COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Bentley et al./Interactions

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, © 2005, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

NB: Illustrations may have been deleted to decrease file size.
The 1990s were not kind to area studies. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, area studies came under attack from several different directions. Some critics charged that not only had cold war interests tainted area studies from their inception and influenced scholars’ conceptions of the larger world, but further that both the institutional structures and the substantive content of area studies were expressions of U.S. hegemony in the larger world. Others argued that area studies perpetuated orientalist constructs deriving from European and Euro-American colonialism. A few questioned the scientific status of area studies, characterizing them as purely descriptive exercises with no theoretical or explanatory power. Yet others charged that area specialists focused so intently on their own regions that they lost sight of the comparative and global contexts of regional experiences, with the result that the area studies project in general was becoming a fruitless and ingrown enterprise. Combined with threats of dwindling financial support, these critiques brought area studies to a point of crisis. Because area studies have been the principal filters through which scholars, policy makers, journalists, and the general public alike have produced and organized knowledge about the larger world since World War II, this was—and remains—a very important development.

By the late 1990s, scholars and funding agencies alike had launched a series of initiatives seeking variously to revive area studies and restore them to their former glory, to transform area studies and encourage them to address comparative and global issues, or to move beyond area studies altogether and develop new ways of organizing knowledge about the larger world. In this atmosphere of reevaluation and experimentation, the American Historical Association (AHA) took the lead in organizing a series of programs funded by the Ford Foundation to promote fresh thought about historical analysis of world regions and large-scale processes. Partners of the AHA in developing these programs were the Library of Congress and a
group of professional societies, including the African Studies Association, the Association for Asian Studies, the Community College Humanities Association, the Council on Latin American History, the Latin American Studies Association, the Middle East Studies Association, and the World History Association. Between 1999 and 2003, representatives of these groups organized three summer seminars for community college faculty and two research conferences, all held in Washington, D.C., at the Library of Congress.  

This volume presents essays from the first research conference on “Interactions: Regional Studies, Global Processes, and Historical Analysis” (February 2001). The purpose of this conference, as well as the larger series of programs as a whole, was not to extend the critique of area studies, but rather to promote scholarship that would build constructively on area studies by crossing the political, geographical, and cultural boundary lines conventionally observed by area specialists and indeed by historians and most other scholars as well. The conference did not focus on a specific issue such as industrialization in Japan or decolonization in Africa or international diplomacy during the cold war. Rather, it addressed the very general theme of cross-cultural interactions, featuring presentations that explored processes of cross-cultural interactions and their significance from area studies and historical perspectives. By focusing on processes that trespassed the conventionally observed boundary lines, so the organizers hoped, the conference would promote fresh ways of deploying area studies scholarship and encourage the emergence of scholarly approaches to explore some pertinent historical contexts of the contemporary globalizing world.

Meanwhile, by focusing on a very general theme rather than a specific issue, the conference organizers sought also to place questions of conception and method on the agenda of historians and area studies scholars. Indeed, a particular concern of the conference was to establish cross-cultural interactions as a category of analysis for historians and area specialists. The term cross-cultural interaction is of course quite problematic, and, as a relative newcomer to scholarly vocabularies, it no doubt harbors unusually good potential to generate miscommunication and misunderstanding. Yet the conference organizers took it as self-evident that numerous historical processes of enormous significance have worked their effects across the boundary lines that historians and area specialists commonly draw to delimit the geographical scope of their analyses. These processes include climatic changes, biological diffusions, the spread of infectious and contagious diseases, mass migrations, transfers of technology, campaigns of imperial expansion, cross-cultural trade, the spread of ideas and ideals, the expansion of religious faiths

Jerry H. Bentley
and cultural traditions, and perhaps others as well. Granting that there are multiple alternative ways to conceive and analyze processes of cross-cultural interaction, organizers of the conference neither assumed nor imposed any rigid construction. Rather, they sought to recruit presentations that would put empirical flesh on conceptual bones, thereby contributing to a larger effort to anatomize processes of cross-cultural interaction as they have unfolded at particular times, in specific lands, through individual and collective experiences. The concern, in other words, was less to seek some general or abstract understanding of these processes than to analyze their workings as inflected by particular conditions of specific times, places, societies, and cultural traditions.

The following essays represent some of the fruits generated by the Interactions conference. As such, they serve as a sampler of recent scholarly reflection on processes of cross-cultural interaction, and they exemplify several distinct and promising approaches to the analysis of these processes. The essays range widely over historical time and geographical space. Indeed, at first blush, there might seem little to link discussions of the postclassical Naqshbandiyyah sufi order, the formation of an African diaspora consciousness, the role of the Red Cross movement in China, and the emergence of contemporary regimes of world order. It would certainly be possible to explore any of these topics with little if any reference to the others.

