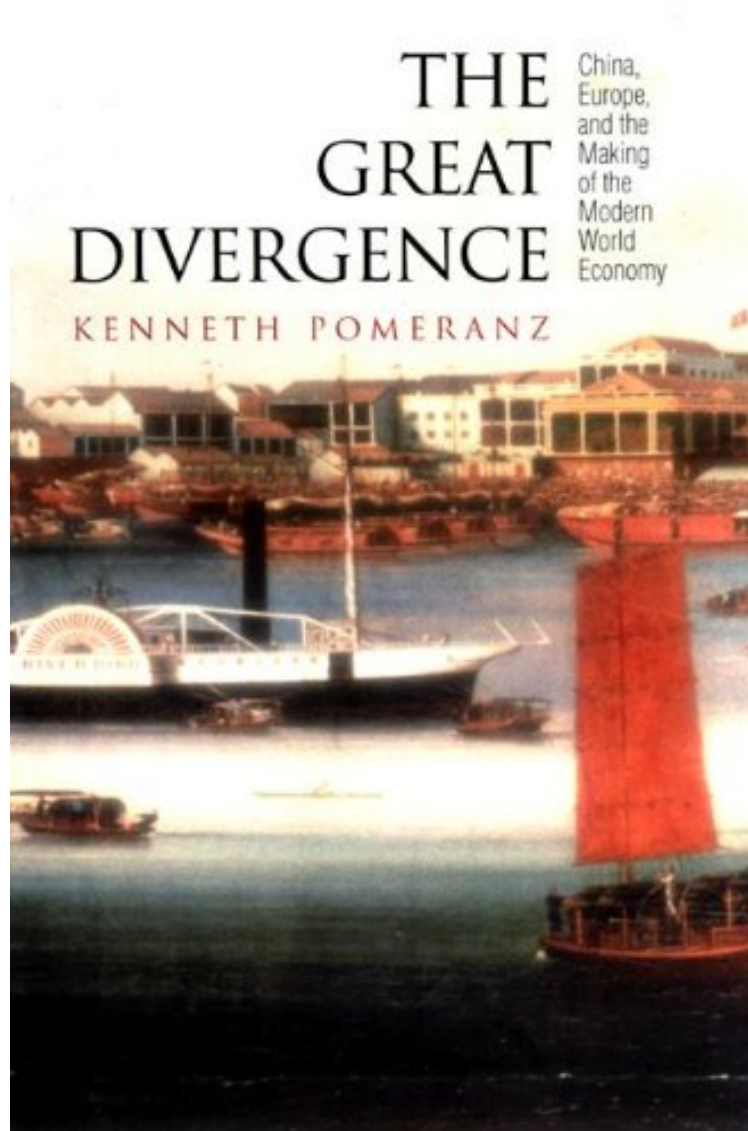


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The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World)

Kenneth Pomeranz

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Kenneth Pomeranz : The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World):

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Informative but unpersuasive

