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Dominique Barjot, Ed. *Catching up with America. Productivity Missions and the Diffusion of American Economic and Technological Influence after the Second World War.* Paris: Presse de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002. 477 pp. Tables, notes, and index. 29.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-84050-240-2.

Review by Ove Bjarnar, Molde University College, Norway.

Many historians and social scientists have been drawn to the study of American influence on European or Japanese business. Studies of Americanization have questioned to what extent the American influence was exported from the U.S. in the form of coherent industrial and productivity models^[1] or, conversely, disseminated through complex institutional arrangements in Europe and Japan that defined the content of American models as well as their possible implementation. While the transfer perspective has emphasized the convergence of institutional set-ups in Europe with American practices, the dissemination perspective has underlined the diverse patterns of implementation of models or techniques. American influence on post-war reconstruction, development of productivity, and transfer of technology has also been a central theme.^[2] The volume offers a rich array of well-researched and detailed accounts of European productivity missions to the U.S. under the Marshall Plan as well as study trips arranged through other channels; this volume edited by Dominique Barjot demonstrates the complexity of the dissemination processes and the diverse picture of implementation. While it can be affirmed that exposure to innovative practices in the U.S. is one of the keys to understanding the economic miracle of post-war Europe and Japan, it was not in the form of a massive transport of a unitary "American" model. The flow of knowledge indeed was structured politically and institutionally, and there were different conceptions of American models or practices in circulation. The title of the volume, *Catching up with America*, thus has a double meaning: 1) catching up was often rooted in learning processes already initiated by European or Japanese actors themselves; and 2) therefore, the historical material is successfully released from the vague concept of "Americanization."

The volume has a substantial introductory chapter by Barjot that aligns the contributions with these perspectives. The essence of American influence was not an export of a coherent American model, perhaps not even in the meaning of "a locally effective ensemble of interdependent elements," to quote Jonathan Zeitlin's introduction to another pioneering work on American influence, edited by Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel.^[3] Marie L. Djelic has claimed that the post-war transformation of European national systems of industrial production stemmed from a massive export of "a peculiar American model" that led to "a redefinition of key rules of the game in Western European industries."^[4] The rich concrete research presented here profoundly challenges this view. It also is contested that mass production was the core element in Americanization. Adoption of mass production was rarely feasible given different institutional settings in European countries. Nor is it likely that in cases where Americanization was rather limited, self-reflecting actors could strategically choose an alternative model, namely flexible specialisation.^[5] Dissemination and implementation of American ideas were heavily influenced by institutional forces such as market conditions, labour-capital relations,

wage and bargaining systems, regulations, managerial or technological dependencies, traditions and cultures, industrial structures, power structures, government-business relations, and geopolitical situations. In some cases, due to linguistic or cultural barriers, participants in the numerous productivity missions could hardly convey any clear conception of the “American model.” Follow-ups of missions were also difficult due to severe restrictions on dissemination, such as barriers for mission members to study each other’s companies. Numerous mission reports were difficult to access, and their circulation was very limited. In general, the most comprehensive dissemination took place when the Marshall Plan channels were coupled to channels that already were independently operative of the plan or were reactivated by the different programs. Such mechanisms at an institutional level are highlighted by Terushi Hara who studies French productivity missions to the U.S. (chapter eleven), Hervé Joly who has researched the sociology of the members of French missions (chapter twelve), and Vincent Guigueno on the role of American experience in the mission reports (chapter thirteen).^[6]

The first part of the volume discusses the United States’ action on the international scene. John Gillingham (chapter two) and Jaqueline McGlade (chapter three) highlight the diverse and even competing perspectives held by factions in the U.S. aid apparatus. According to Gillingham, the Marshall Plan proved to be a complex phenomenon beset with internal contradictions. Big business sectors in the U.S. (motor industry, aircraft production) had grown and restored their societal position during the war due to successful coordination of production and management. But the Marshall Plan both inherited and created itself an alphabet soup of boards, agencies, and various authorities unable to disseminate such lessons in any unitary form. Likewise, McGlade demonstrates that the U.S. technical assistance program mirrored a panorama of administrative conflict, political tensions, international compromises, and policy changes. From the early 1950s, industrial production was set as the central goal of technical assistance in light of the emerging Cold War, and focus was drawn to the immediate rise in European levels of industrial production. A stronger drive for workplace reorganisation and workforce training, underpinned by a massive transfer of American business and organizational skills and techniques, was deemed necessary.