Because of themes that wend their ways through these essays, however, the collection forms a whole greater than the sum of its individual parts. One theme that links many of the following essays is the issue of agency and structure. When scholarly attention tacks between individual experiences and large-scale processes, as is frequently the case in studies of cross-cultural interactions, questions of the relationships between human agency and historical structures inevitably arise and demand attention—or else they lurk beneath the surface and threaten the integrity and coherence of studies that ignore them. Historians and area specialists alike have strong professional interests pushing them to emphasize and even maximize the role of human agency in human affairs—including the agency of individuals as well as that of groups acting collectively—yet a scholarly focus on large-scale processes categorically confirms the point that neither individually nor collectively do men and women make their own history under conditions of their own choosing. Might it be possible to resolve or at least relax the tension between these two positions? On a spectrum of possibilities, ranging from absolute, effective human free will on the one hand to totally deterministic structure(s) on the other, the balance point between agency and structure will naturally shift dramatically from one situation to
another, and indeed even in the cases of individual situations, depending on the perspective taken. There can be no question or pretense here of fashioning general principles or historical laws, but several of the essays offer useful guidance toward the striking of a balance between human agency and historical structures.

Quite apart from the issue of agency and structure, another theme that surfaces frequently in these essays has to do with the roles of states in processes of cross-cultural interaction. In many essays, a tension is noticeable between the historical dynamics unleashed by transregional or global processes on the one hand and the efforts of states to control or influence those processes in their own interests on the other. Yet although they acknowledge that states do not entirely control their own destinies, the essays agree strongly on one fundamental point: states still matter. Some essays attribute more influence to the workings of large-scale processes, while others emphasize the effectiveness of state actions, and several point to the roles of states in organizing and sustaining large-scale processes themselves. In all cases, however, the effort to understand the workings of large-scale processes requires close attention to state actors. Even when states have experienced limited success in advancing their specific goals, they have nevertheless influenced the development and operation of transregional and global processes.

Yet another theme that emerges clearly in several of the following essays is the reciprocal influence of global and local developments. All of the essays deal with large-scale historical processes, or at least with cases that represent important aspects or dimensions of large-scale processes. The authors, however, recognize clearly that a sophisticated understanding of these processes requires close attention to the ways human actors have sought to take advantage of opportunities presented by large-scale processes while at the same time adapting to the circumstances of particular times and specific places. For some purposes it might well be valuable to analyze large-scale processes on very general or abstract levels, just as for some purposes it might well be meaningful to study local developments on a small scale from purely local perspectives. The authors of these essays do not deny the value of either abstract or closely focused analyses, but they would agree that the richest understanding emerges from studies that take account of both the dynamics that have driven large-scale processes and the inflections they have undergone in specific historical settings.

Finally, and most generally, all of the essays collected here establish the theme of cross-cultural interactions as one crucial to the understanding of the world and its development through time. During the past half cen-
tury, both history and area studies have achieved considerable intellectual power as projects to understand the world in time. They have fostered expertise in world languages and cultural traditions, and they have generated libraries of information about individual lands and peoples. In some cases, they have pushed beyond the development of information and the production of knowledge to the formulation of understanding, insight, and even wisdom about the larger world. In doing so, both history and area studies have focused their gaze almost exclusively on the experiences of individual societies (indeed mostly on modern national states) and largely ignored transregional and global processes that have profoundly influenced the development of both individual societies themselves and the world as a whole. This concentration on individual societies has enabled historians and area specialists to bring clear focus to their work, and it has provided them with appropriate contexts for the analysis of many important issues. At the same time, however, it has also inspired them to emphasize themes such as cultural differences, exclusive identities, and local knowledge, while discouraging them from considering larger contexts that go a long way toward explaining the experiences of individual societies themselves. By exploring processes of cross-cultural interaction, the essays in this volume offer some promising ways to understand the larger world through comparative, cross-cultural, transregional, hemispheric, oceanic, systematic, and otherwise global approaches to the past. In doing so, the essays do not abandon history and area studies so much as build on them and move beyond them by crossing the geographical and cultural boundary lines conventionally observed in history and area studies scholarship. They undermine the notion that the conventionally recognized world regions are natural or coherent areas. In place of such facile assumptions, they suggest that there is neither a single conceptual grid nor any set of stable, nailed-down categories that is universally applicable for purposes of understanding the larger world. Instead, the construction of world regions and human geography must take into account shifting patterns of cross-cultural interactions that shape the development of individual societies and the world as a whole.

