



The productivity convergence debate: a theoretical and methodological reconsideration

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Two fundamental issues which have been ignored in the convergence debate are addressed in this paper. First, there has been little attention paid to the development of a general model which is able to explain convergence *or* divergence. Second, in the rush to put data to a convergence hypothesis, researchers have failed to consider certain methodological procedures with respect to the treatment of capital. To remedy this problem we use an input–output approach to measure catch-up. To address the theoretical lacunae we present case studies of Portugal and Japan, two countries which by 1959 had attained the threshold level of development required to join the ‘convergence club’, but which, for various historical (path-dependent) reasons, have diverged rapidly from each other in the period since the late 1950s.

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1. Introduction

The debate over the question of whether national productivity levels have converged over time has yielded an array of ambiguous, if not conflicting, results. Most studies which include only the OECD countries show that the dispersion of productivity levels across countries has diminished over the past 100 years, with some considerable slowing, if not reversal, in the period since 1973. Those studies which include a broader sample of countries provide much less evidence of convergence. Many of these studies actually reveal a divergence between the level of productivity of the richest and the poorest nations over time.

While the convergence debate has been extremely lively, two fundamental issues have been ignored and will be addressed in this paper. First, there has been little attention paid to the development of a general model of cross-country growth patterns able to account for the possibility of convergence *or* divergence. Second, in the rush to put data to the loosely defined convergence hypothesis, researchers have exhibited a failure to consider certain well-established methodological procedures, especially with respect to the operationalisation of the concept of capital. To remedy the methodological problem we propose the use of an input–output approach to the measurement of catch-up. To

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address the theoretical lacunae in the convergence literature we focus on Portugal and Japan, two countries which by 1959 had attained the threshold level of development required to join the 'convergence club', but which, for various political, cultural and historical (path-dependent) reasons, have diverged rapidly from each other in the period since the late 1950s. This case study stresses the historical evolution of institutions and policies and emphasises cumulative causation, learning-by-doing, trade openness and an activist trade policy in explaining why some countries are able to converge to the level of productivity of the leading country and some countries diverge from that level in spite of equally concerted efforts. Our methodological and theoretical reconsiderations of the convergence literature are not independent. Recognition of the capital measurement problem forces us to call into question the assessment of the degree of international productivity convergence and thus to rethink the theoretical foundations of the widely accepted convergence theories. The extreme differences in rates of convergence evidenced by the input-output study indicate the need to look closer at the historical and institutional contingencies behind the radically different performance of countries who at a particular moment had found themselves at a similar point on the catch-up trail. Before turning to the input-output analysis and historical study, we briefly review the theories of convergence that have dominated the recent flurry of research.

2. Theory

Abramowitz's (1986) impressive paper indicates that for all the massive amounts of research aimed at measuring the degree of convergence among various groups of countries, there is surprisingly little work developing a theory of such a phenomenon. The original rationale for the concept of convergence was Gershenkron's (1952) study of Russian industrialisation, which stressed 'the advantages of relative backwardness'. The idea is that for a nation with certain institutions developed to an (unspecified) threshold level, imitation is easier than innovation and 'backward' countries should enjoy a more rapid growth rate than advanced countries. A convergence of the standard of living of these countries should result. The convergence hypothesis has enormous intuitive appeal but has been of relatively little interest to traditional neoclassical economists since it lacks a basis in rational choice, microeconomic theory.¹

The motivation for the recent flurry of research on the question of the international convergence of productivity perhaps explains the lack of development of a comprehensive theoretical accounting for the phenomenon. The apparent decline of the US in the world economy in the mid 1980s led many to seek an explanation in the long-term convergence of productivity levels across countries. The US economic decline could then be located in the inevitable catch-up by rivals, and not in any inherent American incompetence, laziness or cultural decay.² Instead of developing theoretical models, economists have undertaken econometric studies, all premised on an acceptance of the crude form of the Gershenkron hypothesis. Thus, the theoretical development of the Gershenkron hypothesis has been somewhat *ad hoc*. But amidst the spate of recent studies, three distinct theories of convergence have emerged.

The first two have been termed by Baumol (1994) as the 'common forces' explanation and the 'contagion' model. According to the common forces theory, there is a single

¹ Gomulka (1987), for example, describes the rationale for convergence as a 'commonsense notion'.

² Baumol, Blackman and Wolff (1989) and Marris (1982) are good examples. Nelson (1990) and Nelson and Wright (1992) locate convergence in US decline, but do not depict this as inevitable.

steady-state growth path around which all countries eventually congregate, not because of any interdependence but due to some inherent limit to growth. That is, countries face diminishing returns in some form. Baumol (1994) and Dollar and Wolff (1994) focus mainly on diminishing returns to capital which lead the growth rate to rise at a decreasing rate as accumulation occurs. The logic is purely neoclassical: as capital accumulates its marginal product falls and so does the incentive to invest. Capital thus flows to the poor countries, labour flows to the rich countries and the growth rate in rich countries falls as the capital-labour ratio falls. Baumol mentions two other diminishing returns phenomena which potentially lead to convergence. One is the 'cost disease of handicraft services', that is the fact that in certain endeavours (medicine, law, performing arts, research and development) it is impossible to raise labour productivity beyond a certain level. Once a country reaches this level, its productivity growth rate is constrained.¹ The other possibility is the diminishing returns to educational attainment: once a country's population achieves a certain level of education, additional educational attainment does not lead to further productivity gains. The inevitability of convergence implied by the common forces view has its institutional counterpart in the Olson's (1982) hypothesis of 'institutional ossification' due to the role of special-interest groups in democratic regimes.²

The contagion model is the case of catch-up based on the ease of imitation compared to innovation. The purported relative ease of catch-up is rooted in the multiple channels for technology transfer, the international mobility of capital and labour-embodied knowledge, and international competition. The contagion theory is perhaps the most widely held theory of convergence among economists.³ Recent research in this vein has largely been to select, in an *ad hoc* manner, the variables which would be expected to encourage catch-up and regress the growth rate on these variables. Most authors include a 'relative backwardness' variable (usually the per capita GNP gap vis-à-vis the frontier country), and a size variable to control for increasing returns. Barro (1991) also includes trade openness, degree of price distortion, and educational attainment as explanatory variables. Rassekh (1992) focuses exclusively on trade openness, while DeLong and Summers (1992) concentrate on durable capital goods investment. Lichtenberg (1994) focuses on educational attainment, and Blomstrom and Wolff (1994) test for the role of multinational corporations. Alam (1992) attempts to proxy Abramowitz's (1986) notion of 'social capability' with an index of 'corporatism' which measures the degree of 'institutionalized negotiation, bargaining, collaboration, and accord about wages and "incomes policies" between representatives of the major economic groupings in the society (most typically labour confederations and employers' associations) and often including, in addition, representatives of government'.⁴ Nelson (1990) and Nelson and Wright (1992) could also be said to hold the contagion view, although they generally do not rely on regression analysis. For these authors the catch-up to the US by other countries in the post-1972 period is due to the US inability to maintain a dominance in mass production and in high-tech goods production. The causes of this inability are due

¹ Presumably this is consistent with the view that the productivity growth slowdown in advanced industrial countries over the past 20 years is due to the increasing share of services in total output.

² See also Mueller (1983), Hodgson (1988).

³ Among the first studies along these lines was the work of Gomulka (1971, 1979). In the more recent literature see, for example, Abramowitz (1983), Baumol (1986), DeLong (1988), Baumol and Wolff (1988), Gomulka (1990), Barro (1991), and Baumol (1994).

⁴ Quoted by Alam (1992) from Cameron (1982).

as much to structural developments in the world economy (e.g. the successful integration of Western Europe) as to any developments in the US.

The emphasis of the *ad hoc* contagion models is on the explanation of convergence. While this is a perfectly valid task, it avoids the general question of why a given country does or does not join the so-called 'convergence club', that is the group of countries in the process of catching up with the frontier country. Put another way, the *ad hoc* contagion models do not attempt to define the characteristics of the threshold level of development required for membership of the convergence club.

What is the crucial level of development at a given historical moment to attain the required threshold? The problem with the common forces and the contagion models is their inability to account for the vast number of poor countries who have failed to converge, much less catch up entirely. The rush to explain convergence left unanswered (except in the negative) the question of why a large number of countries were never able to join the convergence club. A number of recent studies confirm that many countries have endured relative stagnation while only those lucky club members chugged along on the catch-up trail (DeLong, 1988; Baumol and Wolff, 1988; Verspagen 1991; Chatterji, 1992; Blomstrom *et al.* 1994; Hikino and Amsden, 1994). The common forces model would certainly seem to fail in the face of this evidence alone, unless one argues that there are not enough time-series data available to make a judgment. The contagion model is not necessarily contradicted by this evidence, but it explains the inability of countries to catch up only in the negative, that is as the state of *not* having attained a certain level of, say, educational attainment or capital accumulation. Even Baumol (1994, p. 82) admits, '[T]he line separating those eligible for membership in the convergence club and those foreclosed from membership has not been determined definitively'.¹

The third explanation of the convergence phenomenon seeks to account explicitly for the possibility of convergence or divergence.² These models build on what Abramowitz terms 'social capacities' and attempt to identify the threshold level of such capabilities required for a nation to diverge or converge. Such abilities may include, but are certainly not limited to, the notion of 'absorptive capacity' stressed in the contagion literature. Fagerberg (1988), for example, stresses that contagion alone is insufficient for convergence, but must be combined with appropriate 'national technological activities'. Hikino and Amsden (1994) describe a process of development which allows for the possibility of both convergence or divergence in their model of 'late-industrialization', which gives institutional definition to the threshold level of development whose attainment is required for membership in the convergence club. Three requirements for the ability to

¹ Moreover, the *ad hoc* models have an ambiguous interpretation. When all other factors are accounted for, what is the meaning of the technology gap term? Specifically, most of the studies of the Gershenkron hypothesis use regression analysis. First, they observe whether the base year level of productivity is inversely correlated with the growth rate during the period under consideration. If this relationship ('gross convergence') is weak, then further analysis is undertaken to control for other factors, including educational attainment, investment in machinery and equipment, degree of openness to trade, etc. Usually when this is done, the 'productivity gap' variable becomes significant, that is, the advantages of backwardness are shown once other variables are controlled for (so-called 'net convergence'). But by isolating all these other variables, they are leaving the backwardness variable devoid of meaning. In itself, the backwardness variable is only a proxy for these other factors which (presumably) could not be measured explicitly. The variable has no meaning in itself, except as a proxy for technological disadvantage, which itself is meaningless unless combined with a theory of technological diffusion.

