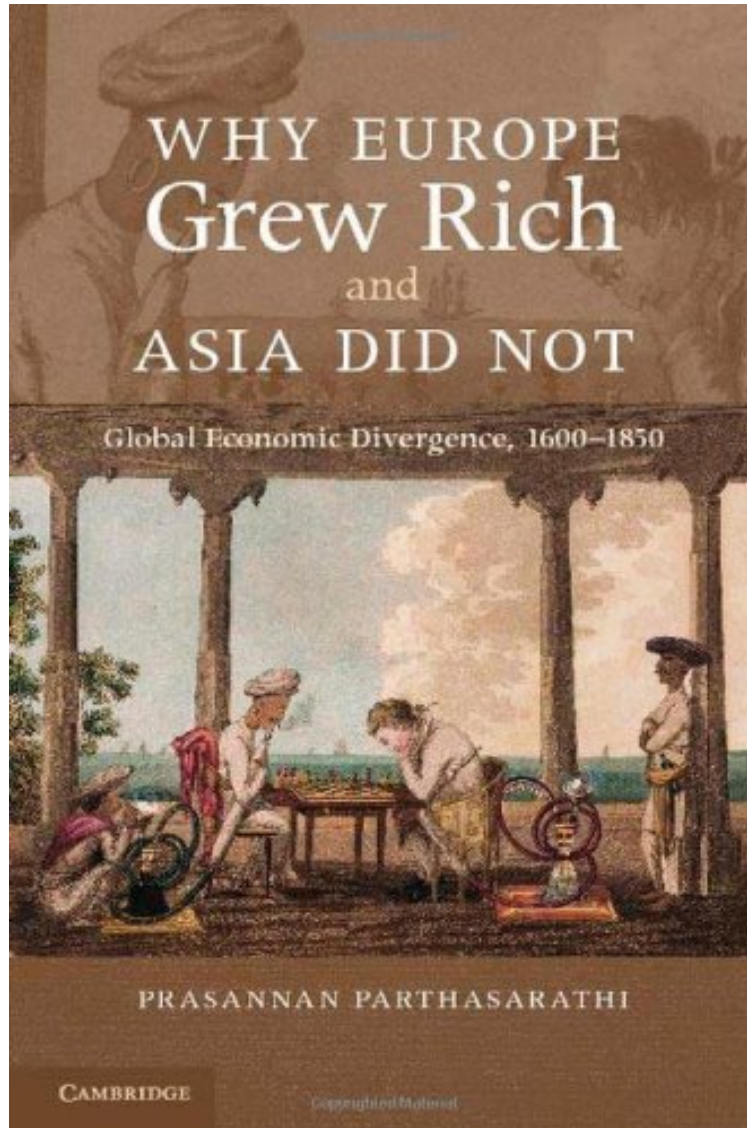


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Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not

Prasannan Parthasarathi

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Prasannan Parthasarathi : Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Good Contribution to the Great Divergence DebateBy Carl WinfieldPrasannan Parthasarathirsquo;s "Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not" is one of the more compelling works in the "Great Divergence" debate, and provides an account for the divergence between England, India, and China in the late 18th century. Like Kenneth Pomeranz, whose 2000 book "The Great Divergence" initiated the debate, Parthasarathi argues that the economies and market structures of India and China were as robust as Englandrsquo;s through much of the 18th century. Parthasarathi draws attention, in particular, to Indiarsquo;s

