DBS-26-02

「Practice before Theory: Kyocera International Incorporated and the Emergence of Proto-Transnational Enterprise in the United States, 1969-1979」

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September, 2026

Abstract

Through the lens of multinational enterprise theory, specifically Bartlett and Ghoshal's transnational solution framework, this study scrutinises the founding phase of Kyocera International Incorporated (KII) and its San Diego manufacturing plant (1969-1979). Drawing on unpublished oral histories, personal memoranda, internal company newsletters, and face-to-face interviews with two of KII's founding engineers, Kiyohide Shirai and Ikunosuke Kawamura, this study argues that Kyocera's early internationalisation exhibited proto-transnational characteristics nearly two decades before the concept was theorised. The acquisition of Fairchild Camera & Instrument's ceramic packaging facility in 1971 simultaneously achieved global integration of production technology, local responsiveness to the U.S. semiconductor market, and multidirectional knowledge flows between headquarters and subsidiary. Contextualised within the broader pattern of Japanese overseas investment in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kyocera's approach, which was emphasising organisational autonomy, thoroughgoing localisation, and the transplantation of a distinctive management philosophy, was markedly atypical. By historicising this case whilst remaining attentive to the risks of theoretical anachronism, the article contributes to the business history of Japanese multinational enterprise and offers a corrective to the Anglo-American bias in empirical studies of the transnational corporation. Methodologically, this study introduces Quentin Skinner's contextualist critique of the history of ideas; his taxonomy of interpretive mythologies (doctrines, coherence, prolepsis, parochialism) and his analysis of illocutionary force into business history and multinational enterprise studies, demonstrating that the risks Skinner identified in intellectual history have precise analogues in the retrospective application of management theory to historical cases.

Keywords:

multinational enterprise; transnational corporation; Kyocera; Japanese business history; Bartlett and Ghoshal; oral history; semiconductor industry; knowledge flow; localisation; Quentin Skinner; anachronism; illocutionary force

Introduction

What makes a corporation 'unintentionally pioneering'? This simple question has propelled my exploratory study of a Japanese American company. An American corporate accounting professional who has worked with a considerable number of Japanese-origin firms in the US market over the past five decades described Kyocera as "a truly unique firm", an assessment grounded in a near-lifetime career at the company, spanning 33 years from 1979 to 2012.[1] What, then, makes a company "unique"? Distinctiveness in corporate management cannot rest on contingent events or ephemeral advantages; it must be visible in repeated patterns of organisational practice, recognised both internally and externally, and sustained through the gradual cultivation of shared values and institutional culture.[2] This article investigates that question by examining Kyocera Corporation's first overseas manufacturing venture, viz., the San Diego plant of Kyocera International Incorporated (KII), and argues that its founding phase (1969–1979) reveals the embryonic characteristics of a transnational corporation, articulated in practice nearly two decades before the concept was formalised in management theory.

Yet the very framing of this argument, 'practice before theory', raises a methodological problem that is at least as important as the empirical findings themselves. Whenever a business historian applies a theoretical framework retrospectively to a case that preceded its formulation, the analysis risks the distortions that Quentin Skinner, in his foundational critique of the history of

[1] From the author's interview with Mr Rodney N. Lanthorne on 29 August and 9 October 2025.
[2] Florian Becker-Ritterspach, Ayse Saka-Helmhout, and Jasper J. Hotho, "Learning in Multinational Enterprises as the Socially Embedded Translation of Practices," Critical Perspectives on International Business 6, no. 1 (2010): 8–37; Eugene Choi, "Kyocera International Incorporated *hatsu no Genchi Seizokyoten* San Diego *Kohjoh Sohritsu-Ki no Dohnyuteki Kenkyu*" (An Exploratory Study of the Formative Phase of Kyocera International Incorporated's First Overseas Manufacturing Base in San Diego), *Inamori Kazuo Kenkyu* (The Journal of Inamori Kazuo Studies), 5 (May 2026): 47-80.

ideas, classified as historical ‘mythologies’: the mythology of doctrines, by which scattered practices are converted into a coherent ‘doctrine’ the historical actors never held; the mythology of prolepsis, by which the retrospective significance of an action is conflated with what it meant to the agent; and the mythology of parochialism, by which the observer’s familiar categories dissolve the alien elements of a past practice into misleading familiarity.[3] If Skinner demonstrated that these dangers pervade the history of political and philosophical thought, they are no less acute, and considerably less examined, in business history. To write that Kyocera “was” a transnational corporation in 1971 would be to commit precisely the anachronism that Skinner identified: crediting historical agents with intentions they could not have held, since the conceptual vocabulary required to articulate those intentions did not yet exist.[4] This study therefore pursues a dual objective: to recover the organisational practices of KII’s founding phase as faithfully as the primary sources allow, and to develop a methodological framework (which is grounded in Skinner’s contextualism) that disciplines the retrospective application of management theory to historical evidence.

The article, therefore, addresses two scholarly literatures that have, until recently, developed largely in isolation from one another. Business history and strategic management once shared intellectual foundations, namely Penrose, Chandler, and Schumpeter, which shaped both fields, but diverged as strategy scholars gravitated towards parsimonious theory and formalised methods, whilst business historians emphasised contextualised narrative.[5] Recent scholarship has

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[3] Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” History and Theory 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53, esp. 7–28. The taxonomy of mythologies, viz., doctrines, coherence, prolepsis, and parochialism, is set out in sections I and II of this journal article.
[4] For Skinner’s argument that attributing doctrines to authors who could not have intended them is ‘strictly speaking void for lack of reference,’ see Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 29. For the complementary argument that the recovery of illocutionary intentions is essential to interpretation, see Quentin Skinner, “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts,” New Literary History 3, no. 2 (1972): 393–408, 401–4.
[5] Matthias Kipping, Takafumi Kurosawa, and R. Daniel Wadhwani, “A Revisionist History of Business History,” in John F. Wilson et al., eds., The Routledge Companion to Business History (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016): 19–35.

sought to rebuild this dialogue. Wadhwani and Jones have argued that historical reasoning is not merely illustrative but constitutive of strategy theory, showing that the dynamic capabilities framework itself implicitly incorporates multiple models of historical change, viz., evolutionary, dialectical, and constitutive, each of which shapes how scholars conceptualise firm-level competitive advantage under conditions of uncertainty.[6] Their insight that 'the dynamic capabilities framework implicitly incorporates a number of historical models of change over time, and that making these models of change explicit offers scholars a way to better identify opportunities for research at the intersection of history and strategy' provides an important warrant for the present study's ambition to bring Skinnerian methodological discipline to the retrospective application of MNE theory.

Kyocera's entry into the United States in the late 1960s was, by any measure, precocious. Founded in 1959 as a fine ceramics manufacturer in Kyoto, the firm had celebrated barely its tenth anniversary when it established KII in Sunnyvale, California, in July 1969, locating itself at the geographic and technological epicentre of the emerging semiconductor industry.[7] Two years later, it acquired Fairchild Camera & Instrument Corporation's ceramic semiconductor packaging facility in San Diego, becoming the first Japanese high-technology manufacturer to operate a factory in California.[8] This was not defensive expansion motivated by the usual tariff avoidance or trade friction, concerns that would dominate Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in the

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[6] R. Daniel Wadhwani and Geoffrey Jones, "Historical Change and the Competitive Advantage of Firms: Explicating the 'Dynamics' in the Dynamic Capabilities Framework," in David J. Teece and Sohvi Heaton, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Dynamic Capabilities (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199678914.013.005.

[7] According to the Industrial Finance Division of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), even by 1973–1974, only one Japanese firm in the continental United States qualified as a 'large-scale' manufacturing investor: Alumax Incorporated (a Mitsui subsidiary). Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Industrial Finance Division, "The Status of Japanese Companies' Expansion into US Manufacturing" (Tokyo: MITI, September 1975): 185–91.

[8] Sony Corporation opened its first U.S. manufacturing facility in San Diego in 1972.

1980s, but rather an offensive move propelled by the bold ambition to embed the firm within the world's most advanced electronics supply chain.

The empirical core of this study rests upon a triangulated body of primary sources: unpublished oral history transcripts held in the Kyocera Inamori Library; personal memoranda compiled by Ikunosuke Kawamura, one of the founding engineers dispatched to San Diego in 1971; serialised accounts from the internal corporate newsletter *Keiten Aijin*; and a series of face-to-face and online interviews conducted by the author between October 2024 and March 2026 with two of KII's founding engineers, Kiyohide Shirai and Ikunosuke Kawamura, and with Rodney N. Lanthorne, former president of KII (1979–2012).[9] These materials, many of which have never been cited in English-language scholarship, provide unusually granular access to the lived experience of cross-border management in the early 1970s.

