

From ‘The West and the Rest’ to Global Interconnectedness: China

Historians and the Transformation of World History as a Discipline

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Abstract: David Landes’s *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* argues that European culture was key to its achievement of wealth and power, and that China’s “cultural triumphalism” and “petty downward tyranny” doomed that country to failure. By adopting a globalist and comparative framework and disputing European exceptionalism, Andre Gunder Frank’s *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, R. Bin Wong’s *China Transformed*, and Kenneth Pomeranz’s *The Great Divergence* contribute to world history scholarship and teaching. These works collectively make the forceful case that Europe’s rise was contingent on external and accidental factors such as the fortuitous abundance of readily accessible coal in Britain along with windfall profits from the Atlantic slave trade and American colonies. These authors propose an inclusive vision of history that emphasizes multiple possibilities rather than the single, inevitable path of the growth of industrialism in the West, thereby stimulating further debate as to the causes of the rise of the West.

In reviewing the above-mentioned texts, this article focuses on how China historians have transformed the dynamic discipline of world history in recent years. First, we sketch the emergence of world history post-World War II as a developing field of teaching and research. We then examine a heated debate over the Great Divergence, or the reasons why Europe became dominant over the rest of the world by 1800 or earlier, pitting proponents of European exceptionalism against revisionist scholars of the California School who decenter Europe in global history, as exemplified by some key texts published around 2000. We next assess the contributions of the California School to research and pedagogy in world history. Finally, we evaluate the ongoing debate over the Great Divergence, and conclude that a general consensus is emerging among most world historians.

Keywords World history; Chinese history; Asian history; history curriculum; history pedagogy

INTRODUCTION: EMERGENCE OF WORLD HISTORY AS TEACHING AND RESEARCH FIELDS

World history presents unique challenges to scholars and teachers, in comparison with national histories and Western Civilization. In all modern nation-states, national history courses serve the cause of nation building. US history surveys focus on the political narrative of the nation that constitutes the foundation under which social, economic, and cultural history can be accommodated (McNeill 2003, paragraph 1). Pioneered by Columbia University “in the wake of World War I with the hope of establishing a Western set of core values and intellectual order out of the chaos and pessimism prevalent at the time,”

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Western Civilization was conceived as a supplement or complement to the US history survey under the assumption that American history could not be properly understood without knowledge of its European heritage (Voeltz 2010, 84-85). The central focus of the European survey is therefore on the elite culture of Western arts and ideas, transmitted over time and space throughout Europe and European settler societies around the world (McNeill 2003, paragraph 2). By comparison, world history has long been anathema to professional historians who advocate “history in fine grain” over historical synthesis, and strong opposition to its inclusion in the college curriculum existed into the 1980s (Allardyce 1990, 23, 40–45, 55–65). Even as the need for global education became increasingly obvious after World War II, how to conceptualize and teach world history has proved much more problematic than in the case of either US history or Western Civilization (McNeill 2003, paragraphs 3).

As an intellectual discipline, leading historians of the emerging field of world history in the 1960s include such luminaries as Fernand Braudel and William H. McNeill. Still, in its early stages even the best monographs remain mired in a Europe-centered world. The high school world history texts from the 1950s into the 1990s were mainly retrofitted Western Civilization texts retaining “the dominant Western narrative” (Woyach 1989; Marino 2011, 423). Even as high school texts began to include more non-Western content in the 1990s, they suffered from using a “composite area studies approach” rather than truly embracing global or comparative conceptual narratives (Don 2003, 513–515).

A Europe-centered world history could not remain unchallenged, particularly since the 1960s when awareness that we are living in an increasingly globalized world grew more widespread, and when American society was becoming more diverse and multicultural. Historians from a variety of fields began to ask and examine large historical questions in a comparative as well as global context, a development that has gained increasing momentum since the 1980s with the publication of important works that broke new ground, and the founding of organizations and journals dedicated to the promotion of world history as an intellectual field and curricular subject. The World History Association (WHA) “was founded in 1982 by a group of teachers and academics determined to address the needs and interests of what was then a newly emerging historical sub-discipline and teaching field” (“History, Mission and Vision of the WHA” 2014). WHA later sponsored the *Journal of World History*, which has been published since 1990 under the editorship of Jerry H. Bentley of the University of Hawai‘i until his death in 2012.

