Economics 485 Paper Assignment

Your assignment is to analyze an academic paper from an economic history journal (e.g. *The Journal of Economic History*, *Economic History Review*, *Explorations in Economic History, European Economic History Review*). The paper should be 3 pages. It should include an introduction, at least one section of analysis, and a conclusion. The paper must include answers to the following questions:

* What question is the paper addressing.
* What is the hypothesis of the paper;
* What is the structure of the paper;
* If there is a mathematical statement of the hypothesis, include it, and explain how it relates to the paper’s hypothesis;
* What evidence is presented and how does it support the hypothesis.

You should comment on any part of the paper’s analysis which you find weak, or, more positively, any part you find particularly clever.

You should relate the paper to any of the themes we have discussed in the class. As part of this, you may discuss why you chose this paper and why it is interesting to you.

Whenever possible, support your statements with direct quotes from the paper. Always give page numbers for quotes. Also, refer to tables and figures by their numbers.

As an example, consider the paper by David Landes, “Why Europe and the West? Why Not China?”

Question. Landes asks two questions. The first is why China failed to “generate a continuing, self-sustaining process of scientific and technological advance” as the West had done (p. 5). The second question was why China failed to learn from European science once contact began in the 16th century.

Hypothesis. Landes argues that China failed on both of these counts due to the values and structure of the Chinese economy.

Structure. An overview of Chinese inventions before European contact. A discussion of Chinese and European contacts from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Two sections discussion Chinese attitudes which led to failure.

Evidence:

Confucian were values were disdainful of science. It was “subjective” so that there was no clear “right” answer to strive for.

The society was overly bureaucratic. Successes were stolen by superiors; failures were blamed on subordinates. The was a strong disincentive for taking risks.

China was able to make copies of clocks and watch, as well as cannon and guns. But they made copies. They did not further the technology. Landes notes that a document on gunnery written by a European in collaboration with a Chinese colleague in 1643 was “revived and reprinted” in 1841. Chinese knowledge had stagnated in the intervening two decades, while European technology had made great strides.

Criticism. The treatment of Christianity does not draw a clear contrast with Confucianism. Though initially, Landes claims that it was Judeo-Christian attitudes to work and subordination of nature to man (p. 9) which spurred European technological advantage, later he suggests the Jesuits were not pushing science forward.

Links to class themes. On page 7. Landes quotes the Hongwu emperor’s favorite moral dicta: “the people will find their food sweet and their clothes beautiful.” The dicta suggests the people should be content with what they have. De Vries argues that it was people wanting tastier foods and more beautiful clothing which stimulated the industriousness which set the stage for the Industrial Revolution.

*(These are not the only pieces of evidence Landes presents, nor the only links. They are just examples.)*

How to find a paper:

One possibility is to search the journals I listed, all of which are available electronically on the library website. Alternatively, you can search ECONLIT. ECONLIT is also available on the library website, from the DATABASES tab.