From the theoretical perspective, this article situates Kyocera's early internationalisation within the framework of Bartlett and Ghoshal's transnational solution, the model positing that the most sophisticated multinational enterprises simultaneously achieve global integration, local responsiveness, and multidirectional knowledge flows.[10] The analytical challenge is that this framework remained unpublished until 1988–1989, approximately two decades after the events under investigation. Applying it retrospectively to a 1970s case study, therefore, requires careful attention to the risks of theoretical anachronism, namely the distortion that arises when concepts

[9] The primary oral history materials analysed in this article are drawn from the Kyocera Inamori Library and Choi's research article in the Journal of Inamori Kazuo Studies 5(2026), and the author carried out additional personal interviews with Kawamura (28 October 2025) and Shirai (7 November 2025 and 10 March 2026) to revalidate the contents together with the two interviewees.
[10] Christopher A. Bartlett and Sumantra Ghoshal, "Organizing for Worldwide Effectiveness: The Transnational Solution," California Management Review 31, no. 1 (1988): 54–74; Christopher A. Bartlett and Sumantra Ghoshal, Managing across Borders: The Transnational Solution (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1989); 2nd ed. (1998).

developed in one era are uncritically projected onto another.[11] The article's central conceptual contribution, namely the derivation of 'proto-transnational' as an analytical category, is itself a logical consequence of taking Skinner's critique seriously, as Section III will demonstrate in detail.

The argument proceeds in five stages. Following this introduction, Section II surveys the development of multinational enterprise theory from Penrose and Vernon through to Bartlett and Ghoshal, identifying the specific theoretical coordinates that frame the subsequent analysis. Section III addresses the methodological question of temporal compatibility between theory and historical evidence, deploying Skinner's taxonomy of interpretive mythologies and his analysis of illocutionary force to establish the conditions under which retrospective theoretical application can be conducted without anachronism. Section IV examines KII's founding and early operations through the three dimensions of the transnational solution, viz., global integration, local responsiveness, and knowledge flow, drawing extensively on interview and archival materials. Section V contextualises Kyocera's approach by comparing it with contemporary Japanese firms operating in the United States. A concluding section synthesises the findings and identifies the vectors for further research.

The Development of Multinational Enterprise Theory

From Penrose to Dunning: The First Three Decades

Modern multinational enterprise (MNE) theory emerged from two foundational impulses in the late 1950s and 1960s. Penrose's theory of the growth of the firm located expansion in the internal

[11] On the danger of presentism in historical inquiry, Skinner's foundational essay remains indispensable: Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 3–53. See also Skinner, "Motives, Intentions,": 393–408. On presentism in business history specifically, see the emerging literature on historical methodology in management studies.

accumulation of managerial resources and productive knowledge, whilst Vernon's product-cycle model explained the staged relocation of production as technological advantage moved from innovating economies to lower-cost locations.[12] Both frameworks captured essential features of the post-war global economy, yet both also tended to treat overseas expansion as predominantly outward and sequential: capabilities were generated at home and then projected abroad.

Hymer's contemporaneous intervention shifted the analytical centre of gravity from the geography of expansion to the strategic logic of foreign direct investment.[13] By insisting that firms invested abroad in order to exploit firm-specific advantages under conditions of market imperfection, Hymer opened the way for a line of inquiry developed in different ways by Williamson, Buckley and Casson, Hennart, and Rugman. Transaction-cost and internalisation approaches clarified why firms might prefer hierarchical control to arm's-length exchange when knowledge was difficult to price, monitor, or safeguard. Rugman's reformulation was especially important because it sharpened the distinction between firm-specific and country-specific advantages, thereby clarifying that the decision to export, license, or invest was not reducible to a single motive but involved a sequence of choices conditioned by both organisational capabilities and environmental opportunity structures.[14]

Dunning synthesised these strands into the eclectic OLI (Ownership-Location-Internalisation) paradigm, whose durability lay precisely in its insistence that no single variable could explain the multinational enterprise. In his 1998 reassessment, Dunning resisted the tendency to treat internalisation as the sole master principle, likening OLI instead to a three-legged

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[12] Edith Penrose, The Theory of the Growth of the Firm (Oxford University Press, 1959: 4th edition in 2009); Raymond Vernon, "International Investment and International Trade in the Product Cycle," Quarterly Journal of Economics 80, no.2 (1966):190-207; Storm Over Multinationals: The Real Issues (Harvard University Press, 1977).
[13] Stephen Herbert Hymer, The International Operations of National Firms: A Study of Direct Foreign Investment (MIT Press, 1976).
[14] Alan Rugman, "A Test of Internalization Theory," Managerial and Decision Economics 2, no. 4 (1981), 211-219.

stool whose explanatory power depended upon the balance among ownership, location, and internalisation advantages.[15] More importantly for the present study, he argued that the location dimension had long been under-theorised. As firm-specific assets became more mobile across borders, the complementary assets sought by MNEs were increasingly location-bound and often, in his phrase, 'knowledge-facilitating': specialised clusters, interactive learning environments, and proximity-dependent exchanges of know-how that resist codification.[16] Dunning's further account of the paradox of global dispersion and local concentration, what economic geographers would describe as 'sticky places within slippery space', is especially apposite to Kyocera's move into California.[17]

The firm was not merely entering a market; it was positioning itself inside the semiconductor corridor where technological learning, supplier relationships, and advanced customer interaction were densely concentrated. Yet for all its analytical reach, the OLI paradigm remained stronger on the motives and location of international production than on the internal managerial architecture through which geographically dispersed units were coordinated, empowered, and made mutually informative. It was precisely this organisational problem, "how the multinational might be managed once international production had been established", that Bartlett and Ghoshal placed at the centre of their analysis.

Bartlett and Ghoshal's Transnational Solution and the Network Turn

Drawing on comparative case studies of nine large multinationals in three industries, Bartlett and

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[15] John H. Dunning, Globalization, Technological Change and the Spatial Organization of Economic Activity, in Alfred D. Chandler Jr., Peter Hagstrom, and Orjan Solvell (eds.) The Dynamic Firm: The Role of Technology, Strategy, Organization, and Regions (Oxford University Press, 1998): Chapter 13.
[16] John H. Dunning and Sarianna M. Lundan, Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2nd edition, 2008).
[17] Ann Markusen, 'Sticky Places in Slippery Space: A Typology of Industrial Districts,' Economic Geography 72, no.3 (1996): 293–313.

Ghoshal proposed a typology of MNE organisational forms structured by two demands that earlier theory had often treated as competing: global integration and local responsiveness. Their familiar fourfold schema - multinational, global, international, and transnational - mattered not merely as a classificatory device but as an argument about organisational possibility. The transnational was the most exacting form since it required the simultaneous achievement of cross-border efficiency, sensitivity to national environments, and worldwide learning through multidirectional knowledge flows.[18]

In this formulation, the transnational corporation was not simply a more elaborate hierarchy. It was an 'integrated network' in which subsidiaries could become centres of excellence rather than peripheral implementers of headquarters' will. Ghoshal and Bartlett's companion network argument deepened this claim by showing that subsidiaries are embedded in distinct local 'organisation sets' of customers, suppliers, regulators, and competitors, and that the density of those local and cross-border relationships shapes both resource configuration and internal power. Their distinction between 'within density' and 'across density' was especially fruitful: dense local environments press subsidiaries to develop rich local capabilities, whilst dense cross-border ties encourage interdependence, specialisation, and the emergence of differentiated mandates across the firm.[19] The resulting image of the MNE as a differentiated network offers a more supple vocabulary than older centre-periphery models for understanding the uneven, historically emergent distribution of capabilities across a multinational system.

This reconceptualisation had a further implication of direct relevance here. Ghoshal and Bartlett argued that the connection between ownership and effective hierarchical fiat is often far

[18] Bartlett and Ghoshal, Managing across Borders, 2nd ed. (1998): esp. Chapter 4 The Transnational: The Emerging Organizational Model.
[19] Sumantra Ghoshal and Christopher A. Bartlett, "The Multinational Corporation as an Interorganizational Network," Academy of Management Review, 15, no.4 (1990): 603-625, at 610 and esp. 612-618.

weaker than conventional theory assumes, in particular where subsidiaries are geographically distant, culturally distinct, and embedded in local networks that headquarters cannot command directly. Under such conditions, localness is not a residual inconvenience but a source of organisational leverage. Subsidiary autonomy is therefore not an anomaly to be explained away; it is a structural consequence of multinational operation itself. This insight illuminates the Kyocera case with particular force, for KII's self-reliance was not a mere episodic improvisation but an organisational condition produced by distance, crisis, and dense local entanglement in the American semiconductor milieu.

The Bartlett-Ghoshal framework also connected MNE theory to a broader shift in strategic management from transaction-cost explanation towards knowledge-based and evolutionary accounts of the firm. Kogut and Zander gave that shift its most rigorous multinational expression. Against the view that MNEs exist primarily because markets for knowledge fail, they argued that firms are social communities specialised in the creation and internal transfer of knowledge, and that multinational expansion reflects the superior organisational efficiency with which such knowledge can be recombined across borders. Their empirical argument was equally significant: the less codifiable, the harder to teach, and the more complex a technology, the more likely it is to be transferred within wholly owned structures rather than by contract.[20] For a case such as Kyocera, built around ceramic-processing know-how, firing discipline, quality routines, and tacit production judgement, this line of reasoning is indispensable.

Kogut and Zander's evolutionary perspective is particularly useful because it refuses to treat knowledge transfer as a one-off act of replication. Technologies resistant to codification are valuable not only because they are difficult to imitate, but because they constitute platforms for

[20] Bruce Kogut and Udo Zander, "Knowledge of the Firm and the Evolutionary Theory of the Multinational Corporation," Journal of International Business Studies, 24-4 (1993): 624-645, esp. 636-639.

future expansion through recombination. On that reading, the multinational grows by carrying know-how into new environments, learning from them, and then redeploying an enriched capability base across the wider organisation.[21] That sequence closely matches the historical trajectory visible in KII: an initial transfer of ceramic manufacturing competence from Kyoto to San Diego, followed by the accumulation of host-market knowledge and process learning in California, and then the gradual incorporation of that experience into Kyocera's wider international development.

