International Society as a Historical Subject

Erez Manela, Department of History, Harvard University

For some time now, historians have been venturing well beyond the traditional spatial enclosures of nation-states that have defined the modern discipline, writing more history that is variously described as international, transnational, global, or oceanic (sometimes also described as transregional).[1] In fact, the concern with history that transcends national enclosures goes back to the origins of the modern discipline. Leopold von Ranke himself had sought to write a *weltgeschichte* that would go beyond national boundaries, and that sensibility was never entirely absent from the discipline in subsequent generations.[2] Still, the historical profession, to an unusual extent among the disciplines that study human societies, has for a long time been divided into geographically defined subfields structured around national or regional enclosures, and to a large extent it remains so divided. There are compelling methodological reasons for this, such as the emphasis that historians place on the acquisition of language skills and other forms of knowledge specific to a single society or region. But structuring the discipline around national or regional categories—until recently, it was rare to see a history position advertised that did not have such a descriptor attached to it, and even now it remains uncommon—have meant that despite the many voices calling for a different model, the vast majority of

[1] For example in Indian Ocean history. See, e.g., Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Harvard, 2006).

[2] Ranke, Introduction to *Weltgeschichte*, vol. I, reprinted in Roger Wines (ed. and trans.), *Leopold von Ranke, The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 249. Indeed, as Walter LaFeber has noted, worries that historians were growing too focused on national frames in contravention of "the unity of history" were already expressed in the very first issue of the *American Historical Review*, in 1895. Walter LaFeber, "The World and the United States," *American Historical Review* 100, No. 4 (1995), 1015-1033.

historians are still trained to work in a particular national or regional history and often continue to do so for the remainder of their professional careers.[3]

Still, there has been growing discomfort with the traditional structures of the discipline and its fields, and in an age preoccupied with globalization, global interconnectedness, and global threats, it is easy to see why. But if agreement on the importance of transcending national and regional enclosures is widely shared within the historical profession, the question of how exactly historians can go about doing it has not been easy to answer. If history, or at least some parts of it, is no longer to be about the nation, what should be its subject? Both the broad agreement on the need to transcend the nation and the ongoing confusion about how to do it are evident in the recent proliferation of publications, discussions, journals, and jobs that include or represent efforts to do international, transnational, and global history. One prominent example is the "Conversation: On Transnational History," published in the December 2006 issue of the *American Historical Review*, in which one participant noted at the very outset noted that he had no idea what the term "transnational history" actually meant and how it related to world, global, and international histories. The ensuing exchange among six leading historians from various precincts of the profession was spirited and fascinating, but at its conclusions the participants were no closer to agreement on the meaning of "transnational history" or on how and why historians should pursue it.[4] Moreover,

---

[3] For some perspectives on the history of the relationship between nations and history and its recent fraying see Akira Iriye, "The Internationalization of History," *American Historical Review* 94, No. 1 (1988), 1-10; Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991); David Thelen, "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999); Eric Foner, "American Freedom in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* 106 (2001); Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105:3 (2000), 807-831.

[4] C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, "*AHR* Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111:5 (December 2006), 1441-

ongoing discussion of the "transnational turn" in historiography have been coupled with the appearance of new journals focused on global history and books whose cover blurbs declare that they represent the "new international history," among other manifestation of post-national trends.[5] In the field of U.S. history, there has been an ongoing project to "globalize American history," one of whose most important and intriguing aspects—beyond an outpouring of publications[6]—has been the proliferation of job searches advertised under the relatively novel category of "United States in the world" (or sometime "United States *and* the world"), a category that is clearly growing in importance but which few can yet define with much precision.[7]

First, some definitions are in order. Historiographical genres that seek to transcend national enclosures have been variously described as "transnational history," "international history," "global history," and sometimes "world history" and one could be forgiven for thinking that these are, essentially, synonyms. The premise of this essay,

---

1464. Akira Iriye, a pioneer in calling for and writing post-national history, stated in a recent book that the distinction between global and transnational history remains "tenuous" and that the two genres could be treated interchangeably. Even in 2016 Iriye could still exasperatedly inquire, "[W]hat is the distinction between 'international' and 'transnational'? If these words mean more or less the same thing, why do we not stick to just one?" Iriye added there that "[t]here is no sustained discussion anywhere in the book of a possible distinction between 'transnational history' and 'global history,' reflective of the overall situation in the academic world and in scholarship today, in which these two terms are often used interchangeably." Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (Basingstoke, 2013), 11, and Iriye, review of *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*, by Davide Rodogno, Bernherd Struck, and Jakob Vogel, eds. *American Historical Review* 121 (February 2016), 208-209.

[5] The term "transnational turn" was popularized in Robert A. Gross, "The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World," *Journal of American Studies* 34 (December 2000), 373–93, but the phenomenon of transnationalization has not been limited to American studies.

[6] Perhaps most notably Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001). See also Marcus Gräser, "World History in a Nation-State: The Transnational Disposition in Historical Writing in the United States," *Journal of American History* 95, No. 4 (Mar. 2009), 1038-1052.

[7] While both the phrases "U.S. *in* the world" and "U.S. *and* the world" often appear to be used interchangeably, I prefer the former. As Kristin Hoganson has noted, talking about the history of the United States *and* the world "may re-center the United States a bit too confidently," while thinking of the history of the United States *in* the world "strikes a better balance between the national and the global." Kristin Hoganson, "Hop off the Bandwagon! It's a Mass Movement, Not a Parade," *Journal of American History* 95, No. 4 (Mar. 2009), 1087-1091.

however, is that these terms properly connote related but distinct projects, and it is therefore worth defining these projects briefly at the outset. Transnational history is history that remains centered on the territorial space of a particular nation-state, but that proceeds from the assumption of the historicity, permeability, and often the contingent nature of the boundaries of that state rather than viewing these boundaries as natural and timeless, or at least teleological. In fact, it is often precisely the permeability of national boundaries and the flow and encounters of people/ideas/commodities across them that are central themes and concern of transnational history.[8] Global history, on the other hand, is focused on processes and connections operating in global space, if not always on a global scale; nation-states, while they may figure in its narrative sweep, are neither central actors nor defining arenas for its unfolding. Global history, like the earlier Annales School that has served as one of its genealogical fountainheads, is often (though not always) concerned with the *longue durée* and with structural forces, rather than with human agents.[9] Finally, international history is concerned primarily with the relations

[8] Borderlands history falls into this category, as do certain types of histories of migration, labor, and capitalism. The term "transnational history" is sometimes used much more broadly to describe any history that seeks to go beyond national enclosures, but my usage here is more limited. For a broad discussion of the term and its meanings see Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Basingstoke, 2013). For another perspective on the term see Matthew Pratt Guterl, "Comment: The Futures of Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 118 (2013), No. 1, 130-139.

[9] One way to get a sense of the scope of the scholarship that falls under the term "global history" is to peruse the pages of the *Journal of Global History*, published since 2006. Despite some efforts, notably by Bruce Mazlish, to distinguish global history (or the "new global history") from the older term "world history," their usage in most cases appears to be synonymous or at least substantially overlapping. The debates on the shape and scope of global/world history and its relationships to ideas and processes related to globalization are outside the purview of this essay, but interested readers can find guidance in the works of Jerry Bentley, A. G. Hopkins, Patrick Manning, Bruce Mazlish, Peter Stearns, and others. See A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2002); Jerry H. Bentley, *Shapes of World History in Twentieth-Century Scholarship* (Washington, D.C., 2003); Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: A Guide for Researchers and Teachers* (New York, 2003); Bruze Mazlish, *The New Global History* (New York, 2006); and Peter N. Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2010); Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Peterson, *Globalization: A Short History*, trans. Dona Geyer (Princeton, 2005). See also Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *American History Review* 100, No. 4 (1995), 1034-1060 and Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, "Global history and the Spatial Turn: From

between states and societies. It has its origins in the history of interstate wars and international diplomacy but has recently expanded, as will be shown below, to include regions, actors, and themes not traditionally associated with international relations narrowly conceived.

