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Philip T. Hoffman, *Why did Europe conquer the World?* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015. pp. 288. 18 figs. 15 tabs ISBN 9780691139708 Hbk \$29.95 £19.95)

Philip Hoffman is professor at California Tech and has been a recent president of the Economic History Association and co-editor of the *Journal of Economic History*. His latest book is a masterful tackling of the question « why did Europe conquer the World? ». This is not the same question as « Why was Europe first? ». The conquest largely happened before the Industrial Revolution and, as chapter 7 makes clear, Hoffman does not argue that war, conquest and empire helped Europe become richer. Contra Allen and O'Brien, he argues that the conquest of the world was the sibling rather than the mother of modern economic growth: the institutions that allowed both events were the same.

The ultimate cause for these institutions and European specificity, chapter 4 explains, are to be found in political and religious history. The centuries of war after the fall of the Roman Empire created elites that valued glory, hated their enemies and punished cowards. Western Christianity did its part by working against the formation of a European hegemon. That was the perfect context for continuous warfare, especially as some states in Europe became very efficient in collecting resources. Furthermore (chapter 5) private entrepreneurs had an important role in European warfare. That spread the capacity for violence throughout society and meant that private enterprise could be tapped to pursue European domination of the world. Nothing of that kind emerged elsewhere where hegemons were able to rise, resource collection never became as efficient, or private entrepreneurs could not play an important role in the war sector.

Violent and glory-hungry elites seem unlikely candidates to be analysed as utility maximizing rational agents carefully considering the trade-off between the cost and the benefit of war. Still, the core of the argument (which is familiar to readers of Hoffman's scholarly articles) is organized around an economic model of tournament inspired from labour economics. The formal model might have been a useful way for the author to clarify his own thought, but it seems to me to be more of a distraction than a support to the argument. For example, p. 92, Hoffman write that '... when the Ottoman fought European leaders, they were contending for the same valuable prize'. That is indeed the case in the model, but the narrative argues convincingly elsewhere that the value of the prize was in the eye of the beholder and that glory was especially dear to Europeans monarchs (e.g. p. 25). Anyway, the book mobilizes data, anecdotal evidence and analytic narratives in a convincing way and it is a good thing that the formal presentation of the model is relegated to four appendices.

The specific political and religious history of Europe put European leaders in a constant rivalry situation in which war was a high-reward, low-risk activity. This was conducive to frequent inter-European wars yielding the learning by doing in gunpowder technology that allowed Europe to conquer the world.

Chapter 2 gives the conditions under which fast learning by doing will take place within a specific geopolitical area: frequent wars (implying that foes are motivated by a high prize, are within easy reach of one another and have comparable mobilisation capacities), high military spending (implying low cost of revenue collection), use of gunpowder technology and lack of obstacles to the circulation of military innovations. These conditions were continuously present in Europe and not elsewhere in Eurasia (chapter 3). China, the Ottoman Empire and Russia had less incentive to develop gunpowder technology because they were distracted by nomad foes. Japan was unlucky in enjoying peace during the Tokugawa period. It was too difficult for India's warring leaders to mobilize resources. In all these places, there were obstacles to the diffusion of European military innovations. As a result there was sustained growth of productivity in gunpowder technologies in Europe relative to the rest of Eurasia.

Chapter 6 discusses the nineteenth century. It is true that diplomacy kept Europe relatively peaceful from 1815 to 1914, but internal rivalry was still very important and, with the rise of the role of research and development in all aspect of industrial life, war was no longer necessary to technical progress in fighting.

My reservation with the role of modelling is more about rhetoric than with the substance of the book. I did enjoy it tremendously. It gives a place to contingency. It uses insights from various disciplines. I learned a lot, especially in the comparative discussions. Anyone interested in big, important historical questions should appreciate it.

GUILLAUME DAUDIN

*Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL Research University, IRD, LEDa, UMR [255] DIAL
Sciences Po, OFCE*