Nelson's 1991 article on interfirm differences supplied a significant complementary vocabulary for explaining why such trajectories diverge so markedly across firms facing ostensibly similar environments. Against the neoclassical tendency to suppress discretionary firm differences, Nelson argued that strategy, structure, and core capabilities together give firms a 'relatively stable firm character', whilst evolutionary competition ensures not convergence upon a single optimum but persistent diversity in organisational forms and performances. His most telling claim for present purposes was that durable differences among firms arise less from command over a particular technology than from organisational differences in the capacity to generate, absorb, and profit from innovation. He also insisted that organisational change is rarely the smooth execution of a fully rational blueprint; it proceeds through uncertainty, experimentation, trial, feedback, and the costly correction of mistakes.[22] Those propositions speak directly to Kyocera's early American venture. What distinguished the company from many contemporaries was not simply that it possessed fine-ceramics expertise, but that it developed an organisational capacity to transplant, stabilise, and learn from that expertise under unfamiliar conditions.

[21] Kogut and Zander, at 636.
[22] Richard R. Nelson, "Why do Firms Differ and How does it Matter?", Strategic Management Journal, 12 (1991): 61-74, esp. 66-72.

The dynamic capabilities literature extended these insights by directing attention to the firm's capacity to reconfigure resources and routines under conditions of volatility. Its relevance to business history is not incidental. As Wadhwani and Jones have shown, dynamic-capabilities reasoning is already implicitly historical, drawing upon evolutionary, dialectical, and constitutive models of change.[23] The Kyocera case reinforces that point. The capabilities that mattered in San Diego were not abstract competences waiting to be deployed, but historically constituted capacities forged through crisis, cultural encounter, and repeated organisational adjustment. What later appears as a coherent capability is, at the historical moment, a fragile and contingent achievement.

A final layer of theoretical enrichment comes from Bartlett and Ghoshal's 1993 argument that leading corporations were moving 'beyond the M-form' towards an organisational model grounded less in capital allocation and formal hierarchy than in knowledge, expertise, and managerial process.[24] Their three-process account (entrepreneurial initiative at the front line, horizontal integration across dispersed units, and top-management-led renewal through purpose and challenge) is valuable here not because Kyocera in 1971 already embodied the full architecture they later observed at ABB, but because it clarifies the dimensions along which KII's early practices were historically unusual. The San Diego operation was compelled to generate initiative locally; it depended upon lateral problem-solving and dense knowledge exchange rather than simple vertical command; and it was animated by an overarching managerial philosophy that framed crisis as learning and autonomy as moral as well as operational discipline. Bartlett and Ghoshal's further call for a 'managerial theory of the firm', developed from the perspective of practitioners rather than deduced from external disciplinary premises, also aligns naturally with

[23] Wadhwani and Jones, Historical Change and the Competitive Advantage of Firms (2017): Historical Models 1-3.
[24] Christopher A. Bartlett and Sumantra Ghoshal, "Beyond the M-Form: Toward a Managerial Theory of the Firm," Strategic Management Journal, 14, (1993): 23-46, esp.40-45; Sumantra Ghoshal and Christopher A. Bartlett, The Individualized Corporation: A Fundamentally New Approach to Management, (Harper Perennial, 1999).

the method of this article. A business-historical analysis built on interviews, memoranda, and actor testimony must recover practice as historical actors understood it, even when later theory helps us to interpret its wider significance.

Temporal Compatibility: History, Theory, and the Risk of Anachronism

The Methodological Problem

A recurrent methodological challenge in business history arises when theoretical frameworks developed in one period are applied to cases situated in another. The risk is twofold: presentism, viz., the retrospective imposition of contemporary concepts onto historical actors who did not share them; and theory-ladenness, that is, the tendency for analytical frameworks to predetermine the phenomena they purport to discover.[25] In management studies, this risk is pervasive yet curiously under-examined. Scholars routinely deploy the Bartlett–Ghoshal typology, dynamic capabilities, or the resource-based view to characterise firms operating decades before these frameworks were articulated, yet the epistemological implications of doing so are rarely confronted.

The problem is deepened by the insight, now increasingly recognised in strategy scholarship, that historical reasoning is not merely decorative but constitutive of the theoretical claims it supports. Wadhwani and Jones have shown that the dynamic capabilities framework, for instance, embeds three distinct historical models of change: each carrying different assumptions about temporality, agency, and the relationship between past and future.[26] The evolutionary model

[25] On theory-ladenness in historical inquiry, see the methodological discussions in Mairi Maclean, Charles Harvey, and Stewart R. Clegg, “Conceptualizing Historical Organization Studies,” Academy of Management Review 41, no. 4 (2016): 609–632.
[26] Wadhwani and Jones, “Historical Change and the Competitive Advantage of Firms,”: see Table 1 Historical models of change in the dynamic capability framework, and associated discussion.

treats capability development as a gradual accumulation of contextually embedded knowledge; the dialectical model posits that innovative change proceeds through the disruption and reconstitution of institutional orders; and the constitutive model holds that actors perceive future opportunities through interpretive lenses formed by their understanding of the past. Each model implies different standards of evidence, different risks of anachronism, and different methodological requirements. If even the theoretical frameworks themselves carry implicit historical assumptions, then the retrospective application of those frameworks to historical cases demands an especially exacting form of methodological self-awareness.

The most sustained philosophical examination of this class of problem remains Quentin Skinner's foundational critique of the history of ideas, advanced in two complementary essays published in 1969 and 1972. Skinner directed his critique at the prevailing methodologies of intellectual history: both the text-centred approach that treated classic works as self-sufficient objects of inquiry, and the context-centred approach that reduced ideas to the effects of their social environment. His positive programme insisted that to apprehend any historical utterance, one must recover the author's intentions in making it: not merely what was said, but what the author was doing in saying it. Whilst Skinner's arguments were directed at political philosophy and literary interpretation, their methodological logic applies with equal force to business history and, this section contends, with particular urgency to the retrospective application of MNE theory.

Skinner's Four Mythologies and Their Analogues in Business History

Skinner classified the characteristic errors of the history of ideas into four 'mythologies,' each generated by the priority of interpretive paradigms over historical evidence. Each has a direct analogue in the business-historical enterprise of applying management theory to past organisational practice. The *mythology of doctrines* arises when the historian, guided by the expectation that each classic thinker must have held a 'doctrine' on each of the topics regarded as constitutive of his discipline, converts scattered or incidental remarks into a systematic position the author never articulated. Skinner's examples are telling: Marsilius of Padua is credited with a 'doctrine' of the separation of powers on the basis of Aristotelian remarks about the executive and legislative roles, that is, remarks that belong to an entirely different intellectual context and could not have been intended to contribute to a debate whose terms were unavailable to him. The test Skinner proposes is austere: if a given author cannot in principle have meant to contribute to a given doctrine, then to credit him with that doctrine is not merely misleading but, strictly speaking, meaningless, to be exact, 'void for lack of reference,' in his phrase.[27]

The business-historical analogue is direct. When a historian examines Kyocera's early American operations and identifies practices that appear to embody global integration, local responsiveness, and multidirectional knowledge flow, the temptation is to conclude that Kyocera possessed (or was enacting) a 'transnational doctrine.' Yet the concept of the transnational corporation did not exist in 1971. The Bartlett–Ghoshal typology was not published until 1988 and 1989. To credit Kyocera's founders with 'a transnational strategy avant la lettre' would be to commit precisely the anachronism against which Skinner warned: attributing a doctrine on the basis of resemblances to a concept whose terms were wholly unavailable to the historical actors. As Skinner put it, there is no means of reformulating such attributions in terms that could in principle have made sense to the agents themselves.[28]

The *mythology of coherence* arises when the historian, finding a thinker's remarks

[27] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding,": 29. The example of Marsilius of Padua and the separation of powers is discussed at 8–9.

[28] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding,": 29: 'there is no means of reformulating any such questions in terms that could in principle have made sense to the agent himself.'

scattered or inconsistent, supplies or discovers a systematic unity that the thinker may never have attained or intended. Skinner observed that this mythology gives ‘the thoughts of various classic writers a coherence, and an air generally of a closed system, which they may never have attained or even been meant to attain.’[29] The metaphors that attend this practice are telling: the scholar’s task is described as an effort to ‘arrive’ at a unified interpretation, to ‘gain’ a coherent view of the author’s system. Thinking, however, Skinner insisted, is an ‘effortful activity’ characterised by confusion, conceptual disorder, and incompatible commitments held at different times; and to impose coherence is to produce a history ‘not of ideas at all, but of abstractions: a history of thoughts which no one ever actually succeeded in thinking, at a level of coherence which no one ever actually attained.’[30]

The analogue in business history is the danger of smoothing the chaotic reality of early overseas operations into a neat strategic narrative. The primary sources examined in this article reveal a founding phase marked by a sequence of crises, frantic improvisation, desperate near-withdrawal, and the ad hoc development of operational principles under extreme pressure. To read these materials through the transnational lens is inevitably to be tempted towards the mythology of coherence; towards presenting the seven self-reliance principles that Kawamura recorded after Inamori’s 1972 visit, for instance, as evidence of a coherent proto-transnational doctrine, when they may equally well have been emergency responses to a specific organisational crisis. Wadhwani and Jones’s observation that capability development in historical perspective is characterised by ‘complex and contingent circumstances, rather than as determined by material and economic constraints’ reinforces this Skinnerian caution: the socio-historical process of capability formation is precisely the kind of unsystematic, crisis-driven, culturally embedded

[29] Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,”: 17.
[30] Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,”: 18.

process that resists retrospective systematisation.[31] The methodological discipline required is to resist the temptation to supply systematic coherence to practices that were, in their original enactment, contingent, reactive, and unsystematic, whilst remaining attentive to patterns that emerged cumulatively over the decade under examination.

