The Origin of Overtaking in the Growth Process: 
Land Abundance as a Hurdle for Education Reforms

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Abstract

This research suggests that the distribution of land within and across countries and its impact on the nature of the transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy have been a prime determinate of sustained differences in human capital, income levels, and growth patterns across countries. Land abundance, which was beneficial for the process of development in early stages, has generated a hurdle for human capital accumulation in later stages, retarding the process of industrialization and the transition to modern growth. The qualitative change in the role of land abundance in the process of development has brought about changes in the ranking of countries in the world income distribution. Some land abundant economies, which were associated with the club of the rich economies in the pre-industrial revolution era, were overtaken in the process of industrialization. The basic premise of this research, regarding the negative attitude of landlords towards education reforms, is supported empirically by a newly constructed data set on the voting patterns on England's education reform proposed in the Balfour Act of 1902.

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