



**Joseph E. Inikori, ed.** *British Imperialism and Globalization, c. 1650-1960: Essays in Honour of Patrick O'Brien*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2022. 348 pp. \$105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78327-646-2.

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Joseph Inikori has assembled a cast of eminent economic historians from both sides of the Atlantic for a festschrift honoring Patrick O'Brien, one-time director of the Institute of Historical Research in London (1990-98) and founder of the Global Economic History Network in 2002 (from which would emerge the *Journal of Global History* in 2006). In collaboration with other economic historians, including a number of those featured in this collection, O'Brien pioneered a distinctively economic approach to global history, one that defined globalization largely in terms of market integration, however inequitably, tentatively, and incompletely it was achieved. Tirthankar Roy, a contributor to this volume, remarked in retrospect that "global economic history emerged from this collective exchange that forced area specialists like many of us to think out of the box" (p. 3). Yet this focus on global history as economic history prompted another contributor to recollect that "perhaps my most vivid memory is that Global History was very 'uncool'" (p. 3). By way of contrast, what had been called world history in North America was giving way to a different kind of global history, one which was less about the movement of goods or capital and instead focused on the transmission of peoples, ideas, and practices.

There is little to be gained by declaring one approach as more or less "cool" than the other; in

fact, we should be exploring ways to foster more dialogue between structural-materialist explanations and those drawing on the discursive and the contingent. But before doing so, we need to bring more historical attention to bear on global as well as regional economies and their interactions, and consider how far imperialism-as-globalization accounts for the so-called great divergence, the gap in terms of economic productivity and living standards that emerged in the nineteenth century between states bordering the North Atlantic (the "West") and those in the developing world (the "Rest"). The British Empire was the first empire to span all of the world's major regional economies, and the ten essays here do justice to its reach, with chapters on Britain, the East India Company, China, Australia and New Zealand, plus two on India and four on Africa.

Anthony Howe revisits the relationship between imperialism and free trade, highlighting how contemporary references to free trade were more often about rallying support than describing or even influencing actual policy. Giorgio Riello's chapter considers how the East India Company and its European competitors understood and engaged with local textile production. He reveals not only the complicated and differentiated nature of production along the Coromandel coast, but also how European traders had to adjust to and negoti-

ate with local merchants and weavers, and that European objectives were not inevitably pitted against local producers. Ken Pomeranz's chapter directly addresses one of the big questions within global history to which we have already alluded: namely, could the Industrial Revolution have happened anywhere else but Britain? Pomeranz compares and contrasts Britain and the Yangzi Delta, which both began the eighteenth century with broadly similar levels of agricultural productivity, commercialization, and handicraft production. Yet such circumstances were not in and of themselves sufficient to trigger an industrial takeoff in China. Part of the explanation is rooted in the energy-intensive nature of industrialization and how geography favored the UK when it came to fossil fuels. Pomeranz also examines government policies and their underlying calculations and legacies, and concludes that there might not have been an Industrial Revolution, or at least one at that time and place, were it not for Britain's overseas territories and imperial linkages, noting parenthetically "principally, but not exclusively in the Atlantic" (p. 96).

This focus on the Atlantic and how it provided the springboard from which the British could dominate other regional economies is an argument taken up by others in this volume. Joseph Inikori proposes a two-stage model of imperialism and globalization by showing how the British were able to use their control of the Atlantic as the basis from which they could "incorporate the economies of the rest of the world" (p. 98). In a data-rich chapter he closely scrutinizes the policies, practices, and institutions used by the British to stimulate commodity production for export trade in Sierra Leone, Gambia, Gold Coast, and Lagos. British manufacturers, backed by the imperial state, are shown to have been a powerful force in the region, suggesting that industrialists, and not just P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins's "gentlemanly capitalists," had a role to play in driving and shaping imperial expansion.[1] Gareth Austin extends this discussion still further by exploring how colo-

nial policies sought to integrate West Africa into the world economy while protecting African producers. The end result was a more regulated market than free-trade rhetoric might otherwise suggest, particularly insofar as land ownership was concerned, which in turn had the effect of encouraging peasants to produce for export markets.

Ralph Austen revisits a long-standing question in imperial history, namely whether there is any evidence that efforts to secure raw materials or control West African exports helped initiate the scramble for Africa. He concludes that trade was not a decisive factor, but this does not rule out the need for further scrutiny of how globalization and imperialism helped to transform African economies. Questions about the importance of export production are also evident in Erik Green's study of settler agriculture in Africa, though it is worth noting that this is another chapter that lies largely outside the long nineteenth century. Green shows how settler production, to be successful, all too often relied upon government support and interventions, particularly in securing access to cheaper labor as shown here in the case of tobacco farmers in Zimbabwe. Such situations created pockets of protectionism within an imperial framework that ostensibly rested on free-market forces. Where the government did not intervene on behalf of white settlers, as was the case with tea in Malawi, production remained with African peasants.

These essays are richly nuanced and well documented, and avoid sweeping generalizations or moralizations. Global forces are identified, yet the authors stress local dynamics and carefully detail regional contexts, which in turn creates spaces within which we can detect local agency. Globalization is treated as neither inevitable or as inherently desirable. An essay such as Prasannan Parthasarathi's on Tamilnad illuminates not only the tremendous human dislocations wrought by imperial control but also the accompanying environmental destruction. Deforestation arising from

the demand for fossil fuels, coupled with colonial policies privileging riverine irrigation over water tanks, constrained peasant access to fodder, fuel, and fish—dangerously so, as was the case in the 1870s when drought struck southern and central India. Tirthankar Roy's chapter on inequality, globalization, and imperialism offers a revisionist challenge to Marxist and neo-Marxist models of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian economic history. He tests and finds wanting the long-standing argument that imperialism and its specific manifestations of capitalism favored landed wealth and led to the deindustrialization of India as artisans and manufacturers became increasingly impoverished. He instead finds evidence that industry and the service sector in India grew, suggesting that some segments of society responded positively to globalization. The final chapter shifts to Australia and New Zealand and looks at how protectionism and efforts to preserve imperial preferences between 1930 and 1960 were deployed as bulwarks against globalization. Ensuring security and stability, including strict immigration controls, trumped growth as far as Depression-era and early Cold War politicians were concerned.

Taken together, these essays offer a telling reminder of the material and structural forces that operated upon and within the British Empire in the long nineteenth century, and whose collective impact continue to shape our world. The many tables and charts testify to the empirical rigor with which these authors address the topic. However, what is quite striking about this collection, at least to someone like myself who was first introduced to imperial history in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is what is missing—there is no mention of, much less engagement with, Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher (and Alice Denny), and their writings on imperialism and free trade that so heavily shaped earlier efforts at aligning imperial and economic history.[2] Yet on reflection, even though they are not individually invoked, the fact that we continue to debate the relationship

between free trade and imperialism (and now globalization) testifies to their ongoing historiographical relevance.

#### Notes

[1]. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1993).

[2]. Robinson and Gallagher, "The Imperialism of Free Trade, 1815-1914," *Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953): 1-15; Gallagher, Robinson, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1981).

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