² Note that these explanations are different from models of 'uneven development'. The latter are aimed at explaining divergence and thus, like the common forces and contagion models, emphasise only one possible outcome. Some prominent models of divergence include Dixon and Thirtwall (1975), Krugman (1981) and Mainwaring (1991). Also see Milberg and Elmslie (1993).

implement such a development policy are: (1) a certain threshold level of wealth accumulation, (2) a relatively equal distribution of income, and (3) a relatively well-educated civil service. Without these characteristics, a country is likely to diverge since its growth rate will not be able to keep up with that of the leading countries, much less surpass it. Hodgson's (1989, 1991) emphasis on the non-codifiability of knowledge—and thus the difficulty of its international diffusion—provides a similar perspective on the convergence process as non-inevitable and dependent on domestic institutions and cultural practices. Hodgson (1991) turns the Olson hypothesis on its head, stressing political pluralism and political disruption as indicators of social capabilities, but rejecting the notions that institutions naturally 'ossify' and that leading countries naturally decline.

Formal models that allow explicitly for the possibility of convergence or divergence tend to stress absorptive capacity alone. Verspagen (1991), for example, develops a simple model where catching-up or falling behind depends on the lagging country's 'intrinsic learning capability', which determines the rate of spillover of knowledge from the leading country. The level of development of infrastructure (proxied by electricity generating capacity) represents the capability to assimilate knowledge spillovers from the leading country. A learning capability in the laggard country above a certain level will bring convergence. Otherwise, the laggard country's growth rate remains below that of the lead country. Testing the model for a sample of 135 countries, Verspagen gets results which support the model. Chatterji (1992), in a model which also emphasises capacity to absorb new technology, finds that there exist two mutually exclusive convergence clubs, one for wealthy countries and one for poor ones, where the division between wealthy and poor is determined endogenously in the model. The ultimate level of convergence for the poor group is 1/30 the level of income of the US, the frontier country in the wealthy group. This result confirms Gomulka's (1987, 1990) hypothesised 'hat-shape relationship' between technology gaps and growth rates.

The following discussion of Japan and Portugal is an attempt to build on this body of work and develop a model centering on endogenous technical progress, external economies and trade in goods with production characteristics favourable or unfavourable for convergence. The idea behind the model is traced back to Adam Smith's writings on trade and uneven development. Smith's underlying theory of exchange led him to the theory that specialisation and international trade may lead to either convergence or divergence in development and technology.¹ Smith's description of economic and technological divergence has its direct counterpart in modern positive-feedback theories of trade and development. Kaldor (1972, 1985) emphasised the cumulative causation of an initial productivity lead based on the existence of dynamic scale economies. Given increasing returns, trade is not automatically beneficial to all countries. International trade expands markets and extends the division of labour, but some countries are left behind in the process:

There are a number of factors . . . that create spontaneous tendencies to imbalance which may well mean that the growth of some of the participants is enhanced while the growth of others is diminished. In contrast to the classical theory of international trade, free trade or even a reduction of barriers to trade may stunt the growth of some industrial areas and enhance the growth of others. Free trade therefore is not necessarily to the benefit of each participant, as it is under the theories of Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Heckscher, Ohlin, or Samuelson. (Kaldor, 1985, p. 71)

¹ For a more complete analysis of Smith's theory of trade and development, see Elmslie and James (1993).

Krugman (1981) put a similar general story of international trade into a simple model. Given the existence of external economies, the country with a small head start in an industry will continually increase its productivity advantage over lagging countries. In a trade context the model posits that the opening of trade causes the 'head start' advanced countries to specialise in the external economies-to-scale industries while the lagging countries are forced out of these industries. We do not expect advantages to relative backwardness because continual productivity gains are caused by external economies which are not transferable as are technologies. Trade and time cause initial productivity differences to be magnified; the advantages of relative backwardness are negative.

Our approach differs slightly from Kaldor and Krugman by focusing explicitly on the characteristics of production that lead goods to possess these so-called dynamic or non-dynamic returns. The role of international trade in determining rates of convergence and divergence is that of the determinant of specialisation. In an abstract sense, goods may be classified as either zero-feedback or positive-feedback goods, depending on the scale economies and positive spillovers their production generates in a particular context. The production of zero-feedback goods generally makes use of low-skill workers with little labour force commitment. Technology is often embodied in standardised machinery that has been perfected to the point of requiring a low-skill operator. Also, these goods are often produced with labour intensive techniques, and production 'blueprints' that are unrelated to positive-feedback goods. This implies that technologies employed in the production of these goods do not benefit from spillovers of technological changes occurring in other goods. Standardisation of both product and production process are characteristics which dominate zero-feedback goods.

In contrast, the production of positive-feedback goods requires skilled labour, and is characterised by technologies that are both embodied and disembodied, less standardised of both product and production technique, and ease of technology transfer both within specific good categories and between goods. This last characteristic implies that technology spillover is rapid even between different goods. In positive-feedback goods, dynamic returns dominate standardisation of product and production process.

The determination of whether a good is of the zero-feedback or positive-feedback variety depends on both the (historically specific) technological characteristics of the good and its production process, and the institutional features of the economy producing it. Since international trade tends to lead to greater specialisation in production, it determines in part whether a country captures positive-feedback, dynamic returns, or whether it is dominated by zero-feedback goods. But even a particularly favourable specialisation pattern does not provide an *a priori* guarantee of a country's convergence. Many countries seek to 'lock in' to specialisation in positive-feedback goods, only some succeed. The determining factors are institutional capabilities and rigidities, including political factors. While the US, for example, experienced industrial labour supply and demand enhancement as a result of nineteenth century productivity gains in agriculture, Portugal's concentration on agricultural production generated no such advantages, owing to an inappropriate transport network and land which was poorly suited to the particular crops that the government promoted. Moreover, the outcome of a particular specialisation pattern is historically contingent: both the UK and Japan used linkages to the textile sector to generate positive feedbacks in the nineteenth century, but today, such a strategy would probably not provide the convergence boost. Thus while our emphasis is on cumulative causation, we stress the role of Arrovian 'learning by doing' as much as Kaldorian investment-driven technological progress. These processes are perfectly

compatible. As Hodgson (1991, p. 157) remarks, '[e]conomic growth is predominantly a cognitive, learning process in which the scope of learning is progressively extended by gross investment'.

The positive-feedback versus zero-feedback perspective leads us to look at the types of linkage which develop in an economy to understand long-term patterns of convergence. A pattern that allows a country to establish strong technological and informational linkages both within and between countries will generate a convergence path. Trade is influential in building these linkages. Where these linkages are weak, we expect a divergence path to develop. Moreover, once this pattern of convergence or divergence has begun (i.e. once the path is determined), patterns are self re-enforcing. Krugman (1987, 1991) and Arthur (1989) demonstrate the difficulty of overcoming an initial vicious path of divergence. Increasing returns act to lock in certain patterns, and countries that specialise in zero-feedback goods find themselves outside the converging group. Breaking the pattern of divergence set by this pattern of specialisation is found to be extremely difficult. A simple model of this process is developed in Appendix B. The model develops the zero feedback–positive feedback distinction to demonstrate the development of two convergence clubs rather than one. Countries that are able to specialise in positive-feedback goods converge at ever increasing productivity levels while those countries specialising in zero-feedback goods converge at a low and stagnant level. Thus, we show divergence between groups and convergence within groups.

3. Methodology

There has been a diverse set of research methods employed to assess the degree of convergence of national productivity levels. The simplest approach is to correlate 'technology gaps' in some initial period with growth rates. The former is often proxied by the nation's level of productivity compared to that of the frontier country. A negative correlation provides evidence of convergence. The most commonly used productivity measure is total factor productivity.¹ Total factor productivity is defined as the value of output per dollar of inputs. In general,

$$TFP = (v_i Y_i) / (w_j X_j) \tag{1}$$

where *TFP* is total factor productivity, *Y* are outputs, *X* are inputs and *v* and *w* are output and input weights respectively. All studies of convergence based on *TFP* growth assume only two inputs (labour and capital) and constant returns to scale Cobb–Douglas technology. *TFP* is then equivalent to the Solow residual, so-called because of its discussion and measurement in Solow's (1957) seminal article. Letting *A* represent output not explained by capital and labour use, the production function is:

$$Y = A(L^\alpha K^{1-\alpha}) \tag{2}$$

where *Y* is aggregate output, *L* and *K* are aggregate labour and capital respectively and *α* is labour's share of income. The translog index of *TFP* is defined by taking logs and solving for the Solow residual:

$$TFP = \ln A = \ln Y - \alpha \ln L - (1 - \alpha) \ln K \tag{3}$$

The wage share parameter *α* serves as the weighting scheme for measuring input use.