By M. Lorenzo Warby

I enjoyed reading this provocative work, which certainly expanded my understanding of China's economic history and development. But I found the central argument unpersuasive. Pomeranz sees the most developed areas of the world being basically equivalent in technology and living standards as late as 1800, so to explain the European take-off must involve late-acting factors. The first problem with that is by 1800, Europe already dominated the Americas, much of coastal Africa, India and was settling Australasia. This suggests some crucial earlier divergence prior to the Industrial Revolution. In agrarian societies, the land/population ratio dominates standard of living. Pomeranz wants to argue that NW Europe and the Yangtze valley essentially had equivalent standards of living yet the Europeans also had the great advantage of the Americas -- which thus becomes crucial but not significant. There is a contradiction here. One can see reasons why the Americas might be much less significant than one expects. First, New World products spread throughout the global trade networks (Pomeranz makes a point of emphasizing Chinese take-up of New World products). Second, the export of the Eurasian disease pool so depopulated the Americas, the Europeans massively imported labour to exploit the new territories. The 9 million African slaves imported may have been paid at subsistence levels, but they still reduced the land/population ratio. Third, the Atlantic itself was also something of a barrier (Pomeranz notes the expense of moving). Finally, sudden expansions in land/population ratio experienced by other societies did not have take-off effects (such as the Qing's expansion of China's borders). The most obvious example of the last point being that the resources of the Americas were mostly controlled by the Spanish and Portuguese, who certainly did not achieve any notable economic breakthrough (the "poor Portugal/rich Switzerland" problem is a perennial in "the overseas colonies did it" explanations). This points to institutional divergence of NW Europe from other regions as a key factor. Moreover, the later one wishes to push the divergence, the more problematic the Americas become as key factor, since Britain lost most of its North American colonies by 1783, Spain its Latin American ones by 1820, Portugal by 1822. If the issue then becomes trade access, that just reinforces an obvious crucial difference dating back to the C16th -- that China was a key part of global trade networks but not a global trader, unlike the Europeans. It begins to look like a "you have to be in it to win it" story. Pomeranz also nowhere deals with Japan being much more successful in dealing with the Western challenge than China. Since Japan was the non-European societies whose institutions (and institutional history) was most like NW Europe, this is surely suggestive. Given that other regions later industrialised without colonies, and the colonial states became richer after they lost or gave up their colonies, Pomeranz is also postulating a big difference between the first industrialisers and later industrialisers. The big change in Europe was it moving from an adaptor civilisation to an inventor civilisation. If one locates the shift at about 1000AD, then one is looking at medieval origins. If one puts it later (as I would: the medievals were excellent adaptors, doing so on a much broader basis than the Graeco-Romans, but not notable originators), then the Scientific Revolution seems crucial. Learning how to learn is surely a crucial step in creating a continuing pattern of new forms of capital, particularly fixed capital (the Industrial Revolution achievement). As Europeans increasingly interacted with the entire globe directly, that gave them a further advantage in being exposed to other people's good ideas and techniques. But this is a very informative and useful work which I recommend as a contribution to grappling with why the dramatic economic take-off from 1820 onwards happened.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Puts the Industrial Revolution into perspective

By Listo

I was taught in high school that the Industrial Revolution came about in England through technological innovation, which led to a fundamental reordering of British society, with old cottage industries overtaken by factories and with country laborers drawn into new, large, cities with perennial grey skies. Later on in lower division history survey course, I was taught that the depletion of English forests to supply the Royal Navy meant that those forests had to be protected and forced Englishmen to look elsewhere for fuel, namely underground, and that the struggle to keep the coal mines from flooding and to transport the coal long distances led to the development of the steam engine, which could then be put to a variety of labor-saving industrial tasks. This book doesn't address these issues so much. What it does do is provide international context to the Industrial Revolution, comparing the economies, laws, natural resources and social structures of Britain and China and Japan, and occasionally India or a few European nations to try and answer the question: Why England, or more broadly, which is what Pomeranz asks: Why Europe? To put, for example, China and Britain into context, he includes Britain as part of Europe, because it makes more sense to compare to large landmasses with large populations, some broadly shared cultural traits to each other. After all, he points out, while China's external trade paled in comparison with European trade in the 19th century, the nation's INTERNAL trade was just as robust as Europe's. Certain persistent myths about the Western cultural foundations of Capitalism should be thrown out-- in 1750 it was easier to buy and sell land on the private market in China than in England, which in retained more feudalistic social and economic structures later than did China. What Pomeranz suggests is that the great economic (and indeed political) lead that Britain and other western powers took on the world stage only occurred in the very late 19th century and lasted relatively shortly. Furthermore, he argues that it was not inevitable that only Britain (or other Europeans) would have developed the Industrial technologies that allowed for so much of European imperial successes, but that other countries (specifically China and Japan) very well could have produced similar technologies given the time or correct. Basically, it was not a matter of cultural determinism a la Weber that the

Industrial Revolution occurred, but rather largely through more proximate factors. The subject itself is interesting, but the evidence at times can be yawn-inducing. Charts and tables on productivity and the like aren't exactly page-turners for me. This is a must-read for anyone interested in the formation of Industrial economies and in the shaping of the modern world, assuming you have the patience to wade through the economic data. Pommeranz offers a compelling, if non-traditional, view of the Industrial Revolution. In history, context is everything, and this book helps provide that.

