

## Why The West Rules – For Now: The Patterns of History and What they Reveal about the Future

**Review Number:**

1091

**Publish date:**

Wednesday, 1 June, 2011

**Author:**

Ian Morris

**ISBN:**

9781846681479

**Date of Publication:**

2010

**Price:**

£25.00

**Pages:**

608pp.

**Publisher:**

London

**Place of Publication:**

Profile Books

**Reviewer:**

Ricardo Duchesne

This book was launched with great fanfare, a high number of editorial reviews from prominent academics, interviews, invited talks, web commentaries, and reviews in the mainstream media, including the *Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *New York Times*, *The Scotsman*, *Economist*, and *Foreign Affairs*. The reviews were for the most part agreeable, though not by comparison with the editorial endorsements, which abound in laudable adjectives: ‘formidable,’ ‘awesome,’ ‘dazzling,’ ‘extraordinary,’ ‘breathtaking,’ ‘thought-provoking,’ ‘engrossing’.

‘Astonishing’ words were penned even by David Landes, the respected author of *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (1998), a work regularly cited in opprobrium for its uncompromising Eurocentric stand. Landes muses over the book’s contents: ‘Will Europe undergo a major change? Will the millions of immigrants impose a new set of rules on the rest? There was a time when Europe could absorb any and all newcomers. Now the newcomers may dictate the terms’. Oh dear, Landes may well have been writing an editorial for Walter Lacqueur’s *The Last Days of Europe* (2007), which is certainly about ‘what happens when a falling native birthrate collides with uncontrolled immigration’. *Why the West Rules*, despite its title, is scarcely about Europe.

As of page 433, in a narrative which runs for 645 pages, no more than 20 pages are dedicated to European history. Pages 385 to 433 cover a chapter, ‘Going Global’, which discusses the Portuguese expeditions and Columbus, but the focus is mostly on the Mongols and Zheng’s Treasure Fleets. Drawing on Gavin Menzies’s discredited book, [\*1421: The Year China Discovered America\*](#) [2] (2002), Morris carefully

speculates over the possibilities of the 'even more astonishing voyages that took Zheng's subordinates to the Atlantic Ocean, the North Pole, Antarctica, Australia and Italy' (p. 410). While he calls the Italian Renaissance 'one of the most astonishing episodes in history' (p. 419), his preoccupation is with the renaissance which the Chinese 'already' had 'in the eleventh century' (p. 419). This renaissance was no less remarkable than the Italian one: 'Was Leonardo's breath really more astonishing than that of Shen Kuo?'

Shen Kuo (1031–95 AD), a polymath scientist and statesman of the Song Dynasty, was a rather impressive figure. Morris may well be pairing Leonardo with the most formidable scientist in the whole of East Asia's history before 1800. Kuo's greatest achievements and discoveries include geomorphology, climate change, spherical celestial bodies (not flat), and the compass, camera obscura, fixing the position of the pole star, and correcting solar and lunar errors (the latter including motion and orbital path).

What Morris fails to note is that Italy's Renaissance – which he also identifies as 'reactionary' (p. 418) – was populated with not one but many outstanding figures. In the field of painting alone there was Botticelli, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Giotto, Ghiberti, Michelangelo, Raphael, Vasari, and Titian. These painters were associated with the development of a radically new method of perspective painting, which was influenced in turn by the work of a noteworthy group of 15th-century mathematicians who discovered algebraic solutions and trigonometric computations well beyond the achievements of the Greeks and Arabs. Their names are recognized in the annals of mathematics: Scipio del Ferro, Nicolo Tartaglia, Johann Muller Regiomonus, Giralamo Cardano – not to forget Luca Pacioli (1446/7–1517), the 'father' of the first known accounting textbook, *Everything about Arithmetic, Geometry, and proportions*.<sup>(1)</sup>

The meagre two pages Morris reserves for the European Renaissance bring up in passing Machiavelli, Michelangelo, and Leon Batista, but it is Zhu Xi, a Confucian 'theorist' of the 12th century, who takes center stage in this chapter, along with the admiral Zheng (and the historian Menzies). What was Zhu's achievement? Other than his emphasis on Confucian family values, we learn from Morris that Zhu's 'extraordinary' pupil and 'new Renaissance man', Wang, 'spent a week contemplating a bamboo stalk, as Zhu had recommended, instead of providing insight it made him ill' (p. 426). I don't blame Wang, bamboo stalks seem innocent enough, but staring at them for a week would have made anyone unwell [3].

Seriously, what is this book about if it is not about Europe? There is a striking similarity between the opening paragraphs of *Why the West Rules* and Jared Diamond's commonly read *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997). Morris asks: 'Why did British boats shoot their way up the Yangtze in 1842, rather than Chinese ones up the Thames?' (p. 11) – which is basically the same question the local politician in the island of New Guinea, Yali, asked Diamond: 'Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?'<sup>(2)</sup>

Just as Diamond rejects explanations framed 'in terms of natural selection and of evolutionary descent,' and asserts that 'many (perhaps most) Westerners continue to accept racist explanations' <sup>(3)</sup>, Morris rejects the idea that 'the West rules today because modern Europeans are the heirs of a genetically superior Neanderthal stock, while Asians descend from the more primitive Homo erectus' (p. 60). He says point-blank that explanations which rely on biological factors are 'racist' (p. 73).

Who is currently offering a theory to the effect that such genetic variations as 'the color of skin, eyes, or hair' are *more than* 'only skin deep' with an 'obvious connection to why the West rules'?<sup>(4)</sup> Neither Diamond nor Morris mentions a single author or source in connection to these 'theories'. Why, then, this persistent need to challenge 'racist theories of western rule'? I take this as an indirect warning against anyone inclined to think that Western *culture* has been uniquely creative and superior. Is it a coincidence that at the same time that he dismisses biological explanations, Morris castigates explanations that point to the 'cultural superiority' (p. 73) of Europe, and the 'old long term theory that the culture of the ancient Greeks ... forged a distinctive Western way of life' (p. 22)? He once believed this, but during his graduate studies in classical archaeology at Cambridge he met some anthropologists of primitive cultures who 'openly laughed at the quaint notion that Greek culture was unique'. Studying 'broader and broader slices of the human past' he came to realize 'how strong the parallels were between the supposedly unique Western

experience and the history of other parts of the world' (p. 23).

