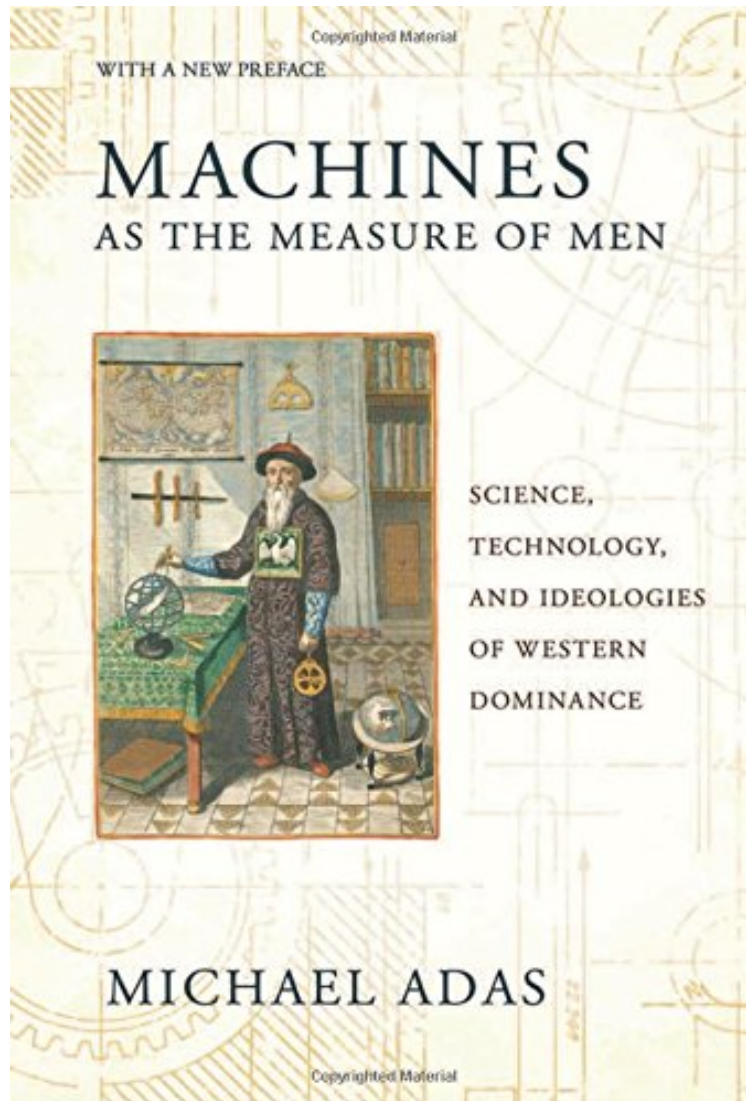


[Library ebook] *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Cornell Studies in Comparative History)

# **Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance (Cornell Studies in Comparative History)**

*Michael Adas*

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#1529397 in Books Adas Michael 2015-01-06 2015-01-09 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.25 x 1.15 x 6.121, .0 #File Name: 0801479800452 pages Machines as the Measure of Men Science Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance Cornell Studies in Comparative History | File size: 42.Mb

**Michael Adas : Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance (Cornell Studies in Comparative History)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*

