

# **CHINA AND EUROPE, 1500-2000 and BEYOND: What is “Modern”? Lesson Guide to Web Module**

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## **I. Introduction**

### **Summary**

The Introduction includes a brief overview of the new directions in scholarship about world economic history that have emerged over the last twenty years. In a short video clip ("Modern: The Tyranny of the European Model") Bin Wong describes the traditional Eurocentric interpretation of world history.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

Eurocentric  
specialization

### **Study Questions**

1. Certain developments within Europe are traditionally seen as preceding European overseas exploration. What are these? How did our understanding of these developments shape our understanding of Europe's interaction with the rest of the world?
2. In general, what has been the traditional contrast drawn between Europe and the rest of the world (Asia, Africa, and the New World)?
3. Why have people begun to question the traditional interpretation of world history over the last twenty years?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the implications of a Eurocentric interpretation of history for today's world?

## **II. What do we mean by “Modern?”**

### **Summary**

In the second section Kenneth Pomeranz and Bin Wong focus on the concept of modernity. They begin by looking at the traditional European notion of modernity that emerged in the nineteenth century and its consequences for our understanding of the modern world.

- In the first video clip (“The Tyranny of the European Model”), Bin Wong also discusses how the European model of modernity makes it seem that potentially “modern” developments in China since 1000 cannot be considered modern because they do not fit with the traditional European model of modernity.
- Pomeranz and Wong (“Comparing Modern China and Modern Europe”) then discuss how various traits associated with modernity came together in Europe in the nineteenth century. They argue that while this development -- the confluence of a series of separate factors associated with modernity -- has often been mistaken for the emergence of modernity itself, it would be more appropriate to interpret this development as a conjunction of separate traits, some new and some old.
- Following this argument, it becomes possible to define modernity in culturally neutral, rather than “European,” terms. Wong also stresses that it is important to recognize the emergence of traits associated with modernity in East Asia before their emergence in Europe.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

“modern”  
modernity  
bureaucracy  
local culture  
national culture  
conjunction  
social welfare

### **Study Questions**

1. What is the traditional definition of modern; on what is it based?
2. How does the development of a civil-service bureaucracy in China around 1000 affect our understanding of modernity?
3. How does this traditional definition of “modern” affect the definition of “not modern”? How does it affect the traditional explanation of how places outside of Europe became modern?

4. How do Pomeranz and Wong use the congruence of politics and culture in nineteenth century Europe as an example of conjunction? How does the use of thinking in terms of conjunction give us more flexibility in our definition of what it means to be modern?

5. What has been the conventional way of interpreting the changes in nineteenth and twentieth century East Asia?

6. What developments associated with modernity occurred in China before Europe? What is the importance of this?

**Discussion Questions**

How does a non-European based notion of modernity affect our understanding of the world around us today?

### **III. Rethinking the Industrial Revolution**

*\* This section of the website corresponds to the 1450-1750 and 1750-1914 units of Advanced Placement World History*

#### **Summary**

Pomeranz and Wong begin the third section by arguing the importance of identifying the economic similarities between parts of China and parts of Europe between 1500 and 1800. They identify two distinct historical developments:

1. the ability of preindustrial societies to maximize their productive potential within the fundamental constraints of the world and
2. the ability of industrial societies to use steam and fossil fuels to move beyond the traditional constraints.

These developments are distinct, and there is no explicit causal connection linking the transition from the former to the latter. Pomeranz argues that this transition did not occur until 1800.

Wong then raises questions about the traditional sequence of economic developments leading up to Europe's Industrial Revolution. He notes the challenge of identifying useful geographical units for analyzing economic changes. Given the relatively recent beginning of the Industrial Revolution, suggests new questions about the causes and about European maritime exploration in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.

#### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

preindustrial  
fundamental constraints  
productive potential  
region

#### **Study Questions**

1. What are the main features associated with preindustrial societies and with industrial societies?
2. Why is 1800 seen as an important historical hinge in economic history?
3. How do the economic parallels between Europe and China in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries affect our understanding of subsequent economic development both in Europe and around the world?
4. Why are regions a useful unit of analysis?
5. How does pushing back the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to 1800 affect our interpretation of Europe's maritime exploration of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries?

**Discussion Questions**

If the transition from a preindustrial society to an industrial society first occurred only 200 years ago, what does it suggest about the future of the global economy?

## **IV. China and Europe: the New Units of Analysis**

### **Summary**

In the fourth section, Pomeranz and Wong argue that the recent emergence of the European Union (EU) has diminished the significance attached to the national state. The emergence of the EU also reminds us that nation-states are not natural developments and that political units change and evolve over time. Wong also analyzes the types of geographical units that can be used in comparing Europe and China; he analyzes the nature of economic dynamism in the world between 1500 and 1700.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

European Union

Imperial China

Advanced Commercial Economy

Nation-state

### **Study Questions**

1. What are the problems with comparing economic development in England and China? What sorts of comparisons are better?
2. How did Europe's economic development between 1500 and 1700 resemble that of other parts of East Asia and South Asia? What do these similarities suggest about the nature of global economic change in this period?

