, no serious study of history will be considered acceptable unless it incorporates at least one of these new features.

The popularity of global history is easy to understand in view of economic and technological globalization that was widely recognized as a main phenomenon toward the end of the twentieth century. Historians, like economists, sociologists, and others, became interested in the phenomenon, but they did not immediately begin to study the past in terms of globalization, nor did they reconceptualize history in a global framework. After all, globalization was a development that had become noticeable already in the 1970s and the 1980s when Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and other countries and ultimately China undertook to open their markets to trade and soon began to accumulate enormous surpluses that they invested in foreign countries. In the meantime, entrepreneurs in the United States and Western European countries established multinational enterprises in which their capital was combined with foreign labor to produce goods for worldwide marketing and consumption. There resulted a globalization of production and consumption, as well as by an almost unlimited circulation of currencies throughout the world.

Despite the fact that the world economic scene was rapidly changing, historians were rather slow to

incorporate such a development into their work. Few, if any, published scholarly work on globalization, and only rarely did they write books or articles that had “global” in their titles. One of the first was an edited volume, *Conceptualizing Global History*, that appeared in 1993. It was a collection of essays originally presented at an international symposium held in Belagio, Italy, in 1991 and may be taken as the opening gun of the new era of global history. In his introduction to the volume, Bruce Mazlish, its editor and the organizer of the conference, declared, “Ours...is an Age of Globalization.” He noted that while economists and others had been discussing globalization for some time, historians had been rather slow to incorporate the phenomenon into their study of the past. This was because, Mazlish wrote, global history “is contemporary history,” and most historians shied away from examining recent and current affairs, leaving the task to social scientists and to journalists. To gain a comprehensive understanding of global economic, social, and cultural developments in the last decades of the twentieth century, one had to turn to books like *Global Shift* (1986) by Peter Dicken and *Global Transformations* (1999) by David Held and Anthony McGrew. These were excellent studies, but the authors were all non-historians.

Historians nevertheless began to take note of such work and to take seriously what Mazlish and his colleagues were doing. To cite personal examples, I published *The Globalizing of America* in 1992 and *China and Japan in the Global Context* in 1993, using terms like “globalizing” and “global” for the first time in my writings. Other historians were also beginning to do so. I must note, however, that nowhere in my work published during the 1990s did I discuss globalization as such. That I was ready to give a book a title like “globalizing of America” but failed to explain how the United States contributed to, and was in turn affected by, globalization was rather typical of historical work at that time. Till the late 1990s, few felt confident or interested enough to devote an article, let alone a book, to an examination of globalization as a historically significant phenomenon.

After the turn of the twenty-first century, the situation changed drastically. So many books began to be written by historians on globalization and global history that anything written without reference to such terms began to appear old-fashioned. It was in 2001 that Bruce Mazlish and I jointly offered a course at Harvard called “The New Global History.” It was meant as an introduction to the ongoing process of globalization, not just economically but politically, socially, and culturally. It so happened that the first meeting of the class took place a week after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, so both the students and we were keenly aware of the negative consequences of globalization as well as its benefits. It was clear, in any event, that we would not be able to come to grips with something like this event without a fuller understanding of trends in contemporary history. Mazlish and I put together a collection of reading material on various aspects of globalization, ranging from terrorism to environmentalism, and published as *The New Global History Reader* (2004). In the meantime, A. G. Hospkins published *Globalization in World History* in 2002 and an edited volume, *Global History: Interactions Between the Universal and the Local* in 2006. The popularity of themes like globalization and global history remains.

A second significant historiographic change has been the de-centering of the West and the parallel development of regional histories. Traditionally, historical study had been dominated by a periodizing scheme that conceptualized ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern periods. These divisions were then applied to other parts of the world even if such a scheme might not mean much. For instance, it would make little sense to consider medieval or early modern history as distinct phases in the history of China, Turkey, or Persia, and the West-centric scheme was often applied to them arbitrarily. Likewise, “modern” history was viewed in terms of what happened in Europe after the eighteenth century and then applied to other areas. When some presumably “modern” characteristics could not be detected in a non-Western country, it was considered to be still “pre-modern.” But if we get away from such

Western-centric notions of the past, we shall be able to consider each region and each country as having their own timetables. We may not entirely get away from the Western system of defining time by centuries, but when we speak, for instance, of the seventeenth century, we shall have to be guided not simply by what happened in Europe but also by developments in the Middle East, Asia, the American continent, and so forth.