These definitions are of course debatable and they are not intended to be prescriptive, a delineation of ideal types. Rather, they are proffered here as descriptive attempts to distill the ways in which these terms have been used in recent years in both formal writings and in informal conversations among historians in a manner useful for the purposes of this essay. They do not necessarily comport with other definitions offered or implied in recent works focused on these respective categories, which in any case often do not agree with each other. Moreover, there is clearly overlap in the historiographical fields they describe, and even working with definitions that attempt to highlight the distinction between these fields one can easily think of historical works that would be hard to pin down as belonging to one category but not to another, or that would fall into more than one of these categories.[10] At the same time, these definitions are useful inasmuch as *most* works of history that seek to go beyond national (or sub-national) frames can be, without too much difficulty, categorized as operating primarily within one or another of these modes of inquiry.[11] They are also necessary in order to define what this essay attempts to do, and what it does not.

---

the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization," *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010), No. 1, 149-170.

[10] C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (Malden, Mass., 2004), comes to mind as an example, but there are others.

[11] The recent debate over Big History is also outside the scope of this essay, but see Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, *Deep history: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley, 2011).

This essay sets out to examine one specific aspect of the broad turn away from methodological nationalism"—the assumption that the nation-state is the natural frame for the study of history— that has swept the historical discipline, an aspect that has often been described as the emergence of a "new international history."[12] The term "international history" has itself had a rather complicated history in the American historical profession, where it has been rather uncommon and, when used, carried meanings that were unstable and imprecise.[13] More common have been terms that seemed to carry meanings that were better specified: diplomatic history, the history of foreign relations, or occasionally, the history of international relations.[14] The genealogy of the "new international history" is rooted in these historiographical traditions, but it has gone beyond them in some important ways. The essay, therefore, begins by tracing this genealogy and surveying the longstanding debates over crisis and renewal in the field of diplomatic/international history, and then traces the various strands of the new international history as it has been emerging in the fifteen years or so. In its second part, it outlines a proposal for redefining and refocusing the practice of international history as the history of "international society," understood not simply as an arena for interstate

[12] The term "methodological nationalism," referring to the tendency to naturalize the nation-state and its boundaries in social or historical analysis, is borrowed from recent important debates in sociology. See, e.g., A. Wimmer and N. Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology," *International Migration Review* 37, No. 3 (2003), 576-610.

[13] This is in contrast to the British context, where the term "international history" has a more straightforward usage essentially to mean "the history of international relations," as in the Department of International History at the London School of Economics. See Patrick Finney, ed., *Palgrave Advances in International History* (Basingstoke, 2005), especially "Introduction: What is International History?" and Gordon Martel, ed., *A Companion to International History* (Oxford, 2007). In Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, 2006) the term "international history" is used more-or-less interchangeably with "the history of international politics".

[14] The latter term was in more common use among historians in an earlier era. See, e.g., Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Introduction to the History of International Relations*, trans. Mary Ilford (New York, 1967).

interactions but rather as a historical subject in its own right, one that comprises an diverse array of actors and institutions, both state and nonstate. The essay concludes with a discussion of the advantages, possible pitfalls, and methodological challenges that are involved in such a move to redefine the field.[15]

Let me be clear at the outset: This essay is not an argument for marginalizing states in the writing of international history, much less for ignoring the power of states in international affairs. Rather, it assumes that historians need to think about states—or rather governments—and what they do in the world within the broader contexts and environments in which they operate and, in these contexts, to understand the workings of power in international society as inhering not only in the realms of diplomacy, military conflict, or economic competition but also in cultural diffusion, legal and social norms, and global issues such as health, food, population, and the environment, and—most importantly—to treat all these realms as intimately interconnected. Moreover, it assumes that we need to treat the place of national enclosures and the role of state power as open questions that historians must interrogate rather than as the premises from which historical investigation begins. I will not attempt to lay out the argument for doing those things since it seems, as noted at the outset, that the debate over the need to transcend methodological nationalism in historical writing has been largely settled. Many historians, most of them trained in nationally-defined fields, have for some time now been venturing beyond national enclosures in their work, and few, it seems, are seriously

[15] Though references to a "new international history" have been making the rounds among historians for a while now, as best I can tell no one has yet attempted to define this term *in toto*. But see Odd Arne Westad, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three Possible Paradigms," *Diplomatic History* 24, No. 4 (Fall 2000), 551-565; Liz Borgwardt, "A 'New International History' of the 1960s," *Reviews in American History*, 32, No. 2 (June 2004), 256-261; and Peter Mandler, "The New Internationalism," *History Today* 62, No. 3 (2012).

challenging the importance and legitimacy of such moves even if they themselves are not engaged in them. The question, then, is not "What?" but "How?" If international historians must, as Matthew Connelly has argued, "see beyond the state," what precisely should they look at and how should they go about doing it?[16]

The history of relations between states is hardly a new field of historical investigation, and in its original guise, as the history of diplomacy, it goes back to the nineteenth century origins of the modern discipline of history. But if the field itself has a long history, so does the notion that it is in decline. More than four decades ago, Ernest R. May already lamented the "decline of diplomatic history."[17] The field, he wrote in an essay published in 1971, had been central to historical work from its earliest days, from its ancient roots in Herodotus and Thucydides to its modern establishment in the era of von Ranke. In the middle of the twentieth century, some of the most prominent figures in the field in the West—Samuel Flagg Bemis, Dexter Perkins, William Langer, Bernadotte Schmitt, Pierre Renouvin, H. W. Temperley—were widely recognized leaders of the profession as a whole.[18] And the field had not stood still. If, in the interwar period, some of the best historians were engaged in the close reconstruction of negotiations between the European courts based on diplomatic documents, after the Second World War leading practitioners began to doubt that diplomatic documents could tell the whole story. Renouvin wanted to look at "les forces profondes" operating behind the scenes, and A. J.

---

[16] The phrase comes from Matthew Connelly, "Seeing beyond the State: The Population Control Movement and the Problem of Sovereignty," *Past & Present* 193 (2006):197-233, which in turn echoed James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, 1999).
[17] Ernest R. May, "The Decline of Diplomatic History," in George Billias and Gerald Grob, eds., *American History: Retrospect and Prospect* (New York, 1971), 399-430.
[18] A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford, 1954).

P. Taylor popularized the notion that such documents recorded no more than "what one clerk said to another."[19]

These critiques invigorated the field, May argued, giving rise to new approaches to the study of foreign policy and international relations, going beyond foreign ministries and diplomatic exchanges to focus on the role of executive branches, on social forces, on perceptions and attitudes, on bureaucracies, on public opinion, and on the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. In the United States, the 1950s saw critiques of the foreign policy "idealism" of the Wilsonian variety while the 1960s saw a surge of studies, inspired by William Appleman Williams' concept of "open door imperialism," on the economic factors and capitalist influences that drove American foreign policy.[20] But despite these developments, May's conclusion in 1971 was that the field of "diplomatic history," recently eclipsed as it was by the rising popularity of social history, had entered a decline and might be approaching its demise. He saw reasons for optimism, however, if traditional diplomatic history could transform itself into "international history." It was too early to say with precision what the contours the renewed field would be, though it was clear that international history would have to venture beyond diplomacy to explore perceptions, ideas, culture, economics, and

---

[19] May, "The Decline of Diplomatic History," 411-12.

