



Discussion of Elis, Haber, and Horrillo, “Transport Corridors”

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Many key lessons from geography + history!

- Guns, Germs, and Steel
- Partition of Africa as a natural experiment
- Others (later slides)
- This paper follows in that tradition
 - Adam Smith's extent of the market — measured by transport corridors — is predictive of long-run economic development

What is this?



Korea

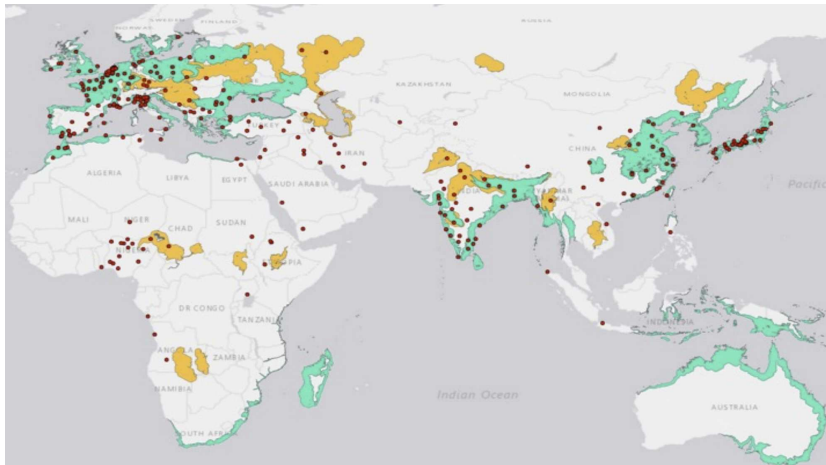


What is their measure of Smith's extent of the market?

- Geography = transport corridors
- Top quartile of potential agricultural productivity
- With at least one natural harbor

*How much highly-productive agricultural land with at least one harbor
can you reach with the transportation technology of 1700 within one day(?)*

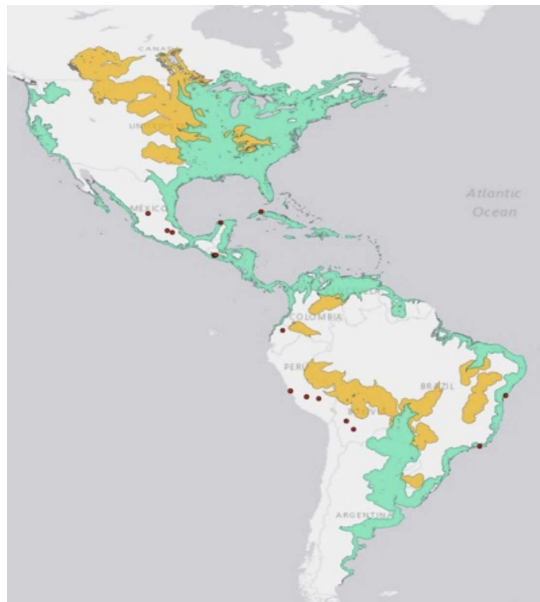
Key Result for 1700: Old World



Correlation

- If there is one city, there is likely to be another nearby
- Why?
 - Agglomeration effects / increasing returns of some kind?
 - Common “shocks” = common unmeasured advantages
- Would be great to hear the stories of Africa and the Middle East
 - The exceptions are as interesting as the observations that fit the hypothesis

Key Result for 1700: New World



New World = out of sample test

- Hypothesis is much less successful in New World in 1700
- Why?
 - No large transport animals until 1500 (horse, ox)
 - Philadelphia / East coast is a long way from the Bering strait. Rockies.
 - But still, people eventually made it. But they did not thrive like they did in Mexico, Peru, etc. Why not? They had 10,000 years!
 - Nothing special about the choice of 1700 but it makes the America's test strong
 - What does it tell us that the east coast is so successful in 1850 and today?

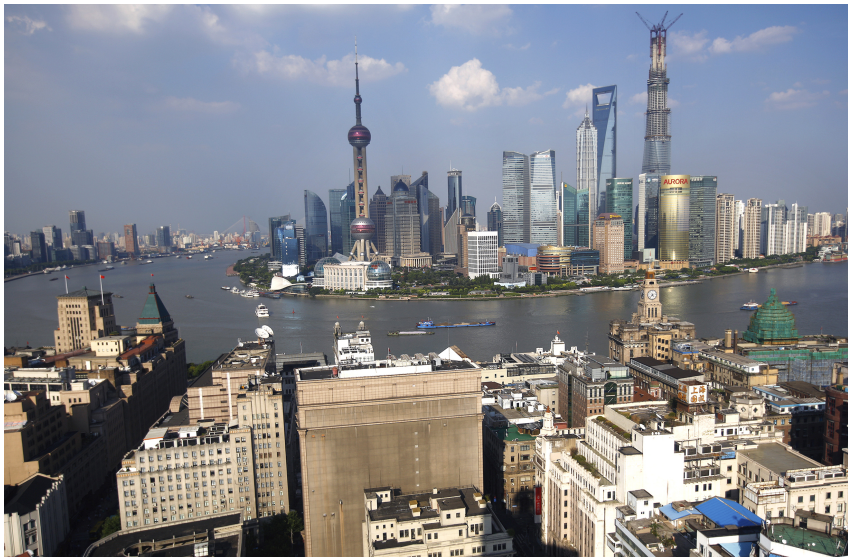
Questions

- Why is population density of SE Asia so much higher (people, not income per person) vs Europe?
- Where hypothesis succeeds versus fails:
 - Africa and the Middle East (cities without geographic advantages)
 - Madagascar versus Japan
 - Australia versus India
- Regression as a way to quantify predictive success and measure how it changes over time and across regions. And role of different components (geography, agriculture, harbors)
- Geography as a predictor versus causal effect (e.g. distance from the equator)

Shanghai 1987



Shanghai 2013



Fascinating paper on a great topic!
Very useful data for future researchers