This is, of course, what multiculturalists have been propagating for decades. All cultures should be celebrated in their diversity because no culture is more gifted than any other. Diverse cultures are equally the same in achievements. Questioning this diversity doctrine is bigoted. As Roger Scruton has pointed out recently, 'anybody who publicly disagreed with that [multicultural] claim invited the attentions of the thought police, always ready with the charge of racism, and never so scrupulous as to think it a sin to destroy the career of someone, provided he was white, indigenous, and male.'<sup>(5)</sup>

This enforcement of diversity on university campuses, as Scruton adds, is based on a false premise, for 'culture and race have nothing to do with each other', and 'not all cultures are equally admirable'. Morris thinks otherwise; all cultures are so admirable as to be essentially the same: 'Eastern thought was just as rational and liberal as Western, and Western thought was just as mystical and authoritarian as Eastern' (p. 261).

But some cultures, apparently, are more equal than others. In a ten-page section on 'The classics,' Morris consigns both Greek and Roman thought to just about one page (p. 260), while giving Chinese thought the other nine pages (pp. 254–9, 261–3).

'Socrates was part of a huge pattern', Morris teaches us, 'not a unique giant who sent the West down a superior path'.<sup>(6)</sup> This line of reasoning is less than inadequate. Not one or two giants set the West apart; rather, it was the *continuous* sequence of original giants in Greece and in Rome, in medieval Europe, and throughout the modern era. The West was always filled with individuals persistently searching for new worlds, new visions, and new styles of painting, architecture, music, science, philosophy, and literature – in comparative contrast, for example, to the intellectual traditions set down in ancient China – Confucianism, Legalism, Taoism (and later Buddhism) – which persisted in their essentials until the impact of the West occasioned some novelties. This is one of the arguments I make in my recent book, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (2011). The ultimate basis of Greek civic and cultural life was the aristocratic ethos of individualism and competitive conflict which pervaded Indo-European culture. Ionian literature was far from the world of the barbarian Indo-European warriors who occupied Greece and founded Mycenaean civilization, but it was nonetheless just as intensively competitive. New works of drama, philosophy, and music were expounded in the first-person form as an adversarial or athletic contest in the pursuit of truth. While Thales, Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Leucippus, and Democritus each had a common interest in the hidden causes of things, each came up with their own radically new explanations. There were no Possessors of the Way in aristocratic Greece; no Chinese Sages decorously deferential to their superiors and expecting appropriate deference from their inferiors. The search for the truth was a free-for-all, each philosopher competing for intellectual prestige, in a polemical tone which sought to discredit the theories of others and to promote one's own.<sup>(7)</sup>

In this environment the Greeks were singular in inventing naturalistic philosophy (the Ionians), tragedy (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides), comedy (Aristophanes, Menander), history (Herodotus, Thucydides), rhetoric (Isocrates), oratory (the Sophists), and dialectical inquiry (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle). Each of these innovative fields was animated by a sceptical and independent disposition. Each artist and intellectual was driven by a desire for originality and fame. Homer may have remained the main schoolbook of the Greeks, but there were always challengers. Early in the 7th century, Archilochus, for instance, broke with the dominance of the hexameter in Homer and Hesiod, and also with the traditional demands of heroic honour, admitting (in a still very warlike culture) that he had thrown away his shield in a flight – 'I can get another just as good'. Simonides soon followed with a new hedonistic poetry which vindicated the individual's right to sensual happiness, lamented the shortness of human life, and consequently challenged the ideal of a short heroic life.<sup>(8)</sup>

This competitive desire on the part of individuals to stand out from others was ingrained in the whole social outlook of classical Greece: in the Olympic Games, in the perpetual warring of the city-states, in the pursuit of a political career and in the competition among orators for the admiration of the citizens, in the Athenian

theatre festivals, where huge numbers of poets would take part in Dionysian competitions amid high civic splendour and religious ritual.<sup>(9)</sup> It was this agonistic temperament which found expression in the Sophistic-Socratic ethos of dialogic argument – in the pursuit of knowledge by comparing and criticizing individual speeches, evaluating contradictory claims, collecting out evidence, cross-questioning and arguing by means of open persuasion and refutation. This aristocratic/individualist ethos was the basis of the West's unsurpassed originality and restless expansionism.

To Morris, like Diamond, the West is simply a geographical category; the ultimate origins of the West's primacy are to be found in geographical factors. Geography shaped the development and the distribution of power and wealth in the world over the last 15,000 years. Morris pays more attention than Diamond to the way technological and social changes in turn changed the way geography came to determine the advantages and disadvantages of geographical location. Then again, this emphasis is evident in Diamond's effort to account for why the Near East, for example, was unable to sustain its initial advantages in terms of its eventual ecological degradation and the new opportunities which arose with the coming of iron in the exploitation of the colder lands of Europe. Morris notes likewise how thousands of years ago the geographical location of an Atlantic Europe facing an impassable ocean was a great disadvantage, but when new kinds of ships appeared in the 15th and 16th centuries that could cross this ocean, being close to the Atlantic and nearer to the Americas became a great advantage.

What Morris adds to the school of geographical determinism is a grid to measure progress, an 'index of social development' comprising energy capture, organization/urbanization, information technology, and war-making capacity, which he employs to determine the precise dates when the West and the East took their respective leads. His grand narrative also pays particular attention to the patterns of human history and the way actual political regimes developed and populations moved in response to environmental challenges. Major sections of the book are dedicated to the way cultures, in varying places in the globe, underwent regular crises brought on by Malthusian pressures, disease, famine, and war. World history, in Morris's narrative, is essentially characterized by a cyclical mechanism wherein dynasties, governments, or civilizations rise and fall at repeated intervals: 2200 BC, 1750 BC, 1200 BC, 800 BC, 540 AD, 1250 AD, and 1645 AD – all of which makes for a repetitive narrative. In his words, 'history is the same old same old' (p. 560).

Perhaps the one atypical contribution Morris makes is his claim that the 'original core' of the West was in the Near East. He brushes aside all prior identifications of the West with the European continent, with Christianity, Greek democracy, Galilean science, or the Enlightenment. These are purely arbitrary designations which should be abandoned. He cites approvingly Norman Davies's alleged argument that the term 'Western civilization' is a mere ideological construct which has been defined 'by its advocates in almost any way that they think fit' (p. 41). Morris reasons that all the societies which descended from the Fertile Crescent, including Rome, Byzantium, the Islamic world, and the Americas, should be deemed 'Western'.

