"KICKING AWAY THE LADDER": DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (A BOOK REVIEW)

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About the Author

Dr Ha-Joon Chang (hjc1001/cecon.com.ac.uk) is a South-Korean institutional economist specializing in development economics and teaches in the Faculty of Economics, University of Cambridge. He was influenced by resounding and notable economists like Joseph Stigliz, John Maynard Keynes, Friedrich List, Friedrich Hayek and others. He is the Assistant Director of Development Studies at the University and a consultant for numerous international organizations like the Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank as well as to Oxfam and various United Nations Agencies. He is also a fellow at the Centre for Economic and Policy Research in Washington.

Dr Ha-Joon Chang is the author of several widely discussed policy books, most notably: "Kicking away the Ladder"–Development Strategy in Historical Perspective; "Bad Samaritans-Rich Nations, Poor Policies", "Reclaiming Development"; "23 Things they don't Tell you about Capitalism" and many published articles on economic development.

Though a neoliberal economist to the core, he adopted a historical analysis to buttress his approach to economic development succinctly in all his works. He is happily married with children.

ABSTRACT

This is a review of a book titled *Kicking Away the Ladder*, in which Ha-Joon Chang, the author, discussed how the now developed countries became wealthy and what lessons this should provide for establishing a suitable framework for developing countries today. His historical analysis shows rather convincingly that the now-developed countries used largely employed interventionist policies to grow, and that their institutions were poorly developed when they themselves were developing countries. In fact, today's developing countries are fewer protectionists and have better institutions than the now-developed countries had at comparable stages of development. The work concludes that the current framework in effect "Kicks away the ladder" the now developed countries used to achieve wealth and prosperity.

Key Words: Free Trade, Protectionism, Institutions Policy, Infant Industry, Prosperity, Economic Development.

Introduction

Kicking Away the Ladder is the main title of a book on economic development in historical perspective published by Anthem Press in 2002 authored by Ha-Joon Chang (2002), the Assistant Director of Development Studies at the University of Cambridge and a consultant for numerous International Organisations, including various UN agencies.

According to Eblemsvag (2005), the term, "*Kicking Away the Ladder*", is borrowed from an earlier work on economic development by the German economist, Friedrich List (1789-1846). List, commonly known as the father of the "*infant industry argument"*, argued in his "*The National System of Political Economy"*, first published in 1841, that Britain was the first country to perfect the art of infant industry promotion: "Having attained to a certain grade of development by means of free trade, the great monarchies (of Britain) perceived that the highest degree of civilization, power, and wealth can only be attained by a combination of manufacturers and commerce with agriculture"(List 1885, Page 111)

According to Chang (p.1), this description is very different from the generally accepted truth that Britain became the world's first industrial superpower because of its laissez-faire policy, while France fell behind as a result of its interventionist policies. According to List, at some point when economic greatness was secured, Britain turned around and became a strong advocate for free trade. List agrees that free trade is beneficial-but only between states at similar level of industrial development, which is why he (List) according to Chang (p. 2) strongly supported the customs union between the German states. The change in British policy, was according to List, done of nationalistic purposes (List 1885), Pages 295-296:

> *It is a very common clever device that when anyone has attained the summit of greatness, he kicks away the ladder by which he has climbed up, in order to deprive others of the means of climbing up after him. In this lies the secret of the cosmopolitical doctrine of Adam Smith, and of the cosmopolitical tendencies of his great contemporary William Pitt, and of all his successors in the British government administrations. Any nation which by means of protective duties and restrictions on navigation has raised her manufacturing power and her navigation to such a degree of development that no other nation can sustain free competition with her, can do nothing wiser than to throw away these ladders of her greatness, to preach to other nations the benefits of free trade, and to declare in penitent tones that she has hitherto wandered in the paths of error, and has now for the first time succeeded in discovering the truth ...*

From this background, Chang aims to "discuss a contemporary problem (how developing countries should develop further) with the help of history" (p.8), using the same "concrete and inductive" approach that List did. Chang is essentially asking whether, "the developed countries are somehow trying to hide the "secrets of their success", and "how did the rich countries become rich?" (p. 2).