centrality in the world textile market. But while Pomeranz identifies accidents of geography as the reason for England's late 18th century divergence, Parthasarathi points instead to differences in state policy. Parthasarathi notes that the British state protected the English textile industry from more popular Indian textiles, giving English manufactures a captive market as they developed the key technological innovations that sparked the industrial revolution. The English state also supported the development of coal and protected the iron industry, in contrast to many Indian states and the Qing Empire. Once the British established a colonial state in India, Britain rendered India powerless to adopt the interventionist and protectionist state policies that allowed France, Belgium, Germany, and the U.S. to catch up with British industry. Parthasarathi argues that societies, acting through political institutions and influenced by culture, respond in very different ways to their natural resource allotments. This argument is more convincing than Pomeranz's narrowly ecological argument. Parthasarathi falls closer to the arguments of Fernand Braudel, who likewise focused on the relationship of state power and capital as a critical variable for explaining wealth. However, Parthasarathi could have dug deeper into the effects that differences in the nature of European and Asian states had on their economic growth. Parthasarathi's examination of taxation—a state function deeply indicative of a state's legitimizing ideology—is, for one, too narrowly focused on tariffs. He fails in particular to address the economic impact of tax farming on the Indian and Chinese economies. Parthasarathi notes that the Mughal Emperor was not oppressive in his taxation or policies, but omits consideration of the behavior of the local aristocracy or the zamindar class, to which the Emperor sold rights to collect revenues. Parthasarathi notes that in contrast to the assumptions of 19th century Western theorists and their narratives of "oriental despotism," European states were stronger and better centralized than Muslim, Indian, and Chinese empires. But it is not clear that this invalidates the reasoning of Adam Smith on free markets to the degree Parthasarathi suggests, given that Smith emphasized that a strong central state is imperative to protecting the operations of the market and enforcing rights. In a similar vein, Parthasarathi hints at but never explicitly addresses the outcomes of wars as a critical variable in England and India's divergent economic development. Parthasarathi gives no analysis, for example, for why the British were able to build an empire in India and win successive wars against Bengal, Mysore, and the Mughal and Maratha Empires. If British colonial rule was indeed the death knell for Indian industry, the causes for Britain's military victories against technologically advanced Indian states, despite the seeming disadvantages of fighting wars half a world away, become central to Parthasarathi's narrative. Parthasarathi's emphasis on the state may ultimately suggest that debates on the great divergence cannot be separated from questions of comparative state formation—a subject that has received more attention recently in political science and sociology than in history.

0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By asmurray5 It is a well documented book. 50 of 59 people found the following review helpful. The Rise of the West - A New Study By Amrit The last decade has seen a profusion of writing on the "rise of the West" - and Parthasarathi's work represents a well argued thesis that makes a valuable addition to the literature on the subject. Andre Frank's groundbreaking "Re-orient" perhaps represented the first major work in the current slew of writings on the subject, making an argument that the coming of Western dominance was largely founded on the arrival of Europeans in the Americas and the appropriation of its resources by Western powers especially its silver to buy their way to hegemony. Frank bases his argument primarily with reference to the comparative position of China vis a vis the West before and after about 1800, with the balance tipping towards the West in the early nineteenth century. Kenneth Pomeranz finds the origins of Western (British) dominance in the proximity of coal to England's industrial complexes, allowing for an energy revolution in Britain on which it could found fast growth whereas regions of China such as the Yangzi valley which though similar in key respects to England in the eighteenth century, were too far from the coal deposits of Northern China to create a similar set of synergies. Frank and Pomeranz are identified with what is called the "Californian school" which argues broadly for a historical position of Asian centrality, interrupted briefly by a period of Western dominance, with the traditional pattern based on an Asian centre now making a come back. John Hobson's *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, works within the same broad framework and explores the acquisition by Europeans of various Asian technologies such as gunpowder, the compass and even the steam engine to eventually overtake Asia. These explanations for Western dominance are based firmly on material forces - as do the explanations given by Ian Morris in his work on the same macro-historical question and Bin Wong. Older discussion on the subject emphasise ideological factors underpinning the West's dominance such as the famous Weber-Tawney thesis which looks to the rise of Protestantism as key to Western Europe's later dominance and its last iteration in David Landes writings emphasising various cultural attributes that were said to be uniquely European with its origins going back into the Middle Ages. Joel Mokyr's writings sit in the same tradition. Parthasarathi's work broadly sits within the Californian school and puts forward an explanation for Western dominance based on the specific patterns of world history during the period he studies from about 1600 to 1800 rather than on broad ideological constructs. He makes his arguments based on data from Britain (like Pomeranz) and unlike earlier writers from the California school, compares Britain with India (rather than China). He also provides comparative perspectives from China, Japan, the Ottoman Empire and France. Parthasarathi covers a broad sweep both in temporal and geographic terms that also looks at data from Africa and the Americas. Parthasarathi's arguments incorporate elements of the theses of other California school thinkers but adds

