

Japan Academy Prize to:

Takeshi ABE
Professor Emeritus, Osaka University

for *The Japanese Cotton Industry from the Tokugawa
Era to the Interwar Period*



Outline of the work:

Introduction to the History of Japanese Cotton Spinning Enterprises, written by Naosuke Takamura in 1971, is an excellent book that has become a classic in the study of big cotton-spinning enterprises, whose emergence promoted the industrialization of modern Japan along with Zaibatsu enterprises. Takamura analyzed the establishment of the big stock companies that provided Western machines to big cotton-spinning enterprises, which were represented by three large firms: Toyobo, Kanebo, and Dainihonbo. Takamura emphasized that the big cotton-spinning enterprises dominated local weaving enterprises; however, he did not show how this was achieved.

Dr. Takeshi Abe's first book, *Local Cotton Weaving Industry in Japan*, published in 1989, was a criticism of Takamura's study. Dr. Abe provided evidence of big local cotton-weaving enterprises that had not been dominated by the big cotton-spinning enterprises.

In 2022, Dr. Abe published his second book, *The Japanese Cotton Industry from the Tokugawa Era to the Interwar Period* [Nagoya, The University of Nagoya Press]. In the first part of this book, Dr. Abe showed that the big cotton-spinning enterprises and the small local weaving enterprises had mutual positive effects. In the second part of this book, Dr. Abe investigated how the Japanese cotton industry developed after the First World War and, in 1933, became a world leader in the export of cotton cloth, surpassing the United Kingdom. He also showed that the Japanese cotton industry had exported many cotton-spinning factories to China, which coexisted with local factories.

This book introduces two important research findings of Dr. Abe. First, he defined the various kinds of local cotton-weaving enterprises in Japan. In defining these enterprises, he considered technical innovations, whether in the use of hand or power looms, along with managerial innovations involving both putting-out and factory systems. According to Dr. Abe's study, there were three innovations in the history of Japanese local cotton-weaving enterprises.

The first innovation occurred in the 1880s and involved putting-out merchants; these merchants supplied weaving farmers with cotton yarn. The second, in the 1910s, involved putting-out merchants adopting power looms to weave single cloths. The third innovation

occurred in the 1920s in advanced weaving areas, where former putting-out merchants built their own factories equipped with power looms to weave broadcloth.

Owing to these innovations, the local cotton-weaving industry developed rapidly in the interwar period. The spread of the technique of cutting broadcloth to single cloth expanded the domestic market for cotton cloth. The expanding export market for cotton cloth was also a primary basis of the development of the local cotton-weaving industry.

In addition, Dr. Abe estimated that the proportion of exported cotton cloth produced in the local weaving areas to that of the total exported cotton cloth—which was 30% in 1914—will increase to approximately 60% after 1932. However, from the latter half of the 1920s, the export of Japanese cotton cloth to China suddenly decreased. According to Dr. Abe, the causes for the decrease were the boycott movement against Japanese goods and the tariff policy of the Chinese Government. However, Dr. Abe could not have explained the real cause of the Chinese boycott of Japanese goods. According to the records of the trade association of Japanese cotton-spinning enterprises in China (Zaikabo [在華紡]), the activities of Zaikabo were not regarded as representative of Japanese imperialism. This is the second important result presented in Dr. Abe's book. Most Japanese historians supported Hiroshi Nishikawa's opinion, who argued that the boycott movement was politically guided by the Chinese Government, so the Zaikabo relied on Japanese soldiers. Dr. Abe's criticism of this view is a big contribution to historical research. He underscored the necessity of the criticism of historical materials.

Dr. Abe's work contributed greatly to the study of the Japanese cotton industry. His work is highly appreciated by economic historians. For example, Janet Hunter, the professor emeritus of the London School of Economics and Political Science and an expert in the history of the global cotton industry, praised Dr. Abe's work, stating that he successfully explained the complicated development of the Japanese cotton industry. There is no doubt that Dr. Abe's work is a monumental academic contribution that has elevated the study of modern Japanese economic history and is thus worthy of the Japan Academy Prize.