103 of 114 people found the following review helpful. China's Advocate
By James B. DeLong
China's Advocate: A Review of Ken Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*
The Great Divergence ----- For some time now it has been becoming clear that there is something wrong with the traditional story of the coming of the nineteenth-century European industrial revolution and the associated trans-oceanic European empires. The conventional wisdom sees Western European civilization's edge building gradually yet inexorably--with a pronounced setback during the Dark Ages--from the days when the conquests of Julius Caesar and Rome's Julian dynasty emperors brought the high civilization of the Greeks to Eboracum, Londinium, Lutetia, and Colonia Claudia. Western Europeans then build on top of Greek philosophy, Greek literature, Roman engineering, and Roman law. From Naples in the south to Stockholm in the north, from Vienna in the east to Sagres in the west, the tide builds to a flood: the rule of law, the consent of estates to taxation, rational thought, the replacement of magic by religion, security of private property, the horse collar, the scientific revolution, and war-driven technological advance gave--according to the conventional wisdom--European societies as of 1500 a substantial and decisive edge in technology and productivity. During the early modern period from 1500 to 1800 this decisive edge blossomed into the social, political and economic institutions of the modern age that created today's wealthy industrial democracies. Elsewhere, according to the conventional wisdom, civilizations with agriculture, metalworking, and complex social organization hit the Malthusian wall: population pressure and lack of resources kept standards of living low in spite of sophisticated but non-mechanical technology, and elites focused much more on grabbing the surplus from the people and from one another than on enlarging the surplus through further investment or innovation. The great Eurasian agrarian empires and civilizations had larger populations, more splendid courts, and richer elites, but they were a dead end for a humanity trapped under a monstrous regiment of kings and priests.

#Eurasian Parity ----- However there was always something wrong with this triumphal march, something visible to those with eyes to look. The fifteenth-century Portuguese Infante Dom Henrique sat in his castle at Sagres and sent his ships in small squadrons groping for perhaps a thousand miles south along the coast of Africa. The fifteenth-century Chinese notable Cheng Ho--in modern transliteration Zheng Ze, the eunuch admiral who was a trusted lieutenant of the Yung-lo Emperor--took 30,000 men and seventy ships on eight voyages to the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as Zanzibar and projecting power on such a scale that Sri Lankan kings who were not properly respectful of Chinese power were brought back to China to make their apologies. The Ottoman Emperor Mehmet II deployed the largest and strongest pieces of artillery in the world--specially made for the occasion--for his conquest of Constantinople in 1453. The Great Moghul Babur's use of advanced technology--matchlocks--and tactics--wagons tied together as field fortifications--allowed him to decisively defeat an army eight times his size at Panipat and conquer northern India. We think that the populations of China and India grew more rapidly than the population of Europe from 1500-1850: this suggests--at least if we believe in Malthus--somewhat more prosperous societies with more rapidly growing economies in the Eurasian "east." In the efficiency of agriculture, in the scale of social organization, in the sophistication of consumer goods, in the density of population, and even in navigation and military technology the fifteenth-century Eurasian east--from the Ottoman Empire through Iran and India to southeast Asia, China, and Japan--appears nowhere less and almost always more "civilized" than the small, semi-anarchic proto-nation-states of western Europe. As Pommeranz puts it, the core regions of Eurasia "the Yangzi delta, the Kanto plain, Britain and the Netherlands, Gujarat--shared some crucial features with each other, which they did not share with the rest of the continent or subcontinent around them... relatively free markets, extensive handicraft industries, highly commercialized agriculture..." The similarities are more impressive than the differences. So what happened? If the western European edge in technology, organization, and productivity was not a long-standing broad tidal wave building slowly since the coronation of Charlemagne, then how did the world we live in come to be? How did the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century become a Portuguese (and later a Dutch) lake? How did Britain conquer India in the century from 1750? And why did the industrial revolution take place in late eighteenth century Britain? In Ken Pommeranz's book *The Great Divergence* we have one serious attempt at an answer. It is a wonderful book. It is the first book I have read that takes the problem of the post-1500 great divergence between the Eurasian west and the Eurasian east seriously and thoughtfully, and that does not run far ahead of its evidence in pursuit of pre-chosen conclusions. This is not to say that I agree with the book. I think that it misses--or rather downplays--three important phenomena that, in my opinion at least, are key to understanding the past millennium of world history. The first is the shift in the locus of invention--not in the level of technology, but in the birth of new technologies--from China to Europe around the year 1000, and subsequently what appears to be a steadily growing European lead in inventiveness and science. The second is the extraordinary organizational coherence of western Europe by 1700, which shows itself in areas as divergent as the military superiority of European-trained musketeers in eighteenth century India, in the extraordinary reach and longevity of Europe's armed trans-oceanic