But this geographical definition is far more arbitrary than any prior definition, starting with the fact that Morris completely misconstrues Davies's argument. Davies writes, in his massive *Europe, A History*, that 'Western civilization is essentially an amalgam of intellectual constructs which were designed to further the interests of authors' <sup>(10)</sup> (as Morris points out), but he does so only in reference to the divide between Western and Eastern Europe, not to the Near East or any other area of the world. Each of the 12 ways Davies lists (in which academics have defined the West) addresses some cultural aspect of the European and American continent (e.g. Christianity, the Roman Empire, Protestantism, the 'WASP variant', the 'Cold War-variant'). What Davies faults is the exclusion of Eastern Europe by some authors, but in the end he concludes that 'for purposes of comprehensive treatment, however, the important thing about all these definitions is that *each and everyone* contains a variety of regional aspects ... Despite their differences, all the regions of Europe hold a very great deal in common. They are inhabited by peoples of predominantly Indo-European culture and related kin. They are co-heirs of Christendom...'.<sup>(11)</sup>

With his new definition of the West, Morris gladly limits the history of *Europe* to a rather insignificant role

until the 18th century. Meanwhile, 'the birth of the West' in the Tigris, Euphrates and Jordan valleys, gets his loyal attention, in a long chapter which runs from page 81 to 134. From the beginnings of agriculture around 10,000 BC until 550 AD, this was the "most developed region" of the world. Afterwards, the Eastern world takes the lead. From about 550 through 1775 AD, the Eastern regions move ahead of 'the West'. Europe proper thus becomes significant *only after 1775*. Ancient Greece, Rome, medieval Christendom, the Renaissance, Reformation, the Cartographic Revolution, the Scientific Era, the French Revolution are all summarily treated as local affairs, if not ignored completely. In fact, the 'core' within Western civilization barely shifts away from the Near East, Islamic Africa, and Ottoman Turkey before the 1770s. The Roman Empire is not even given the status of 'core' region.

Morris never uses the words 'distinctive' or 'uniquely' in reference to Europe except in a sardonic way (pp. 23, 261). Only in reference to Iraq and Syria does he write with conviction of 'a distinctive Western world', (p. 97) and 'a distinctive Western way of living' (p. 99).

Chapter six, which covers the period from 100 BC to 500 AD, and which, accordingly, covers an era before China takes the lead after 500 AD, is nevertheless about China rather than Rome. Once the 'Eastern Age' arrives, it is for the most part China which holds Morris's obliging attention. History is so pleasant now; Tang China's cultural 'openness to foreign ideas and ability to blend them into something new' (p. 342), 'the rise of a kind of "protofeminism"' (p. 339), the 'extraordinary' achievements of the Neo-Confucians (p. 376).

In all fairness, the early medieval 'West' does get an honourable mention: 'by 700 the Islamic world more or less was the Western core, and Christendom was merely a periphery along its northern edge' (p. 354). Islam is even portrayed as more significant to Europe's history than Christianity; the Arabs 'came not to bury the West but to perfect it' (p. 353). He rebukes the 'plenty of political pundits' today who 'find it convenient ... to imagine Islamic civilization as being outside of and opposed to Western' civilization' (p. 353). Saudi Arabia was a 'core' region of the West far longer than Europe. Now we see what a rather innocent call for unbiased 'geographical labels, not value judgements' (p. 41) essentially amount to: Welcome to Eurabia!

Without the slightest equivocation, Morris writes that all monotheistic religions, including Buddhism, speak 'the same truth' (p. 325), though he enjoys attacking Christianity's 'extremist' positions and atrocities while carefully managing with soft gloves the 'pragmatic,' 'rational', and 'perfected' beliefs of the Eastern and Islamic worlds (pp. 324, 362, 372-3, 472-3). The reader should have been made aware, at the least, of a growing scholarly literature pointing to some rather dramatic contrasts between Christianity and Islam. Christianity has exhibited a far richer intellectual tradition visible in the immediate fusion of Greek philosophy, Roman law, and the development of a Christian theology in the first centuries AD, not to mention the scholastic legacy of the Middle Ages.[\(12\)](#)

For Christianity the authority of the earthly rulers is limited by God's law, which both grants rights to every person and holds that God is conterminous with reason, whereas in Islam the idea that Allah has limits to his own powers, by making an everlasting covenant with human beings, is unthinkable, in that Allah is viewed as absolutely transcendent. There is no self-limitation to the sovereignty of Islamic rulers, and this is one reason Islamic cultures have faced great difficulties producing a secular political order subject to extra-religious checks and balances. As Robert Reilly argues in *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (2010), Islam was at first engaged with Aristotle but eventually rejected his reasoning when Abu Hamid al-Ghazali established a theology in which Allah came to be portrayed as the personal and immediate director of the movement of every molecule in the universe through his sheer incomprehensible wilfulness. In contrast, with St Anselm, Aquinas and others, Christianity went on to conceptualize the movement of material bodies in terms of natural laws.

Reilly cites Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 address at Regensburg, according to which the Muslim theologian Ahmad Ibn Hazm (11th century) asserted that Allah was not limited by any natural order, not even by his own word. The assertion that Christianity is just one more religion among many others may be comforting to Eurocrats wishing to bring Turkey into the European Union and achieve their goal of extirpating Christianity from Europe's heritage, but it is clearly out of step with a fascinating literature on the comparative study of

religions, which includes such recent work as James Gauss's *Islam & Christianity, A Revealing Contrast* (2009), Christopher's Catherwood's *A God Divided: Understanding the Differences Between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism* (2007), and [David Goldmann](#) [4]'s [Islam and the Bible](#) [5] (2004).

The Cathedrals, Peter Abelard, and Aquinas are mentioned in the two pages Morris allocates to the High Middle Ages, along with the observation that this period saw 'the formation of a persecution society' which defined itself 'against what they were not – pariahs such as Jews, homosexuals, lepers, and heretics, who, for the first time ... were terrorized' (p. 370). Despite the Renaissance, and their voyages across the oceans of the world, Europeans 'still counted for little,' they 'had destroyed the Aztecs and shot their way into the markets of the Indian Ocean, but it took more than that to impress the gatekeepers of All Under Heaven. Eastern social development remained far ahead of Western ... in 1521 there was little to suggest that the West would narrow the gap significantly' (p. 433).

Europe does not look too impressive even 'in 1773,' when it finally catches up with China (and surpasses the 'old Western core' regions of Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey). The rise of Newtonian science and the Enlightenment still count for little in Morris's estimation. 'Newton's Principia came out just five years after England's last witch-hanging and five years before the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts. Newton himself ... was as enthusiastic about alchemy as about gravity ...' (p. 470). Locke may have proposed a new theory of government based on natural rights, but 'Voltaire knew exactly where Europeans should be looking for more enlightened models: China'. Confucianism, 'unlike Christianity, was a faith of reason, free from superstition and foolish legends.' Indeed, 'Chinese intellectuals had already been challenging absolutism for a century before he [Voltaire] was born' (pp. 472–3).