By the 1990s, world history had evolved to embrace three approaches or perspectives that were complementary rather than mutually exclusive. First, some world historians adopted a globalized approach in place of a focus on nation-states. An important example is world-systems analysis pioneered by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein and others. Second, world historians analyzed historical problems and issues by comparing different regions and societies. Third, world historians began to focus on studying interactions, connections, and exchanges across cultures and societies (Marino 2011, 426–427).

By the 2010s, world history courses were commonly offered at the high school and college levels. High school texts had become better at incorporating themes and concepts suggested by world historians. However, coverage remained heavily focused on Europe. On the other hand, AP and college textbooks, often written or cowritten by distinguished world historians, provided much more balanced geographical coverage as well as better integration with global themes (Bolgatz and Marino 2014).

By actively participating in world history organizations and conferences, contributing influential research monographs, and writing widely adopted textbooks, historians of China played leading roles in the transformation of research in and teaching of world history.

For example, Kenneth Pomeranz is the author of *The Great Divergence* (discussed below) and one of the coeditors of the *Journal of Global History*, which began publication in 2006. Xinru Liu has published extensively on the silk roads and on cultural exchanges between India and China (Liu 1988; Liu and Shaffer 2007; Liu 2010). Robert B. Marks penned the popular textbook *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-first Century* (Marks 2007), while Craig A. Lockard, a historian of Southeast Asia and the overseas Chinese, wrote another widely adopted textbook, *Societies, Networks, and Transitions: A Global History* (Lockard 2015). Other China historians, including Pamela Crossley, Benjamin Elman, and Michael Tsin, have contributed to leading world history texts (Bulliet et al. 2015; Tignor et al. 2014).

DEBATE ON THE ORIGINS OF THE GREAT DIVERGENCE: EUROPEAN EXCEPTIONALISM VS. THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL

The debate on the root causes of the rise of the West is one to which China historians have made significant contributions through their research. China historian David D. Buck, for example, summarized this controversy in the title of his review article, “Was it Pluck or Luck that Made the West Grow Rich?” (Buck 1999). European economic historian David S. Landes argues that certain internal historical developments in Europe had prepared the region for economic wealth and global dominance, and that therefore it was the “pluck” of the West that brought about its rise. On the other hand, China historian Ken Pomeranz, sociologist Andre Gunder Frank, and others argue that the West benefited from “lucky” or contingent circumstances, such as colonization of the Americas and Britain’s easy access to abundant coal supplies.

David S. Landes’s best-selling 1999 book, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor*, is a massive and elegantly written foray into world history that projects the conventional “the West and the Rest” view. Landes, following the example of Max Weber’s studies of the relationship between religion and capitalism, argues that European culture was key to its achievement of wealth and power. As Landes puts it: “It was not resources or money that made the difference; nor mistreatment by outsiders. It was what lay inside—culture, values, initiative” (Landes 1999, 253). In other words, if a nation remained poor, it had its own culture to blame: lack of resources or capital or the exploitation of imperialism were no excuse. For Landes, the Middle Ages represented “the bridge between an ancient world set in the Mediterranean—Greece and then Rome—and a modern Europe north of the Alps and Pyrenees” (31). Landes argues that the Middle Ages paved the way for the birth of a new society in Europe that “took a path that set it decisively apart from other civilizations”: Greek democracy in contrast to oriental despotism; private property vs. ruler-owns-all; economic development vs. the squeeze operations of despotic empires; the split between the secular and the religious in Europe vs. religious fundamentalism (Islam in the Middle East) or ideological fundamentalism (Confucianism in China) (Landes 1999, 31–38). Landes flatly states, “Until very recently, over the thousand and more years of this process that most people look upon as progress, the key factor—the driving force—has been Western civilization and its dissemination: the knowledge, the techniques, the political and social ideologies, for better or worse” (Landes 1999, 513).

For the most part, Landes is dismissive of non-Western societies. Japan and the Four Little Tigers of East Asia—Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong—are exceptions. He attributes these countries’ recent economic success to their work ethic and “an exceptional manual dexterity useful in micro-assembly” (Landes 1999, 471–475). He is particularly critical of China. For him, China’s failure is exemplified by the maritime expeditions of Admiral

Zheng He in the early fifteenth century, the conduct and cessation of which demonstrated the Chinese “lack of range, focus and curiosity” (Landes 1999, 96). In its encounter with Europe, China was doomed by its “cultural triumphalism” and “petty downward tyranny,” which “made China a reluctant improver and a bad learner” (Landes 1999, 336).

