



Call for Papers

51st Annual Meeting of the Social Sciences History Association
Hilton Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia – November 19th-22nd, 2026
Submission Deadline: March 1st, 2026

Decentering Modernity

Since the inception of social science disciplines in the nineteenth century, modernity has been viewed as a unique phenomenon originating in the West and radiating to the rest of the world. This understanding of modernity has served as the foundation of modern social sciences. It has also been embraced by both Western imperialists, who believed in their “civilizing mission,” and postcolonial nationalist elites striving to implement “modernizing programs” in their new nations.

Over the last three decades, social science history has witnessed a flourishing of works that challenge this Western-centric notion of world development. They demonstrate that modernizing processes that have long been assumed to be unique to early modern Europe – such as the rationalization and centralization of the state, marketization of the economy, the rise of new ideologies pursuing individual freedom and political representation, and the transition away from the demographic *ancien régime* – have been parallel processes across different civilizations in the post-Mongol world. Embedded in diverging cultural idioms and manifesting local variations, the multiple forms of early modernities interacted with one another in the integrated global economy from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. As such, the rising domination of the Western form of modernity in the Age of Imperialism is far from a unidirectional imposition of Western institutions, but a constant process of power, resistance, hybridization, and negotiation.

In today’s world, we see the center of gravity of capitalist development moving away from traditional Western countries with the emergence of new centers of capital accumulation in the Global East and Global South. While the ongoing democratic backsliding does not spare many traditional Western democratic nations, many young democracies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe have shown striking resilience. Amidst the current reconfiguration of the global political and economic order, we need new historical perspectives that avoid both the assumption of the universality of the Western form of modernity and the Orientalist gaze that essentializes non-Western civilizations as unchanging traditions antithetical to modernity.

In this Social Science History annual meeting, we invite interdisciplinary papers and panels that address social, political, economic, and cultural processes from a historical perspective, broadly defined. In particular, we welcome works that examine the convergence, divergence, and connections between multiple forms of modernity across the world, spanning long, medium, or short historical timeframes. We also encourage submissions that connect historical analyses to contemporary issues.

Program Committee Co-Chairs:

Sefika Kumral
Matthew Norton
Christy Thornton
He Wenkai

2026 SSHA President:

Ho-fung Hung