As if this were not enough, Morris adds that an intellectual movement in 17th to 18th century China known as Kaozheng, 'paralleled western Europe's scientific revolution in every way – except one: it did not develop a mechanical model of nature' (p. 473). What evidence does Morris adduce for this claim? None – except one: a brief statement on the travels of a civil servant named Gu Yanwu, who filled some notebooks with detailed descriptions of farming, mining, and banking; and these writings, apparently, heralded a new empirically based vision of nature. Future Chinese scholars imitated Gu-Yanwu's call for concrete facts over speculation, and this produced a scientific method.

The Chinese could have even chosen to develop a mechanical vision of the universe but they were 'still as excited about ancient inscriptions [the texts of the Han dynasty] as about mining or agriculture.' They were not as mechanical as the Europeans who, by contrast, were not the wilful choosers of their Newtonian orientation, but were led to it as a result of their transoceanic explorations; 'the new frontier across the oceans *needed* precise measurements of standardized space, money, and time ... [It] would have been obtuse not to wonder whether nature itself was a mechanism' (p. 476).

There is nothing else I can cite from Morris that would substantiate these claims. Searching for the sources he relied on, I was led to Benjamin Elman's *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (1984). For Elman the intellectual changes in 17th-18th century China constituted a veritable 'epistemological revolution'. Chinese scholars began to speak and promote 'evidential research', as opposed to mere bookish speculations. But Elman never says there was a comparable scientific revolution in China. The conquest of the Manchus and the collapse of the Ming in 1644 led some Chinese scholars to find new ways to restore China's greatness by bringing attention to the ideas of the Warring States period and the Han dynasty. The comparison Elman makes is with the Italian Renaissance scholars who rediscovered the Greeks and Romans. Chinese scholars, in their search for ancient texts, cultivated a philological reading of texts to determine which of many editions of the classics were really original and which copied or forged additions of later centuries.

Elman, in a subsequent book, *In Their Own Terms* (2005), went on to argue that the Chinese failed to adopt the basics of Western science, despite, I would add, a huge amount of tutoring of the Chinese by Jesuit scholars. He showed that, by 1600, Europe was ahead of Asia in producing basic machines, such as clocks, levers, and pulleys, which would constitute the basis for the mechanization of agriculture and industry.

There were some consumer-related techniques that Europeans sought to learn from the Chinese, such as the secrets of producing silk, fine textiles, and porcelain, as well as tea cultivation. Elman does not argue that this philological movement contained the elements of modern Western science.

Wing-Tsit Chan says that Gu Yanwu (Ku Yen-wu, 1613–82) and the scholars associated with the kaozheng movement ‘refused to accept anything without evidence,’ which is why this movement was called “Investigations Based on Evidence”.<sup>(13)</sup> But Chan does not read into these statements a Baconian program for the investigation of nature and the development of useful technologies for the improvement of the human condition. These scholars were tired of the bookish Sung and Ming Neo-Confucians, their endless ‘rationalistic’ commentaries on books, and thus they called for the study of “concrete subjects”, philology, history, astronomy, geography, and the like. As is clear in the writings of Yen Yuan (1635–1704), who also criticized the purely pedantic approach of the Neo-Confucians, the call was for a practical attitude to life, knowledge connected to action.<sup>(14)</sup> The Han ancients were practical men engaged in archery, chariot-driving; and it was from this perspective (not any parallel Western-like perspective) that Yuan advocated manual work and contact with concrete realities, against an effeminate bookish education.

Beyond Elman, and in direct contradistinction to Morris, Kai-wing Chow (1994) argues that Late Imperial China witnessed not a philological revolution but the ‘rise of Classicism, ritualism, and purism’.<sup>(15)</sup> The so-called ‘evidential’ (k’ao-cheng) movement was a response to the threatened position of the Chinese gentry, an effort to restore an elite culture which had been considerably weakened by Ming commercialization. The philological scholarship was a subsidiary component of a broader socio-cultural movement by a class seeking to preserve its status. The vision of this movement was conservative, recovery of the ‘original’ or ‘pure’ Confucian norms and language. They were dedicated to philological precision in their efforts to achieve or recover the pure classical traditions. They rejected the Ming Neo-Confucian appeal to the innate capacities of the common people, and instead stressed the distinction between the elite gentry and the commoners. ‘Filial devotion, loyalty to the monarch, and wifely fidelity’ – these were their mottoes combined with ‘punctilious observance of hierarchical relationship, and the exaltation of the ritual authority of the Classics.’<sup>(16)</sup>

Chow even challenges Elman's comparison of this movement with the Renaissance, emphasizing that ‘the Ch’ing scholar's abhorrence of personal opinions and divergent patterns of behaviour contrasts markedly with the attitudes of Renaissance humanists’.<sup>(17)</sup> Let me add, in fact, that the ‘philological revolution’ Elman saw in 17th–18th-century China had already been pioneered by 14th-century Italian humanists in their ‘rediscovery’ of lost ancient Roman classics, which was more important to the humanists than recovering the classical Greek past. Starting with Petrarch (1304–74), who discovered several texts of Cicero, including letters, and verified that these were actually written by him, Lorenzo Valla (1407–54) carried to maturity this philological program by developing sophisticated methods of linguistic analysis to determine age and authenticity. The best known example of this textual analysis was his determination that the Donation of Constantine, a testament in which Constantine bequeathed his power and wealth to the Church, was actually a forgery. The humanistic education program of the *artes liberales* emphasized as well the importance of a practical education that would prepare young men for a civic life. The ideal gentleman epitomized in Baldassare Castiglione's, *The Book of the Courtier* (composed between 1508 and 1528) was that of a citizen who performed all kinds of services, such as taking care of the prince's household, managing servants, educating children, providing entertainment, keeping accounts, administering estates, going on diplomatic missions, training in horsemanship, swordplay, and fighting battles.

