Crisis in Silk-Reeling Industry
and Operations of Silk Wholesale House
—Hara Unlimited Partnership in 1920s to the 1930s’ Crisis—

MATSUMURA Satoshi

It is a well-known fact that the advance financing by silk wholesale houses in Yokohama to silk-reeling industry has played a decisively vital role in the development process of the silk-reeling industry in modern Japan. The development framework of silk-reeling industry under the financial control of leading wholesalers over the operation of filatures in the period of industrial revolution is called “Domination by Raw Silk Wholesalers” in our history of studies. Thereafter however this “Domination by Raw Silk Wholesalers” gradually altered its character from around the World War I and the significance of financing from wholesalers in operation of filature went ever decreasing. Note however that it has so far hardly been attempted any study intended to clarify positively, from the wholesaler side, the recession process of this domination. This paper is an attempt to elucidate this process in 1920s to the 1930s’ Crisis, taking as an example Hara Unlimited partnership in Yokohama, which was the largest raw silk wholesaler in Japan at that time.

In conclusion, as a result of our investigation on the general evolutive trend of Hara’s assets and shareholding, it has been turned out that Hara House was on the rather rapid decline after the Great Earthquake of 1923. She narrowly escaped bankruptcy through vast relief financing from Bank of Japan and Yokohama Specie Bank, Ltd. Though the arrival of silk at Hara House did not much reduce, it became extremely difficult for her to dominate her filatures by advance, since she became much more passive in financing to their operation. This same tendency was seen in other leading wholesalers and to the best of my knowledge, all the leading wholesalers managed to wangle out of this crisis in silk-reeling industry without or extremely decreasing the advance to the filatures at the latest at the time of the 1930s’ Crisis. Thus at the time of the 1930s’ Crisis the “Domination of Raw Silk Wholesalers” in the sense of financial
control over large-scaled filatures by leading whole-salers completely collapsed and this domination was not any more the economical structural framework characterizing the Japanese silk-reeling industry.