
FROM GLOBAL TO COSMIC PERSPECTIVE

THE BEDROCK OF SURVIVAL: HUMANITY, HISTORY, AND ADAPTATION

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This is a brief overview of the field of Big History and a reflection on its significance. Like others, I developed a macro-perspective of existence from the 1950s onwards, as a natural way of thinking, without label or rubric. It was only in 2003 that I heard of 'Big History' and realized this concept expressed much of what I had been doing. This realization mirrored the experience of many others around the world in the second-half of the twentieth century – interdisciplinary and macro-historical studies had emerged independently around the planet in a global conjuncture. It was a general human expression, representing an impulse of humanity. For my part, I had engaged in ethnographic studies in various locations, with a focus on human adaptation. I therefore saw cosmic evolution, big history and universal studies as a component of humanity's survival strategy – a concept especially understood by our post-Soviet and Asian colleagues. As a result, my focus is now on how macro-historical studies relate to the theme of human survival in this modern era of climate crisis. This article I jointly published with the Journal of Big History.

Keywords: *Adaptation, Survival, Climate Crisis, Collective Knowledge, Collaborative Knowledge, History, Cosmic Evolution, Big History, Universal Studies.*

究天人之际，通古今之变，成一家之言。

To inquire into the relationship between heaven and human,
to comprehend the vicissitudes of past and present,
and to form a single narrative of it all.

— 司馬遷 *Sima Qian, 100 BCE*

Like Sima Qian, our ancestors wondered about their existence as they looked up at the stars, watched red lava flow down volcanic slopes, heard waves roll softly along a beach, and felt the breath of other life on their skin. However, this creative process was not just a poetic legacy – it took root in brutal shifts on the landscape three-million years ago, when such questions were a serious strategy for human survival.

As ice sheets absorbed the world's moisture, the global climate cooled and dried. In East Africa, forests retreated, forcing our ancestors onto arid grasslands. They had to

Journal of Globalization Studies, Vol. 14 No. 1, May 2023 137–169
DOI: 10.30884/jogs/2023.01.09

find a new way of life, searching out wetlands and new foods to harvest. Their repertoire of skills grew to match the shifting climate and biome – from stone tools, fire and clothing to shelters and snares, along with increasingly complex languages. Those, who could not adapt, perished.²

Additional shifts in the glacial period forced our ancient families further afield, but our surviving kin prospered and migrated into new landscapes, adding to their collective knowledge as they went. Family bands grew and used their keen observations to craft complex worldviews. We get glimpses of these new understandings in calendars built by early foragers and farmers, such as the markings on the 20,000 year old *Ishango Bone*, crafted in a fishing community along the Semliki River in today's Democratic Republic of Congo, which some scholars interpret as a lunar calendar.

In these early times, gaps in understanding were filled-in by fables and magic. Although the instructions for making a stone hand-axe differed from explaining bright objects in the night sky, all explanations involved intangible meanings, which often served as memory-devices flavoured with fantasy. Stones were thought to have hidden qualities as much as constellations. Myth and science coexisted with a rich use of metaphor and narrative (Rodrigue 2019: 109–112; 2022).

As the last glacial advance began to wind down twenty millennia ago, sea levels and fresh water tables rose, which contributed to new abundances along with the development of horticulture and pastoralism. But then another period of aridification began 8000 years ago – the ‘Great Drying.’ In North Africa, wetlands evaporated as grazing herds compounded the climate problem. Prairies degraded into Sahara dunes. Some adapted to desert life, such as the Bedouin, but others relocated to new areas of water: the Mediterranean, Lake Chad, and the Niger and Nile rivers. One of these transitional sites was Nabta in southern Egypt, where cattle remains and climate change are seen in archaeological sites, including celestial-oriented stones. Their later migration to the Nile is thought to have contributed to the Egyptian cult of the sky-goddess, Hathor (Tierney *et al.* 2017; Brookfield 2010; Brooks 2010; Haas and Creamer 2006; Hassan 1988; Barnard and Duistermaat 2012; Malville, Wendorf and Mazar 1998).

Other peoples around the world moved to the Tigris and Euphrates, Indus and Ganges, Yellow and Yangtze, Norte Chico and Barka, as well as smaller wetlands (Hritz 2010; Kathayat *et al.* 2017; Mostern 2021; Wu *et al.* 2021; Haas and Creamer 2006). This inter-ethnic clustering required them to share resources and led to new social dynamics. Complex agriculture arose, along with centralized religions, new craft specializations, wider communication skills (writing in dominant languages), and stratified society. Today, we call this survival strategy: *civilization*.

Such links between climate, resources and civil society were noted by the Islamic scholar Abū Zayd Ibn Khaldun in his *مقدمة ابن خلدون* [Muqaddimah / Prologue] almost 800 years ago.

This [lack of water] can be observed in countries where springs existed in the days of their civilization. Then, they fell into ruins, and the water of the springs disappeared completely in the ground, as if it had never existed (Khaldun 1958: 481).

While we think in terms of the steady advance of civilization, its establishment and spread was a fractured process. Many societies continued traditional foraging lifestyles, while others adopted a few attributes of civilization but not others. Some abandoned civil life when circumstances changed, while others took it on when events suited them. An example is the Oxus Civilization in the Aral Sea watershed, which shifted with cli-

matic changes 4000 years ago, before finally succumbing to aridification and its people taking on the nomadic and farming lifestyle of the surrounding steppe peoples (Dubova 2019; Gannon 2021). Civil society was a mixed global pattern of human adaptation.

With these adaptations, worldviews also changed, as seen when Yorùbá Babalawo in West Africa, Pre-Socratic philosophers in the Eastern Mediterranean, Mauryan sages in South Asia, Zhou scholars in East Asia, and Mayan astronomer-priests in Central America codified holistic cosmologies. Rational answers slowly replaced myth to become fact-based understandings. This process accelerated as peoples began to more and more connect via trade routes. Besides an exchange of precious commodities, they shared ideas.

In these early stages of global networking, scholars knit together larger ideas about humanity and nature and, in the process, began to transcend imperial, religious, linguistic, and ethnic frontiers. In the first century BCE, the Roman philosopher Lucretius expressed a material view of the universe and a unitary sense of humanity in *De Rerum Natura* [On the Nature of Things]. Likewise, the Medieval scholar Abū Zayd Ibn Khaldun composed his vast universal history, كتاب العبر / Kitāb al-‘ibar [Book of Lessons], which assessed human experience in a pragmatic worldview through the lens of Islamic civilization. These collective understandings of a common existence went through times of intense thought called *axial, renascent, enlightened, and revolutionary*.²

Besides holistic family-community instruction, dedicated centres for learning sprang up in places like Nalanda (India) over a thousand years ago, while Inca aristocracy along the Andes attended the *Yacha Huaci* [House of Knowledge] for lessons in reading *quipu*, mathematics, and public affairs. In China, Emperor Yongle ordered a vast encyclopaedia, 永樂大典 [Yongle Dadian] in 1403. Almost a million pages in length, it only has been superseded in scope by *Wikipedia*. Even some of the brilliant works of Leonardo da Vinci drew inspiration from Asian innovation (UNESCO 1966, 2009; Vega 1609: 357–359; Christos 2010; Encyclopædia Britannica 2007; Broek 2018).

By the early modern period, European colonial expansion in the fifteenth century led to profound changes in understandings about humanity, but there was no metaphysical quality of north-west Eurasian society that unleashed their hegemony on the world. Far from just a European phenomenon, the new global engagement had grown from the silk-road system into a planetary sphere of interaction that is more properly designated as ‘global civilization’ (Rodrigue 2019: 112–115).

