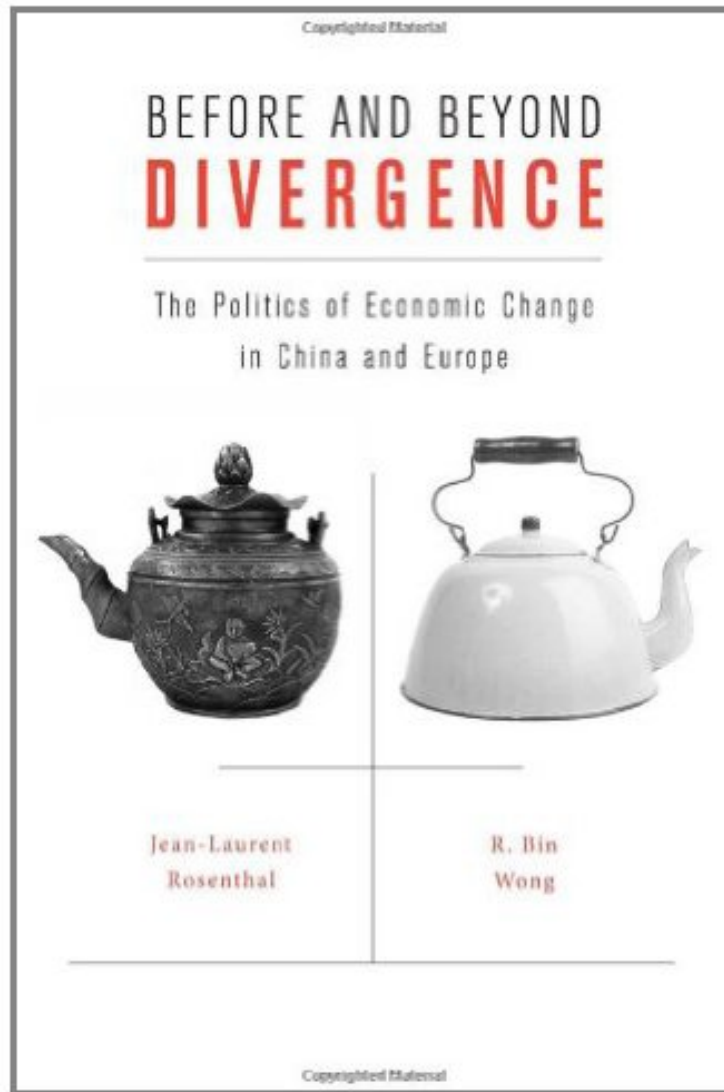


(Ebook pdf) Before and Beyond Divergence

## Before and Beyond Divergence

*Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, Roy Bin Wong*  
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**Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, Roy Bin Wong : Before and Beyond Divergence** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Before and Beyond Divergence:

18 of 22 people found the following review helpful. Very Uneven; 2.5 Stars By R. Albin This uneven book addresses a very interesting and extremely important issue; what accounts for the "Great Divergence" in economic trajectories between western Europe-North America and China over the last few centuries. Wong and Rosenthal attack several prior explanations for this phenomenon and then attempt to provide their own answer. The critical sections is definitely the strongest aspect of this book. The authors take aim at arguments that the divergence was due to demographic factors, family structure, credit market differences, and the lack of institutions that favored capitalist