More on the Case

This book deals with the contrast between mainstream and heterodox approaches to economic development of the less developed countries (LDCs) in an eclectic manner. Central to the neoliberal discourse on globalization is the conviction that free trade, more than free movements of capital and /or labour, is the key to global prosperity.

Even many of those who are not enthusiastic about all aspects of globalization seem to agree that free trade is the most benign, or at least a less problematic, element in the progress of globalization. Part of the conviction in free trade that the proponents of globalization possess comes from the belief that economic theory has irrefutably established the superiority of free trade, even though there are formal models which show free trade may not be the best (FPIF, 2003). However, even the builders of those models, such as Paul Krugman, argue that free trade is still the best policy because interventionist trade policies are almost certain to be politically abused (FPIF, 2003). Even more powerful for the proponents of free trade, is their belief that history is on their side. After all, the defenders of free trade ask, whether it not through free trade that the entire world's developed countries have become rich. They wonder, what some developed countries think, when they refuse to adopt such a tried and tested recipe for economic development.

To this end, there is currently great pressure on LDCs from now developed countries (NDCs), and the international development policy establishment as well as the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) that it controls, to adopt a set of "good policies" (restrictive macroeconomic policy, liberalization of international trade and investment, privatization and deregulation etc.) prescribed by the so-called Washington Consensus, and "good institutions" (democracy, good bureaucracy, an independent judiciary, strongly protected private property rights (including intellectual property rights) and transparent and market –oriented corporate governance and financial institutions (including a politically independent Central Bank) etc (p.1) to foster economic development.

Naturally, there have been heated debates on whether these recommended policies and institutions are "appropriate" for developing countries. However, curiously, even many of those who are sceptical of the applicability of these policies and institutions to the developing countries take it for granted that these were the policies and the institutions that were used by the NDCs when they themselves were developing countries, contrary to the basis of the policies and the institutions that they now recommend to, and often force upon, the LDCs. Unfortunately, this fact is little known these days because the "official historians" of capitalism have been very successful in re-writing its history.

The author uses an historical perspective which in effect says; to know the present we must look into the past and to know the future we must look into the past and the present to demonstrate that in their initial stages of development, the NDCs did apply protectionist (Industry, Trade and Technology, (ITT) policies and when they were at the same stages of development, they did not achieve a high level of institutional development in comparison with the now LDCs. Debunking the myth of free trade from the historical perspective demonstrates that there is an urgent need for thoroughly rethinking some key conventional wisdom in the debate on trade policy, and more broadly on globalization.

Despite its relative brevity, the book contains four chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic and develops the overall argument. Chapters two (2) and three (3) provide the empirical flesh of the investigation, while the fourth chapter concludes with lessons for the present.

In the introductory chapter, the author outlines what is often presented as "good policies and institutions" advanced by the developed world as an essential and indispensable background for economic development in LDCs. This contention is generating heated debate nowadays. The orthodox view, which assumes that the developed countries applied the principles of free trade and laissez-faire in the initial phases of their development, does not correspond to reality, if we study it within a historical perspective. As Chang, (2002) puts it, "a closer look at the history of capitalism, however reveals a very different story".

When they were developing countries themselves, virtually all of today's developed countries did not practice free trade (and laissez-faire industrial policy as its domestic counterpart). Rather, they promoted their national industries through tariffs, subsidies, and other measures. Particularly notable is the fact that the gap between "real" and "imagined" histories of trade policy is the greatest in relation to Britain and the United states, which are conventionally believed to have reached the top of the world's economic hierarchy by adopting free trade when other countries were stuck with outdated mercantilist policies. The two countries were in fact, often the pioneers and frequently the most ardent users of interventionist trade and industrial policy measures in their early stages of development.