### **Discussion Questions**

Do Pomeranz and Wong's arguments about units of analysis make sense?

Can you think of other examples of comparison in which the units being compared do not seem to match up?



## **V. China and Europe: 1500-1800**

*\* This section of the website corresponds to the 1450-1750 unit of Advanced Placement World History*

### **Summary**

Traditional arguments about European economic growth have suggested that Europe was unique in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but Pomeranz and Wong suggest that this interpretation is wrong.

- Between 1000 and 1500, China was the world's most dynamic economy. This dynamism was not matched by any parts of Europe until after 1500.
- But as Europe's economy began to expand after 1500, regions of China's economy also continued to expand. A comparison of the lower Yangzi region of China and England in 1750 suggests that the two regions, roughly equal in geographic size, were still roughly economically equal.
- Between 1500 and 1800 China had many traits typically associated with a modern state: acceptance of a market-based economy, reliance on the use of contracts, specialization of tasks, state oversight of food production and supply, and encouragement of competitive economic markets.
- China's participation in the global silver trade between 1400 and 1800 confirms the dynamism of China's economy and shows that it not isolated in this period.
- By 1800, Europeans began to move away from exporting silver to China and began to trade opium instead.
- Under the Qing dynasty in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China's size and population expanded significantly and in ways that would eventually create some significant ecological shifts in China.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

Lower Yangzi Delta

income per capita

Oriental Despotism

farmer/peasant

Sichuan, Red River Basin

contracts

contractual relations

specialization of tasks

granary

domestic economy

rural handicrafts

silver trade

population growth

ecological change

### **Study Questions**

1. What was the nature of China's economy between 1000 and 1500?
2. Why is it important to consider the nature of China's economy before 1500 when comparing the economies of China and Europe after 1500?
3. In what ways were the economies of the lower Yangzi and England comparable in 1750?
4. How does the state of the lower Yangzi economy in 1750 affect our traditional understanding of China's economic development?
5. What is the difference between a farmer and peasant? Is our use of the term "peasant" usually correct?
6. How many Chinese migrated to Sichuan in the eighteenth century? How many Europeans migrated to the Americas between 1500 and 1800? What does this comparison suggest about the Chinese?
7. What were some of the uses of contracts in China between 1500 and 1800? What does the widespread use of contracts in China tell us about the development of a market-based economy?
8. What does the widespread specialization of tasks suggest about Chinese attitudes towards the market economy?
9. What were state granaries, and why did the Qing dynasty maintain them?
10. Why did the Qing encourage population migrations to the south of China, and how did these migrations affect the overall food supply of China?
11. How do the Qing government policies regarding grains differ from those of European governments?
12. How and why did the Qing encourage domestic economic production? What were the benefits of this policy?
13. What was the Qing attitude towards monopoly in the market? What are the two ways in which this attitude can be interpreted historically?
14. How did cotton production become widespread and popular in China? What does the growth of cotton production tell us about the development of China's economy over time?

15. With whom did China first trade for silver, and what was the nature of this trade? What happened to this trade during the sixteenth century?
16. How does China's demand for silver affect our understanding of the global silver trade and the development of China's economy in the period between 1500 and 1800?
17. In what ways did China's demand for silver shape the production of coins in other parts of the world?
18. How did the global silver trade facilitate the global movement of other goods?
19. What happened to the overall size of the Chinese population between 1680 and 1820, and what were the causes of this change?
20. What do we know about the geographical location of population growth in China and the cultural variables affecting it? Which specific regions in China experienced population growth?
21. How did this population growth affect the ecology of China?
22. What might be some of the long term consequences of this extended period of population growth?
23. In what ways did the Chinese attempt to regulate population growth?

**Discussion Questions**

In what ways was Imperial China modern, and how does this affect our understanding of modernity?

## **VI. China and Europe: 1780-1937**

*\* This section of the website corresponds to the 1450-1750 and 1750-1914 units of Advanced Placement World History*

### **Summary**

In the sixth section, Pomeranz and Wong use Jan De Vries' concept of the "Industrious Revolution" to describe the global economic transformation that occurred between 1500 and 1800.

