

Escaping from National Narratives: The New Global History in China and Japan

This part aims to integrate the big questions with an accurate methodology and historical evidence. Such well-known questions are why modern science and capitalism did not emerge in China or why North-Western Europe (Great Britain and the Netherlands) took off and China got left behind. They were formulated by global historians in order to shed light on the different paths of modern economic growth between China and Europe. Our aim is to refresh such questions with a satisfactory theoretical and methodological framework, presenting empirical evidence through specific case studies.

An issue that deserves further explanation is how such practice of global history is penetrating Chinese academia, which is currently undergoing a new adjustment of its national narrative that ultimately serves to present the uniqueness of the long-lasting Chinese civilization. This is of course due to the current national echoes of the Chinese government policies based on the concept of ‘soft power’ closely linked with the revision of Chinese culture and history. This can be observed through the presentation in this part of the big questions that can be used to understand the development of modern science and economic growth in China. The main issues to be analysed in this part are: (1) the depression of the Chinese economy, whether or not provoked as cause-effect of the foreign intervention in China in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; (2) changes in the Chinese economy due to the introduction of overseas commodities; (3) the joint action of foreign merchants with private Chinese traders mainly in the port of Macau and the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian; and (4) how global history challenges national narratives in China and Japan.