By the 18th century, Europe had moved well beyond the study of ancient texts, examining the origins of language itself (Dugald Stewart wrote in 1761 his *Dissertation on the Origin of Language*), the etymology of the Bible from a ‘naturalistic’ standpoint, the bio-social evolution of the human species, and the ethnographic study of language groups. Besides, while Morris writes of Chinese ‘renaissances’, it has long been well established that the Renaissance spearheaded by Italy was preceded by what Charles Homer Haskins called ‘the Renaissance of the 12th Century’, which saw the culmination of Romanesque art and the beginnings of the Gothic, the emergence of vernacular languages, the revival of Latin classics, poetry, and Roman law, as well as the recovery of Greek science and philosophy, the origins of universities, towns and

the sovereign state.(18)

Every epoch in European history has seen major innovations and original giants. The medieval invention of eye glasses and mechanical clocks were part and parcel of what Norman Cantor has called ‘a starting point for new directions and dimensions in all facets of civilized life’.(19) May I offer a rough, and rather incomplete, catalogue of these immense achievements: i) the investiture controversy and the emergence of a distinctive legal system of canon law which led to the rise of whole new systems of law – urban law, merchant law, royal law, natural law, divine law – that served to create a civil society composed of kingdoms, baronies, bishoprics, urban communes, guilds, and universities, each empowered to enact its own ordinances as well as to adjudicate internal disputes (20); ii) the institutionalization of a university curriculum ‘overwhelmingly oriented toward analytical subjects: logic, science, mathematics, and natural philosophy,’ which gave birth to a unique synthesis of reason and revelation, and made Catholicism the most scholarly religion of the world (21); iii) an ‘epochal shift from qualitative to quantitative perception’ which led to a new conception of time as a succession of quanta, and a new polyphonic music where sounds could be seen as a phenomena moving through time, written on a paper using a codified and standardized system of notation for all sounds and rests.(22)

Morris cavalierly remarks that ‘printing [in late Imperial China] had created an even broader readership for new ideas than in western Europe’ in the 1700s (p. 473). Morris seems to be claiming that black is white in denial of the plain facts. The investigations of one of the foremost experts in this area, Cynthia Brokaw, point to a book publishing and reading culture spreading throughout south China from the late 17th century through the early 20th century. But nowhere does Brokaw claim that China witnessed a proliferation of new ideas. Her research simply traces the networks of itinerant book-selling and bookstores through south-Western China; the spread of primers and textbooks, ritual handbooks, medical manuals, fortune-telling guides, poetry collections, and novels from the past. Through the dissemination of these books, publisher-booksellers were acting as agents of cultural integration, disseminating the core ancient texts of Chinese culture to poor county seats, interior market towns, and isolated peasant villages.(23)

Manchu emperors, it is true, became great patrons of literature and sponsored enormous projects of compilation and publications, including a vast encyclopedia in 5,020 chapters, and a project which resulted in the collection and reproduction of 3,697 classic works under the title *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*. But the same Manchu (or Qing) advocates of these projects conducted the well-known ‘literary inquisitions’ of 1774-89, against books which reflected badly on the alien Manchu rule. Over 10,000 works were placed on the index of prohibited works, and some 2,320 works were completely destroyed. The Manchu rulers also imposed strict controls over teaching and the academies, and carried out punishments against thousands of authors and their families, executions, enslavements, exiles, and tortures.(24)

In the meantime, a rather small region of Europe, England, was being flooded with print materials: *belles lettres*, novels, magazines, newspapers, philosophical treatises, scientific manuals, pulp fiction, periodicals, and the like – as we learn from Roy Porter’s learned and vivacious book, *Enlightenment, Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (2001). During the 1620s about 6,000 printed titles had appeared in England, increasing to almost 21,000 during the 1710s, and to about 56,000 by the 1790s. The total in separate book and pamphlet titles published between 1660 and 1800 was over 300,000, with an estimated 200 million copies sold. These numbers are all the more exceptional when we consider that the population in Britain in 1750 was only about 6.5 million, whereas in China it was around 210 million in 1700. By the 1770s, the total annual sale of newspapers (25), when there were nine dailies in London and 50 provincial weeklies, was over 12 million. ‘By 1800, a staggering 250 periodicals had been launched in England’, including magazines written by and for women, dealing with love, marriage and the family, education, etiquette and health. Ten thousand copies were printed of the third edition (1787-97) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.(26)

Morris is not thinking of economic indices merely when he writes that ‘as late as 1750, the similarities between the Eastern and Western cores were still striking’ (p. 503). ‘It is hard not to see’, he reflects a few sentences down, ‘a certain kinship between sprawling eighteenth-century novels of manners such as Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Cao Xueqin’s *Dream of the Red Chamber*’ (p. 503). I cannot see a single



similarity. *Dream of the Red Chamber*, first printed in the late 1700s, is known as one of 'The Four Great Classical Novels' of Chinese literature. Many other tales were written, satirical, edifying, criminal, and sentimental stories, but today they are generally not seen as having the status of great books of the world. Strictly speaking, none of the Great Classical Novels were novels. The word 'novel' came into use only at the end of the 18th century in England as a transliteration of the Italian word 'novella. The roots of the novel can be traced back to i) Spanish picaresque tales (1500s) with their strings of episodic adventures held together by the personality of the central figure; ii) Elizabethan prose fiction and the translation of ancient Greek romances into the vernacular, iii) French heroic romance with its huge baroque narratives about thinly veiled contemporaries (mid-17th century) who always acted nobly and spoke high-flown sentiments. What British novelists added in the 1700s was a more unified and plausible (down-to-earth) plot structure, with sharply individualized and believable characters, and a less aristocratic (or more 'middle class') style of writing. The novel, in these respects, was invented in Europe, particularly after 1750.<sup>(27)</sup> It was 'associated from its inception,' in the words of Porter, 'with individualism and a certain political liberalism'.<sup>(28)</sup> England played the leading role in this genre, cultivating a new sensibility for authenticity, personal experience and feeling, a spirit of non-conformity towards rigid and 'insincere' conventions, a fascination with the inner depths of the affective self. *Clarissa* was just one of such novels; consider *Pamela* and *Sir Charles Grandison* by the same author; Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and *Moll Flanders* (1722), Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1764), Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1767), and more popularly Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788), *Ethelinde* (1789), *Celestina* (1791), *Desmond* (1792), *The Old Manor House* (1793), *The Wandering of Warwick* (1794), *The Banished Man* (1794), *Montalbert* (1795), *Marchmont* (1796), *The Young Philosopher* (1798).