¹ See, for example, Baumol (1986, 1994), Baumol, Blackman and Wolff (1989), Wolff (1991), Dollar and Wolff (1988, 1994) and Dowrick and Nguyen (1989).

The validity and interpretation of the Solow residual, and the aggregate production function on which it is based, came under intense scrutiny in the 'capital controversy' of the 1960s and 1970s. For a number of years after this debate, the use of the aggregate production function waned. In a disturbing development for those who acknowledged the validity of the capital critique, the aggregate production function has made a resurgence in research on convergence.¹

The capital controversy concerned the issue of the interdependence of income distribution and the value of the capital stock. The Cambridge, UK critique of the aggregate production function was that the value of the capital stock is a function of the distribution of income between wages and profits. The neoclassical model is flawed because the value of the capital stock cannot be known until the profit rate is known, but the profit rate (equal to the marginal product of capital) is unknowable without knowledge of the value of the (aggregate) capital stock. One implication of this circularity critique is that the aggregate production function has been shown to be invalid except within the confines of a one-commodity world (Garegnani, 1970), or when the capital-labour ratios and technologies are equal in the production of all goods (Samuelson, 1962).

The practical problem in the use of the aggregate production function is the potential bias it brings to the analysis. Important for the purposes of this paper are the implications of this critique for the empirical analysis of convergence. If the neoclassical theory of distribution is invalid, and the value of capital is a function of distribution (which it must be in any general aggregate production model), then two major problems arise for the analysis of convergence. First, the capital stock data used in the empirical analysis do not account for the role of distribution and may be distorted as a result. Second, estimates of the Solow residual, also based on this discredited growth model, may also be distorted.² *TFP* growth (*TFPG*) is defined as the amount of growth of output not accounted for by growth in labour and capital:

$$TFPG = \hat{Y} - \alpha \hat{L} - (1 - \alpha) \hat{K} \quad (4)$$

where a $\hat{\cdot}$ over a variable represents the time derivative in the log of the variable. Of note in this common formulation is the assumed constancy of α with respect to time. Regardless of the weighting scheme chosen to perform the *TFPG* calculation, α is a constant. This specification leaves such calculations vulnerable to the critique of Shaikh (1980, 1987) that the residual will not measure technical progress, as it is so often described. Instead, the residual will reflect distributional changes. According to Shaikh (1980, p. 85), 'Solow's measure of technical change is merely a weighted average of the growth rates of the wage rate, w and the rate of profit, r '.³ Shaikh shows that *any* data

¹ Note that the resurgence in popularity of the aggregate production function is not limited to the convergence literature. The 'new' growth theory and the New Classical macroeconomics are also based on this discredited concept. (see Romer, 1986; Plosser, 1989.)

² Of course the rejection of the Solow residual is equivalent to a rejection of the neoclassical notion of a shift versus a movement along a given production function. Kaldor (1961) rejected the feasibility of this distinction and thus turned to a technical progress function as an alternative.

³ The percentage rate of change in A equals the following: $\hat{A}/A = [1 - s]\hat{w}/w + (s/r)\hat{r}$, where s , r , and w are the constant share of income going to capital, the rate of profit, and the wage rate. In a disaggregated, homogeneous input, homogeneous output model, with Hicks neutral technical progress, \hat{A}/A is immune to changes in w and r (i.e. a movement along a linear wage-profit frontier). However, in the absence of these strict assumptions, or those adopted in Samuelson (1962), \hat{A}/A is influenced by changes in wage and profit rates, changes in the composition of output, and changes in the valuation of capital. All these are independent of changes in technology.

(thus the ‘humbug production function’) will provide a good fit of a constant returns to scale Cobb–Douglas specification assuming the wage share is relatively constant. Hsing (1992) further develops the critique of the aggregate production function by demonstrating that the measure of technical change (\hat{A}/A) is itself inconsistent with neutrality and homogeneity. Hsing further shows that reformulating \hat{A}/A to conform to neutrality and homogeneity results in a production identity rather than a production function.

The importance of this critique for the current purposes is that it implies that *TFP* may capture things other than technical progress and may simply represent changes in distribution. In their comparison of the convergence of *TFP* with that of direct labour productivity, Dollar and Wolff (1994) show that in the 1963–1972 period *TFP* converged faster than labour productivity, with the opposite occurring following 1972. Following the above discussion, this result may simply reflect that technical change is embodied in inputs and that the convergence of technologies may not have stopped since 1973. The lack of *TFP* convergence in the later period may reflect a lack of change in the functional distribution of income in that period across the sample countries, not a lack of diffusion of technology. Dowrick and Nguyen (1989) find that *TFP* converged more rapidly than per capita income. This result could reflect a bias in *TFP*. Rapid *TFP* convergence could be based on distributional trends, not technical change.

To avoid such ambiguities we propose the use of a concept of capital as heterogeneous. This vertically integrated approach, using the work of Leontief (1966) and Pasinetti (1981), avoids the bias inherent in the homogeneous capital measures. With input–output data available for a considerable number of countries over a significant period of time, there is no reason not to apply such a methodology to *international* comparisons and thus to the question of convergence itself.¹ It is to this task that we now turn.

The approach adopted in this paper is the vertically integrated measure of productivity that looks at direct and indirect labour productivity in a sector. Vertical integration captures the interdependence of sectors, providing a more comprehensive measurement of labour productivity than simple direct measures.²

The vector of vertically integrated labour coefficients (*vilcs*) is calculated as follows:

$$v = l(I - A)^{-1}$$

where v = the $1 \times n$ vector of *vilcs*

l = the $1 \times n$ vector of direct labour coefficients

I = the $n \times n$ identity matrix

A = the $n \times n$ transactions matrix.

Not only is v a more comprehensive measure than a direct measure but it also captures dynamic scale economies, since productivity in a given vertically integrated sector is a function of productivity in all its intermediate sectors. Because of the wide variance in input composition among final goods sectors, we should not expect each sector to share equally the advantages of dynamic scale economies. Vertically integrated analysis thus captures the importance of Kaldor–Young dynamic returns at a disaggregated level. The

¹ Baumol, Blackman and Wolff (1989) do calculate input–output based measures of labour and total productivity, but these are done only for the case of the US in 1947 and 1976, and in order to confirm the NIPA-observed stagnancy of labour productivity in service sectors in the US resulting from ‘cost disease’.

² Momigliano and Siniscalco (1984) argue that the direct approach will be misleading if indirect effects are significant. Also see Milberg and Elmslie (1992).

Table 1. *Final aggregated industrial sectors*

Sector industry group	Corresponding original sectors in the input-output data base	
	1959-1965	1970-1975
1 Agriculture, hunting, fishing and forestry	1	1
2 Coal mining, crude petroleum, and natural gas	2	2, 3
3 Metal ore and other mining	3	4, 5
4 Food, beverage and tobacco	4	6
5 Textiles and clothing	5, 6	7
6 Wood, wood products, paper and printing	7	8, 9
7 Chemicals and rubber	8, 9	10
8 Petroleum and coal products	10	11
9 Non-metallic mineral products	11	12
10 Ferrous and non-ferrous metals (basic metals)	12	13
11 Machinery, transport and other manufactured goods	13, 14	14, 15
12 Electricity, gas and water	15	16, 17
13 Construction	16	18
14 Trade, distribution, transportation, storage and communication	17, 18	19, 21, 22

simple direct measure fails to capture the dynamic returns since each final goods sector's performance is considered in isolation from all others.

In input-output analysis changes in production over time take the form of changes in the matrix of technical coefficients—a vector for each sector. However, the direction and magnitude of this change is ambiguous. Vertically integrated analysis reduces the input-output current flows matrix to a vector, and thus a scalar for each sector. Productivity change can be measured as changes in this single coefficient. Such a measure of technical change is unambiguous, yet retains the information provided by input-output tables.¹

The United Nations ECE input-output data base allows the use of vertically integrated analysis in an assessment of international productivity divergence, for a limited set of countries over the period 1959-1975.² Table 1 shows the sectoral breakdown of the input-output sectors. Convergence is measured in two ways: first, the ratio of highest to lowest *vilc* across countries is calculated. An increase in this ratio implies divergence and a decrease implies convergence. Second, the coefficient of variation³ (*cv*) in each vertically integrated sector across countries over time is calculated. Declines in the *cv* imply convergence and increases imply divergence in a given sector. The results of these two measures are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

¹ See Pasinetti (1973).

² See United Nations (1976). This is the most up-to-date internationally compatible input-output data set. Maddison (1982, 1991) and Summers and Heston (1988), the usual data sources for convergence tests, provide only aggregate data and are used below for the purpose of general comparison with our disaggregated results.

³ The coefficient of variation is the standard deviation divided by the mean.

