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Provincial Europe and Global History in the Early Modern Period: Toward New Perspectives

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The question of provincial and rural Europe should be at the heart of renewed problems in global history. We have good models that allow us to pose problems of change. Jan de Vries' influential idea of an "industrious revolution" helps us to explain how the seeming continuity of social life in Europe in the eighteenth century masked transformations of work and family within the peasant and urban households. The industrious revolution, alongside the increased trade in commodities around the Atlantic and finished goods from Asia, underpinned the slow commercialisation of everyday life in all regions around the Atlantic. The old model of early modern Europe as a set of immobile provincial societies, which would latterly be transformed by exogenous forces, namely cities, industry, war and revolution, has been replaced by a much more differentiated, complex vision.

The effects of intensified international trade and industrious revolution were not confined to Europe, or even the Atlantic basin. The Bay of Bengal and the Yangzi Delta experienced the same efflorescence of urbanisation, net gains in productivity and cultural creativity as the Netherlands or urban England in the eighteenth century. Growth was relatively common in the early-modern world and this raises the question, beautifully framed by Jack Goldstone, that if "traditional" societies around the globe regularly experienced this kind of growth why did the modern world emerge belatedly and relatively locally in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Knowledge culture is the vital factor that differentiates the late eighteenth-century transition from all previous episodes of growth.

The idea of a knowledge culture deployed by Joel Mokyr, Margaret Jacob or Goldstone is compelling, but the specific model of a knowledge culture they use does not adequately explain the European transition. Their work, and more specific studies of local "knowledge economies" such as Peter Jones' study of the West Midlands, do a fine job of describing regions and countries in the process of escaping the limits to growth, but do not adequately answer Goldstone's question. Just why was science-based growth immune to capture by new interests?

The Atlantic basin and Western Europe were able to participate in the epochal shift of the early nineteenth century, even though industrial regions and trade centres made up only a very small part of that world. How did provincial people learn how to adapt themselves to a changing world, to take on new opportunities, hedge against new kinds of risk and associate with others in novel forms of

collective action? To understand why the technologically-driven efflorescence became self-sustaining we need to see the knowledge culture that produced it in a much wider context than that of the industrial regions themselves. Was there a tacit knowledge, a “know-how”, which provincial Europeans acquired through social experience? If so what were those experiences? How could we credibly account for a process of cognitive change profound enough to offer a novel repertoire of collective action on a wide and deep basis? The four papers on this panel explore the regions and inter-regional communication as a form of social innovation and explore how the themes of global history are found in specific local interactions.

Vorträge

-  **The Global Languedoc 1690-1850. Ideas, Money and Things in Provincial Europe**
James Livesey (Dundee)

-  **Pehr Kalm’s Atlantic: Climate Change and History in Swedish Cameralism**
Fredrik Albritton Jonsson (Chicago)

-  **(Pen)insular perspectives on 17th and 18th century Europe**
Renaux Morieux (Cambridge)

-  **The States of Nature, 1651-1816**
Mark Somos (Harvard)