[20] William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, rev. ed. (1972; c. 1959); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (1963); Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (1967); Lloyd C. Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison, 1964). Williams, in turned, had based the concept of "open door imperialism" partly on the notion of Britian's nineteenth-century "informal empire" associated in with the Cambridge historians John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson. See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review*, Second series, 6, No. 1 (1953); Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1961).

institutions. It promised, May concluded, "to be one of the rich areas of future historical scholarship."[21]

Despite May's optimism, the sense of crisis in the field did not recede in the course of the 1970s. If anything, it got worse. This perception was perhaps most famously articulated in Charles S. Maier's much-debated 1980 essay "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations." The tone of the essay was ominous from the outset. "The history of international relations," Maier began, "cannot, alas, be counted among the pioneering fields of the discipline during the 1970s."[22] The "hot" fields among American historians, he noted, included social history, slavery, labor, and colonial America. Their work was premised on the importance of "bottom up" history and reflected the suspicion and distaste toward the study of power and the powerful that had spread in the post-Vietnam profession and had seemed to marginalize the history of diplomacy as a history concerned only with dead white men.[23]

The field, Maier acknowledged, had not stood still: Michael J. Hogan and others had developed the corporatist approach to the diplomatic history of interwar years, John Lewis Gaddis had launched Cold War post-revisionism, and there were multilingual, multi-archival works on Asian diplomacy by Michael Hunt and Akira Iriye.[24] Despite these contributions, however, the field of diplomatic history as a whole remained peripheral in the historical profession. Still, Maier saw reasons to think "that a renewed

---

[21] May, "The Decline of Diplomatic History," 429-30.
[22] Charles S. Maier, "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 355-387.
[23] Maier, "Marking Time," 356.
[24] Akira Iriye, "Culture and Power: International Relations as Intercultural Relations," *Diplomatic History* 111 (1979), 115-128; Iriye, ed., *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); Michael H. Hunt, *Frontier Defense and the Open Door: Manchuria in Chinese-American Relations, 1895-1911* (New Haven, 1973).

sense of collective purpose may be at hand." Lamenting the fact that U.S. diplomatic history, in particular, still remained a branch of U.S. history rather than moving in a more international direction, he was nevertheless buoyed by the growing interest in global history as reflected in recent work on world systems theory, and recommended that historians pay more heed to the ideas of historical sociologists on the independent roles of states.[25] Like May, Maier called for collapsing sharp distinctions between domestic and international politics. If historians of international relations did all this, he concluded, their field "might profitably develop … into 'international history' that would analyze political structures, cultural systems, and economic arrangements within the persisting framework of a world of competing territories."[26] But it was clear that for Maier, as for May almost a decade earlier, "international history" remained an ideal that diplomatic historians should aspire to rather than something that they were already engaged in.

The publication of Maier's essay caused a stir of proportions and duration not usually associated with contributions to scholarly anthologies. The ensuing debate—recently dubbed "the Charlie Maier Scare" in one essay by a prominent member of the guild—played out over several decades.[27] Much of this discussion took place on the pages of *Diplomatic History*, the journal of record of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), where a succession of scholars tried to assess what if anything was wrong with the field and what could be done about it. The debate

---

[25] Maier cited the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, Perry Anderson, Theda Skocpol, and Charles Tilly as examples. Maier, "Marking Time," 384.
[26] Maier, "Marking Time," 387.
[27] See Mark Philip Bradley, "The Charlie Maier Scare and the Historiography of American Foreign Relations, 1959-1980," in Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan, eds., *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations, 2nd ed.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 9-29. Bradley served as President of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) in 2013.

was provisionally summed up in a pair of essays by Michael H. Hunt published in the early 1990s.[28] "International history has been much with us of late," began the first of those essays. "It has become over the last decade increasingly difficult to open a journal or hear a luncheon address without being treated to the academic equivalent of a ritual rain dance summoning the spirit of a more international approach."[29] Hunt then proceeded to partake in the ritual himself, recommending a series of steps to promote such an approach: more multi-archival research, more focus on nonstate actors, a better integration of social and economic factors, and more attention to comparative dimensions and to the world outside the United States. His conclusion, however, eerily echoed those of Maier and May before him, as he looked forward to a day when diplomatic historians find themselves "moving beyond field renewal to an enhanced influence within the profession," when "diplomatic history, once derided as the most narrow and insular of the historical fields," emerged "in its new guise as one of the broadest and most interpretive" fields in the profession.[30] Though much had changed in the two decades that passed between May's lament and Hunt's, the bottom line seemed to have remained the same.

The very next year Hunt continued his renewal project with a bracing critical analysis of the state of the field.[31] Diplomatic history, he wrote, fell into three categories. The first, of which Hunt was sharply critical, was foreign policy history marked by a "naïve positivism" that assumed rather than probed the meaning of notions such as the

---

[28] Michael H. Hunt, "Internationalizing U.S. Diplomatic History: A Practical Agenda," *Diplomatic History* 15:1 (1991), 1-11.
[29] Hunt, "Internationalizing U.S. Diplomatic History," 1.
[30] Hunt, "Internationalizing U.S. Diplomatic History," 11.
[31] Michael H. Hunt, "The Long Crisis in U.S. Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure" *Diplomatic History* 16:1 (1992), 115-140.

"national interest." This approach also suffered from "archival fetishism," forever chasing newly-opened archives and thus privileging new documentation over new perspectives or interpretations.[32] In the second category was literature that focused on the domestic determinants of U.S. foreign policy—ideological, social, cultural, and economic. This approach, built upon the work of Charles Beard and William Appleman Williams, had come to prominence with New Left historians of 1960s and later branched into a number of permutations, such as the "corporatist synthesis" that focused on the imbrication of government and big business in the management of foreign policy. Hunt generally approved of this approach, though he recommended that its practitioners go beyond economics and institutions to pay more attention to culture and its role in the construction of power relations. Finally, there was work on U.S. policy in international context, though Hunt noted it focused largely on relations with Europe. What characterized all these approaches, however, was that they all still concentrated on the agency of states and their officials, and Hunt called on his fellow historians to think more about nonstate actors such as immigrants, refugees, multinationals, and missionaries.[33] What Hunt really wanted to achieve was stated starkly in the essay's title: "The Long Crisis in U.S. Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure." But closure remained elusive.

Hunt presented an ambitious agenda for renewing the field. But over the course of the 1990s, his proposal, though much admired and echoed, found relatively few who were willing to follow the call. A proliferation of manifestoes, many noted, was met by a paucity of monographs. And so another decade later Akira Iriye could still issue an urgent call to "internationalize" international history, lamenting that too many works in

[32] Hunt, "Long Crisis," 117-122.
[33] Hunt, "Long Crisis," 117-122.

the field remained uni- rather than multi-archival.[34] Too many historians focused on understanding the sources of policy decisions, whose study, despite a broadening array of analytical tools—gender, culture, perceptions—remained focused squarely on the United States. Iriye called for broadening the focus not just beyond the United States but beyond the national framework more broadly and beginning, among other things, to look at collective other identities that might shape transnational interactions, such as those based on gender, religion, culture, or ideology. Moreover, he wanted historians to go even beyond the transnational framework to study global issues that were not defined by national boundaries. He noted that international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, dealt with such crucial issues as nuclear disarmament, refugee relief, economic development, cultural contacts, human rights, and the environment. But while they had long been a subject of study for sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars of international relations and law, they remained largely neglected among international historians.[35] Having apparently given up on the hope that such actors and issues would gain the attention of "traditional" international historians, Iriye concluded with a proposal for studying the two realms, interstate relations and "world community," separately.[36] But after three decades of imagining a new, inclusive international history just over the

[34] Akira Iriye, "Internationalizing International History," in Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, 2002).