Neo-Confucian scholar Miura Baien (1723–1789) merged Japanese concepts with Chinese and European ideas to develop a new vision of the world and existence, as in his masterpiece, 玄語 [Deep Words]. Miura's work has been compared favourably with the later studies of Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859). Anthropologist Keiji Iwata, for example, sees Miura's work as an expression of Eastern cosmology / existence, while Humboldt's studies express Western perspectives. Humboldt had studied at the University of Göttingen, where his professors sought to unify knowledge and deploy it so individuals, society and nature could coexist. His five-volume study, *Kosmos* (1845), is a precursor to what would come to be called Big History.³

As historian Daniel Smail at Harvard University points out: ‘... all universal histories before 1859 [a point of revolution in historical understandings of deep time] were big histories, since they began with cosmology (as it was then understood) and subsequently linked in the human genealogy.’⁴

Ironically, just as such synthesis was coming together, its diffusion was interrupted by counter-trends in the modern university system that led to specialization, disciplines,

and departmental studies (Wallerstein 1991; Christian 2010: 13–15). This partitioning of knowledge led to deepening insights about the world and cosmos, but it also led to silos that divided categories of thought and caused pervasive distrust of attempts to synthesize concepts into larger narratives.

In these days of the late 1800s, the new academic departments represented more general ‘fields’ than narrow ‘disciplines,’ while much of their work lay in defining intangibles – such as ‘culture’ in anthropology or ‘consciousness’ in psychology. These studies also debunked older concepts, such as ‘aether,’ which chemists dismissed as a relic of alchemy. Universal history participated in this process, as it built links between these fields and disciplines (Waddell 2017).

From Departmentalism to Cross-Disciplinary Studies

Despite growing institutional resistance to universal models of knowledge, holistic frameworks continued. Geographer Peter Kropotkin's Siberian natural history fieldwork in the 1860s and 1870s contributed to his theories of global social responsibility, as in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* in 1902. The next year, biogeographer Alfred Wallace, co-discoverer of evolutionary theory with Charles Darwin, released his synthesis of existence, *Man's Place in the Universe* (Wallace 1903). Such macro-thinking percolated widely through popular and ecumenical culture.

Author Herbert George Wells' *Outline of History* (1920) was updated with new scientific breakthroughs over the next fifty years. Engineer Hiram Maxim composed *Life's Place in the Cosmos* (1933), which considered the existence of life beyond Earth, based on the latest scientific knowledge. Scholar, artist and Nobelist Rabindranath Tagore encouraged the global-networking of science and philosophy, ideas which he collated in Bengali essays as विश्व परिचय है [Our Universe] in 1937 (Tagore 1937, 1969). Christian scholars like palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and astronomer Georges Lemaître advanced science and how it related to the human condition.⁵

By the 1940s, universal notions entered primary education, as in Maria Montessori's pedagogy of *cosmic education*, adopted from an English model and developed while she was interned in India during the Second World War.⁶ Similarly, ecologist Kinji Imanishi composed his thoughts of life's commonalities in 生物の世界 [The World of Living Things] in 1941, on the eve of his military deployment. He survived the war and expanded on his concept of 自然学 *shizengaku* or ‘deep nature thought’ as an integrated view of existence.⁷

Each rendition incorporated the latest discoveries of science and considered how they could be applied to society. In industry, cross-disciplines arose in new fields like astro/physics and bio/chemistry. The scientific and technological ferment of the World War and Cold War eras led to new data, which required ever-larger frames of reference, from aerospace and oceanography to medicine and computer science. It was a time of ‘new frontiers.’

In 1949, the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) set-up a commission to assemble a history of all humankind, producing a multilingual, multi-volume series: *The History of Humanity* (1966, 2009) (Duedahl 2011). The Space Race also galvanized efforts for new interdisciplinary discoveries, while socio-historical scholarship struggled to understand the post-colonial world through its many disciplinary and social lenses.

Soviet scholars developed an integrated pedagogy that spanned the natural and social sciences (Nazaretyan 2005). An early book of this new view of existence was by astrophysicist Josif Shklovsky – *Вселенная. Жизнь. Разум*. [Universe, Life, Intelligence] in 1962. Four years later, an expanded English adaptation was produced with US astrophysicist Carl Sagan as *Intelligent Life in the Universe* (Shklovsky and Sagan 1966).

This international co-operation was not accidental, as a similar macro-study had developed in the United States. From the 1920s through the 1950s, Harlow Shapley had promoted *cosmography*, a study that examined the interlinked nature of stars, the Earth, life and humanity at the Harvard College Observatory. In the 1960s, Carl Sagan offered his rendition, and, in 1974, astrophysicists George Field and Eric Chaisson began a course on *cosmic evolution*.⁸

Likewise, in the 1970s, astrophysicist G. Siegfried Kutter integrated celestial studies with studies of life and society as part of the cutting-edge, interdisciplinary course-structure at Evergreen State College. His synthesis appeared as *Universe and Life: Origins and Evolution*.⁹ Astronomer Tom Bania taught ‘Cosmic Evolution: Search for Extraterrestrial Life’ at Boston University, while Earth-scientist Michael Rampino had organized ‘The History of the Universe from the Big Bang to the Big Brain’ at New York University.¹⁰

This wide-thinking reflected the high-stakes competition going on between the respective allies of the Soviet Union and the USA in the second half of the twentieth century. But many of these scholars began to move beyond the technological rivalry of the times in order to look at the possibilities of peaceful coexistence, not just with other humans but with our habitat and other lifeforms. This progress towards assembling a big picture of our place in the vast scheme of things emerged in other parts of the world as well.

Hubert Reeves studied physics with developers of the atomic bomb and became an astrophysicist at France’s Centre national de la recherche scientifique. He brought his studies down to Earth in popular books like *Patience dans l’azure: l’évolution cosmique* [Patience in the Azure: Cosmic Evolution] in 1981, where he explained the stars, along with the significance of water, Einstein's dog, and jazz. His work has become a mainstay of the environmental movement and a youthful audience seeking to change the world (Cadrin-Rossignol 2002).

In the 1980s, Chinese scholars, including the celebrated rocket-scientist, Qian Xuesen, began studies of complexity. They developed a paradigm that served as a meta-synthesis of scientific knowledge, 开放的复杂巨系统 [The Open Complex Giant System].¹¹ Such global awareness took place in many fields and began to produce a wealth of integrated knowledge about our existence. Other works included that of bio-geologist Preston Cloud's *Cosmos, Earth and Man* (1978) and astrophysicist Erich Jantsch's *The Self-Organizing Universe* (1980). Mathematician Antonio Vález in Colombia began a trilogy on universal history with *Del Big Bang al Homo sapiens* [From the Big Bang to Homo sapiens] in 1994 (Sulkin 2015).

Evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis developed a universal view of existence via microbiology, which led her into collaboration with chemist James Lovelock to study self-regulating global systems, which Lovelock's friend and neighbour, author William Golding, helped to name as *The Gaia Hypothesis*.¹² Some works became very popular. The television series, *Cosmos*, with Carl Sagan (1980), was viewed by over 500 million

people in 60 countries, while the book, *A Brief History of Time* (1988), by astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, sold over 9 million copies.¹³

This search for meaning also found expression in various faith traditions. Philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti generated an understanding that embraced humanity, nature and the cosmos, as in his *Beginnings of Learning* (1975). A global movement of 'Teilhard associations' sprang up, based on Teilhard de Chardin's thinking in *Le phénomène humain* (1955). One of these activists, cultural historian Thomas Berry, expounded a 'new story' that integrated a global narrative of humanity and nature, as in his *The Dream of the Earth* (1988). Both Krishnamurti and Berry set-up organizations that developed education programs, multimedia productions, and converged with new science and scholarship in the global articulation of holistic thinking.¹⁴

Parallel to this activity, social and economic studies coalesced with international relations in an effort to comprehend the many faces of global development. Economic historian Andre Gunder Frank moved global studies outside Cold War frameworks to describe a one-world system, while social-scientist Immanuel Wallerstein envisioned interlocking subsystems. This socio-historical work began to merge with even larger paradigms, as when economist Graeme Snooks moved his Theory of Global Dynamic Systems to encompass Earth history (Frank 1978; Wallerstein 1984; Snooks 1998; n.d.).