Landes’s thesis of European exceptionalism as the explanation for the rise of the West is challenged by Andre Gunder Frank, whose *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Frank 1998) was published at about the same time as Landes’s *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. Indeed, the two had engaged in an acrimonious in-person confrontation over their paradigms under the auspices of Northeastern University’s World History Center (“Economic History Debate” 1998). Although Frank was a world economic historian and sociologist and not a China specialist, he drew on the research of leading China historians including William Atwell, Joseph Fletcher, Bob Marks, Jack Wills, and Bin Wong, as well as research from other disciplines, to construct what he calls globological perspective, a global interpretation of world economic history. Frank argues that: (1) Asia (especially China and India) was much more active and significant before 1800 in a world system of economies that had already been in place by around 1000 than was Europe; and (2) not only did Europe not build that world system, it made use of profits from America through the exploitation of its natural resources and slave labor to “buy a ticket on the Asian train” (Frank 1998, xxv). In Frank’s words, “Europe did not pull itself up by its own economic bootstraps, and certainly not thanks to any kind of European ‘exceptionalism’ of rationality, institutions, entrepreneurship, technology, geniality, in a word—of race ... Europe used its American money to muscle in on and benefit from Asian production, markets, trade” (Frank 1998, 4–5). Therefore, “the globe-encompassing world economy/system did not have a single center but at most a hierarchy of centers, probably with China at the top” (Frank 1998, 328).

Whereas Landes focuses primarily on national cultures and histories to construct his vision of the economic history of the world, and Frank employs a global perspective, two books published by China historians at around the same time as the works of Landes and Frank, R. Bin Wong’s *China Transformed* (1997) and Kenneth Pomeranz’s *The Great Divergence* (2000), make use of the comparative method by analyzing Europe and China in terms of economic change, state building, and popular protests.

Wong agrees with Frank that “Europe’s leading role has been exaggerated both spatially and temporally” (Wong 1997, 281). To Wong, there were serious “limitations of seeing non-Western history in terms of European national state formation and the development of capitalism” (Wong 1997, 1). Whereas Frank argues that the global economy was polycentered, with China possibly at its apex, Wong contends that China and Europe were “shaped by historical processes both similar and different, both shared and solitary” (Wong 1997, 293). Because of contingencies and surprises, multiple possibilities and historical trajectories in response to common challenges were present on both continents (Wong 1997, 6).

According to Wong, in the late eighteenth century:

China and Europe shared important similarities of preindustrial economic expansion based on Smithian dynamics. These included rural industries, more productive agriculture, and expanded commercial networks.

These similarities disrupt a simple contrast between European economic dynamism and Chinese material stagnation. We can see that common factors were at work before the Industrial Revolution and that the mere presence of these factors cannot

explain the Industrial Revolution. The comparative perspective reveals an element of contingency that reflects the incompleteness of our explanations of European patterns of economic change (Wong 1997, 278).

Moreover, “looking at Europe from a Chinese perspective” rather than China from a European one,

the late imperial Chinese state sometimes outperformed early modern European states. European states lacked the ability to expand the taxation of their agrarian populations, because elite claims on the land kept governments from establishing major new claims of their own. Nor could European governments enumerate their subject populations. Finally, before the nineteenth century no European state could imagine an attempt to shape social opinion and cultural practices (Wong 1997, 282).

If Wong does not explicitly address the question of why the Industrial Revolution began in Europe, Kenneth Pomeranz in his book *The Great Divergence* does. Similarly to Wong, Pomeranz uses a comparative method that decenters Europe from its privileged position as the model of economic development. In addition, Pomeranz employs an integrative or global approach analogous to Frank's. Like Frank, Pomeranz argues that the world before 1800 was “a polycentric world with no dominant center” (Pomeranz 2000, 4). Also like Frank, Pomeranz goes against the dominant European historical literature to explain the Industrial Revolution as rooted in either “a Europe-centered world system carrying out essential primitive accumulation overseas,” or endogenous factors such as sophisticated markets and other capitalist institutions, or the cultural factors that Landes emphasizes (Pomeranz 2000, 5). In rejecting European exceptionalism, Pomeranz points to similarities between the core regions of Western Europe and of Asia¹ before the nineteenth century:

Far from unique ... the most developed parts of western Europe seem to have shared crucial economic features—commercialization, commodification of goods, land, and labor, market-driven growth, and adjustment by households of both fertility and labor allocation to economic trends—with other densely populated core areas in Eurasia.