(Cornell Studies in Comparative History):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Dense and Deeply Researched but Clearly and Straightforwardly Written. A Model Study. By Hugh E. Brennan I am reading this excellent work on three levels. One is in accordance with the author's thesis, which I find compelling and well founded ( especially so as it confirms through laborious research my own conclusions ). Second, is as an example of clear prose writing. The author does not get in the way of his content through either foregrounding "style" or the embroidering of his narrative with obscure terms or references to fashionable "theory." Thirdly, the plenitude of references contained in the straightforward footnotes are a work of great value in themselves. Simply selecting and following a fair sample of the references provided would serve as a foundation for a broad education in history, anthropology, technology and science. This, in my estimation, is an indispensable work for any who are interested in global history, imperialism, racism, technology, science, colonialism, exploration or our current globalization debate.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant and subtle history of technology and ideology. By M. A. Krul Michael Adas' excellent book "Machines as the Measure of Men" says all about the topic: it is an extremely thorough and systematic study of the role of ideas of technological and scientific superiority in the European outlook on non-European peoples. Covering the historical gamut from the time of Columbus to (briefly) post-WWII developments and including an absolutely stunning array of sources, studies and quotations to buttress its thesis, it is bound to impress even specialists in the field, let alone general readers - and given it won the 1991 prize of the Society for the History of Technology, it seems to have done so. But although the material is gone over with a breadth and depth of learning that is impressive even for a specialized monograph, it is very accessible to the general reader, not in the least place due to Adas' extensive use of quotations from political and literary sources. This makes it also a very strong book as popular history on the experience and ideology of European imperialism. Adas' main thesis is that European ideologies of superiority and dominance, justifying first exploratory-exploitative and later explicitly colonialist enterprises, were founded first and foremost on using a ranking of peoples and cultures in terms of the level of science and technology achieved by them. As has been pointed out by other historians as well, the European attitude to China is a good example; in the 16th and 17th centuries, when Europe compared fairly modestly with China in terms of economic performance but also in terms of technological accomplishments, China was generally seen as a highly sophisticated and superior realm with almost perfect good government and containing a wise and enterprising people, who only happened unfortunately not to be Christians. But as Europe's lead over China in technological terms increased, China increasingly became seen as a cesspool of corruption, laziness and stagnation and having never seriously accomplished any novelties or innovation in their long history of stubborn bureaucracy. The Chinese themselves were seen from the late 18th century on as superstitious, arrogant and cowardly and unable to innovate or accept anything new. As Adas shows, this sort of pattern is repeated consistently for each people or 'race' and in each region. As Europe itself became ever more 'scientific' and industrialized, more and more only machines became the true measure of men, and the worth of each people determined by their skills at and attitude towards technology and (to a lesser extent) science. Adas emphasizes the importance of this phenomenon and also the manner in which it contrasts with other theories. In the earliest stages of exploration, during the late Renaissance, the main judgment of Europeans toward non-European peoples was in terms of cultural norms (for example an abhorrence of nakedness) and likelihood of Christian conversion, but outside religious terms there was a remarkable degree of relativism about the observations of foreign lands. The technological measure from about the time of Newton and the 'Scientific Revolution' on displaced this attitude, and led over time to persistent systematic rankings of all peoples and cultures on scales from lower to higher, invariably with the Western Europeans on top (whereby who the ultimate people were depended on whether the author was French or British). The true imperial attitude was born, whereby the dominated state of the colonies proved that the peoples had been unable to make scientific use of their resources by commanding nature through technology as well as the Europeans, and this in turn justified the European domination of those colonies in the first place. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish this way of thinking from a purely race-based one. As Adas correctly points out at length, explicitly racial and thereby 'innate' classifications of peoples were extremely marginal until the second half of the 19th century, reaching their peak only around the 1880s-1890s (and possibly early 20th century) - and even then they represented only a significant minority of intellectual views on the matter, and the author sees their actual import in terms of effect on imperial policy as very limited. The 'technological measure' tended to combine the Enlightenment belief in human equality with the Victorian view of science as the pinnacle of human endeavour in their judgement of African and Asian peoples: although in principle all men were equally capable of attaining the highest scientific level of civilization, only the Europeans had actually fully developed the potential of their minds while the lower peoples had stalled at an earlier or later phase. This led to a split among intellectuals on what this implied for imperial policy: some argued that this meant that Africans and Asians could become just as skilled at science and technology as Europeans, after a period of European tutelage, perhaps even eventually leading to self-determination. But as the colonial-educated middle class in India and Africa increasingly became nationalist, and they started taking this as a serious proposition, this 'improver' view became less popular among the administrators. Instead, they favored increasingly an alternative view which saw

the divergence in European and non-European minds as having taken place fairly early in history, and thereby being so ingrained that it would take generations or centuries to overcome. The majority of intellectual discussion about justification for imperial rule took place in terms of either of these camps, rather than in terms of immutable racial classifications, and often authors would take on eclectic elements of either into their argument for a particular policy or viewpoint. Adas ends the book, unlike many studies of imperial thought, not at the end of the Victorian age but with a discussion of the way in which the mechanical horror of World War I undermined European self-confidence. The superiority of better technology was now not so evident, and there was widespread disillusionment with 'improving' viewpoints. However, this did not necessarily lead to a lesser evaluation of science and technology as a measure of civilization; on the contrary, among other things it led to 'reactionary modernism' such as fascism, where such subservience of man to machinery of death was seen as the way of the future. Post-WWII, racial theories and such explicit love of war machinery became unacceptable, but Adas does briefly point out that both American and Soviet-supporting development thinkers in and about the Third World tended and tend to see industrialization and technology as the main measures of 'progress'. While the author is clearly somewhat skeptical of these standards, he does take good care to not really editorialize about whether the imperialist thinkers were right or not about seeing technology as the way forward for mankind, and this seems a topic of contention by no means resolved in our current day, with good arguments existing on either side. Even new leaders in the formerly colonized areas are by no means united on whether or not they prefer this measurement either, and it is not clear what other yardstick could be used instead. Overall, this is a magisterial and fantastic effort on the topic, which fully deserves a read by anyone interested in imperialism and ideology. It took the author some ten years to write it, and maybe because of that the promised sequel about African and Asian responses to the ideology of technology has, as far as I can tell, never actually been written. This as well as a deeper study of the functioning of this ideology today would be worthy tasks of an author of this caliber. The book also does not particularly go into the impact in concrete terms of the policies based on the ideology, only the forms it took and the debates within it. But this book truly contains everything one could want to know about the way in which for Europeans in an age of empire, machines are the measure of men. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. machines as masters of thought

