

occurred as a reaction to Western impact, an approach outdated since the early 1980s (e.g. p. 26). More recent studies have tended to emphasize Chinese agency within this modernization process. In this reviewer's opinion, the experience of Chinese economists demonstrates that the introduction of Western economics into China might also be understood as a process of cultural hybridization: the formation of new intellectual concepts from both Western and Chinese precursors (regardless of the practical applicability of these hybrid concepts).

On a factual level, it is surprising to find that the author has made no reference to Margherita Zanasi's recent monograph (2006) on a related topic, particularly as this would have allowed him to bypass at least some of the linguistic issues arising from his work. The author himself acknowledges that, in the case of Chinese-language primary sources, he has had to rely on translations; for the same reason, his exposure to Chinese-language secondary literature has been limited.

Regrettably, this book is also beset by a number of factual mistakes. These range from the embarrassing—the annexation of Austria by the German Reich took place in 1938, not 1936, as claimed by the author (p. 90)—to the grossly misleading, such as the author's contention that premodern China was marked by the “absence . . . of the vigorous development of town life which was significant in Europe by the fourteenth and fifteenth century” (p. 214), or that the city of Harbin, in Heilongjiang Province, was “essentially a Russian city” (p. 190).

This is an important book that provides a convincing account of the introduction of Western economic thought into China. In summer 2006, this reviewer interviewed Yang Jingnian, who had been a research assistant to Fang Xianting (H. D. Fong) in the late 1930s. Professor Yang suggested that China's economic backwardness had turned a generation of Chinese economists returned from the United States and elsewhere, and trained by leading free trade economists, into fervent advocates of protectionist policies. In Dr. Trescott's work we now have the entire story behind this process.

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## REFERENCE

Zanasi, Margherita. 2006. *Saving the Nation: Economic Modernity in Nationalist China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

D. E. Moggridge, *Harry Johnson: A Life in Economics*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. xxii, 486, \$90.00. ISBN 978-0-521-87482-3.

Don Moggridge has done historians of economics a great service in chronicling the life of Harry G. Johnson, the brilliant comet who passed over the economics landscape in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Johnson appeared on the horizon,

a twenty year old with a bachelor's degree who joined the faculty of St. Francis Xavier University in eastern Nova Scotia in 1943. In 1948, while a graduate student at Harvard, Johnson had his first scholarly publication, on David Ricardo's theory of rent. His first articles in international and monetary economics, which were his primary fields, came in 1950. His brilliant but short career of thirty-three years came to an end on May 9, 1977, when Johnson died in Geneva, Switzerland. The journey from Nova Scotia to Geneva, though short in time, was long in other dimensions. Johnson had an appetite for life as large as his ample frame.

There were his legendary travels. Johnson was truly a global economist, especially over the last twenty years of his life. He would travel anywhere he was invited to teach, to give lectures, or to consult. As his health deteriorated toward the end, his travel accelerated, as if he was attempting to squeeze in as much living as he could. From February through December 1976 Johnson visited fifteen different countries, while based in two, the United States (Chicago) and the U.K. (London).<sup>1</sup>

Johnson's professional base alternated between three countries: his native Canada, and for the larger portion of his career, England and the United States. In England he was first a lecturer and fellow of King's College, Cambridge. From Cambridge he moved to Manchester in 1956, with visiting positions at Toronto, Northwestern, and Stanford along the way. He left Manchester for Chicago in 1959, and he added the London School of Economics (LSE) to Chicago in 1966, holding two full-time appointments until his resignation from LSE in 1974.

Johnson's bibliography takes up fifty-three pages in the August 1984 issue of the *Journal of Political Economy*, with over 52 books of which he was author or editor and over 500 scholarly articles. The length of the bibliography and its availability in the *JPE* no doubt explains why Moggridge did not include a Johnson bibliography in his intellectual biography. Johnson had a thorough knowledge of the economics literature, both literature in print and not yet in print. He gained the latter from his connections with economists around the world and his meticulous and energetic editing for the *Review of Economic Studies*, *Manchester School*, *Journal of Political Economy*, and *Economica*.

It will come as no surprise to those who have read Don Moggridge's biographies of Keynes or benefited from his editorial work on Keynes's *Collected Writings* that this book is thoroughly researched and expertly written. In addition to published sources, Moggridge made use of documents from thirty-five manuscript collections and several unpublished autobiographical accounts left by Johnson. The focus is on Johnson's intellectual and professional life, but there is enough about Johnson the man to give the account depth and texture. Johnson's autobiographical essays help especially in providing details of his early life. Moggridge makes prudent use of these recorded memories, checking Johnson's accounts of his life against facts available from other sources. Moggridge's skill as both a biographer and historian of economics is evident.

The arrangement of chapters is mostly chronological with the story built around Johnson's tenure at the different universities, and in smaller part around themes of his writings. There is a chapter, for instance, on his undergraduate education at the

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<sup>1</sup>See Simpson, 2001, p. 636.

