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**Review: European Social Science History Conference, Leiden University, March 26 – 29, 2025**

Phoebe Ka Laam Ng and Evan Liddle

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Freie Universität Berlin  
Global Histories: A Student Journal  
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut  
Koserstraße 20  
14195 Berlin

Contact information:

For more information, please consult our website [www.globalhistories.com](http://www.globalhistories.com) or contact the editor at: [admin@globalhistories.com](mailto:admin@globalhistories.com).



# European Social Science History Conference, Leiden University, March 26–29, 2025

REVIEWED BY

**Phoebe Ka Laam Ng and Evan Liddle**

## ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

Phoebe Ka Laam Ng is completing her Master's in Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Having finished her editor role at *Global Histories*, Phoebe is pursuing her career in museums, with a primary focus on (post)colonial networks, history of science, and East Asian history.

Evan Liddle graduated from the University of California Santa Barbara with a BA in History and Geography and later received a master's in education. He is currently enrolled in the Master's in Global History at the Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Evan is interested in epistemologies and the history of science and technology.

## Introduction

As the former and current editors in chief of *Global Histories*, we were honoured to be invited to the latest biannual European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC), which took place from March 26–29, 2025, hosted by the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Leiden University, to join other distinguished history journal editors on the discussion about the role of journals in shaping the field of global history. Begun in 1996, this year ESSHC celebrated its fifteenth iteration, and around 1500 scholars gathered in Leiden to share their latest research. Aiming to provide a platform for scholars that use social science methods to analyse historical phenomena, the conference comprised twenty-seven thematic networks, each featuring ten to fifteen panels, totalling 370 sessions. Focusing on panels themed on global history, this review includes discourses on the latest and upcoming research topics that are raising interest in global history, and most importantly, our dialogue with other journal editors reflecting on our work's significance in moulding the discipline.

## Panel Series: Reconstructing the Slave Trade in Asia

One of the major questions within global history is how the field can advance when most scholarship focuses on materials written in languages of the Global North. With this question in mind, Phoebe joined the panel series, “Reconstructing Slave Trade in Asia,” which explored potential solutions to limitations in global history. Mostly using Asian language sources, the initial collection of presentations disclosed the slave trade in fifteenth- to nineteenth-century China (Claude Chevaleyre), the Dutch-indigenous collaboration on slave trade in seventeenth- to nineteenth-century Papua and Maluku (Hans Hägerdal), and piracy and human trafficking along the sixteenth-century Chinese coast (Barend Noordam). The later session then focused extensively on projects based on European language sources and suggested potential institutional collaborations; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, on behalf of IISH, introduced their latest project, *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* (ESTA), followed by Pascal Konings, who demonstrated the current-in-production ESTA digital database supported by the Team/Individual Data Entry System (TIDES). Additionally, Giuseppe Marino revealed how the Portuguese Jesuits were connected to the slave trade during the Imjin War in the late sixteenth century, which involved Japan, Korea, and China. Meanwhile, Philipp Huber, also from the ESTA team, detailed the global slave trade network that operated from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century in Portuguese Macau.

This panel series was intriguing as it offered a model to accomplish global history projects through international institutional collaboration. The ESTA project aims to identify and reassess the slave trade networks connecting the

Indian Ocean, Indonesian Archipelago, and South China Sea, which involved Asian and African actors and the Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish Empires. Although the database is still in production and currently focuses on sources written in Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish, this digital model, which records different voyages with open access, demonstrates potential for including sources in other Asian and African languages in the future.

The panel was organised precisely as a platform for scholars with different language skills and regional focuses to gather around and exchange knowledge. Panellists from the first session contributed based on Asian materials, while the second group added to the discussion with European literature, and together they produced a fruitful discussion on each project. This kind of insightful knowledge exchange can only be accomplished by international collaboration, and it could be a way forward for global historians with limited language abilities.

### **Panel: Radical Global Histories**

Evan attended the panel “Radical Global Histories,” a critical examination of the global history frameworks of “mobilities” and “connections.” The panel ranged from an analysis of various radical utopian communities (Robert Kramm), the role of women as partners to mobile anti-colonial activists (Joanna Simonow), to the examination of individual lives, such as the work of anti-fascist Inôcencio da Câmara Pires (Sara Camacho Felix) and philosopher-activist Tran Duc Thao (Dominique Ankoné).

Fundamentally, each presentation focused on one way in which traditional global history paradigms failed to fully capture the radical nature of activists and their communities in the twentieth century. Kramm’s presentation examined utopian communities and their common responses to early twentieth-century capitalism and imperialism. Felix’s examination of Pires’ life reflects silences in archives. In histories of anarchism, Pires is deracialised, his Africanness is invisible, or he is described by the nationality of his wife; while in Angolan national histories, he is deradicalised so that his anarchism is invisible. This panel offered not only a global reach, but also differences in scale, switching from the macro-scale (Kramm and Simonow) to the micro-scale (Felix and Ankoné).

Additionally, these presentations all highlighted the difficulties of studying marginal and mobile figures and the need to look beyond archives. Both Simonow and Felix relied on marginal sources: notes, travel documents, and photographs. Felix pointed out how a large part of Pires’ life is known through notes he wrote on the back of photographs, a source which very easily could

have been lost. Answering questions about his intention to study disconnected radical communities, Kramm offered the analogy of fungus or mushrooms as a decentralised network and a way for future scholars to square the circle of studying marginal groups without placing them in grand or national narratives, suggesting his “associative global history” as a possible framework. In short, these presentations offered new and exciting ways of examining global history beyond existing methodologies.

