

Comparisons don't *have* to be odious...



Economic comparisons over long periods of time are fraught with both conceptual and data problems – but are loads of fun, nonetheless. The big winner in this 185-year span is, of course, the United States, which had a miniscule population compared to China or India in 1820 and was playing industrial catch-up with Britain.

Arguably the most surprising figures here are for France, Britain and Spain, which have roughly held their own in terms of GDP through the rise and fall of empires and two catastrophic wars (make that three for France). China and India (ranked 12th in 2005) slipped badly over the two centuries. But unless they falter once again, both will be in the top four in another few decades.

TOP TEN ECONOMIES (PERCENTAGE OF WORLD TOTAL)

1820	GDP	POPULATION	2005	GDP	POPULATION
China	28.7%	35.7%	United States	28.1%	4.6%
India	16.0	19.6	Japan	10.3	2.0
France	5.4	2.9	Germany	6.3	1.3
U.K.	5.2	2.0	China	5.0	20.2
Prussia	4.9	4.2	U.K.	5.0	0.9
Japan	3.1	2.9	France	4.7	0.9
Austria Hungary	1.9	1.3	Italy	4.0	0.9
Spain	1.9	1.1	Spain	2.5	0.7
United States	1.8	0.9	Canada	2.5	0.5
Russia	1.7	1.1	S. Korea	1.8	0.7
Top Ten Total	70.6	71.7		70.2	32.7

SOURCES: The International Monetary Fund and Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: Volume 1: A Millennial Perspective and Volume 2: Historical Statistics* (OECD, 2001 and 2003). (Thanks to Jim Barth and Jerry Caprio.)