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*Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Part 2: City and Village in Japan.  
(Oct., 1960), pp. 93-107.

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*Economic Development and Cultural Change* is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

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## LANDLORDS' SONS IN THE BUSINESS ELITE

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Some social classes in preindustrial societies are generally thought to be more favorably disposed than others to industrialization. Among those thought to be least favorably disposed are landlords, for two reasons. They are typically identified in interest with the existing political system and social and economic orders; and, partly for this reason, but also because they often live in rural environments where tradition is its own sanction, they are likely to be passionately devoted to the most conservative of ideologies.

Like many instructive generalizations this one has its exceptions. Japan's landlords are a case in point: their sons during the last century have provided a far higher proportion of the nation's leaders in government, politics, business, education, scholarship, science and the arts, than their numbers in the population would warrant. This paper is an attempt to explain why. To keep the discussion concrete I shall confine my remarks to business, but they might with little modification apply to other activities as well.

The paper considers, first, what proportion of modern Japanese business leaders sprang from the landlord class, and, second, some characteristics of that group which seem to throw light on the success of its members. Throughout, I shall be interested in the extent to which the relevant characteristics may be identified as 'modern' or may be regarded as 'traditional,' although not until the end of the paper will this question be raised explicitly.

### I

As no figures are available on the social origins of Japanese businessmen, I have been obliged to compile my own, basing them on the biographies of 154 presidents of companies ranking among the 323 largest in the country in 1956.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-five per cent of these men were born before 1890, 80 per cent before 1901, and 97 per cent before 1911. Thus we are considering a group of men who, with few exceptions, began their business careers during the first two decades of this century.

Two weaknesses of the sample should be noted. Although the firms represented were those with the largest capital, and in each case the president (shachō) was chosen as the officer most likely to be the effective head of the firm, the sample is small in relation to the group that might reasonably be

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1. Each with a capital of 1,500,000,000 yen or more in 1956; figures on capital from Kaisha nenkan (Tokyo, 1956).

considered the 'business elite.' Then, too, the selection of companies on the basis of size alone makes for uneven representation of the various parts of the economy, capital-intensive industries being over-represented and labor-intensive industries being over-represented and labor-intensive industries under-represented. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the bias in favor of bigness diminishes rather than exaggerates the importance of rural origins since as a rule farm sons probably reached the top in the largest companies least easily.

According to the responses of the company presidents to a questionnaire designed to elicit information not usually given in the standard biographical dictionaries, the fathers of 70 (45 percent) were "farmers" (Table I). Ten of this number were absentee landlords, however, leaving 60 or 38.9 percent who lived on the land. Eighteen of these had a second occupation, which they presumably followed concurrently with farming rather than in some career sequence to it. This is plausible since the occupations were of the sort commonly combined with farming; and a generation ago the heads of farm families rarely abandoned farming for another occupation, although their sons and daughters commonly did.<sup>2</sup> Farming in one form or another, therefore, was probably a lifetime occupation in all cases, but whether it was the main or a secondary occupation is difficult to say.

Table I. Occupation of Father

	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>%</u>
'Farmers	(60)	38.9
Noncultivating landlords	26	
Cultivating landlords	11	
Owner-cultivators	19	
Owner-tenant	1	
Other	3	
Absentee landlords	10	6.5
Others	<u>84</u>	<u>54.6</u>
Total	154	100.0

The farm sons in our sample of business leaders did not come from a cross section of the farm population. The fathers of 26 of the 60 were non-cultivating--though not absentee--landlords; men who worked no land themselves but lived exclusively or in part off rents. Of the remainder, the fathers of 11 were cultivating landlords who let part of their holdings to tenants and worked

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2. Despite the migration of labor from agriculture to other employments, this is suggested by the fact that the number of farm families remained at approximately five and a half million from the turn of the century to the end of World War II. Ōuchi Hyoei (ed.), Nihon keizai tōkei shu (Tokyo, 1958), p. 147.

the rest themselves; 19 were owner-cultivators; one was an owner-cultivator who worked some land as a tenant; and 3 were unclassified in the responses of their sons.

It is clear, then, that farm sons who became company presidents came from the upper strata of the farm population, a fact borne out by their own testimony (Table II). Asked to rate their family's economic situation when they were young, as 'affluent,' 'poor,' or 'in between,' all but two of the 37 landlords' sons answered 'affluent.' Four of the 23 sons of non-landlords rated their families as 'affluent,' 13 as 'in between' and 6 as 'poor.' These ratings are of some relevance despite the probably marked subjectivity of them; and the results are about what one would expect from a group well over half of which came from landlord families. One must not conclude, however, that even the 'affluent' families were wealthy; large landowners were rare in Japan and most landlords were far from wealthy by city standards.