European socialists as well as democratic leaders realised that social benefits depended on increased production and industrial modernization, and in particular France and West Germany adopted reform policies such as modernization of industrial production, incentives for private business growth, stimulation of domestic mass consumer markets, and lowering barriers to intercontinental trade. Norway became one of the most positive supporters of the technical assistance program, despite the fact that its industrial structure was dominated by a small- and medium-sized enterprises. Participation was predominantly politically motivated, and this counteracted the fact that there were few structural incentives to adopt Fordist modes of production. Eli Moen (chapter five) also demonstrates that the productivity movement had long-term effects on industrial development and that it contributed to a distributionist coalition in Norwegian politics. In contrast to the Norwegian case, Richard T. Griffiths and Erik Bloemen (chapter six) show that it was difficult to launch a progressive productivity campaign in the Netherlands, partly because institutional barriers such as wage and price policies were not responsive to American productivity models.

Factional struggles for competencies also hampered administrative and political co-ordination of the productivity campaign. Henry B. Wend (chapter seven) highlights institutional constraints rooted in German attitudes concerning manufacturing, competition practices, advertising practices, industrial relations and consumption patterns. The American policy intended to lead the West German government to divert investment from consumer industries to heavy industry for the sake of rearmament. Labor and business co-operation became a chief goal of the technical assistance, including sharing the results of increased productivity, strengthening of free trade unions, and free competition. This encountered political and ideological resistance from both German business and labor. Nevertheless, changes were brought about through exchanges of ideas and technology stemming from productivity missions and more so due to channels operating independently of the Marshall Plan.

Luciano Segreto (chapter eight) further illuminates the role of institutional arrangements in structuring the dissemination of American inspiration. Above all, the productivity campaign in Italy experienced difficulties rooted in governmental hesitation to engage in any type of reform of the bureaucratic apparatus. The lack of planning culture made it difficult to subsume technical assistance under an overall national modernisation programme. Despite radically different views on distribution of productivity gains between the Americans and the Italians, however, dissemination of American ideas led to the setting up of the first Italian business schools, comprehensive Training Within Industry (TWI) courses, training centres, pilot plants, thirty-five provincial productivity centres, and utilisation of American ideas in peripheral Italy. In general, creating national or regional productivity centres was intended to promote the productivity drive. The European Productivity Agency (EPA) should have furthered this process and merged American with European initiatives on a cross-national level. However, the EPA, as Bent Boel outlines (chapter four), never played a leading role in the drive due to European resistance and the absence of a coherent American policy. The EPA nevertheless created numerous networks and arenas within a European framework.[7]

The second section contains articles discussing national experiences. In the case of Britain, Jim Tomlinson and Nick Tiratsoo highlight that the Labour government's public rhetoric had, by 1948, already established productivity as a key concern. There was also a tradition for private channels for studying American performance. Despite this, British companies often lacked personnel and knowledge to make a proper assessment of much of the American gospel, problems strengthened by British anti-professionalism in management, a lack of a holistic private sector view on productivity, and strong hostility to government involvement in productivity matters. Till Geiger (chapter ten) depicts the influence of American technology in the British defence industry. British policy makers and their American counterparts believed that business in general would benefit from large scale military production. Given the monopolistic power government had over the defence sector, one would expect this sector, then, to lead the way in the adoption of American production and productivity techniques. But ammunition production missions actually failed to identify any specific productivity problems in British ammunition factories, and although defence production increased, it contributed only marginally to the spread of productivity models in Britain.

Kinsaburo Sonaga (chapter fourteen) asserts that the productivity movement played an essential role in Japan against the background of the economic recession following the end of the Korean war. A joint government-business effort resulted in modernisation of Japanese corporate management practices. As interest in Japan grew in the U.S. in light of Cold War policy, Japan became the star pupil of productivity. Especially effective was the implementation of American style management techniques, disseminated through a well structured program for productivity missions, that mobilised the most influential business leaders. Modernisation had major effect on Japanese economic growth. Reiko Okayama (chapter fifteen) further argues that even in times of strong confrontations between labour and capital in the late 1940s, labour shared common ideas with management on the need for increased production and reconstruction. This was helped forward by the allied authorities that put pressure on Japan to legalise trade unions. In the 1950s individual companies in every industry invested massively in technological innovation, rationalisation of labour, and production management. This development was partly nurtured by, and also paved the way for, the productivity movement. Satoshi Sasaki studies the influence of productivity missions on the Japanese electrical equipment industry (chapter sixteen). A large number of teams went to the U.S., and major unions cooperated with government and business. They realised that it was possible to merge assembly line production with a flexible production of a variety of products. Following this observation, Japanese electrical equipment makers embarked on the enhancement of mass production capabilities and a host of related systems. Again it is fair to conclude from this section of the volume that institutional constraints or potentials in recipient countries had decisive effect on dissemination and its outcome, whether positive or not.