The *mythology of prolepsis* arises when the retrospective significance that an observer may justifiably find in a historical action is conflated with the meaning of that action for the agent who performed it. Skinner illustrates this with the claim that Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoux 'opened the Renaissance': a description that might capture the historical significance of the action but could not be a description of any action Petrarch intended, since the concept of 'the Renaissance' was not available to him.[32] The characteristic of this mythology is what Skinner termed 'a necessary asymmetry between the significance an observer may justifiably claim to find in a given statement or other action, and the meaning of that action itself.'[33]

For the present study, the mythology of prolepsis defines the central analytical risk. To say that Kyocera exhibited proto-transnational characteristics in the 1970s is to claim a retrospective significance for the firm's practices. This claim is legitimate, providing it is never conflated with the claim that Kyocera's actors were intentionally pursuing what we now recognise as a transnational configuration. As both Shirai and Kawamura testified, neither they nor President Inamori thought in terms of 'transnational' theory or any formalised strategic model. Shirai's reflection is particularly revealing: 'We were not explicitly told such things. . .. Mr Inamori held that within his heart, but he never discussed such matters with us.'[34] The proleptic danger is that

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[31] Wadhwani and Jones, "Historical Change and the Competitive Advantage of Firms," Section 2.
[32] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding,": 22–23, drawing on Arthur C. Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History (Cambridge, 1965): 169.
[33] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding,": 23.
[34] Oral history interview, 23 October 2024. Details can be read in Eugene Choi, "Kyocera International Incorporated," The Journal of Inamori Kazuo Studies 5 (May 2026): 70, Interview Record no.80.

what amounts to a description of patterns visible from our vantage point may be mistaken for a description of strategic intentions that the actors could not have held.

The *mythology of parochialism* arises when the observer, applying familiar categories to an alien context, misdescribes 'both the sense and the intended reference of a given work' through a process of historical foreshortening.[35] Skinner warned that the observer may '"see" something apparently (rather than really) familiar in the course of studying an alien argument, and may in consequence provide a misleadingly familiar-looking description.'[36] A particularly insidious form of parochialism operates through 'influence' claims that lack genuine evidential warrant: what Skinner described as 'nothing better than the capacity of the observer to foreshorten the past by filling it with his own reminiscences.'[37]

In the MNE context, the mythology of parochialism takes two forms. Firstly, the Bartlett–Ghoshal framework, developed primarily from studies of large Western multinationals (supplemented by selected Japanese cases), carries embedded assumptions about organisational architecture, labour relations, and strategic decision-making that may not map straightforwardly onto a mid-sized Kyoto ceramics manufacturer in 1971. To describe Kyocera's practices using terms like 'global integration' and 'local responsiveness' is already to risk dissolving the distinctively Japanese, and distinctively Kyocera, character of those practices into categories designed for a different organisational world. Secondly, the overwhelming Anglo-American provenance of empirical studies in MNE theory creates a parochial baseline against which Japanese practice appears as a deviation from, rather than an alternative to, the dominant model. Ghoshal and Bartlett themselves acknowledged this limitation when they noted that the

[35] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding,": 24.
[36] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding,": 24–25.
[37] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," at 27.

‘ownership-based intraorganizational ties’ connecting MNC headquarters and subsidiaries do not preclude the ‘entire range of discretionary behaviours’ found in interorganizational systems without such ties; an acknowledgement that the formal architecture of the MNC may obscure the actual relational dynamics within it.[38] Applying the transnational framework without attending to this parochialism risks reproducing the very bias my research attempts to correct.

Illocutionary Force and the Recovery of Organisational Intention

Skinner’s positive programme drew centrally on J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory, and specifically on the concept of illocutionary force. Austin had demonstrated that to understand a serious utterance, it is not enough to grasp its propositional meaning; one must also grasp what the speaker was *doing* in issuing it: whether asserting, warning, promising, advising, or performing some other illocutionary act. Skinner extended this insight to the interpretation of historical texts: ‘the understanding of statements presupposes a grasp not merely of the meaning of the given utterance, but also of what Austin labelled its intended illocutionary force.’[39] Crucially, Skinner argued that illocutionary force cannot be decoded straightforwardly from the text itself or from its social context, for both may be compatible with multiple incompatible characterisations of what the agent was doing. In his 1972 essay, Skinner refined this argument by distinguishing three senses of ‘meaning’: the meaning of the words themselves (meaning$_1$), what the work means to the reader (meaning$_2$), and what the writer meant by what he wrote (meaning$_3$). He further distinguished between a writer’s motives (contingent antecedent conditions, standing ‘outside’ the work), perlocutionary intentions (what the writer hoped to achieve *by* writing: the intended effects), and

[38] Ghoshal and Bartlett, “Interorganizational Network,” at 607.
[39] Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 45-46. On illocutionary force generally, see J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words, ed. J. O. Urmson (Oxford, 1962).

illocutionary intentions (what the writer was doing *in* writing: the point of the action as performed). It was this last category that Skinner identified as 'not merely relevant to, but actually equivalent to, a knowledge of the meaning$_3$ of what he writes.'[40]

This analytical architecture is transferable, *mutatis mutandis*, from the interpretation of texts to the interpretation of organisational practices. Just as a historian of ideas such as Skinner must ask not only what a political theorist said but what he was doing in saying it, to be exact, "endorsing, subverting, contributing to, or departing from a prevailing discourse", so a business historian must ask not only what organisational practices a firm exhibited but what its business actors were doing in enacting them. The distinction matters because the same observable practice may embody radically different illocutionary acts. When Kyocera's founders insisted on open-plan offices and plants in San Diego, they were not 'implementing a transnational management architecture' (an intention that could not have been available to them); they were transplanting a specific element of Kyocera's management philosophy, which was (and has been) the rejection of hierarchical spatial symbolism, into an alien cultural environment.[41] When Inamori characterised a 100-million-yen loss as a 'tuition fee,' he was not articulating a strategy of worldwide learning in the Bartlett–Ghoshal sense; he was performing a recognisable act within the Kyocera management philosophy: reframing failure as investment in human development.

The distinction between observable practice and illocutionary intention maps productively onto a cognate distinction in knowledge-based MNE theory. Kogut and Zander distinguished between 'information' (declarative knowledge, such as a factual statement or a

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[40] Skinner, "Motives, Intentions," 404. The three senses of meaning: meaning$_1$ (word meaning), meaning$_2$ (meaning for the reader), and meaning$_3$ (what the writer meant by what he wrote), are distinguished at 396–97.

[41] Eugene Choi, "Kyocera International Incorporated," The Journal of Inamori Kazuo Studies 5 (May 2026): Section 5, Records no. 1, 4, 5, 8, 10. For more in-depth analyses, see Eugene Choi, "Inamori Management Philosophy," Inamori Kazuo Studies, no. 2 (2023): 41–68; Kimio Kase, Eugene Choi, and Ikujiro Nonaka, Dr Kazuo Inamori's Management Praxis and Philosophy (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), chaps. 2, 4–5.

blueprint) and 'know-how' (procedural knowledge, such as a recipe for carrying out a task), arguing that the latter is inherently more tacit, experiential, and organisationally embedded.[42] The same analytical move applies to the interpretation of organisational practices: the observable features of KII's operations, namely what might be called the 'information' content of its management, are accessible to any researcher who examines the primary sources, but the 'know-how' dimension, viz., the tacit, culturally embedded, and contextually specific understanding of what those practices meant to the actors enacting them, requires the recovery of illocutionary force. Skinner's method and Kogut and Zander's epistemology converge on a common insight: that what matters for understanding a firm's practices is not only the codifiable content of those practices but the socially embedded knowledge that gives them their distinctive character and renders them resistant to imitation.

The methodological implication is that the appropriate unit of analysis is not the observable practice alone (which invites the mythology of doctrines), but the practice understood in conjunction with the intentions recoverable from the actors' own testimony and from the linguistic and institutional conventions within which they operated. Skinner proposed two rules for recovering such intentions: firstly, 'focus not just on the text to be interpreted, but on the prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the issues or themes with which that text is concerned'; secondly, 'focus on the writer's mental world, the world of his empirical beliefs.'[43] Translated into business-historical method, the first rule requires the historian to situate the firm's practices within the prevailing conventions of Japanese management and overseas investment in the late 1960s and 1970s: an investigation undertaken in Section V of this article. The second requires the historian to establish what the business actors actually believed about what they were

[42] Kogut and Zander, "Knowledge of the Firm," at 631.
[43] Skinner, "Motives, Intentions,": 406–407.

doing: a task to which the interview and archival evidence of Section IV is directed.