[35] In IR see, e.g., Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford, 2007); in international law, Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, 2004); in sociology, John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[36] Iriye followed soon thereafter with a book tracing the outlines of this new project. Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2002).

horizon, this separatist approach was, in some sense, an admission of failure. Was not international history supposed to be all about connections?

Two years later, in 2004, Michael J. Hogan's SHAFR presidential address echoed Iriye's sentiments, as Hogan called on the organization change its name and mission to include fully historians of international relations whose work did not focus on the United States.[37] But even as Iriye still saw much to be done in 2002 and Hogan worried about diplomatic historians failing to take the lead on the transnational turn in the profession, the field had already begun to shift. At the dawn of the new millennium, the work on the domestic determinants of foreign policy, which had initially focused on institutions, politics, and economics, was branching into new social and cultural themes. The influence of the cultural turn in the profession at large since the 1980s has led increasing attention to the significance of race relations and racial categories in the history of foreign relations.[38] Gender, and to a lesser extent class, have become significant categories of analysis for understanding the history of foreign relations.[39] The role of religious faith in

---

[37] Michael J. Hogan, "The 'Next Big Thing': The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age," *Diplomatic History* 28, No. 1 (Jan. 2004), 1-22. The phrase "next big thing" came from an essay by then-AHA president Lynn Hunt, who had wondered two years earlier if the "next big thing" would be "some kind of revival or refashioning of diplomatic" history. Lynn Hunt, "Where Have All the Theories Gone?" *Perspectives* 40 (March 2002), 7.

[38] This rich literature includes work on the role of race in the US empire, e.g. Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, 2001) and Paul A. Kramer *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, 2006). Another important strand is work on the relationship between foreign relations and domestic race relations, e.g., Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York, 2003); and Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Harvard, 2001). Other notable works include Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U. S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Marc S. Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with China and Japan: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

[39] Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, 83, No. 4 (Mar., 1997), 1309-1339; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998); Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, 2001). Elizabeth McKillen, "Ethnicity,

shaping foreign relations, too, has begun to attract sustained attention lately after decades of puzzling near-invisibility in the historiography.[40] There has been important new work on cultural diplomacy and more broadly on the role of culture, including consumer culture, in shaping relations between states and societies.[41] And while historians of international relations have long been interested in the role of ideology, important recent literatures have been characterized by close attention to ideological strands that came to prominence in international relations only in the postwar era.[42] In fact, among the most vibrant strands in the recent literature have been ones focused on the histories of previously understudied intellectual constructions central to postwar international history,

Class, and Wilsonian Internationalism Reconsidered: The Mexican- and Irish-American Immigrant Left and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1914-1922," *Diplomatic History* 25 (Fall 2001), 553-87, uses on both ethnicity and class.

[40] Andrew Preston, "Bridging the Gap Between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 30, No. 5 (November, 2006), 783-812 and idem, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, 2012); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: the Soul of Containment* (Cambridge, & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Duke University Press, 2004) deals with both race and religion.

[41] Emily Rosenberg has been a pioneer in incorporating culture, and particularly the culture of capitalism, into the history of foreign relations. See Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York, 1982) and idem, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham, 2003). Other examples are Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004) and Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

[42] Two classics are Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 1970) and Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven, 1987).

namely ideas and practices of modernization and development,[43] of humanitarian intervention and human rights,[44] and of global governance.[45]

As these trends suggest, one of the signal characteristics of the new international history has been the growing inclusion of non-Western regions of the world not simply as arenas but as important agents in international affairs. This trend has given rise to a number of related approaches. One approach has focused on the nature and consequences of the Cold War in the "third world."[46] Another has emphasized the agency of developing nations such as Cuba or national liberation groups such as the Algerian FLN or the PLO in the history of the Cold War.[47] Yet a third approach includes work that endeavors to "take off the Cold War lens" entirely and focus on themes such as anticolonialism and decolonization, health and demography, and the shifting dynamics of international

---

[43] See, *inter alia*, Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley, 1997); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, 2000); David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Nil Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003); and Nathan J. Citino, *The 'History of the Future': The Politics of Modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations, 1945-1967* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

[44] On the former see, e.g., Gary Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York, 2008). On the latter, prominent examples include Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York, 2007); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); and Mark Philip Bradley, "American Vernaculars: The United States and the Global Human Rights Imagination," *Diplomatic History* 38:1 (Jan. 2014), 1-21. Still useful if already dated is Kenneth Cmiel, "The Recent History of Human Rights," *American Historical Review* 109:1 (2004).

[45] See, e.g., Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York, 2012).

[46] Perhaps the most prominent recent example is Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005). But see also Robert J. MacMahon, *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York, 2013).

[47] See, e.g., Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, No. 4 (Fall 2000), 567-591; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill:, 2002); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: The Algerian Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War World* (New York, 2002); Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford, 2012); and Mark Philip Bradley, "Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919–1962," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2010), vol. I, 464-484.

institutions in its examination of the role of the nations and peoples of the global south in international affairs.[48] There is a growing interest in the roles of nonstate actors, a rather inelegant term that includes everything from international NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch to private philanthropies such as the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, to missionaries, global corporations, and terrorist organizations.[49] There is also now a growing literature on the histories of various international organizations and activities associated with the United Nations and its predecessor, the League of Nations, which were until recently a virtual historiographical *terra incognita*.[50]

Historians can now see up-close the emerging contours of the international history that May and Maier spied on the distant horizon in the 1970s and 1980s, and that Hunt, Iriye, and others had called for in the 1990s and after. The contours, of course, do not fit those visions in all their particulars, nor do they remain static as the field evolves. Nor has this history emerged as a rejection of the traditional diplomatic history that May saw in decline and Maier accused of "marking time." Rather, it has incorporated the traditional concerns and methods but has expanded and gone beyond them in several

---

[48] The phrase is taken from Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens," *American Historical Review* 105 (2000). For a survey see Matthew Connelly, "The Cold War in the Longue Durée: Global Migration, Public health, and Population Control,' in Leffler and Westad, eds., *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III.

[49] For useful recent surveys of this literature see Jeremi Suri, "Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-State Actors," in Finney, *Palgrave Advances in International History*, 223-46; Brad Simpson, "Bringing the Non-State Back In: Human Rights and Terrorism since 1945" in Costigliola and Hogan, eds., *America in the World*, 260-283.