There were numerous heterodox publications associated with the British Enlightenment. How can Morris state in all seriousness that there was a 'broader readership for *new ideas*' in China? The point is not that China was lacking in eminent thinkers such as Ku Yen-wu, Tai Chen (1723–77), and Chang Hsueh-ch'eng (1736–96) – all three viewed by Gernet as the 'most profound and original thinkers' of their time.<sup>(29)</sup> It is that these scholars were always preoccupied with the Classics, commenting on them, debating, challenging, or re-evaluating past interpretations. Looking at England alone, during the same period, we find a fundamentally different list: Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, David Hume, John Locke, Bernard Mandeville, Adam Ferguson, Isaac Newton, Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Reid, Samuel Clarke, Erasmus Darwin, Edward Gibbon, William Godwin, Francis Hutcheson, Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and, if we need to add a woman, Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>(30)</sup>

Morris, called a 'polymath' by at least two reviewers, must surely know that he is playing tricks with historical facts, but somehow as a Party intellectual who knows in which direction the evidence must be altered to fit with the multicultural line, he has satisfied himself, through the exercise of Orwellian doublethink, that the actual historical evidence was not violated.

He follows closely Kenneth Pomeranz's claim that the industrial revolution was initiated in England 'more by accident than design'. He emphasizes colonial resources, easy access to coal mines, and especially England's proximity to the Atlantic and the opportune emergence of ocean-crossing navigational technologies.<sup>(31)</sup> By combining Diamond's long term argument on the domestication of plants and animals and Pomeranz's short term emphasis on England's geographical good luck, Morris believes he has solved the enigma of human history. It never occurs to him to pay some attention to the devastating criticisms mounted against every major empirical claim made by Pomeranz.<sup>(32)</sup>

The actual history of Europe's industrialization hardly gets more attention than 'what-ifs' questions about China's non-industrialization. In a chapter entitled 'The Western age,' which starts on page 503, Morris finally focuses on Europe – mind you, through the prism of Marx's condemnation of England's capitalism, and only until page 515, as he returns to the East, the 'defeat, humiliation, and exploitation' it suffered 'at Western hands' (p. 520). From here on, the rest of the book is almost entirely about the 'astonishing' speed with which Easterners assimilated Western modernization, and the faster rate of development exhibited by China after the 1990s, until we are led to a conclusion in which he explores the future.

Morris's consideration of the future seems to be purely technological and unconcerned with cultural matters. This is how reviewers have invariably read his concluding chapter. Influenced by the New Age futurist Ray Kurzweil's idea of 'singularity', Morris proposes that human life will be transformed by technology at an expanding speed. The human species is approaching 'a massive discontinuity' via the fusion of humans with computers and robots and the emergence of genetically engineered life forms.

But this ostensibly scientifically neutral vision is essentially a continuation of Morris's disparaging attitude towards everything Western and European. These new technologies, in the long run, will 'obliterate the old geography', including any distinction between east and west; we will come together 'in a global village'. But before that happens, China will 'rule and the world will be Easternized' (pp. 589–90). What I find arresting, or perhaps not, since this is a view commonly endorsed in academia and supported by the progressive globalist billionaire George Soros, is the defeatist way Morris welcomes the decline of the West. 'The patterns established in the past suggest that the shift of wealth and power from West to East is inexorable' (p. 614). He finds it a bit alarming that Americans speak of decline as if it were a terrible thing; after all, 'if you just substitute America and China, you get really remarkably similar kinds of things'. Perhaps this is better than what Soros said not long ago: 'I have to say that today China has a more, not only a more vigorous economy, but actually a better functioning government than the United States'.<sup>(33)</sup> There are many who believe this and look at the rise of China and the decline of the West with great enthusiasm. This way of thinking, including talk of a global village, is conterminous with Morris's geographical determinism and his claim that humans are all the same regardless of cultural background, religious beliefs and intellectual life.

Morris writes: 'If we think about culture in a broader, more anthropological sense, the West's history again seems to be one example of a larger pattern rather than a unique story.' The key word here is 'anthropological'. Anthropology studies the repeatable behaviours of large numbers of faceless people, and, as such, it is a discipline which has been effectively set against the elite culture of the West. From the perspective of what thousands and millions of humans do routinely to survive – the energy they consume, the tools they have, the fertility of the land – the achievements of singular individuals seem trivial. 'Humans are all much the same wherever we find them; and, because of this, human societies have all followed much the *same sequence* of cultural development. There is nothing special about the West'.<sup>(34)</sup>

This emphasis on a common cultural humanity is consistent with the officially established academic ideology of 'diversity' <sup>(35)</sup> which is intended precisely to do away with the notion that Western nations have a distinctive, particular identity. Not only is there no such thing as a pan-European identity but such things as Britishness or Germanness are dismissed as ethnocentric and even dangerous. The humans who inhabited the British Isles for millennia developed a culture no different from the ones who inhabited Tasmania; humans are all the same, interchangeable and malleable. The British national culture does not really exist (by which multiculturalists mean that it should not exist). Americans and the Chinese are practically (in terms of economic growth and biological longevity) the same, or at least similarly enough that their differences don't really make much of a difference. The American Declaration of Rights with its peculiar imposition of strict limits on the ends of the federal government, and its protection of individual liberty, is akin to the ideals of the Communist Party in China.

If only one could find in Morris a common human nature with some redeeming qualities; but that is not the case. The 'bottom line', he writes, is that all humans are equally 'lazy, greedy, and fearful' (p. 194). These dispositions are the driving forces of social development, and since they are the same everywhere, it is 'the

maps rather than the chaps' that account for the differences in the rates of innovation. He repeats this phrase – 'history is made by lazy, greedy, and fearful' people – throughout the book (pp. 99, 112, 26, 359, 467, 557, 559, 571, 618). Towards the end, at the same time as he is hyping up fears about the 'shocking scale of environmental degradation', Morris becomes more dismissive, even contemptuous, of ordinary people, regularly calling them 'bungling idiots' (pp. 565, 568, two times in 578, 616). Absent here is the social ethic that was distinctive of the British Enlightenment, according to which humans generally were endowed with a 'moral sense,' a 'fellow-feeling' that inspired in them sympathy, benevolence and compassion for others. Morris is far closer to the French Enlightenment's mistrust of the common people, the 'imbecility', the 'idiocy' of the 'multitude', of the 'rabble', as Voltaire, Diderot, Holbach, Helvetius, Lamettrie, and Rousseau were wont to write.<sup>(36)</sup> The difference is that Morris is contemptuous of great men as well: 'I have argued throughout this book that great men/women and bungling idiots have never played as big a part in shaping history as they have believed they did' (p. 616).<sup>(37)</sup>

By the same token, Morris credits himself with proposing a 'Morris Theorem': 'to explain the entire course of history ... I hope that the evidence presented in Chapters 2–10 has borne this out' (p. 559). Then he warns us that the 'next forty years will be the most important in history' – that is, the remaining years of his life. Disrespectful of the Western past, mistrustful of the democratic will of the unlettered masses, but looking forward to a more enlightened future, Morris closes with these final words: 'only historians can draw together the grand narrative of social development, only historians can explain the differences that divide humanity and how we can prevent them from destroying us' (p. 622). He claims in the introduction to be the only historian to have put together a grand narrative of history unifying long-term and short term theories of development. In other words, only Morris can prevent humanity from destroying itself. Astonishing indeed!