Deriving the Proto-Transnational Concept

The concept of the 'proto-transnational' is itself a logical consequence of taking Skinner's critique seriously. It is the analytical category that becomes necessary once four constraints are simultaneously accepted: (1) that the Bartlett–Ghoshal framework possesses genuine descriptive affinity with the practices revealed by the primary sources; (2) that to attribute a 'transnational strategy' to Kyocera's founders would be to commit the mythology of doctrines, since the concept was not available to them; (3) that to conflate the retrospective significance of these practices with the actors' own understanding would be to commit the mythology of prolepsis; and (4) that the actors' own testimony confirms they did not conceptualise their actions in these theoretical terms. Given these constraints, the historically responsible formulation is not that Kyocera *was* a transnational corporation in the 1970s, but that its practices, which recovered through attention to the actors' illocutionary intentions within their own conceptual horizon, exhibited, in retrospect, a configuration that the transnational framework proves particularly apt at illuminating. 'Proto-transnational' denotes this specific epistemic relationship: a retrospective analytical characterisation that acknowledges its own temporal distance from the phenomena it describes.

A further methodological consideration concerns the selection of Bartlett and Ghoshal over competing frameworks. MNE theory has not stood still since 1989; the metanational model, dynamic capabilities, and institutional theory have all contributed new insights.[44] Yet for a case study set in the late 1960s to 1970s, the transnational solution offers the closest temporal and conceptual fit. Earlier frameworks (Hymer, Vernon, OLI) illuminate the motivations for Kyocera's

[44] Yves Doz, José Santos, and Peter Williamson, From Global to Metanational (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

FDI but lack the organisational vocabulary to analyse what happened within the subsidiary once it was established. Later frameworks (dynamic capabilities, the knowledge-based view) assume conditions of rapid technological change and market volatility that, whilst germane to today's semiconductor industry, overstate the pace of change in the industrial intermediate-goods sector circa 1970.[45] The transnational solution occupies the analytical middle ground: developed in temporal proximity to the case, attentive to organisational architecture, and alert to the knowledge-flow dynamics that the primary sources reveal most vividly. Moreover, the Bartlett–Ghoshal framework was itself inductively derived from historical observation of firms operating in the 1970s and 1980s, including Japanese manufacturers: a genealogy that mitigates, though it does not eliminate, the risk of parochialism. Its analytical categories possess genuine affinity with the conditions of the period under study; the task is to deploy those categories as a retrospective heuristic, not as a prospective description of what the actors themselves were intending.

That said, the companion perspectives of Ghoshal and Bartlett's network model, Kogut and Zander's knowledge-based evolutionary theory, and Rugman's internalisation framework each illuminate dimensions of the KII case that the transnational typology alone leaves underspecified. The network model explicates the structural conditions, namely within-density, across-density, subsidiary centrality, under which proto-transnational configurations emerge. The knowledge-based view explains why tacit, organisationally embedded knowledge necessitates wholly owned subsidiaries rather than licensing or joint ventures as the vehicle for cross-border transfer; Rugman's framework clarifies the simultaneous operation of firm-specific advantages (Kyocera's ceramic technology and management philosophy) and country-specific advantages

[45] Kazuhiro Asakawa, Introduction to Global Management, new ed. (Tokyo: Nikkei Publishing, 2022); Anne-Wil Harzing, "An Empirical Analysis and Extension of the Bartlett and Ghoshal Typology," Journal of International Business Studies 31, no. 1 (2000): 101–20.

(the United States' position as the frontier of semiconductor demand) in motivating and shaping the form of Kyocera's FDI. These perspectives are deployed not as competing alternatives to the transnational framework but as complementary analytical resources that enrich its application to historical evidence.

The Founding of Kyocera International and the San Diego Plant

Strategic Context: Kyocera and the Semiconductor Frontier

By the late 1960s, Kyocera had established itself as the pre-eminent Japanese manufacturer of fine ceramics for electronic applications. Despite its relative youth (indeed, the firm had been founded only a decade earlier by Kazuo Inamori and a small group of colleagues), it had achieved international credibility through contracts with leading American technology firms, including the supply of alumina substrates to IBM France and ceramic components for Texas Instruments' contribution to NASA's Apollo programme.[46] These relationships demonstrated that Kyocera's technical capabilities met the most stringent global standards and, crucially, they connected the firm to the strategic heartland of the semiconductor industry.

Shirai's testimony provides direct evidence of the strategic vision that animated Kyocera's American venture. Asked about the rationale for choosing the United States as the first overseas manufacturing location, Shirai explained that Inamori identified three imperatives: firstly, that the United States constituted the world's largest semiconductor market, and that establishing a production base there would generate both commercial opportunities and industry visibility;

[46] Kyocera Corporation, Challenging the Boundless Future: The Kyocera Group's 50-Year Journey (Kyoto: Kyocera Corporation, 2009): 97–98.

secondly, that the management philosophy Kyocera had cultivated domestically needed to be validated in a radically different cultural environment, that is, ‘he wanted to prove that Kyocera’s approach would work in the US’; and thirdly, that the company needed a stable foothold in a resource-rich economy at a time when Japan’s own economic future remained uncertain.[47]

A Skinnerian reading of these motivations requires distinguishing carefully between the retrospective significance we may attribute to them and what they meant to Inamori himself. From our vantage point, the second imperative, to be specific, the ambition to validate a management philosophy across cultural boundaries, appears strikingly proto-transnational, emphasising worldwide learning and organisational culture that Bartlett and Ghoshal would later theorise. But to Inamori in 1969, this ambition was intelligible within a different conceptual horizon: the Kyocera Philosophy’s emphasis on universal human values (‘judging what is right as human beings’) carried an implicit claim to transcultural validity that Inamori wished to test empirically. His illocutionary act was not ‘implementing transnational management’ but ‘demonstrating the universality of the Kyocera Philosophy’: a characterisation that is both more historically faithful and more analytically precise.[48] In Wadhwani and Jones’s terms, this represents a constitutive model of historical change: the actors’ perceptions of future opportunities were shaped by their interpretations of the firm’s past achievements and philosophical commitments, not by theoretical frameworks that did not yet exist.[49]

Shirai also confirmed that the aspiration for overseas manufacturing had predated the specific opportunity in California. Even at the time of his own recruitment in spring 1964, Inamori,

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[47] Unpublished Corporate Record of Interviews of Shirai and Hasegawa between July and November 1997 at Kyocera HQ, Kyoto, by the 40th Anniversary Corporate History Compilation Committee; Personal interview with Shirai, 23 October 2024 at Inamori Library and 10 March 2026 at Kyocera HQ, Kyoto.
[48] Eugene Choi, “Kyocera International Incorporated,” The Journal of Inamori Kazuo Studies 5 (May 2026): Section 5, Records no. 1, based on oral history interview with Shirai, 23 October 2024.
[49] On constitutive models of historical change in strategy, see Wadhwani and Jones, “Historical Change and the Competitive Advantage of Firms,” Section 4.

then Technical Director, had been urging colleagues to 'accelerate the realisation of overseas operations.'[50] The vision was not for the conventional export structure of manufacturing domestically and selling through trading houses or local sales offices; it was for a complete value chain, which was from customer engagement through design, manufacturing, delivery, and aftercare, located in proximity to the world's most demanding customers. In Rugman's terms, Inamori was seeking simultaneously to exploit firm-specific advantages (Kyocera's ceramic technology and organisational culture) and to access country-specific advantages (the density of semiconductor innovation concentrated in California's emerging technology corridor).[51] When the opportunity presented itself through Fairchild's approach in early 1971, the decision to proceed was therefore the realisation of a strategic intention that had been incubating for the better part of a decade.

The Fairchild Acquisition and the Launch of Manufacturing

In early 1971, Fairchild Camera & Instrument Corporation, a pioneering American semiconductor firm, proposed that Kyocera take over its struggling ceramic semiconductor packaging factory in San Diego. Fairchild had recognised the superiority of Kyocera's CerDIP (Ceramic Dual In-line Package) technology and, amid a semiconductor market downturn, sought to divest a facility it could no longer operate profitably. In October 1971, KII completed the acquisition, becoming simultaneously a manufacturer on American soil and a supplier to Fairchild itself: a transaction that merged market entry with supply-chain integration in a single bold stroke.[52]

One manager and four younger engineers were dispatched to oversee the transition:

[50] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025 at Kyocera HQ, Kyoto.
[51] Rugman, "Internalization Is Still a General Theory of Foreign Direct Investment," Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv 121, no. 3 (1985), 570–575: esp. 571–572.
[52] Kyocera Corporation, 50-Year Journey, at 132–148.