University of Toronto, another on his year at St. Francis Xavier, two chapters devoted to his time at Cambridge, one to Manchester, one to Chicago, and one to LSE. Other chapters highlighting economic ideas include Canadian issues; money, trade, and development; money and inflation; and the international monetary system.

This book is a valuable reference for history of monetary and international economics from the 1940s through the 1970s, and also for British, American, or Canadian economics from the period. Likewise it provides institutional history of Cambridge, Manchester, LSE, and Chicago for the periods of Johnson's tenure. More broadly, the story of Harry Johnson's life in economics is food for thought about the state of economics during the second half of the twentieth century. Two questions come to mind.

First is the matter of Johnson's bursting onto the scene, burning very brightly, and then being largely forgotten except for his aging friends and colleagues and historians of economics. Moggridge reports that over the last six years of his life Johnson averaged 249 citations per year, second only to Paul Samuelson. By 1990 the count dropped to 94 and since 2003 fewer than 30 per year. Why are some economists' renown and ideas more perishable than others? Moggridge suggests that in Johnson's case the drop in citations and recognition is a product of some of his ideas being incorporated into the mainstream, thus losing their novelty and distinctiveness, others being tied to current events that have passed into history; and the heavy complement of surveys in Johnson's writings. He also suggests, and Johnson himself acknowledged, that Johnson did not place a high value on his renown. He was scrupulous in giving credit to others without demanding it for himself. Yet Johnson was far from a colorless, closeted academic. He cut a figure larger than life. Moggridge's biography of Johnson suggests that there is good history of thought work to be done on the respective roles of personality, analytical method, and writing style in giving shape and identity to the body of economic knowledge that passes from one period to another.

A separate, but perhaps related question prompted by Johnson's story is both historical and methodological. It can be posed in two ways: (1) What is it that economists think they are doing and why do they think there is value in it? (2) What is it that economists are doing and what value is there in it? It is clear from Moggridge's account that Harry Johnson thought of economics as a science. Methodological discussion of the nature of scientific economics was rich in the Johnson era, prompted by developments in mathematical economics and econometrics. One particularly interesting slice of the Johnson story concerns the New Welfare Economics. Johnson worked in this area on questions of optimal trade policy, and his close Cambridge friend, Jan Graaff, wrote a dissertation that was published as *Theoretical Welfare Economics* in 1958. Graaff concluded:

The greatest contribution economics is likely to make to human welfare, broadly conceived, is through positive studies—through contributing to our understanding of how the economic system actually works in practice—rather than through normative welfare theory itself . . .

No doubt many professional economists are reluctant to abdicate what they may like to regard as their traditional prescriptive role and are unhappy at becoming mere purveyors of information (Moggridge, p. 150).

Moggridge sees Graaff's and Johnson's welfare economics as nihilistic. Nihilism is a strong term for the conclusion that one particular approach to economic theorizing cannot deliver the goods that were expected of it. The alternative function for economics suggested by Graaff, "understanding how the economic system actually works in practice," would seem to be a basic function of science. And this was exactly the Chicago conception of scientific economics. Shortly after Johnson went to Chicago he wrote Graaff, "Sooner or later I shall have to adopt the path of positive economics, which you forecasted as the way ahead in the last chapter of your book" (Moggridge, p. 203).

We learn that Johnson was attracted to the Chicago style of economics from what he wrote to a student in 1973:

I think the Chicago mixture is the best kind of economics on offer . . . I came from Manchester to Chicago . . . because I was convinced that Chicago was going somewhere whereas no other place in England was, and the other places in the U.S. seemed too soft and too much like Cambridge, England (Moggridge, p. 419).

Yet Johnson found Chicago "a tough environment, especially for someone accustomed to the English traditions of the reasonable compromise between conflicting points of view" (Moggridge, p. 205). He recalled the difficulty of getting used to the "prevailing intellectual brutality" (p. 205). As for Chicago economic methods, he used terms such as "theological" and "heresy" in characterizations not intended to be complimentary. He wrote of the Chicago emphasis on empirical work that "it is not altogether obvious that the only possible way to find out how the economy works is to sit for two years in a cellar behind a calculating machine" (p. 207).

Johnson was also critical of mathematical economics, depicting it as "a way of appearing to do economics without actually doing anything controversial or committing oneself to belief in what one is doing" (p. 330–31). And he was critical of English economists for converting a scientific subject into "political necromancy" (p. 329).

These criticisms of communities of economists conform to Johnson's self-image. He viewed himself as an outsider. It is also clear to anyone who observed him in person or who does so retrospectively through this biography, that Johnson was restless. Perhaps this helps explain why his light faded so quickly after his death. Not establishing long institutional roots, he was not Harry Johnson of Cambridge, or of LSE, or of Chicago. Nor was he Harry Johnson—Keynesian, or Harry Johnson—monetarist. No "ism" became coupled with his name. But Moggridge shows that he was a fascinating man and, for a time, a dynamo in the world of academic economics.

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## REFERENCE

- Simpson, Elizabeth Johnson, in L. Moss, ed. "Harry G. Johnson (1923–1977): Scholar, Mentor, Editor, and Relentless World Traveler," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60 (3): 601–49.