[50] On the UN see Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations," *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008) and the other essays in that special issue. Also Mazower, *Governing the World*; Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York, 2006); and Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food And Agriculture Organization, And World Health Organization Have Changed the World 1945-1965* (Kent State, 2006). On the league see Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112:4 (Oct. 2007).

important ways. It has absorbed the insights of the "cultural turn" that swept the profession in the 1980s and 1990s, and it forms a part—indeed, arguably a cutting edge—of the transnational turn that has shaped the discipline more recently.[51] It incorporates the traditional interest in high diplomacy, war, and the domestic determinants of foreign policy but also ventures beyond them in three distinct ways. First, it takes a greater interest in the regions of the global south and in the agency states and peoples there in the international arena. Second, it incorporates the roles of nonstate actors, including international organizations, NGOs, foundations, and transnational networks. Third, and relatedly, it explores a broader array of themes, both to probe the domestic sources of foreign policy and to look into global issues such as development, population, and disease, than those that had received little attention from international historians in the past.[52] When Brenda Gayle Plummer surveyed in 2005 the "changing face of diplomatic history," she mustered optimism about the state of the field that had seemed a distant hope to her predecessors. The field of foreign relations history had "become more inclusive, and "its vitality and the exciting new scholarship … will provide intellectual sustenance for many years to come."[53]

---

[51] On the cultural turn see Frank A. Ninkovich and Liping Bu, eds., *The Cultural Turn: Essay in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations* (Chicago, 2001). On a recent assessment of the impact of the cultural and transnational "turns" on the history of foreign relations, focusing on the U.S. case, see Erez Manela, "The United States in the World," in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now* (Philadelphia, 2011), 201-220.

[52] For example, the three-volume *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad and published in 2010, includes two chapters on the Cold War in the global south and additional chapters focusing on science and technology, transnational organizations, the biosphere, human rights, consumer capitalism, and global migration, public health, and population control.

[53] Brenda Gayle Plummer, "The Changing Face of Diplomatic History: A Literature Review," *The History Teacher* 38:3 (May 2005). Additional optimistic assessments include Tom Zeiler, "The Diplomatic Bandwagon: The State of the Field." *Journal of American History* 95 (Mar. 2009), 1053-73 and Manela, "The United States in the World."

Still, even as the atmosphere of crisis has lifted and the field has expanded in novel directions, new anxieties and confusions have arisen. The broad thematic expansion and the blurring of the boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, states and non-states, hard and soft power, has caused some to wonder whether the traditional field of diplomatic history, in its drive to expand, renew, and keep up with the times, has lost its intellectual coherence. In the field of U.S. history, one conspicuous sign of both the change and the confusion it has entailed has been the replacement of faculty positions in diplomatic or foreign relations history with a proliferation of positions advertised as "U.S. in/and the world," a term designed to connote a sense of thematic inclusiveness and innovation but also carries within it a certain vagueness that often has both departments and candidates puzzling over the precise scope and character of such positions. Does the category of "United States in the world" refer to the history of relations between the United States and other states and societies, however expansively defined in terms of regions, actors, and themes? Or does it encompass the much larger universe of historians whose work follows the lead of Thomas Bender, Ian Tyrrell, and others in embedding U.S. history within the context of a wider world?[54]

Moreover, once one ventures beyond the focus on U.S. relations with the world to look at international history more broadly—a move that was, after all, a central component of the agenda that was laid out by May, Maier, Hunt, Iriye, and others—the sense of definitional instability and contestation grows even greater. With all the recent expansions in its geographic, thematic, and methodological purviews, and as it has moved closer to the concerns and approaches that have animated the transnational turn in

[54] Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York, 2006); Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since* 1789 (New York, 2007).

the historical discipline as whole, has international history has become so broad and so diffuse as to lose its intellectual definition and coherence as a distinct area of study? Indeed, as one surveys the numerous discussions and debates over the state of the field in the recent decade or so, it is easy to get the sense that the term "international history" has either been consigned to cover the undoubtedly important but relatively narrow and rather old-fashioned topic of interstate relations, or else it was morphing into a designation whose boundaries were vague and a term whose distinction from the related fields such as global, transnational, and/or world history was unclear and perhaps unimportant. As the field has expanded it may have moved, as the optimists have claimed, to the cutting edge of the historical profession, but at the same time it has been increasingly difficult for those engaged in it to imagine themselves as part of a unified intellectual project.[55]

The challenge is not simply to pitch a "big tent" under which historians dealing with a diverse array of regions, topics, and methodologies could all shelter in mutual tolerance. Nor is it to decree that certain traditional approaches and preoccupations are past their expiration date and must be jettisoned. No one who is aware of the current international and global environment can argue that efforts to understand questions of war, diplomacy, and military power are outdated, or that understanding the thinking of

---

[55] As its name suggests, SHAFR was founded as a professional society for scholars of *U.S.* foreign relations, rather than international history more broadly. However, over the years it has also included, partly for lack of alternatives, numerous historians who worked, at least some of the time, on topics that were not centered on the United States. In recent years SHAFR meetings and publications have witnessed a number of tense debates between those who called on the society to move away from a U.S. focus and toward international history—including changing the name of the organization and its journal—and those who argued for retaining the focus on the United States. See, e.g., the sharp exchanges in Matthew Connelly, Robert J. McMahon, Katherine A.S. Sibley, Thomas Borstelmann, Nathan Citino, and Kristin Hoganson, "SHAFR in the World," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 42, No. 2 (Sept. 2011), 4-16. The argument for "bucking the historiographical trend toward international history" and instead "concentrating on the foreign policy of one nation," namely the United States, is made *inter alia* in Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009). Quotes are from p. 4.

top decision-makers in major capitals, or the environments in which they operate, is no longer important. Rather, the challenge is to reframe the field of international history in a manner that would not only encompass the various approaches described above but also make clear the common historical subject which these approaches are all working to illuminate.

With that goal in mind, I would propose that these diverse strands of historical study that are found broadly under the umbrella of international history can be given a substantial measure of coherence if we think of all of them as concerned with the history of international society. The term "international society," while not in common use among most historians,[56] including those concerned with the history of international relations, is not new; it has for decades been a central concept in the so-called English School of International Relations. English School theorists, however, have used the term narrowly to mean "a society of states," and have traced its history from European origins to global expansion within that framework.[57] More recently, some IR theorists, most notably Barry Buzan, have sought to expand the framework of the discussion through the introduction of the term "world society," which Buzan defined as the combination of

[56] One recent exception is Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 2012). As the book's title suggests, Gorman uses the term in a more limited sense than its meaning in the present essay. For a very different but equally interesting perspective on interwar internationalism see Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006)

[57] The literature here is very large, but see in particular Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford, 1984); Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London, 1992); Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (London, 1998); Cornelia Navari, ed., *Theorising International Society: English School Methods* (Basingstoke, 2009).

interstate society, transnational society, composed of nonstate actors, and "interhuman society," made up of interactions between individuals in the global space.[58]

Thinking of international society as the interstate component of a broader "world society" may be useful from the point of view of IR theory. But putting aside the theoretical uses of the distinctions between interstate, interhuman, and transnational society, some of the questions that have been most interesting for international historians in recent years lie where these domains interpenetrate, and where states insect and interact with a variety of other actors. Moreover, as a matter of history rather than theory it would be prudent not to insist on drawing overly sharp distinctions between these domains, and certainly not to insist that they be studied separately. After all, most of the issues that international historians are concerned with, from war, imperialism, and diplomacy to development and cultural exchange, involve an array of state and nonstate actors, often in ways that make it hard to distinguish between the domains. For example, in Matthew Connelly's recent book on the global campaign to control world population, the USAID Population Division, a part of the U.S. government and so notionally a state actor, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, an NGOs, operated in tandem along with numerous other state and nonstate agencies and transnational expert networks to constitute a globally influential "population establishment." Similarly, Nick Cullather's recent work on the history of the "Green Revolution" shows how governments in Washington, New Delhi, Manila and elsewhere, the UN Food and

---

[58] Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge, 2004). The term "world society" is also used, somewhat differently, by sociologists interested in global interactions. See John Boli, John W. Meyer, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez, "World Society and the Nation-State," *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1): 144-81. The phrase "Global society" also crops up on occasion, though mostly as shorthand for the term "global civil society," which was coined to serve in contradistinction to "international society" as a society of states. See John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge 2003).