The author argues that this cannot be further from the truth, the NDCs did not get where they are now through the policies and the institutions they recommend to the LDCs today. Most of them actively used "bad" trade and industrial policies, such as in fact industry protection and export subsidies-practices frowned upon, if not actively banned, by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) these days. He points accurately to Friedrich List, commonly known as the "father of the infant industry" argument, who applied history-based methods in analysing the economic development of the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) during the nineteenth century.

Almost all of today's rich countries used tariff protection and subsidies to develop their industries. Interestingly, Britain and the USA, the two countries that are supposed to have reached the summit of the World economy through their free-market, free trade policy, are actually the ones that had most aggressively used protection and subsidies.

List was not alone in seeing the matter in this light. Many American thinkers shared this view. Indeed, it was American thinkers like Alexander Hamilton, the first Treasury Secretary of the USA, and the economist David Raymond, who first systematically developed the Infant industry argument. Indeed, List who is commonly known as the father of infant industry argument, in fact, started out as a free trader (he was an ardent supporter of German Customs Union –Zollverein) and learnt about this argument during his exile in the USA from 1825to 1830 (Chang, 2003).

Chang ends chapter one by providing an overview of the book and a "health Warning"; "what this book is about to say will undoubtedly disturb many people both intellectually and morally" (p. 2).

In chapter two, the investigation turns to the nature of industrial, trade and technology policy applied by the NDCs during their early stage of development, ranging from fourteenth century England all the way to the recent success of the East Asian Tiger. Chang discusses many of the leading economies at the time Britain, USA, German France, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Japan as well as their colonies when applicable. The arguments are supported and substantiated with numerous details and references, which brings the needed thoroughness to make claims of the sort that ... "it was the UK and the USA, the supposed homes of free trade policy which used tariff protection most aggressively" (p. 59). That is, what might come as a surprise to many readers is that Great Britain apparently has not been the laissez-faire poster child of the nineteenth century as described by conventional historical accounts, but in fact has meddled more with its economy than "interventionist" France or Germany (Ruckert, 2006).

Change painstakingly documents how all of today's developed countries have used highly interventionist industrial, trade and technology policies to promote economic development. Prominent examples of such interventionist policies include tariffs on trade, protection of infant industries, business subsidies, poaching of highly skilled and knowledgeable workers, and the theft of intellectual property. While these interventionist policy tools might have become more variegated and complex (but possibly more effective) over the course of history, the general pattern of state intervention has nevertheless remained in place.

For brevity, some excerpts from the discussions on Britain and the US suffice here. Britain was "... the only country that can claim to have practiced total free trade at one stage in history ..." (p. 19) but it did not last long. Through colonization and the Navigation Acts, which required that trade with Britain had to be conducted on British ships, Britain managed to increasingly capture trade prior to1721.

However, after 1721 policies were deliberately aimed at promoting manufacturing industries. In the words of Brisco (1907), "manufacturers had to be protected at home from competition with foreign finished products; free exportation of finished articles had to be secured; and where possible, encouragement had to be given by bounty and allowance". Not until 1846, were major changes introduced – but arguably as "... an act of free trade imperialism" (p. 23).

USA is commonly seen as a strong supporter of free trade, but:

> *"Was only after Second World War that the USA with its industrial supremacy unchallenged finally liberalised its trade and started championing the cause of free trade. However, it should be noted that the USA never practiced free trade to the same degree as Britain did during its free trade period (1860 to 1932)" (Garranty and Carnes 2000, p 29).*

In fact, the USA during the 19th century "... was not only the strongest bastion of protectionist policies, but also their intellectual home" (p.13). Even more disturbingly, "... the importance of the tariff issue in causing the secession "the civil war cannot be over emphasized", indeed "... Lincoln made it clear that he was quite willing to allow slavery in the southern states in order to keep the union together. He enacted slave emancipation in the autumn of 1962 as a strategic ore to win the war rather than out of moral conviction" (Garranty and Carnes, 2000).