It should also be noted that conceptions of regions have also undergone significant change in the recent years. It used to be that European history, Asian history, Latin American history, Middle Eastern history, and the like were little more than sums of developments among local and national communities that happen to be in the same area, but during the last twenty years or so, there has emerged what may be called “the new regional history.” As best exemplified by Daniel Rodgers’ *Atlantic Crossings* (2000), this approach takes a region as an integrated whole and examines political, economic, and especially cultural interconnections across national boundaries. In Rodgers’ case, the focus was on reformist ideas connecting U.S. and European municipal leaders and intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century. Historians of slavery, of course, have for a long time viewed the American continent, the Caribbean, and western Africa as a region in which slaves were bought, transported, and made to work. Likewise, immigration history has viewed the Atlantic as a bridge between Europe and America. Few other regions of the world have yet developed analogous analyses, but recent studies of pan-Asianism such as Cemal Aidyn, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (2007) and John Price, *Orienting Canada* (2011) suggest that the new regional history is likely to remain an important approach to the study of the past.

Third, a particularly interesting historiographic development during the last decade has been the virtually sudden emergence of transnational history. The transnational approach to history is related to the growth of global and regional histories. These two have moved historians out of their preoccupation with one country’s past and prodded them to put national history in a global or at least a regional framework. Either way, the nation as the key unit of study is no longer considered sufficient. It must be put in the context of other countries’ developments and of global or regional interrelationships. Hence the adjective “transnational,” which means transcending national boundaries. There is the belief that what is “national” can only be understood in terms of the “transnational.” A nation is what it is because of its connections with other nations. Such a perspective is explicitly presented in Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations* (2006) and Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation* (2007). Both present United States history in relation to global developments, and it may safely be predicted that the urge to “transnationalize” national history, not just of the United States but of all other countries, will continue to motivate historians.

Moreover, the growth of transnational history, in conjunction with developments in social and cultural history, has reinforced the sense that the nation provides only one of many identities that define an individual. The majority of humankind are citizens of specific countries and identify with the history and geography of a given nation. But each citizen is also a member of a race, a religion, a class, a gender, a generation, a profession, and many other identities besides the nation. It is, therefore, important to study the past not just in terms of a country’s development but also that of a race, a religion, and many other categories that are by definition transnational. Transnational history in this sense is a history of racial, religious, class, and many other identities as well as of the interactions among them. These interactions obviously are separate from international affairs defined as interrelationships among independent states.

In this connection, it is particularly important to distinguish transnational history from international history. As the term implies, international history is a study of interrelationships among nations as they deal with one another in various situations, ranging from peaceful trade to violent clashes. As independent bodies, they are defined by their own decision-making bodies, military force, and “national

interests.” Whatever their internal conditions, they act as unified entities in the world arena. In the process they may negotiate treaties to define their relationship, thereby contributing to a world order governed by law, or they may compete for greater power, influence, territory, and shares of the earth’s resources and in the process they may collide and fight a war. “The rise and fall of the great powers” is a standard framework for tracing such a history, a drama in which a handful of nations with superior military power compete with one another for greater influence. A power may rise to a position of preeminence and then lose it when a contending power challenges it, either alone or in combination with others. Such a power game may define a world order (sometimes called “world system”) at a given moment in time, or some sort of balance may obtain among them, however temporary it may prove to be. Or, a “great power” may try to lead other nations to share and promote certain objectives, such as free trade (as Britain did in the nineteenth century) and “self-determination,” a cardinal foreign policy agenda of the United States after the First World War. All countries may come together to form an international organization for establishing rules for their mutual relations, be they commercial or political. Such efforts are often called “internationalism,” a movement that seeks to bind nations together for their common ends. Internationalism implies cooperation among nations, but it may not necessarily a universal proposition. For instance, “capitalist internationalism” unites nations characterized by a capitalist system of economic affairs, while “socialist internationalism” brings together socialist (and communist) countries. In any event, the key units are still nations. International history is a field of history in which these and related developments among nations are studied.