Agriculture Organization, the Rockefeller Foundation, and a transnational network of plant scientists were all indispensable and interlinked parts of the story of the transformation of global agricultural practices in the postwar world. In both of those cases, and in others, limiting the story to either state or nonstate actors would have been nonsensical, and would have left us with a much-impoverished understanding of these histories.[59]

For historians, borrowing the term "international society" from the English School and expanding its meaning to include an array of nonstate actors would make more sense than using an alternative such as "world society." Among other things, retaining the term "international" would serve to emphasize that, having absorbed the insights of the transnational turn in the discipline and the scholarship on globalization within history and other social sciences, the role of states, their power, and the impact that have had on history remains a central concern for international historians. In this usage, the term "international society" transcends the meaning of a "society of states" but rather conjures a typologically diverse and hybrid subject in which states (or rather, governments) play important roles but in which they also operate alongside a host of other actors, with the relative significance of actors of different types varying from case to case. In this context, the term "society" is preferable to alternatives such as "community" (as in the common phrase "international community" or in Iriye's "global community") in that it underlines the diverse, contested, often hierarchical structure of

[59] Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008); Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010). See also in a similar vein Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York, 2014); Erez Manela, "A Pox on Your Narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History," *Diplomatic History* 34, No. 2 (April 2010), 299-323.

the subject rather than carrying implications of harmony and equality that the term "community" may bring to mind.

It is precisely works like Cullather's and Connelly's, cited above, that highlight the limits of the debates of the last few decades as to whether historians of US foreign relations must "internationalize"—that is, expand their interests beyond U.S. foreign policy—or whether the outsize power and influence of the United States in international affairs, at least in the last century, means that they must keep their efforts focused on the view from Washington. Cullather and Connelly, and they are by no means the only ones, shows us that historians collectively can do both. This is not to argue that every historian of international society must actively engage in research on several different state and nonstate actors, in numerous languages, and across several continents. But it is to say all historians of international society are contributing to a broad field a scholarship that is neither focused on the policies of a single government nor concentrated on topics of high politics and diplomacy. Such work demonstrates that is enlightening and indeed crucial to spend substantial time with U.S. decision-makers, but also to embed those decisions, the contexts in which they were made, and the impact they had, within a rich historical narrative that includes a host of other actors: government officials outside the U.S., plutocrat philanthropists, global networks of scientists and experts, transnational activists and, not least, individuals on the ground who had to contend with and respond, in those particular cases, to concerted efforts to decrease their production of children and increase their output of grain.[60]

[60] It is perhaps unsurprising but nevertheless notable that the Rockefellers and their foundation were major actors in both of these stories. Given the cumulative impacts of transnational campaigns for family planning and agricultural reform in the course of the twentieth century and the Rockefeller's roles in both of these efforts across decades, as well in numerous other projects related to medicine and public health

Once international society is seen as a distinct historical subject that is larger than the sum of its parts, akin in the nature of its historical subjecthood to national categories such as "the United States," it becomes apparent that its history can and should be studied using the full complement of thematic approaches and methodologies that historians have long used to study any national (or for that matter regional) history. So constructed, international society of course has a political history and an economic history, and much (though by no means all) of what is considered traditional work on the history of foreign policy and interstate relations falls into these thematic categories. But it also has intellectual and legal histories, where we can conceptually fit, among other things, the recent outpouring of work on transnational circulations of ideas and norms on such topics as human rights, the nature and criteria of civilized status in international affairs, or the right of self-determination (indeed, the very ideas about the nature and characters of nations in the first place are part of this theme).[61] International society also has a cultural history, worked out in detail in numerous studies on cultural globalization, "Americanization," and cultural homogenization and fragmentation on a global scale.[62] It

---

that have had global impacts, there is a plausible argument to make that the Rockefeller Foundation, even leaving aside the family's imprint, in its corporate guise, on the history of energy, was one of the most influential actors in twentieth-century international history. Yet it is a measure of the state-centered focus of international historians that no full-scale scholarly history of the foundation and its global impact has yet been written. For important but partial treatments see William H. Schneider, ed., *Rockefeller Philanthropy and Modern Biomedicine: International Initiatives from World War I to the Cold War* (Bloomington, Ind., 2002), and the work by political sociologist Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York, 2012). The closest thing to a general history of the foundation and its projects was authored more than 60 years ago by a recent president of the foundation. See Raymond B. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New York, 1952).

[61] On human rights see works already cited above, including Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* and Moyn, *The Last Utopia*. On the question of "civilization" in international society see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007). On self-determination see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007).

[62] E.g., Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural*

also has a social history, which considers, among other things, the nature and significance of transnational social movements.[63] All these categories, of course, intersect and interpenetrate as they do in nationally or regionally-defined historical fields, and many, perhaps even most works on the history of international society touch on more than one of them.

Thinking of international society as a distinct historical subject highlights connections between, and conversations among, burgeoning fields of historical inquiry that might otherwise appear to follow separate trajectories. It brings out more clearly the connections between historians concerned with domestic determinants of foreign policy and those who work on global issues; between historians focused on interstate relations and those who study transnational interactions and nonstate actors; between those who write about more traditional topics such as war and diplomacy and others who are more interested in questions of food, population, disease, international law, human rights, and the environment. Two examples of currently lively areas of scholarship that demonstrate this point are the history of international development and the history of transnational humanitarian groups and movements. Both are fields which have attracted significant attention among historians only in the past 15 years or so, and yet both have already seen the development of burgeoning literatures, with dozens of articles and monographs already published and, no less importantly, a great many fascinating studies in various stages of preparation. The topic of development has, of course, been of great interest to

---

Diplomacy in Postwar Germany (Baton Rouge, 1999); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us*: *How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York, 1997), and much else.

[63] Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Harvard, 2005); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present* (Stanford, 2003); Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* (2008); Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, 1997).

social scientists for most of the postwar period if not before. The beginning of the historiographical tsunami on the topic, however, can be traced rather precisely to a Research Note published in the pages of *Diplomatic History* in 2000 under the title "Development? It's History." The author, Nick Cullather, noted the prodigious fascination of social scientists with the subject of "economic development" since the 1950s and announced that historians of foreign relations "must sooner or later grapple with this immense literature and the ideas behind it," adding that by the early 1960s the influence of development discourse in Washington was such that "developmentese" had become "the Kennedy administration's court vernacular."[64]

Cullather's call heralded an outpouring of scholarship on the history of international development that has shown no signs of letting up since. That same year, Michael E. Latham published *Modernization as Ideology*, which traced the ideological contours of modernization theory within the U.S. social science community, tied it to earlier ideas of development that had their genesis, *inter alia*, in Washington's imperial projects in the Philippines, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, and placed its evolution in the postwar period in the context of the Cold War battle against communism for "hearts and minds" of postcolonial peoples. He then followed modernization theory from the realm of ideology and social science to the precincts of policy, examining in particular its role in the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps, and "nation-

