

more experienced scholars contributing to this volume are biographically tied to the historiography of the past 30 years and its attendant controversies, and this needs to be understood to properly locate their analyses.

The Oxford History of the British Empire provided a sustained and coherent response to academic fragmentation. Its very success might call into question the need for additional volumes, but this collection richly offers the additional depth, new research and fresh interpretations that will continue to enliven an exciting field of historical studies. Readers of this journal might especially note that, while Indian historiography's impact in other areas has been felt for several years, there is a strong indication here that the political and economic history of India under British rule is increasingly being framed within a distinctively Asian sphere.

The East India Company: The World's Most Powerful Corporation

By Tirthankar ROY
New Delhi: Allan Lane, 2012. 268 pp.
ISBN: 978-0670085071 (Hardcover)

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After experiencing the “Hindu rate of growth”, India has been enjoying rapid economic development in the current globalized economy, in which the narratives of the British East India Company give modern multinational enterprises a meaningful historical lesson in many respects, including organisational structure, business practices, and morality. Roy's easy-to-read book on the Company's trading activities with India is a part of Penguin's *The Story of Indi-*

an Business series and targets not only a circle of academics but also a general audience. The story of this book spans from the English adventurers' efforts to access the Indian market before the Company's foundation until its final years. The point that distinguishes Roy's work from other books on a similar topic is that the story of the rise and fall of the Company is told not from the Metropolis' viewpoint but from India's. This book lacks footnotes due to its editorial policy; nevertheless, the author makes convincing arguments based on several contemporary and recent materials listed in the bibliography—although it should have included the Company's original records, such as of the India Office Records, for further studies.

Regarding the change of the Company's nature from a mercantile organisation to the ruler of India, Roy's argument appears rather conventional for current historians. He explains that this transformation is rooted in "the divided nature of the organisation" (p. 30). In an age of poor long-distance communication, perception of the Company's principals in London was often different from the reality that their semi-autonomous agents in India were facing. Consequently, as Roy repeatedly describes, to deal with local events in India, the Company's local officials ignored orders from London and initiated territorial acquisitions and expansions, often accompanied by military force, on behalf of the Company as well as their personal interests. Later, they obtained consent for their conducts. Nevertheless, although the interaction and relationship between these two groups was a key in understanding the change in the Company's nature, the author intentionally avoids detailed descriptions of the Company's management and internal politics in the Metropolis and focuses instead on its business in India. In consequence, he fails to sufficiently explain the overview of this transition.

As an economic historian, the author also insists that the Company played a role in bridging the gap between India and the world economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to his argument, the joint-stock company's large-scale purchases of local commodities and introduction of contractual purchases in indigenous commercial activities reshaped India's tradi-

tional business order. Eventually, by providing a better commercial environment to both the Europeans and the Indians, this new order resulted in rapid growth of commercial and manufacturing business in the Company's trading ports—such as Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta—which “made the world economy more accessible to the Indians” (p. 211).

Adversely, it also brought disputes and tensions between the Europeans and the Indians. In the past, Indian scholars as well as politicians emphasized the “drain of wealth” from their country after the Battle of Plassey was a continuing cause of Indian poverty. Although such a simple view with a strong nationalist bias has been revised in more careful and sophisticated arguments, even now, the narratives of the Company's conduct in India—for example, Nick Robins' work with a similar title and target audience (*The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational*. New York: Pluto Press, 2006)—are prone to the temptation of emphasising just plunders and savage economic conditions during the transformation period from a commercial organization to a governmental institution. In the meantime, Roy's stance in his book is much more neutral, and his arguments are balanced throughout the story.

Finally, coming back to the modern world, India's current rapidly growing economy and relatively optimistic future as one of the BRICS countries are owing not only to its inexhaustible pool of young and low-cost labour and vast domestic market but also its linguistic advantage, as many business critiques refer: English as a global language is creating new business opportunities, such as BPO activities, for Indians. In terms of number of speakers, it is a question why India became neither Portuguese- nor French-speaking country; the answer can obviously be traced back up to the Company's influence there a few hundred years ago. For instance, during the period of the Company's rule, contemporary Orientalist John Crawfurd described, “In the towns of Calcutta and Bombay, many of the native merchants have made themselves acquainted with the English language and literature, and speculate largely and boldly in foreign commercial adventure” (K. N. Chaudhuri, ed., *The Economic*

Development of India Under the East India Company 1814–58: A Selection of Contemporary Writings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 225).

This reviewer from a non-English-speaking country wishes the author had referred to this linguistic impact on the Indian business community. In addition, it would have been quite helpful if the author included a glossary of Indian terms for those unfamiliar with this aspect. In spite of these shortcomings, by examining the impact of the Europeans' trading organization and its activities in Indian business society, this introductory book brings new insights to the history of the East India Company.

The Uniqueness of Western Civilization

By Ricardo DUCHESNE

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Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2011. 540 pp.

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Why have the great accomplishments in the arts and sciences been overwhelmingly European and why is Europe the most creative culture in the world? One fails to be persuaded by Ricardo Duchesne's focal question in his heavily cited voluminous 540 page effort to prove that there is something "wrong" with the non-Western world. The author's objectives include tracing the devaluation of the Western world in academic culture and refuting the arguments of multicultural revisionists. He argues that the traditional Eurocentric historiography is important and that the development of a liberal democratic culture was indispensable in the