## Notes

1. Paul Lawrence Rose, *The Italian Renaissance of Mathematics: Studies on Humanists and Mathematicians from Petrarch to Galileo* (Geneva, 1975).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (Norton, 1999), p. 14.[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Ibid, pp. 8–9.[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. These words are taken from Morris's article, 'Latitudes, not attitudes: how geography explains history', *History Today*, 60, 11 (2010). Similar expressions can be found in *Why the West Rules*, pp. 60–1.[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Roger Scruton, 'Multiculturalism R.I.P', *The American Spectator* (December 2010 – January 2011).[Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Ian Morris, 'Latitudes, not attitudes: how geography explains history.'[Back to \(6\)](#)
7. G. E. R Lloyd makes this observation as well in *The Way and the Word. Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven, CT, 2002), co-authored with Nathan Sivin, who writes chapter on ancient Chinese science. Lloyd does not connect this competitive spirit to the aristocratic character of ancient Greece, arguing instead that it was somehow generated out of the argumentative atmosphere of the democratic assemblies.[Back to \(7\)](#)
8. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia. The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Vol. I: *Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens* (Oxford, 1986 [1939]), pp. 114–35.[Back to \(8\)](#)
9. G. E. R Lloyd describes this agonistic atmosphere well:  
'Far more than their counterparts in most other ancient civilizations, Greek doctors, philosophers, sophists, even mathematicians, were alike faced with an openly competitive situation of great intensity. While the modalities of their rivalries varied, in each the premium, to a greater or less degree, was on skills of self-justification and self-advertisement, and this had far-reaching consequences for the way they practiced their investigations as well as on how they presented their results'.

When Herodotus travelled around Egypt in the fifth century 'he was astonished to find no organized games; [but] open competition in games is incompatible with such rigidly stratified societies as those

of the ancient Near East, with their Pharaohs and other absolute monarchies at the apex, divinely sanctioned and sometimes gods themselves'. As cited in John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, 1994), p. 247.[Back to \(9\)](#)

10. Norman Davies, *Europe, A History* (New York, NY, 1997), p. 25.[Back to \(10\)](#)
11. Ibid, p. 28.[Back to \(11\)](#)
12. See Edward Grant, *God & Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2001); James Hannam, *God's Philosophers: How the Medieval World Laid the Foundations of Modern Science* (London, 2009); Alasdair Macintyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD, 2009)[Back to \(12\)](#)
13. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ, 1963), p. 709.[Back to \(13\)](#)
14. Ibid, pp. 703–6.[Back to \(14\)](#)
15. Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China* (Chicago, IL, 1994).[Back to \(15\)](#)
16. Ibid, pp. 3, 227.[Back to \(16\)](#)
17. Ibid, p. 230.[Back to \(17\)](#)
18. Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the 12th Century*, published originally in 1927, challenged Burckhardt's view that the Italian Renaissance saw 'the first modern individuals'. Haskins reminded historians that 'the continuity of history rejects violent contrasts between successive periods' (1972, v). I agree in the paradoxical sense that Western history has been continually discontinuous.  
[Back to \(18\)](#)
19. Norman Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (London, 1994), p. 305.[Back to \(19\)](#)
20. Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1983).[Back to \(20\)](#)
21. Grant, *God & Reason in the Middle Ages*.[Back to \(21\)](#)
22. Alfred Crosby, *Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250–1600* (Cambridge, 1997). We could go on writing about medieval creativity in literature, for example: Capellanus and a vernacular literature dealing with love, romance, seduction, and adulterous affairs; El Cid and a vernacular poetry dealing with the epic; Dante and the placement of vernacular literature on a par with biblical and classical literature; Chaucer and the freeing of poetic diction and the use of participial constructions and a wider vocabulary that includes more polysyllabic words; Guibert de Nogent, Pierre Abelard and the discovery of the human persona, of privacy and the need to be 'on one's own', not to mention the proliferation of heterodox religious movements, Cistercians, Victorines, Franciscans, Dominicans, and the 'democratization' and 'laicization' of mystical experience – all symbolized in a Gothic architecture with a new dynamic spirit of movement upward, soaring spires and extended vaulted arches.[Back to \(22\)](#)
23. Cynthia Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge, MA, 2007) [Back to \(23\)](#)
24. John King Fairbank, *China, A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 158–9; Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 505.[Back to \(24\)](#)
25. Newspapers, a major medium in the creation of a mass readership, were invented in Europe in the seventeenth century. It has been said that the regular Chinese *pao* (or reports of court affairs) circulated among the educated civil servants for more than a thousand years (AD 618-1911) was the forerunner of the modern newspaper. But if we define the term 'newspaper' as denoting, in the words of Johannes Weber, 'printed medium appearing at regular short intervals of at least once a week, produced in relatively large print runs, sold to the public at a moderate price and providing information to a sizable number of readers about important current events and developments around the world', the first newspaper sheet appeared in Strassburg in 1605. By the 1620s a variety of newspapers were circulating in central Europe. Speaking of a broad readership for new ideas, let it be said that by the mid-seventeenth to eighteenth century, newspapers 'were the most widely read secular material' in Europe. 'They provided a seedbed for the broadening political education which fostered the development of the Enlightenment'. See Johannes Weber, 'Strassburg, 1605 : The origins of the newspaper in Europe', *German History*, 24, 3 (2006).[Back to \(25\)](#)

