

The Essence of the Successful Development of the Textile Industries in Prewar Japan

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ABSTRACT

It is widely recognized that Japan successfully imported advanced technologies from Europe in the prewar period, particularly in the modern cotton-spinning and silk-reeling industries. However, the traditional silk- and cotton-weaving industries also flourished using imported technologies. This study explores key factors contributing to the successful development of the textile industries in prewar Japan by examining long-term statistical evidence and synthesizing the accumulated insights of the existing studies. We found that while many of these industries initially failed to develop by directly importing modern capital-intensive technologies, the unique and common feature of the successful industrial development in prewar Japan was the selective choice of appropriate foreign technologies, combined with the adaptations of these technologies to factor endowments, including those of skilled and unskilled workers and capital. As a result, labor-intensive industrialization occurred before World War I, when the real wage rate began increasing sharply, followed by capital-intensive industrialization.