

You Only Weave Twice. Industrial Espionage and Economic Growth in XIX Century France

Can state-sponsored industrial espionage promote innovation and lead to self-sustained growth? I study the effect of 18th century French industrial espionage activity on French innovation and industrial activity in the XIX century. Between 1730 and 1800 the French Bureau of Commerce promoted an ambitious plan aimed at stealing from Britain the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution, bribing British entrepreneurs and inventors to leave England and bring their expertise to France. I assemble a novel database with a comprehensive list of French espionage activity between 1730-1800 and combine it with newly-digitized 17th 18th century industrial surveys, 1800s industrial censuses, and the full list of early French patents. I find large, positive, and persistent effects of industrial espionage on industrial activity and innovation.