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本台 進

『大企業と中小企業の同時成長』
──企業間分業の分析──

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While on trips to south east Asia the author observed that manufacturing, particularly in the machine industries, is following a different path of development than that experienced by Japan. Some of the differences appear to be related to organisational features, and have implications for both economic efficiency and employment creation. As was formerly the case in Japan, labour is a more abundant factor of production than capital, and a manufacturing arrangement in which both are optimised would be beneficial economically and socially, particularly since agriculture cannot be expected to absorb the population increase these countries are experiencing. They appear to be sub-optimizing, however, because much of the production is carried out in capital-intensive factories with an insufficiently-developed interfirm division of labour making use of labour-intensive small firms.

The belief that these countries have something to learn form Japan's experience provides the motivation for writing this book. After a brief literature review Hondai analyses the distinctive development of Japan's machine industries, concentrating on the division of labour between large and small firms. Prior to the 1930's, he shows many large firms followed a basic strategy of in-house production, while a finer interfirm division of labour, often co-ordinated by a *tonya*, could be observed between small firms because of their very limited resources. From the late 1920's, however, and especially in the 1930's, the large firms began to subcontract out more and more of their production functions to smaller firms. The aim was to increase the efficiency of capital through substitution by material inputs. This was more economical than in-house substitution of labour for capital, the scope for which was anyway limited. The same parts were produced more labour intensively in smaller firms, using less specialised machines more fully. Through this interfirm substitution both capital and labour resources were used efficiently.

Hondai calls upon various sources to support his argument. First, *kojo tokeihyo* statistics show that horsepower per worker (his proxy for capital intensity) fell in large factories in the machine industries during this time. Amongst various possible explanations, the increased use of subcontracting is most convincing. Second, pre-war and post-war *kojo/kogyo tokeihyo* and subcontracting surveys show a marked shift towards increasing reliance on subcontracting by large firms. Third, some evidence is offered from specific industries.

The author rejects-rightly-the notion that labour differentials by firm size were the major impetus for the growing use of subcontracting. Also, the rapid rise in military orders and industrial production in the 1930's intensified the trend, but did not initiate it. Emphasis is placed on the logic of substitution given Japan's factor endowments and their elasticities. This logic, however, varied according to the industry and changed over time. In export-oriented light industries, such as gloves, which faced fierce price competition, substitution for labour rather than capital was an important reason for subcontracting from the late 1920's. Within the machine industries substitution for capital gave way in the 1960's to labour substitution, as worker shortages pushed wages upwards. And the rising technical competence of specialist subcontractors ensured the continued expansion of subcontracting, even though firm-size wage differentials shrank.

A logic of substitution, however, does not mean that the benefits were rationally calculated *a priori*, or that they were pursued according to a prior planning. The intricate interfirm division of labour in the machine industries was largely a product of historical accident. But it was also consciously pursued in industries like sewing machines in the 1950's and 1960's, with dramatic competitive results. Osaka authorities encouraged local small firms to specialize and cooperate within industry associations, and the price reductions and productivity and quality improvements forced larger, self-contained makers to switch to subcontracting. Cameras was another selected industry.

The interfirm division of labour which evolved in the machine industries facilitated the simultaneous growth of large and small firms. The latter were able to raise their technical levels through specialisation and economies of scale, but also received assistance from their 'parent' firms. The efforts of the small firm owners themselves must be given due recognition, however. Thus the direction of causation is not simply an interfirm division of labour facilitating the growth and upgrading of small firms, but moves in the opposite direction as well. This virtuous circle facilitated the rapid growth of Japan's machine industries, and contributed to employment growth.

Views of small firms in Japan's industrial structure have undergone a lot of change in recent years. From the early 1960's, critics of the dual structure/domination by monopoly capital thesis argued that growth and maturation of the economy offered new opportunities to entrepreneurial and *chuken* firms. Not only have their arguments become widely accepted, but the validity of the dual structure/domination thesis prior to the 1960's has also been increasingly questioned. This book is a major contribution to that re-evaluation, opening up new areas for debate, and with a particular strength in quantitative analysis.

The general thrust of the re-evaluation is probably unassailable, but some of the qualitative aspects may be questioned. In stressing the positive aspects of subcontracting, the author sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly suggests the relationship is one of equality and equally beneficial. Yet small firms had more to lose in terminating a subcontracting relationship in the 1930's and 1950's than large firms, and had fewer resources with which to alter terms and conditions. The relationships were undoubtedly stressful, even if ultimately beneficial for both parties. When it is mentioned, too, policy is seen as unambiguously and beneficially promoting this interfirm division of labour, yet policy is more complex than this, even contradictory at times. Sensitivity to these nuances is important for ensuring a balanced re-evaluation.[1)]

The book is mainly written for developmental economists, addressing debates within developmental economics. Whether the lessons of Japan can be successfully applied in developing countries is a moot point, as the author recognises. Nonetheless, it is a valuable analysis, which should be widely presented outside Japan as well, and inform development policies. But its significance is even wider, extending to developed countries. Why did Britain-or the US-not develop a similar interfirm division of labour? Can they even now create one in their quest to restore industrial competitiveness? Perhaps in future the author can address such questions in (less technical) English for the benefit of a wide foreign readership as well. An excellent book, highly recommended.

1) For instance, officially-promoted *Kogyo/tosei kumiai* are cited, but Komiyama's ambivalent view of them in the provinces let alone the major urban industrial concentrations is passed over. Komiyama (1941, 131) also mentions a Tokyo Keiki executive who, when asked his view on some of his suppliers being organised into an association and directly receiving military orders, retorts bluntly ; 'It would destroy our parent-child relationship and we would not be able to look after them in a downturn.'

[D. H. Whittaker]