## Journals and the Shape of Global History

To encourage collaboration and discuss the future of history journals in the field of global history, Giorgio Riello chaired a roundtable question and answer discussion. We were glad to be included as representatives from *Global Histories: A Student Journal* (GHist) and join the chief editors of major professional journals, namely Laura Mitchell from the *Journal of World History* (JWH), Elisabeth Leake from the *Journal of Global History* (JGH), and Anne-Isabelle Richard and Cátia Antunes from *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions* (IT). Riello set the tone of this discussion by noting that global history connects otherwise isolated fragments into a fairer, more inclusive narrative.

Riello then invited responses in terms of how journals have been shaping, or gatekeeping, global history. The panellists agreed that “global history,” as its criteria should remain broad and inclusive, provided that the article is a well-written piece that goes beyond national history and presents a novel or innovative methodology or unorthodox sources. Additionally, the presenters from IT asserted that history journals should never remain neutral on contemporary problems. Publications, when engaging with these issues, can offer alternative ways of thinking about both the present and the historiography. By publishing special issues based on different regions or languages, IT’s publications reflect this standpoint on broadening historiography.

The roundtable then moved onto concerns on balancing academic and commercial considerations and the question of inequalities of access by authors and readers. The professional editors from JGH, JWH, and IT all acknowledged that publishers have imposed financial restraints, which contributed to the problem of inequalities. For example, the additional fees to publish articles in open access impact author visibility and the ability to get published. While all the journals present invite submissions from around the globe, they cannot provide language editors or translators for non-native English authors. Thus, when scholars are independent researchers or come from institutions with minimal funding, language barriers—compounded by extra publication fees—often discourage them from submitting to international journals which mainly publish in English. As a student-run journal, GHist receives university funding

to provide open access publication for our student authors. However, GHist still shares the issue of regional imbalance with most submissions coming from the Global North.

Inspired by this, an audience member inquired about “the pyramid,” or the system by which publication standards are set. Acknowledging that the Global North currently sets the standards for knowledge production, there was much discussion of the barriers to scholars from the Global South and ways to encourage more submissions from the region, including mentorship and closer relationships between authors, editors, and peer reviewers. However, Mitchell from JWH pointed out that the pyramid is constrained by financial resources, noting that any instant changes without in-depth consideration would harm the journals’ production and finances. This highlights the struggles of professional journals in balancing academic and commercial factors. However, all journals ultimately called for more active participation from the Global South.

Audience members then raised several other concerns. One particularly interesting topic was the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools as a possible aid to reduce inequality. All editors agreed that existing AI technology does not meet publication standards in terms of accuracy and sensitivity in translations. The presenters from IT pointed out that some concepts in Asian and African languages simply do not exist in English, and their translation risks spreading misunderstanding of historic phenomena. As Antunes from IT said, “Some things are untranslatable, and that’s okay!” It was also pointed out by the panel that popular translation technologies are a microcosm of this issue, as they are often poorly designed for translating many African and Asian languages. Nevertheless, several panellists remained optimistic that in the future, AI tools might be able to help with submissions and publications.

To wrap up the panel, the chair asked for visions on the future of publication in global history and advice for potential authors. Topic-wise, JGH encouraged more submissions on early modern and medieval history. Social and cultural history, microhistory, the history of commodities, and environmental history are also welcome in both JGH and JWH. IT highlighted their eagerness for good conceptual articles concerning time and space, with a rich diversity of sources. Yet, all journals struggled similarly in finding peer reviewers outside of the Global North. For GHist, the reviewers are limited to the current master’s programme students, while for the other journals, the editors must stretch their choices from reaching out to published authors to “stalking” scholars from their work cited on Google Scholar. As institutions often do not share their scholars’ emails on their webpages for internet security, it is difficult for editors to reach out to specialists. Although IT mentioned their attempt to overcome this challenging search for peer reviews by keeping a pool mixed of

junior and senior scholars, all editors agreed and emphasised the importance of responsiveness and communication. Thus, it is essential for authors to keep their online profiles up to date and be patient as the editing process can take up to a year to get reviewed. In return, the journal editors provide active support by sharing access to literature, enabling potential writers from underrepresented regions to have their work published.

For one of the last questions, an audience member inquired about the future of the “journal issue” as a concept and whether a collection of articles on similar topics remains worthwhile when there are search engines that can easily find a particular subject. The panellists agreed that the “journal issue” should remain. As opposed to publishing articles individually, collating similar articles into issues can provide context for research and put authors in dialogue, despite the extra effort and time it takes to edit and organise. Though research might not begin by consulting issues, as a resource for scholars, journal issues will always remain an essential tool.

## Concluding remarks

Global history as a field is constantly in flux. This conference provided fascinating insights into how global history not only continues to ask important questions of scholars and sources but also expands and evolves itself. The effort to publicise understudied connections, such as the slave trade in Asia, and the attempt to tell global stories of marginalised communities, reflect this ongoing process.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Laura Mitchell from JWH, who initiated and organised this special panel with Giorgio Riello, for inviting us to join this inspirational discussion on journals and global history. It was an exceptional opportunity for our team to gain insights from professional history journals and promote the efforts of our student contributors. We believe this panel marks a starting point for *Global Histories* to further collaborate with other journals in the future.