In contrast to international history, transnational history examines the roles played by non-national actors. Instead of taking nations as the units of analysis, transnational history is concerned with the interactions among such entities as races, ethnic groups, religions, and various categories of people (the young, the old, the disabled, and others) who are not interchangeable with national entities but who share identities across national boundaries. Transnational history at one level is thus the history of interrelationships among these categories of people. Interracial relations, for instance, have their own history apart from international relations. Non-national entities also include non-state actors, those individuals and groups that are not part of the state apparatus. That would mean essentially the bulk of a country’s citizens as well as the communities they establish, such as business enterprises, non-governmental institutions, and sport, artistic, and entertainment organizations. Transnational history in this sense is a history of connections among such non-state actors across national boundaries. The history of humanitarian organizations, for instance, is a typical subject of study for transnational history, as are the histories of “off shore” business activities, sporting events, and popular entertainment, all of which lie outside the usual perimeter of international history.

The growing popularity of transnational history may be seen in the fact that during the last ten or fifteen years so much has been published on environmental issues and on human rights. Traditional historiography almost completely ignored these subjects, and yet humans have always lived in a physical setting, benefiting from the heat generated by the sun, the water produced by seas and rivers, and the like, so that it makes no sense to write history without putting it in the context of the natural environment that knows no national boundaries. Likewise, to the extent that men and women have for centuries been dealing with each other as individuals and in terms of their racial, religious, and other identities, the question of human rights, namely how they treat one another, is of fundamental importance. Hence the awareness that human rights lie at the foundation of history. It is no accident that the growth of environmental history and human rights history has paralleled that of transnational history, indeed that these subjects have been at the core of the new transnational turn in the study of history.

That the transnational perspective helps enrich our understanding of international history may be seen in the contributions made by books such as John McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun* (2001),

and Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* (2011). Traditional studies of international affairs hardly mentioned environmental subjects such as air and water pollution, but McNeill's study discussed the implications of these phenomena on a nation's economy and people, which obviously have geopolitical implications. Imperialism, too, were put in a fresh perspective. No longer just a story of great-power rivalries for exploitation of Asia and Africa, the book traced the environmental impact of colonialism on the health of the local population. Likewise, the study of any war would now be incomplete without examining its implications on the eco system. ("Ecocide" is a term that has begun to be used in connection with the war in Vietnam in which U.S. forces used biological agents to destroy forests and farmland.) Snyder's book, on its part, shows that the history of the ending of the Cold War can never be understood unless it is put in the context of the activities by human rights organizations on both sides of the geopolitical divide. It was not so much the high-level negotiations by the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union but non-state actors (such as Helsinki Watch) that promoted human rights in Eastern Europe that eventually brought about the demise of the Iron Curtain and the political transformation of Soviet-bloc countries, leading to the end of the Cold War. Here is an excellent demonstration of how a transnational perspective is essential to an understanding of international history.

A fourth notable phenomenon in the study of history during the last twenty years or so has been the widening usage of concepts like hybridity, consumerism, and memory as themes worthy of historical study. Hybridity connotes the coming together and blending of people, goods, and cultures, and it is not surprising that, given the globalizing trend in the world, these phenomena came to attract the attention of sociologists, anthropologists, and eventually historians, some of whom have gone back to the earlier times to trace the ways in which different tribes and ethnic communities encountered and interacted with one another, in the process creating something hybrid. Already in 1991 Martin Bernal caused a stir among scholars and other readers by arguing in his book, *Black Athena*, that the classical civilization of Greece and Rome had been a product of the coming together of people from Africa, the Middle East, and southern Europe. Although not all specialists accepted his interpretation, the themes of encounters and interactions among people of different backgrounds, resulting in the creation of hybrid cultures and societies, have been pursued by a growing number of historians. Going much beyond the traditional themes of civilizations "challenging" and "responding" to one another, the stress has been on the end products that are characterized as hybrid. Indeed, the view of all human societies, including nations, as hybrid is now commonplace. It pits itself against the traditional idea of "pure" national communities and leads to the inevitable conclusion that all societies, indeed all humans, are "mixed blood" productions. Such a view makes it easier to understand the process of globalization and transnationalism, for it suggests that human history may be seen as a story of the steady erosion of distinctions, biological or otherwise. It may be for this reason that there has been a renewed interest in the history of racism, as seen in books like Izumi Hirobe, *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice* (2002), and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (2008), for race prejudice may be seen as an anachronistic response to the inevitable coming of the age of hybrid people and cultures.

