

HIS250/HIS116 Tema 4: China and the World since ca. 1800

China's draconic economic growth and its increasing global political importance over the last decades has led to a world-wide surge of demand for knowledge of the history of China. Questions such as 'When and why did the Great Divergence emerge?' and 'Are we witnessing a return to Asian hegemony?' have been central to some of the debates. The history of China and the world over the past two centuries can be seen as a pendulum that has swung from a Western economic and cultural presence in China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, towards a omnipresent global Chinese presence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In the quest to understand China's recent past and its relationship with the world, it is vital to address events that unfolded during the late Qing dynasty. The 'Treaty Century' from the early 1840s and until 1943 has been central to both Eurocentric narrations of the past as well as China's own master narrative. Whilst some historians describe an isolationistic, stagnant and inward-looking China that was 'opened' by Western powers, others describe the same events as the beginning of a 'century of humiliation' that paved the way for the Communists to take power in order to restore Chinese greatness. Similarly, some scholars have interpreted China's recent economic growth as a result of adopting liberal economic principles, whilst others argue that it is a consequence of other processes, such as demographic transition. At the same time, China is also looking for a history that mirrors the economic success and geopolitical power that it experiences today. Thus, the interpretations of the modern history of China and the world appear to be changing fast and offering increasingly disparate directions.

Furthermore, China's place *within* the world has been pivotal to debates within the rapidly rising genre of global history. The key debate here concerns when and why the West gained economic supremacy and why China lagged behind. The discussion on the Great Divide can be divided into three main interpretations. First, the Eurocentric tradition places emphasis on the supremacy of European culture and institutions and argues that the decisive moment came with the European expansions around 1500. Second, the 'California School' stresses that the Chinese economy was superior and on par with the West for much longer than proponents of a Eurocentric view tend to believe, and moreover that the Western economic hegemony from the 18th century onwards was the outcome of luck and the contingency of events. Finally, sino-centrics claim that China has been the centre of the World for most of human history – and that after a few centuries of temporary Western hegemony, the World is once more returning to normality with Asia and China as its epicentre. In this course we will place emphasis on stressing how events and paths of development have been perceived, narrated and explained differently between these various "schools" of history. In addition to this, we will also bring in a side to the story that sometimes tends to be ignored in the West, namely how these events have been perceived and narrated within China itself.

This course aims at providing an overview of some of the key topics and main views on the history of China's and the world since around 1800 until the present day. It is – of course – practically impossible to give an exhaustive in-depth analysis on such complex issues encompassing a relatively long time-span. Hence, the historical picture has to be painted with a broad brush. The focus within this course is placed upon political and economic forces and processes, and where the relationship between China and the world revolves around connections, conflicts and comparisons. The lectures are organised in a chronological order, but at the same time reflect key thematic events. The reading

list consists of a broad set of literatures that is aimed towards providing an overview of events, represent various views of history as well as reflect various genres of academic literature.

This will be the first course on this topic taught at the University of Bergen, and it is expected to run again in 2016. The course is partly an outcome of a research project on China and Norway during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic that is being carried out at the department of AHKR. Scholars involved in this project will be giving most of the lectures. Odd Arne Westad, professor in international history at the LSE, is one of the most internationally acclaimed historians on China. He is also the author of one of the key readings of the course; *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (2012) as well as the author behind the recent update of J.M. Roberts iconic *History of the World* (2013). Westad will come to Bergen in March to give a set of intensive lectures on this course.

Syllabus:

Kaufman, Alison Adcock (2010). The "Century of Humiliation," Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order, in *Pacific Focus*, 25: 1–33. (Available through the University library)

Kirby, William C. (1997). The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era, in *The China Quarterly*, No. 150, Special Issue: Reappraising Republic China; 433-458. (Available through the University library)

Strauss, Julia C. (2009). The Past in the Present: Historical and Rhetorical Linages in China's Relations with Africa, in *The China Quarterly*, No. 199: 777-795. (Available through the University library)

Westad, Odd Arne (2012). *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750*, New York, Basic Books; 475 pp.

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley (2010). *Cambridge Illustrated History. China*, second edition, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; 220-363. (There is also a study guide available to this edition)

Hobson, John (2004). *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; 1-26, 190-218, 283-320. (This is available as an e-book at the University library)

Landes, David (1998). *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London, Abacus, 3-44; 200-212, 335-370, 465-524.

Wang, Zheng (2012). *Never Forget National Humiliation. Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, New York, Columbia University Press; 242 pp.