The volume's third section depicts the impact of productivity missions sector by sector. According to Ruggero Ranieri (chapter seventeen), the Marshall Plan provided an intensive flow of technology and know-how in modernisation of steel production in Europe. The decisions to invest in wide-strip mills related technology was strongly influenced by governments or central planning agencies, as in France, or indirectly through state-owned steel companies, as in Italy, Austria, and the Netherlands. In Britain it was helped forward by regional policy. The issue over size and nature of the market was, however, a major delaying factor in the adoption in western Europe. At the company level the problems lay in finding the adequate scale of production, resources, and output. European steel producers, with few exceptions, chose a diversified strategy consisting of diversified output and intermediary technologies. On the other hand, several wide-strip mills were fitted into plants that were either too small or too old to accommodate them.

In the French steel industry, researched by Philippe Mioche (chapter eighteen), production missions turned out to be a failure. Instead, major production changes originated in the environment of French steel-makers themselves. Changes were coupled to an old tradition of field studies by company representatives going to Britain or the U.S., or by candidates from the *Écoles Polytechniques* that came to manage the major steel companies. However, reports were the private property of each company, and dissemination ran into a strong tradition of industrial secrecy. In cases where diffusion of technology became an important device for disseminating growth, the main point of reference was German industry. Hence, productivity gains would stem mostly from investment in equipment more than adopting American management techniques and from home-grown and possibly German-inspired innovations.

Eric Godelier (chapter nineteen) explores further the introduction of then new wide-strip rolling-mill technology at the French steel producer Usinor. In addition, a piecemeal adaptation of managerial techniques current in the U.S. took place. The new technology boosted productivity, but it was something of a compromise with far less capacity than that used in the U.S. Hence, rather than a wholesale implementation of an American model, a number of Usinor managers implemented U.S. management tools at plant level, not at corporate level. Then struggles over new wage calculation systems led to a breakdown of working climate into permanent conflict.

Wilfried Feldenkirchen (chapter twenty) discusses two types of productivity missions: those initiated by private companies and those under the technical assistance program. Both types of study trips forwarded the implementation of practices such as co-operation among government institutions, employers, and labour unions. To some extent, such relations were institutionalized in the German Productivity Council, the Committee for Productivity Enhancement (coal mining sector), and multiple arenas, comprising conferences, associations, and bilateral committees. However, trips initiated by companies more effectively opened up channels for diffusion of technological and organizational know-how. Furthermore, due to Germany's superior technology in specific branches of great interest to U.S. actors, we should speak of dissemination of knowledge rather than of a one way transfer from the U.S.

Pierre Lanthier (chapter twenty-one) devotes his chapter to the role of U.S. industrial know-how in the French electrical-engineering business. French electrical manufacturers had been—since the late eighteen hundreds—quite receptive to American technology and industrial organization and were therefore ready to make full use of the productivity missions. Management science was well known to French business since the 1920s, including scientific work organization, co-ordination of sales, research and production, use of assembly lines, and keeping of statistical data on production and stocks. As a whole, the dominant attitude was a desire to catch up with the latest improvements and to praise the good employer-employee relations in the U.S. In the private sector, many companies got hold of U.S. patents to boost their market share, and links were set up between American actors and French research and industry. In more specific areas, then, productivity missions organized within the Marshall Plan did

influence the catching up with state of the art technology but, in general, the French were already drawing benefits through other channels.