Furthermore, there is no reason to think that these patterns of development were leading “naturally” to an industrial breakthrough anywhere. Instead, all these core areas were experiencing modest per capita growth, mostly through increased division of labor, within a context of basic technological and ecological constraints that markets alone could not solve (Pomeranz 2000, 107).

For Pomeranz, all of these core regions, including Western Europe, were “headed for a common ‘proto-industrial’ cul de sac, in which even with steadily increasing labor inputs, the spread of the best known production practices, and a growing commercialization making possible an ever-more efficient division of labor, production was just barely staying ahead of population growth” (Pomeranz 2000, 207).

What then made it possible for Western Europe to achieve an industrial breakthrough—“the capital-intensive, energy-intensive, land-gobbling ‘European miracle’” (Pomeranz 2000, 207) that was both qualitatively and quantitatively different from earlier proto-industrial growth? In Pomeranz's words, the fortuitous abundance of readily accessible coal in Britain and the windfall profits from the Atlantic slave trade and American colonies made the difference:

... depopulation, the slave trade, Asian demand for silver, and colonial legislation and mercantilist capitalism shaped the New World into an almost inexhaustible source of land-intensive products and outlet for western Europe's relatively abundant capital and labor. Thus, a combination of inventiveness, markets, coercion, and fortunate global conjunctures produced a breakthrough in the Atlantic world, while the much earlier spread of what were quite likely better-functioning markets in east Asia had instead led to an ecological impasse (Pomeranz 2000, 23).

Scarce supplies of land and energy were relieved by "the fruits of overseas exploitation" and Britain's "epochal turn to fossil fuels" (Pomeranz 2000, 23). *The Great Divergence*, then, was due at least as much to exogenous forces as to internal developments in Europe.

Sociologist/political scientist Jack Goldstone has dubbed Frank, Pomeranz, and Wong, along with other scholars (including himself) who also contribute to revisionist scholarship decentering Europe and rehabilitating China in world history the California School (given that most had institutional affiliations in California).² In African and world historian Patrick Manning's view, the California School has contributed significantly to bringing about a paradigm shift in the understanding of world history by replacing of a view of the world economy as "a cumulation of local economies" with a model of a multipolar global system, and "the development of global and interactive modes of thinking in historical context" (Manning 2002, 420–422).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL FOR WORLD HISTORY RESEARCH AND TEACHING

The contributions of the historians of China have been important to the scholarship and the teaching of world history in several ways. First is the fact that most practitioners and teachers of world history today no longer accept European exceptionalism as the explanation for the rise of the West, in part due to the work of Frank, Wong, Pomeranz, and others who made the forceful case for Europe not diverging from China in significant ways until the nineteenth century.

Second, in explaining why the European West became globally dominant (a fact not disputed by the critics of European exceptionalism), and in analyzing topics and issues in world history in general, the work of Wong and Pomeranz illustrates the values of the comparative approach. In particular, both made the important point that in comparing China with the West, one must ask questions not just from the vantage point of the West, but also from that of China—not just why China was not more like the West, but also why the West was not more like China. The same consideration, of course, applies to any comparison between the West and the non-Western world.

Third, both Frank and Pomeranz locate their explanations of the rise of the West in a globalist or integrative framework, emphasizing the importance of the world economic system, and opposing the focus on culture and internal developments by Eurocentric historians such as David Landes. Fourth, the versions of world history influenced by Frank, Wong, and Pomeranz envision a polycentered world economy until the Industrial Revolution, a vision of history that emphasizes multiple paths and possibilities, not a single and inevitable path of the rise of industrialism in the West. The rise of the West was highly contingent upon developments outside of Europe. For example, the economic profits derived from the colonization of the Americas yielded huge quantities of silver that were used to purchase Asian goods, and exports of cotton, sugar, and other commodities produced on plantations by African slave labor also played a crucial role. Accidental factors played significant

roles, too, such as the availability of accessible coal in Britain that enabled that country to take off industrially. The emergence of the nation-state and the development of capitalism in Europe, of course, were also fundamental to the rise of the West. While the nation-state was a uniquely European phenomenon, European capitalism was matched or perhaps even surpassed elsewhere, in countries such as China, India, and Japan (*Rethinking the Rise of the West* 2004).