The Merging of Cross-Disciplinary Studies

Another manifestation of these cross-disciplinary connections appeared in calls for reform of higher education. In 1985, world historian John Mears advocated for an integrated curriculum of general education around a theme of evolutionary and universal history. Four years later, he began a course that spanned existence in the context of history at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas (USA), as did David Christian at Macquarie University in Sydney (Australia).¹⁵ As Christian explains, he began asking the question: 'When does history begin?' Receiving different answers, he realized that students were getting confused fragments about our origins:

The astronomer talking of 'galaxy and star formation,' the geologist discussing 'plate tectonics and erosion,' and the biologist describing 'life and evolution' were all referring in different ways to what historians might describe simply as historical change or change through time.¹⁶

So Christian sought to 'erase' the 'jagged edges' between these studies and design a course that was more unified. In 1991, he coined the term *big history* in a moment of whimsy, when asked what such a perspective was called ... and the name stuck – at least for many social scientists (Christian 1991; Christian and McNeill 2008).

Physical scientists still use the term, *Cosmic Evolution*, while other designations remain in use, such as the *Open Complex Giant System* among cybernetic scholars in China and *The Story / the Universe Story* among progressive Christians, or under no special name whatsoever, when seen as just an extension of a discipline, as in *macro-sociology*. This holistic trajectory continued, arising elsewhere quite independently and often acquiring regional identities.

In China, social scientists began to adapt ideas for an integrated view of history from their physical-science colleagues. Historians Qi Tao (1991) and Cheng Ming (1994) each argued for interdisciplinary and holistic interpretations of ancient history. In 1996, science historians Dong Guangbi and Tian Kunyu published *The Origin of*

Heaven and Earth – Natural Evolution and the Birth of Life. Three years later, historian Ma Shili (1999), at Nankai University, extended his text on world history to include cosmic origins and the evolution of life. And, in 2000, historian Huang Liuzhu (1997) called for uniting natural science and human histories, urging his colleagues at Northwest University (Xi'an, Shaanxi) to initiate such a program.¹⁷

Historical psychologist Akop Nazaretyan codified his own research in the Russian Academy of Sciences under the Education Ministry's category of 'conceptions of modern sciences,' which he considered *Универсальная история* [universal history]. In 1991, he produced *Интеллект во Вселенной: истоки, становление, перспективы* [Intelligence in the Universe: Sources, Evolution, Prospects], which was a bridge between Shklovsky's research and his own work in social psychology and conflict resolution. He joined global historians and scientists in this effort, such as with biologist Alexander Markov, anthropologists Andrey Korotayev and Dmitri Bondarenko, historian Leonid Grinin, and astrophysicist Alexander Panov (Bondarenko, Grinin, and Korotayev 2011; Grinin, Korotayev and Markov 2017; Panov 2017).

Sociologist Johan Goudsblom and biochemist / social historian Fred Spier first encountered Big History upon reading David Christian's 'The Case for "Big History"' (1991). On a visit to Australia the next year, Goudsblom met Christian and brought back a copy of his syllabus. He and Fred Spier then started a course in Big History at the University of Amsterdam two years later. Spier then produced, *The Structure of Big History: From the Big Bang until Today* (1996), in which he outlined the parameters of the new field. He also introduced Big History at several other universities, such as Eindhoven University of Technology and Amsterdam University College. These initiatives continue through the work of Esther Quaedackers, who herself contributed the important concepts of 'Little Big History' and 'Local Big History' to encapsulate focused studies in a big-history context (Spier 2005a: 1; 2017; Quaedackers 2015). In this way, three generations of a dynamic academic lineage gave continuity to Big History in the Netherlands and Europe.

Eric Chaisson's works serve as a standard for physical scientists, as with *Cosmic Evolution: The Rise of Complexity in Nature* (2001a; Chaisson 2016). Akop Nazaretyan synthesized his principles in *Civilization Crises within the Context of Universal History: Self-Organization, Psychology and Forecasts* (2001). David Christian developed his *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (2004), while Cynthia Stokes Brown produced *Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present* (2007), which she worked into a continuum of world history. Fred Spier produced his own overview in *Big History and the Future of Humanity* (2010).¹⁸ These and other works have been translated into world languages and appear in new editions; thus, a solid core of literature came into service of the field. These works also drew scholars whose works had already moved in these directions. Two of them were Tom Gehrels and Walter Alvarez.

A strong pragmatic and social foundation underlay the work of astrophysicist Tom Gehrels. He had founded the celebrated Space Science Series at the University of Arizona in 1974. His text, *Hazards Due to Comets and Asteroids* (Gehrels 1995), brought together concepts behind his Spacewatch Project (1980), an astronomical survey at the Kitt Peak National Observatory that hunted impact threats to Earth.¹⁹ The diversity of his thinking and its applications appeared in his memoir, *On the Glassy Sea: An Astronomer's Journey* (Gehrels 1988).

Adapting new scientific strategies, geologist Walter Alvarez developed deep-time sequences in the Mediterranean region, described in *The Mountains of St. Francis* (2009). From this work, he and others theorized how an asteroid impact contributed to the extinction of many lifeforms 65 million years ago, including the dinosaurs, as he described in *T. Rex and the Crater of Doom* (1997). In addition, he began research on other extinction episodes in Earth's history.²⁰

Gehrels and Alvarez developed concerns about the survival of life on Earth and offered their visions of the field – as in Alvarez's course 'Big History: Cosmos, Earth, Life, Humanity' at the University of California Berkeley (2006) and Gehrel's course 'Universe, Humanity, Origins and Future' at the University of Arizona (2007). Both also established themselves at overseas centres where they offered their courses: Alvarez at the Coldigiocco Geological Observatory in Le Marche, Italy and Gehrels at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.²¹

Visual timelines have existed since petroglyph sequences in the Palaeolithic, so it is no surprise that computer technology led to new materials that articulated deep-time. Eric Chaisson and his colleagues visualized evolutionary models in *Cosmic Origins: A Logarithmic Rendering of Look-Back Time* (2001b) and *Arrow of Time: A Linear Rendering of Forward Time* (Chaisson and Berry 2007). Designer Roland Saekow and Walter Alvarez worked to develop their own highly interactive timeline, *Chronozoom* (2014) with Microsoft Research.²² Both remain available on the internet, and other such electronic aids have proliferated and supplemented the scholarship.

Big History has received endorsement by a wide range of public figures, from Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Nixon White-House counsel John Dean to American vice-president Al Gore. This led to many new productions, as when Gates and David Christian developed a free, web-based secondary / continuing-education curriculum, which emerged as the Big History Project in 2011 (bighistoryproject.com, accessed 22 December 2021). As an outgrowth of this initiative, the first college-level textbook, *Big History: Between Nothing and Everything* came out two years later.²³

The first world conference on Big History took place at the International University of Nature, Society and Humanity in the Soviet-era science-city of Dubna, Russia in November 2005 on the theme of *Big History and Synergetics*. As a result of this gathering, an edition of the journal, *Social Evolution & History*, was devoted to Big History and included many of the field's innovators. In October 2009, the US-based e-journal, *World History Connected*, devoted an entire edition to big-history topics.²⁴

Other associations encouraged these developments, including the World History Association, the Historical Society [in the US], and the African Network in Universal & Global History. In turn, big-historians helped groups like the Network of Global & World History Organizations [headquartered in Leipzig, Germany <https://research.uni-leipzig.de/~gwhisto/organization/bureau/>, accessed 26 October 2021]. Senior historians like William McNeill provided advice and support, as did publishers like global historian Leonid Grinin at Uchitel Publishing in Russia and the Berkshire Publishing Group in the United States (Christian and McNeill 2008).

The Consolidation of a Movement

It is easy to look back now and see this trend, but, as recently as 2009, the leading advocates for the field were unsure how widespread the big-history movement was or

would become. The question was discussed by the panel for 'Macroevolution: Hierarchy, Structure, Laws and Self-Organization' at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Fifth Conference on *Hierarchy & Power in the History of Civilizations* in Moscow in 2009. So, Barry Rodrigue, with other big historians, began assembling a global directory and bibliography to see who was doing such macro-studies.²⁵

A shared belief was that there were only a handful of active scholars, but, to everyone's surprise, we found dozens of people teaching and researching different forms of Big History. Most had independently developed their own perspective because 'it just made sense.' In other words, a global *conjuncture* had taken place over the previous fifty years.