Table II

	Noncul- tivating Landlord	Culti- vating Landlord	Owner- Culti- vator	Owner- Tenant	Tenant	Unre- ported	Total
'affluent	22	9	2	0	0	2	35
'neither affluent nor poor'	4	2	12	1	0	0	19
poor	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	26	11	19	1	0	3	60

As to whether the percentage of farm sons in our sample of businessmen is significantly high or not, two measures are available. One is to compare the sample with similar samples from other countries; the other, to compare the percentage of farm sons in the sample with the percentage of farm sons in the population; or rather (since no such figure as the latter exists), with the percentage of the labor force engaged in farming at the time when the sons were entering their careers.

Comparison of apparently similar groups from different countries is notoriously difficult; essential data are lacking, or they come in awkward categories, or it is impossible to determine at which dates comparisons ought to be made. These difficulties are at a minimum, however, in making comparison with the United States for which there exist several examples of the business elite, at a variety of dates.

I shall use the decade 1890-1900 in the United States for comparison with Japan in 1956; this comparison is suggested by the following considerations.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Solomon Fabricant, "The Changing Industrial Distribution of Gainful Workers," Conference on Research in Income and Wealth, Studies in Income and Wealth (New York, 1949), XI, p. 27; and Ōkawa Kazushi, Nihon keizai no seichō ritsu (Tokyo, 1956), p. 131.

(1) The year 1920 is the date of the earliest Japanese census, and so of the earliest reliable figures on the composition of the labor force; this date also corresponds to the early business careers of the men in our sample. (2) Approximately the same proportion of the labor force employed in agriculture in Japan in 1920--50 percent--was employed in agriculture in the United States in 1870. (3) Men who were launching their business careers in 1870 achieved eminence in American business about the decade 1890-1900.

Five studies have been made of the social origins of American business leaders centering on or close to the decade 1890-1900 (Table III). Although the percentage of farm sons varies with the sample, it will be seen at a glance that the highest figure--21.5 percent--is below the Japanese figure of 38.9 percent, and that the lowest American figure is scarcely a quarter of that. Comparison is admittedly rough and the samples are small and variously chosen; no great importance attaches therefore to small percentage differences. With all due caution, however, it seems likely that the agricultural population contributed no less to the business elite in Japan than in the United States at a comparable stage of economic development, and perhaps a good deal more. This is a bit surprising in view of the reputation of the Japanese farmer--whether peasant or landlord--for stubborn conservatism, and of the American farmer for ingenuity and enterprise.

Table III<sup>4</sup>

<u>Author of Study</u>	<u>Percent of business elite whose father's principal occupation was farmer</u>	<u>Size of Sample</u>	<u>Date of Elite</u>
Miller	12.00	190	1900-10
Newcomer	20.8	308	1900
Bendix	9.0*	380	1861-90
Mills	21.5	?	1850-79**
Keller	16.00	168	1900

\* Aggregate of 'farmers' and 'gentry farmers.'

\*\* Elite classified year of birth.

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4. William Miller, "American Historians and the Business Elite," Journal of Economic History, IX, 2(1949), pp. 203-04; Mable Newcomer, The Big Business Executive, 1910-50 (New York, 1955), pp. 53-54; Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, Social Mobility in Industrial Society (Berkeley, California, 1959), pp. 122-23; C. Wright Mills, "The American Business Elite: A Collective Portrait," Journal of Economic History Supplement (Dec. 1949), p. 32; Suzanne Keller, The Social Origins and Career Lines of Three Generations of American Business Leaders, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia (1953), p. 69.

The second kind of comparison yields somewhat different results. By this kind of comparison, farm sons were under-represented in the business elite, comprising only 38.9 percent of it, whereas 51 percent of the labor force was engaged in agriculture in 1920. The result is different again, however, if we consider landlords' sons only. They were enormously over-represented in the business elite, being approximately five times more numerous in our sample for 1956 than in the population in 1920.<sup>5</sup> There is a suggestive parallel here with Professor Bendix's findings on the social origins of American business leaders. According to his figures, the majority of farm sons who rose to positions of business leadership in America between 1770 and 1920 were the sons of 'gentry' farmers, defined as farmers who were clearly 'very prosperous,' although such men must have accounted for no more than a fraction of all farm families.<sup>6</sup>

## II

By both comparative measures, then, the number of landlords' sons who became business leaders in Japan is significantly high. Still, the question is why. Part of the answer may be inferred from the group characteristics of farm sons in the business elite, of which characteristics only two are clearly discernible in the biographical notices in standard reference works. One is that they were exceedingly well educated; the other that they were preponderantly younger sons. Before considering these characteristics, however, a few general remarks on the landlord class may prove useful.

