Explorations and the sense of the global: Sven Hedin and the emotions of overview

This paper concerns how geographical explorations circulated a sense of seeing global patterns in overview. The empirical focal point is the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin who undertook four expeditions to Asia between 1893 and 1935. He became influential in international geography as well as a European celebrity, and his books, articles and lectures, for example “My Life as an Explorer” (1925), were best sellers. I ask how his exploratory practices invited the audience to sense a global space, for instance vertigo about the distances that Hedin’s travel narratives were claimed to engender. How were emotions linked to the sensing of distant places and the individual position in such large patterns? The paper aims at showing how emotions of experiencing global space were produced, suppressed and cultivated collectively. It explores the circulation of knowledge making emotions in the twentieth century. My methodological claim is that publications and popular presentations were among the arenas where emotions of exploration were circulated and emotional communities shaped. There has been a close link between knowledge of global contexts and public emotions in Western modernity. A history of that link is pivotal for our understanding of how global space and shifts are perceived and sensed collectively.