Table 2. Total productivity ratios, 1959–1975*

Sector	1959		1965		1970		1975	
	High/low	Countries	High/low	Countries	High/low	Countries	High/low	Countries
1	3.76	[J/G]	3.36	[J/G]	2.97	[P/G]	4.11	[P/G]
2	10.93	[J/N]	11.70	[J/N]	5.97	[G/P]	9.86	[I/P]
3	6.96	[P/I]	4.05	[P/I]	13.75	[I/J]	2.31	[P/J]
4	2.41	[I/G]	2.23	[J/G]	3.60	[P/G]	4.67	[P/G]
5	5.92	[I/N]	3.15	[I/N]	3.28	[J/N]	6.46	[P/N]
6	4.38	[I/G]	3.66	[J/G]	2.37	[J/I]	4.85	[P/I]
7	4.20	[I/N]	2.86	[J/N]	2.41	[P/N]	3.54	[P/N]
8	4.12	[J/N]	6.56	[J/N]	3.44	[G/I]	5.43	[P/I]
9	4.02	[P/N]	2.71	[P/N]	2.44	[P/N]	3.53	[P/N]
10	6.29	[J/N]	3.50	[J/N]	2.87	[G/P]	1.90	[G/N]
11	5.19	[J/N]	3.87	[J/P]	2.28	[J/N]	2.43	[J/N]
12	8.95	[J/N]	10.68	[J/N]	1.86	[P/N]	3.20	[P/I]
13	6.74	[P/N]	4.37	[P/N]	3.65	[P/N]	3.70	[P/N]
14	4.52	[J/N]	4.10	[J/N]	2.69	[P/N]	3.54	[P/N]
Median	4.86		3.77		2.92		3.62	

*The countries included in this table are Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, and Portugal. To interpret this table properly, remember that a high vertically integrated labour coefficient implies low total productivity. Thus the country in the numerator (e.g. Japan in sector 1 in 1959 and 1965) is the low-productivity country, while the country in the denominator (e.g. Germany in sector 1 for all years) is the high-productivity country.

Source: Elmslie and Milberg, 1992.

Table 3. Coefficients of variation of vertically integrated labour coefficients*

Sector	1959	1965	1970	1975
1	0.4599	0.5035	0.4413	0.6567
2	0.8438	0.7266	0.6061	0.9444
3	0.8454	0.5754	0.9839	0.3826
4	0.3069	0.2960	0.5408	0.7370
5	0.6414	0.4640	0.4267	0.7390
6	0.4730	0.4511	0.3943	0.7250
7	0.5854	0.3887	0.2960	0.4866
8	0.5946	0.7187	0.5156	0.7259
9	0.5465	0.4003	0.4011	0.6207
10	0.7297	0.4382	0.3742	0.2423
11	0.6746	0.6014	0.3460	0.2965
12	1.1706	1.2936	0.2754	0.5936
13	0.7536	0.6223	0.6222	0.6069
14	0.5722	0.5060	0.3739	0.5290
Median	0.6180	0.5047	0.4139	0.6138

*The countries included in this table are Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, and Portugal.

Source: Elmslie and Milberg, 1992.

The bottom line of Table 2 shows the median of the sectoral ratios of highest to lowest *vilc* by year. This ratio declined from 4.86 in 1959 to 3.62 in 1975, implying that on average the country with the lowest productivity in each sector partly 'caught up' with the leading country in that sector. This provides support for the

Table 4. *Gross domestic product per capita (thousands of 1975 \$US)*

Country	1959	1965	1970	1975
Germany	4876	6209	7443	8067
Italy	2969	3952	5028	5685
Japan	2003	3391	5496	6518
Norway	4866	6205	7104	8580
Portugal	1360	1850	2575	3057
United States	7321	8634	9459	10,197

Source: Summers and Heston, 1988.

Gershenkron hypothesis, and is consistent with a number of the recent studies discussed above.

Looking at the coefficient of variation of specific sectors in Table 3, no clear-cut tendency for divergence or convergence is observed over the entire period. The number of sectors in which there was convergence was exactly equal to the number of sectors in which divergence was observed over the 1959–1975 period.

Not surprisingly, the comparison of end points (1959 and 1975) hides some interesting fluctuations over the sample period. Specifically, there was considerable convergence between 1959 and 1970, and then equally large divergence between 1970 and 1975. In Table 3 we see that, between 1959 and 1965, 11 of 14 sectors showed convergence. Again, between 1965 and 1970, convergence occurred in 11 sectors. But from 1970 to 1975, convergence occurred in only 4 sectors: metal ore and other mining; basic metals; machinery, transport and other manufactured goods; and construction. Moreover, the median coefficient of variation rose from 0.4139 in 1970 to 0.6138 in 1975. The median for 1975 increases almost to the original 1959 level of 0.6180. This break in the convergence tendency observed in the 1975 data is confirmed by the ratios in Table 2, comparing the highest to lowest productivity in each sector over time. The median of the ratios of highest to lowest sectoral productivity levels declines steadily from 1959 (4.86) to 1970 (2.92) and then jumps back up in 1975, practically to its 1965 level. The picture from this sample is thus considerably more muddy than the Dollar and Wolff (1994) results indicate, and requires an explanation that goes beyond the simple Gershenkron hypothesis.¹

The evidence from the input–output study demonstrates that simply monotonic convergence did not occur at the sectoral level in the sample countries for which input–output data are available. According to Table 2, in 1959 and 1965, Portugal was the low productivity country in 3 sectors: metal ore and other mining; non-metallic mineral products; and construction. In 1970 and 1975, Portugal was still the low productivity country in the same 3 sectors, but in 1970 it became the low productivity country in 7 sectors² and in 1975 it was the low productivity country in 11 of the 14 sectors. Japan was the low productivity country in 6 sectors in 1959, 10 sectors in 1965, 3 in 1970 and only 1 in 1975. The data indicate that over the 1959–1975 period, Portugal failed to join the convergence club while Japan became a card-carrying member.

¹ More recently, Dollar and Wolff (1994) report a major slowdown in the rate of convergence in nine countries after 1972. This is consistent with the results reported here.

² The exception is that Italy appears as the low productivity country in sector three in 1970. This is obviously a data error. Italy was the high productivity country in sector three for 1959 and 1965. Moreover, the ratio jumps from 4.05 in 1965 to 13.75 in 1970 and back down to 2.30 in 1975.

Table 5. Total productivity ratios, 1959–1975, excluding Portugal*

Sector	1959		1965		1970		1975	
	High/low	Countries	High/low	Countries	High/low	Countries	High/low	Countries
1	3.76	[J/G]	3.36	[J/G]	2.24	[J/G]	1.87	[J/G]
2	10.93	[I/N]	11.70	[J/N]	3.61	[G/J]	6.32	[I/J]
3	2.36	[J/I]	1.88	[J/I]	13.75	[I/J]	1.57	[N/J]
4	2.41	[I/G]	2.23	[J/G]	2.41	[J/G]	2.04	[J/G]
5	5.92	[I/N]	3.15	[I/N]	3.28	[J/N]	3.46	[J/N]
6	4.38	[I/G]	3.66	[J/G]	2.37	[J/I]	2.34	[J/I]
7	4.20	[I/N]	2.86	[J/N]	1.98	[J/N]	1.92	[J/N]
8	4.12	[J/N]	6.56	[J/N]	3.44	[G/I]	4.59	[G/I]
9	2.13	[I/N]	2.25	[I/N]	1.56	[J/N]	1.73	[J/N]
10	6.29	[J/N]	3.50	[J/N]	1.86	[G/N]	1.90	[G/N]
11	5.19	[J/N]	3.87	[J/P]	2.28	[J/N]	2.43	[J/N]
12	8.95	[J/N]	10.68	[J/N]	1.19	[G/N]	1.26	[G/I]
13	2.54	[J/N]	2.13	[I/N]	1.55	[I/N]	1.53	[J/N]
14	4.52	[J/N]	4.10	[J/N]	2.32	[J/N]	1.86	[J/N]
Median	4.29		3.43		2.30		1.91	

*The countries included in this table are Germany, Italy, Japan and Norway.
 Source: Milberg and Elmslie, 1993.

Per capita income figures roughly mirror those of the sectoral productivity values. Table 4 reports per capita income levels for each country in the sample, plus the US, over the same time period. This table indicates that Japan rivalled Portugal as the least developed country as measured by per capita income in 1959. Over the sample period the ratio of per capita income for Japan and Norway (the leader in the sample) jumps from 0.41 in 1959 to 0.76 in 1975, while the same ratio for Portugal and Norway moves from 0.28 in 1959 to 0.36 in 1975. These numbers amount to a rate of convergence of 59% for Japan and only 24% for Portugal. The numbers for the other countries in the sample as well as for the United States may also be calculated.

Given Portugal's apparent divergence in most sectors, it is interesting to ask whether the lack of unambiguous convergence in the sample countries can be fully explained by the inclusion of Portugal. To address this, we have recalculated the ratios without Portugal. Table 5 reports total productivity ratios for the low and high productivity country in each sector. By excluding Portugal we note that overall convergence did occur between the sample countries in each period. The median total productivity ratio falls from 4.29 in 1959 to 1.91 in 1975. Moreover, the median ratio fell in the 1970 to 1975 sample period. The strong divergence shown in Table 2 can be attributed to Portugal's performance in relation to the other sample countries. The convergence trend does show signs of slowing during the 1970 to 1975 period for Germany, Italy, Japan and Norway. This is shown by the fact that, even though the median ratio fell, 7 of the 14 sectors diverged over this period. This is compared to 5 sectors diverging from 1959 to 1965 and 4 sectors diverging from 1965 to 1970. However, the fact remains that Portugal is responsible for the median divergence reported in Table 2. Portugal's role is again confirmed using the coefficients of variation for Germany, Italy, Japan and Norway reported in Table 6. Between 1959 and 1975, there was divergence in only 1 sector (petroleum and coal products) and the median coefficient of variation falls from 0.6375 in 1959 to 0.2818 in 1975. Moreover, from 1970 to 1975 the median falls from 0.3506.