[64] Nick Cullather, "Development? It's History," *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (Fall 2000), 641-653. Quotes are from p. 641. Cullather's call built on the pioneering essays in Cooper and Packard, eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences* and on the vast literature that had grown on the subject of development among political scientists, anthropologists, and others. Within this literature, two of the most influential works on historians have been James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998) and James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1990).

building" efforts in South Vietnam in the early 1960s.[65] There followed other studies in this vein, examining the evolution of modernization as a mode of thinking and its influence on intellectual history, culture and the arts, politics and policy, colonialism and anticolonialism, both in the United States and elsewhere. Amy L. S. Staples demonstrated the influence of development thinking on the establishment and practices of United Nations agencies, focusing in particular on the World Bank, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Health Organization and tracing the growth of a network of experts who self-identified as "international civil servants" rather than representatives of any one nation, with their attendant discourses of scientific expertise and apolitical professionalism.[66] Work by David C. Engerman, David Ekbladh and others traced development thinking back in time to earlier ideologies of civilization, progress, and economic growth, exploring connections to European colonial projects, through left-wing intellectuals who marveled at the Soviet Union's modernization programs in the interwar years, to late nineteenth-century missionaries in China and elsewhere and early twentieth-century philanthropists working in East Asia and Latin America.[67]

Within a few years, the literature on the history of international development was branching out well beyond its origins in the history of U.S. foreign policy. In 2009, David C. Engerman and Corinna R. Unger pointed the way toward a "global history of modernization" in their introduction to a special journal issue that included essays on modernization discourses and projects in Peru, Algeria, Kenya, Indonesia, Syria, and the

---

[65] Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*.
[66] Staples, *The Birth of Development.* On the World Health Organization in particular see also Sunil S. Amrith, *Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930-65* (Basingstoke, 2006) and Nitsan Chorev, *The World Health Organization between North and South* (Ithaca, 2012).
[67] Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*; David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization & the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, 2010).

International Labor Organization.[68] The work of Connelly and Cullather, already mentioned above, showcased a new stage in the development of the literature on the history of development in combining research on the foreign policy of the U.S. and other governments with a diverse array of nonstate actors such as international organizations, NGOs, foundations, and expert networks, all combining in a bewildering array of what might today be called "private-public partnerships" to design and execute development projects. By 2011, Michael Latham could draw on a broad and rich literature in his survey of the roles of modernization and development in U.S. foreign policy from its origins in "imperial ideals" to the neoliberal turn of the 1980s and beyond to Washington's disastrous nation-building projects in Afghanistan and Iraq.[69]

In short, the histories of international development have seen a remarkably rapid growth of from to initial focus on the policies of the Kennedy administration into a literature that is growing global in its scope and that encompasses an expansive timeline, from Enlightenment ideas about Progress to the civilizing missions of the Victorian era to the erstwhile nation-builders of post-Cold War world. In the course of this expansion in space, time, and theme, the history of international development has increasingly come to intersect with the equally vibrant scholarship on the history of transnational humanitarian movements, whose focus has long been on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but which has recently expanded, particularly with its concern with humanitarian

---

[68] David C. Engerman and Corinna R. Unger, "Introduction: Toward a Global History of Modernization" *Diplomatic History* 33, No. 3 (June 2009), 375-385. The move toward a global history of modernization is still in its infancy, but examples on ongoing and forthcoming work in this direction include Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Development, Humanitarianism, and Global Projects in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge, 2016); and David C. Engerman, *Planning for Plenty: The Economic Cold War in India* (in progress).

[69] Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Chapel Hill, 2011).

interventions, into the 1990s and beyond. One notable aspect of this literature has been work by Ian Tyrrell, Ussama Makdissi, and others on missionaries and self-appointed agents of reform and civilization and in East Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere.[70] Combining these two literatures, one can now easily trace the genealogies of postwar development experts and international civil servants back through the transnational reformers and philanthropists and to those civilizing missionaries, with this all thickly enmeshed of course with the histories of empire.[71] The work on transnational reform and its connections to empire, in turn, has expanded to include interest in the international law and international institutions, such as the League of Nations, that came into being after World War I.[72]

The discussion of the literature to this point should suffice to show that a proposal for a history of international society is not a call for a Whig history that would celebrate the origins, rise, and eventual triumph of internationalism. Nor does this proposal aim to exaggerate the degree of cohesion or unity that should be claimed for international society, whether past or present. But the utility of international society as a

---

[70] Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2010); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, 2008).

[71] On transnational activism and reform movements see Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, 1991); Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, 1999).; Ann Marie Wilson, *Taking Liberties Abroad: Americans and the International Humanitarian Advocacy, 1821-1914* (forthcoming). On the complex relationship between missionaries and empire in this period see, e.g., J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York, 2006).

[72] Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations." Recent works that are part of the resurgence of interest in the League that Pederson describes include Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and world order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: 2008); Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism c. 1918-45* (Manchester , 2011); Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford, 2013); and Philippa Hetherington, *Circulating Subjects: The Traffic in Women and the Russian Invention of an International Crime* (forthcoming). On international law in the interwar period see, e.g., Dorothy V. Jones, *Toward a Just World: The Critical Years in the Search for International Justice* (Chicago, 2002).

historiographical subject does not much depend on the degree of its cohesion as a historical one, that is to say the degree to which it can be shown to have "actually" existed in the world. Rather, thinking about diverse sorts of work in international history as writing the history of international society can help us specify the scope of the field, and the common endeavor in which those who work in it are engaged. But even if one accepts that "international society" makes sense as a distinct historical subject, there remain a number of crucial questions that must be attended to if the field is to be institutionalized on a solid footing with faculty positions, graduate programs, course catalog category headings, and the other sundry accouterments of academic field-dom. First, one must consider the precise spatial and temporal scope of the subject. Second, there are some basic issues of research method and training—which languages? which archives?—that must be addressed in order to further extend and establish the recent push in the field beyond manifestoes and toward monographs. Finally, one must attend to the question of the place of nation-states within the history of international society, or to put it another way, the question of how this field should relate to historical fields anchored in national or regional enclosures and to the rise of scholarship defined as the study of "the United States (or Europe, Russia, China, etc.) in/and the world." This is an important question given the continuing salience within the field of international history of studies focused on the foreign policy of a single state and the historically close connections, at least within the American historical profession, between international history and the history of U.S. foreign relations.

First, if it is useful to think of "international society" as historical subject, how far back in historical time does this framing remain useful? Is it something that only those

who work on the modern era need to think about or could it be useful to histories focused on earlier eras? On first glance, the term's utility to thinking about the history of international affairs may seem largely confined to the modern period, and more specifically to the period roughly encompassing the last two centuries, during which the norms and institutions of the modern, sovereign nation-state began to migrate beyond Europe to the American continent, and when political contacts between Europeans and states across much of Asia started to intensify. This view might be bolstered by the observation that the most, though by no means all, of the recent scholarly work that is self-consciously concerned with international history has focused on the twentieth century, and most particularly on the postwar period, even if the search for the intellectual, legal, and cultural origins of international society may well lead back into earlier centuries and even, with certain questions, back to the ancient world.[73] But the recent focus of the new international history, in particular, on the modern era need not mean that its salient themes—the emphasis on the roles of non-Western and nonstate actors in international society and the significance of interactions between states that go beyond war, economics, and diplomacy—have no relevance to the history of periods prior to the nineteenth century.

