
World-Systems Evolution and Global Futures

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A Big History of Globalization

The Emergence of a Global
World System



Springer

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Foreword

The Big History of Globalization is a large and important book. It is rigorously argued and superbly written and will deepen and enrich discussions about the immensely important theme of globalization. It advances these discussions and debates because of its thoroughness and clarity, but also in two other ways. First, its mainly Russian authors bring together insights on globalization from Russian-language and Western scholarly traditions, linking ideas and approaches that have been disconnected for far too long. Second, it places the notion of globalization within a much wider scholarly context than usual.

This book is not just *about* global connectivity; it is itself a wonderful example of that connectivity, because it connects the scholarly worlds of the Anglophone and European “West” with the Russophone scholarly worlds of the former Soviet Union. The intellectual, linguistic, cultural, and ideological barriers that have limited discussion between these rich and often very different scholarly and scientific worlds are lamentable. Bringing these worlds together produces immense intellectual synergies, as this volume shows. Western scholars have much to learn from Russian scholarly traditions because, as a rule, Russian-zone scholars have paid more attention to Western debates on such issues than Western scholars have to Russian debates. In this volume, the reader will find discussions that link the scholarly traditions of these worlds and, by doing so, generate new insights into the nature of globalization.

The Big History of Globalization also expands our understanding of globalization by placing its theme within the context of deep time. This means discussing globalization holistically, which allows the authors to illuminate the subject with insights from many different disciplines, complexity theory, catastrophe theory, and network theory, to the many insights from different traditions of “world history,” “global history,” and “world-systems” thinking. As Chap. 1 explains, placing the notion of globalization within this broad historical and intellectual framework raises fundamental questions about the connectivities that are at the heart of globalization, and about how the dense and Earth-wide connectivity of today’s world can be compared with earlier forms of connectivity in human history, and in the biosphere over several billion years, and even within the whole cosmos. Why did the emergence of networks of inter-connection between once isolated entities matter? How did increasing connectivity give rise to emergent properties within human societies,

and what is suggested about these properties by comparing them with emergences that occurred in the biosphere and the geosphere, or within molecular chemistry and quantum physics? This book proposes that there have been waves of globalization and deglobalization in human history that are similar in some respects with cycles of integration and disintegration that have occurred in physical and biological evolution. If this is so, can these oscillations be measured? Can rigorous models of their causes be developed and tested that will help us comprehend their impacts and causes? How distinctive are the astonishing forms of connectivity that are emerging in the era of the Internet and the Anthropocene? Are we now entering another phase of deglobalization?

Discussing globalization within such a vast conceptual framework is exhilarating and illuminating. The Introduction depicts in more detail how the subject of globalization can be set within a deep time framework and why it is important to do so.

The book's broad interdisciplinary framework and its linking of Western and Russian-language scholarship on globalization mean that scholars everywhere will find this volume illuminating and thought-provoking. They will also find a rich, but compact, summary of the scholarly studies of globalization both in the West and in the Russian zone over many decades. Its accounts of the history of globalization as a concept and of different possible definitions of globalization are deft, precise, and clear. There are also learned discussions of debates about the nature and significance of globalization and original contributions to the challenge of *measuring* globalization in different eras and contexts. Readers new to the field will find introductions to most of the important thinkers who have contributed to these debates. And, because this book explores the deep roots of the idea of globalization, it will help readers understand globalization as one expression of the mechanisms of networking that are present in all complex entities and explored within many different disciplines from physics to biology to environmental studies to economics and to studies of today's emerging global society.

The book begins with precise examination of what the word "globalization" has meant in different contexts and within different traditions and how it has been and might be measured. Its definitions are broad and varied, and they touch on many different types of links among human societies: economic, cultural, technological, ecological, demographic, political, and geopolitical. The authors date the earliest forms of globalization in human history to the first era of urbanization, to Gordon Childe's urban revolution. That is a periodization that some other scholars have questioned. Some archaeologists contend that important long-distance exchanges were already linking state-less and city-less hunter-gatherer societies to one another during the Paleolithic and Mesolithic Eras. Others contend that the technologies of communication and transportation of foraging societies constrained the systemic consequences of interaction to produce rather small regional human interaction systems, but that these were still comparable in important ways with the spatially larger systems that emerged after transportation and communications technologies facilitated more long-distance interaction. *The Big History of Globalization* traces the spread, expansion, and complexification of many kinds of networks over several thousand years, until the major turning point of the sixteenth century CE when, for the

first time, there emerged truly Earth-wide links among human societies. The world-historical significance of the global networks of exchange that emerged during the sixteenth century has been understood by historians for many centuries and was central to Marxist accounts of the history of capitalism, beginning with some famous passages in the *Communist Manifesto*. The book then traces the growth of international and transnational networks in recent centuries and their close links to modernization and industrialization. This volume takes the story of globalization up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Since then, the Anthropocene Epoch has seen an explosion of globalization so rapid and so potent that it will deserve an entire second volume.

This study is included in a series on World-Systems Evolution and Global Futures that is being published by Springer Verlag. Other volumes will present contending approaches to conceptualizing and periodizing globalization and ways of specifying the systemic spatial boundaries of whole world-systems. The scientific study of long-term, large-scale social change and sociocultural evolution will benefit from the clear exposition of contending approaches of the sort that is presented in *The Big History of Globalization*.

The authors are to be congratulated for producing the most thorough general account of the history of globalization that is currently available and for setting their discussion within a wide intellectual and historical context. Their book will do much to disperse the fog of globalization and to help us comprehend what is happening and what yet may happen in the twenty-first century.

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