

PUBLISHED VERSION

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[The rural entrepreneurs: A history of the stock and station agent industry in Australia and New Zealand.](#) Journal of Economic History, 2002; 62(2):612-613

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23 April 2014

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and institutions, [yet] it spent far too little relative to what was needed to make a significant difference for the average Indian" (p. 273).

But greater public spending, as the dismal performance of the post-Independence Indian economy has shown, is not a panacea for India's age-old poverty. Roy only hints at "the sense of inertia that colonialism was powerless to change" which, as I have argued in *The Hindu Equilibrium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), has deep roots and is what needs to be explained. It is the continuing reluctance of Indian economic historians to take this long view which lends a degree of superficiality to their attempts to delineate the roots of stagnation and growth in South Asia.

While Roy's complaint that "there is no coherent non-Marxian theory on the origins of underdevelopment" (p. 11) by and large has been true till recently, this neglect is now being redressed, not least I hope by the present reviewer (see my *Unintended Consequences* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998]). The point being that, while there was not much to choose in standards of living between the great Eurasian civilizations in, say, the Middle Ages, one—the West—diverged and generated what I like to call Promethean intensive growth. To that extent it is right to try and explain the rise of the West. But the Indian story during the colonial period is important in demonstrating that India too (like Japan) saw the first shoots of this form of intensive growth in the nineteenth century, and it was the left-nationalist failure to recognize this and its basis—the free-trade laissez-faire regime along with the provision of the basic public goods—which led to the disastrous experiment with autarkic *dirigisme* in the Nehruvian era. If nothing else, this book provides a timely antidote to this continuing and dangerous misreading of colonial Indian economic history.

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The Rural Entrepreneurs: A History of the Stock and Station Agent Industry in Australia and New Zealand. By Simon Ville. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xiv, 259. \$64.95.

The "agent" is almost as emblematic of Australasian farming as akubra hats, water tanks, and windmills. The agent was an employee of "stock and station" firms, who provided farmers with a range of purchased inputs and other goods and services, and assisted with the marketing of their products. As the name implies, they originated in the mid-nineteenth century to serve the needs of pioneer sheep "stations." The firms later expanded their activities, partly in response to the farms themselves becoming multiproduct enterprises (combining wool with meat, wheat, and other grain crops), and partly to pursue full-line diversification. Having established a network of contacts with farmers through local agents in relation to the wool trade, a distribution system was in place to reap economies of scale or scope by catering to farmers' other needs such as finance, machinery, management advice, the sale or purchase of land and livestock, travel services, etc.

This book examines the history of this "industry" in Australia and New Zealand. After highlighting the importance of farming to the growth of these two economies, and the origins of the agents and their firms, Simon Ville adopts a topical rather than chronological treatment. Successive chapters explore the services agents provided relating to farm finance, the marketing of wool, the marketing of other farm products and farmland, and the provision of information and advice to farmers. Attention then turns to the changing structure of the agents' industry, the evolution of firms within the industry, and the extent of competition and cooperation between agents and between firms. In most chapters the reader is provided with an account of the relevant activities of the agents and firms, some note is

taken of suggestions from business history or organization theory, and then case studies or examples are provided from the business records of the firms.

There is a generous number of photographs and detailed references to the experiences of individual firms, suggesting an intended readership in the industry and the wider farming community. But the absence of a historical narrative approach may make the book less appealing for a general reader. Indeed, the text jumps around from period to period (as well as region to region within Australia and New Zealand), hence the reader is not provided with an integrated account of the historical evolution of the industry nor the agents' role and practices. The structure of the book thus implies an intention to assess the contributions a study of this industry can make to the literature relating to the emergence and evolution of private institutions that enhance efficiency. However, the brief references to this literature (covering, for example, information asymmetries, principal-agent problems, network externalities, scope economies, and the analysis of risk) are cursory and insufficiently integrated with the primary material.

There exists a substantial body of writing on the economics of the Australian wool industry that overlaps with topics raised here: for example, histories of wool marketing and of the pastoral finance companies by Noel Butlin, Alan Barnard, Neville Cain, John Bailey, and others. Although there are passing references to this literature, the book under review unfortunately does not attempt to locate its approach, analysis, or findings in the context of the debates to be found there; this task the readers will have to undertake themselves.

An assumption running through *The Rural Entrepreneurs* is that an important function of the agents was their transmission of specialist knowledge to farmers on a range of economic, scientific, and management-related topics. Yet agents were basically salesmen who informally acquired some specialist knowledge about their industry, but were not vital to farmers in this respect. As farming became more scientific, farmers' education levels rose (I doubt they were ever less than that of the typical agent). And farmers drew upon an array of overlapping sources of information and advice—including field days at experiment stations, the agricultural “shows” (fairs), the state departments of agriculture, the local veterinary surgeon, and rural social organizations—of which the agent was but one. A more balanced assessment of this particular role of agents is needed.

While offering a comprehensive description of the roles the stock and station agents played in the rural economies of Australasia, the book is cautious in venturing further. Just how important was this industry to rural efficiency and growth? Ville claims that the agent system emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in response to a crisis in the wool industry. But it is not clear what this crisis was, since the wool export trade was well developed by then. Nor is there explicit consideration of what other set of institutional arrangements for supplying inputs and marketing output might have been adopted. If the agent system was unique to Australasia, was this an institutional innovation induced by unique conditions, or a case of institutional path dependence originating in location- and period-specific features of the wool industry circa 1850?

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UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Colonial New England. By Gloria L. Main. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 237. \$49.95.

Family relationships were not immune to the complexities of settler life that are a consistent theme in much of the literature on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America.