Table 6. *Coefficients of variation of vertically integrated labour coefficients, * excluding Portugal*

Sector	1959	1965	1970	1975
1	0.5267	0.5586	0.3577	0.2936
2	0.9193	0.8374	0.4424	0.8063
3	0.3311	0.2501	1.1092	0.2160
4	0.3256	0.3258	0.3924	0.3230
5	0.7662	0.5133	0.4655	0.5013
6	0.5481	0.4895	0.4183	0.3836
7	0.6462	0.4489	0.2707	0.2699
8	0.6413	0.7725	0.6028	0.7704
9	0.3393	0.3808	0.2045	0.2624
10	0.7022	0.4754	0.2547	0.2596
11	0.6540	0.5448	0.3316	0.3454
12	1.2319	1.3279	0.0783	0.0944
13	0.3434	0.3533	0.2146	0.1949
14	0.6337	0.5638	0.3434	0.2465
Median	0.6375	0.5291	0.3506	0.2818

*The countries included in this table are Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway.

Source: Milberg and Elmslie, 1993.

The divergence observed in Tables 2 and 3 for the 1970 to 1975 period is due to the divergence of the least developed country, Portugal.

The remainder of the paper is devoted to applying our theoretical framework to the question of why Portugal and Japan experienced such different paths over our sample period. We have argued that the input-output approach is preferable to the aggregate production function in assessing the degree of convergence. But in order to explain the convergence/divergence tendencies we must push our methodological reassessment further. While most attempts to explain convergence consist of cross-sectional regression analysis, we propose an historical account of political and institutional factors in the particular cases of Japan and Portugal. Implicit in this methodological choice is the belief that regression analysis is insufficient to capture the theoretical dynamics of positive feedbacks associated with specialisation and international trade. Our methodological choice thus reflects a realist perspective, in which economic and political institutions play a fundamental role and are irreducible to the activities of individual agents. In Lawson's (1993) words, these social structures are 'inescapably geohistorically grounded'.

4. A tale of two countries

Japan

The data covering the period from the late 1950s to the middle of the 1970s clearly support the view that Japan experienced rapid convergence toward the developed countries. Further inspection reveals that this pattern is part of a long-run trend. Table 7 reports direct productivity ratios for the US, Norway, and Japan from 1870 to 1979. These data reveal a clear convergence path over the entire period. From 1870 to 1938 Japan converged toward the US and Norway. In 1870, the measure of productivity differential between the US and Japan stood at 0.9975, but by 1938 the measure was down to 0.6679. The destruction of Japan during World War II is evident. In 1950 the measure was 0.8612 and it did not drop below the 1938 level until 1970. During the period from 1960 to 1973

Table 7. *GDP/Man-hour in 1970 US\$*

Year	USA	Japan	USA–Japan		Norway–Japan
			USA	Norway	Norway
1870	0.70	0.17	0.9975	0.40	0.575
1880	0.88	0.20*	0.7727	0.46	0.565
1890	1.06	0.24*	0.7735	0.56	0.571
1900	1.29	0.32*	0.7519	0.63	0.492
1913	1.67	0.37	0.7784	0.82	0.549
1929	2.45	0.64	0.7387	1.28	0.500
1938	2.62	0.87	0.6679	1.62	0.463
1950	4.25	0.59	0.8612	2.03	0.709
1960	5.41	1.03	0.8096	3.04	0.661
1970	6.96	2.79	0.5991	4.78	0.416
1973	7.60	3.49	0.5408	5.28	0.339
1978	8.19	4.22	0.4847	6.43	0.344
1979	8.28	4.39	0.4698	6.65	0.340

*Interpolated using constant geometric growth for 1870–1913.

Source: Maddison, 1982.

(the approximate sampling period above) we see continuous convergence. The rapid convergence from 1960 to 1970 appears as a catch-up for ground lost from the war. Generally, the periods before and after this show persistent, if unsteady, convergence. The results from a comparison to Norway are extremely similar. A persistent convergence path is demonstrated before the war, followed by rapid catch-up from 1950–1973.

As Japan developed, it directed resources toward manufacturers and away from primary products.¹ Table 8 reports data on Japan's exports from 1874 to 1970. Clearly the trend is toward manufacturing sectors. From Table 9 we note that in 1874 the ratio of manufacturing exports to total was 0.423. This ratio rises continuously to 1970. Even WWII does not stop this trend. By far the most important sector in manufacturing exports is textiles. In 1874 the ratio of textile exports to total manufacturing exports is 0.571. This ratio grows to 0.628 in 1895 and maintains its dominance until 1935.² From 1935 to 1970 the ratio falls from 0.545 to 0.120, with the sharpest decline occurring after 1955. The decline in export performance in textiles is consistent with the total labour productivity data which show that Japan became the low productivity country in textiles by 1970, and was only better than Portugal in 1975 (see Tables 2 and 5).

The data indicate that manufacturing in general, and textiles in particular, played a major role in Japan's convergence. We now develop further this line of argument by

¹ As Table 8 reports, primary products exports did rise until WWII. This export expansion clearly represents the rapid rise in agricultural productivity that characterised the Meiji period. As we shall show was the case in manufacturing, this increase in agricultural productivity resulted from direct government policy. This policy was aimed at increasing the information flow between farmers as to the best practice techniques, and the transferring of foreign techniques. The latter effort began by bringing in foreign experts from the United States and Great Britain. However, the large-scale techniques encouraged by these consultants proved unsuitable to Japan's small plot farms. The Japanese then sought the expertise of German and Dutch scientists and engineers. They encouraged improvements in technique and seed, as well as the increased use of fertilisers. These changes were a major source of improved agricultural productivity during the Meiji period. The increase in agricultural productivity was sought by the government largely as part of its overall industrialisation effort (Maddison, 1965).

² In the early period, exports were dominated by silk textiles; later, cotton textiles became a primary export.

Table 8. Japanese commodity exports by industry at constant prices, 1874–1939, 1951–1970*

Year	Processed food	Textiles	Wood products	Chemicals	Ceramics	Metals	Machinery	Misc. manufactures	Total manufacture	Primary products	Total exports
1874	1.8	9.3	0	3.2	0.1	1.5	0	0.3	16.3	20.5	38.5
1880	2.2	14.5	0	8.4	0.6	2.5	0	1.7	29.9	29.6	61.4
1885	3.1	24.3	0.2	10.2	0.8	6.6	0	2.5	47.8	37.1	88.8
1890	2.1	27.5	0.2	13.8	1.5	12.5	0.1	4.0	61.8	49.9	115.7
1895	4.8	81.9	0.7	19.6	2.6	10.2	0.3	10.3	130.5	71.2	209.1
1900	8.3	97.1	23.4	25.7	4.2	13.0	0.8	17.2	169.8	77.6	262.5
1905	35.3	164.3	9.4	40.2	9.6	14.3	3.7	29.3	306.2	74.1	400.6
1910	33.0	290.7	17.1	56.4	11.5	29.5	7.4	43.6	489.1	104.6	628.3
1915	46.3	420.1	18.7	95.1	19.1	56.8	18.4	100.3	774.9	143.4	968.3
1920	50.6	475.3	20.7	87.4	23.9	56.0	36.9	82.4	833.2	91.6	995.6
1925	79.8	768.8	16.2	99.9	35.1	49.8	26.1	82.0	1157.8	145.8	1435.9
1930	119.7	871.3	15.8	171.5	53.2	106.1	72.4	106.2	1516.4	136.8	1755.3
1935	208.5	1665.1	42.8	311.2	103.8	256.2	251.3	216.7	3055.7	210.5	3411.1
1939	235.9	1353.5	106.2	395.9	113.8	232.6	456.6	252.9	3147.4	278.6	3480.0
1951	13.7	135.4	4.8	16.8	20.4	72.9	29.5	17.5	311.0	16.4	332.3
1955	33.8	257.7	15.5	31.5	32.5	116.8	87.3	40.9	615.8	37.5	668.5
1960	68.4	428.8	21.4	89.8	56.1	192.9	320.3	126.3	1304.0	75.8	1405.9
1965	81.1	519.0	35.7	309.8	95.4	618.4	1043.4	224.7	2927.5	93.4	3057.7
1970	148.2	768.9	37.2	872.3	129.8	1160.0	2986.0	284.2	6386.7	85.8	6547.8

Source: I. Yamazawa and Y. Yamamoto, 1979. Crawcour (1988) cites Japanese language critiques of this 14-volume data set.

*1874–1939 are given in 1935–1936 prices in million of yen; 1951–1970 are given in 1965 prices in billions of yen.

Table 9. Changes in the importance of manufactures in Japanese exports

Year	Total manufac./total	Textiles/total manufactures	Manufac. exports*/GNP
1874	0.423	0.571	-
1880	0.487	0.485	-
1885	0.538	0.508	-
1890	0.534	0.445	-
1895	0.624	0.628	-
1900	0.647	0.572	-
1905	0.764	0.537	0.046
1910	0.778	0.594	0.062
1915	0.800	0.542	0.090
1920	0.837	0.570	0.072
1925	0.806	0.664	0.093
1930	0.864	0.575	0.109
1935	0.896	0.545	0.166
1939	0.904	0.430	0.141
1951	0.936	0.435	0.037
1955	0.921	0.418	0.063
1960	0.928	0.329	0.084
1965	0.957	0.177	0.116
1970	0.975	0.120	-

*GNP data is taken from *Japanese Economic Growth: Trend Acceleration in the Twentieth Century* by Kazushi Ohkawa and Henry Rosovsky, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1973. To 1939, GNP is given at 1934–1936 prices in million yen, from 1951, GNP is given at 1960 prices in billion yen.

focusing on textiles and manufacturing. Specifically, we focus on the role played by positive feedbacks in Japan’s convergence, and argue that external economies played a major role in the early development of the textile industry and external economies generated by the military provided for the later growth (1900–1920) and development of the heavier industries such as chemicals, metals and machinery. These developments set Japan on the convergence path that we observe from 1959 to 1975. This path was severed by WWII but quickly re-established after the war.