The findings of the California School can inform the classroom by serving as resources for teaching a variety of topics in Chinese history and world history, including not just the Great Divergence, but also “early modern trade, the Atlantic System, the Industrial Revolution, imperialism, twentieth-century China, and modernization in the developing world,” among others (Hubbell 2004, paragraph 1). I have included Landes’s *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* and Frank’s *ReORIENT* in readings for a senior seminar on globalization, and their wildly contrasting interpretations served well to stimulate classroom debate as well as historiographical analysis. While Landes writes in a very engaging style, the books by Frank, Pomeranz, and Wong are far more dense and theoretical, and may prove challenging to an undergraduate beginning his/her studies in history. Nonetheless, a judicious choice of excerpts from these books summarizing their arguments can form the basis for constructive and illuminating discussions (Hubbell 2004, paragraphs 7-12). In addition, the instructor can supplement the readings with online resources, including clips from the Frank-Landes debate (“Economic History Debate” 1998). Pomeranz and Wong have collaborated in creating a teaching module, “China and Europe 1500-2000 and Beyond: What is Modern?,” for Columbia University’s “Asia for Educators” Web site. The authors provide concise summaries of their historical thinking in text and video. The module also offers lessons and study guides created by high school teachers, including materials on “*The Great Divergence Debate*” and other units on world history issues raised by the writings of Pomeranz and Wong (Pomeranz and Wong 2004; Georgidis 2009). Another very useful supplementary resource is “Rethinking the Rise of the West,” Episode 18 of the television series *Bridging World History*, which provides a succinct account of the Great Divergence debate and features a number of eminent world historians, including William McNeill, Jerry Bentley, Patrick Manning, and Anand Yang (*Rethinking the Rise of the West* 2004).

TRANSFORMATION OF THE FIELD OF WORLD HISTORY: DEBATE AND CONSENSUS

While the paradigm and findings of the California School have been generally accepted by many (if not most) world historians and incorporated into the most recent college and AP world history textbooks, it is important to emphasize that there is an ongoing debate over their interpretations, which have been extended, refined, and critiqued.

Ken Pomeranz and Bin Wong have further expounded or expanded on their books in articles for a 2002 forum on “Asia and Europe in the World Economy” for *The American Historical Review* (Manning 2002; Pomeranz 2002a; Wong 2002; Ludden 2002). According to Jan de Vries, the industrious revolution of 1550-1850, which witnessed Northwest European households working more hours for the market and buying more goods rather than making them, as they had done previously, led to greater specialization and gains in efficiency, and paved the way to the Industrial Revolution. Pomeranz argues that the more advanced regions of China (and Japan) also experienced an industrious revolution, and so that facet alone cannot explain European industrialization (Pomeranz 2002a, 426-430). Instead, one reason why England was able to achieve a breakthrough was a coal boom made possible by both technological innovation and fortuitous location of coal deposits near

London, while China's best coal reserves were located far from the Yangzi Delta (Pomeranz 2002a, 437). Another reason was that the New World constituted an expanding market for British manufactured goods (since slaves could not meet their own subsistence needs) and a source for agricultural products, including cotton and sugar, thereby both stimulating British industry and relieving Britain of land constraints. In contrast, Jiangnan's peripheries experienced rapid population growth and the shifting of labor to handcrafts, thereby limiting demand for its manufactures (Pomeranz 2002a, 438–442).

Wong's *AHR* article delves into foreign trade, a topic not addressed in his *China Transformed*. In evaluating the thesis of European historians that the Chinese state's lack of interest in promoting foreign trade and supporting merchants was a key reason for China's failure to modernize its economy, Wong adopts an interesting counterfactual exercise. What if a Chinese merchant empire was established along its southeastern coast in the seventeenth century (a possibility that might have ensued had Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) or his descendants been able to fend off the Manchus)? Wong argues that this change of Southeastern China's political economy from agrarian empire to merchant empire would have likely resulted in the exchange of Chinese tea and silk for European armaments (rather than silver), but not the closer integration of Chinese and European economies exchanging Chinese primary products and luxury goods for European manufactures. It was not until the late nineteenth century that global connections mattered more than internal economic and political relations in East Asia, and that Europeans could impose "their vision of international relations and international trade" (Wong 2002, 458–461).