At the end of the chapter, Chang compares the LDCs with the NDCs using the purchasing power parity income measures. He contends that productivity gap between todays developed and developing countries is much greater than that which used to exist between the more developed and less developed NDCs in earlier times. This means that today's LDCs need to impose much higher rates of tariff than those used by the NDCs in the past, if they are to provide the same degree of actual protection to their industries as that once accorded to the NDC industries. (p. 67). The author makes the case undoubtedly clear and convincing on the "that" policy level by ending chapter two in a rather typical way stating that "today's developing countries are actually less protectionist than the NDCs used to be". (P. 68).

In the third chapter, Chang contemplates the relationship between political institutions and economic development, a classical question that has haunted generations of development scholars. While until recently the development community was only marginally concerned with political structures, "good governance" has become a central concern of most development institutions over the course of the 1990s, and political conditionalities have been increasingly attached to concessional finance (Ruckert, 2006).

The discussion on institutional development is less clear than the discussion on policies because the actual historical traces of what took place are less clear and it is difficult to assess how well the institutions actually worked. From his discussion on democracy, Chang concludes "this shows that the idea, if not necessarily the practice, of universal suffrage is much more widely accepted in today's developing countries than it was in the NDCs when they were at similar stages of development" (p. 76). The same turns out to be the case for bureaucracy, intellectual property rights and public finance institutions. For institutions such as the judiciary, limited liability, bankruptcy law, audit, financial reporting, information disclosure, completion law, banking, banking regulation, central banking, securities regulation, social welfare institutions, however, the discussion is relatively unclear as to how well today's developing countries are doing compared to the NDCs at a comparable level of development (Embelmsvag, 2005). But overall, Chang concludes that "contemporary developing countries have much higher levels of institutional development than the NDCs did at comparable stages of development" (P. 111).

One important conclusion that emerges from the history of institutional development is that, it took the developed countries a long time to develop institutions in their earlier days of development. Institutions typically took decades, and sometimes generations, to develop. Just to give one example, the need for central banking was perceived at least in some circles from at least the 17 century, but the first "real" Central Bank, the Bank of England, was instituted only in 1844, some two centuries later (Chang 2003).

More importantly, however, is the fact that "...many of the institutions that are these days regarded as a necessary condition for economic development were actually in large part the outcome, rather than the cause of economic development in the NDCs. This is not [his italics] to say that developing should not adopt the institutions which currently prevail in developed countries". (P. 10-11). Another important fact is that "...it took the NDCs decades, if not centuries, to develop institutions from the time when the need for them began to be perceived". (p.15). hence, "...the currently popular demand that developing countries should adopt "world standard" institutions right away, or at least within the next 5 to 10 years, or face punishment for not doing so, seems to be at odds with the historical experiences of the NDCs that are making these very demands" (P. 117).

If the policies and institutions that the rich countries are recommending to the poor countries are not the ones that they themselves used when they were developing, what is going on? We can only conclude that the rich countries are trying to kick away the ladder that allowed them to climb where they are. It is no coincidence that economic development has become more difficult and stunted during the last two decades when the developed countries started turning on the pressure on the developing countries to adopt the so-called "global standard" policies and institutions. During this period, the average annual per capita income growth for the developing countries has been halved from three per cent in the previous two decades (1960-1980) to one and a half per cent. In particular, Latin America virtually stopped growing, while sub-Saharan Africa and most ex-communist countries have experienced a fall in absolute income. Economic instability has increased markedly, as manifested in the dozens of financial crises we have witnessed over the last decade alone. Income inequality has been growing in many developing countries and poverty has increased, in a significant number of them (Chang, 2003).The author also compares the per capita incomes table of the richest countries in 1975 with the present day developing countries. (p. 122-123) and concludes by asking the question: where were the NDCs when they were developing?

In this final chapter, Chang presents the lessons for the present – what should history teach us? Concerning "good policies" he identifies an apparent paradox stating that "all countries, but especially the developing countries, grew much faster when they used 'bad' policies during the 1960 -1980 period, than when they used 'good' ones during the following two decades" (p. 129). From this and all the other arguments presented earlier in the book, he concludes that interventionist policies – are more attuned to the historical record. Hence "...in recommending the allegedly "good" policies, the NDCs are in effect "*Kicking Away the Ladder*" by which they have climbed to the top" (P. 129).

