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Caroline Schulenburg, *Renault und Daimler-Benz in der Zwischenkriegzeit (1919-1939): Eine vergleichende Unternehmensgeschichte zweier europäischer Automobilhersteller*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008. 296 pp. Tables, bibliography. 47€(pb). ISBN 978-3-515-09200-5.

Review by Hubert Bonin, Sciences Po Bordeaux.

Comparative studies have become an important means to approach business history. These comparisons are usually between the various affiliates of a multinational firm all over Europe (Philips, Unilever, Shell, Ford, etc.), and also, more and more, between companies themselves. Schulenberg's case-study presents a relevant survey of three, then two (after the merger of Daimler and Benz) car industries, and moreover gathers the materials and arguments to make the case about the institutionalising of "big business" during the first stage of the second industrial revolution, in the interwar period.

The key issue of the book is: How did these "little" car firms resist the American technological, organisational, industrial and commercial offensive in Europe? The book addresses this by examining the methods followed by the industrialists: investments, commercial policies, strategy about the business model (middle-range cars for Renault, luxury cars for its German counterpart), debates about the commitment to a "small car" design, and export policy. It then goes on to gauge, with precision, the results of these choices, alongside turnover, returns, market shares, overall competitiveness, etc. What struck me, as a specialist in banking history, is that Schulenburg (unlike others) did not forget to tackle financial issues, such as the equity of companies and the relationship with banks (both commercial and investment). It is clear that she thinks that such connections were part of the business model of the manufacturers (Renault demanding independence from bankers' tutelage, whereas German bankers and industrialists set up a co-operative way of common life).

The most important contribution of this book to business history is with the key issue of "corporate and brand image." This topic had been considered by Loubet about Peugeot in his dissertation and by Bonin about Ford,[1] but the comparative process Schulenburg undertakes is very useful, all the more because it goes beyond the sole case of French manufacturers. [2] What had been (and still is) at stake was the discrepancy in quality and perception between French and German cars --as shown by, for example, by Feldenkirchen.[3] Car business history had also insisted on addressing marketing but a thorough study based on comparison ("differentiation) between European brands and companies is still missing, either to underline "the decline" of some, the "rebirth" of others, and the upward move (Audi) or durable strength of still others.[4] For this Schulenburg's book is very important, and opens doors to further researches and enquiries.

This book was developed from a dissertation, and it still has traces of that style which might have been improved. For example, the two chronological parts ought to have been amalgamated because there is no genuine difference in issues to justify such a separation; in addition, the thematic subparts are redundant--each repeats a study of Renault, then of the German entities, last a synthesis. The reader also could use, for example, "integrated" tables that include the figures about both countries on actual comparative tables (about production, types of models, workforce, etc.). But, beyond these flaws, the overall outlook is very interesting, all the more because Schulenburg went beyond the existing literature and dived into fresh archives, which propelled her analysis, beyond, for instance, the results already reached about Renault by Fridenson and Loubet.[5]

There are a few other holes in this otherwise excellent book. Schulenburg does not make as much use of the work of business historians as she might have. The technical corporate culture of the firms ("*culture technique*") are not assessed. Other questions might have been asked--questions such as, for example, the technological environment, or how reserves of trained workers in mechanics and metal were created. She does not pay enough attention to the differences in "management culture" between a "family business" (typically somewhat autocratic) and a far more proto-managerial business (with broad stakeholders). I might also highlight the absence of any argument about the differences between a "French" and a "German" way of management or culture. The building of a brand image (through advertising, for instance) should also have been studied. Finally, it is a shame that data about the strategy of "diversification" was not sufficiently mobilised (despite relevant tables here and there) to feed a deeper analysis of the portfolio of strategic activities of the firms. But these qualms aside, this is an excellent book that paves the way (we hope) for promising future similar comparative research.

NOTES

[1] Jean-Louis Loubet, *Automobiles Peugeot. Une réussite industrielle, 1945-1974* (Paris: Économica, 1990) and Hubert Bonin, "Ford brand's image: An essay to gauge its evolution in Europe (between the 1930s and the 1980s)," in Hubert Bonin et. al., eds., *Ford, 1903-2003: The European History* (Paris PLAGE, 2003).

[2] J.-L. Loubet, *Citroën, Peugeot, Renault. Histoire de stratégies d'entreprises* (Boulogne: ETAI, 1999) and *Histoire de l'automobile française* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

[3] Wilfried Feldenkirchen, *"Vom Guten das Beste": von Daimler und Benz zur DaimlerChrysler* AG. (München: Herbig, 2003).

[4] On marketing see Patrick Fridenson, "French automobile marketing, 1891-1979," in A. Akochi and K. Shimakawa, eds., *Development of Mass Marketing: The Automobile and Retailing Industries* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1981).

[5] Patrick Fridenson, *Histoire des usines Renault, 1898-1939* (Paris: Seuil, 1998 [1972]) and Jean-Louis Loubet, *Renault. Cent ans d'histoire, 1898-1998* (Paris: ETAI, 1998).

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