public. That arc, and the specifics of changes in police powers—their propagation through space and time, overlaps and contradictions with central powers, and so forth—are at best badly captured, she argues, by our traditional views of the French state as the very model of a centralized system.

In the end, then, this book is a congeries of major steps forward from the proposition that began this review. And you will even learn something about plain old government armies along the way.

Historical Dynamics: Why States Rise and Fall. By Peter Turchin. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003. Pp. xii+245. $35.00.

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This book intends to show that the rise and fall of agrarian empires can be modeled mathematically based on two cyclic mechanisms. The first is the wax and wane of *asabiya* (a concept Peter Turchin borrows from Ibn Khaldun to refer to the level of solidarity of the people within a polity; however, the book provides neither a clear definition of the concept nor a way to measure it empirically). Turchin argues that metaethnic competition at the frontiers not only enhances the asabiya of each ethnic group but also enables a group with higher asabiya to conquer the weaker groups and establish an empire. However, once an empire is established, asabiya will gradually decline at its center due to the lack of external threats and internal competition. Meanwhile, new metaethnhic competitions at the frontiers will lead to the emergence of a new group with higher asabiya. This group crushes the old empire. Thus the cycle goes. Turchin's second mechanism concerns the interaction between the human population density and political fortune of an empire. Here, he argues that the interaction between demography and politics will lead to the following cyclic pattern: increase in population → war and political instability → depopulation → political stability → increase in population→.

The book is well organized and clearly argued. It is written in such an accessible manner that a scholar with little mathematical training should be able to grasp most of the analyses. Moreover, unlike some simple-minded mathematical modelers, Turchin is very familiar with the relevant literature and has made a genuine effort to incorporate historical data into his models. I have learned a great deal from this work, and I strongly recommend it to scholars who are interested in historical sociology and mathematic modeling in social sciences.

This said, however, I would like to point out some of the problems of this book. I start with empirical issues. Turchin's theory of asabiya, which he considers the book's "most novel development" (p. 197), is problematic. Before the rise of nationalism and nation-states, the strength of a state

largely depended on the state's capacity to cage the domestic population into a better organized polity on the one hand, and to cut deals with (or co-opt) regional elites on the other hand. Mass-based solidarity that is crucial to the existence and strength of today's nation-states has little to do with the rise and fall of most agrarian empires. Since political deals between the imperial court and regional elites were often the basis for the existence of an empire, an empire could sometimes be formed with neither elite-based nor mass-based common identity. In fact, across Eurasia, the only empire that had developed a very strong pro-state elite culture and solidarity was China. Yet, the rise and fall of most Chinese empires was caused by domestic rebellions and civil wars, which bore little relevance to Turchin's metaethnic frontier theory.

Turchin's demographic-structural theory is also dubious. This is not to say that human population density does not have an impact on politics; its impact is huge. The issue is whether depopulation always results from political instability, whether political instability is always caused by high population density, and, most important, whether human population has a constant impact on politics throughout the history of agrarian empires. To these questions, the answers could all be negative. In fact, even by reading Turchin's own description of the secular waves in France and Russia (chap. 9), we can see that while some cases of depopulation were the result of political instability, others were caused by such factors as epidemics and famine. My hunch is that, during the entire era of agrarian empires, the years between 1500 and 1900 C.E. was the period when population density had the strongest impact on politics. This is because human population in every corner of Eurasia grew in an exponential manner after 1500 C.E. (in other words, mortality was no longer the most crucial check on human population), but the mechanisms of fertility control of human population (typically associated with industrialized nations) had not yet come into play.

The above, however, are all relatively minor problems. For example, although population density may not have had a strong and constant impact on politics as Turchin claims, few will deny that it always existed as a major mechanism behind agrarian politics. Thus, if Turchin were to argue that the demographic-structural theory was built not for explaining empirical reality but for capturing the functioning of one of the important mechanisms behind the politics of agrarian empires, his argument would certainly win more acceptance. A more fundamental question for mathematical historical sociology is whether we can treat a type of human society (say agrarian empires) as a system whose dynamics are determined by a number of mechanisms with a fixed time-invariant relationship. Obviously, Turchin believes we can (once we have good data). Therefore, in the final chapters, he attempts to link the "different mechanisms" that he constructs in the book "into an integrated whole" (p. 200). Yet, most historians believe that the importance of any mechanisms in history changes, and more important, there is no time-invariant structure that

can organize all the historical mechanisms into a system. Most historians also believe that nonsystemic mechanisms such as path dependence, interstitial development, polymorphous crystallizations, human mistakes, and learning all weigh importantly in historical dynamics, which makes any mathematics-based explanation of long-term historical trends nearly impossible. History is, in Michael Mann's famous phrase, a patterned mess. Mann's *Sources of Social Power* (1986, 1993) has illustrated this point well, but unfortunately Turchin has only made a very superficial citation (p. 47) to this important work.

The above criticism, however, does not mean that mathematics-based analysis has no place in historical sociology. It does. While grand historical processes may not be quantifiable, I do believe that behind historical processes are some flexibly related mechanisms, and many of those mechanisms are quantifiable. Moreover, as we know more and more about the nature of some basic social mechanisms, we can structure these mechanisms in certain ways (i.e., to construct "artificial societies") in the computer to simulate historical scenarios once a society is so organized. We should also move beyond the more rigid differential equation models adopted by Turchin to the newer and more flexible agent-based modeling techniques. Although no models explain history, good simulations will provide many insights that cannot be obtained from other venues of research.

Finally, although this review discredits a system view of history, I hope scholars who are working on the mathematical modeling of historical processes will remain committed to their undertaking. Only true believers will have the emotional energy to push an approach to the limit, which allows us to see both the beauty and the limitation of that approach at the same time.

Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks. By Robert Huckfeldt, Paul E. Johnson, and John Sprague. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xxi+249. $70.00 (cloth); $26.99 (paper).

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Political Disagreement is a welcome and productive corrective to what has been for too long a focus on one side of a duality. We know that people connected by strong relationships tend to think in similar ways, express similar opinions, and show similar behaviors. Their similarity in thinking, opinion, and behavior encourages relationships with one another at the same time that socializing conversations in their relationships reinforce similarity in their thinking, opinion, and behavior. The association between social connection and similarity was established in early classic