

Plate # 3

What is Modernity?

Jan 9

Person	Place	Thing
Adam Smith – 1776: "China much richer than Europe"	Potosí – Bolivian silver mines; Europe's ticket in	Silver Arbitrage – silver worth 2x more in China
Fernand Braudel – "Europe invented historians"	Malacca Strait – chokepoint of East-West trade	Asiatic Mode – Marx's flawed "stagnant East" idea
Qianlong Emperor – 1793: rejected British trade	Guangzhou – Canton: only port open to Europeans	Great Divergence – ~1800: when gap actually opened

Timeline



Map



"Europe climbed up on the back of Asia, and then stood on Asian shoulders—temporarily." — Frank

Penetrating Questions	Very short answers
1 If China was wealthier than Europe until 1800, why do we think of "modernity" as a European invention?	Power shapes narratives. European colonialism coincided with writing "universal" history. Who wrote the textbooks?
2 Is "modernization" the same as "Westernization"? Can you be modern without being Western?	Key course question. Japan's Meiji, China's reforms — Western adoption or independent paths?

Causes / Effects / Connections
Causes: China's advanced production created global demand; Europe had nothing Asia wanted → drove search for silver → colonialism
Effect: Eurocentric narratives shaped how we define "modern," "developed," "progress"
Connection: Today's "China rise" = return to historical normalcy
To Plate 4: Imjin War shows E. Asian powers before European involvement

Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frank is a SKIM reading — find thesis + evidence Asia for Educators videos are accessible intro China's GDP was ~33% of world in 1820 "Modernity" = industry + nation-states + capitalism Debate welcome — Frank is deliberately provocative