By Silver mike Michael Adas presents a thoroughly researched and clearly written compendium of the place of science and technology in the historical relations between the West and China, India and Africa, from the sixteenth century to the 20th. The centrality of the West's thinking, with few exceptions, of its machines as THE measure by which civilizations are to be measured, is revealing. Mr. Adas' insights provide much food for thought. His style of writing, and his organization are excellent. I would go so far as to say that reaching any reasonable understanding of world history requires reading this book.

Over the past five centuries, advances in Western understanding of and control over the material world have strongly influenced European responses to non-Western peoples and cultures. In *Machines as the Measure of Men*, Michael Adas explores the ways in which European perceptions of their scientific and technological superiority shaped their interactions with people overseas. Adopting a broad, comparative perspective, he analyzes European responses to the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa, India, and China, cultures that they judged to represent lower levels of material mastery and social organization. Beginning with the early decades of overseas expansion in the sixteenth century, Adas traces the impact of scientific and technological advances on European attitudes toward Asians and Africans and on their policies for dealing with colonized societies. He concentrates on British and French thinking in the nineteenth century, when, he maintains, scientific and technological measures of human worth played a critical role in shaping arguments for the notion of racial supremacy and the "civilizing mission" ideology which were used to justify Europe's domination of the globe. Finally, he examines the reasons why many Europeans grew dissatisfied with and even rejected this gauge of human worth after World War I, and explains why it has remained important to Americans. Showing how the scientific and industrial revolutions contributed to the development of European imperialist ideologies, *Machines as the Measure of Men* highlights the cultural factors that have nurtured disdain for non-Western accomplishments and value systems. It also indicates how these attitudes, in shaping policies that restricted the diffusion of scientific knowledge, have perpetuated themselves, and contributed significantly to chronic underdevelopment throughout the developing world. Adas's far-reaching and provocative book will be compelling reading for all who are concerned about the history of Western imperialism and its legacies. First published to wide acclaim in 1989, *Machines as the Measure of Men* is now available in a new edition that features a preface by the author that discusses how subsequent developments in gender and race studies, as well as global technology and politics, enter into conversation with his original arguments.

"Provocative and fascinating. . . . Adas's deft use of quotation gives the missionaries, travelers, explorers, administrators, and teachers their authentic voices. He provides a wealth of documentation. One learns things worth knowing on every page. . . . One leaves *Machines as the Measure of Men* persuaded by its essential analysis: that mastery of nature lay at the heart of Europe's comparison of itself to others. As an intellectual history of French and British assessments of Africa, China, and India, the book is wonderfully informative and nuanced. It will alter the

debate about the history of Europe's relationship to the rest of the world."New York Times Book "'Remarkable' is an adjective that is most appropriate for this study. Broad in interpretation, rich in detail, and supported by a wealth of information, Michael Adas's work will command the attention of every scholar of modern imperialism, every student of the broad subject of 'technology.' . . . Adas offers an example of popular history at its very best, which is cultural history exquisitely constructed of detailed research, a well-designed overarching theme, and nicely polished prose. . . . It will long be pivotal in all discussions that revolve around the technology and culture of modern European expansion. In sum, this is a most compelling, splendid book."American Historical "The terrain of Adas's magnificent book is vast. He starts with the first encounters of intrepid European explorers in the seventeenth century and ends with the seeds of doubt which the Great War in Europe sowed in the western civilizing process. . . . A vast range of sources are cited. Alternatives to the predominant ideology of western scientific and technological progress are explored, and the potential for diffusion of science and technology into different third world societies is also illuminated."Times Higher Education Supplement

About the Author Michael Adas is Abraham E. Voorhees Professor of History and Board of Governors' Chair at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. He is the author most recently of *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission*.