Scholars of other regions of Asia have extended analysis of the origins of the Great Divergence to apply to their areas of specialization. South Asia historian David Ludden sees regions in South Asia also characterized by "Early modern baseline similarities"; industrial growth in India was actually faster than in much of Europe and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ludden charges that "Modern knowledge substantiated inequality and made it sensible ... Orientalism provided a flexible tool for explaining backwardness that Karl Marx and Max Weber wrote into the foundations of social science" (Ludden 2002, 472–473). South Asia historian Prasannan Parthasarathi's *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence* provides an in-depth response to the question "Why Britain? Why not India?" (Parthasarathi 2011). While Parthasarathi agrees with the California School in seeing parallels in Eurasia and the Great Divergence as contingent, he pays more attention to human agency, including the roles of the state, science, and technology. According to Parthasarathi, Britain faced two challenges to industrialization: a shortage of wood and competition from Indian textiles. The former was solved by increase in the use of coal and invention of the steam engine, while the latter was addressed by British mercantilist policy, including protectionism and disciplining of the labor force (Vries 2012, 640–642, 648–658).

Japan scholars have also incorporated the Great Divergence debate into their analysis of Japanese history in global context. In an essay revisiting Thomas C. Smith's classic study of premodern economic growth in Japan (Smith 1973), Osamu Saito confirms Pomeranz and Wong's conclusion that "until the end of the early modern period East Asian market economies were as brisk as those in western Europe" as applicable to Japan (Saito 2005). Both Western Europe and Japan experienced Smithian growth, with an increasing division of labor and productivity increase through specialization. But real wages declined and GDP per capita increased along with growing income inequality in Europe, while wages in Tokugawa Japan grew concomitantly with output. While Japan's premodern growth was not associated with increasing income inequality, it was primarily market-driven and lacked the

capitalist sources of growth (mercantile capitalism and agricultural capitalism) that were important in northwestern Europe (Saito 2005). In an article on forest history comparing Japan with the Lingnan region in South China, England, and France, Saito further tested and largely confirmed Pomeranz's proposition that East Asia did not suffer much worse ecological constraints and pressures on its forest resources than did Western Europe (Saito 2009). Carmen Gruber asks whether Japan's substantial coal reserves might have helped relieve Malthusian pressures in the Tokugawa era, and promote Meiji Japan's successful industrialization, as coal did in England according to Pomeranz. She finds that despite high population density and a lack of migration, Tokugawa Japan was able to maintain a stable population and a rising standard of living. Given Japan's abundant timber resources and successful afforestation programs, coal did not play an important role in energy production and management of Malthusian limits in preindustrial Japan. Coal mining, however, did contribute significantly to Japan's subsequent modernization, as did colonies (Gruber 2014).

Bin Wong has collaborated with economic historian Jean-Laurent Rosenthal in writing *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Rosenthal and Wong 2011). Their explanation of why self-sustaining economic growth occurred first in Europe rather than in China draws on earlier work by Wong, Pomeranz, and others, but departs significantly in methodology and conclusions. Rosenthal and Wong agree with Pomeranz that in 1800 China and Western Europe were comparable in terms of markets, consumption, and life expectancy, and that cultural explanations of the Great Divergence are unsatisfactory (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 6–7). But they argue that the roots of divergence go back much earlier than 1800, and that domestic political economy (emphasized by Wong in his earlier writings) was more important than access to resources and overseas markets (emphasized by Pomeranz). Specifically, Rosenthal and Wong believe that the long history of China as a unified empire versus Europe's political fragmentation brought about differences in their political economies that had unintended consequences (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, ch. 1).

With the help of a series of economic models, Rosenthal and Wong analyze kinship relations and population dynamics, formal and informal market institutions, location of manufacturing, financing of trade and production, and public finance in early modern Europe and China (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, chs. 2–6). They argue against several common explanations of the Great Divergence. Variation in household structure has been a commonly evoked factor to account for differential economic growth across societies. The European nuclear household coupled with prudent reproductive behavior and willingness to participate in factor markets has been contrasted with the Chinese extended family that practiced unrestrained reproduction. Rosenthal and Wong counter that recent demographic research has demonstrated that China's population grew slower than Europe's between 1400 and 1700, and that some Chinese households engaged in preventive checks on fertility (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 35–43). As for the argument that modern economic growth has been fostered by formal institutions through the enforcement of contracts and protection of property rights, Rosenthal and Wong contend that it fails to properly credit the importance and efficacy of informal institutions in sustaining commerce, and to note that both Europe and China use a mix of formal and informal institutions. Chinese and European merchants both relied on informal institutions for long-distance trade, but because China had a longer history of such trade due to its early and sustained political unity, "a commercial regime based on networks and informal mechanisms" ensued (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 2–4, 88–92).