- During this period, the real price of basic necessities, such as bread and rice, increased. People offset this increase through increased domestic production of goods for the market and increased reliance on specialized goods produced by others.
- China and Europe continued to be similar in this period in terms of real wages, life expectancy, and consumption of non-essential goods.
- Around 1800, China and Europe also continued to remain roughly comparable in terms of the ecological transformation.
- Given the extensive similarities between China and Europe, only the European use of fossil fuels, the steam engine, and the presence of colonies and plantations in the Americas can explain why Europe industrialized during the nineteenth century.
- The Chinese, meanwhile, began to experience significant ecological decline in the peripheries of the empire, which led to outbreaks in famine and population decline during the nineteenth century.
- The core regions of China along the coast reached out to other parts of East Asia for its resource needs and participated in an extensive maritime East Asian trade boom. These economies of these regions even began to transform into a more industrialized economy, similar to the transformation in late nineteenth century Japan.
- But because of the uneven development between China's declining inland peripheries and its more dynamic coastal core regions, as well as European incursions, the Qing dynasty was unable to implement a widespread industrialization policy.
- Instead, some areas of China continued to export finished goods and other regions became exporters of raw materials.
- A similar uneven economic development can be found around much of nineteenth century Asia.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

Industrious Revolution

leisure time

consumption

fossil fuels

coal

steam engines

New World

core/periphery

Asian trade boom

### **Study Questions**

1. How did people pay for the increasing price of bread, as well as other new items, in Europe? How did people pay for the increasing price of rice, as well as other new items, in China?
2. What happened to the amount of leisure time that people had in the period between 1500 and 1800?
3. How do the rates of consumption of nonessential goods in England and the Yangzi delta compare?
4. How does the ecological transformation of China and Europe compare in 1800?
5. Why was Western Europe and England, in particular, more easily able to access its coal deposits than China?
6. What different factors contributed to the success of the steam engine in Europe?
7. How did the New World help to ease the demand for raw materials in Europe? How else did the New World benefit Europe?
8. Why did China's inland peripheries decline in the nineteenth century?
9. What was the Asian trade boom of the late nineteenth century? How did it affect the coastal regions of China?
10. How did the decline in the peripheries affect the economic development of China's coastal core?
11. How did the economic development of Asia in the nineteenth century differ from the development of Africa? How does this difference affect our overall picture of nineteenth century Asia?

### **Discussion Questions**

What does the economic development of Asia in the nineteenth century tell us about the use of broad, geographic-based generalizations? What issues do we need to consider when making generalizations in world history?

From other readings, can you discuss:

- What was the nature of the European impact on China in the 1800s?
- How did the timing of this impact affect developments in China?

## **VI. China Achieves a Modern State**

*\* This section of the website corresponds to the 1914 to present unit of Advanced Placement World History*

### **Summary**

After 1949, the Chinese leaders began to modernize the country. Although they introduced many policies and institutions based on Communism, a political philosophy that originated in Europe, these policies and institutions also have many similarities to those of the Qing emperors. China's economic dynamism in the 1980s and 1990s can also be traced back to imperial precedents. Imperial China continues to have many important effects on the development of modern China.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

Communism  
rural industry

### **Study Questions**

1. How did the Communist rulers' understanding of the connection between politics and culture reflect the understanding of that relationship in late imperial China? How does this affect our understanding of the legacy of imperial China in the twentieth century?
2. How does the use of the campaign by China's Communist leaders compare to the development of democratic institutions in parts of Europe?
3. What was the main source of economic dynamism in China in the 1980s and 1990s? Explain.
4. How do China's recent economic growth and its sources complicate our understanding of what it means to be modern?

### **Discussion Questions**

Does the collapse of the Nationalist government and the rise of Communism in China in the late 1940s mark a complete break with long imperial history of China?

## **VIII. Conclusion: Issues for the 21st Century**

### **Summary**

The authors argue that there is a common pattern of economic development across East Asia in the twentieth century. This pattern of development is evident in China in the early part of the twentieth century China, in Taiwan, and then in contemporary China.

Some of the main features of this East Asian plan include an interventionist government that shapes the direction and development of the economy and the promotion of rural industry. In some cases, the East Asian model has also included the use of military power to achieve economic goals.

The governments of East Asia have also been open to borrowing from and adapting the policies of other states that the East Asian governments regard as promising (similar to the way in which European states borrowed and adapted the model of a civil service from China in earlier centuries.) In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, governments are particularly aware of economic policies of others and interested in assessing their outcomes.

### **Key Terms/Vocabulary**

East Asian model

Xinjiang ("New Territories")

### **Study Questions**

1. What is the East Asian model of economic development?
2. What have East Asian states done to secure the raw materials needed for economic development? How did U.S. policy after 1945 affect the means by which some East Asian states obtained their raw materials?
3. Compare and contrast China's relationship with its western territories, including Tibet, with U.S. relationships with America's Western frontier?

### **Discussion Question**

Investigate the current articles in the news on Chinese economic development. Do these articles and the current policies they discuss confirm the continuation of an "East Asian economic model of development" or do they reflect changes in this model?