Keisuke Hasegawa (financial accounting), Kiyohide Shirai (CerDIP), Takashi Kawaguchi (ceramics), Ikunosuke Kawamura (multilayer packaging), and Katsuhiro Kato (metallisation), later dubbed the 'Kyocera 5 Samurai' by a local American employee, Ken Evory.[53] The sobriquet was apt in one respect: the five were being sent into largely uncharted territory. For a mid-sized Japanese firm in 1971, establishing a manufacturing operation in the United States was an extraordinary undertaking. The MITI survey of Japanese manufacturing investment conducted in 1975 identified only twenty-three Japanese firms with production facilities in the entire United States, and KII was among the earliest.[54]

Predicament, Self-Reliance, and the Forging of Autonomy

The early months of the San Diego operation were tumultuous. In November 1971, barely a month after the acquisition, the factory manager abruptly resigned, triggering the departure or dismissal of several other American managers. Kawamura's private memorandum captures the severity of the crisis:

In November 1971, Factory Manager B suddenly resigned. … At an urgent meeting with President Inamori, who had travelled to the US, we discussed how to proceed with the factory's operations. The President was seriously considering withdrawal. 'The timing for establishing a factory in the US was too early. I cannot bear to see you, with no experience running a factory in the US, struggle. We should withdraw,' he stated. However, we pleaded earnestly, 'We will strive our utmost, so please allow us to continue.' … Afterwards, he said, 'I understand your feelings. We've already suffered a loss of 100 million yen, but consider this amount the tuition fee for your

[53] The naming of the 'Kyocera 5 Samurai' was attributed to Ken Evory, confirmed by Kawamura in the personal interview of 28 October 2025 at Inamori Library, Kyoto.
[54] MITI, "Status of Japanese Companies' Expansion into US Manufacturing,": 185–191.

training in America. From now on, give it your all.'[55]

This episode is analytically significant for several reasons, and a Skinnerian reading illuminates dimensions that a purely structural analysis would miss. The mythology of coherence would tempt the historian to present Inamori's 'tuition fee' metaphor as evidence of a calculated long-term learning strategy: an element in a coherent proto-transnational programme. Yet attention to the illocutionary force of the utterance within its immediate context reveals something different: Inamori was performing a recognisable act within the Kyocera management tradition, i.e., the reframing of loss as developmental investment, under conditions of genuine uncertainty about the venture's survival. The coherence of a strategic vision can be discerned only in retrospect; at the moment of utterance, the force of Inamori's statement was consolatory, motivational, and conditional ('from now on, give it your all'). In Wadhwani and Jones's terms, this is a constitutive moment: the actors' interpretation of a past investment (the 100-million-yen loss) was being reframed to open a perceived path towards the future, deploying organisational memory as a resource for collective sense-making under conditions of Knightian uncertainty.[56]

The subsequent instructions recorded in Kawamura's notebook reveal the crystallisation of what would become KII's defining organisational ethos: thoroughgoing self-reliance. Following Inamori's visit in February 1972, Kawamura recorded seven policy principles, the core of which were: (1) support from Japan should not be expected, hence survival must be sought through the plant's own efforts; (2) there would be no technical assistance from Japan; (3) drawings should be created locally to secure orders independently; (4) local sales should be pursued without reliance

[55] Record compiled by Ikunosuke Kawamura (July 2022), "Untold Stories of the San Diego Plant's Founding," no. 2/1, Story 4. Personal archive.

[56] On constitutive uses of the past in strategic sense-making under uncertainty, see Wadhwani and Jones, "Historical Change and the Competitive Advantage of Firms," Section 4; also, David J. Teece, Margaret Peteraf, and Sohvi Leih, "Dynamic Capabilities and Organizational Agility: Uncertainty and Entrepreneurial Management in the Innovation Economy," California Management Review 58 (2016): 13–25.

on Japan; (5) the Japanese staff should train young American employees; (6) new product development should be pursued independently; and (7) factory line automation should be commenced.[57]

The keyword that pervades both Kawamura's written record and Shirai's oral testimony is *jiritsu* ('self-reliance'). In Shirai's words: 'Mr Inamori insisted we mustn't rely on Japan. … I desperately sought that spirit of independence.'[58] These seven principles repay careful attention. Read through the transnational lens, they appear to constitute a remarkably prescient charter for subsidiary autonomy; the capacity for independent initiative that Bartlett and Ghoshal would later identify as essential to the transnational model. Yet this reading must be disciplined by the Skinnerian caution against prolepsis. The seven principles were not a strategic blueprint; they were an emergency protocol issued in the wake of a near-fatal crisis. Their 'transnational' character is a retrospective observation, not a description of what Inamori was doing in articulating them. What he was doing, "the illocutionary act recoverable from the contextual evidence", was to draw a sharp boundary between subsidiary and parent, compelling the San Diego team to develop the organisational capabilities that the withdrawal of headquarters support made imperative.

Read through Ghoshal and Bartlett's network framework; however, the seven principles acquire an additional analytical dimension. The forced self-reliance had the structural effect of compelling the subsidiary to develop dense exchange relationships with the members of its local organisation set, namely, American customers, suppliers, and technical communities, in order to survive. In an environment of high within-density (the tightly interconnected Californian semiconductor ecosystem), KII's comprehensive local capabilities, e.g., independent design, local sales, and autonomous product development, were precisely the conditions that Ghoshal and

[57] Record compiled by Kawamura (July 2022), "Untold Stories," no. 3/1, Story 5.
[58] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025 at Kyocera HQ, Kyoto.

Bartlett identified as necessary for subsidiary membership in densely linked national organisation sets.[59] The Kyocera case thus offers an unexpected causal mechanism for the emergence of the differentiated network: not the deliberate strategic design of an 'integrated network' architecture, but the enforced autonomy of a subsidiary compelled by crisis to build the very capabilities that the network model identifies as structurally necessary.

In the Bartlett–Ghoshal framework, the transnational corporation is characterised precisely by subsidiaries that function as autonomous yet integrated nodes within a global network, possessing sufficient local capability and initiative to contribute to the whole rather than merely executing headquarters' instructions. The self-reliance imperative that emerged from KII's predicament produced the same practical outcome, but through a radically different causal pathway: not through strategic design oriented towards 'worldwide learning,' but through the forced autonomy of a subsidiary that had been cut loose from the parent's operational support.

KII through the Transnational Lens 1: Global Integration

Global integration in the Bartlett–Ghoshal framework denotes the cross-border coordination of core competencies, technologies, and strategies to achieve corporate-wide operational efficiency. At KII, this manifested most clearly in the transplantation of Kyocera's ceramic manufacturing technology. The five dispatched engineers introduced Japanese expertise in ceramic formulation, firing, and precision quality control, including CerDIP, multilayer packaging, and metallisation processes, to the San Diego facility, aligning the quality of American output with Japanese standards.[60] The transfer of Kyocera's production methodology was accompanied by the

[59] Ghoshal and Bartlett, "Interorganizational Network,": 612–13.
[60] Technical details confirmed in interviews with Shirai and Kawamura: Kawamura on 28 October at Inamori Library, Kyoto, Shirai on 7 November 2025 at Kyocera HQ, Kyoto.

introduction of its quality control systems and small-group operational practices, ensuring that the American plant would operate within a unified global framework of standards and procedures.

In Kogut and Zander's terms, this transfer involved precisely the kind of knowledge that firms are most likely to internalise rather than license: ceramic formulation and precision firing constituted know-how that was difficult to codify in manuals or blueprints, demanded extensive hands-on teaching through the 'exchange of engineers and workers' from the originating plant, and involved complex interactions among multiple disciplinary knowledge bases: the very dimensions of codifiability, teachability, and complexity that their empirical research identified as predictive of wholly owned transfer modes.[61] That Kyocera chose to acquire a facility and dispatch its own engineers, rather than licensing its CerDIP technology to an American manufacturer, was not a transaction-cost calculation; it reflected the tacit and embedded character of the knowledge being transferred.

Equally significant was the integration of the San Diego facility into Kyocera's emerging global supply chain. Post-acquisition, Fairchild sourced all of its CerDIP packages from Kyocera; a relationship that tied the American plant directly into the production architecture of a major U.S. semiconductor manufacturer. By 1973, when Owens-Illinois, KII's sole American competitor in CerDIP production, ceased operations, the San Diego facility had achieved a dominant position in the domestic market.[62] The integration was technological, operational, and commercial: Kyocera's ceramic packaging technology, developed in Kyoto, had been effectively globalised through the Californian subsidiary.

KII through the Transnational Lens 2: Local Responsiveness

[61] Kogut and Zander, "Knowledge of the Firm,": 632–35.
[62] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025.

If global integration demanded technological fidelity to Japanese standards, local responsiveness required adaptation to an American labour market, regulatory environment, and business culture that differed fundamentally from what the founding team had known. The San Diego plant inherited existing American employees from Fairchild, and the management structure was deliberately bicultural from the outset: whilst the five Japanese engineers provided technical leadership, primary on-site managerial responsibility was entrusted to American managers; an arrangement that was notably progressive for the early 1970s, when many Japanese firms operating in the United States relied heavily on expatriate staff.[63]

The cultural adaptation required was substantial. Shirai's testimony is instructive on this point. He recalled the challenge of conducting annual performance appraisals, viz., a practice deeply embedded in American management expectations but profoundly unfamiliar to the Japanese founders: 'Another thing that gave me the biggest headache was the annual appraisal of my direct reports. ... You can't just go by feelings; you must check your notes.'[64] Rather than imposing either a purely Japanese or purely American approach, Shirai adopted what he termed the 'Kyocera Way': a hybrid formulation that was deliberately neither the 'Japanese Way' nor the 'American Way.' This linguistic strategy itself was an act of local adaptation, translating the firm's management philosophy into a register that could claim universality rather than national provenance. In Skinnerian terms, the coinage of the 'Kyocera Way' was an illocutionary act of considerable subtlety: it simultaneously asserted the firm's philosophical distinctiveness and disavowed the cultural parochialism that might have attended the label 'Japanese Way.'

