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## Understanding The Great Divergence On The Example Of The Californian School

In the article Peer Vries, professor of International Economic History at the University of Vienna, aims at analysing the theme of the Great Divergence, that is to say the financial gap between the richer, more developed countries and the poorer and more disadvantaged ones. In order to do this, he focuses his attention on the interpretations of the California school, a group of intellectuals working at universities in the homonymous state, analysing their argumentations and criticising their weaknesses. He chooses to make the example of Britain and China to reach his goal.

The school, in fact, maintains that from the fifteenth century until the advent of the Industrial Revolution, there were no differences between Western Europe and East Asia, but that there actually were some similarities. Their point of view to study economic history differs from the typical Eurocentric ones, such as the Weberian and the Marxist ones, as they put China as the heart of the Modern Global Economy since that, according to them it was the cradle of many innovations. They considered China to have the world's biggest economy, making the example of what Vries defines as "the silver sink-thesis" and to explain that, with the great import surplus of silver, the Chinese economic strength could be pointed out. According to them Britain, or Western Europe in general, developed at the expense of Asiatic countries and its colonies, exploiting their resources, and therefore can not be considered as the creator of global economy.

Europe probably achieved industrialisation, and wealth with it, out of pure luck. However, Vries wants to underline the fact that we can not compare the British development to the Chinese one and vice versa since the general situations in which those countries evolved were completely different. One point the author wants to make is that on the one hand, in comparison to China, even before industrialisation, England was prone to mechanical and technological innovations, since its main focus was to reach a strong economic system. China, on the other hand, gave much importance to human labour, in fact, the most important unit of production was the household itself.

Furthermore, there was also a huge difference in terms of military organization: England had always been indeed more militarily organized than China, who had difficulties in defeating even the weakest enemies. In conclusion, while it is true that the approach to this topic of the Californian school, with its innovativeness, influenced in many ways the way people look at the economic history of the world, the argumentations presented are not always congruent to each

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other. It would be really convenient to see and study the development of societies singularly since they can not be compared to one another.

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