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How and Why Position is Determined in China and Japan

In Japan, there is a presence of themes involving hierarchy and dependence in the determining of one’s position in society. In “Making Majority Culture,” Goodman describes a group mindset in Japan, which seems to tie in with historical causes, including Chinese Confucianist concepts involving the belonging to a family or clan or *ie* (Goodman 2008, 60). After the Meiji Restoration, people weren’t bound as much to this rigid structure, as now education plays a higher role in role stratification, as universal education was implemented, though the traditional system is still prevalent. Goodman mentions that individuals in Japanese society tend to associate themselves much more to their company than their role in that company. This *ie* system dates back to the Tokugawa period, and was used by the elite class, the samurai. A person’s position in society was given by their position in their company and rose to higher levels through seniority, all the while people who moved into the *ie* (both domestic Japanese and foreigners) generally start from scratch, to maintain social stability (a social construct – not natural – (in)directly meant to keep people in place and discourage social mobility).

In China, there is a huge wage gap, which was the result of the political determination to enter into Maoist society (or lack thereof). Those in the Maoist society were living in a communist society, and the characteristics of the high classes were switched with those at the lower end. The authors of “Social Class and Stratification” explains that Post-Mao society involved the restructuring of the economy into a market economy, which was controlled by corrupt bureaucrats and industry giants who widened the canyon between the rich and the poor. Nowadays, sociologists claim that wealth does not guarantee a high spot in the social pyramid. Instead, class is determined by a mix of “moral virtue and civility, political authority, gender, generation and age,” which hint at some early Confucius and Mencius values (Jacka et. al 2013, 200). However, there are inconsistencies between those in higher positions, as some who benefit from connections with the bureaucracy are sometimes vilified, while others aren’t, such as those in academia.

Works Cited:

Goodman, Roger. 2008. “Making Majority Culture,” 59-72.

Tamara Jacka, Andrew Kipnis, & Sally Sargeson. “Social Class and Stratification” in Contemporary

China: Society & Social Change. Cambridge University Press, 2013.