new elements to produce an original argument that emphasises the key role of State power in the rise of the West. He sets the scene with a survey of the world from about 1600 to 1700 to conclude that the most developed parts of the world such as Britain, the Yangzi delta, Japan and parts of India such as Gujarat, Bengal, the Coromandal were more alike than different. All were underpinned by robust manufacturing, high skill levels, an interest in knowledge and technological improvement, vibrant monetised economies and complex legal and commercial institutions. India in particular dominated the global market with its cottons, which were in demand throughout the world. The beginnings of British and subsequently European dominance lie in the eventually successful efforts by Britain to imitate and then overtake Indian cotton production and capture the lion's share of the global market. Key to this process was vigorous support from a strong interventionist state which provided British industry with tariff and other types of protections, including at times, prohibitions on Indian imports. He contrasts the policy of the Ottomans which was to ensure adequate supply of goods such as cottons to its peoples regardless of the origin of the goods - instead of making a determined effort encouraging local production as did Britain. Turkey by the end of the period of the study is in deep financial crisis and the "sick man of Europe". France also though like Britain attempts the use State power, does so less effectively and unlike Britain has limited access to the Atlantic trade. The next key development was the exploitation of coal in Britain and the energy revolution this creates. This was largely in response to deforestation reducing the availability of wood, the traditional fuel in most parts of the world. By contrast, China also suffering similar problems did not expand in the same way coal production, its coal recourses being more distant from the centres of industry. Japan follows a different path by effectively protecting its forests. India by contrast was not subject to any of these challenges and suffered no energy crisis on account of abundant forests and had little incentive to experiment with more efficient and plentiful energy production allowed by coal. The extensive uses of coal in Britain allows for an expansion of the iron industry which becomes a key factor underpinning the widening gap between Britain and the others. These coal-iron-energy complex by the end of the eighteenth century provides the basis for the the wide application revolutionary new technologies used in cotton production, namely the water frame, spinning jenny and the mule, eventually to make Britain the "workshop of the world". Underpinning these changes is a powerful British state that supports its merchants through protection and a policy of import substitution, the exploitation of coal and the development of new technologies. Britain's competitors did not use State power in quite the same thoroughgoing way. In his final Chapter, the role of the State assumes key significance. Britain hugely extends its lead (over India in particular) by having acquired political dominance over the subcontinent. Following policies that encourage imports of British manufactured goods, a withdrawal of State support for Indian enterprise and the consequent withering away of the technological and economic capabilities built up over the previous centuries, the gap widens - with insufficient levels of compensating European inputs to maintain a high growth pattern. Parthasarathi in emphasising the role of a powerful interventionist State in Britain does not exactly break new ground. Similar ground has been covered by Ha Joon Chang in his historical surveys on how countries became developed, which focus on the critical role of strong State driven economic policy (eg Kicking Away the Ladder). That was a view that was widely accepted if not conventional fifty years ago but was rapidly abandoned and then forgotten (at least in the West) after the neo-liberal ascendancy of 1980s and beyond. Parthasarathi shares with Chang views on the centrality of State action and Parthasarathi's original contribution to the current debate among historians is to introduce into the discussion in world history begun perhaps by Frank and Landes over a decade ago, the kinds of experiences previously written about by developmental economists. The debate on the "rise of the West" has its current counterpart in the study of the "rise of the East". The exercise of State power once again looms large and holds a mirror to the past economic development of the West. Despite the ritual pronouncements of Asian states in favour of free trade and their membership of the WTO, the lessons of Britain's rise through the exercise of State power do not appear to be missed in China, India and other high growth economies. These economies have travelled along a path that is similar to that of Britain under the Stuarts and early Hanoverians - or for that matter the US in the nineteenth century under the influence of Alexander Hamilton - of protecting infant industries followed by a later acceptance of a free trade position once one's protected industries are well established and strong enough to to compete in the world market. Parthasarathi's sets out an intriguing account of attacks on women wearing clothes made of Indian cloth and the tearing off of their dresses by mobs in Early Modern England. This will immediately resonate with any student of the colonial era nationalist movement in India where the compliment was returned with the destruction of British cloth by nationalists. It seems that in "East" and "West", protectionist economic went beyond State policy or economic theory and could and did become an affair of the street. Parthasarathi's study is rigorously empirical, supporting his arguments based on a detailed study of data rather than overriding theoretical constructs such as the "Protestant work ethic" or a "culture of reason". Explanations based on overriding theories such as this can be made to appear very convincing and by providing a simple explanation for a difficult subject obtain quick acceptance among a broad readership. Explanations based on empirical study can produce more complex answers - however those who have the patience to bear with arguments based on sifting through hard data may in the end be rewarded with a more satisfying and convincing explanation. Indeed, the new forms of cultural determinism that one sees taking hold during the last couple of decades in the study of history, when tested against the actual record, are apt to mislead as much as the older types