The transplantation of the Kyocera Philosophy, to be exact, 'judging what is right as

[63] Kiyoshi Ikemoto, Akira Ueno, and Kenichi Amuro, Multinational Expansion of Japanese Companies (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1981), pt. II, chaps. 3, 5.
[64] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025.

human beings' and 'pursuing the material and spiritual well-being of all employees', to the American context entailed both integration and adaptation.[65] Practices such as employment stability (layoff avoidance), open-plan offices replacing private offices that symbolised managerial hierarchy in American firms, and the expectation that all staff, regardless of rank, would share responsibility for workplace maintenance were introduced gradually. As Shirai recounted, 'Even when we acquired this factory, there were plenty of private offices. In the US, every manager gets a private office; it's a symbol of sorts. We were open-plan, and right to the end we all worked together.'[66] The process was not frictionless, but through sustained and committed engagement, namely what both interviewees described as 'daily frantic battling in sweat and tears', a hybrid organisational culture gradually took root.

The 'Kyocera Way' illustrates a phenomenon that the interorganizational network perspective illuminates with particular clarity. Ghoshal and Bartlett argued that the MNC's resource configuration is influenced not only by technical and economic considerations but by the social and institutional structure of the environments in which its units operate, including 'political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness.'[67] KII's development of a hybrid management culture was precisely such an act of institutional legitimacy-seeking: the firm needed to establish itself as a credible member of the densely linked Californian semiconductor organisation set, which demanded not only superior products but also recognisable managerial praxis compatible with local norms. The 'Kyocera Way' was the vehicle for achieving

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[65] Kazuo Inamori, A Passion for Success (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995); The Inamori Management Philosophy centres on internalising principles through daily practice. For a detailed analysis, see Eugene Choi, "Inamori Management Philosophy," Inamori Kazuo Studies, no. 2 (2023): 41–68; Kimio Kase, Eugene Choi, and Ikujiro Nonaka, Dr Kazuo Inamori's Management Praxis and Philosophy (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), chaps. 2, 4–5.
[66] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025: Shirai stated that his naming of 'Kyocera Way' was surely influenced by the American 'HP (Hewlett-Packard) Way' from Shirai's study of HP and related publication.
[67] Ghoshal and Bartlett, "Interorganizational Network,": 612, citing DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

this institutional embeddedness without sacrificing the firm-specific philosophical commitments that constituted its distinctive capability.

KII through the Transnational Lens 3: Multidirectional Knowledge Flow

The third pillar of the transnational solution, and arguably the most illuminating dimension of KII's experience, is multidirectional knowledge flow. In the Bartlett–Ghoshal framework, knowledge in a transnational corporation does not flow unilaterally from headquarters to the periphery; it circulates among all nodes of the network, with each subsidiary serving as both a learner and a contributor.[68]

At KII, knowledge transfer from headquarters to the subsidiary was the initial and most visible flow. Japanese engineers trained local staff in ceramic formulation, firing techniques, and quality inspection methods, and transferred drawings, specifications, and, in some cases, moulds and equipment. But the reverse flow, from subsidiary to headquarters, proved equally consequential. Operating from the California base, Kyocera's engineers gained direct access to the requirements and emerging technological demands of American semiconductor firms. As early as 1968, before the San Diego plant was even established, Kyocera had responded to Fairchild's request to develop multilayer IC packages, viz., a previously unexplored technology that earned Kyocera the prestigious Okochi Prize in 1972.[69] Contact with American customers spurred headquarters to overcome technical limitations and to generate new knowledge that would not have been produced without the subsidiary's proximity to the frontier of demand.

Kogut and Zander's evolutionary perspective provides a precise vocabulary for this process. They argued that the firm grows through the 'recombination of knowledge, resting upon

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[68] Bartlett and Ghoshal, Managing across Borders, chaps. at 4–5.
[69] Kyocera Corporation, 50-Year Journey: 140–42.

what we have called a "combinative capability," that a firm exploits its current knowledge for expansion into new markets.'[70] KII's founding phase exemplifies this combinative dynamic: ceramic manufacturing knowledge developed in Kyoto was recombined with market intelligence and process innovations generated in San Diego, producing an enriched knowledge base that neither headquarters nor subsidiary could have developed in isolation. Tellingly, Kogut and Zander noted that the 'sequential expansion of a firm's activities after the first entry into a country is an articulation of the evolutionary acquisition and recombination of knowledge': a characterisation that captures precisely KII's developmental trajectory from initial CerDIP production through independent design capability to autonomous new-product development over the course of the 1970s.[71]

Kawamura's testimony vividly illustrates how knowledge flow operated in daily engineering practice. He described the motivational transformation that occurred when the San Diego plant acquired a scanning electron microscope, expensive equipment that American engineers, with their strong professional identity, regarded as both a tool and a marker of technological seriousness: 'American engineers have considerable pride. They see themselves as engineers. Being able to use such expensive equipment... fostered that sense of fulfilment. They were absolutely delighted. ... Since then, their sensitivity increased tremendously.'[72] The investment in analytical instrumentation created new channels of knowledge generation: American technicians began identifying microstructural phenomena that fed back into process improvements, raising quality standards at the San Diego plant to a level that, by Kawamura's account, eventually surpassed those of the Japanese factories.

[70] Kogut and Zander, "Knowledge of the Firm," at 636.
[71] Kogut and Zander, "Knowledge of the Firm," at 636, 640.
[72] Personal interview with Kawamura, 28 October 2025.

A particularly revealing dimension of KII's knowledge ecology was the management of the inevitable competitive tension between the San Diego and Japanese plants. Once KII's mass-production system was established and operating profitably, a turning point was reached around March 1973, American customers found themselves able to source identical CerDIP products from either the Japanese or the American factory. As Shirai recalled: 'Sales can place orders with … Since San Diego tends to cause problems immediately, I often went [to Kyoto] to say, "Place orders with San Diego."' [73] This intra-corporate competition, and the knowledge-sharing mechanisms that evolved to manage it, exhibits a configuration later validated as the 'differentiated network' concept that Ghoshal and Bartlett would not formalise until 1997. [74] In the network framework, this intra-corporate dynamic reflects the emergence of multiple subsidiaries with overlapping capabilities competing for internal mandates, a structural condition that generates precisely the kind of intersubsidiary knowledge flows and capability upgrading that the differentiated network model identifies as a source of competitive advantage.

Once again, however, the Skinnerian caution against prolepsis applies: to say that this practice 'anticipated' the differentiated network is to describe its retrospective significance, not to claim that Shirai was conscious of implementing a network governance structure. His illocutionary act, recovered from the testimony, was that of an engineer advocating for his plant's survival and growth within an emerging intra-corporate competitive dynamic: an act intelligible within the conventions of Japanese intra-firm rivalry (*kyōsō*) without recourse to later theoretical vocabulary.

[73] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025.
[74] Ghoshal and Bartlett, "Interorganizational Network," at 612-618; Nohria and Ghoshal, The Differentiated Network (Jossey-Bass, 1997).

Kyocera in Comparative Perspective

The distinctiveness of Kyocera's approach becomes most apparent when contextualised against the broader pattern of Japanese overseas manufacturing investment in the same period. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Japanese manufacturing FDI remained highly unusual.[75] The MITI survey conducted in 1975 identified only twenty-three Japanese firms with manufacturing operations in the United States, and most Japanese overseas investment was concentrated in trading and financial services.[76]

Among those Japanese firms that did establish American manufacturing in the 1970s, the prevailing model differed markedly from Kyocera's approach. Sony Corporation opened a television assembly plant in San Diego in 1972, one year after Kyocera's acquisition of the Fairchild facility; however, its initial focus was on market access and trade pressure mitigation, with design authority retained in Tokyo.[77] Toyota and Honda did not commence full-scale American manufacturing until the 1980s, and both initially relied heavily on Japanese expatriates, introducing systems such as Just-In-Time and Quality Control Circles, with limited local managerial autonomy.[78] Matsushita (Panasonic) and Sharp similarly began American assembly operations in the 1970s under headquarters-centric governance structures. In Bartlett and Ghoshal's terminology, the prevailing Japanese model was indeed that of the Global Corporation: strong central coordination, unidirectional knowledge flow from home to host, and limited local adaptation.

In Rugman's framework, this prevailing pattern reflected a particular calibration of firm-

[75] Further contextual data from Ikemoto, Ueno, and Amuro, Multinational Expansion.
[76] MITI, "Status of Japanese Companies' Expansion into US Manufacturing."
[77] Sony Corporation, "The San Diego Way" (Sony History, chap. 17).
[78] See the extensive literature on Toyota and Honda's American operations, including Paul S. Adler, "The 'Learning Bureaucracy': New United Motor Manufacturing, INC.," (Draft 3.1, April 1992).

specific and country-specific advantages. Most Japanese firms entering the United States in this period sought primarily to exploit firm-specific advantages developed at home (such as production technology, quality systems, cost discipline) whilst treating the American location as providing access to a large consumer market and, increasingly, as a hedge against protectionist trade measures. The country-specific advantage for these firms was, in principle, the United States' market size, not its knowledge base. Kyocera's approach inverted this logic: whilst pursuing market access, it sought to tap the country-specific advantage of the United States as the frontier of semiconductor innovation, embedding itself within the American knowledge ecology, not merely for sales. The seven self-reliance principles, read through the lens of internalisation, represent not merely an emergency protocol but a deliberate (if crisis-precipitated) commitment to developing the subsidiary's absorptive capacity for locally generated knowledge.