As a result of discovering this ferment, Rodrigue proposed formation of a global association of Big History in August 2010, during a workshop at the Coldigioco Geological Observatory in the Apennine Mountains of Italy. Discussion of a professional society had gone on for years, but the documentation of big-history practitioners made it apparent there was a critical mass to make it viable. The International Big History Association was launched at Coldigioco at that time.²⁶

The IBHA embarked on organizing itself, as well as bringing together those active in Big History around the world. This was done by what amounted to an on-going '24 / 7' open-ended board meeting. The approach worked well, given its spread across the global landscape. Its structure was put in place, and they adopted a working definition of Big History:

*Big history seeks to understand the integrated history of the cosmos, Earth, life and humanity, using the best available empirical evidence and scholarly methods.*²⁷

The organization developed a website, a bulletin – *Origins*, a newsletter – *Emergence*, and the *Journal of Big History*. In 2011, the IBHA fielded six panels and two roundtables at the 20th World History Association conference in Beijing, where board-member Craig Benjamin was a keynote speaker.²⁸ In February 2012, most of the board presented at the Global Futures 2045 conference in Moscow, which Akop Nazaretyan and Barry Rodrigue co-organized with media-executive Dimitry Itskov. The inaugural conference of the IBHA was held at Grand Valley State University in Michigan in 2012 on the theme of *Teaching and Researching Big History: Exploring a New Scholarly Field*.

Independent efforts sprang up and joined with big-history associations, such as Wendy Curtis' *The Biggest Picture: From the Formation of Atoms to the Emergence of Societies* (2013). Besides the IBHA, several independent regional centres formed, often with additional themes of action. In 2011, the Eurasian Center for Megahistory & System Forecasting came together in the Russian Academy of Sciences' Oriental Institute. They focused on the predictive potential of historical trends for understanding human activity and to avert crisis. Akop Nazaretyan, a scholar and advisor in conflict resolution, served as its first director. The Eurasian Center continued its study of macro-history with Uchitel Publishing, managed by Leonid Grinin and Andrey Korotayev. Their almanac, *Evolution*, is devoted to Big History.²⁹

In Japan, Big History first merged with the peace movement. The Institute for Global & Cosmic Peace (IGCP) had begun during the Cold War's Space Race, in 1986, through the work of historian Osamu Nakanishi. Philosopher Alexander Chumakov's

holistic perspectives inspired Nakanishi, and, in 2005, his student, Nobuo Tsujimura, introduced concepts of big-historian David Christian and planetary-scientist Takafumi Matsui. The discussions led to a framework of 宇宙学 [universal studies]. The IGCP then engaged with Barry Rodrigue and Akop Nazaretyan, leading to a series of publications about the intersection of Big History and Peace Studies (Nakinishi and others 2014, 2016, 2017; Nakanishi and Tsujimura 2015, 2016; Rodrigue 2013).

In 2015, biochemist Martin Robert introduced big-history concepts into his course on 'Life and Nature' for international students at Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan. Two years later, he and geologist Norihiro Nakamura developed a liberal-arts course for Japanese students, based on big-history concepts, with archaeologist Mitsuru Haga and astrobiologist Yumiko Watanabe.³⁰

In 2016, environmental economist Hirofumi Katayama, astronomer Ryosuke Miyawaki and their advisor, Nobuo Tsujimura, established the Big History Movement and a course at J.F. Oberlin University in Tokyo. That year, world-history teacher Kenji Ichikawa introduced Big History at Aletheia Shonan High School in Chigasaki, Kanagawa.³¹

Big History arose in South Korea as part of a national program of *convergence education* between the sciences and humanities in 2009. David Christian introduced it with world historians Ji-Hyung Cho and Seohyung Kim at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. Cho and Kim taught the first regular courses of Big History, developed programs for secondary schools, and translated Big History materials into Korean, including a twenty-book series about Korean Big History for teens. In 2015, Kim founded the Cho Big History Academy (Kim 2016, 2018).

China has multifaceted settings of Big History. The Open Complex Giant System had begun to integrate scientific disciplines, while progressive world historians were expanding historiography to include science and the natural world. These trends had continued in the new millennium. Women's research physician Zhao Mei assembled concepts about *qi* [life energy] in a big-history context and approached historian Zhu Weibin at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, who saw Big History as a natural extension of global history. This view had been endorsed by officials of the Shanghai Communist Party, when David Christian's book, *Maps of Time*, was vetted for publication in 2007. It was seen as compatible with Chinese historical paradigms.³²

The Asian Big History Association came together as a result of this work in China, Japan, and Korea. Its organizational meeting was held at the 2nd IBHA conference in San Rafael, California with Sun, Tsujimura and Kim as organizers with Barry Rodrigue. Their initial work forged more solid links between its members. In 2014, Rodrigue accepted an offer as visiting scholar in Big History at Shandong Normal University in Jinan, Shandong Province, China. This was arranged by Sun Yue, and historian Qi Tao, who had advanced big-history models twenty-years earlier and had become deputy governor of Shandong. This assignment was in preparation for the International Congress of Historical Sciences (ICHS), to be held the next year in Jinan (Rodrigue 2013).

In 2013, English-translator and historian Sun Yue joined the IBHA board and, as editor of the *Global History Review*, produced, with his colleagues, the first issue of a journal on Big History in China (Liu and Sun 2013). In Beijing, CITIC Press also began publishing a series of books on Big History, of which its editor, Ma Xiaoling, wrote: '... gives

us all a broader vision, more possibilities and more attention to our common human future.³³

In August 2015, Rodrigue and Sun organized a panel on Big History for the ICHS in Jinan, where they joined the board of the Network of Global & World History Organizations, along with Lowell Gustafson of the IBHA. Sun described his studies about the twin sides of humanity's perplexing search for social stability – its need for harmony and creativity that exists alongside witch-hunts and conflict. He sees its resolution as a central issue of Big History.³⁴

For twenty years, atmospheric scientist Alexis Lau 劉啟漢 taught at the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology and served as director of its Institute for the Environment. He thought about cancelling their general-education course on climate change because he saw how students became so pessimistic after taking it. Then he heard about Big History from his colleague, Robert Gibson, and, in 2015, merged Big History and sustainability studies into the climate-change course. The result was dynamic. The next year, graduate-student Aidan W.H. Wong 王瑋軒 joined him in this work and attended the 3rd IBHA conference in Amsterdam. Their course, 'Big History, Sustainability and Climate Change,' remains in the core curriculum. In 2017, they collaborated with the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education to make a macro-sustainability course for secondary students. Two years later, Wong worked with Hong Kong Scholars to publish a course-book, *Big History: A Scientific Origin Story* (2019).³⁵

A public advocate in Taiwan, Gavin Lee first learned of Big History in 2017 while he was writing a book on *The Maritime Silk Road and World Civilization*. He found that Big History provided a more holistic way to understand the world's interconnectedness. The next year, he started Worldviews Academy as a vehicle to encourage Big History, beginning with a six-class sequence for the general public and for high school. After Taiwan's K-12 education reform in 2019, Ming Dao High School added this course as an official elective, under the guidance of its principal, Albert Wang. Other followed.³⁶

Their team expanded course content with new media tools, such as virtual and augmented reality, along with classroom experiments and digital arts. They customized Big History for different sectors, such as problem-solving scenarios for life-long learners. For business leaders, they adapted big-history theories, like self-organizing and emergence concepts to guide organizational change in Executive MBA programs at the National Taiwan University and Tunghai University. By 2021, over 3000 people had participated in Worldviews Academy's activities, while three high schools and a university adopted its curriculum. The academy is presently curating an online series of articles about Big History for the general public and designing a course for experiencing each complexity threshold with a featured board game.³⁷