Perhaps the most original and controversial aspect of Rosenthal and Wong's book is

their refutation of the thesis that Europe's political fragmentation nurtured political competition, leading rulers to adopt benevolent policies and grant privileges to craftsmen and merchants to rally support, while despotic regimes like China levied heavy taxes and provided few public goods. They point out instead that incessant warfare in Europe resulted in high levels of violence and reduction of long-distance trade (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 99). The putatively despotic regime of China, on the other hand, collected light taxes, provided public goods, and interfered little with domestic trade (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 174). The constant warfare in Europe resulted in manufacturing becoming concentrated in urban centers as entrepreneurs sought safety behind city walls, while in more peaceful China, rural industry remained the norm (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 111–119). An unintended consequence of this movement of entrepreneurs to the cities was that Europe's combination of high wages (due to the costs of feeding urban workers) and low-cost capital (as urban markets became more efficient) promoted capital-intensive modes of production that characterized the Industrial Revolution (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 119–126).

While the paradigm and findings of the California School have been further expanded and refined by Asia scholars, critiques of its methodology and conclusions have likewise continued. David Landes, for one, stands by his thesis. His 2006 article "Why Europe and the West? Why Not China?" charges the California School with creating a politically correct but false myth of accidental European success and Asian priority derailed by European tyranny. For Landes, China missed two chances "to match and even anticipate the European achievement," first failing "to generate a continuing, self-sustaining process of scientific and technological advance on the basis of its indigenous traditions and achievements," and then failing "to learn from European science and technology once the foreign 'barbarians' entered the Chinese domain in the sixteenth century" (Landes 2006, 3–5).

The most indefatigable critic of the California School and other scholars with a similar outlook is historical sociologist Ricardo Duchesne, who has engaged in debates and exchanges with scholars of the California School as well as others (Duchesne 2001; Wong 2003; Goldstone 2003; Duchesne 2003; Duchesne 2005; Vries 2005; Duchesne 2006b). Like Landes, Duchesne is a culturalist and a Weberian. Also like Landes, he asks the question, "Why didn't China have a scientific revolution?" Duchesne points out that China had no profession of scientists, that the educational system was careerist and directed towards success in the civil service exams, that Chinese science was practical rather than theoretical, and that Chinese thinking was associative rather than inferential, and had no conception of nature as "a separate entity working according to universal laws that could be understood in terms of cause-effect relations, self-evident definitions, and logical inferences" (Duchesne 2006a, 73). He takes the California School to task for ignoring the "intense creativity" in Europe after 1100, when it entered "a period of cumulative progression, richer in originality, boldness and spiritedness than any other cultural efflorescence witnessed since the Ancient Greeks" (Duchesne 2006a, 80). From Frank's conception of a world economy dominated by Asia from 1400 to 1800, to England facing Malthusian constraints in the eighteenth century like China, to the Industrial Revolution as a contingent rather than necessary event, Duchesne disputes numerous of the California School's findings (Duchesne 2001; Duchesne 2003). His 2011 book, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*, "presents the most wide-ranging critique of the field of world history that has yet appeared," directing "his most sustained attacks at recent works by Frank, Bin Wong, and Kenneth Pomeranz," according to reviewer David Northrup (Northrup 2012).

Another tense and extensive debate over the comparability between Jiangnan and England before 1800 took place between Ken Pomeranz and fellow China historian Philip C.

C. Huang. Huang insists that the agrarian conditions of the highly capitalized agriculture of eighteenth century England contrast sharply with those of Jiangnan, which was in a state of involution characterized by increasing labor intensification leading to rising absolute returns per unit of land but diminishing marginal returns to labor. On the other hand, Pomeranz reconfirms and supports with further evidence his view that the two regions were comparable in terms of living standards, efficiency of factor markets, and levels of environmental stress (Huang 2002; Pomeranz 2002b; Huang 2003; Pomeranz 2003). Like Huang, Europeanist Robert Brenner and China historian Christopher Isett are skeptical that Jiangnan's agriculture was comparable to England's in the eighteenth century. Brenner and Isett agree that Jiangnan and England were roughly equal in levels of development and welfare but both came up against a Malthusian ceiling imposed by the limited supply of land. However, they further argue that (1) the Yangzi delta was heading towards a demographic and ecological crisis because the main economic agents, peasants and landlords, possessed direct, non-market access to land, and hence were shielded from market competition and from having to allocate their resources optimally; and (2) England was experiencing self-sustaining growth and heading towards the Industrial Revolution because the main economic agents, principally tenant farmers, were separated from land and must engage in profit-maximizing behavior (Brenner and Isett 2002). After examining available data, economic historians Bishnupriya Gupta and Debin Ma conclude that living standards of even the most advanced regions of China and India lagged considerably behind those of northwestern Europe by the seventeenth century, and that therefore the Great Divergence was already well along the way before the onset of the Industrial Revolution (Gupta and Ma 2010).