trading companies, and the requirements of at least the appearance of due process of law--trials and bills of attainder--imposed on even the most tyrannical northwest European rulers. The third is the late nineteenth century firebreak: as Sidney Pollard put it, the fire of nineteenth-century industrialization burned brightly to the limits of western European populations and colonial settlements, smoldered in eastern Europe, and there stopped (with the single exception of Japan)--no nineteenth-century industrialization in Turkey, Egypt, India, or China. The fact that the nineteenth-century Eurasian east did not while the nineteenth-century Eurasian west easily did adopt British-invented industrial technologies must be explained somehow. But even though I think that in the end the book misses the bullseye, it is definitely a solid hit on the target. It is very much worth reading. In the past I have had a very hard time finding a book that challenges the conventional wisdom that I am not ashamed to give to my students--for example, I can't get my students to take Immanuel Wallerstein seriously, for his unwillingness to count makes it impossible to assess whether his anecdotes are representative and his teleological functionalism makes it nearly impossible to figure out just what the proposed chain of causation is; and they have a hard time dealing with Jack Goody, who splits hairs ever more finely as if deconstructing sociological and anthropological concepts will somehow lead to understanding. This is a book I will not be ashamed to give my students. And it makes me think. #The Grand

Counterfactual ----- At the core of Pomeranz's book is a grand counterfactual. Suppose that you removed the Americas from the surface of the globe: Columbus sails west in 1492 and dies of thirst in a mammoth world ocean. And suppose that you erased the coal deposits from the island of Britain and from the Rhine valley. What would post-1500 world history have looked like then? Pomeranz's answer is that the most likely trajectory would have seen economic life in northwest Europe evolve the way that economic life in Gujerat or the Yangzi delta evolved between 1500 and 1800: a flourishing commercially-revolutionized society bumps up against ecological limits as deforestation, declining marginal products of labor, the rising ability of peripheral regions to make their own manufactures, and so forth reduce the returns to innovation and commerce and increase the rewards of landlord or priestly surplus extraction. Thus growth stops. And what growth there is follows a labor-intensive, resource-economizing logic that--as it did in the nineteenth century Yangzi delta--boosts elite consumption but not mass standards of living, and leaves no space for an industrial revolution. Pomeranz's argument is powerful. For he is right in saying that "industrial capitalism, in which the large-scale use of inanimate energy sources allowed an escape from the co

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The Great Divergence brings new insight to one of the classic questions of history: Why did sustained industrial growth begin in Northwest Europe, despite surprising similarities between advanced areas of Europe and East Asia? As Ken Pomeranz shows, as recently as 1750, parallels between these two parts of the world were very high in life expectancy, consumption, product and factor markets, and the strategies of households. Perhaps most surprisingly, Pomeranz demonstrates that the Chinese and Japanese cores were no worse off ecologically than Western Europe. Core areas throughout the eighteenth-century Old World faced comparable local shortages of land-intensive products, shortages that were only partly resolved by trade. Pomeranz argues that Europe's nineteenth-century divergence from the Old World owes much to the fortunate location of coal, which substituted for timber. This made Europe's failure to use its land intensively much less of a problem, while allowing growth in energy-intensive industries. Another crucial difference that he notes has to do with trade. Fortuitous global conjunctures made the Americas a greater source of needed primary products for Europe than any Asian periphery. This allowed Northwest Europe to grow dramatically in population, specialize further in manufactures, and remove labor from the land, using increased imports rather than maximizing yields. Together, coal and the New World allowed Europe to grow along resource-intensive, labor-saving paths. Meanwhile, Asia hit a cul-de-sac. Although the East Asian hinterlands boomed after 1750, both in population and in manufacturing, this growth prevented these peripheral regions from exporting vital resources to the cloth-producing Yangzi Delta. As a result, growth in the core of East Asia's economy essentially stopped, and what growth did exist was forced along labor-intensive, resource-saving paths--paths Europe could have been forced down, too, had it not been for favorable resource stocks from underground and overseas.