First, this class had a long habit of local economic and political power dating back to the early seventeenth century or (for some members) before. Not all landlord families could trace their status as landlords back so far, but there were few whose ancestors were not by that time already substantial holders. The local political functions entrusted to them also dated from the seventeenth century. In village affairs they spoke as representatives of the feudal lords, and outside the village they could claim to represent not merely themselves but their communities as well. Partly for this reason, but also because they possessed exceptional means for entertaining and gift-giving, and often went outside the village to find equal marriage partners, they were on friendly terms with families like themselves in other villages, and with warrior officials in their districts.

Second, insofar as circumstances allowed, landlord families identified themselves with the warrior's style of life. Rarely were they in a position to withdraw entirely from cultivation or the supervision of it, but they escaped the severer forms of work. They used their wealth and such leisure as they had to cultivate the arts, educate their sons, dabble in or devote themselves seriously to scholarship; they affected swords and learned to use them when they could obtain permission; and they modelled their family life and personal behavior on warrior ideals.

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5. This figure is based on an estimate of the number of landlords in 1920; for the difficulties of such an estimate see Tōhata seiichi, "Jinushi no sho hanchū," Kokka gakkai zasshi, LV, 6 (June 1941), pp. 37-55.
  6. Lipset and Bendix, Social Mobility, pp. 122-23.

Third, they often invested in moneylending and in local commercial and industrial activities. Nor was this an interest that appeared only after the Restoration; the impressive development of trade and industry in rural areas during the Tokugawa period was largely the work of landlords and peasants who, adding to their holdings, moved into the landlord class. Whether this imparted any specifically commercial traits to the sons may be doubted; but, as a consequence, the sons were not inhibited from entering business by the model of the supposedly more 'honorable' occupation of their fathers.

Finally, after the Restoration, landlords became politically important nationally. We tend to forget how important, since dramatic instances of wealth and influence in this period were mainly urban: the coterie around the throne comprising former lords turned into capitalists by the commutation of feudal privileges, old merchant families like Mitsui and Sumitomo and princely new ones like Iwasaki and Shibusawa (a landlord's son). But these were small groups, and for them the ruling class of the countryside was worthy of more than casual notice: the pinnacle of power needed a sturdy social base, and the base had to be in the countryside, since the population was preponderantly rural. That meant relying on the landlord class,<sup>7</sup> for, as the *Kokumin no tomo* declared in 1892, "Country gentlemen (*inaka shinshi*) comprise the largest single element of our middle class. Indeed they are the middle class!"

The *Kokumin no tomo* expanded on the importance of this 'middle class':<sup>8</sup>

Good fortune, riding on the wings of a revolution (*kakumei*), fell into its lap. Who, after all, were the beneficiaries of the 'liberation' of the people? The *samurai* lost power and the rural middle class gained it (*seiryoku*). The so-called autonomous local governments have fallen into its hands; so has the power to elect provincial assemblies, and now a national parliament. In the twenty years since the Revolution, this class has been given so much political power, it can scarcely hold it in its two hands.

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7. Testifying to the political power of well-to-do farmers shortly before the turn of the century in Japan is the fact that 120 of the 300 members of the lower house of the Diet elected in 1892 were engaged in one of the primary industries, most of them no doubt in agriculture. Since there was a high tax qualification both to vote and to stand as a candidate, the farmers who were Diet members were all well-to-do.

Another evidence of political power of this class is to be found in the distribution of 450,000 voters of the country by prefecture in 1890. Few of the most heavily agricultural prefectures had less qualified voters than Tokyo Prefecture, and some had a great many more. For example, there were 6,000 in Tokyo Prefecture, but Niigata had 18,000, Chiba 17,000, Yamagata 20,000 and Toyama 17,000. *Kokumin no tomo*, VII, no. 96, p. 505ff; *Chihōshi kenkyū hikkei* (Tokyo, 1952), p. 206.

8. *Kokumin no tomo*, No. 172, Nov. 13, 1892, p. 697ff.

