

Invitation

- Please join me for a reception celebrating our class together Tuesday from 2-4 at my residence.
- Time: 2-4
- 102 Packard International Faculty Pavillion
- North end of lake
- snacks and beverage

Western Philosophy of Social Science

Lecture 11. Eurasian Comparisons: Institutions, organizations, and knowledge systems

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Eurasian economic and political development

- There is very interesting research underway today aimed at providing more satisfactory analysis of economic development in Europe and Asia in the early modern period.
- Western historians have traditionally regarded “industrial revolution” and modern economic growth as a western invention.
- They have located China’s development under the question, “Why did China fail to experience modern economic growth in the early modern period?”

Eurasian development

- This assumption that European development establishes the pure case of economic development is unfounded.
- There are valid and effective alternatives in the design of social and economic institutions.
- Economic historians can learn more by considering the specifics of China's economic institutions.

The challenge of comparative economic history

- In the economic history of Europe or Asia we observe a number of important processes: changes in levels of productivity and output in agriculture and manufacture, population change, urbanization, technology change, intensification of trade and commerce, social differentiation, patterns in the standard of living, changes in the organizational capacity of the state (fiscal, regulatory, military), and

The challenge ...

- changes in the organizational forms through which human activity is coordinated and controlled (property systems, family norms, business forms).
- What are the causes and effects of these processes of change?
- What can we learn about the causal and institutional characteristics of various historical settings of economic and political development?

Three areas of question

- descriptive and factual research into productivity, technique, standard of living, trade, handicraft output, prices, ...
- investigation of the economic, political, and social institutions embodied in societies at different times
- formulation and testing of causal hypotheses about patterns and differences in outcomes
- are there **common social causal processes** at work?

New research

- A number of scholars are taking up the challenge of providing insightful and rigorous comparative analysis of European and Asian historical development.
- These include R. Bin Wong, Kenneth Pomerantz, James Lee, Bozhong Li, Phillip Huang, and Robert Allen among others.
- These approaches shed substantial new light on general questions about the social and institutional characteristics of economic development.

Central findings

- Comparative economic and political historical research can shed new light on even parts of the story that we had thought we understood well.
- Discovery of parallels and divergences across the economic institutions and outcomes of Eurasia permits re-evaluation of our claims of causal centrality for some processes (e.g. secure property rights, institutions of the market, proto-industrialization) while giving new emphasis to others.

Central findings ...

- The model of Western development does not establish a natural or paradigm instance of modernization, development, or historical change.
- The theories of social, economic, and political change that have emerged from the study of the Western experience(s) are flawed insofar as they suggest that there is one preferred or most natural pathway of development.
- There are alternative historical pathways to modern sustained economic growth

Reasons to pursue comparative research

- To avoid “privileging” the experience of western Europe
- To come to a better appreciation of the contingency of large historical developments and the plasticity and variability of social and economic institutions
- To allow for a better framework for arriving at and testing hypotheses about the causes of largescale historical change.

Large-scale comparisons

- The general question is, what factors drive economic and political change?
- What caused the agricultural revolution in early modern England?
- Why did Chinese agriculture tend to improve productivity at about the pace of population growth?
- What were the relative levels of the standard of living for ordinary people in different regions of Europe and Asia?

Large factors

- Factors that have been considered as causes of economic change include:
 - Surplus extraction systems, population growth, technology change, increase in state capacity, the development of scientific knowledge
- Do these factors play different roles in different historical settings?

Foundational questions

- In order to carry out large historical comparisons across major civilizations we need to address some important foundational questions.
- What conceptual choices must be made in order to carry out the meso-level comparisons?
- What ontological and “structure” decisions must be made? What are the units of comparison that best serve the purpose of social science research?
- Are there common mechanisms of development in the several areas under study?

Large differentiating questions across Europe and Asia

- Historians have put forward interpretations of European and Chinese economic history that emphasize several important differentiating structural characteristics:
- Institutions present? Market, family, technology, property relations; capitalism
- The large variables--population, grain, real wage, life expectancy? How do these behave in large scope in the different regions?

Large differentiating questions

- Important factors to be analyzed include in order to better understand structural change and economic development:
- Role of state
- Role of institutions providing large sources of credit
- Population dynamics—the Malthusian debate
- Colonialism?
- Global pattern of resource distribution (fossil fuel, metals)?

Current topics of research:

- What are the most meaningful units of comparison in considering Eurasian economic development—nations, regions, or communities?
- How did rural real wages compare in England and China in 1600 and 1800?
- How did agricultural productivity compare in England and China—considering both land productivity and labor productivity?

Topics ...

- What were the trends in real wages and agricultural productivity in England and China? Were wages and productivity falling in China while rising in England?
- Was the Chinese agricultural economy in a process of “involution”, in which population pressure forced farmers to expend ever-higher levels of labor to maintain subsistence?

Topics ...

- What were the factors—institutional, environmental, international—that accounted for the “great divergence” between Western Europe and East Asia in the nineteenth century?
- Were there distinctive demographic regimes in Western Europe and East Asia, leading to different population dynamics and different patterns of economic development?
- Did “proto-industrialization” function as an important cause of modern economic development—and did it recur in Western Europe and East Asia?

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