C. A. Bayly establishes a context for the following studies in his essay on premodern globalization and its elaboration through time into the international networks that are the primary avenues of contemporary globalization. Bayly’s globalization has deep historical roots. His periodization envisions an era of archaic globalization beginning about 1600 C.E., followed by an age of protocapitalist globalization extending from 1760 to 1830 and a period characterized by European-dominated internationalism after 1830. Notwithstanding the prominence of industry and empire in his later eras,
Bayly sees considerable continuing influence of the principles that drove his archaic globalization. By Bayly’s account, this archaic globalization arose from universalizing kingship, the expansion of universalizing religious traditions, and widely shared understandings of bodily health that placed a premium on exotic medicines and potions. These three principles encouraged vigorous global exchanges of commodities, peoples, and ideas in the early modern world, Bayly argues, and moreover established patterns that continued to influence global exchanges in his later eras of protocapitalist globalization and European internationalism. Although the three principles of archaic globalization did not necessarily manifest themselves in the specific forms of the earlier era, Bayly sees their general influence persisting in the ages of protocapitalist globalization and European internationalism, which saw considerable continuity and intensification of links established earlier (by rapid expansion of slave trading in the late eighteenth century, for example, and the survival into the twentieth century of cultural and social values that drove efforts to consume exotic products).

By virtue of its emphasis on cultural and social values rather than finance, transport, mobility, and communications, Bayly’s vision of globalization history differs markedly from the dominant views of contemporary globalization. Yet Bayly has clearly fingered some important dimensions of globalization, even if they are somewhat obscure and certainly undernoticed in most studies. Indeed, his understanding of globalization history wins implicit endorsement in many of the studies that follow. The next three contributions address his themes quite directly through the exploration of various globalizing processes.

John Voll’s essay on the Naqshbandiyyah sufi brotherhood, for example, offers a case study on the workings of Bayly’s archaic globalization by examining the effects of an expansive religious tradition. Organized in the thirteenth century as a local expression of Turkish devotion in central Asia, by the fifteenth century the Naqshbandiyyah had spread to northern India, eastern Turkestan, and southwest Asia. By the eighteenth century, the group was active in western China, and in the twentieth century it established a presence in North America. Throughout the centuries of its existence as a large transstate organization, the Naqshbandiyyah promoted Muslim renewal and Islamic identity, often benefiting from the patronage of ruling elites who aided the group’s representatives with an eye toward enhancing the cultural unity of their lands and acquiring merit for themselves. Relations between the Naqshbandiyyah and states became more complicated in the nineteenth century, when the group played a prominent role in the mobilization of resistance to European imperialism. On balance,
though, Voll holds that the organization does not reflect a world of clashing civilizations, but rather has demonstrated the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue in the interests of “a renewal of human society based on moral values.”

If Voll’s essay helps to develop the notion of archaic globalization, Sven Beckert’s contribution on the global significance of cotton delves into Bayly’s era of protocapitalist globalization. In the nineteenth century, the empire of cotton embraced Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Cotton integrated the lives of merchants, manufacturers, skilled workers, manual laborers, slaves, bureaucrats, and consumers around the world. It inspired technological and organizational innovations in the forms of new machinery and the factory system. It launched global migrations of workers. It linked plantations to factories, capitalism to industry, and wage labor to indentured labor and slavery. Only in global context is it possible to comprehend the role of cotton in the nineteenth century. Yet only in light of specific state policies is it possible to understand the emergence of cotton as the world’s most important economic product of the early nineteenth century. Beckert argues that the global cotton market was not a natural phenomenon, but rather was a conscious construction of state policies reflecting public and private interests. Policies regulating labor, land use, and tariffs—not to mention episodes of imperial expansion—were crucial in ordering an environment that favored the rise of cotton. Thus, Beckert makes it clear through the example of his study that the understanding of large-scale processes calls for approaches that keep both global and local developments in view, integrating them in sophisticated analyses that are attentive to the influences of the global on the local and vice versa.

