

Internationalisms

A Twentieth-Century History

This is a pioneering survey of the rise of internationalism as a mainstream political idea mobilised in support of the ambitions of indigenous populations, feminists and anti-colonialists, as well as politicians, economists and central bankers. Leading scholars trace the emergence of intergovernmental organisations such as the League of Nations, United Nations, International Labour Organisation and World Health Organisation and the corresponding expansion in transnational sociability and economic entanglement throughout the long twentieth century. They reveal how international thought helped to drive major transformations in the governance of global issues from refugees to slavery and sex-trafficking, from the environment to women's rights and human rights, and from state borders and national minorities to health, education, trade and commerce. In challenging dominant perceptions of how contemporaries thought of nations, states and empires, *Internationalisms* radically alters our understanding of the major events and ideas that shaped twentieth-century politics, culture, economics and society.

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Foreword

During the past several decades, there has been a major shift in the writing of history, especially of the modern period. This change may be characterised as de-nationalising, or the de-centring of the nation as the key framework of analysis. Nations, of course, have not disappeared from historical narratives, but they now share their conceptual space with such other categories as gender, race and age. One may, of course, study these categories within specific countries (e.g. Muslims in the United States, women in Turkey, children in China), but that would be totally inadequate inasmuch as these communities of people are found all over the world. They may identify themselves as members of their respective nations, but they will also be connected, mentally and physically, to their counterparts elsewhere. In this sense, to study them is to de-centre the nation as the principal framework of analysis. Nation-centric history is incompatible with human history.

Likewise, international history as it has traditionally been written and taught is antithetical to global history because it prioritises those nations that are powerful and influential, the so-called 'Great Powers'. International relations studies have privileged 'the Great Powers', thus ignoring the bulk of humanity. The primary objective of these studies has been to trace the rise and fall of the Great Powers, and the rest of the world have counted primarily as objects of their expansion and exploitation. In that sense, international history has tended to be a mere extension of national history, viewing nations as powers. One studies decision-making mechanisms among the Great Powers, totally ignoring how the bulk of humanity lived – or cared.

Such conceptualisation is totally unacceptable in today's world, which has, especially since the 1970s, become increasingly interdependent economically and culturally. Reflecting this trend, the scholarly literature has increasingly turned its attention from national history to international history and from power in its more simple state forms to other contexts and ingredients of human association and behaviour. The recent resurgence of the study of internationalism that this volume

exemplifies may be understood as an aspect of this historiographic transformation.

Studies of internationalism, of course, do not ignore nations. After all, as this volume makes clear, there can be no internationalism without nations, and the connections between nations can, by definition, be both international as well as transnational. In my own work, I have focused in particular on cross-border cultural connections, namely, the movement of art, music, literature, ideas and consumer goods such as food and clothes. I call these phenomena ‘cultural internationalism’ in the sense that cultural products are consumed by and make an impact on people in different countries. In a book entitled *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (1997), I defined the term as ‘the fostering of international cooperation through cultural activities across national boundaries’. If I were writing today, I would add to ‘international cooperation’ such other phenomena as ‘global consciousness’ and ‘hybridization’ as important byproducts of cultural internationalism. These phenomena transcend national boundaries to such an extent that ‘transnationalism’, rather than ‘internationalism’, may be the more proper word to use.

I am pleased to introduce the essays in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* as adding to my original discussion by emphasizing the extent to which international and transnational phenomena have always existed alongside and inside national affairs. They offer us more evidence of the fact that scholars today recognise that the history of the twentieth century cannot be fully understood unless international and transnational phenomena are brought into the picture. Their major contribution to the study of the twentieth century is to demonstrate that national and international affairs developed in symbiotic relationship to each other and that, in the process, transnational connections grew stronger.

It may well be that the twenty-first century will witness an acceleration of this same trend so that the international and the transnational will come to dominate human affairs and affect individual lives far more than national affairs. If so, it would mean that ‘power’ might yield its position as the key strategic concept in the understanding of the modern world. I welcome this volume as an important means of thinking through what remain the most fascinating and pressing questions for the future of internationalism studies: What is political power? And how might historians transgress the boundaries of its national and state-based conceptualisations?

AKIRA IRIYE