Some of the seeds of the European Big History Network (<https://bighistory.eu/>, accessed 17 October 2021) were also planted at the second IBHA conference in 2014, when Dutch big-history student Maarten Oranje and Spanish geology professor Olga Garcia-Moreno decided to reach out to scholars in Europe. Garcia-Moreno worked with geologist Walter Alvarez, who had asked Esther Quaedackers to invite palaeontologist Jan Smit and social-scientist Jesse Bos. During the Amsterdam Big History Conference (2016), the idea became concrete, and, the next year, she organized the first EBHN assembly in Salas, Asturias, followed by another in 2018, with twenty scientists and teachers. The third EBHN meeting was organised in Coldigioco in 2019.³⁸

As a result of these meetings, several activities were initiated in secondary and university settings. Constance van Hall and Jesse Bos (Netherlands) and Adalberto Codetta (Italy) began an exchange between big-history teachers from Spanish, Italian and Dutch secondary schools with support from the EU Erasmus Program. Esther Quaedackers (Netherlands), Olga Garcia-Moreno (Spain), Jacob Wamberg (Denmark) and Giovanni Grieco (Italy) also brought together their universities of Amsterdam, Oviedo, Aarhus and Milan to work on a collaborative course in 'Local Big History.' Funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, students from their universities worked together to analyse their local histories through a big-history lens. In addition, students and teachers brought out an Italian newsletter with Adalberto Codetta on Big History, while Giovanni Grieco in Italy advanced the role of geoparks and eco-museums for public education about Big History.³⁹

In the midst of these successes, there were counter-trends. The first big-history course had been added to a core curriculum at the University of Southern Maine (USA) in 2006 and was offered online three years later. Dominican University of California put Big History into their core curriculum in 2009. And, in 2012, Macquarie University established their Big History Institute in Sydney (Australia), which, among other initiatives, developed an award-winning big-history MOOC and an elementary-school big-history curriculum. They also graduated the first PhD students in Big History.⁴⁰ Despite the popularity of such academic developments, especially among students, university administrators ended all three programs, reinforcing a vision of education as a profit-making business.⁴¹ Nonetheless, new efforts continued to rise up, in part, as a result of these closed programmes and their scholars.

In my own role as International Coordinator for the IBHA (2011–2021) and the Asian Big History Association (2014–2021), I engaged in a considerable amount of fieldwork and outreach, including a sabbatical at Shandong Normal University in Jinan (China) and dialogues in Beijing, Moscow, Lake Tahoe, Grozny, Boston, Hanoi, Montreal, Guangzhou, and Bombay. It also involved the six-year production of an international, comprehensive anthology of Big History, *From Big Bang to Galactic Civilizations*, which appeared as a three-volume series between 2015 and 2017. It involved 100 contributors from 25 nations and many mother tongues.

As a result of the anthology, the Indian Association for Big History was founded at Symbiosis International University in Pune, Maharashtra in 2016. There was fertile ground for it. Orla Hazra and Prashant Olelaker's had promoted a 'New-Story' program (see below) in Bombay, while macro-history studies had begun for secondary students, such as at the Sri Adwayananda Public School in Kerala under stimulus from the Big History Project.

At this point, my home university in the United States was one of the institutions (described above) that shut down its successful world and big history courses, in an ill-considered move to enhance profit margins. I was invited to join the faculty at the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts to set-up a core course in Big History, the first such course in a South Asian university. This led to more dynamic activism in Asia, involving the Asian Big History Association and the IBHA. In 2018, Symbiosis began an annual symposium on Big History and interdisciplinarity with J. F. Oberlin University's Big History Movement and the ABHA. A series of webinars then began in 2020 with

colleagues from Malaysia, Japan and India that led into the 2021 Global Big History Conference (the Fifth IBHA Conference and the Third ABHA / SSLA symposium).⁴²

By necessity, this conference became innovative, since it took place during the Covid Pandemic. Since it was a global event, online, with participants from all around the world, we set it up as a rolling rendezvous that ran 24-hours a day for four days, so that each time zone would have activities during their prime times – 84 hours of continuous participation. It was an ambitious but highly successful program that set a new worldwide benchmark for including people who could not otherwise attend in-person.

For the first time, as a result of this online ability, friends from the newly formed African Big History Association were able to attend our 2021 Global Big History Conference. They had come together in 2018, as a result of their work with Tan Chee Keong, a big-historian from Malaysia who was with his family working in Yaoundé, Cameroon (ABHA 2018; Nganfon Eric 2018; Tan 2019).

Creative, Ecumenical and Tribal Expressions

Creative expressions have appeared inside and outside of the academic community long before the field of Big History was ever conceived. For example, geologist Alessandro Montanari is also a musician who teamed up with Gabriele Rossetti, a sound engineer, to convert geological data into music via a computer programme they designed. The resulting ‘geophonic’ compilation, *Balla con la Terra* [Dances with the Earth], made in 2001, musically represents episodes of Earth's stratigraphic history in the Umbria and Marche Apennines. They use this creativity to expand knowledge about our place in the world. The Coldigioco Geological Observatory, which Montanari and Paula Metallo co-founded with Walter and Milly Alvarez in 1992, serves as an incubator of creative arts, as it does for science (Rossetti and Montanari 2001; Paula Metallo is a creative artist and co-director of the Coldigioco Geological Observatory; Metallo 2016).

Two big-history PhD graduates from Macquarie University in Australia embarked on creative expression of their studies in 2014. David Baker wrote a eighteen-episode series on Big History for YouTube's *Crashcourse*, with the Big History Project, which had over 150,000 viewers, while Rich Blundell spun-off his ‘Shakespeare in the Cave: A Big History of Art.’ As Blundell described it: ‘Our art is not only a product of cosmic creativity, but it is through our art that new drastic change can emerge’ (Baker 2014–2017; Blundell 2014).

Nigel Hughes is a paleobiologist at the University of California in Riverside. He specializes in the study of trilobites and has worked in the Himalayas for much of his career. He also works on projects in South Asia promoting public education and Earth sciences. As part of this work, he wrote the children's book, *Monishar Pathorer Bon / Monisha and the Stone Forest* (2012a) in Bengali and English, which also appeared online as a multimedia event. It introduces basic principles of historical geology in a story about a curious village girl searching for a natural explanation of petrified wood, which is common throughout much of Bengal. The book sales support public education in India (Hughes 2012b, 2012c, 2016).

The creative arts have long held big-history views, outside of the academy, such as in the bioregional, geopoetic, ecofeminist and eco-art movements. For example, Nobuo Tsujimura attributes a big-history perspective to Osamu Tezuka's manga, especially his life-work masterpiece, *Phoenix*, which appeared in twelve volumes between 1967 and 1988. As Tsujimura summarizes it: ‘Art is not just means to explain and spread Big

History, but Big History itself is art to explain humanity in the whole universal history' (Tsujimura 2014).

Based on his life in Bombay in the 1980s, novelist Greg Roberts independently assembled his vision of existence, which he called 'Resolution Theory' in his novel, *Shantaram* (2003). He presciently asks: 'Are we leaving a lamp of Earth Empathy in our literature, presentations or elsewhere for those who will one day see us and our conferences as history?'⁴³

Shubhangi Swarup, also from Bombay, grounded the characters in her first novel, *Latitudes of Longing* (2018), within the tectonics of Nature. As she wrote about her experience:

Over time, novels have evolved into a myopic enterprise, centred around singular human actions, limited by political borders, identity politics, and, even worse, a plot. The cause and effect within a plot is restricted to its characters, devoid of the appreciation and continuations within a larger universe. In an increasingly polarised and isolating world, the human imagination has been trapped in rooms of its own creation. If the reader views life from just one window, then I, as a novelist, want to tear down all the windows and walls, and bring down the roof. I want to pull the entire structure down till the reader is standing under an immense sky and looking at the infinity we call a horizon. For in that infinity, human history is only a tiny slice of the Earth's history, and the evolution of life doesn't begin with our ancestors leaving Africa but the birth of the first unicellular organism or perhaps the Big Bang. For only when we have grounded ourselves in this way can we appreciate the vastness of our own lives.⁴⁴

While this academic and creative movement spread, a growth of interfaith exchange with new scientific discoveries occurred. David Christian prominently described his big-history model as a 'modern creation myth,' one that formed a basis for all humanity to share globally, outside the confines of a single tradition. His sensibility was reinforced by the classroom experiences of big-historian Craig Benjamin, who saw this search for meaning as a central responsibility for students: '... [T]he lack of a modern creation myth is actually harmful to our species because without it we are left only with an overwhelming sense of disorientation and purposelessness that Emile Durkheim referred to as "anomie."⁴⁵

Before C. P. Snow's discourse (1959) about a growing divide between science and humanities, bridges were already being built. In 1954, the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) formed (<https://www.iras.org>), which included astronomer Harlow Shapley, a founder of cosmography, which had led to studies in Cosmic Evolution at Harvard University. IRAS helped found *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (<http://www.zygonjournal.org>) twelve years later and its contributors included leading scholars and educators in macro-historical studies, like astrophysicist Eric Chaisson and biologist Ursula Goodenough (Shapley 1966; Chaisson 1999; Goodenough 2003).

