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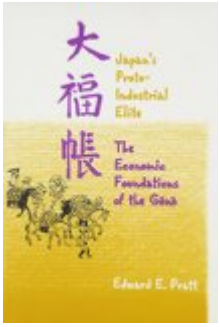
Edward E. Pratt. *Japan's Proto-Industrial Elite: The Economic Foundations of the Gono.* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999. x + 260 pp. $39.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-47290-7.



Reviewed by Meg Nakano

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Edward E. Pratt has skillfully summoned 66 primary sources and 210 secondary works, including 75 in English, to give *Japan's Proto-Industrial Elite: The Economic Foundations of the Gono*, an integration across geography and time missing in many other studies of proto-industrial activities in Japan, while maintaining a valuable scholarly depth of focus. This work elucidates Japan's first transition to a modern economy, as well as what is wrong with the current and popular trade view of Japan's industry as being inherently monolithic or top-down. It also documents historical precedents that illuminate some of the reasons the Japanese seem reluctant to tear down monopolies. The value of the author's affiliation with Hitotsubashi University while conducting the research for this work in Japan is demonstrated in the extent and accuracy of the details presented.

The early seventeenth century Tokugawa era began with rigid social stratification, binding the farmers to the land and limiting their economic activities. This is the over-riding image of feudal Japan for many even today. But by the mid-Tokugawa eighteenth century, everything began to change. Part I, "The Political Economy of Japanese Protoindustrialization" examines the relationships between the evolving gono, or rural elites, as they became producers of manufactured goods for increasingly larger markets, and the governments of the Tokugawa and Meiji. Pratt traces how the farming class developed a variety of side businesses that grew in scale, and increasingly became not only a source of income to pay taxes, but also became the main economic support for the rural elites and, through loans, supported the local and national government coffers as well. The government of the Tokugawa, at all levels, was widely indebted to the rural elites (p. 23).

By the late Tokugawa nineteenth century, Pratt shows how the rural elites had moved into protoindustrial activities, producing a wide variety of goods which were shipped to the large urban markets of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo. When Commodore Perry forced the Tokugawa to open up to trade, the merchants and producers were in a good position to respond with goods to meet overseas market demands. The author follows the changes in regional production across time in sev-

eral regions, as well as within the context of government policies and regulations, to enable a clearer view of a number of aspects unique in Japan's major transition from the closed, feudal Tokugawa era to the open, modernizing Meiji period.

Consider the contrast in just two of the vectors for change examined by Pratt: the local and the national governments. During the ongoing process of change and development, neither the national nor the local governments were passive bystanders, simply collecting taxes. Local domains began policies to encourage greater rural production (p. 20). Monopolies were established at first to insure taxes were paid (p. 21), yet also provided producers with a chance to inspect goods to insure quality (p. 22), a key factor in interregional economic competition. The national government, in contrast, issued edicts slashing sake production during the Tokugawa period (p. 29), and in the Meiji period set up ambitious projects "not to better the lot of farmers, but to provide employment for samurai" (p. 37).

Other vectors for change traced with equal care by Pratt are of course the innovative individual rural elites themselves, who engendered the greatest innovative developments, as well as the town and city merchants, the guilds, and their descendants the trade and industry associations and producers' cooperatives. Pratt manages to coordinate his presentation of this extensive richness of material detail skillfully.

Part II, Case Studies, is perhaps easier reading as it follows the developments within each of the cotton, silk, sake and tea industries, throughout the main island of Honshu, including the development achieved during the Tokugawa, and the volatility seen in the Meiji period, which eventually removed most of the gono from the economic mainstream.

In his Conclusion, Pratt re-examines this instability that beset the rural elites as Japan moved into the industrial era, and goes on to discuss how social conditions, although similar to other areas in the world, moved neither into the relative equality among elites and commoners alike, as in the northern United States and Canada, nor into the high levels of inequality, as in many Latin American countries (p. 188). Pratt mentions that the Meiji government leaders clearly recognized the benefits of active participation in the market by all members of society, and speedily abolished feudal restrictions and class privileges. Earlier evidence presented in the book allows the reader to infer that this may have been more due to the complex role the rural elites themselves played during the transition, rather than any liberal or broad-minded benevolence on the part of the Meiji leaders.

As valuable as the scope of this contribution is to constructing an overall field of reference for more specific academic studies, this reviewer would hope that this book also finds an audience among the business community and trade negotiations teams, as it would provide excellent insight into the historical differences in attitudes toward government involvement and control, monopolies, as well as hint at the resilience of overall industry in Japan.

A few weak spots for the ordinary reader, however, do exist: the maps, which show the Tokugawa provinces and not the domain names used in the descriptions in the text, and there is no effort to tie traditional areas of production to present-day experience, even when (as in the case of sake brewing) ample example exists.

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