Textiles. As indicated above, the textile industry was extremely important in Japan’s early development. The industry was Japan’s first large-scale, modern industry and was responsible for one-third of all industrial production from 1890–1930 (Yamazawa, 1990, p. 70). Table 9 shows that textiles accounted for over half of all manufacturing exports until 1939. By 1920, Japan passed Great Britain as the world’s leading exporter of cotton textiles. The growth of textile exports from 1900 to 1935 is astonishing. In 1900 textile exports were valued at 97.1 million yen at constant prices, by 1935 the export value reached 1665.1 million, an increase of 1600%. Moreover, the growth of the cotton textile industry provided important support for downstream industries in spinning machinery and tools, so that by the late 1920s spinning machinery was a net exporting industry (Akamatsu, 1961).

Government involvement in cotton textiles began early. Japan’s trade surpluses of the pre-Restoration period quickly turned into large deficits. From 1874 to 1880 the total deficit at constant prices was 460.5 million yen, 92.9 million more than total exports. Textile imports accounted for 45% of all imports and the value of these imports exceeded

the total value of exports.¹ Because of their importance, the government began an extensive import substitution programme in cotton textiles. This was an important decision. Textiles proved to be a positive feedback industry, useful for its technological spillovers, its demonstration effects and its downstream industry benefits.

The government began by buying two cotton spinning plants in 1878, and in 1879 it also bought 10 more plants for sale on easy terms to private investors and provided financing for three additional plants. '[T]he government hoped that its new nonmilitary industries [cotton and wool textiles] would have a demonstration effect in familiarizing Japanese with factory production, training administrative and technical staff, and accumulating experience that could be made generally available' (Crawcour, 1988, p. 612). This effort paid large dividends even though the government-run enterprises failed to make a profit. '[T]he State shouldered the early risks, reconnoitred the path of technological advance, and patronized many private ventures which followed on its heels' (Lockwood, 1955, p. 507). In the period from 1883 to 1893, a large number of spinning companies were established without government aid, and by 1895 a small trade surplus in textiles developed. The new private companies learned a great deal from the government's operations and failures. In 1884 the first major plant, the Osaka Spinning Company, began production using cheap Chinese cotton and steam power. This factory was also much larger than the early government ones; 10,500 spindles compared to 2,000, allowing the firm to take advantage of scale economies (Yamazawa, 1990). Within 4 years the operation was making large profits and paying high dividends. In 1888, the Japan Cotton Spinners' Association was organised. This organisation was developed to ensure that technology, production, and cost information flowed freely between producers. Its purpose was to ensure large and continuous external economies for all its members.²

The cotton spinning industry went through several stages of development. First was the importing of technology. In 1882, the Osaka company ordered its plant design and all its machinery from the Platt Brothers, a British engineering company. Moreover, the company made extensive use of the Platt Brothers' technical expertise. Foreign technicians generally played a major role in the transfer of technology to the Japanese industry.

Second, the Japanese took the foreign technology and then adapted it to their own requirement. By running factories at two 12-hour shifts per day, and only resting the machines for 2 or 3 days a month, the effective labour-capital ratio was two and one-fifth higher in Japan than in Britain (Ranis, 1957). This resulted in a higher depreciation rate that allowed Japanese cotton spinning firms to maintain the best techniques rather than produce with technologically dated machines. Advances from mules to reels and the development of bundling press equipment provide excellent examples (Saxonhouse, 1974).

The Japan Cotton Spinners Association also played a major role in ensuring that all firms maintained the latest techniques, by ensuring the rapid dissemination of the best possible information for its members. According to Saxonhouse:

The following information, broken down by firms, was published on a monthly basis in the Association's journal . . . (1) Average number of spindles operated per day; (2) Working days per month; (3) Working hours per day; (4) Yarn produced by count; (5) Raw cotton consumed; (6) Workers, male and female; and (7) Wages, male and female . . . [C]omplete cost data for certain

¹ These figures were developed from Yamazawa and Yamamoto (1979).

² The members also agreed not to hire skilled workers away from each other. When this pledge failed, the association acted to mediate (Crawcour, 1988).

mills were [also] occasionally published . . . [The journal also] translated particularly interesting articles appearing in foreign language journals. (Saxonhouse, 1974, p. 160)

The Association was very influential and always encouraged its members to share the costs and benefits of technological acquisition and development. This cooperation meant that 'the cost of acquiring technological information for any given Japanese spinning firm was extremely low by international standards' (*ibid.*, p. 163).

Finally, the success of the cotton spinning industry led, through the Association, to the development of downstream indigenous industries producing spinning tools and machinery.¹ The borrowing of British technology led to Japan's first major internationally competitive non-military machine industry. The Japanese made their first copies of English hank-cop reelers in 1888. By 1892 no new orders for English hank-cop reelers were made, and by 1907 no orders for any English machinery were made (*ibid.*, p. 155).

From a perspective that emphasises cumulative causation and external economies (i.e. positive feedbacks), we are led to conclude that the success of textiles in Japan was the direct result of an active pursuit of foreign technological knowledge and its dissemination by the Association. This led to the development of domestic downstream industries which could develop important indigenous technologies leading to still further development of other industries. Cumulative effects, begun by textiles, had an impact both on the industry itself and on other industries in the economy. In explaining the convergence of Japan over the period to 1975, it is fundamental to look at the early development of textiles as a prime element in the story. Japan's first modern manufacturing industry developed by borrowing foreign technology which it was quickly able to assimilate, copy and improve. Many of the day-to-day improvements in technology which resulted from cumulative experience in production were quickly disseminated to all firms by the Association. The government began the industry with the intention of creating an increasing returns, spillover industry that would propel the entire economy forward. The early decision to promote textiles helped to set Japan on a path of convergence toward the western powers.

The role of the military. Another major element in the story of convergence is early Japanese militarism. External economies from its military build-up aided the development of textiles and led to the development of Japan's heavy industry including metals, machinery and, later, chemicals.

Several writers have argued that Japanese militarism was a major drag on the economy during the Meiji Restoration.² Much of this work focuses on the increased taxation and government spending brought on by Japan's expansionism as evidence of its growth-retarding influence. However, other writers have concluded that Japan's military build-up played a great part in its 'industrial revolution'. 'Imperialism . . . coincided with rapid industrialization', and brought Japan the status it craved as a major power (Iriya, 1989). We argue that Japanese militarism did play a substantial role in the development of light and heavy industry,³ with the greatest impact coming from the increased demand

¹ The dyestuffs industry was also an important downstream industry developed directly from textiles (Yamazawa, 1990).

² Oshima (1965) is one example.

³ For example, cotton textiles exports exceeded imports for the first time in 1897. This export success was aided greatly by the victory in the Sino-Japanese War which resulted in the opening of the cotton trade to China.

for industrial products and the technology disseminated to build these products. The latter aspect is emphasised here.

The military was a centre for the dissemination of high technology capital equipment and technical expertise to private industry in Japan. Yamamura (1977) provides a rough measure of the technological gulf that existed between military arsenals (including satellite plants and other government financed factories created for the military), and private shipyards and factories. He measures what he calls 'prime-mover capacity' measured in horse power for both military and non-military industry from 1899 to 1912. The number of workers in each sector is divided by this capacity variable to obtain a productivity measure. Military arsenals are shown to be 42% more productive in 1899 and 55% more productive in 1912. The technology gap was substantial during this period, and the size of the gap was increasing. The questions concerning us here are how the military obtained and disseminated the technology.

After rising to power, Meiji leaders quickly moved to increase Japan's military power. By 1880 four arsenals with satellite plants and three government shipyards were operating to supply the military. The government shipyards were the first to build iron ships in Japan. Most of the technology necessary to build modern military equipment was bought and borrowed from abroad. '[I]n 1884, the arsenal [Tokyo] had Belgian, French, and German engineers and foremen, imported machinery, [and] 2,094 workers ...' (Yamamura, 1977, p. 114). Other arsenals in Osaka, Yokosuka and Tsukiji also developed early by the same process of importing technology in the form of capital equipment and technicians. To supplement the flow of foreign technology, many Japanese engineers were sent abroad to acquire knowledge. The development of machine-tool factories and shipyards developed according to the same basic pattern.

The importance of this technological acquisition by the military was that it resulted in a rapid dissemination of the technology to private firms at low cost.¹ This process of dissemination took many forms, including allowing firms to purchase foreign (and arsenal-produced) machinery owned by the government at subsidised rates, giving no-interest loans to firms purchasing technology, and direct technical assistance.

The rapid growth of technical knowledge by the arsenals and the rapid pace of the spillovers continued, and was accelerated by the Sino-Japanese War (1895),² and the war with Russian in 1904. '[T]he most significant effects of the Russo-Japanese War were the rapid dissemination of modern technology to a large number of private firms and a sudden accelerated growth in the fledgeling and often struggling private machine and machine-tool makers who received increased and timely military demand and technological assistance' (Yamamura, 1977, p. 121). This process of technological spillover led directly to the development of endogenous technical progress in private factories and shipyards. The combined effects of the transfer and development of technology resulted in Japan's private shipyards being as advanced as any in Europe by 1912.³ These advances resulted in the increased competitiveness of Japan in international markets, allowing Japan to benefit greatly from WWI and to establish new trading arrangements

¹ Cotton textiles was an early benefactor. The Osaka plant used gears supplied by an arsenal, while most other early plants used steam engines produced by an arsenal (Yamamura, 1977).

² The Yawata Iron Works was created in 1895 because of the increased demand for iron associated with the war. With great technical assistance, production began in 1901 and was Japan's first successful major heavy industry (Iriya, 1989).

