

History of Japanese Economic Thought

Lecture No. 7

Winter Semester, 2004

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6. Concept of Work

1. What is diligence? Discipline of time

● Diligent Japanese?

● We (foreign reporters) cannot possibly imagine Japan will become an affluent nation. A natural condition gifted with mild weather may be the only advantageous point to Japan, but **tendency of lazy and pleasure-loving people of this country interferes with its progress to civilization**. Japanese are a happy ethnic group, who are satisfied with slightness and never wish to accomplish much. ...Even though the principles established and accepted in Western society have been transplanted to this nation, it looks as if they lost their original significance and merely brought about devastation and decadence. (G.C. Allen, *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan*, 4th ed., Macmillan Press, 1981, p.48)

Japan in First Year of Meiji Photographed by Foreigner



Pictorial Magazine of Modern 100 Years' History, Vol. 3: 1868-1872, Kokusai Bunka Jyohosha, 1951, pp.250-251

Shape of Open-Port Spot Yokohama

— Danielle Vision who came to Japan in the 1880s

- Frantic crowds of people on pavements, grin, respectful greetings exchanged folding up gracefully. Rickshaws that noiselessly run in flying dash pulled by weather-beaten and muscular-built rickshaw men. Some with shaven hair, some wearing their hair in a funny bun, clad in piod clothes, half-odd, half-cute children.
- Laborers of uncovered upper bodies, shouldering long bamboo sticks that hang heavy luggage on both tip-tops, without wiping away the dripping sweat, pass by shouting time with cadenced chant. Stores that line edges of the eaves of heavy tiled roofs on the street open up front doors, and paper lanterns of numerous color designs hung to the eaves swing in blowing wind.

(Hugh Cortazzi, *VICTORIANS IN JAPAN: In and around the Treaty Ports*, translation by Tetsuro Nakasuga, Chuo Koron Sha, 1988, p.146)



Yokohama in the 1880s – – George Parson

● I feel totally disgusted with this enclave beaten down by the harshly candescent sun. I hate dusty streets. There's no moisture but heavy drips of sweat flown off from rickshaw men running with all their might. And unlively streets and drowsy, dull stores. Bleakness of desolate boulevards. Hollow pathos looming over buildings of tenantless stores. Looked from an empty waterfront street, there is no change in the scene of the simmering ultramarine ocean under furiously burning rays of the sun from a day to another.

(Hugh Cortazzi, *VICTORIANS IN JAPAN: In and around the Treaty Ports*, translation by Tetsuro Nakasuga, Chuo Koron Sha, 1988, pp.146-147)

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Illustrated History of Japan, vol. 14, Shueisha Inc,
1976, p.77

Yokohama in the 1880s – – Sir Henry Norris, Army Major

● Yokohama is a somber, lifeless and depressing town. With no people on streets, no sight of barges at the dock, stores attracted few customers. And lastly, disappeared from mercantile establishments were ardent figures seen while gaining prosperity peculiar to such towns as Hong Kong enjoying a boom and Shanghai growing daily.

(Hugh Cortazzi, *VICTORIANS IN JAPAN: In and around the Treaty Ports*, translation by Tetsuro Nakasuga, Chuo Koron Sha, 1988, p.149)

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Reality of Rough, Long Working Hours

● In summer, one had to irrigate with water troughs for 50 to 60 times per a *tan* [992m²] of field, which was so cruel a job to be referred to as “*yomegoroshi*” [killer of daughter-in-law]. All farmers had stiff shoulders with water drawing a few hundred times a day. Those who grew cotton were called “*hamanome*” [eyes of beach] in general and got mocked by those of other areas which boasted of abundant rice production. Many of those who dwelled in this district were poor as its land only grew potato or wheat in addition to cotton. (Takeo Yoshimura, *History of Folk Custom in Cotton Growing*, Seia Shobo, 1982, p.90)

Haruhito Takeda, *Shueisha-Edition History of Japan (19)*
/Imperialism and Democracy, Shueisha, 1992, p.543



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Illustrated History of Japan, vol. 14, Shueisha Inc, 1976, p.228

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Poet and Peasant-Movement Activist: Teisuke Shibuya

Starting in the morning when the moon at dawn is still up
Stay in field in the evening as long as hands are visible
Work altogether breaking off bodily bones
And go to a dept two *ri* away in the night to pull feces and
urine (stercorary). That's who I am

(Tsuneo Yasuda, *History of Thought on Encounter: Theory on Teisuke Shibuya*,
Keiso Shobo, 1981)

Tsuneo Yasuda, *History of
Thought on Encounter:
Theory on Teisuke Shibuya*,
Keiso Shobo, 1981



Taishiro Mita who was a craftsman of beating cotton

●“In this store, again, the place for sleep was the place for work, and we used to be awakened at 3 o’clock a.m. on busy days. Breakfast was at 6. During meals, a servant boy sat down at the last but had to rise up first, and was unable to get down on his knees squarely or to sit cross-legged, and ate sitting with one knee drawn up. While one could eat as much boiled rice as he wanted, there were many instances when dishes accompanying it were gone. I came back to Mogamigata at 18 years old, performed the ascetic practices as a gauzy-ware craftsman, and became the one specialized in the Ome cotton.