Archbishop Lazar Puhalo of the Orthodox Church in America had been a dynamic and early advocate for science, rationalism, and faith. His book, *On the Neurobiology of Sin* (2010), served as a bridge between the two cultures. He joined the dialogue of Big History, speaking, along with other big-historians, at the *Global Futures 2045* conferences in Moscow (2012) and New York (2013). He raised important moral questions

about issues, such as immortality and artificial intelligence, and participated in IBHA conferences (Puhalo 2010, 2016; Orthodoxy in Dialogue 2018; Roderick 1977).

Cosmologist Brian Swimme worked with Catholic philosopher Thomas Berry and began the Center for the Story of the Universe in 1989, which affiliated with the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. This led them into deeper collaboration with religion-scholars John Grimm and Mary Tucker, who founded the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University in 2006. Their production of *The Journey of the Universe* (2011) was a multimedia synthesis of Berry's and others' views of spiritual meaning in the cosmos (Swimme 2016). Parallel to this work, the Philadelphia Center for Religion & Science had grown into the Metanexus Institute by 1997 and, through its director, William Grassie, became a supporter of Big History.

Jennifer Morgan, a journalist and educator, also grew out of this tradition of the Universe Story. After participating in an Earth Literacy Program at Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey, she composed the *Universe Story Trilogy* for children, between 2002 and 2006, consulting with noted scholars, like astrophysicist Neil de Grasse Tyson and anthropologist Jane Goodall. She then developed the *Deeptime Network* (2014; <https://dtnetwork.org/>, accessed 30 October 2021) with a mission to unite all faith traditions with each other and with science (Morgan 2002, 2003, 2006, 2017).

Pope Francis' *Laudato Si', On Care for our Common Home* (2015) led to renewed actions by Catholics around the world to conserve the planet. Among them, in 2016, Prashant Oralekar and Orla Hazra merged these ideas with Thomas Berry's 'New Story' and a big-history paradigm to establish their course, 'Awakening to Cosmic Compassion,' at the Department of Interreligious Studies, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai (Hazra 2016; idem 2017 / 2022; Oralekar 2017).

Educator Luis Calingo had served as Provost of Dominican University of California when it added Big History to its core curriculum. In 2015, he became President of Holy Angel University, a major research institute in central Luzon, Philippines (his home) and, two years later, sent professors to the Summer Institute in Big History at Dominican. Holy Angel then began a two-course big-history sequence the following year. With the largest Roman Catholic population in Asia but acknowledging the Philippines' Islamic and Animistic traditions, Holy Angel University promotes Big History along with the country's many rich philosophical traditions.⁴⁶

While much of the overt and well-publicized efforts at rapprochement between science and religion exist in the Western context, especially among Christians, that does not mean that such efforts do not exist elsewhere. Besides helping Malaysia's farmers adapt to changing land and climate, soil-scientist Shamshuddin bin Jusop also had been active in guiding Muslims to see how Islam and modern science are bound together, as in his popular text, *The Earth Story: Lessons from the Quran and Science* (2006; Jusop with Nor Azlian 2018). Similarly, physician H. Sudarshan, a Vedic scholar living among the Soliga tribal people of South India for over forty years, adapted his worldviews and medical practices in a complex weave of science and community service, as delivered by his medical / educational NGOs, the Karuna Trust and the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra.⁴⁷

While big-history discussions often centre on urban forms of education, we must be mindful that many tribal societies from which civilization grew maintain holistic and inclusive concepts of existence. It is acknowledged that their low-impact survival strategies could help correct the lifestyle of dominant societies. Far from being an exotic

primitivism, or a return to nature, tribal experience encompasses Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), while connecting with the scientific community, as in the founding of the Alaska Native Science Commission (<http://www.nativescience.org/>, accessed November 3, 2021). Traditional societies have a major potential to re-envision our future in a big-history context (Shtyrbul 2006; Rodrigue 2014).

Such bridges have already been opened, as in biologist Edward Wilson's *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (2006) and recently led to the global anthology, *Science, Religion, and Deep Time* (2022), edited by big-historians Lowell Gustafson, Barry Rodrigue and David Blanks.

Broad Diversity and Context

If Big History was just an obscure micro-discipline that a handful of specialists were advocating, it would not necessarily be of significance. But, since the movement and its area of scholarship reflect human trends of wider, more inclusive awareness of natural phenomena, we see it as a cooperative, scientific and scholarly endeavour that will continue to expand with exciting possibilities.

It was not the invention of one person or a small research community but instead an organic response by many independent thinkers all around the world, a *global conjuncture*. This is a testimony to the universal thinking of human beings to be able to arrive at similar ideas from many different backgrounds, an exercise in global intellectual ability. Big History fits within a wide variety of educational structures, is taught at many levels, in many departments and general education curriculums. Its popularity is dramatic: Universities hold undergraduate classes accommodating hundreds of students, while their online courses draw students from around the planet.

Many scholars focus on complexity as a benchmark of evolution. While this is an highly important concept, philosopher Wang Dongyue reminds us of the fragility of complexity: As things become more complex, instability increases (Chaisson 2010, 2011; Bondarenko and Baskin 2016; Wang 2020; Bridge-Minds 2021; Chen 2023). Other scholars identify other processes. Biologist E.O. Wilson refers to the cross-disciplinary unification of knowledge as *consilience*. Fred Spier breaks it down into a series of nested *regimes*, while David Christian focuses on *thresholds*. Barry Rodrigue centres his work on social implementation of universal studies, or *mutualization*. Big History also employs concepts like collective learning and concerns for the Anthropocene (Moddejonge 2012; Wilson 1998; Spier 1996; Christian, Brown, Benjamin 2013; Rodrigue 2017b; Baker 2016; Chaisson 2010, 2011). Being a young nexus of people and information, other conceptualizations will appear.

This effort to understand our place in the universe transcends Big History in its institutional sense, since these approaches and understandings appear outside of the big-history programmes described above. For example, geographers Georges Nicolas and Eric Waddell see a need for humanity to bridge a widening chasm between meaning and science. Biologist Edward Wilson also addressed this concern in his book, *The Meaning of Human Existence* (2014):

Human beings are not wicked by nature. We have enough intelligence, goodwill, generosity, and enterprise to turn Earth into a paradise both for ourselves and for the biosphere that gave us birth. We can plausibly accomplish that goal, at least be well on the way, by the end of the present century. The prob-

lem holding everything up thus far is that *Homo sapiens* is an innately dysfunctional species.

Paleobiologists Neil Shubin and Ted Daeschler discuss these wider contexts in their disciplines, as in Shubin's book about our evolutionary lineage, *The Universe Within* (2013). Others have widely popularized such macro-concepts, as with biogeographer Jared Diamond and historian Yuval Harari.⁴⁸ So, whether Big History succeeds as a field of study or morphs into something else is immaterial – the concept and the effort to comprehend our widest existence and future is here to stay.