## III

All this makes it easier to understand the impressive educational record of farm sons in the business elite (Table IV). Biographical sources give no educational information for 9 of the 60 farm sons in our sample, perhaps because they had little or no formal education. But all of the remaining 51 went beyond elementary school, and all but one beyond middle school; 39 attended college, and 28 of these attended Imperial universities. This made farm sons as well educated as non-farm sons in the business elite (Table V); and both were far better educated than the population in their generation generally. Although exactly comparable figures are not available, of the male population aged 25 or over in 1950, only 2.3 had 14-15 years of education, 1.0 16 years and 1.8 17 years--which gives some notion of the enormous educational advantage business leaders had over their contemporaries.<sup>8a</sup>

Table IV. Education of Company Presidents of Farm Origin

Highest School Attended	Noncultivating Landlord	Cultivating Landlord	Owner-Cultivator	Owner-Tenant	Unclassified	Total No. of Cases	%
College	20	5	12	0	1	39	65.0
Technical, Higher or Trade School*	5	1	3	1	0	11	18.4
Middle School	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.6
Elementary School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Unknown	0	3	4	0	2	9	15.0
Total	26	11	19	1	3	60	100.0

\*Semmon gakkō, Kōtō gakkō and Jitsugyō gakkō respectively.

Table V. Education of Company Presidents of Farms and Non-Farm Origin

Highest School Attended	Farm No. of Cases	%	Non-Farm No. of Cases	%	Total	%
College	39	65.0	66	70.2	105	68.2
Technical, Higher or Trade	11	18.4	19	20.2	30	19.5
Middle	1	1.6	3	3.2	4	2.6
Elementary	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	9	15.0	6	6.4	15	9.7
Total	60	100.0	94	100.0	154	100.0

This advantage was largely a function of the economic and cultural advantages offered by old and relatively well-to-do families. Education was open to all, but just before the turn of the century even elementary schools were beyond the means of many. Schools in rural areas were often not within walking distance, and if children were to be sent to school at all they had to be boarded in the nearest village containing a school. This was even more likely after elementary school; middle schools were far more widely scattered than elementary, and colleges and universities were confined to towns and cities of some importance. Only families with more than average means and an exceptionally strong belief in education sent their sons away to school. There

8a. Sorifu tokeikyoku (ed.), Showa 25 nen kokusei chosa hokoku, III, pt. 1, p. 108.

were many parents too poor for this, and not a few who thought education of too little use to warrant the expense. Judging from autobiographies, parents who did send their sons away never let them forget the sacrifice the family made on their behalf.<sup>9</sup>

Not only were Japanese business leaders better educated than their contemporaries; they had far more formal education than American businessmen in 1900. According to Professor Newcomer's figures, 39 percent of American business leaders in 1900 had attended college;<sup>10</sup> the comparable Japanese figures in 1956 were 65 percent for farm sons and 70 percent for non-farm sons. There seems little doubt, therefore, that education was a more important ingredient of business success in Japan than in the United States.

There were several reasons for this. Perhaps the most important concerns the role of formal education in late but rapidly industrializing countries. The later and more rapid industrial development is, the sharper must be the break between the axiomatic, technical knowledge handed down from father to son and from master to apprentice on the one hand, and the knowledge required by modern industry and finance on the other. As late as 1887, Japanese boys living outside the large cities often had never even seen Western dress,<sup>10a</sup> which suggests how dependent the younger generation was upon the schools for the kind of knowledge it most needed. Nor did this escape the notice of contemporaries. Shortly after the Restoration they were remarking on the extraordinary value of book knowledge, particularly in business; and they saw that in new lines of business the old merchant class was often at a disadvantage compared with the warrior who, despite lack of commercial experience, usually had the advantage of more formal education and sometimes of foreign travel.

Education also had great status value in Japan. During the Tokugawa period, literary education had been as important for the warrior as military education; and scholarship was perhaps the single most important means of mobility within the warrior class. After the Restoration, as ascriptive criteria of status receded in importance or disappeared entirely, education to some extent took their place: a diploma became both a certification of knowledge and a 'pedigree' (*katagaki*): the best single indicator of a man's circle of friends, and of his social past and probable social future. Fathers looking for sons-in-law, businessmen hiring staff and government officials selecting subordinates were at least as interested in 'pedigrees' as in knowledge.

Still another factor that made education important in business was the role of government in the economy. Of all institutions, government was most deeply committed to the new education from the beginning; and of all large groups, government officials were most punctilious about distinctions of rank. After about 1890, the government was manned almost exclusively by the graduates of particular schools and colleges. Business firms, heavily dependent on

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9. Sakuda Keiichi, "Risshin shusse," in Kawashima Takeyoshi, Ningen to shakai (Tokyo, 1955), p. 312.

