

溝口敏行・高山憲之

『高度成長下における平等と貧困：  
日本の経験』

Toshiyuki Mizoguchi and Noriyuki Takayama,  
*Equity and Poverty under Rapid Economic  
Growth: The Japanese Experience*, Tokyo; Kino-  
kuniya, 1984, xi+244 pp.

This comprehensive book on equity and poverty co-authored by Professors Toshiyuki Mizoguchi and Noriyuki Takayama aims to fill the gap of insufficient empirical research on income distribution and the incidence of poverty in Japan under the condition of rapid post-War economic growth. It contains five chapters as well as four appendices to the first four chapters in the form of collected essays, which represent the fruits of almost ten years of research on the Japanese income and wealth distribution organized and coordinated by Professor Mizoguchi at the Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University. Indeed, this publication succeeds effectively revealing the changes in income and wealth distribution and the incidence of poverty over several decades and stages of economic development in Japan.

Of the five chapters, the first two respectively deal with income and wealth distribution, while each of the later three chapters focus on the measurements of poverty and their applications to Japan, the poverty levels by stages of economic development, and a review of the anti-poverty policies of the past hundred years in Japan. Four appendices to the first four chapters

provide, respectively, a survey on the literature on Japanese income distribution, a comparison of housing conditions in selected East Asian countries, a note on measuring affluence, and a survey on available data for income distribution and poverty in Japan.

As evident from the contents of the book reviewed here, one of the most significant contributions of the publication of their collected essays is to replenish empirical evidences and analyses on income distribution and poverty studies in Japan, a nation where all other aspects of empirical analyses have progressed abreast with the other developed nations. In contrast to the general impression on the availability and reliability of the existing Japanese data and statistics held by the academicians and researchers throughout the world, their relatively short studies were laboriously and intensively researched, in view of the past inadequate data and statistics on these important issues, even in Japan. Professor Mizoguchi and his associates carefully examined and cleverly pooled existing data, primary and peripheral, to provide an empirical basis for their analyses. Certainly, their contribution will serve as a cornerstone for continuing future research in this important field in Japan and elsewhere.

Another notable contribution of their study is an advancement of a new index of poverty, modified from the celebrated Sen's poverty index. This alternative index is essentially derived from "the censored income distribution truncated from above by the poverty line," thus enabling the use of the Gini coefficient not only as an index of inequality, but also as a measure of poverty (p. 128). The authors emphasize the fact that their new measure of poverty supplements the difficulties inherent in Sen's index concerning the finite number of the poor and the normalized poverty value.

A technical note on measuring affluence appended to Chapter 3 is also a piece deserving of further thought, the philosophical basis of which merits a further study. However, the implications of the inherent weaknesses of Gini coefficient, namely its insensitivity in empirically showing the changes in income distribution and its having the same value for different distributions, need to be carefully noted in advancing a measure of affluence as well as applying their new measure of poverty.

In order to determine the poverty level by

each stage of economic development, Professors Mizoguchi and Takayama wisely pooled the changes in consumption patterns and seven categories of social indicators ranging from nutrition to surplus income and assets. While they had concluded modestly their study to be exploratory in nature and withdrawn themselves from drawing their final conclusions, the examined evidence related to the cut-off line of poverty provided us with a number of helpful suggestions to discern and to decide the levels of absolute and relative poverty.

Particular emphasis by the authors is placed on the usefulness of housing and related indicators as well as the indicators on education, recreation, entertainment, and asset holdings in the context of the Japanese experience. Their proposal to work on the aggregation of these indicators in the future would not be likely to result in a meaningful endeavour, for many such attempts had failed in the past by the proponents of social indicators. However, the authors have made significant progress in relating relevant social indicators to an analysis of the poverty problem.

In the final chapter, the authors summarized the policies and issues on poverty in Japan over the period of 1880 to 1980. Despite the benefits of its conciseness and bird's eye view of the Japanese anti-poverty policies, this chapter is far too short and somewhat shallow to be practically useful for those who would like to draw useful lessons from the Japanese experience. Especially, their final remarks are too brief and condensed to the point of even giving a misleading impression to the readers that the relatively successful historical experience of Japan in coping with the complexity of the poverty problem is primarily attributable to voluntary rural mutual aids, the limit of social restrictions preventing labor mobility, and the spread of basic education (p. 231).

While this reviewer fully appreciates all the merits of this study by Professors Mizoguchi and Takayama as aforementioned, one cannot help mentioning here, although the space allotted is limited, that two interrelated recurring themes and viewpoints of the authors do require further persuasion to the readers. The first theme has to do with their view that the Japanese economy had "succeeded in catching up with the tail of the developed economy in the late 1970s," since the late 1940s (See for example, p.

48 and p. 135). The second concerns with one of their major findings that the Kuznetsian inverted U-shape hypothesis in income distribution in the process of economic transition from underdevelopment to development "can be seen in the Japanese size distribution of household income between 1953 and 1975," with the turning point placed in the early 1960s (p. 46).

The assertion of Japan's catching up with the developed countries in the late 1970s may be true, if not debatable, in terms of the yardstick of per capita income. However, aside from the historical roots of contending "Japan As Number One," the level of economic development in Japan in the pre-World War II era, in terms of her human, industrial, and technological capabilities, far surpassed that of any newly industrializing country of today, or was equivalent to, if not above, that of a developed country just beyond the threshold of per capita income of five thousand U. S. dollars in the early 1980s, which is used as the common yardstick by the World Bank to distinguish a developed country from a developing country.

If this is the case, the Japanese evidence in support of Kuznets' inverted U-shaped hypothesis is, at most, a special case unique to post-War Japan and not compatible with the Kuznetsian context of long-term economic development, upon which his celebrated hypothesis is based. Their conclusion on this particular issue is inevitable for Professors Mizoguchi and Takayama, who had 'truncated' the period of their analysis to that of rapid economic growth since the late 1940s from the long-term historical development of Japan, although they included a chapter which reviewed one hundred years of anti-poverty policies in Japan since 1880.

Nonetheless, hearty acknowledgement and compliments are deservedly due to Professor Mizoguchi and his associates for attempting such pioneering empirical research in the long neglected, but very important fields of equity and poverty in Japan. The authors were haunted by the inadequacy and lack of existing data, but they still provided the readers with a number of noteworthy conclusions that may serve as points of departure for further studies. Certainly, the work of Professors Mizoguchi and Takayama will be a noteworthy addition to the limited inventory of empirical studies on equity and poverty.

(Choo Hakchung)