Social class and family change

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Social classes

• Japanese “middle class society” – 95% self-identify as middle class

• Distinction between “old middle class” and “new middle class”

• Occupation, family form, community participation
Shitamachi vs. Yamanote

• Shitamachi – “lower town” – merchants and artisans – occupational segregation

• Yamanote – “foothills” – samurai and lords

• Eastern vs. Western Edo

• Legacy of spatial class division continues to some extent in present-day Tokyo
Tokugawa Social Classes

- Neo-confucian ideals of stability, inherited class status
  - Samurai
  - Peasants
  - Artisans/Craftspeople
  - Peasants

(plus imperial aristocracy, priests, and outcastes)
Social class

- Tokugawa class system (mibun system) involved legal classifications – shi-no-ko-sho

- 1870s, the legal class system was abolished (although household registries retained notations for some time)

- Class becomes fluid social/cultural phenomenon
class from Edo to Tokyo

- Meiji accomplished revolution without much violence, and without a surviving entrenched urban elite – samurai were sent “back home”

- Thus, one class structure was swept away leaving the urban system open for innovation

- Also, Meiji government paid off samurai with government bonds, giving many of them the capital to go into business – start of dynamic new class system
Emergence of new urban class structure

- Abolition of feudal classes in 1870s
- Growth of cities and urban commercial/industrial sectors
- Increasing importance/standardization of education
- Generational succession (from Tokugawa period; from farming backgrounds)
Urban demographic change

“traditional” townspeople – merchants, artisans
“de-frocked” samurai – new bureaucratic class
rural migrants – factory labor, manual labor
(many first wave rural migrants were factory women)
samurai

- Hereditary positions abolished
- Stipends converted into government bonds
- Ex-samurai left to their own devices
- What skills?
- Many became government b’crats
- Some became businessmen
- Some became educators
- Some became poor
New urban middle classes

- Development of nuclear family as urban norm
- Contrast with multigenerational *ie* (stem family)
- Vastly different dynamics of family composition and family life

- Conservative elements of Japanese patriarchy
- Also emulation of Western urban middle classes

- Demographic transition as historical trend
Traditional stem family

- Traditional Japanese family system (IE)
- Patriarchal stem family = multi-generational household with single heir
- Household continuity is paramount
- Preservation of family property
- Recruitment by marriage, adoption, and grow-your-own methods
- Outplacement of all children beyond heir (marriage, adoption, apprenticeship)
- Dominance of household head as family steward, responsible both to ancestors and as-yet unborn generations
Stem family

• Adaptation to land scarcity and the incredible investments of labor necessary to prepare land for irrigated rice agriculture
  – building terraced paddy fields requires generations of labor
  – amount of land available usually sufficient only to support a single household
  – division of land would result in plots too small to support a household
Stem vs. nuclear family

- S.F. – households of both production and consumption
- S.F. – economic resources/livelihood inherited across generations
- S.F. – social reproduction largely within household
- S.F. – multigenerational, tended to be fixed in one location; local involvement
Stem vs. nuclear family

- N.F. – households of consumption; wages earned outside; increasing fragmented consumption

- N.F. – status reflected/achieved thru consumption; cultural capital

- N.F. – economic resources, livelihood based on non-inheritable achieved status
Stem vs. Nuclear family

- N.F. -- emphasis on education; social reproduction outside h.h.

- N.F. -- nuclear family – at most two generations, not enduring social unit

- N.F. -- generally mobile, both in social class and in location; often not locally involved
Rural-urban transition (ala Vogel)

- Rural stem families controlled first waves of migration
- Rural fabric intact
- Urban migrants released from familial obligations
- Ability to generate new nuclear family patterns in urban areas
Rural-urban transition

- “urbanization without breakdown”

- Co-existence of two interrelated kinship systems

- Related to dual structure of economy

- Both “ends” of demographic transition
Family and Social Class
But what is class?

• Two major sets of definitions
• One structural
• The other relational or gradational
What is class? I

• Marxist definition of class – relationship to the means of production

• Capitalist classes own the means of production

• Workers do not own the means of production, and must rent their labor power to capitalists

• Capitalist class makes profit by exploitation of surplus
What is class? II

- Non-marxist sociological definitions generally see classes (at least in urban, industrial societies) as:
  - System of relative rankings
  - Socio-economic status
  - Wealth, education, occupation as key determinants
What is class? III

- anthropological definitions generally see classes in terms of:
  - Cultural “dispositions”
  - Symbolic markers
  - Content (i.e., subcultural repertories)
  - Cultural capital (Bourdieu concept)
Cultural capital

- Pierre Bourdieu (French sociologist)

- Distinction between material wealth and cultural assets of a particular class.

- Cultural assets become a resource (a type of social wealth) for members of a class.

- Cultural capital in various forms becomes instrumental in converting economic power into social class, and vice versa.
Cultural capital: 3 forms

• what people know and can learn (musical skills, speaking a foreign language, appreciating French cuisine) – becomes integrated into individual identity

• material objects (books, paintings, musical instruments) – appreciation/understanding comes from the above, but can be bought and sold (exchanged)
Cultural capital: 3 forms

• credentials (a Harvard B.A., for example)

"certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to power."
Cultural capital

Thus, in the ability to obtain or confer particular kinds of cultural capital, economic capital/power can be converted into social class, and vice versa.

Social class confirmed by cultural capital, and also generates conditions through which particular kinds of cultural capital can be obtained or conferred.
Cultural capital

In Bourdieu’s view of social class (which most anthropologists accept):

Modern urban industrial societies’ social class distinctions are highly dependent on material consumption, consumer taste, stylistic preferences, and the growth of mass markets (and micro-niches within those mass markets)

>>hyper-consumerism
Bourdieu’s habitus

- habitus – the unconscious modes of thought and behavior that make up what Bestor refers to as “urban subjectivities”

- aspects of culture anchored in daily practices of individuals, groups, societies, and nations; the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, and other knowledge or behavior that “goes without saying”
Emergence of new urban classes

- Structural distinction (in Marxist terms) between “old middle class” and “new middle class”
- Differences (in Bourdieu’s terms) in capital – economic vs. cultural capital
- Bourdieu’s notions of distinction and class, lead to focus on lifestyles, habitus, consumption
- Shitamachi = chōnin = old middle class
- Yamanote = salaryman = new middle class