10. Newcomer, The Big Business Executive, p. 69.

10a. Kawada Shige, Watakushi no rirekisho VI, p. 260.

government subsidies, loans and contracts, had to develop a similar officer corps of their own. Only thus could they keep open the channels of communication with government at all levels, and eventually with each other. For, in the intricate negotiations with government and other firms, it was essential to have access to the key men as well as to have a convincing case, and nothing assured access like friendships developed in the dormitories, sports clubs, brothels and sake shops.

## IV

Most farm sons in the business elite were younger sons: 68 percent, as compared to 26 percent who were eldest sons and 6 percent whose birth order is unrecorded in the biographical sources. This reflects the expectation in farm families--especially in landlord families--that the eldest son would inherit the headship of the family, the bulk of family property and his father's occupation. Indeed it is a bit surprising that despite this so many eldest sons of farmers managed to have business careers. It is obvious, nonetheless, that the career prospects of an eldest son were considerably dimmer than those of a younger son. This was not true in non-farm families, however, since business leaders of non-farm origin were almost equally divided between eldest and younger sons.

The inheritance system in farm families accounts in part for the large number of farm sons in the business elite. There were greater obstacles in the village than in the town or city to entering a business career, and special incentives were required to overcome them. The inheritance system provided these: by forcing eldest sons to follow their fathers' occupations, it obliged younger sons to embark on new ones. Very early in life they were made to understand that they could not inherit the family property, occupation, or social position, but had to make their own way somewhere else, doing something new. This was a fact of life taught them by differential treatment, by the example of other younger sons, and by explicit instruction. Eldest sons, therefore, might identify themselves with their families and villages; younger sons were obliged to some extent to reject both, in preparation for the day of rejection by them. And, in doing so, they were encouraged to anticipate affiliation with some outside group--army, navy, government officialdom, businessmen, and so on. This early transfer of self-reference, from father and eldest brother to some hero of the great world outside, was perhaps one of the strongest springs of ambition raising men from the slow-moving life of the village to commanding positions in the city.<sup>11</sup>

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11. Gotō Keita, a railway and department store tycoon born in a mountain village in Nagano Prefecture, expressed the belief that eldest and younger sons were, at one time at least, typically different personality types. "My eldest brother was the proverbial blockhead of a first son. Perhaps for this reason he was a placid fellow and continued our family's farming occupation. Anyway, he lived a perfectly mediocre life in the village, although he became mayor and was eventually elected to the Prefectural Assembly. On the other hand, I was the typical second son, stubborn and quick-tempered, and always getting into trouble by hitting a playmate on the head with a spade, or scribbling on the front of the village shrine, or some such thing." Watakushi no rirekisho, I, p. 3.

This, incidentally, was a mechanism not found in the United States. Not only was property in American farm families commonly divided among sons, but, until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, there was always free land in the West, and it was taken up mainly by the sons of farmers. In Japan, there was no free land outside Hokkaido and even there it was disappearing rapidly; for younger sons born in farm families, therefore, the expanding frontier of opportunity lay not in farming but in business, or some equally urban occupation.

Poor farm sons made their way to the cities as best they could; landlords' sons received valuable help. The family helped, first, by paying the costs of education and, later, by standing the son's cost of living in the city until he was established. Such financial aid in making a career was expected by the son, and from his point of view was a form of inheritance. From the family's point of view, however, it was an investment, by which it was hoped to make the son economically independent and so avoid dispersion of its resources.

Families also helped their sons in the city socially. Few landlord families were without a network of social relations which led, through friends and relatives and their friends and relatives, from the village to the town or city, connecting them with men influential there in politics and business. These networks were kept intact by use, above all by doing and asking favors. One of the most common and important uses made of them from the village end was to ease the way for sons 'going up' to the city. The sons of peasants often set off to the city friendless; landlords' sons usually had patrons there who were under some obligation to get them started and to help them in their careers as long as they could. With such help in prospect, and with the pleasing manners 'breeding' gave, a young man with education and talent might hope for anything.

## V

In all complex societies there are young men with the advantages of money, birth and education; but they do not in all societies put them to the same uses. If the sons of Japanese landlords used them to a greater extent than landlords elsewhere to rise in the business world, one reason was no doubt that business careers offered greater opportunities in Japan than in many countries. But an equally important reason may have been a special stress in Japan on the virtues of work and worldly success, since these were part of the credo that inspired the nation in the two or three generations after the Restoration.