Existence and Survival

Questions about existence are still a serious strategy for human survival, as much as they were two million years ago at Olduvai Gorge, a process that led to us being the sole surviving species of our lineage. We are today facing another life-changing crossroads, a crisis of our own making and one of an even more rapid and intense nature. The present-day disruption of the ecosphere has been caused by our very own success.

Over-population has engulfed the planet along with the increased stratification of resources. Entire species of life are vanishing, along with fresh water supplies. Non-renewable resources are being exhausted and resource wars are proliferating. Pollution makes swathes of the world uninhabitable. Climate change is impacting the entire planet, from the melting of the world's ice sheets and permafrost to related rise in sea levels and greenhouse gas emission, storm surges, disruption of ocean currents and wind patterns, and wildfires.

Local agriculture and business are destroyed by competition from mega-industry, resulting in the vast concentration of people in urban areas, as more and more residents are dropped to the lowest rungs of society. Many think they can escape this devastation, but that is a false illusion. More than half the world's oxygen is generated by the ocean's phytoplankton, which is being severely impacted by global warming and pollution. A decline in microalgae will not just imbalance marine life, it will impact our ability to breathe ... all species, all individuals, everywhere.

In a moderate scenario, the scale of the present-day crisis could lead to the end of civilization as we have come to know it. In a worse case, it could lead to human extinction, along with the demise of many other species and biomes. Nonetheless, we have many things in our favour. Instead of having to develop new stone tools, our present problems largely involve ways of seeing the world and social transformations. One of the tools at our disposal is Big History (Rodrigue 2021, 2017b).

Perhaps the most powerful understanding to come from Big History is not only to reinforce how all humans are one unified family but how we are related to everything else, from inanimate matter to other life forms. This is not intuitive. Nor is it a simple revealed process of having a general understanding and good intentions. There must be a willingness to act on this knowledge.

Society is a messy process. It began to be perfected as our species moved out of their forests. The start of the glacial age over two million years ago forced our ancestors onto the East African grasslands, where they were challenged to find new forms of sustenance by fluctuating periods of dry and wet climates. Some of these implications will be discussed in Part Two of this essay – ‘The Children of Climate Change.’

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the following people for reading this article and offering thoughtful and constructive comments: G. Siegfried Kutter, John Mears, Eric Chaisson, Sun Yue, David Christian, Fred Spier, Penelope Markle, Nobuo Tsujimura, Akop Nazaretyan, Sun Chao, Li Qingcheng, Zhao Beiping, and David Blanks.

NOTES

¹ My first awareness of such macro-ideas came when I was six years old and dug up what I thought to be a *Brontosaurus* femur (... in retrospect, it was probably just a cow's leg bone). My parents and Jesuit educator Bernard Scully encouraged my learning about prehistoric life and science. In the 1970s, I studied with G. Siegfried Kutter, a founder of what later came to be called Big History. My macro-consciousness intuitively manifested itself, while I did my PhD in geography at Université Laval in the 1990s, when I was assigned to write the opening chapters of a historical geography of south-central Québec. The Quebec National Institute for Scientific Research rejected my proposal to start the book with the Big Bang, but they did let it begin at Pangea! Courville and others 2003. In 2002, a colleague, Bob Schaible, told me of an article he read about Big History, which began my purposeful affiliation with other big-historians.

² As an example of some of this research, see the following. Bönner *et al.* 2021.

³ Miura 1982 [1789]; Iwata 1989. Miura's work was hampered by foreign and domestic policies of Japan's Tokugawa shogunate and so it became lesser known than those of other scholars. Piovesana 1965; Mercer in Miura 1991. I am grateful to Nobuo Tsujimura for bringing Miura and Iwata to my attention. Humboldt's five volume series of *Kosmos* was produced between 1845 and 1862. Humboldt 1845, 1847, 1850, 1858, 1862. Christian 2010: 12; Spier 2010: 10. I am grateful to Fred Spier for bringing Alexander von Humboldt to my attention. Rodrigue 2019: 115, 122.

⁴ Daniel Smail, Cambridge, Massachusetts, e-mail to Barry Rodrigue, 4 August 2010. Darwin's book, *On the Origin of Species*, came out in 1859 and was part of a 'time revolution' in historical understanding, one mediated by geologists and archaeologists. Christian 2015.

⁵ Tagore 2006; Teilhard de Chardin 1955; Lemaître 1927. I am grateful to historian Alex Holowicki for his presentation on 'Big History and Big Anxieties in the Interwar Period: Rethinking Hiram Percy Maxim's *Life's Place in the Cosmos*' at the third IBHA conference in Amsterdam (2016).

⁶ Montessori 1998: 15. Jos and Anne-Marie Werkhoven, Almere, Flevoland, Netherlands, private communication, 26 May 2015; see also Werkhoven 2016.

⁷ Imanishi 1941, 1983, 1984, 2002. Matsuzawa and McGrew 2008. I would like to thank Nobuo Tsujimura for sharing his insights about Imanishi. Nobuo Tsujimura, personal communications (e-mail), to Barry Rodrigue, 4 June 2017.

⁸ Eric Chaisson, 1975, 1977, 1982; idem, personal communications, to Barry Rodrigue, 29–30 June 2010; idem, to Barry Rodrigue, Joseph Voros and David Baker, 22 January 2015, 4 February 2015. Field and others 1978. Field 1980.

⁹ G. Siegfried Kutter 1987; idem, 2011: 102–103. Kutter's course and book came together from collaborative efforts, notably with ecologist Burton Guttman and microbiologist Elizabeth Martin Kutter, who also wrote a synthesis of her work in relationship to Big History. E. Kutter 2017.

¹⁰ Thomas Bania, personal communications, to Barry Rodrigue, 12 February 2014, 31 March 2014. Michael Rampino, entry in Rodrigue (with Stasko) 2009: 15–16.

¹¹ Qian 1991; Qian, Yu, Dai 1990; Cao, Dai, Zhou 2009; Sun 2015; Lu 2004. I am grateful to Sun Yue for bringing the Open Complex Giant System to my attention.

¹² It bears noting that Lynn Margulis and Carl Sagan had been married from 1957 to 1964. They evidently shared a passion for holistic views of existence, considering their subsequent work. Lovelock and Margulis 1974; Lovelock 1975; Lovelock and Epton 1975; Margulis and Sagan 1986; Margulis 1998.

¹³ KCET Studios and others 1980 (*Cosmos*, TV series, 1980). Wikipedia, 'Carl Sagan,' accessed 13 October 2021. L. Hawking 2016. McKie 2007.

¹⁴ One of the groups dedicated to Teilhard's work is the Association des amis de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (https://www.teilhard.fr/presentation_association, accessed 24 December 2021). On some of the on-going initiatives related to Berry's work and its links to Big History, see the following. Hazra 2016. Morgan 2017.

¹⁵ Mears 1986; idem, personal communication, to Barry Rodrigue, Western History Association, Conference, Incline Village, Nevada, 14 October 2010; idem 2016.

¹⁶ David Christian, personal communication, to G. Siegfried Kutter, 2011.

¹⁷ Huang Liuzhu's proposal for uniting natural and human history at Northwest University was not adopted. Sun Yue, personal communications, to Barry Rodrigue, 2013–2014. Sun Yue at Capitol Normal University in Beijing is a leading big historian in China and has been engaged in a study of Chinese traditions of macro-history. Sun Chao at Shandong Normal University in Jinan was a student of Ma Shili. I appreciate their insights into the development of Big History in East Asia. PhD students Li Qingcheng at Sun Yat-sen University and Zhao Beiping at Beijing Normal University also assisted me greatly.

¹⁸ Some of these efforts were challenging. Cynthia Stokes Brown had planned to write her book in the 1990s, but the sabbatical committee at Dominican University of California laughed at her and refused to allow such an 'outlandish' proposal, so she was forced to defer the project for a decade. Cynthia Stokes Brown, personal conversation, with Barry Rodrigue, 6 August 2014.