The state comes into clear focus once again in Caroline Reeves’s essay on the experiences of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in China. As Reeves points out, the ICRC is a prominent globalizing agency that is particularly keen to promote a global moral order. It does so by extending its recognition and services only to member states that subscribe to certain treaties and conventions. Yet the experiences of the ICRC in China during the late Qing dynasty show that local political interests profoundly influence the effects of globalizing agencies and globalizing processes in particular lands. Reeves argues that Chinese diplomats manifested considerable interest in ICRC membership principally because they sought recognition as a sovereign member of the civilized international community. The benefits and responsibilities that flowed from ICRC membership were less important than the symbolic significance and international diplomatic status conveyed by ICRC membership. In the event, however,
before Chinese diplomats were able to establish a relationship with the ICRC, domestic turmoil flowing from the Boxer Rebellion and international military intervention threw their campaign off its track. Internationalism fell out of favor, at least temporarily, and as Reeves points out, the only Red Cross activity in China during the early years of the twentieth century was the effort of the Japanese Red Cross to care for Europeans wounded in the bloody campaign to suppress the Boxer Rebellion. By 1904 the campaign to establish a Chinese Red Cross had resumed, but the ICRC did not recognize a Chinese chapter until 1912, the year after revolution had put an end to the Qing dynasty.

The next three essays complement Voll’s, Beckert’s, and Reeves’s studies of globalizing processes by focusing attention on specific issues arising from movements of peoples and commodities. Colin Palmer takes up the question of identity formation in the African diaspora. The latter-day term African diaspora implies a much stronger sense of community than was possible for involuntary migrants recruited from different societies, delivered to different regions, and subjected to different influences, whose descendants had little conception of their ancestral homelands. Under conditions of slavery and pseudoscientific racism, Palmer finds that the formation of African American identities reflected considerable influence of European and Euro-American thought. Palmer notices several distinct patterns in voices that represented the emergence of African American identities: they characterized Africa in Eurocentric terms, emphasizing African achievements that resembled those of European peoples and their Euro-American cousins; they accounted for contemporary African weakness by reference to innate barbarism, the absence of Christianity, European exploitation, and slave trading; and they reflected the development of a strong missionary impulse—sometimes a religious impulse that sought to Christianize the African continent but occasionally also a secular drive to bring enlightenment and modernity to a benighted ancestral homeland. In all these cases, it is clear that African American thinkers drew heavily on European and Euro-American constructs—although they sometimes reacted strongly against them—in their efforts to determine the significance of Africa for African American identities. In this light, there is deep resonance to Palmer’s call for new constructs and fresh comparative approaches to the study of Africa.

Adam McKeown turns attention to the more recent movement of Chinese migrants to the United States, and he brings unusually clear focus to the role of the state and its bureaucracies in regulating the migratory flow. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the institution of
passports, visas, and official policies regulating migration offered government agencies scope for controlling functions that formerly had fallen to networks of lawyers and private businessmen. Despite the elaboration of ever more clear and precise rules, and despite the building of a large bureaucracy to oversee migration, individuals who did not meet the criteria for legal migration nevertheless found ways to obtain false papers allowing them to enter the United States. In McKeown’s story, unqualified migrants pursuing their own individual interests won numerous battles and skirmishes, but the bureaucrats representing state interests largely won the war, although it took them some time to bring the migration process under reasonably effective control. Yet tensions between the desires of individuals to move and the obligations of government officials to control movement in the perceived interests of the state persist to the present day. Thus, McKeown’s essay makes clear once again that the study of large-scale processes calls for sensitive analysis that takes proper account of both global and local developments.

If McKeown shows that movements of peoples are messy processes that resist official supervision, Alan L. Karras confirms that movements of goods and commodities also offer abundant scope for irregularity. Karras’s study focuses on state efforts to regulate and control trade, which he finds have historically been only sporadically effective. As in the case of migration, states have long sought to control trade through bureaucratic and administrative measures, but they have not prevented enormous volumes of smuggled goods from flowing alongside legal trade. Karras attributes the limited effectiveness of regulatory efforts to the fact that states have been unable to detect most smuggled merchandise and further that they have been unwilling to punish most smugglers severely even when they have detected illegal trade. In fact, Karras holds that state options are not entirely open when it comes to the matter of controlling trade. Quite apart from informal collusion between local officials and smugglers pursuing their individual interests, strict enforcement of laws and regulations sometimes runs the risk of damaging local economies in which production, brokering, marketing, and transport all revolve around smuggling. Thus, as long as trade flows between lands and peoples, it is safe to predict that smuggling will survive alongside legal commerce. Karras notes a frequent pattern according to which individuals serving their own interests rewrite the laws and regulations by evading them.

