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The "Rise of the West" and the "Decline of the East"

My PhD dissertation shall discuss possible reasons behind the "Rise of the West" and "Decline of the East" in a global perspective. My primary concern is to examine the causes of the Industrial Revolution, which propelled Europe's ascendancy and facilitated Britain's ultimate mastery of the world. The fact that - throughout the "early modern" period - some "core areas" within Asia had similar levels of economic, technological and military capabilities, in comparison to "core areas" within Europe, poses the question: How was England able to gain world-wide domination? For this purpose, I shall compare Britain's development vis-à-vis the trajectories of the Mughal Empire and eventually the Safavid and Ottoman empires, China, Japan and other European states.

Since the emergence of the non-Eurocentric, revisionist school of world history, the debate about the specific moment and causes of the Rise of the West has gained new impetus and increased attention. This has created a controversy over previously held assumptions, with the potential undermining of the whole basis of standard historical sociological theories at stake. One current here is the challenging of predominant Eurocentric assumptions of "early modern" Asiatic "stasis" and underdevelopment. The idea that Europe's ascendancy is intimately connected to Afro-Asian "resource portfolios" (ideas, institutions, goods and technologies) as well as the notion of contingency is winning more and more recognition. What is more, non-Eurocentric empirical research has revealed that "core areas" in Asia were - in many respects - as "developed" and "progressive" as those in Europe to about 1800. Needless to say, the ongoing scientific discourse about the causes of Europe's ascension to global power is extremely prolific, whereas the reasons behind the decline of the East (except for China) have barely been touched upon. This is surprising because the historical trajectories of Asian "core areas" are of special significance precisely because it casts new light on the causes of the "Rise of the West", the Industrial Revolution and the conditions for European colonialism.