

Jonathan Zeitlin, Gary Herrigel, eds.. *Americanization and Its Limits. Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 410 pp. \$74.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-829555-6.



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More History than Economics

This book, edited by Jonathan Zeitlin, Professor of History, Sociology and Industrial Relations at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Gary Herrigel, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, is based on a number of claims. Chief of these is that an American model of production and governance was exported to Europe and Japan in the mid-twentieth century and that that model explains much of the economic successes Europe and Japan have since enjoyed.

The authors therefore make the claim that America developed a model and that countries as diverse as Sweden, Italy, Japan, France, Germany and Britain successfully adopted this model and adapted it to their own ends. The last paragraph of Professor Zeitlin's introduction claims that Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Portugal and Finland have recently seen the American light as well.

The book therefore ignores the forms of indicative planning which French and Hungarian economists developed during the 1950s and which many of the afore-mentioned economies

readily adopted during that time to achieve economic lift-off. The book likewise underplays the significant domestic cultural and economic imperatives, which came to bear in those countries during the same time period. Sweden, for example, owes as much to the great entrepreneurs who came to prominence there at the beginning of the twentieth century as it does to any American imported model of growth. The fact that Sweden, Japan and most of the other countries mentioned were faced with different constraints than was the United States and had different economic priorities during those periods also delimits the efficacy of the all-embracing American model the authors espouse.

The contributors, most of whom seem to be business or economic historians, see things differently. They have a paradigm of economic growth and they are endeavoring to make that paradigm fit the facts. However, those of us schooled in more traditional faculties of economics or business will look at the facts differently. We will try to see how economic policy in Europe and Japan fell into line with the economic and political or-

thodoxies of the particular period and region in question. This is not to deny that the Swedes, Germans and Japanese copied American practices whenever they proved superior. It is merely to put the arguments of the authors into the perspective of economic orthodoxy.

And what of the particular arguments themselves? Almost all of the chapters deal with either the automobile, rubber or steel industries during the period 1945 to 1965. Because these industries remain to the forefront of the globalization process, it is no wonder that America, the world's largest market for these commodities, would have a profound impact on its competitors. Japan, for example, has gone from being a very minor car exporter in the early 1960s to being the world's largest exporter of cars today. The automobile and steel industries are not only interlinked; they lend themselves to automation, to where those countries, like post-war Japan or modern Korea or China can copy and, like Toyota and Honda, improve upon the processes of the market leader, the United States in these cases.

The thesis that the United States had some great managerial insight that others could not see just does not seem to hold true. The insights were confined to the narrow range of industries discussed and America's insights were a direct consequence of its industrial hegemony.

Mainstream economists will therefore, I imagine, have some problems with accepting the book's theses in their entirety. The authors have given a good historical record of the automobile, steel and rubber industries in a variety of countries. They have also done the same with the British telecommunications industry from 1945 to 1975. However, the deregulation process has made much of this irrelevant to modern day business. The contributors are very good economic historians, and there is a lot here which the industrial historian will find of use. However, scholars looking for insights into modern-day strategic decision-making will not find the book so useful.

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