While he agrees that 'good' institutions have "helped the NDCs to grow quickly by providing them with greater macroeconomic and financial stability better resource allocation and greater social peace" (Armstrong, Glyn and Harrison1991), he claims that "by demanding from developing countries institutional standards that they, themselves had never attained at comparable levels of development, the NDCs are effectively adopting double standards, and hurting the developing countries by imposing on them many institutions that they neither need nor can afford" (p. 135). The main problem with this view is that setting up "good institutions" might be too demanding for developing countries in terms of their resources and could lead to the draining of revenues from other more important areas. Thus "...the NDCs are "*Kicking Away the Ladder*", not only in the area of policy, but also in the area of institutions".

This classic represents an enormous, academic, theoretical and empirical contribution to the field of development as it suggests a distinct perspective on the study of the question of development. In addition, the language of the book makes it very understandable and any reader can easily grasp the main ideas outlined therein. The reader doesn't have to necessarily be an expert in the due field. Chang, in his book, uses a historical analytical method to back up his main arguments with empirical facts and from a theoretical perspective, he clearly undermines the mainstream view with the argument he advances to support his position. In this way, he positions himself on a traditional nationalist approach. Furthermore, he presents the information tables to clarify his ideas with visible facts rather than just presenting arguments. Moreover, he successfully uses materials and facts from the data of the international organisations to make arguments against their actual positions besides referring to a vast amount of literature. Albeit very briefly in the end, he suggests a handful of policy recommendations.

To him, policy related conditionalities attached to financial assistance from International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank or from the donor governments should be radically changed, on the recognition that many of the policies that are these days considered "bad" are in fact, not, and that there are no "best practice" policies that everyone should use. Improvements in institutions should be encouraged, but this should not be equated with imposing a fixed set of institutions on all countries.

Lastly, he argues that by adopting policies and institutions that are more suitable to their stages of development and to other conditions they face, the developing countries will be able to grow faster. This will benefit not only the developing countries but the developed countries in the long run, as it will increase the trade and investment opportunities available to the developing countries.

This provocative and inciting presentation by Chang can be compared to the classic by Walter Rodney in his book, "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" (1972). Rodney too took a historical approach to the question of development in Africa by arguing that Africa was developing at its own pace until she was hijacked and forcefully integrated into the very structure of the developed capitalist economies, which are integrated in a manner that is unfavourable to Africa and ensures that Africa is dependent on the big capitalist countries (p. 30). Rodney concludes succinctly that "the facts and interpretations that follow will make a small contribution towards reinforcing the conclusion that African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries" (p. Viii).

Some Final Comments

The historical research Chang has assembled is in-depth though, and is to be commended for this wide ranging study. The book "Kicking Away the Ladder" on the whole create some very positive impressions, represents a welcome and much needed addition to the development literature. But like Marx, after making an excellent historical analysis, he draws some erroneous conclusions and there are also some points that should be highlighted in regard to omissions, shortcomings and ambiguous ideas that are presented. The only possible objection Chang accepts to his arguments is that it can be shown that "things" are different today than when the NDCs developed (Emblemsvag, 2005).

While Chang presents a comprehensive synthesis of some of the historical literature on economic development, his book arguably lacks theoretical originality. Chang does not provide a novel theoretical insight in the book that goes beyond the strikingly similar argument that has been developed in the early 1980s by the two German scholars, Ulrich Menzel and Dieter Senghaa's. Chang is aware of Senghaa's work and claims to be more comprehensive than him, but only references, one out of a number of books that Senghaas published on development strategy in historical perspective. (Rukert, 2006).

In addition, Chang can be criticized for his superficial treatment of some country cases. It is questionable whether conclusive evidence about the historical development of a country can be produced in less than one page, as is the case in his analysis of Belgium and Switzerland. Especially in the last sections of the second and third chapters, the author compares the developed and developing countries, but the comparisons are very limited. The author discusses some developed countries in great detail particularly Britain and the USA, but there is a lack of such detailed information for the reader on the side of the developing countries. He rather subsumes developing countries into sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, etc. (P. 134). In the historical approach the cost of this high level aggregation is that omitted details matter. The author should have also assessed each LDC, the individual country's situation on a case by case basis.

