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Review Of "The Adoption And Diffusion Of Imported Technology: The Case Of Korea" By J. L. Enos and W. H. Park

Larry E. Westphal

Swarthmore College, lwestph1@swarthmore.edu

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The Adoption and Diffusion of Imported Technology: The Case of Korea. By J. L. ENOS and W. H. PARK. London: Croom Helm; New York: Methuen, 1988. xvi, 272 pp. \$55.00.

The role of technological development in the Republic of Korea's extraordinarily rapid industrialization has received remarkably little scholarly attention. The authors make an important contribution to overcoming this neglect by documenting and analyzing the sources of Korea's effective mastery of modern industrial technology. Their investigation, based on work by eight knowledgeable economists and engineers, comprises case studies of particular technologies in four industries—petrochemicals, synthetic fibers, machinery, and iron and steel. The focus of each study is the firm that first introduced the technology, but adequate attention is given to other actors as well. The book also includes useful chapters that describe the methodology; provide necessary economic and technological background; compare rather sketchily Korean with Japanese experience in the same technologies; and draw general conclusions, including many about issues of public policy.

The case studies contain a wealth of relevant technological detail and provide estimates of many salient economic magnitudes. Each analyzes all the pertinent elements: economic and technological planning, the search for and negotiation with foreign suppliers, the design of production facilities and equipment, project implementation through the start-up of production, improvement in the use of the technology, the development of new products and processes, and the diffusion of technology to the firm's customers and suppliers as well as to subsequent producers of the same products.

Drawing on all the information obtained, the last chapter states conclusions that command assent and merit attention. Production methods have been mastered very rapidly, atypically so, with faster absorption where the demand for output exceeded capacity. Economically significant improvements have been made in each technology, and there has generally been ample diffusion. The least progress has been made in the areas of design and of development. In overall terms, the authors rate Korea as having been highly successful in acquiring, absorbing, and diffusing imported technology. They ascribe this success to the government's objectives regarding technology transfer and to its intimate involvement either as direct participant or as supervisory monitor in every stage of transfer and assimilation.

Two limitations detract from the potential value of the book. First, it is largely concerned with recording what has occurred and affords relatively little insight into many aspects of the underlying behavior. Second, notwithstanding the crucial role ascribed to the government, it provides little detail about the particular agencies involved and their specific modes of operation. There are valid reasons for these limitations; nonetheless, many lessons that might be sought from the Korean experience will not be found in this book. Because of these limitations and also because of the warranted but extensive attention given to technical detail, this book will be of interest primarily to diligent students of industrial and technological development in Korea and in general, to whom I most strongly recommend it. Others may find it very worthwhile to read the concluding chapter for an instructive discussion of the government's role in Korea's industrial and technological development.

LARRY E. WESTPHAL
Swarthmore College