

Technological adoption: Catching-up to the frontier

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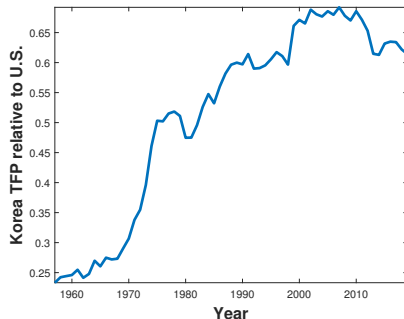
Crecimiento Económico / Growth Theory

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Introduction

- We have seen a model that describes the discovery of entirely new ideas by researchers at the frontier.
- It is reasonable to think that implementing an already existing idea is simpler than discovering it anew.
- We have seen that most income differences between countries are due to differences in TFP.
- However, given large TFP differences, implementation cannot be frictionless.
- Here, we will consider a model of technological adoption that is relevant for countries away from the frontier.

TFP growth



We have seen that parts of Korea's rapid output per worker growth was due to capital accumulation. However, also TFP grew quickly.

A model of technological adoption

The household sector, as before, accumulates the aggregate capital stock :

$$\dot{K}(t) = sY(t) - \delta K(t), \quad (1)$$

where Y is the final output good. The population grows at rate n :

$$\dot{L}(t) = nL(t). \quad (2)$$

We use the insights from the Romer model and assume output uses differentiated capital goods:

$$Y(t) = L(t)^{1-\alpha} \int_0^{h(t)} x_j(t)^\alpha dj. \quad (3)$$

Here, $h(t)$ is the measure of capital goods that the country knows how to use in period t . This may be different from the technological frontier $A(t)$. For example, the U.S. may know how to produce mRNA vaccines but China does not.

Rewriting the production function

As in the Romer model, each unit of capital goods needs to be produced using a unit of the aggregate available capital stock:

$$\int_0^{h(t)} x_j(t) dj = K(t). \quad (4)$$

Moreover, each unit is used in the same proportion:

$$x_j(t) = x(t) = \frac{K(t)}{h(t)}. \quad (5)$$

Substituting into the production function:

$$Y(t) = L(t)^{1-\alpha} h(t) x(t)^\alpha \quad (6)$$

$$Y(t) = (L(t) h(t))^{1-\alpha} K(t)^\alpha. \quad (7)$$

Key to the model is the accumulation of the skill level h . Skills evolve over time according to

$$\dot{h}(t) = \mu \exp(\psi u) A(t)^\gamma h(t)^{1-\gamma} \quad (8)$$

As in the model of human capital accumulation, u measures the time people spend learning new skills. This may be explicit research activity or learning-by-doing.

$$\frac{\dot{h}(t)}{h(t)} = \mu \exp(\psi u) \left(\frac{A(t)}{h(t)} \right)^\gamma \quad (9)$$

The speed of adoption depends on the distance to the technological frontier. When that distance is large, $\frac{A}{h}$ is large, skill accumulation is fast. I.e., it is easier to copy technologies that are already in use for a long time. Finally, we assume that the frontier grows according to

$$\frac{\dot{A}(t)}{A(t)} = g. \quad (10)$$

Given the production function, we know already that a steady state in $\tilde{k} = \frac{K}{hL}$ exists:

$$\tilde{k}^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta} \right)^{\frac{1}{1-\alpha}}. \quad (11)$$

Hence, along the balanced growth path, output per worker is

$$\left(\frac{Y(t)}{L(t)} \right)^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta} \right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} h(t). \quad (12)$$

The balanced growth path

For the growth rate in skills to be constant we directly see that

$$\frac{\dot{h}(t)}{h(t)} = \mu \exp(\psi u) \left(\frac{A(t)}{h(t)} \right)^\gamma \quad (13)$$

$\frac{A(t)}{h(t)}$ needs to be constant, i.e., $g_h = g$.

Hence, along the balanced growth path,

$$g = \mu \exp(\psi u) \left(\frac{A(t)}{h(t)} \right)^\gamma \quad (14)$$

$$\frac{h(t)}{A(t)} = \left(\frac{\mu \exp(\psi u)}{g} \right)^{1/\gamma} . \quad (15)$$

The more time individuals spend in accumulating skills, the closer is the economy to the frontier.