Perhaps the most balanced critic of the California School is economic historian Peer Vries, author of *Via Peking Back to Manchester: Britain, the Industrial Revolution, and China* (Vries 2003). Vries is in agreement with the California School on many points: "that the Qing did not interfere with most economic transactions . . . ; that Confucianism was no obstacle to economic development . . . ; that some (if not all) Chinese markets were remarkably well integrated . . . ; that, even in the late eighteenth century, Chinese agriculture had much higher land productivity than that of Britain, while differences in labor productivity were minimal . . . ; and that differences in income per capita were probably small" (Pomeranz 2004, 149). However, he feels that the degree of resemblance between eighteenth century China and Britain and the role of luck have been exaggerated, and that some important explanatory factors have been neglected.

Vries asks, if "resemblances [between Britain and China] were so striking, ... then why did not China 'take off,' or at least find it easy to catch up when others did?" (Vries 2010, 737) If Britain had the luck of having accessible coal and colonies, it still had to make use of these resources productively. Spain and Portugal had "amassed enormous amounts of bullion and land," but remained poor, while the Dutch Republic and Japan lacked resources but nonetheless became rich (Vries 2010, 737). Vries would have us remember that there were in fact significant differences between Britain and China by the eighteenth century. Long before the Industrial Revolution, Britain had embarked on a much more energy-intensive route than China, making far more use of animals and consuming the most coal in the world by 1700. Britain was also more attuned to seeking mechanical solutions and adopting centrally coordinated and large-scale production in manufacturing. In contrast, China witnessed a lack of improvement in the quality of iron utensils and implements, and even a decrease in the use of sophisticated machinery and an increase in decentralized modes of production. The two societies were going down different economic paths, one more likely

than the other to lead to industrialization (Vries 2010, 743).

Vries further points out that culture, institutions, and politics have been neglected by the California School, which omits consideration of Britain's culture of innovation, institutions (including its national bank, funded public debt, chartered companies, and Parliament), and fiscal-military state. Colonies were not an accidental acquisition, but the product of Britain's mercantilism (Vries 2010, 744–746; Vries 2001, 439).

CONCLUSION: AN EMERGING CONSENSUS

Ongoing criticisms of the California School notwithstanding, we are witnessing a significant change in the conceptualization of world history, as reflected in both professional monographs and textbooks. This new world history is more inclusive; more mindful of multiple possibilities and the role of contingencies, accidents, and conjunctures; and more aware of the significance of societal, regional, and global connections in the shaping of local and national histories. This trend in the evolution of thinking about world history can be seen for example in William McNeill, America's most venerable world historian. McNeill's pioneering work, *The Rise of the West* (1963), was criticized by South Asia historian Anand Yang as "largely about Europe and Europe's domination of the world ... [and] passing off the story of Europe as the story of the world." Yang acknowledges that McNeill's thinking has changed considerably since then (*Rethinking the Rise of the West* 2004, transcript, 2). Significantly, in later editions of McNeill's book, the original subtitle *A History of the Human Community* became the main title. As McNeill states, "When I wrote *The Rise of the West* I thought in terms of separate civilizations each with its own . . . sphere of influence and then interacting overlapping zones and movement of ideas back and forth of technologies back and forth and skills and organization back and forth. And now I think it's not untrue but it seems to be today it's better to think of the . . . totality of different civilizations lodged within a web, web of communication and transportation, that means that new experiences, new possibilities, new things can move back and forth perpetually" (*Rethinking the Rise of the West* 2004, transcript, 2).³ McNeill reminds us that the world has always been more than just a collection of separate societies. Instead, we have long constituted one human community with shared experiences, intensification of interactions, and constant renewals.

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NOTES

1. For example, Britain and the Netherlands in Western Europe, the Yangzi Delta in China, the Kantō Plain in Japan, and Gujarat in India shared several crucial features that “they did not share with the rest of the continent or subcontinent around them” (Pomeranz 2000, 7–8).
2. Other leading scholars of the California School who made significant contributions include James Lee, Wang Feng, Robert Marks, Dennis Flynn, and Arturo Giráldez.
3. McNeill’s latest book, co-authored with his son J.R. McNeill, is significantly entitled *The Human Web: A Bird’s-Eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003).