³ These shipyards also produced locomotives, turbines, railroad cars and other machinery for the private sector (Yamamura, 1977).

and expand exports. Most important, however, is that the technological spillovers created in Japan's early industrial efforts set it on a path of continued convergence toward the Western powers. Once this convergence path was established, it created the opportunities for its maintenance. The conditions necessary for the rapid rate of convergence we observed from 1959 to 1975 in Tables 2 and 3 were laid years earlier by Japan's decisions to import substitute in cotton textiles and to develop as a major military power. The success of these policies as a development strategy resulted from the assimilation of Western technology and the rapid rate of spillover of technology within the industry and the economy. In essence, the decision to industrialise by encouraging positive feedback industries set Japan on the convergence path that we observe in the data to 1975.

Portugal

Portugal provides an interesting case study against the simple Gershenkron hypothesis. By the 1950s the major roadblocks to rapid convergence had been removed. Yet, in productivity terms, this country diverged from the other countries in our sample. This section reviews the historical record of Portugal to argue that its trade relations and long-established trade patterns may have played a vital role.

The question is not whether Portugal developed over the sample period. It did. Table 6 shows that Portugal's per capita GDP grew at about the same rate as Norway's.¹ Krugman and Macedo (1981, pp. 54–55) characterise Portugal by 1973 as 'fairly typical of the group of middle income nations sometimes referred to as . . . "nics"', adding that Portugal was 'able to achieve rapid economic growth during the 1960s and early 1970s via increased trade, [and] exploiting their relatively abundant supplies of semiskilled workers'. Portugal did develop, but it did not converge in absolute terms, as Gershenkron would lead us to expect. Why?

The Fascist government of Oliveira Salazar can partially explain both. When the new government took power in 1928, Salazar began building his 'economic corporation' which was set up to link government and business. A leading historian of Portugal wrote that, 'the corporate system built up an economically organized country, an interventionist state essentially different from the liberal, "laissez-faire" republican order' (Marques, 1976, p. 180). A large part of this system was devoted to the development of infrastructure. The total road network more than doubled from 1925 to 1950. Port facilities were extensively improved so as to allow larger ships and more traffic. Telegraphs and telephones were also greatly expanded. '[T]he public works policy bore fruit, making possible—along with the general expansion of Europe—the rapid economic development of Portugal in the 1950s and the 1960s' (*ibid.*, p. 198).

But productivity convergence did not occur. Several reasons can be given for this. First was Salazar's anti-democratic bent. Examples of this include harsh censorship rules, the active Secret Police, and the aggressive National Guard. Salazar (a former university professor) was also extremely suspicious of intellectuals, resulting in Portugal's high illiteracy rates. Because of this anti-education bias, Portugal fell further behind the rest of Europe in terms of science and technology creation.² Second was Portugal's major resource commitment to keeping its remaining colonies. However, some economic analyses suggest that the captive markets and cheap supplies of raw materials more than offset Portugal's military and administrative expenses in keeping the colonies (Stallings,

¹ In fact, Portugal's per capita GDP grew faster than Norway's from 1965 to 1970.

² The major exceptions were tropical medicine and civil engineering.

1981). In addition 'the war [in Angola] became a factor of economic growth. It even encouraged Portuguese industries connected with the army' (Lucena, 1979, p. 77).

Finally, and importantly, Salazar made a decision early in his regime to emphasise a stagnant non-increasing returns industry, grain. The main concern here was to attain self-sufficiency in grain production. In 1929 Salazar began the *campanha do trigo* (wheat campaign). The 1930s saw vast amounts of resources devoted to increasing the harvests, and agricultural land and wheat output continued to increase to the 1960s. The results of this campaign were disastrous, most soils were never properly conditioned for grain production and per acre yields eventually fell (Marques, 1976).

Agriculture is not necessarily a constant returns industry. Rapid technical progress in agriculture has made productivity increases very rapid in many countries. However, for Portugal this was not the case. Even though the government encouraged and protected agriculture, no serious attempt was ever made to modernise that sector's archaic production methods (Murteira, 1979).¹ Even with the original goal of self-sufficiency, agricultural imports of grains, fish and meat accounted for 13% of imports by 1973. The resources poured into agriculture over the years meant that when Portugal finally made a serious transition from agriculture to manufacturing in the 1950s and 1960s, it began much further behind its major European trading partners than if it had started earlier.² Most of the growth of the 1960s occurred in manufactures and construction. But the stagnation of agriculture helped to keep Portugal from making the investments in technology necessary to converge from such a low starting point. Unlike Japan, Portugal's government designed no specific policies to create the technology transfer and spillover. No policy existed to generate convergence through encouraging external economies of any kind. In fact, the import substitution policy for agriculture seemed to discourage these types of activity.

Portugal's pattern of specialising in zero-feedback goods has a long history. This history is characterised by Portugal's willingness to grant trade concessions (to Great Britain) in exchange for military protection. This pattern killed off promising industrialisation efforts (again in textiles) in 1703 with the signing of the Methuen Treaty. This treaty reopened Portugal to English woollen cloth and wool manufactures in exchange for Portugal's wines being allowed into England at a tariff one-third lower than that on French wines. The effects of the treaty were that '[a] few years after 1703, the import of English woollens quadrupled, eliminating the entire domestic production ...' (Sideri, 1970, p. 45).³ Sideri goes on to conclude that, 'the Treaty caused the destruction of the only sector [textiles] which could have served as the leading sector of the industrialization process, and whose very existence would probably have prevented the "technology gap" which still affects Portugal today' (*ibid.*, p. 47). Trade policies do have long-term effects: if Portugal had had a manufacturing sector at the beginning of the industrial revolution in the middle of the eighteenth century, it would have been in a

¹ This is confirmed by the vertically integrated analysis above. Portugal is second only to Japan in 1959 and 1965 as the lowest productivity country in agriculture, and it is the lowest productivity country in 1970 and 1975.

² In 1950, 48% of employment was in agriculture, while agriculture accounted for 28% of the GNP and 70% of exports. By 1970, agriculture accounted only for 32% of employment and 17% of GNP, while manufactured goods accounted for 60% of exports (Murteira, 1979).

³ The treaty brought a formal end to Portugal's first major attempt at industrialisation policy. In the late seventeenth century, D'Ericeira (superintendent of manufactures for Portugal) developed an industrialisation plan centring on glass and textiles. This effort included 'hiring foreign experts and artisans from France, England, Spain, and Venice; lending funds; and granting all sorts of privileges to the new industries' (Marques, 1976, p. 382).

position 'to assimilate the new production techniques that were being developed. To the nonexistence of a manufacturing nucleus at a stage when production techniques were being revamped in the last quarter of the century, must be ascribed the fact that Portugal became an agricultural dependency of England' (Furtado, 1963, p. 90).

Other industrialisation efforts met similar fates. Around 1770, Portugal developed a plan that re-established manufacturing, especially along the coast. The effort ultimately failed, partly because of the invasion of France that forced Portugal back to pre-1770 trade patterns, especially with Great Britain. Portugal was left with an economy dominated by a traditional, slow growth agricultural sector with only small pockets of primitive manufacturing. During the second half of the nineteenth century Portugal again attempted to industrialise, this time by building its infrastructure. This effort failed. As an example, from 1855 to 1859 light manufacturing in textiles and chemicals averaged approximately 7% of exports, but by 1890 no industrial products were exported (in percentage terms; Sideri, 1970, pp. 170, 175). In sum, trade policies that resulted in Portugal's specialisation in zero-feedback industries did play a significant role in its failure to converge to the wealthier European countries. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Portugal did converge slightly in terms of overall per capita income. However, this convergence of per capita income did not result from a convergence of vertically integrated labour productivity. In these terms, Portugal was still diverging in 1975. Perhaps this is part of the reason behind Portugal's failure to continue its slow convergence of per capita income since 1975, as is demonstrated by the Summers and Heston (1988) data set. It was not grounded in the secure foundation of vertically integrated labour productivity convergence.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that, while Portugal and Japan were at similar stages of development in terms of technology and per capita GNP in 1959, by the mid 1970s Japan had converged quickly to the standard of living of the US while Portugal had not. Our explanation of the two countries' convergence experiences focuses on the role played by increasing returns, learning-by-doing, and technological-spillover (i.e. positive feedback goods) industries. In increasing returns models, patterns of convergence or divergence can become self-perpetuating as initial conditions become locked in. If cumulative causation and technological lock-in are important elements in determining convergences or divergence paths, then economists need to look to turning points in a country's history to analyse how these paths are established. For Japan, we focused on the early decisions by the Meiji government to foster cotton textiles as an import-competing industry, and to build a high-technology military industry. These sectors proved to be very dynamic in terms of technology creation and dissemination, and promoted other related industries such as machinery, shipbuilding, steel, etc. For Portugal, we focused on the persistent failure to develop such industries. Historically, Portugal gave up her industrialisation efforts as trade concessions to Great Britain, establishing a pattern of specialisation in low-productivity-growth agricultural products. This set the stage for the productivity divergence witnessed from 1959 to the mid-1970s.

The main point is not that positive-feedback industries tell the whole story. We have argued, however, that early historical patterns of political and social action can have important long-term effects. As Hodgson (1991, p. 162) puts it, 'events occurring during a crucial and formative period of change may greatly influence later socio-economic

outcomes'. We have argued, for example, that when international trade acts to expand small initial differences (in productivity, etc.), divergence can be an endogenous result of exchange rather than an anomaly generated outside exchange.