Output per worker along the balanced-growth path

$$\left(\frac{Y(t)}{L(t)}\right)^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta}\right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} \left(\frac{\mu \exp(\psi u)}{g}\right)^{1/\gamma} A(t). \quad (16)$$

- Higher capital per worker leads to higher output per worker. Hence, for a developing economy, population growth decreases output per worker unambiguously as it no longer affects $A(t)$.
- The model provides a reason why education leads to higher output per worker. Education does not make workers more productive in the abstract, it makes them more productive by allowing them to use more advanced capital goods.
- Pushing out the technological frontier benefits all countries as they can copy those new ideas over time.

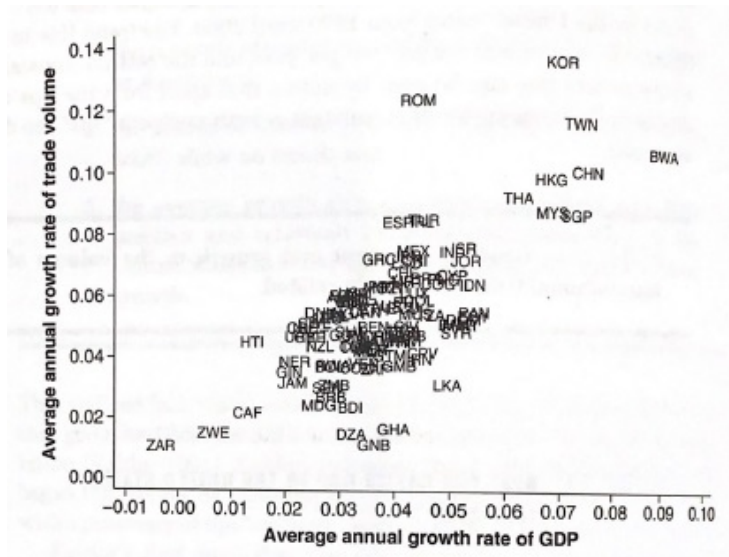
Knowledge spillover and trade

Knowledge spillover and trade

So far, we assume that the technological frontier is available to all countries. However, there are good reasons to believe that trade is important for new technologies becoming available to countries:

- A famous example is China severely restricting trade in the 14th century which coincides with its downfall as technological leader.
- The trade embargo on modern Iran coincides with Iran losing in terms of output per worker.
- FDI into China was an important source of technological adoption.
- Patenting may assure that recent inventions can only be bought from abroad.

The data suggests that a link exists



The data suggests that a link exists II

Table 3: Bilateral trade linkages and the European MTC

	GDP per working age population			
<i>Bilateral exports US</i>	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Lag 0	0.6509*	0.7485*	0.7825*	0.7994*
Lag 1	0.7058*	0.7670*	0.7938*	0.7640*
Lag 2	0.7079*	0.7521*	0.7643*	0.6943*
Lag 3	0.6798*	0.7136*	0.7066*	0.6091*
	Investment per working age population			
<i>Bilateral exports US</i>	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Lag 0	0.6150*	0.7905*	0.4726*	0.7965*
Lag 1	0.6222*	0.7340*	0.4917*	0.7770*
Lag 2	0.5733*	0.6283*	0.4702*	0.7184*
Lag 3	0.5001*	0.5012*	0.4287*	0.6504*
	Relative price of capital			
<i>Bilateral exports US</i>	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Lag 0	-0.6575*	-0.1974*	-0.7331*	-0.5444*
Lag 1	-0.6416*	-0.2554*	-0.6604*	-0.4967*
Lag 2	-0.6218*	-0.3134*	-0.5667*	-0.4378*
Lag 3	-0.5838*	-0.3694*	-0.4522*	-0.3617*

Source: López and de Blas Pérez (2018)