What is even more problematic is that the book does not seriously investigate the *various channels and mechanisms* through which trade policy affects economic growth. As critics have been quick to point out, a correlation between protectionist policies and economic growth does not prove that protectionist policies are the cause of economic growth. Perhaps, the success of the NDCs materialized despite the *distortions and inefficiencies* associated with interventionist policies, the well-known argument against protectionism put forth by neo-liberals. To insulate himself from this criticism, Chang could have undertaken a counter-factual analysis to determine the magnitude of benefits and costs of infant industry policy and to discount other factors emphasized by contending theories of development.

Also, very importantly, Chang disregards the role that colonialism and imperialism (in the form of exploitation, plunder, and theft of resources) have played in the development of nineteenth century Europe. This is not a small oversight, given that some developing countries have transferred substantial amounts of their national wealth to imperial powers during the colonial period. This oversight is linked to the way in which Chang apolitically conceptualizes development as a technical process that simply requires the right policies, without consideration for (international and domestic) power relations that lie at the heart of the development process (Rakert, 2006).

The author came to the conclusion that in the last two decades, the developing countries growth rate has decreased. "In fact, growth has markedly decelerated during the last two decades, especially in the developing countries, when compared to the 1960-1980 period when "bad" policies prevailed" (P. 128).Which factors led him to conclude that it was open and liberal economic policies that led to the fall in the growth rate in the last two decades? He did not underline the internal problems that existed in developing countries and passionately assumed they (LDCs) are a homogenous group with the same resource endowment base, political structure, historical experience, fiscal architecture, value systems and ideologies, religious and cultural undertones, which could ultimately lead to failure in growth if these institutions mentioned are not managed diligently in a developing country.

Also, the author does not take the facts into consideration that the overall growth rate in the 1970s could be positively influenced by high oil prices stemming from the Arab oil embargo and the growth in the 1960s could be the product of general post war development and /or probably multiplier effects of the Marshall plan or cold war politics that dominated at that period. As Rodney notes, "experiences of other countries that have chosen a *different path*, a path of economic reconstruction, are most instructive here. Take North Korea or Abaia for example. Both these countries were underdeveloped as late as the 1950s. The reason why they have been able to register most outstanding progress is that they have decided to opt out of production for the so-called world market and diverted their resources towards the development of materials and technological base internally. (P. 351).

The author talks about institutions but he places limits "... even when we agree that institutions are "good" or even "necessary", we have to be careful in specifying their exact shapes". (P. 130); and on the validity of the idea of democracy, he contends that it includes more than transparent elections. Even "if good" institutions are introduced under global pressure they may not deliver the expected results if they cannot be effectively enforced" (137) by whom?

On purpose or unintentionally, but then it leaves some matters unclear for a reader who wants to dig deeper into the topic. In our opinion, it is the main disadvantage of the historical method, which analyses the issues through historical facts, but restrains itself to determinism, and bases the arguments on certain assumptions derived only from historical facts.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly *Kicking Away the Ladder* is a must-read masterpiece that is critically and cogently argued, carefully grounded, aptly presented and focussed essentially on the enrichment of current development theory for anybody interested in development strategy, and will prove to be a significant contribution to the development literature. At the same time, it will also provide new intellectual ammunition to those critics of the IFIs who are uncomfortable with the neoliberal policy advice given by the World Bank and the IMF over the last two decades. The author's central message has added profound insights and useful perspectives in the nature of the development process. It evidently represents a new wave of challenge to contemporary policy. Its invaluable contribution to current debates on development has heightened the tempo and direction of such debates.

Finally, because of its accessibility and clear language, the book could also be used in the classroom and will be of interest to non-academic readers, intrigued by development questions. This is the author's magnum opus.

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