The final three essays of the volume turn from the study of processes proper to considerations of conceptual issues that recent scholarship has placed on the agenda of historians and area studies scholars. Kären Wigen
notes that, as historians have shifted their analytical focus from states to historical processes, they have created the need for fresh historical and geographical conceptions. States simply do not make the best containers for the study of many historical processes. With an eye toward priming the pump for a new round of rethinking historical and geographical conceptions, Wigen reviews four earlier projects to reconsider received constructs by fashioning fresh understandings of the world’s oceans. She highlights four distinctive conceptions of the world’s oceans articulated by historians, geographers, and other scholars between about 1450 and 1950. One conception viewed maritime space as an extension of national territory, while another posited oceanic arcs or bands that facilitated the flow of peoples and goods across the waters. A third conception took whole ocean basins as large zones of interaction and exchange, and the fourth viewed all the world’s seas as parts of a single global ocean that served as the highway of globalization. Wigen’s point is neither that one of these conceptions is right and the others wrong nor that later conceptions have superseded their predecessors. Rather, she sees at least some limited merit in all of them, suggesting that in the lack of permanent or stable constructs a flexible approach to historical geography is most useful for purposes of analyzing processes that cross the national and cultural boundary lines conventionally observed by historians and area specialists.

Stephen H. Rapp, Jr.’s essay moves Wigen’s principles from the waters onto terra firma and applies them to the case of the Caucasus, the mountainous isthmus linking the Black and Caspian Seas. Rapp points out that geographies of world areas that reflect modern and contemporary times will inevitably distort the understanding of premodern experiences. This point holds especially true for regions like the Caucasus that had few large and strong states of their own but conducted intense dealings with several powerful neighbors. To highlight its distinctiveness, Rapp proposes to construe this region as Caucasia. At various times from deep antiquity to the present, Caucasia had close historical and cultural relations with Persia, Byzantium, the Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin, Muslim southwest Asia, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Christian Europe. In Rapp’s view, it makes little sense to lump Caucasia with one or another of these admittedly larger and more powerful neighbors. Rather, he suggests that Caucasia participated in several different overlapping cultural communities, often simultaneously, although it frequently engaged more fully with the community whose political, military, economic, and cultural power was dominant at any given moment. Thus, while readily acknowledging Caucasia’s close links with neighboring communities, Rapp seeks to establish it as a distinctive space
of considerable historical importance. Even without large or strong states of its own, Caucasia has nevertheless been a perennially influential region because it has bridged different neighboring cultural communities and served as a major hemispheric crossroads of peoples, products, and ideas.

Charles Bright and Michael Geyer conclude this volume with their own contribution to fresh historical and geographical conceptions—the notion of the regime of world order in the twentieth century. Bright and Geyer view the regime of world order as a new organizing principle that helps bring the significance of twentieth-century history into clearer focus. The authors take the role of the state seriously: the regime of world order concept explicitly seeks to understand the dominance of two hegemonic states—namely, imperial Britain and corporate America—that built regimes of world order in the twentieth century. While making a prominent place for states, however, Bright and Geyer place the development of British and American hegemony in the context of global financial, commercial, and cultural flows. The authors clearly recognize that British and American regimes of world order reflected the hegemons’ political, military, and economic power. Going beyond that, however, they argue that dominance through regimes of world order depended crucially on British and American ability to secure compliance and the consent of many peoples to participation in world orders that brought disproportionate economic benefits to the hegemonic powers themselves. Thus, Bright and Geyer build a cultural dimension into their regime of world order concept, thereby acknowledging the agency of all parties to historical regimes of world order while also deepening and enriching the understanding of processes sometimes treated more mechanically as macroeconomic operations or developments in international relations.

The essays presented here do not pretend to establish new sets of fixed analytical categories for history and area studies. Both individually and collectively they raise more questions than they answer concerning the construction of useful temporal and spatial categories for historical and area studies analyses. Nor do the essays in this volume seek to displace earlier modes of historical and area studies scholarship. Rather, they recognize that the local, regional, and national frameworks conventionally employed by most historians and area specialists are useful, meaningful, and entirely appropriate for the analysis of many issues. Accordingly, they seek to complement and build constructively on earlier studies and scholarly approaches by focusing attention on problems and processes that local, regional, and national frameworks often do not bring into clear view. Indeed, a later volume of essays (flowing from the conference on "Seascapes, Littoral Cultures,
and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges”) will continue this effort by considering patterns that emerge when historians and area specialists take bodies of water as sites of human activity. After all, historical development takes place simultaneously on many different spatial registers—individual, local, regional, national, continental, hemispheric, oceanic, global, and perhaps others as well. Attention to processes that unfold on the multiple registers of historical development and to the different faces that these processes present from different perspectives can only lead to enriched understanding of human experience.

NOTES


6. Themes of the summer seminars were “Globalizing Regional Histories” (July 1999), “Explorations in Empire” (July 2001), and “Seascapes, Littoral Cultures, and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges” (July 2003). Themes of the research conferences were “Interactions: Regional Studies, Global Processes, and Historical Analysis” (February 2001) and “Seascapes, Littoral Cultures, and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges” (February 2003).