The word used for success--'shusse'--is significant of the notion people had of it. Originally a Buddhist term meaning either to take monastic vows and so 'leave the world,' or for a priest to go into the world proselytizing, <sup>11a</sup> it came to have the meaning of 'getting on' in the world. When and how this change came about is uncertain, but by the latter half of the nineteenth century 'getting on' was the usual meaning of the term, expressing a national belief that one should rise above his parents and achieve wealth, fame and power in the world outside the family and village.

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11a. I am indebted to R. P. Dore for calling my attention to the second of the two religious meanings of shusse.

Itō Chūbei, later a leading industrialist, in a charming anecdote in his autobiography, tells what this phrase meant to him as a boy and later as a man.<sup>11b</sup> Itō was the first boy in his village to complete the elementary school located in the neighboring village. Upon graduating from the school, at the age of thirteen, he went to take leave of the headmaster. Since he had been a mischievous boy the master took the opportunity to admonish him for his past conduct and to hope he would do better in the future; but finally relenting near the end of the interview, he predicted that the boy would be a success despite his unpromising beginning. 'You will be a success, I know it!' he exclaimed. At this the boy was unable to hold back the tears and wept loudly. Years later in recounting this incident to a reunion of his classmates, Itō was so affected that he again wept. Nor was his gratitude to the master less when after the meeting he learned that each of his classmates had been sent off with exactly the same exhortation!

The passion to 'rise in the world' no doubt explains in part the enthusiasm for education. Nowhere was 'education mania' (*kyōiku-kyō*), as old-fashioned contemporaries called it, more intense than in country districts. Impatient for the government to found local schools, many villages after the Restoration built their own; and for several decades provincial newspapers regularly printed notices of large private donations for the founding of schools in the district.

These newspapers were widely read in rural areas if we may judge from the number of letters to the editor signed 'So-and-so, Farmer,' and often carried biographies of local persons of outstanding merit. Many of these moralistic stories were of a traditional type, of filial sons and daughters and chaste wives; but some had themes partly new. Among them were success stories of poor boys who became wealthy by hard work, perseverance in the face of great hardship, and always it seemed also by exemplary and simultaneous duty to their parents. There were also stories of the older generation sacrificing for the education of the young: of a grandmother, for instance, living in a remote valley deep in the mountains of Hida, who every day carried her grandson on her back through the snow to school; stayed the day at school, spinning; and then carried the child home again at night, delighting in what he had learned that day.<sup>12</sup>

The same newspapers carried advertisements of correspondence schools for those unable to attend regular schools. In 1889, one such school, significantly called the Utilitarian Society (*Jitsuri Gakkai*), offered courses in book-keeping, English and mathematics; and promised by improved methods to prepare 'ambitious provincials' for entrance into government schools and for careers in teaching, business and banking.<sup>13</sup> Such notices were common. The promises made in them to credulous young men handicapped by family circumstances or geographical isolation suggest a widespread belief in the limitless

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11b. Watakushi no rirekisho, II, pp. 94-95.

12. Shimpi shimbun, Feb. 28, 1875.

13. Kōchi shimbun, No. 1751, Jan. 13, 1889.

possibilities of self-improvement, and in the relevance of self-improvement to success.

Part of what sustained young men in the fierce struggle for success was a touchingly sincere belief in the efficacy of effort. It is impossible to say how common this belief was, and it is certain that contrary beliefs were held by some; but there can be no doubt that it was widely held by young men who were successful in business, or more precisely by such men as they later look back on their early business careers. Rarely do the autobiographies of businessmen describe success as coming easily; they rather dwell lovingly on episodes of hard work, disappointment and adversity. In a typical passage, Sugiyama Kintaro tells us about his first job:<sup>14</sup>

At the time I graduated from school and went out into the world to work, I had no other desire than to learn my job. Going to work at 7 o'clock in the morning and working until 9 or 10 o'clock at night made no difference to me; life was a joy. I worked with a feeling that whatever I was paid was all right. While I was working for an export-import company during World War I, I was so busy that some years I worked 365 days without a single holiday.

Whether or not such retrospective accounts are factually accurate, they show the value the authors thought ought to attach to work. The authors believed hard work had been instrumental in their own success and were eager that others share this belief. Yamasaki Taneji tells how he went from his village to work in Tokyo for a rice broker. Being used to farm work he could work around the clock without rest and do twice as much of the heavy warehouse work at which he was employed as could his fellows. His employer at the end of a second year recognized his superior ability by giving him two sets of clothing instead of the one he gave to each of the others; and from that time Yamasaki rose in the world!<sup>15</sup> This is the stock type of how-I-got-my-start anecdote in business autobiographies.