26. Roy Porter, *Enlightenment, Britain and the Creation of the Modern*, pp. 73–92.[Back to \(26\)](#)
27. See Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, CA, 2001 [1957]).[Back to \(27\)](#)
28. Porter, *Enlightenment, Britain and the Creation of the Modern*, p. 283.[Back to \(28\)](#)
29. Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, pp. 500–15.[Back to \(29\)](#)
30. Some of the countless new titles published during this period by secondary writers who nevertheless were highly influential and original in their day are worth thinking about: Anthony Collins's *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), John Trenchard's *Natural History of Superstition* (1709), Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), J. T. Desaguliers's *The Newtonian System of the World: The Best Model of Government, an Allegorical Poem* (1728), James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* (1795), Joseph Priestley's *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777), Oliver Goldsmith's 8-volume *History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774), John Lettsom's *The Natural History of the Tea Tree with Observations on its Medical Qualities, and Effects of Tea-Drinking* (1772), Dudley North's *Discourses Upon Trade* (1691), Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* (1725), David Hartley's *Observations On Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749), William Bolla's *The Freedom of Speech and Writing upon Public Affairs Considered* (1766), William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1769), Edmund Hoyle's *The Polite Gamester, Containing Short Treatises on the Games of Whist, Quadrille, Backgammon and Chess* (1744), James Usher's *Clio or, Discourse on Taste* (1769), William Howell's *History of the World* (1680-85), Gilbert Burnet's *History of the Reformation* (1679-1715), John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), John Wilke's *Essay on Woman* (1763), John Wilmot's *A Modest Defence of the Public Stews; or An Essay Upon Whoring* (1724), Henry Kames's *The Gentleman Farmer; Being an Attempt to Improve Agriculture by Subjecting it to the Test of Rational Principles* (1776), William Alexander's *History of Women* (1779), Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1779), Judith Drake's *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), Richard Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705), Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), John Clarke's *Essay upon the Education of Youth in Grammar-schools* (1720), Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories Designed for the Amusement and Instruction of Young People* (1786), George Ballard *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences* (1752), James Hanway, *Defects of Police* (1775), Joseph Priestley *The History and Present State of Electricity, with Original Experiments* (1767), Richard Price, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity* (1778), These, and many more, were all works with new ideas.[Back to \(30\)](#)
31. In a lecture he gave at the Carnegie Council, October 28, 2010, Morris said the following regarding the arrival of Europeans in the Americas: 'There are other factors as well involved of course, but the Europeans are the ones who settle in the Americas, take it over, and kill the enormous majority of the native population with their *disgusting European germs*' <  
<http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/resources/transcripts/0331.html#1> [6]> [accessed 18 April 2011].
- Not long ago, *The New York Times* (October 31 2010) reported some new findings indicating 'that all three of the great waves of plague originated from China', including the so-called 'Black Death' which killed about 30 per cent of the European population. I wonder what the reaction of an audience would be if someone had stated that there is now confirmation that the Black Death was brought on by 'disgusting Chinese germs'. Westerners are so used to this ethno-masochistic way of speaking (Morris was born in England), that the audience let it pass with a compliant, if unsatisfied, laughter.[Back to \(31\)](#)
32. See, for example, Philip Huang, 'Development or involution in eighteenth-century Britain and China,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 61, 2; Peer Vries, 'Are coal and colonies really crucial ? Kenneth Pomeranz and the great divergence,' *Journal of World History*, 12; Ricardo Duchesne, 'On the rise of the west: Researching Kenneth Pomeranz's great divergence', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 36, 1 (Winter 2004), 52-81.[Back to \(32\)](#)
33. In *The National Post* (November 16 2010).[Back to \(33\)](#)

34. The cited words in this paragraph are from 'Latitudes, not attitudes: how geography explains history'. For similar passages in the book, see 29–30.[Back to \(34\)](#)
35. See Peter Wood's *Diversity: The Invention of a Concept* (New York, NY, 2003).[Back to \(35\)](#)
36. For a well-argued book contrasting the British to the French Enlightenment, see Gertrude Himmelfarb's *The Roads to Modernity* (New York, NY, 2004).[Back to \(36\)](#)
37. Only Chinese rulers, philosophers, and scientists, including poets cited at length (pp. 377-82, 477), seemed to have played 'extraordinary' historical roles.[Back to \(37\)](#)

### Other reviews:

Asian Review of Books

<http://www.asianreviewofbooks.com/new/> [7]

Economist

<http://www.economist.com/node/17199546> [8]

Financial Times

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/13172d36-07cf-11e0-8138-00144feabdc0.html> [9]

Foreign Affairs

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66831/niall-ferguson/niall-ferguson> [10]

Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/30/why-the-west-rules-ian-morris-review> [11]

Media Culture Reviews

<http://reviews.media-culture.org.au/modules.php> [12]

New Statesman

<http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2010/11/morris-history-western-china> [13]

New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/books/review/Schell-t.html> [14]

Scotsman

<http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/features/Book-review-Why-the-West.6633014.jp> [15]

Telegraph

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/8176576/Why-the-West-Rules-For-Now-The-Patterns-of-History-and-What-They-Reveal-About-the-Future-by-Ian-Morris-review.html> [16]

**Source URL:** <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1091#comment-0>

### Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/5520>

[2] <http://www.maritimeasia.ws/topic/1421bunkum.html>

[3] [http://www.google.ca/images?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4ADBF\\_enCA281CA292&q=bamboo&oi=image\\_result\\_group&sa=X](http://www.google.ca/images?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4ADBF_enCA281CA292&q=bamboo&oi=image_result_group&sa=X)

[4] [http://www.amazon.com/David-Goldmann/e/B001KHMC4E/ref=sr\\_ntt\\_srch\\_lnk\\_4?qid=1301582674&sr=1-4](http://www.amazon.com/David-Goldmann/e/B001KHMC4E/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_4?qid=1301582674&sr=1-4)

[5] [http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp\\_srsbj\\_allbutton#/ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_srsbj_allbutton#/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-)

[keywords=Comparing+Islam+and+Christianity&rh=n%3A283155%2Ck%3AComparing+Islam+and+Christianity](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_srsbj_allbutton#/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Comparing+Islam+and+Christianity&rh=n%3A283155%2Ck%3AComparing+Islam+and+Christianity)

[6] <http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/resources/transcripts/0331.html#1>

[7] <http://www.asianreviewofbooks.com/new/?revID=1186>

[8] <http://www.economist.com/node/17199546>

[9] <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/13172d36-07cf-11e0-8138-00144feabdc0.html>

[10] <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66831/niall-ferguson/niall-ferguson>

[11] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/30/why-the-west-rules-ian-morris-review>

[12] <http://reviews.media-culture.org.au/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4541>

[13] <http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2010/11/morris-history-western-china>

[14] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/books/review/Schell-t.html>

[15] <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/features/Book-review-Why-the-West.6633014.jp>

[16] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/8176576/Why-the-West-Rules-For-Now-The-Patterns-of-History-and-What-They-Reveal-About-the-Future-by-Ian-Morris-review.html>