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**Comparative Approaches in
Social Sciences and Humanities:
A French-Japanese Initiative via Joint
International Laboratory between
CNRS and University of Tokyo**

Introduction

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The essays presented in this volume originated in three international workshops held in 2005, 2006 and 2007 in Paris and Tokyo. This rare example of cooperative work in social sciences and humanities between Japanese and French researchers reflects the plurality of approaches of the International Associated Laboratory created in 2005 by the Institute of Oriental Culture and Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Tokyo, and the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). It covers several disciplines: economics, labor relations, economic geography, and economic history, and strongly emphasizes the comparative dimension between France and Japan.

1) Using a French dataset covering 14 manufacturing industries over an extended period (1990-2002), Bellone, Musso, Nesta and Quéré in their chapter “Post-entry and Pre-exit Performance of French Manufacturing Firms,” focus on the role of productivity as a determining factor in market selection mechanisms of both young and mature firms. Interestingly, they find that the competitive challenges a firm faces during its life evolve over time. They suggest different patterns of exit for young and mature firms: in France, the exit of mature firms is more likely to depend on productivity performance than that of young firms.

2) In a companion chapter, “Productivity Convergence at the Firm Level: Effects of Exit on Firm-level Productivity Growth in Japan,” Kiyota, Nakajima, and Nishimura also

discuss the use of exit in analyzing firm-level productivity growth. Focusing on the effect of firm exit, they ask whether there exists productivity catch-up, or productivity convergence, among firms in Japan. They find evidence for productivity convergence. Moreover, they conclude that analysis without a consideration of the effects of exit leads to a sample selection bias in the speed-of-convergence estimation.

3) The stability of Japanese labor relations is at the core of Nitta's paper "Evolution of Japanese Employment Systems in the Lost Decade and After." He clarifies the complex sub-systems that form the structure of life-time employment. He concludes by showing how life-time employment was able to survive the turbulent post bubble years, although a new policy, namely the employment portfolio strategy, was emerging during the post-financial crisis, leading to a growing gap between workers entitled to a regular-status job, on the one hand, and part-timers, "arbeiters," and subcontract workers, on the other. Those developments have also profoundly altered the image of Japan as an egalitarian society.

4) Lanciano-Morandat and Nohara's chapter, "Professionals, Production Systems and Innovation Capacities in The Software Industry: A Comparison between France and Japan," represents an original attempt to compare French and Japanese software production systems. Noting the ambiguous position of the software sector between manufacturing and services, they argue that there is a conflict, within both countries, between the logic of manufacturing with its highly standardized order, and the specific type of knowledge required to respond to the highly diversified need of customers in the service sector. In other words, the unorganized and more control-free invention system which is at the core of the software industry induces the need for a neo-industrialization logic of services.

5) Focusing on issues of economic history, Hamashita, in his contribution, "Historical Transformation of Coastal Urban City Networks in the East China Sea Zone: From Pusan-Nagasaki-Ryukyu-Southeast Asia Channel to Yinchon-Shanghai-Kobe Channel" depicts 16th-18th century tributary trade as a very sophisticated regional system, incorporating both official and private economic relations, with trade networks being closely linked to migratory movements. He sees sea and maritime realms, rather than land-based polities, as taking the central place in the movement of persons and economic exchanges.

6) In a closely related paper, "Asian Mediterranean: China at the Core of Two Periods of Globalisation (16th-20th century)," Gipouloux shows how the Braudel concept of the Mediterranean can be usefully applied to Asia. The East Asian economic corridor, which

is spread over several interconnected maritime basins-the Sea of Japan, Yellow Sea, South China Sea, Sulu Sea, and Celebes Sea-could be considered a valid illustration of this principle during the two periods under consideration, the end of the 16th century and the end of the 20th century.

7) Hattori and Lecler's chapter, "Innovation and Clusters: The Japanese Government Policy Framework," addresses the question of the interconnection between process and product innovation as well as the complexities of research and development resulting in mega competition in knowledge. This configuration places clusters, both industrial and knowledge, at the center of the process of revitalization of regional economies within the country.

8) Marukawa's chapter provides a fascinating and illustrative case study of several of the issues raised by Hattori and Lecler. In the paper, "The Emergence of Industrial Clusters in Wenzhou, China" Marukawa deals with Wenzhou, a city in eastern China that has long been an emblem for private-led growth. Relying on interviews and written materials, he highlights the complexity and diversity of its industrial clusters, covering a number of products from leather shoes to electric parts, apparel, and automobile components. He attempts to explain why as many as 153 industrial clusters have appeared in Wenzhou, relying on the extreme reactivity of the industrial structure, and the interlocking repetition of innovation and imitation.