In the Italian chemical industry, as well, transfer of technology had been an important feature since the 1930s, as revealed by Rolf Petri (chapter twenty-two). Italian actors had by 1943 thought out strategies to use oil and methane for rubber production, and American-Italian co-operation aimed at revitalising these strategies. However, the most important outcome of Americanization in this industry was the restriction of foreign influence in the national energy and petrochemical sectors. Americanization was counterbalanced by a national philosophy of technocratic independence with corresponding command structures. Also Paul Erker, depicting the American influence in the German rubber- and tire industry (chapter twenty-three), highlights how the existing knowledge base in different German companies led to different patterns of "Americanization." Learning and interaction processes were based on German know-how.

The fourth section comprises detailed studies of the productivity missions and their fallout in France by Remi Baudouin (chapter twenty-four), Dominique Barjot (chapter twenty-five), Jean-Pierre Daviet (chapter twenty-six), Muriel Leroux-Calas (chapter twenty-seven), Florence Hachez-Leroy (chapter twenty-eight) and Anne-Catherine Robert-Hauglustaine (chapter twenty-nine). Baudouin also finds a long-standing tradition in France of fact-finding tours within engineering and metallurgical industries. This channel was reinforced in light of the recovery, productivity, and rearmament drive, not least through key influential persons that fostered connections of specific importance to the building and construction sector. The channel also strongly influenced national and regional planning processes and set-ups in France. By way of missions sent to the U.S., among other factors, a program-centered planning culture developed (see also Barjot, introduction, p. 41). Barjot explores such features in depth in the French public-works industry. Here, also, initiatives taken by business leaders preceded government action. Vitalized by the proactivity of the professionals, missions paved the way for the success of the productivity movement in this industry, especially after 1950 when a significant mission was mounted and financially supported by the Economic Cooperation Agency (ECA), the French government, and French firms, and organized within the framework of French productivity organizations. Despite a lack of consensus within the missions, they stimulated technological innovation and thoroughgoing changes in corporate practices, resulting for example in improved efficiency in public workplaces, in development of highway construction, and in earthwork. Substantial gains in productivity were won in the public work sector by the late 1950s.

In other sectors, however, the impact of the missions was more limited. Daviet shows that in the wool industry, the American message was listened to, and perhaps even praised, usually for political purposes, yet in the end not acted upon. Its representatives crossed the Atlantic in 1951 and were impressed by American methods: for example, a higher degree of integration and mechanization and better design and lay-out of the plants, but, above all, by human relations practices. But they also recognized that conditions in their homeland were very different, including a smaller domestic market and a production system based on craftsmanship rather than mass production. The actual degree of change on the shop-floor remained limited. Leroux-Calas investigates the missions' impact on R&D in the French aluminum industry, especially with reference to the firm Pechiney. Even here, as also shown in previous studies,^[8] a tradition of regular contacts with American business leaders was evident since the 1890s. Crucial inspiration in fields of production processes, R&D, and matters of work organization was obtained through these channels from 1945-47, even before the productivity drive was launched.

Hachez-Leroys' investigation of the building industry, in which aluminum came to play an important role, shows that a number of firms after the war saw the opportunity to take advantage of a novel market in using aluminum in the fabrication of assemblies (doors, windows, frames etc.). However, study trips organized by the metal-structure industry included few, if any, of the actors already involved in this process. The missions did not explore the assembly potential and, in fact, they acted as a hindrance

to the promotion of such innovations. Robert-Hauglustaines' study of the use of welding in French industries concludes this section of the book. The industries were reluctant to take up the use of new welding techniques in the heavy-metallurgical industries. This led to the establishment of a mission of engineers to get an overview of recent technologies, as well as functional organization, and was followed by an information drive in the relevant industries.

Francois Crouzet draws the material together in a thought-provoking concluding chapter (chapter thirty). It is obvious, according to Crouzet, that the adoption or appropriation of American technology and management techniques was partial and selective (p. 436). Massive imports were not realistic, and novelties had to be adapted to local conditions. Most European companies adopted at least some of the U.S. management techniques on offer in the post-1945 period, but without devaluing all of their own indigenous practices. Crouzet also refers to the large net of channels and intermediaries that operated besides the productivity missions. The role of different intermediaries have recently been studied in detail elsewhere.[9]

Several recent volumes on the American influence on European and Japanese societies and business now offer a wealth of new and detailed insight into the complex processes of international and cross-cultural dissemination and institutionalization of technology and organizational models. This volume edited by Dominique Barjot also marks a substantial step forward for such institutional and contextual studies. It should be of great interest to scholars within different disciplines, as well as politicians and managers concerned with dissemination of management and organizational models and their possible implementation.

