

## **Natural Disasters, Environmental Changes, and Rural Market Development in North China since Ming Dynasty**

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Whether in the academic circles of Europe and the United States, the economy of Ming-Qing (AD 1368-1840) China (or later imperial China) was always regarded as being much less developed than the economy of the British and others in the Western world at the same time period. It is Kenneth Pomeranz's book *Great Divergent* published in 2000, and the research of his followers and collaborators from University of California that have brought the economic history of Ming-Qing China (equivalent to about Europe's early modern times) into the perspective of scholars of world history or global history.

But unfortunately, the image of China as described by Western scholars for the Western world is extremely exaggerated and unrealistic. These scholars, who are known as the California School, have always argued that the economy of Ming-Qing China was not less than, but much more developed than British in the same time, and its dynamic, namely Smithian dynamic, was also the same. But as far as I can see, it is not only the distortion of Chinese history, but also the misreading of Adam Smith's theory on market and division. As a result, the new global history based on this assumption is still a kind of illusion; and also, their new interpretation about the economic development path of the contemporary China, for which they use this argument as the foundation, does hold water.

What I have been doing, focusing on Hebei Province in northern China, is to deconstruct the California School's theory as above. In my opinion, there was a kind of economic development path different from the West in the Ming-Qing China. But this path is not based on Smithian market exchange caused by social division of labor, and instead mainly based on the "market without social division of labor" in the context of peasant family economy. It is after Opium War (1839–1842) and especially after the the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 that Smithian road began to penetrate into the economic body of China, and then gradually expanded, and finally has formed the growing economic tides today. Under its influence, the China-styled road is gradually transformed, and even destroyed to a larger extent, although it has still showed strong resilience and vitality till now. Actually, China are repeating the past road of Europe in a highly concentrated time range, so that behind the surface of prosperity, it has caused many economic, cultural, ecological risks, which may be the root to detonate the global crisis in the end.

The reason why I chose north China as the starting point is that Chinese economic historians, especially from the California School, have focused heavily on the Jiangnan area, which is located in both south of Jiangsu Province and west of Zhejiang Province in Yangzi Delta. From their work arose the idea of a "Jiangnan model" which is supposed to explain economic development for all of China. That

model argues that it has been the center of China economy from Ming dynasty on, and was the one of world economy systems at least in eighteen century. This approach, however, ignores the fact that north China, which includes Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Shanxi, and Shaanxi Province, had much earlier, even before the Tang-Song era (AD 618-1279), taken the lead in China's economy. From that development in north China did Jiangnan's development come. But examining the older center of development does more than help us understand later events; it also forces us to acknowledge that China's economic development was not a smooth evolution in the terms of Adam Smith, or what is often called "Smithian dynamics." That development was far more vulnerable to ecological disturbance, environmental degradation, and population pressures than historians have realized.

In this project, I will analyze carefully the prevalent arguments about North China's rural market and show the differences between it and Jiangnan's market economy. I will also explain the mechanism of population increase and proliferation, and the trends of natural disasters, environmental decline, and simplification of ecological diversity, and show the environmental dynamic of rural market development in North China. Overall I want not only to compare North China to Jiangnan, but also discuss the recent economic change in rural China, tracing the evolution of a national market network.