Changing the production function

Assume h capital goods are produced at home and m are imported:

$$Y(t) = L(t)^{1-\alpha} \int_0^{h(t)+m(t)} x_j(t)^\alpha dj. \quad (17)$$

A country produces $z(t)$ units of each home-based capital good and, hence,:

$$z(t)h(t) = K(t). \quad (18)$$

The country keeps only $x(t)h(t)$ of these goods and buys $x(t)$ of the imported goods. Hence, balanced trade implies:

$$x(t)m(t) = K(t) - x(t)h(t) \quad (19)$$

$$K(t) = x(t)[m(t) + h(t)]. \quad (20)$$

Rewriting the production function

Equal input usage implies

$$Y(t) = L(t)^{1-\alpha} \int_0^{h(t)+m(t)} x_j(t)^\alpha dj \quad (21)$$

$$Y(t) = L(t)^{1-\alpha} (h(t) + m(t))x(t)^\alpha. \quad (22)$$

Using the trade balance:

$$Y(t) = L(t)^{1-\alpha} (h(t) + m(t)) \left(\frac{K(t)}{m(t) + h(t)} \right)^\alpha \quad (23)$$

$$Y(t) = ([m(t) + h(t)]L(t))^{1-\alpha} K(t)^\alpha \quad (24)$$

$$Y(t) = K(t)^\alpha (h(t)L(t))^{1-\alpha} \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)} \right]^{1-\alpha} \quad (25)$$

Steady state

Define $\tilde{k}(t) = \frac{K(t)}{h(t)L(t)}$:

$$\dot{K}(t) = sY(t) - \delta K(t) \quad (26)$$

$$\frac{\dot{K}(t)}{K(t)} = s \frac{Y(t)}{K(t)} - \delta \quad (27)$$

$$\frac{\dot{\tilde{k}}(t)}{\tilde{k}(t)} = s \frac{Y(t)}{K(t)} - (n + g_h + \delta) \quad (28)$$

In steady state

$$s \left(\frac{Y(t)}{K(t)} \right)^* = n + g_h + \delta \quad (29)$$

$$\left(\frac{K(t)}{Y(t)} \right)^* = \frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta} \quad (30)$$

The balanced growth path

From the production function:

$$Y(t)^{1-\alpha} = \left(\frac{K(t)}{Y(t)} \right)^\alpha (h(t)L(t))^{1-\alpha} \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)} \right]^{1-\alpha} \quad (31)$$

$$Y(t) = \left(\frac{K(t)}{Y(t)} \right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} h(t)L(t) \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)} \right] \quad (32)$$

$$(33)$$

Along the balanced growth path:

$$Y(t)^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta} \right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} h(t)L(t) \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)} \right] \quad (34)$$

$$y(t)^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta} \right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} h(t) \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)} \right] \quad (35)$$

The balanced growth path II

Using the earlier insights, we have for output per worker along the balanced growth path:

$$y(t)^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta} \right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)} \right] \left(\frac{\mu \exp(\psi u)}{g} \right)^{1/\gamma} A(t) \quad (36)$$

(37)

Income per worker is increasing in the import to home production ratio of capital goods. Trade makes us richer as it allows us access to capital goods currently not produced in our country.

$$\left(\frac{Y(t)}{L(t)}\right)^* = \left(\frac{s}{n + g_h + \delta}\right)^{\frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}} \left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{h(t)}\right] \left(\frac{\mu \exp(\psi u)}{g}\right)^{1/\gamma} A(t) \quad (38)$$

- Trade can be a substitute for human capital investment. By selling “unsophisticated” capital goods, the country can gain access to more advanced capital goods. Note, the implications would be somewhat different in a Schumpeterian model.
- China is a good example. By foreign countries bringing their technologies with them and using an uneducated Chinese workforce, output was able to grow at tremendous rates.

Back to our three big questions

- ① Why are we so rich and they so poor?
 - Different saving rates, population growth rates, technologies for idea adoption, skill levels, and trade openness.
- ② Why are there growth miracles?
 - Rapid accumulation of physical capital or ideas.
- ③ What are the engines of long run economic growth?
 - Skill accumulation.

LÓPEZ, M. C. AND B. DE BLAS PÉREZ (2018): “Faraway, so close!, technology diffusion and firm heterogeneity in the medium term cycle of advanced economies,” *Documentos de trabajo del Banco de España*, 1–64.