If the volume has a theme less general than that industrialization for the Pacific Basin L.D.C.s is a Good Thing, that theme is the product cycle. With comparative advantage bouncing around in a fairly predictable pattern, most of our authors think or hope that private direct investment from the U.S. and Japan have learned to take more than a momentary view, and will build up the “right” set of industries in the Pacific L.D.C.s—or rather, that public agencies either national or international could not be trusted to do systematically better. This runs counter to the influential views of Professor Kiyoshi Kojima of Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, especially as regards direct investment by U.S. firms. (His theory is mentioned; I wonder whether he was offered any chance to defend them either in person or by proxy.)

Many important skeletons are kept locked in their respective closets by this series of papers. Let me mention just four: (1) Rivalry between the Pacific Basin L.D.C.s themselves for the more prestigious, high-skilled, high-paying industries; (2) What about sharper protectionism, if it comes to all these countries’ potential markets, particularly the American one? (3) What would happen to Pacific Basin industrialization if a strong trade-union movement were to get under way in one or more of the countries concerned? And finally (4) what is it anticipated that the regional Communist powers—North Korea and Viet Nam as well as China—will do in international competition in the market for industrial products? Surely they are not expected to withdraw behind “Chinese walls” and take in each others’ washing?

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Japanese in decision-making groups are different from Westerners: they don’t take strong public positions, they generate little overt conflict, and indeed they go to extreme lengths to avoid conflict altogether. At least this is the image Westerners have attributed to Japanese decision-makers in settings ranging from rural villages to modern businesses and government organizations. The reasons underlying this allegedly characteristic Japanese behavior are presumed to lie in cultural values.

Robert Marshall accepts this stereotypic image of Japanese decision-making, but argues that those who describe it miss the point of why the Japanese act this way. The reason, Marshall argues, is not because of underlying Japanese values, but rather because of the logic of the situations in which Japanese collective decision-making commonly occurs, i.e. in “productive exchange relations governed by mutual investment.”

Rural Japanese hamlets were organized as “productive exchanges:” member families had to cooperate in maintaining the small-scale irrigation systems necessary to grow rice. In doing this they not only had to work together but to invest family-owned resources in the joint productive activity. This dependence on productive exchange relations governed by mutual investment, according to Marshall, continued in a diminished form at the time of his fieldwork in the late 1970s. It is also characteristic of modern large Japanese organizations, possibly (though Marshall does not go into this) because of the permanent employment system.

In the first quarter of his book, Marshall develops a series of hypotheses about how decision-makers could be expected to act in productive exchange relations governed by mutual investment. He then proceeds through a description of the collective decision-making apparatus in Nohara (the hamlet in Aichi prefecture where he did three years of fieldwork) to a description and analysis of seven collective decisions. The descriptions of the decisions are used as a test of Marshall’s hypotheses.

The hypotheses themselves are posed in rather obtuse language, e.g. “Corporate productive exchange transactions governed by mutual investment always follow the same bifurcate procedure,” but, if I follow Marshall’s logic correctly, his overall argument boils down to something like the following:

Families in Japanese hamlets must work together and must also contribute family-owned resources to the collective activities of the hamlet. If they are opposed to a decision made by the hamlet as a whole, they can withdraw from the hamlet—but it is reasonable to do this only in the rare case where the benefits of staying in the hamlet are outweighed by the costs of remaining.

In a long term relationship of this sort it is only reasonable that those proposing decisions carefully prepare the way by finding out the opinions of other members and soliciting support (nemawashi). If opposition to a proposed action is strong enough that it might result in important resources being withdrawn from the hamlet, it may be foolish to persist. Conversely, if one is clearly on the losing side (and unwilling to consider leaving the group), it makes little sense to fight in the face of certain defeat. Under these circumstances, one would not expect strong public advocacy to occur. And, if decisions should come to a vote, one would expect unanimity or near unanimity.

The logic of the situation also suggests that agreements will not typically be reached via bargaining. The powerful do not have to offer concessions to the weak. All the powerful have to do is to avoid outraging the weak to the point that they defect with valued resources.

Marshall sees support for his hypotheses in his accounts of decisions to buy softball equipment, bring in the city water system, have English lessons at the hamlet hall, etc. More grandly, he concludes from his cases studies that: “the mode in which a collective decision is taken is an emergent property of the decision-making process itself and not the result of participant’s preferences, culturally or otherwise determined, for particular decision-modes.”

I have some misgivings about the support offered for the hypotheses from the descriptions. Not all have much to do with the productive exchange relationships of the hamlet (e.g. the decision by some members of the hamlet to form a softball team and to buy equipment for it). In some of the cases, important events occurred that Marshall did not observe. A research procedure in which one generates hypotheses and then seeks stories to support them can lead to considerable insight if the stories are rich enough that they persuasively detail the mechanisms by which the hypothesis operates. It did not seem to me that the cases developed here were rich enough to serve this function. Despite this, I think one aspect of Marshall’s argument was both persuasive and important. William Duchi in The M-Form Society (Reading: Adison-Wesley, 1984) suggests that Westerners learn from a Japanese collective decision-making process in which everyone cooperates, because everyone knows they will ultimately get their fair share. Marshall’s picture of Japanese collective decision-making is less appealing. The losers in a decision can accept their defeat or leave. Defeat does not give them chits to be cashed in later.