Consumerism, too, has been a popular subject of study among historians. It may also reflect economic and cultural globalization in that middle-class ways of life that were exemplified by the widespread popularity of consumer products used to be limited to a few rich countries, whereas now there is virtually global consumerism. As Emily Rosenberg notes in her essay in Andrew Bacevich, *The Short American Century* (2012), what used to be a typically American phenomenon has now become observable everywhere, in China and Turkey as well as in Brazil and South Africa. Not just in commodities, but also in popular entertainment and sport, consumer products are shared widely among nations. In this connection, it may be noted that since young people are particularly sensitive to, and

knowledgeable about, cultural trends, the study of youth across nations is emerging as another important subject in the study of history. Every generation may share certain characteristics across nations, and there is little doubt that consumerism distinguishes today's youth from the older generations, for whom the experiences of the Depression and wartime hardships are shared memories.

This leads to the current popularity of the study of memory. How history is remembered, by individuals, nations, and other communities, has become a particularly notable object of concern among historians. Historical memory, of course, has always existed, but it did not gain much scholarly attention till toward the end of the twentieth century. The very fact that the turbulent century was ending may have given rise to such preoccupation. Equally important may have been the growth of global, regional, and transnational histories, all of which gave rise to fresh concern about shared memory, or about the question of whether memory could be shared across national, religious, gender, and other boundaries. Whatever the reason, this phenomenon may be seen as yet another manifestation of historical self-consciousness, that is, the awareness that historical data are always being reinterpreted and that in the process memory – the historian's personal memory as well as collective memories of people that are subjects of study – provides an important clue.

It is perhaps no accident that some prominent historians wrote their personal memoirs toward the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Many of them had lived through turbulent decades of war and global transformations and were thus keenly interested in the relationship between these events and their own lives, which included their careers as historians. Felix Gilbert, Peter Gay, Eric Hobsbawm, and Fritz Stern, just to name a few examples, have published revealing accounts of the intersection between world history and personal lives, and they all indicate that their work as historians has been deeply affected by this conjunction of the global and the personal. Not surprisingly, many such memoirs have been written by transnational scholars, those who were born in one part of the world but pursued their careers elsewhere. Their perspectives on such cataclysmic events of the twentieth century as the Depression, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the division of Europe during the Cold War have undoubtedly affected their perspectives on the recent past, which in turn would shape ways in which their readers establish connections between their personal lives and the wider world.

The last two decades have also witnessed clashes of collective memories, as well as efforts to reconcile them. A collection of essays that Daqing Yang and others have put together, entitled *Toward a History Beyond Borders* (2012), is one of the best examples of both phenomena. The contributors to this volume describe how Chinese and Japanese have developed divergent, often contradictory, memories and understandings of the origins and the nature of the war between the two countries. The "history war," as such conflicting images of the past are sometimes called, is not, however, limited to China and Japan. Americans and Japanese, for example, have sharply divergent views of the atomic bombings in August 1945, as evidenced by the controversy that arose in 1995 when the Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington held an exhibition of the *Enola Gay*, the aircraft that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The majority of Americans remember the bombing as the step that put an end to the cruel war, whereas for Japanese it opened a new, dangerous atomic age that threatened the whole of humanity. Similar "memory" wars have been fought between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and its vicinity, between Muslims and Christians in Bosnia, between North and South Koreans, and many others. On the other hand, most Europeans have come to accept a common view of their past, including both its glorious moments like the Enlightenment and tragic events like the Holocaust. The European Union has developed as a "community of shared memory," as some historians call it. Whether other regions of the globe may also develop as communities of shared memory remains to be seen. But the very fact that such a question is being discussed reveals the significant role that memory plays in

defining individual as well as collective identities. Historians are inevitably drawn into the picture and are expected to contribute to defining a usable memory of the past that may be shared across national, religious, and other boundaries.

This is an enormous task, one that confronts historians all over the world. That may be one of the most significant aspects of the historiographic transformation since the 1990s. Because of their increasingly transnational and global perspective, they are in a position to try to define a shared memory across boundaries and ultimately for the whole of humanity. That will be a noble task worth all their efforts, and I would consider it an honor as well as an obligation for me personally and for my scholarly colleagues everywhere to take up the challenge.