development. The institutionalist arguments of Douglass North and his followers are a particular target. Wong and Rosenthal take two parallel tacks in their critiques. In the first and most important tack is arguments that China and Europe were much more similar than traditionally thought with respect to market functions. The second, and somewhat more speculative but interesting tack, is that differences reflect rational economic adjustments to the scale of the Chinese state and economy. Agreeing with quite a bit of recent scholarship, Wong and Rosenthal argue that Qing China was actually much closer to the "Smithian" market ideal than European states and that consequently, the North family of institutionalist arguments cannot account for the Divergence. While these are solid and generally convincing arguments, I don't believe they are actually novel ideas. The authors' effort to account for the Divergence is less convincing. They argue that political division and chronic war in Europe favored concentration of manufacturing in cities. China, in contrast, was peaceful for longer periods of time, and manufacturing tended to settle in rural areas. The relative urbanization of manufacturing biased Europeans towards more capital intensive and technologically innovative strategies. One problem with this argument, which the authors themselves concede, is that it doesn't seem to apply to Britain. From the accession of Henry VII until well after the Industrial Revolution was underway (and beyond), Britain (excluding Ireland) was less wartorn than China. Proto-industrialization in Britain was quite rural and much innovation in the pioneering textile industry occurred in rural sites because of the presence of water power needed to power new machinery. Wong and Rosenthal don't provide a convincing response to this apparently fatal fact. I tend to agree with the authors that political competition within Europe was at least a key factor in the genesis of the Divergence, though not for the reason stated. Political competition and warfare was a spur for some technologies, a point Wong and Rosenthal mention. More important, international competition was unquestionably a driving force in the international expansion of Europe, making these rivalries a partial cause of the windfall of the Western Hemisphere. European expansion outside Europe was a significant intellectual stimulus and European political divisions prevented ideological hegemony in Europe, factors that contributed significantly to the vigor of European intellectual life, including the development of European science. Other defects of this book include somewhat sloppy writing and inconsistent reasoning. It doesn't appear that the authors know what the term induction actually means. There are some surprising factual errors which probably reflect lack of attention to detail, for example, the authors apparently believe that Charles II was executed during the English Civil War and that there were Tercio infantry formations in 1300. Wong and Rosenthal are frequently inconsistent in their arguments. They are critical of other scholars who read more recent events into the past but they frequently use recent developments in China to support their arguments about the premodern Chinese economy. They are critical of arguments that see the Divergence as resulting from deeply rooted "cultural" features. But, they make a great deal of the persistent size of the Chinese state. When discussing why China was a consistently large polity over centuries, they point to the impact of the Confucian tradition. How is this not a persistent "cultural" feature? A major feature of this book is use of theoretical econometric models. Overall, these models don't seem to add much to the main arguments. In one case, modeling the effects of war, the models appear to be actually misleading. The authors argue that chronic war detracted from public goods and that this was a factor holding back the European economy. But, what if war contributes to public goods? Is it an accident that the most successful mercantilist aggressor of the 18th century, Britain, had the most dynamic economy and the largest volume of international trade? War can pay well, though only if you win consistently, which the British did.

Why did sustained economic growth arise in Europe rather than in China? The authors combine economic theory and historical evidence to argue that political processes drove the economic divergence between the two world regions, with continued consequences today that become clear in this innovative account.

Before and Beyond Divergence addresses the old 'Why Europe? Why not China?' question by presenting clear, original, and provocative arguments. It is an important contribution, both substantively and methodologically. (Kenneth Pomeranz, University of California, Irvine) An important contribution that will force a wide variety of scholars to rethink what they know about both China and Europe and that lays out a model for doing big comparative research projects in the social sciences. (Timothy W. Guinnane, Yale University) With its sustained, rigorous economic analysis and frequently compressed exposition of complex arguments, this taut monograph is a formidable but rewarding read. Rosenthal and Wong boldly tackle one of the most challenging questions in comparative economic history: why did sustained economic growth arise in Europe rather than China? The authors systematically demolish conventional narratives touting the superiority of European political, social, and economic institutions over their Chinese counterparts. They find convincing explanations for Sino-Western divergence in contrasting processes of long-term political development originating centuries before Europe's industrial revolution. Over the course of a millennium, the huge size, prosperity, and relative stability of China's empire conferred significant economic advantages that long eluded Europe's fragmented, bellicose polities. Rosenthal and Wong nonetheless conclude that the costly military competitions that habitually distorted European history had unintended consequences. By impelling urbanization and a demand for capital-using technologies, Europe's constant wars rather than China's long peace laid

the groundwork for modern economic growth. (R. P. Gardella Choice 2011-08-01)About the AuthorJean-Laurent Rosenthal is the Rea A. and Lela G. Axline Professor of Business Economics at the California Institute of Technology.R. Bin Wong is Professor of History and Director of the Asia Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.