

Book Reviews

Global Economic History. *Edited by Tirthankar Roy and Giorgio Riello.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. xiv + 370 pp. Tables, figures, references, notes, index. Paper, \$54.99. ISBN: 978-1-4725-8843-2.

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Reviewed by Chinmay Tumble

Economic history has flourished as a discipline over the past two decades with a focus on globalization and debates surrounding the timing, causes, and consequences of the “great divergence” between “the West” and “the Rest.” It has led to different schools of thought privileging technology, resources, institutions, trade, human capital, and, perhaps less so today, culture, in understanding the trajectories of economies around the world. Rarely do we get a book that presents such wide-ranging scholarship on economic history from opposing viewpoints in a concise form. This edited volume goes a long way in filling that void.

Global economic history, in this book, is presented as a dialogue between economic history and global history, with a time frame—mentioned in the introduction but not in the book’s title—from 1500 to 2000. Stemming from discussions at the London School of Economics and the University of Warwick over many years and the work of Patrick O’Brien (to whom the book is dedicated), Tirthankar Roy and Giorgio Riello bring together twenty-three contributors, resulting in nineteen concise chapters across three parts: “Divergence in Global History,” “The Emergence of a World Economy,” and “Regional Perspectives to Global Economic Change.”

The first part, on divergence, is riveting. Broadly, there are scholars who hold that the Great Divergence occurred only after 1750, and especially in the nineteenth century, and other scholars who argue for an earlier starting point. A chapter coauthored by Kenneth Pomeranz and Prasannan Parthasarathi—who wrote important books on the Great Divergence in 2000 and 2011, respectively—shows how the debate has not only extended beyond prices and incomes to include other themes such as politics, environment, and science but also raised important questions about measurement of living standards of the past. In chapter 2, titled “Data and Dating the Great Divergence,” Jack Goldstone discusses the economic evolution of the Netherlands and Britain and holds the middle of the eighteenth century as the key breakpoint.

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Patrick O'Brien argues in chapter 3 that the divergence debate needs to move beyond macroeconomic statistics and considers the role of useful and reliable knowledge in the divergence between Europe and China. In a similar framework, but in a separate chapter, Karel Davids looks at technology.

Other chapters include one by Trevor Burnard on plantations in the divergence debate (chapter 6) and one by Maxine Berg on why consumption history matters to global economic history (chapter 7). For business historians, chapter 5, by Regina Grafe and Maarten Prak, on the role of families, firms, and politics in sustaining premodern economic growth, will be of considerable interest, as it invokes institutional and organizational differences in the divergence debate. Collectively, the chapters appear to be comprehensive, though reference to the work of economists on the divergence debate seems to be surprisingly deficient. That such a divergence did occur and that its legacy persists to date is best borne out by the university locations of the twenty-three scholars who contributed to this volume: the United Kingdom (nine authors), the Netherlands (four), the United States (four), Italy (two), Germany (one), France (one), Japan (one), and Australia (one). Recent global economic convergence in living standards is yet to manifest itself in the production of scholarship on global economic history.

The second part of the book, on the emergence of a world economy, consists of six chapters, tackling trade, environment, labor, industrialization, commodities, and finance. Roy and Riello illustrate waves of global trade over five centuries and its relationship with politics and development (chapter 8). J. R. McNeill outlines the relationship between the global environment and the world economy through four narratives, on industrialization, biological exchange, American plantations, and the Anthropocene, respectively (chapter 9). This is a welcome addition to a book on global economic history, which often comes across as a field that celebrates the rise of the West but fails to acknowledge its environmental fallout. Alessandro Stanziani reviews different types of labor regimes and migration that created the world economy (chapter 10) and Bernd-Stefan Grewe surveys the global history approach toward commodities, commodity chains, and value chains (chapter 12). Kaoru Sugihara explores varieties of industrialization in Asia—mainly in South Asia, East Asia, and Japan—and its differing interaction with resources and globalization (chapter 11). The chapter by Youssef Cassis, titled “The Rise of Global Finance, 1850–2000,” weaves a narrative on financial evolution moving in tandem with globalization and should be of interest to business historians (chapter 13).

The third part of the book contains six chapters that focus on regional perspectives. Chapter 15, by Alejandra Irigoin, shows the significance of silver discovery in the Americas in forging global trade. There

are also important review chapters on sub-Saharan Africa by Gareth Austin (chapter 14), on East Asia by Debin Ma (chapter 16), on South Asia by Bishnupriya Gupta and Tirthankar Roy (chapter 18), on South-east Asia by J. Thomas Lindblad (chapter 19), and on Europe by Peer Vries (chapter 17). Each of these chapters summarizes key advances in historiography of those regions in recent years. The book ends with a valuable glossary compiled by Karolina Hutkova, which summarizes key concepts introduced in the book.

In the book's grand sweep, the editors sensibly do "not aim for completeness of information, or treatment, or chronologies" and instead are more interested in articulating different historiographies that exist or that seem to be emerging (p. xiii). They also acknowledge the "lack of specific chapters dedicated to topics such as 'empire,' 'gender,' and 'North America'" (p. 9). This gap, along with gaps on Russia (missing from the index) and the Middle East or West Asia, means that the book misses out on important debates on institutions, religion, and comparative economic systems. Without the United States and Russia, discussions on global economic history in the twentieth century, for the most part, take a natural backseat.

In sum, this book is a valuable resource for students of economic history, especially those who want to understand Europe and Asia, those who are methodologically agnostic, and those who prefer brevity over long, meandering essays. Its use in economics departments could be limited as the book is light on references to the work of economists, which in itself is surprising given how much economics has done to popularize economic history in recent years. Business historians could also benefit by reading this book and could perhaps use it as a point of reflection: that with the addition of big narratives and cross-country debates (beyond the usual quartet of United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan), a similar book on "global business history" may also be feasible.

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Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919. By Erik Grimmer-Solem. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xiv + 654 pp. Maps, photographs, figures, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$44.99. ISBN: 978-1-108-48382-7.

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Reviewed by Heidi Tworek