From Booklist Pomeranz is a history professor at the University of California^Irvine and the author of *The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853^1937* (1993), an academic study that investigated the role of steam-powered transportation (among other developments) in the growth of China's Shantung Province. He is also the coauthor of the more popularly accessible *The World That Trade Created* (1999). Now he looks at the question of why sustained industrial growth began in northwestern Europe but not East Asia. To even ask the question can bring charges of Eurocentrism, but Pomeranz acknowledges the role of colonialism in Europe's growth. He emphasizes, though, Europe's access to America's resources as one of two contributing factors to industrial growth, the second being the widespread availability within Europe of coal as a fuel. After challenging the convention that Europe held an edge before 1800, he traces with scholarly diligence the diverging patterns of growth between Europe and China. David Rouse Winner of the 2000 John K. Fairbank Prize, American Historical Association Co-Winner of the 2001 Book Prize, World History Association One of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for

2000 "The vast international disparity in incomes and standards of living between Western Europe and its offshoots on the one hand, and most of Asia, Africa, and Latin America on the other, is a striking feature of the modern world. Pomeranz's study is an important addition to the literature that challenges elements of every major interpretation of the European take-off."--Choice "A profoundly thought-provoking book which will change the terms of the debate about the origins of capitalism, the rise of the West and the fall of the East."--Jack Goody, Times Higher Education Supplement "This book makes, bar none, the biggest and most important contribution to our new understanding of the causes and mechanisms that brought about the great divergence' between the West and the rest of China in particular. . . . An entirely new and refreshing departure. Although he makes new comparisons between Europe, China, Japan, India, Southeast Asia, Pomeranz also connects all these and more in a bold new sweep that should immediately make all previous and most contemporary related work obsolescent."--Andre Gunde Frank, Journal of Asian Studies "This book is very important and will have to be taken seriously by anyone who thinks that explaining the Industrial Revolution . . . is crucial to our understanding of the modern world. . . . [A] book so rich that fresh insights emerge from virtually every page."--Robert B. Marks, American Historical Association "Exhaustively researched and brilliantly argued. . . . Suffice it to say that The Great Divergence is undoubtedly one of the most sophisticated and significant pieces of cliometric scholarship to be published of late, especially in the field of world history."--Edward R. Slack, Jr., Journal of World History

From the Back Cover "Pomeranz uses that European invention--economics--to overturn Eurocentrism, establishing beyond cavil a New Fact in our world. Never again will Europeans imagine they stood alone in the doorway of economic growth. Pomeranz and his colleagues in the new sinology have reintroduced the Central Kingdom and its stunning historical sources, and Pomeranz has written the one essential book."--Deirdre McClosky, University of Iowa "Pomeranz uses a mixture of institutional forces and technological/geological luck to explain how an economic and ecological 'tie game' suddenly became a victory for western Europe over China. He combines global imagination with the scientific detail needed to make his points hold firm. The Great Divergence should command widespread respect."--Peter H. Lindert, University of California, Davis "A truly magisterial effort based on an immense knowledge of the field, a vast amount of reading, and on close and careful analysis, informed by both social science and history."--Joel Mokyr, Northwestern University "This is an outstanding book, painstaking and devastating in its attack on received wisdom, supported by a wealth of solid evidence and elegant argument."--Jack A. Goldstone, University of California, Davis