¹⁹ The Spacewatch Program was begun by astronomer Tom Gehrels at Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona (USA) in 1980. University of Arizona, Lunar and Planetary Laboratory, Spacewatch (<http://spacewatch.lpl.arizona.edu/>). Gehrels 2007: 183–202; idem, personal communication, to Barry Rodrigue, 24 March 2010.

²⁰ Other team members also published, such as Smit and Hertogen 1980.

²¹ Gehrels's text was developed / updated with his students as *Survival through Evolution, from Multiverse to Modern Society* (2007).

²² Eric Chaisson's timelines are maintained with additional materials at the Harvard University website, *Cosmic Evolution: An Interdisciplinary Approach* 2013. Saekow 2016. Duan 2013.

²³ Gates and Rose 2009; Dean 2009; Gore 2013; Sorkin 2014; Christian, Brown and Benjamin 2013. The Big History Project focused on organizing courses and projects in schools in the US, Europe, and Australia. Some schools in non-Western countries developed big-history independently by using the BHP website, as well as other sources. Bob Regan, e-mail, to Barry Rodrigue 11 July 2019.

²⁴ A playful slogan for the 2005 Dubna conference was paraphrased from the *Communist Manifesto* – 'The spectre of Big History is roaming the Earth.' Spier 2005b. Akop Nazaretyan, personal conversations with Barry Rodrigue, Moscow, Russia, February 2012. *Social Evolution and History: Exploring the Horizons of Big History* 4 (1), 2005 (Guest ed. Graeme Snooks). *World History Connected* 6 (3) October 2009 (Guest ed. Craig Benjamin <https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/6.3/index.html>. Accessed 15 October 2021). In this issue of *World History Connected*, a review of books by world-historian William Everdell provided an interesting overview of Big History. Everdell 2009. Alexander Moddejonge also provided an early synthesis of big-history in his MA thesis. Moddejonge 2012.

²⁵ Several versions of the directory and bibliography resulted, which explains variations in content and participants. They appeared online, but, as sites became defunct, some versions vanished. A few were as follow: Rodrigue with Stasko 2009; idem, 2010; Stasko and Rodrigue 2010a, 2010b; Rodrigue, Spier, Christian and Chaisson 2011; Rodrigue and Sun 2017.

²⁶ The big-historians who met at Coldigioco and founded the International Big History Association on 20 August 2010 were David Christian of Macquarie University in Sydney (Australia), Walter Alvarez of the University of California at Berkeley (USA), Craig Benjamin of Grand Valley State University in Michigan (USA), Cynthia Stokes Brown of Dominican University in California (USA), Fred Spier of the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), Lowell Gustafson of Villanova University in Pennsylvania (USA), and Barry Rodrigue of the University of Southern Maine (USA). Other participants who were instrumental at this session were Alessandro Montanari and Paula Metallo (directors of the Coldigioco Geological Observatory), Milly Alvarez, Pamela Benjamin, Gina Giandomenico, Penelope Markle, Daron Green and Michael Dix. Barry Rodrigue chaired this first meeting, as he had proposed the IBHA's formation.

²⁷ The IBHA statement was based on a definition of Big History used by Walter Alvarez.

²⁸ The big-history panels and roundtables were organized by Barry Rodrigue and Craig Benjamin Rodrigue 2013.

²⁹ Barry Rodrigue began as Secretary for the IBHA, but, in 2011, he took on the role of International Coordinator. The IBHA discussed how to encourage such worldwide growth at its first board meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2011. Part of Rodrigue's duties involved encouragement of local and regional initiatives, including that of the Eurasian Center, which he had proposed to Akop Nazaretyan and Andrey Korotayev. In 2015, he was appointed as a Research Professor in the Eurasian Center. Social Studies (<https://www.sociostudies.org/almanac/evolution/>, accessed 16 October 2021).

³⁰ Martin Robert had learned of Big History through David Christian's Ted Talk and then consulted Big History Project materials. Martin Robert, Kyoto, e-mails to Barry Rodrigue, 20–22 December 2018. Christian 2011.

³¹ I appreciate the background details of these efforts in Japan from Nobuo Tsujimura, who participated in much of the formative work.

³² Zhao 2016; Zhu 2016; Christian 2007; Rodrigue 2013. News of the debate in Shanghai about David Christian's *Maps of Time* came from Osamu Nakanishi, who had learned of it from colleagues in the Chinese Communist Party. Nobuo Tsujimura, Tokyo, e-mail, to Barry Rodrigue, 29 June 2015. Osamu Nakanishi, private conversation, with Barry Rodrigue and others, Yokohama, 5 September 2015.

³³ Ma Xiaoling, Beijing, e-mail to Barry Rodrigue, 6 June 2017.

³⁴ Network of Global & World History Organizations 2021.

³⁵ Aidan Wong, Hong Kong, e-mails to Barry Rodrigue, 17–20 October 2021.

³⁶ Lee Chiata, Taipei, e-mail to Barry Rodrigue, 16 October 2021.

³⁷ Lee Chiata, Taipei, e-mail to Barry Rodrigue, 16–20 October 2021.

³⁸ During the COVID pandemic, the European Big History Network met bimonthly online. Esther Quaedackers, Amsterdam, e-mails, to Barry Rodrigue, 20 October–24 November 2021. Jesse Bos, Amsterdam, e-mail, to Barry Rodrigue, 28 October 2021.

³⁹ The Italian newsletter editors are Adalberto Codetta, Giovanni Grieco, Renza Cambini, Silvia Morlotti, and Davide Tonet. Jesse Bos, Amsterdam, e-mail, to Barry Rodrigue, Pune, 28 October 2021. Adalberto Codetta, Milan, e-mails to Barry Rodrigue, 28 October–16 November 2021. Esther Quaedackers, Amsterdam, e-mails, to Barry Rodrigue, 20 October–24 November 2021.

⁴⁰ Rodrigue 2010. The students to first graduate with doctorates in Big History were David Baker and Rich Blundell at Macquarie University. David Christian, Sydney, e-mail to Barry Rodrigue, 26 October 2021.

⁴¹ Likewise, some opposition arose from traditionalist academics who saw Big History to be an attack against 'human agency' or religion (Furedi 2013).

⁴² The program and recording for the 2021 Global Big History Conference appear online at <https://sites.google.com/ssl.edu.in/ibha-ssla/schedule/day-1?authuser=0> for the programme and at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI9McVpH-6SD9gNeHSESL7EBTFoIKc1af> for the recording. These also appear on the IBHA website: <https://bighistory.org/>.

⁴³ Roberts 2003: 705–709; idem, Geneva, e-mails to Barry Rodrigue, 4 April 2012, 23 January 2019; idem, Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts and others 2021, pp. 70–72. A version of the contents of the second e-mail appeared in the programme of the 2021 Global Big History Conference for which it was sent. Roberts 2021. I would like to thank Michael Dix for noting this connection between Greg Roberts' work and Big History.

⁴⁴ Shubhangi Swarup, Bombay, e-mail to Barry Rodrigue and Oishika Neogi, 10 March 2020. A version of the contents of this e-mail appeared in the programme of the 2021 Global Big History Conference.

⁴⁵ Christian 2004: Introduction. Benjamin 2009. Not everyone agreed with the characterization of Big History as a modern creation myth, including John Mears and Barry Rodrigue. A concern was the implied association of science with myth. Mears, conversation with Barry Rodrigue, Western History Association Conference, Incline Village, Nevada, 14 October 2010.

⁴⁶ Espartinez, Maniago and Gonzales 2018. Holy Angel University 2018a, 2018b. Nobuo Tsujimura, Tokyo, email to Barry Rodrigue, 6 October 2021. Santa Cruz Sentinel 2021.

⁴⁷ Jusop and Tan 2022; Sudarshan 2022; Shamshuddin, Tan and Sudarshan engage with Big History to encompass their ideas of existence at global venues with the IBHA and ABHA.

⁴⁸ Nicolas 1989; Waddell 2017; Wilson 2014: 176; Diamond 1997; Harari 2015. Edward O. Wilson, Cambridge, e-mails, to Barry Rodrigue, 4 May 2012.

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