

networks in Iran carried local, national, and even transnational dimensions. Similar to other railroad projects undertaken as nation-building projects across the globe, the Trans-Iranian Railway as transportation and communication infrastructure “created multiple traveling publics” with multiple identities depending on the specific context (p. 189). For example, new access to rail travel for the purpose of conducting transnational pilgrimages or establishing transnational political networks that linked communists from Iran, Iraq, and Moscow via rail created new mobility networks during the 1940s. With its decentralized narrative informed by the broad concept of mobility, *Iran in Motion* succeeds in showcasing the complex transformation of people who built, worked for, and traveled on the Trans-Iranian Railway across the twentieth century.

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Tata: The Global Corporation That Built Indian Capitalism. *By Mircea Raianu.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021. 304 pp. Photographs, appendix, notes, index. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-67498-451-6.

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Reviewed by Chinmay Tumbe

The Tata Central Archives in the city of Pune in India holds a large collection of books written on various aspects of the Tata family, mostly by people associated with the family and Parsis of the Zoroastrian faith, to whom the Tata family members belong. Mircea Raianu’s book—one of the few written on the subject by a professional historian—provides a masterful critical reading of archives spread across three continents and tells a compelling narrative of India’s famous business house and its persistent global linkages. The narrative begins in the late nineteenth century and ends in the 1970s via six chapters. A brief epilogue summarizes the key events of the past five decades, when the Tatas globalized like never before. Of all the group companies, the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO, now Tata Steel) hogs most of the attention in the book. Raianu skillfully highlights the relationships between labor and capital, company and state, and nationalism and globalization. This is his first book, built on his doctoral dissertation at Harvard University. Interestingly, it follows closely on the heels of Dinyar Patel’s 2020

biography of the Parsi statesman Naoroji. (Patel and Raianu overlapped as doctoral students at Harvard and, as the footnotes convey, benefited from each other's rich archival research.) It also has a much wider scope than Chikayoshi Nomura's rigorous study, *The House of Tata Meets the Second Industrial Revolution*, published in 2018.

Tata's exceptional success in staying dominant in India's business landscape for over a century demanded an explanation that went beyond the charisma of its leaders that various hagiographers have vividly described. As Raianu points out, in India, it is "as though the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers themselves, not simply their modern equivalents, owned Amazon, Apple and Google" (p. 2). How did this happen? The book's core argument is that "transnational financial connections," "control over land, labour and natural resources within India," and "networks of scientific and technical expertise cultivated through strategic philanthropy" gave Tata the edge over the long run (p. 6). While the book does not engage with the large literature on institutional voids in explaining the persistence of business groups in many parts of the world, the arguments are built on solid archival foundations enabling a peek deep inside the proverbial black box of the firm. It should thus be of as much interest to the strategy scholar as it is to the business historian.

Of its three core propositions, the first one is difficult to judge given the paucity of numbers in this book. Raianu correctly emphasizes the significance of Tata's international trading concerns even after getting into manufacturing in the early decades of the twentieth century (building on a quip by a Tata director, A. D. Shroff). But there is little quantitative information on the size of the group's companies, with which to assess how large they were in the overall fold or how exactly they mattered. In the 1920s, for instance, company directory lists show the trading firm R.D. Tata & Co. to comprise less than 5 percent of total paid-up capital of Tata's listed companies. The collapse of that firm is unlikely to have affected the Tata Group in any meaningful way and appears to be overemphasized in the book.

The other two propositions, resting on physical and knowledge infrastructures built or secured by the Tatas, are superbly marshalled by way of unravelling the connections between key stakeholders. Here, the archives come to life as the author paints a rich description of why certain decisions were made to get into particular types of investments or philanthropy and the organizational challenges thereof. Raianu ties together various literatures, such as business history, labor history, urban history, and intellectual history, to challenge established theories in the field. He is not shy of criticizing the Tatas at different points but also points out where the governments of the day faltered in their

dealings with Indian business. A balance of perspective is maintained throughout.

For a book that harps on hybridity and eschews generalizations, its emphasis on Tata being “the” global corporation that built Indian capitalism (as claimed in the subtitle of the book) may sound outlandish. That is a shortcoming; the book does little to explain Tata’s behavior in relation to other large Indian firms (outside the Birlas) and especially in the steel sector, on which a large part of the book is focused. The Indian Iron and Steel Company, for instance, is mentioned just once, regarding its nationalization in the 1970s. The book’s emphasis on Tata’s company town Jamshedpur and experiments in urban planning could have benefited from a reading of other Indian company towns, especially Batanagar (set up for Bata, the shoe company).

Raianu’s *Tata* is gripping in the way it fleshes out key protagonists of the company, especially those not carrying the Tata surname, such as B. J. Padshah and Minoo Masani. It has a clear eye for the “big picture” story, though at times it loses chronological focus in the main text, jumping years or even decades, clarified only by a close reading of the extensive footnotes. On balance, though, this is quite easily the best book written to date on the Tata Group, and there have been many.

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London Couture and the Making of a Fashion Centre. *By Michelle Jones.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022. 320 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Hardcover, \$30.00. ISBN: 978-0-262-04657-2.

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Reviewed by Véronique Pouillard

Michelle Jones has written a milestone book on the history of the British fashion industry. London is at present one of the four fashion capitals, along with Paris, New York, and Milan. In the most recent decades, new cities have emerged as fashion centers, including Shanghai and Tokyo. The history of the British fashion industry has been the topic of important studies on the aesthetics of the London look, the rise of mass fashions, fashionable British textiles, and the emergence of new stylists in the boutiques of the 1960s. The institutional history of British fashion, however, has long remained under-researched. Jones’s book fills a substantial gap in the historiography. The author has