Work had an ethical as well as a practical value; and there seems to have been two separate though related ethical evaluations of it. One was that even the most menial and routine work was a means of moral training and might even impart wisdom; as Ichimada Hisato, a former Minister of Finance, put it: 'Even the counting of bills in a bank is an art from which one can learn things about life.'<sup>16</sup> It was something like this that Nagai Reisaku's parents had in mind when they sent him off to a neighboring village to school, deciding to board him with poor rather than rich relatives, since the day-to-day discipline of work and hardship in such a family would be excellent character training for the young boy. Nagai believes that the experience had this effect in fact.<sup>17</sup>

14. Sugiyama Kintarō, Ten'etsu shichijū nen (Tokyo, 1951), pp. 125-26.

15. Watakushi no rirekisho, I, p. 281.

16. Watakushi no shūgyō jidai (Tokyo, 1952), p. 41.

17. Nagai Reisaku, Tetsu to watakushi (Tokyo, 1956), pp. 23, 231-32.

The other ethical evaluation was based on a belief that to work at an appointed task selflessly was to discharge an obligation to others: a morally valuable act in itself. There was about this belief something of the Calvinist sense of 'calling,' although the Calvinist did God's bidding while the Japanese discharged some secular duty--to parents, employer, emperor, or nation. Satō Kiichirō, a prominent banker before World War II, says that when his father died he resolved to work harder since 'if I did not, my father's spirit would not rest in peace.' And after describing how he worked in the Mitsui Bank, he speaks with candor of his motives:<sup>18</sup>

To tell the truth I did not work hard because I liked to, but because if I did not it would create difficulties for my superior, and he would be unable to achieve his purposes.

This sense of duty sometimes reached a pitch of intensity that cannot have been commonly surpassed anywhere. Take the case of Okano Kitarō, a provincial banker, who recalled the devastation of the Kantō area by the great earthquake of 1923 and the personal loss it brought him.<sup>19</sup>

I lost my wife and third daughter in the great quake. The two of them were on their way to a hotel in Yugawara for a rest when the quake struck and their train plunged into the sea. When the news of this misfortune reached me my courage failed. But after a while my sense of responsibility returned sharply. I thought to myself "You are head of the Suruga Bank! You must discharge your duty as a banker in this time of trouble! Compared to that your personal misfortune is a trifling matter!" My whole body trembled.

Okano's sense of duty was extreme, perhaps, but it was not unique. When Fujiwara Ginjirō was put in charge of the Ōji paper company by Mitsui, he invested his life's savings in the company's stock, then borrowed on the stock to buy new shares, although the company was then floundering. Fujiwara explained his boldness to a superior: henceforth his and Ōji's fates were identical, and he could have no interest that might prevent his devoting himself wholly to the company; if despite this the company failed, he was prepared to lose everything!<sup>20</sup> Almost identical incidents are recounted in many business autobiographies. Apparently, this was a common means of removing all possibility of dereliction of duty and, equally important, all possible suspicion of it.

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18. Watakushi no shūgyō jidai, pp. 125, 167.

19. Watakushi no rirekisho, V, p. 96.

20. Fujiwara, Jitsugyō-nin no kimochi, pp. 138-39.

## III

It is impossible to doubt the importance to the rise of the Japanese business class of the value put upon work and success; nor is any part of the ideology of the business class likely to strike one as more 'modern.' Yet this gospel was by no means new, although new means were adopted after the Restoration to spread and deepen belief in it, through the new public education, moralistic novels and the translation of Western writers such as Samuel Smiles. For two hundred years or more the Japanese population had been indoctrinated in these values, as essential to personal and civic virtue. This fact, as much as the new sanctions from the West or the new means of spreading old ideas, accounts for the awesome energy of so many business careers after the Restoration. It seems especially important in the case of men reared in the countryside, often in old-fashioned families where the Chinese classics had been known for generations but not a word yet heard of Samuel Smiles.

