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Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History (review)

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Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History.

By E. L. JONES. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 2nd ed. Pp. xlvii + 247. \$21.95 (paper).

Of all the questions asked about world history, one of the most important is: Why did the "industrial revolution" occur? The usual explanations start in either mid-eighteenth century Britain and emphasize factors unique to Britain, or in Europe as far back as the tenth century and emphasize factors unique to Europe (e.g., Hajnal's demographic thesis) but stressing continuities between pre-modern and industrial Europe (de Vries's "industrious revolution"), or with the global division of labor attendant upon the New World conquests (as in world systems analysis). More recently Frank (in *ReOrient*) and Pomeranz (in *The Great Divergence*) have proposed different storylines that critique Eurocentric explanations and pay much more attention to Asia in general and China in particular.

Growth Recurring, first published in 1988 and reissued in 2000, belongs in this class of explanations, but with a new twist. According to Jones, the focus on the causes of the industrial revolution (which he remembers having to tackle as a schoolboy in England) raises the wrong questions. Rather, Jones sees industrialization as but one manifestation of a broader phenomenon, which he dubs "intensive growth," and it is that which he thinks deserves the attention of historians. This book is the result of his search around the world for instances of intensive growth, which he finds not just in early modern Europe, but in Abbasid Persia (ninth century), Song China (tenth–thirteenth centuries), and Tokugawa Japan (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries).

Jones is interested in demonstrating many things about world history: that intensive economic growth (which he defines as rising per capita incomes) has occurred several times; that these instances could have developed further and faster had not they been cut short; that other parts of the world where economies grew ("extensively," i.e., not any faster than the population) had their chances for intensive growth stymied, largely by surplus-sucking empires and their elites; and that because intensive growth is a gradual process, industrialization represented not a rupture or "revolution" but a continuity with the past. Thus while his emphasis on continuities puts him in agreement with the "industrious revolution" folks, his argument that intensive growth occurred in several other times and places and thus was not unique to Europe puts him in the camp of non-Eurocentrists.

The reason Jones gives for not expecting economic growth to be limited to Europe is interesting. As an economic historian, Jones makes

clear his assumptions, in this case, about human beings everywhere on earth and their propensities, upon which he builds the scaffolding of his argument. Jones believes that the most parsimonious assumption one can make is that in any relatively complex society, there will always be individuals who seek to improve their material condition. Under most circumstances (which thus are amenable to historic, as opposed to economic or sociological, explanation), Jones believes, this striving is suffocated, while in a few instances (also amenable to historical explanation), an array of political, social, and economic forces allow individuals to seek to improve, and when that becomes a strong force, intensive economic growth breaks free and people's material lives are vastly improved, an outcome that Jones heartily applauds.

Because Jones postulates a propensity for growth to be more natural to human societies but recognizes that the instances of growth are rare, much of the book is devoted to identifying those forces which have suppressed economic growth. To narrow the scope of his inquiry, Jones first identifies those parts of the world that had both growing and increasingly dense populations, using those as evidence of what he calls "extensive growth": an agrarian economy had to expand to be able to support a larger population, and it had to grow somewhat faster than population to support non-farmers (e.g., rulers, bureaucrats, merchants, artisans). This exercise (ch. 5) leads him to focus on Eurasia, and to choose there the cases of late-imperial China, Tokugawa Japan, the Ottoman empire, Mughal India, and early modern Europe.

Because of his (admittedly) materialist assumptions, Jones does not have much interest in cultural explanations for differences in economic outcomes in world history. He does not simply dismiss Confucianism, Islam, Shinto, or Christianity (or Protestantism), but discusses the reasons cultural values do not offer good explanations for what happened in those societies (and hence contra Landes in *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* or Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*). Instead, Jones focuses on states and what they do or do not do to foster economic growth.

Nonetheless, Jones does not essentialize states, or invoke that most oppressive of states enshrined as Wittfogel's "oriental despotism" (a concept thankfully now in well-deserved disrepute). As Jones is at pains to prove through an examination of the economic revolution in Song China (ch. 4), "China's imperial state" cannot be used to explain late imperial economic stagnation (which he thinks there was) if basically the same state fostered economic growth under the Song. Instead, Jones looks for some explanation as to why various Asian empires fostered intensive growth around the first millennium, but failed to do so

later, identifying the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century and their aftermath, especially in China and India, as critical: "most tempting of all features of the invasion thesis is that western Europe and Japan both escaped the Mongol and later [i.e., Mughal and Manchu] conquests. . . . The coincidence of intensive growth at the extremities [of Eurasia] and reversion to extensive growth in conquered China and the rest of mainland Asia seems neat" (p. 110). Why?

"Lethargic states" (ch. 8) in most of Eurasia were among the most salient "derivative effects" (ch. 7) of the conquests, the exceptions being Japan (ch. 9) and Europe (ch. 10), where intensive growth continued. To Jones, the key to this differential outcome lay in the weaker states, for very different reasons, in Europe and Japan which allowed "market forces [to] push their way through" (p. 189). "Formulated in this way," Jones concludes, "Japanese and European history seem to be matters of accidentally contrived balances of forces. Indeed, why not?" (p. 190).

Growth Recurring is an interesting book, and needs to be taken seriously by anyone interested in explanations about how the modern world came to be. The twelve years since it was first published, though, have seen some important new work (especially recently, by Landes, Frank, and Pomeranz), none of which is addressed in the introduction to the second edition, a serious oversight for a book published in the year 2000.

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Beyond Binary Histories: Re-imagining Eurasia to c. 1830.

Edited by VICTOR LIEBERMAN. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. Pp. 325. \$21.95 (paper).

Victor Lieberman's book of nine essays undertakes a study of Eurasia between c. 1450 and 1830, giving special consideration to Japan, France, Russia, Vietnam, Burma, and Thailand. In the first essay, "Transcending East-West Dichotomies," Lieberman presents his rationale to examine and to compare these "six ostensibly disparate areas" during the early modern period, and to look for broad Eurasian patterns and commonalities. According to Lieberman, previous comparisons of Europe and Asia have struggled to explain European success and Asian failure, and have focused on the question: "Why was Asia different?" (p. 19). Scholars searched to identify the characteristics that produced modernization in the West, and then searched to find similar charac-