

The University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Department of History  
Semester II, 1990-91

Comparative Industrialization: The United States and  
Japan since 1868

This course selectively reviews the development of the manufacturing sectors of these two industrial giants over the last two hundred years. Its intent first of all is to identify when, how, and why these two nations industrialized. We will rely upon the comparative method to analyze the common elements of manufacturing growth as well as those which are distinctive. Comparative studies of these two nations are quite recent; most of the developmental literature compares the United States with other early industrializers such as Great Britain, and Japan with later industrializers such as Russia.

The course will be broken down into three time periods; the 1860s-1910s; the 1910s-1940s; and the postwar era to 1973. Each era will begin with a brief overview of American and Japanese economic development. Then we will turn to historical controversies related to that era. For the first era, the 1860s to 1910s, we will focus upon the characteristics of modern economic development and modern industrialization. Having identified common features, we will investigate the "Western" pattern of industrialization based upon the exploitation of vast mineral resources, notably coal. Then we will turn to the "economics of backwardness," an argument that late industrializers succeed only through increasingly intrusive governmental promotion of industry.

For the second era, the 1910s to the 1940s, we will highlight the changing nature of the industrialization process. Drawing from the Japanese experience particular attention will be given to the role of government in influencing investment, consumption and wages. Then we will turn to the topic of dualism. Industrial development everywhere proceeds unevenly, the relationship between the modern and traditional sectors will be investigated highlighting

the patterns of business organization and labor policies. In contrast to the first era which emphasized economic commonalities, this section will investigate the influence of different cultures on industrial organization.

The final era, from World War II to the present, will focus upon the spectacular achievements of these two industrial nations and the current debates over competitive advantage. After week of common readings, we will have student reports that compare American and Japanese performance. One set of reports will consider economic or business variables, such as savings and/or capital investment, government policies, labor supplies and skills, and interindustry relationships; the other set of reports will compare specific industries, such as steel, autos, computers, or electronic appliances.

While this course has no economics prerequisite, it will require students to confront a literature drawn largely from economics. Readings will be comparatively light, except for those weeks when we survey the histories of the era. Students will be expected to write brief (two page) summaries of the readings every week and to write a moderate (20 page) paper on a topic drawn from the postWorld War II era.