International society may be global in scope today, but it need not be so in other historical places and times in order to serve as a useful concept. There is of course a long tradition of writing on the history of international relations in historical periods going back to the ancient world; indeed, it has often been argued that the ancient historians

[73] The focus on the recent century, and particularly on the Cold War era, has been evident to anyone who attended SHAFR conferences in recent years or follows the major journals in the field, such as *Diplomatic History*, *International History Review*, and *Diplomacy & Statecraft*. Several leading journals in the field, such as the *Journal of Cold War Studies* and *Cold War History*, are explicitly dedicated to this era.

themselves—Herodotus and Thucydides are the most prominent names often noted—were themselves among the founders of the genres of world history and international history, respectively.[74] There are also traditions of scholarship about international orders in other regional contexts, such as East Asia.[75] In fact, the idea of international society as a historical subject can be a useful tool to think with in regard to nearly any historical time and place, at least since the beginning of recorded history, since it can frame historical problems in a way that highlights the broader international and transnational contexts in which actors, events, and interactions were embedded and helps to identify connections along thematic and spatial lines that might otherwise remain obscured. As recent works such as David Armitage's studies on the global contexts of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and on the evolution of international thought have shown, people in the early modern period thought of themselves as operating within an international society that contained a diverse array of actors and operated according to established norms, and this of course applies to other eras and regions in history in which governments sought to establish and legitimate themselves and in which other (nonstate) actors, whether collective or individual, sought to resist, avoid, coopt, defeat, or otherwise interact with state power.[76]

---

[74] The works of Donald Kagan are one example of international history as applied to the ancient world. On the ancient historians themselves and their foundational role see José Miguel Alonso-Nuñez, *The Idea of Universal History in Greece: From Herodotus to the Age of Augustus* (Amsterdam, 2002); Larry Pratt, "Thucydides and International History," in *Power, Personalities and Policies: Essays in Honour of Donald Cameron Watt* (London, 1992), 1-31. The writings of Thucydides, in particular, have been widely influential in the field of International Relations. See Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, "The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations," *International Organization* 48, No. 1 (1994), 31-153.

[75] John King Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order; Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

[76] David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); idem, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2012). Numerous other studies that exemplify these themes could, of course, be proffered.

It may be tempting to think of the long history of international society as one of the gradual formation a number of regional societies of states, which were then slowly knitted into one in the era of Western global expansion, imperialism, and eventual decolonization. This notion is useful to a point, but it implies far too hermetic a separation between the different regions of the globe in the era before the rise of the West, a separation that few historians now accept (as well as rendering teleological a historical process which was highly contingent). To put it another way, if global history has been centered on the history of globalization, focusing on the structural forces that have shaped and modulated the shifting connections and interactions between different parts of the globe, then the history of international society may be viewed as the history of internationalization, meaning the responses of a diverse set of historical actors, both individual and collective, state and nonstate, to the process of globalization. As A. G. Hopkins and others have argued, the processes that comprise what is now called globalization have played crucial roles on shaping history well before the modern era, and therefore so did the myriad responses to those forces across time and space.[77] The two projects, of global and of international history, are therefore distinct but also mutually supportive, indeed mutually-constitutive.

Second, there is the issue of research methodology and training in the field of international history. Questions about languages and archives come up quickly and often in any discussion of the field in the context of shaping graduate training and facilitating monographic research, but they are not quite as difficult as they may seem at first. On the issue of language skills there is surely no one answer that fits all cases, and the array of

[77] A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2002), esp. Chap. 1 "Globalization—An Agenda for Historians."

skills required will vary significantly from one project to another. The traditional languages of diplomatic history, French and German, remain useful in many cases, as does Spanish. But perhaps one of the most salient characteristics of new scholarship in the field as far as language skills are concerned are first, a greater focus than in the past on non-European languages and second, a growing prevalence of uncommon combinations of linguistic skills (for example, Turkish and Japanese, or Russian and Chinese), since such combinations can suggest perspectives and allow the interrogation of connections that had hitherto remained largely hidden from view or not well explored.[78] As the backgrounds and native language skills of students in doctoral programs in the Anglophone world are growing more diverse, this question of language skills, though still a central consideration in the design of any undergraduate or graduate program, is becoming less prohibitive.

While a breadth and diversity of language skills is crucial for a scholarly field concerned with the history of international society, the foregoing discussion has made it clear that the willingness to devise new questions and adopt new perspectives is no less important. This leads among other things to the issue of archives and other primary sources, and here, too, the obstacles are not as great as they may seem at first. Traditional repositories of international history research, such as the official archives of the American, British, French, and other major powers remain centrally important even for those interested in the non-Western world or in nonstate actors. But international historians have been branching out in their research beyond the usual suspects. First, as their thematic interests expand they have increasingly consulted the records of

[78] The first combination facilitated Aydin's *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, the second Westad's *Global Cold War*.

government agencies that until recently were left untouched by historians of foreign relations; in the U.S. case this might mean reading not only State Department or White House documents but also the records of such agencies as the USIA, USAID, and the CDC. They have conducted research in colonial and postcolonial records of numerous states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. They have also increasingly tapped the record of non-government entities: international organizations, INGOs, and foundations, among others. If until recently historians who worked in such places found themselves "virtually alone,"[79] these days they might be joined by others. The archives of the League of Nations in Geneva or the Rockefeller Archives in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., may never be as busy as the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland, or the UK National Archives in Kew, but they may soon compete with mid-sized presidential libraries in terms of research visits from international historians. And while there is significant variance, archives of nonstate actors, with the possible exception of corporate entities, often compare favorably in openness, efficiency, and organization to their governmental counterparts.[80] Finally, there is of course a vast array of personal papers as well as published sources—newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, reports, autobiographies, etc.—that can shed light on new questions as they did on the old ones.

The final challenge of a project to institutionalize the history of international society is to grapple with its relationship to historiographical fields anchored in particular nations and regions. How does one locate the history of a particular nation-state in

[79] As Matthew Connelly did at the archives of the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and the Ford Foundation ("*AHR* Conversation: On Transnational History," 1453). While such admissions are not normally found in published writings, similar experiences can be heard in many an informal conversation in conference halls and elsewhere.

[80] On the history and possible uses of the U.N. archives specifically, see Emma Rothschild, "The Archives of Universal History," *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008).

relation to the history of international society? And how would such a project relate to the very large, rich historiography of foreign policy that is not, strictly speaking, international? The first question is not particularly difficult. The precise answer will depend on the particular project undertaken, but in any case historians of international society must necessarily sustain a strong interest *in* the role of particular nation-states in world affairs even if they do not view themselves as historians *of* that nation-state. The second question, however, is more fraught, not least because the history of foreign policy has long functioned as a subfield within national historiographical fields.[81] So the question can be rephrased thus: Should historians *of* a particular nation-state (the United States, or Britain, France, Russia, etc.) who study policies toward and interactions with other parts of the world think of themselves—not exclusively, but simultaneously—as historians of international society? In my view the answer is that they should, or at least that they should see themselves as contributing to the historiography of international society even if their own interests are focused on the foreign policies or a single nation. The foreign policy of any nation, after all, is imbricated with the history of international society, and the creation and implementation of foreign policy is always shaped relationally and by historically-constructed conceptions of a larger international space. That space, in turn, is not merely an arena in which the agency of states or other actors plays out. Rather, it is an international society that has its own history of high politics and wars, of social interactions and intellectual currents, of diffusions of cultural forms, scientific understandings, technologies, and legal norms, of movements of people and goods, of biopolitics and health. It is, in short, a historical subject in its own right.

[81] The passions engaged by this question, at least among historians of U.S. foreign relations, were apparent in the 2011 "SHAFR in the World" conversation cited above.