of crude economic determinism if not more so. Parthasarathi does a good job of puncturing these types culture based arguments to explain divergences in economic development based on the actual record. Joel Mokyr in his review of Parthasarathi's book on EH-Net does not appear to produce any knock out arguments to rebut Parthasarathi's arguments even if he raises some interesting questions. He does however make the point that despite the introduction of industrial revolution technologies to India in the nineteenth century, labour productivity was lower in India with higher rates of absenteeism, implying some kind of cultural difference, referring to Gregory Clark's controversial arguments along these lines. However, most developmental experts who find differences between the productivity of workers in poor and rich countries usually find that once basic nutrition and calorific intake is improved, these kinds of differentials reduce. It is also interesting that French government officials in the nineteenth century would express alarm and frustration at what they saw as the sloth of French peasants compared with their more industrious British peers. It is now thought that the "sloth" seen in French peasants may in fact have been the result of lower food intake and that their supposed laziness may in fact have been a perfectly rational way in which to work making the best use of their smaller calorific intake. One could suppose that something similar may have been happening with textile workers in nineteenth century India although a systematic study of comparative nutrition and health outcomes would be required to come to a conclusive view. Mira Wilkins study of the different levels of investment into British and Indian mills especially in management may also be relevant although Mokyr does not mention her work. Interestingly, idealistic explanations for the rise of the West though in the end perhaps less convincing when tested against the actual empirical data are remarkably resilient. Troublingly, one perhaps can also detect in an embryonic form at least similar types of idealistic agreement being mounted to explain the present the rise of the East. Commonly argued is the position that Confucianism in some way gives East Asia an advantage over others with its emphasis on hard work and discipline, mirroring in an eerie way the old Protestant work ethic argument. In the case of India, one sees a complex of ideas emerging that seek to argue India's revival in present times based on supposed virtues peculiar to India (for the example it is argued that Indians do business in ways that may hold an advantage over other models). It would be unfortunate if such arguments take hold and confuse and mislead in Asia, in the same way that similar arguments once did (and to some extent still do) in the West. Parthasarathi's work hopefully will help encourage those who try to explain the "rise of the East" in terms of a supposed "Asian values" framework to look to the hard data which may tell a different tale - and it is by the grunt work of sifting through that data that a historian is in the end best able to follow Von Ranke's injunction to tell it "as it happened". Parthasarathi's work, on this measure does not disappoint.

Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not provides a striking new answer to the classic question of why Europe industrialised from the late eighteenth century and Asia did not. Drawing significantly from the case of India, Prasannan Parthasarathi shows that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the advanced regions of Europe and Asia were more alike than different, both characterized by sophisticated and growing economies. Their subsequent divergence can be attributed to different competitive and ecological pressures that in turn produced varied state policies and economic outcomes. This account breaks with conventional views, which hold that divergence occurred because Europe possessed superior markets, rationality, science or institutions. It offers instead a groundbreaking rereading of global economic development that ranges from India, Japan and China to Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire and from the textile and coal industries to the roles of science, technology and the state.