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- Anne-Catherine Robert-Hauglustaine, “How do they Weld?: A Study of U.S. Welding Technology through one French Productivity Mission in 1951.”
- Francois Crouzet, “Conclusions.”

NOTES

[1] As claimed recently by M.L. Djelic, *Exporting the American Model. The Postwar Transformation of European Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[2] For overviews of the theoretical positions, see Ove Bjarnar and Matthias Kipping, “The Marshall Plan and the Transfer of U.S. Management Models to Europe: An Introductory Framework”, in Mattias Kipping and Ove Bjarnar, eds., *The Americanization of European Business. The Marshall Plan and the Transfer of U.S. Management Models* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998); Jonathan Zeitlin, “Introduction: Americanization and Its Limits: Reworking U.S. Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan,” in Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel, eds., *Americanization and Its Limits. Reworking U.S. Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Also consult Patrick Fridenson, “La circulation internationale des modes manageriales,” in J.-P. Bouilloud and B.- P. Lecuyer, eds., *L’invention de la gestion. Histoire et pratiques* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994): 81-89.

[3] Zeitlin, 17.

[4] Djelic, 65, 270-273.

[5] See Zeitlin. Also consult Paul Hirst and Jonathan Zeitlin, “Flexible Specialization versus post-Fordism: Theory, Evidence and Policy Implications”, *Economy and Society* 20, no. 4 (1991): 1-56. See also Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *World of Possibilities. Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[6] Institutional approaches are further developed in works such as Giuliana Gemelli, “American Influence on European Management Education: The Role of the Ford Foundation,” in Rolv Petter Amdam, ed., *Management Education and Competitiveness: Europe, Japan and the United States* (London:

Routledge, 1996); Giuliana Gemmelli, ed., *The Ford Foundation and Europe (1950's-1970's). Cross-Fertilization of Learning in Social Science and Management* (Brussels: European Interuniversity Press, 1998); and Mauro F. Guillén, *Models of Management. Work, Authority, and Organization in a Comparative Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Also consult Lars Engwall and Vera Zamagni, eds., *Management Education in Historical Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

[7] However, this section of the volume does not entirely rule out an “Americanization” perspective. Organizations can be seen as interwoven in external surroundings where cognitive models are shaped and reproduced and signal how organizations should be designed in order to be perceived as “modern.” Although actors will have to “de-couple” models, in the long run ideas and practices will converge towards the original prototype or model, because the success of implementation will depend on following interrelated organizational principles. Could it be that actors are often lured into changing processes that have more far-reaching consequences than is first understood? See, for example, Hallgeir Gammelsæter, “The implementation of “Management by objectives” in an academic setting. The Norwegian experience,” paper presented at the 17th EGOS Colloquium, 5-7 July, Lyon, France, 2001. Also see Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147-160; and Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[8] Ludovic Cailluet, “Selective adaptation of American management models: the long-term relationships of Pechiney with the United States”, in Matthias Kipping and Ove Bjarnar, eds., *The Americanization of European Business. The Marshall Plan and the Transfer of U.S. Management Models* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998)

[9] See, for example, Matthias Kipping and Nick Tiratsoo, eds., *Americanization in 20th Century Europe: Business, Culture, Politics* (Lille: Université Charles-de-Gaulle, 2002); Akira Kudo, Matthias Kipping, and Harm Schröter, eds., *Transforming the American Model: German and Japanese Industry During the Boom Years* (London: Routledge, 2003). Also consult Rolv Petter Amdam and Ove Bjarnar, “Networks and the Diffusion of Knowledge: The Norwegian Industry Committee in New York during the Second World War,” *Business and Economic History* 28, No. 1 (1999): 33-43; Rolv Petter Amdam and Ove Bjarnar, “Regional Business Networks and the Diffusion of American Management and Organisational Models to Norway, 1945-65,” *Business History* 39, No. 1 (1997): 72-90; and Ove Bjarnar, Rolv Petter Amdam, and Hallgeir Gammelsæter, “Management Qualification and Dissemination of Knowledge in Regional Innovation Systems. The Case of Norway 1930s-1990s,” *Journal of Industrial History* 4, no. 2 (2001): 75-93.

Ove Bjarnar
Molde University College, Norway
Ove.Bjarnar@hiMolde.no

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