This comparative exercise fulfils the first of Skinner's two hermeneutic rules: it delineates the 'prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the issues or themes' with which the historical agents were engaged.[79] By establishing the contemporary norm of Japanese overseas management, we gain a benchmark against which Kyocera's divergence can be measured, that is to say, not against the anachronistic standard of later theory, but against the actual practices of contemporary firms operating under comparable conditions. Kyocera's divergence from this pattern is striking. Its localisation strategy emphasised not merely market access but the incorporation of American technology and talent; the dual purpose of efficiency and learning that, in retrospect, is characteristic of the transnational model. The management structure was deliberately bicultural from the outset. The emphasis on local self-reliance, codified in the seven principles that emerged from the 1972 crisis, went far beyond the autonomy typically granted to

[79] Skinner, "Motives, Intentions," at 406.

Japanese overseas subsidiaries of the period. And the ambition to transplant a management philosophy, rather than merely a production system, reflected a conception of internationalisation that was organisational and cultural, not merely operational.

Shirai drew the contrast explicitly, recalling the experience of Japanese employees at other firms: 'A local employee who graduated from an American university was complaining that people from Japan worked facing Japan. … Most Japanese expatriates felt they were stationed there without actually causing any incidents and then returned to Japan.'[80] Kyocera's founding directive was precisely the opposite: to face outward, to build locally, and to achieve an autonomy that would render the subsidiary a genuine contributor to, rather than a dependent recipient of, the parent corporation's capabilities. In the Ghoshal–Bartlett network vocabulary, most Japanese firms maintained a hub-and-spoke internal structure in which the headquarters enjoyed maximum point centrality and subsidiaries remained peripheral dependants; Kyocera, by contrast, was developing towards a structure in which the San Diego subsidiary possessed its own dense exchange relationships, independent mandate, and capacity for autonomous initiative: a configuration in which subsidiary centrality rivalled that of headquarters for specific activities and knowledge domains.[81]

That this ambition was articulated by a mid-sized ceramics manufacturer in 1971, two decades before the theoretical vocabulary to describe it existed, is what makes the KII case historically significant, as long as we maintain the distinction between its significance for us (which is substantial) and its meaning for the actors themselves (which was framed in terms of the

[80] Personal interview with Shirai, 7 November 2025.
[81] On the relationship between subsidiary centrality and network structure, see Ghoshal and Bartlett, "Interorganizational Network," at 616–617, and Figure 2.

Kyocera Philosophy[82], not of transnational theory).

Conclusion

This article has argued that the founding phase of Kyocera International Incorporated constitutes an early, empirically documented instance of proto-transnational enterprise: an organisational configuration that, without conscious theoretical articulation, embodied the core elements of global integration, local responsiveness, and multidirectional knowledge flow that Bartlett and Ghoshal would later identify as the hallmarks of the most sophisticated multinational corporations.[83]

The primary sources examined here, viz., oral histories, personal memoranda, internal newsletters, and extended interviews with founding participants, reveal a picture of early internationalisation that is considerably more complex than the standard narrative of Japanese overseas expansion suggests. Kyocera's entry into American manufacturing was not driven by the defensive motivations (tariff avoidance, trade-friction management) that characterised later waves of Japanese FDI. It was, rather, an offensive strategy animated by an unusually long-term vision: to embed the firm within the world's most advanced semiconductor ecosystem, to validate its management philosophy across cultural boundaries, and to build an autonomous overseas organisation capable of contributing to ("not merely depending upon") the parent company's capabilities.

[82] The crux of Kyocera Philosophy was forged by the founder, Kazuo Inamori, who strenuously stressed the significance of 'incessant development of embodied knowledge from daily praxis' before 'theorisation'. For the details, see Kimio Kase, Eugene Choi, and Ikujiro Nonaka, Dr Kazuo Inamori's Management Praxis and Philosophy (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), Chap. 2 on Schematic Representation, esp. the mechanism of 'intra-action' between hypostasis and substantiation.
[83] This formulation adheres to the Skinnerian distinction between retrospective analytical significance and the actors' own understanding of their situation.

The theoretical enrichment achieved through the integration of complementary perspectives from across the MNE literature deepens this finding in three respects. First, Rugman's internalisation framework clarifies that Kyocera's decision to acquire a facility rather than license its technology was not just a strategic preference, but a structural necessity dictated by the tacit, organisationally embedded character of its firm-specific advantages. Second, Kogut and Zander's knowledge-based evolutionary theory illuminates the mechanism by which KII's capabilities developed: through the cross-border transfer and recombination of knowledge that was difficult to codify, demanding to teach, and embedded in the cooperative routines of a social community: a process that generated a combinative capability resistant to imitation and constitutive of the firm's subsequent competitive advantage. Third, Ghoshal and Bartlett's interorganisational network model reveals the structural logic of KII's trajectory: forced self-reliance compelled the subsidiary to build dense local exchange relationships and develop comprehensive autonomous capabilities, producing an embryonic differentiated network in which subsidiary centrality rivalled headquarters for specific knowledge domains, specifically, the very architectural condition that the network framework identifies as characteristic of the most sophisticated MNEs.

The methodological implications extend beyond the single case. This article has sought to demonstrate that Quentin Skinner's contextualist critique of the history of ideas, which was developed for the interpretation of political and philosophical texts, provides indispensable analytical tools for business history and multinational enterprise studies. The four mythologies Skinner identified (doctrines, coherence, prolepsis, parochialism) have close analogues whenever management theory is applied retrospectively to historical cases, and his positive programme (namely, the recovery of illocutionary intentions through attention to prevailing conventions and the actors' mental world) offers a disciplined alternative to the uncritical projection of later concepts onto earlier practices. The concept of 'proto-transnational' itself is a product of this methodology: the category that becomes logically necessary once the Skinnerian constraints are accepted. Wadhwani and Jones's demonstration that the dynamic capabilities framework itself incorporates implicit historical models of change provides broader warrant for this kind of methodological self-consciousness: if the theoretical frameworks carry their own historical assumptions, then the retrospective application of those frameworks to historical evidence demands an especially rigorous form of temporal awareness.

Business history's engagement with management theory is most productive when it is disciplined by this kind of temporal awareness, that is to say, when the historian neither rejects the analytical utility of later frameworks nor applies them uncritically to earlier periods. The convergence between Skinner's insistence on recovering illocutionary force and Kogut and Zander's emphasis on the tacit, socially embedded character of organisational knowledge points towards a deeper methodological insight: both the meaning of historical practices and the competitive advantages they generate resist codification, demanding forms of understanding (precisely, contextual interpretation in the one case, organisational learning in the other) that cannot be reduced to explicit formulas or abstract categories.

Several limitations and directions for further research should be noted. This study focuses upon the founding and early growth phase of a single subsidiary; the subsequent evolution of KII and of Kyocera's broader global organisation, including the pivotal 1990 acquisition of AVX Corporation, which Lanthorne identified as a further expression of Kyocera's transnational capabilities, lies beyond the present scope and merits dedicated investigation.[84] The theoretical framework could be enriched by deeper engagement with the individualised corporation concept

[84] Kyocera's acquisition of AVX Corporation (1990). Online interview with Rodney N. Lanthorne, 9 October 2025.

proposed in Ghoshal and Bartlett's later work, which shares notable affinities with the Inamori Philosophy and amoeba management system.[85] A comparative study incorporating the European dimension of Kyocera's early internationalisation, specifically the firm simultaneously established a semiconductor packaging joint venture in Germany in 1971, would further illuminate the distinctiveness of the American venture. More broadly, the Skinnerian methodology developed here invites application to other cases in which management theory has been applied to historical practice: from the retrospective identification of 'dynamic capabilities' in nineteenth-century firms to the attribution of 'knowledge management' to pre-modern craft organisations.

If we recognise today's Kyocera as a uniquely pioneering transnational corporation, the story of KII's founding and growth may be understood as its prototype in miniature: an early demonstration, which was forged in the hardship and isolation of an overseas start-up, of the organisational capabilities that would later sustain the firm's global expansion. The founding members, the 'Kyocera 5 Samurai', working under the distant skies of San Diego, confronted daily the gap between their organisation's nascent capabilities and the demands of their environment. Bridging that gap through resourcefulness, cultural adaptation, and an ethos of self-reliance is not merely a corporate success story. It is a chapter in the broader history of Japanese multinational enterprise that has, until now, remained largely untold in English-language scholarship.

[85] Ghoshal and Bartlett, The Individualized Corporation; Kazuo Inamori, Amoeba Management: The Dynamic Management System for Rapid Market Response. (CRC Press; A Productivity Book Press, 2012); Kase, Choi, and Nonaka (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to Mr Kiyohide Shirai, Mr Ikunosuke (Mike) Kawamura, Mr Rodney N. Lanthorne, and the archivists and librarians at the Inamori Library of Kyocera Corporation.

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