

Akira Suehiro, *Catch-Up Industrialization: The Trajectory and Prospects of East Asian Economies*, NUS Press, 2008, ISBN 978-4-87698-741-2 Paperback US\$30
doi:10.1017/S146810990990053

First published in 2000 under the title *Kyatchi-appa gata Kōgyōka-ron: Ajia Keizai no Kiseki to Tenbō*, this book by distinguished Japanese economist Akira Suehiro offers a timely analysis of industrialization in East Asia (a term that also includes the economies of Southeast Asia). This revised English language edition is especially welcome as it offers non-Japanese speakers access to the work of a scholar who has long been making significant contributions to debates on East Asian development issues.

Professor Suehiro sets himself the ambitious task of developing a theory of East Asian economic transformation based upon a critical examination of ‘catch-up industrialization’. In pursuing this objective, he critically engages with debates concerned with the nature of relations between governments and markets in East Asia, the role of state enterprises, state–society relations, and the contributions of ideology and Asian values. The book contains 13 chapters organized into two broad sections. The first section of four chapters discusses a range of perspectives and methodologies and sets out a broad theoretical approach. The second section of nine chapters focuses on ideology, government policy, dominant economic actors (state/public enterprises, multinationals and family businesses), and the various institutional arrangements or ‘fixes’ (types of technology formation, labor markets, and education systems) used to promote catch-up industrialization. Japan is seen as offering a ‘typical-case’ of catch-up industrialization and is used as a reference point for tracking and analysing various differences in the design of government policy, corporate systems, production management systems and processes of technology formation. Empirical material is also drawn from case studies of Thailand and other East Asian economies. In each of the substantive chapters, Professor Suehiro offers a succinct discussion of key issues and debates before presenting his empirical data. This makes the book especially useful for those looking for a text to introduce students to the major themes and perspectives associated with explaining the nature and trajectories of economic development in East Asia over the latter half of the twentieth century.

For Professor Suehiro, ‘catch-up industrialization’ essentially refers to the enduring attempt by East Asian nations to replicate the path of earlier capitalist industrial countries. Much of the book can be read as an exploration of those factors seen to have contributed to both the development successes and failures of late-industrializing East Asian societies to develop competitive advantage and compete on regional and global capitalist markets. This leads him to combine both an agent centred with an institution-based approach that focuses on the specific capacities to realize development goals at levels of government, enterprise, and workplace. The theory also takes into account the political and social spheres so we are taken beyond a sole focus on the institutionalization of government–enterprise relationships to an examination of state–society relations, with some emphasis on the formation of development ideology.

In a short review of this sort, it is impossible to do justice to the depth of scholarship, and nuanced ways with which Professor Suehiro engages with competing theoretical approaches to East Asian economic transformation and the manner in which he brings his approach to bear on the analysis of the empirical material. This is certainly an impressive achievement of synthesis and will interest a range of disciplinary specialists, albeit some more than others. While development economists, students of business, and international relations specialists will

find much to occupy their energies, others might find the text's coverage of the politics of industrialization less than satisfactory. After all, the adoption of certain technologies and policies, whether at the levels of government, enterprise, and workplace, cannot be understood solely as the product of enlightened and rational decision making. Rather, they are products of contestation and conflict between complex and competing coalitions of social forces and interests. Attention to the broader external and internal relations of power and interests within which East Asian development objectives have been established and institutional arrangements have emerged and been embedded, needed to be more fully brought to the heart of the approach.

This is not to suggest that Professor Suehiro is unaware of conflict and competition. Indeed, he is acutely aware that catch-up industrialization is fundamentally a process of intense competition between firms both within and between nations in the drive to secure 'competitive advantage'. He is also acutely aware of the profound negative social consequences and conflicts that are generated by processes of capitalist industrialization. In the conclusion of the book, he writes that 'Nobody wants an affluent society if that affluence is purchased with the lives of people killed by excessive work and competition' (p.323). He argues that such a dilemma cannot be resolved solely through a technological fix but requires a fundamental alteration in developmental ideology or 'mind-set'. What is lacking in this work, however, is a more concrete identification and analysis of the competing interests that have been involved in shaping development objectives and an explanation of why some sets of development goals have prevailed, and continue to prevail, over others.

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