The value of work was a very old doctrine among the peasantry. Work ranked with frugality and filial piety as cardinal virtues in the homilies government tirelessly directed at the peasants during the Tokugawa period. Work was essential to good farming, the basis of family prosperity, an assurance of community harmony. The man who worked from before sunrise until after sunset had no time for quarreling, or for intriguing with a neighbor's wife; nor was he the kind to spend money on fripperies or to cherish ambitions disquieting in a peasant. His constant labor in all weathers by some alchemy made him honest, thrifty, and content--nature's aristocrat and society's drudge. Nor was work an ideal held up by the warrior only to be ignored by the peasant. Treatises on agriculture by peasants were full of sentiments on the moral as well as the economic value of work; laws drawn up by villages for their internal governance made quite as much of the civic value of work as did the sermons of district magistrates.

The idea of success is a more complicated matter. The notion of 'rising in the world' was new, since feudal society did not, in theory, admit the possibility of movement from one class to another, and an impressively large and subtle body of regulations governing dress, residence, food and language was in part designed to prevent it. Some important elements of the idea, however, were an essential part of warrior ideology, by which landlords were almost as deeply affected as warriors themselves.

Take, for example, the value put upon achievement. Bravery in battle, physical prowess, skill with the sword and loyalty to one's lord were manifestly qualities that belonged uniquely to individuals. They were qualities sought in subordinates and admired in superiors, at times taking precedence over considerations of age, rank and family. Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, the two commanding military figures of the sixteenth century, both rose from relatively low ranks; many lesser warriors of this turbulent period sprang from the peasantry. Nor was merit in individuals ignored after the Tokugawa brought peace to the country, though it was probably less quickly rewarded. The ordering of boys in the classroom and in the fencing hall was based on performance rather than on their fathers' ranks; men of outstanding ability were often promoted to office and salaries beyond their inherited status. These were practices based in part on considerations of policy and in part on a deep belief in heroism. In the folktales children were raised on, memorable acts of bravery and sacrifice were depicted

more often in vassals than in their lords, which added to the drama and made the lesson more widely applicable. All peasant children must have listened to such stories, but especially the landlords' children; for their parents were literate and could use such stories to instruct as well as entertain.

So although the Meiji generation sought success in new ways, it inherited from its fathers much of the desire to excel. Success now meant rising above one's father's station; but this end was thought worth nearly any sacrifice for some reasons neither new nor modern. Perhaps the most powerful was the emotions surrounding the family. Men wanted to succeed to make their parents proud, to bring honor and security to their families, and even to fulfill duties to their ancestors. These sentiments neither came from the West nor were recently developed in Japan, but harked back to the beginnings of Confucianism. Admittedly such sentiments were mixed with more selfish and, conceivably, more 'modern' feelings, which, whether modern or not, gave ambitious men as little peace in Japan as elsewhere: but they were no less real for that.

How real they were to Meiji businessmen is evident from their autobiographies. Men made deep resolves in the name of their parents whose images they called up in moments of crisis; and they hastened to honor their families when they had achieved success. No wonder. One hears the wilful boy Shibusawa Eiichi being daily reprimanded by his father, a man whose single-minded devotion to family interest was an awful burden for the son, and who used these words: "How shall I ever be able to entrust you with the future of this house?"<sup>21</sup> One imagines the emotions of Hiraō Hachisaburō whose father, no longer able to maintain him in middle school, sent him off to Tokyo to be apprenticed; then, overcome with remorse at denying education to a talented son, determined to continue Hachisaburō in school at whatever cost, declaring to the boy that his success must vindicate the father to his ancestors.<sup>22</sup> One sympathizes with Imai Gōsuke who, after a year in the United States where he went in hopes of finding a way of exporting raw silk directly, wrote in his diary: "A year has passed since I came to America, and I have accomplished nothing in this time. I can hardly bear the thought of the pain I have given my parents."<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusions

Landlords are not necessarily enemies of industrialization--even the village-dwelling, money-grubbing landlords so common in Asia. Japanese landlords contributed much to the creation of a modern business class. Nor is this to be explained merely by the 'modern' traits this class took on in the late Tokugawa period. These were admittedly important, but one must attach equal importance to older traits: the cult of family, the value put upon education, the ideals of work and achievement, and underlying all, the cultural and social affinity with the warrior class. These traits, which derive more from the traditional social structure than recent changes in it, were among the dynamic forces that made modern Japan.

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21. Shibusawa Seien kinen zaidan ryūmon-sha (ed.), Shibusawa Eiichi denki shiryō (Tokyo, 1955), I, p. 170.
  22. Kawai Tetsuo, Hiraō Hachisaburō (Tokyo, 1952), pp. 22-25.
  23. Nishigahara dōsōkai (ed.), Imai Gōsuke ōden (Tokyo, 1949), p. 30.

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### **[Footnotes]**

#### <sup>4</sup> **American Historians and the Business Elite**

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