The ability or inability of a nation to converge to the productivity level of the country on the global frontier no doubt depends on that nation's attainment of a certain threshold level of income, education, capital accumulation, and equality of income distribution. We have emphasised the role of institutional development, including an ability to manage international trade and capture external economies, and to coordinate investment. The determination of the required threshold and the factors necessary for its attainment are difficult to capture in a single formal model, and it is not surprising that no choice-theoretic micro model has been developed to explain the phenomenon. We have proposed instead an eclectic approach which involves the use of input-output data to analyse the degree of convergence or divergence, and historical analysis to capture the conjuncture of socio-economic factors that influence the process. 'Capital' is considered heterogeneous and produced, thus overcoming the bias inherent to analysis based on homogeneous capital and aggregate production functions. Overall, our approach is not a far cry from the original approach by Gershenkron (1952) to his 'advantages of relative backwardness' hypothesis, which took the form of a careful institutional study of the development of Russian socio-economic development.

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Appendix A: data sources and manipulation

Input-Output Tables

The A matrices of each country were constructed from the *Standardized Input-Output Tables of ECE Countries for Years around 1959, 1965, 1970, and 1975* published through the United Nations by the Economic Commission for Europe. Each transaction matrix for years around 1970 and 1975 is aggregated to 24 sectors by the ECE, using the post-1965 International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC). Most sectors are aggregated to the 2-digit level. Each matrix for years around 1959 and 1965 is aggregated to 20 sectors by the ECE using the pre-1965 ISIC.

In order to make the tables compatible with each other and the available labour data, certain manipulations of the data were performed. First, the tables were made compatible. Italy had one sector that was not reported in 1970 and 1975; this sector had to be filled in order for the results to be comparable between countries. The missing sector is other mining (ISIC 29). The methodology to develop the Italian sector was to take the data from France and assume $x_{ij}/l_{iy} = x_{iz}/l_{iz}$ where i and j are standard input-output sectors, and y and z are each country. The x_{ij} for Italy was then divided by its purchasing power parity exchange rate (z/y) to make it conform with the rest of the table. The sectoral output data are derived by assuming that $x_{iy}/l_{iy} = x_{iz}/l_{iz}$. Again, this is divided by the purchasing power parity exchange rate.

The vertically integrated labour coefficients were made compatible between countries by converting the country-currency-denominated output to a dollar-denominated output, multiplying by the US purchasing power parity exchange rate from Ward (1985). Also, the output was deflated by dividing by a wholesale price index (1970=100) for general goods published in the *Statistical Yearbook* (1977).

Second, in order to make the tables consistent with the labour data, we aggregated the 24 sectors for 1970 and 1975 and the 20 sectors for 1959 and 1965 into 14 sectors, shown in Table 1.

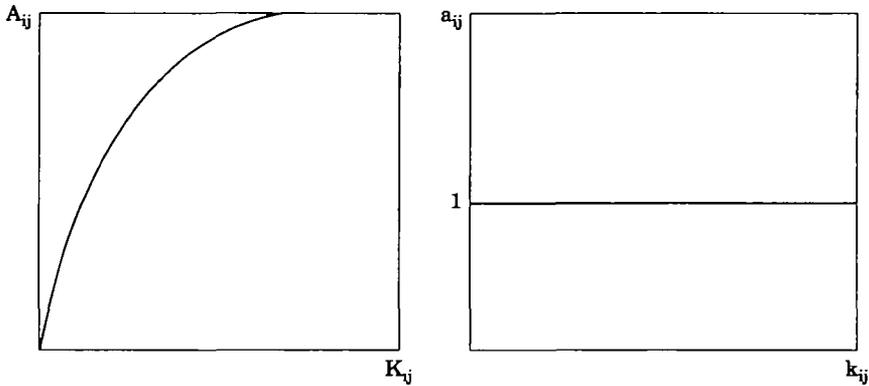


Figure B1.

Labour data

The labour data used to develop the direct labour coefficients are taken from the *Yearbook of Industrial Statistics, vol. 1, 1976* edition published by the United Nations, and from *Labour Force Statistics, OECD, 1986*. To obtain the missing sector for Italy the following methodology was employed: $l_{iy}/X_{iy} = l_{iz}/X_{iz}$ for countries y and z .

Appendix B: a model of convergence and divergence

Consider a simple Ricardian m country, one factor world producing n goods with constant returns to scale at any time t . Following Krugman (1987), actual labour productivity at any point in time is a function of cumulative output. Goods are defined by the effect of experience on productivity and the effect of output on experience. Let X_{ij} indicate the output of any good i from country j . For reasons that become clear later, these goods are called positive-feedback goods. Also, let x_{ij} represent the output of any zero-feedback good i produced by country j . Given a Ricardian formulation of the model, we obtain the following:

$$X_{ij}(t) = A_{ij}(t) L_{ij}(t) \quad i = 1 - h \tag{B1}$$

$$x_{ij}(t) = a_{ij}(t) l_{ij}(t) \quad i = h - n$$

where L_{ij} and l_{ij} are the labour used to produce X_{ij} and x_{ij} respectively, and $A_{ij} = X_{ij}/L_{ij}$ and $a_{ij} = x_{ij}/l_{ij}$. Over time, as experience accumulates, productivity increases owing to learning. Thus:

$$A_{ij}(t) = K_{ij}(t)^{\epsilon_j} \quad 0 < \epsilon_j < 1 \tag{B2}$$

$$a_{ij}(t) = k_{ij}(t)^{\lambda_j} \quad 0 \leq \lambda_j < 1$$

where K_{ij} and k_{ij} represent accumulated knowledge in the production of any X_i and x_i for each country j . One distinguishing characteristic between positive-feedback and zero-feedback goods is that $\epsilon_j > \lambda_j$ for all j s. In practice, goods have more or less positive-feedback characteristics. For simplicity assume that $\lambda_j = 0$ and $\epsilon_j > 0$. The relationship between productivity and output for positive and zero-feedback goods is shown in Figure B1.¹

Knowledge is accumulated by increased output. However, knowledge in any given good X_i and x_i is augmented not only by increases in a commodity's own output, but also by the increased output of other industries (i.e. producers of jet aircraft learn from the aerospace industry, etc).

¹ Note that in the general case, a_{ij} is below A_{ij} for any constant level of $K_{ij} = k_{ij}$.

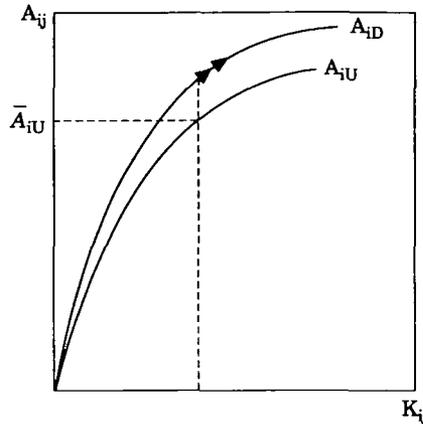


Figure B2.

Thus:

$$K_{ij}(t) = \int_0^t X_{ij}(z) + \delta x_{ij}(z) dz \quad 0 \leq \delta < 1 \tag{B3}$$

$$k_{ij}(t) = \int_0^t \alpha X_{ij}(z) + \beta x_{ij}(z) dz \quad 0 \leq \delta < 1 \quad 0 < \beta < 1$$

where t is time, z is the integration factor over time and δ , α , and β are parameters specifying the rates of knowledge spillover.

Knowledge is transmitted perfectly between positive-feedback goods, but these goods can gain knowledge from zero-feedback goods as well. The closer δ is to zero, the less of this type of knowledge accumulation that takes place. Zero-feedback goods producers also accumulate knowledge, but this occurs at a slower rate which is determined by α and β .

Thus, two characteristics distinguish positive from zero-feedback goods. First, from equation B2, learning has a stronger effect on the labour productivity in positive-feedback goods production. Second, from equation B3, knowledge is accumulated faster for any given increase in output for positive-feedback goods.¹

Now, assuming full employment, fixed labour forces in each country j , and no savings, we may open the model to international trade. Countries will specialise production in either a positive-feedback or a zero-feedback good. The determinant of any country's specialisation pattern may be any number of factors.² For example, country 1 may have a technological advantage in the production of any positive-feedback good, thus it has a high ϵ . Country 2 may be larger, thus possessing a great deal of experience, or its labourers may have a strong taste for a particular good, also resulting in a larger accumulation of knowledge. Whatever the reason, some countries specialise in a positive-feedback good while others specialise in a zero-feedback good.

Continuing with the special case example where $\lambda=0$, we denote countries specialising in positive-feedback goods as D and countries specialising in zero-feedback goods as U. Also, assume in this case that specialisation is based on a technology gap between D and U in the production of positive-feedback goods. Thus, for any given K_j , $A_{iD} > A_{iU}$. The opening to trade forces U out of positive-feedback production. As shown in Figure B2, this causes A_{iU} to stagnate at \bar{A}_{iU} while A_{iD} increases with increased knowledge.

¹ For the special case described in Figure B1, knowledge plays no role in increasing labour productivity.

² Given that this is not a model interested in establishing one major factor determining trade patterns, we are not particularly concerned with what determines trade patterns in any specific case.

Relative productivities continually diverge (i.e. trade causes a divergence of relative productivities so that $A_{iD}/\tilde{A}_{iU} = K_{iD}^{\alpha_D}/K_{iU}^{\alpha_U}$ continually increases. In the special case, the zero-feedback goods play no direct role in the measure of divergence.

The result of international trade is not one 'convergence club' but two. D countries converge to each other, at ever increasing productivity levels, while U countries converge at a stagnant level. A further important result of the continued divergence between the D and U countries is that once a pattern of specialisation is established it is ever more difficult to overcome. This is the lock-in result often referred to in the positive feedback literature.