(Tsuneo Yasuda, *History of Thought on Encounter: Theory on Teisuke Shibuya*, Keiso Shobo, 1981)

Female at Colliery

●Coming out of the pit, first, I run to pick up my child left in other’s care. And shopping at a concession stand for dinner with the child tied on my back in the shape of a cross, ...Back home I could hardly wait for fish to be stewed, so, I prepare *agarizake* [sake to mark the finish of day’s work] by putting a sake bottle in the kettle.

(Hiroshi Ichikawa, *Social History of Colliery Labor — Japanese Traditional Labor/Social Order and Administration*, Taga Shuppan, 1997, pp.35-36)

Illustrated History of Japan, vol. 14, Shueisha Inc, 1976, p.229

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明治になって紡績業・製糸業が盛んになると
農村から女工となって出てゆく女性が多くな
った。†

Tsuneichi Miyamaoto, *History of Bread-and-Butter
Job*, Miraisha, 1993, p.231

60 筑豊切羽(きりは)での採炭作業——第1次大戦ころまでの坑
内労働は多く2人組制で、先山(さきやま)が男、後山(あとやま)が女で
あった。ツルハシをふるのが男で運搬が女の仕事である。機械力のなか
った炭坑では人力だけが頼りであり、納屋制度が行われていた。納屋頭
(なやがしら)を頂点に、その下に人繰り、勘場などがおかれていた。納
屋頭が会社から坑夫賃金の代理受取りをし、そこから貸金利子その他の
ピンはねをした。大正11年国会で納屋制度廃止の決議が行われたが、請
負組が作業員を丸ががえする関係はなおいろいろの形で存続した。

Illustrated History of Japan, vol. 16, Shueisha Inc,
1976, p.62

Why did a gap come about between foreigners' observations and Japanese actual feelings?
To begin with, how did Japanese get at significance of the term “*hataraku* [to work]”?

● Meaning, origin of the word “*ro-do*” [work]

Comprehensive Dictionary of Japanese Language, Japan Comprehensive Dictionary Publishing Society, ed., Shogakukan, 12/1972, 3/1976 ‡

Ro-do: to work using one's body

● Usage examples:

Yoseikun [training instruction]; Body should work [≡ **move**] daily bit by bit; Not to sit quietly for long.

Saigoku Risshiden; Benefit to work [≡ **move**] the body

Toson Shimazaki, *Transgression*; Ushimatsu watching a scene of working, ...

Gishi - Kadaden; Human body wants to get a work [≡ **move**]

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● In other words, in old examples, [“do” in] “*ro-do* 労働” is inscribed as “*ro-do* 労働[move]”. The idiom of “*ro-do*” is a product of the modernized age, and has been firmly fixed as a translation word.

● Meaning, usage examples of “*ro* 労”

- ① to experience hardships; tireless efforts
- ② having meritorious deeds in a service; achievement; long service
- ③ to be skillful with acquired experience; proficiency
- ④ to be experienced, and attentive in every respect
- ⑤ to appreciate; nurturance

Word “*hataraku* 働<[to work]” and usage examples

- ①to move one's body; to move
- ②to act; to behave
- ③to do something with effort; to be hard at job; to labor
- ④especially, to play an active role in combat field
- ⑤for heart to waver; to sway
- ⑥for spirit to spark up
- ⑦to do something to be of service
- ⑧to exert effort for someone else...

- “to have *hataraki*”; to be capable of doing something well
- “to have no *hataraki*”; ①of no effect ②cannot do job well

Both “*hataki*” and “*hataraku*” are the words to describe someone in motion

- They have shifted over to the ones that include the effects resulting from the original words. For its inscription, *hiragana* [Japanese syllabary characters] is not principally used for “*hataraku*.”
- According to Tetsuji Morohashi, *Comprehensive Kanwa* [meaning of Chinese characters as they are used in Japanese] *Dictionary*, Taishukan Publishing Co., 4/1984, 7/1986:
 - “*Do* 働” is a character to express the meaning of “strive”, “ply”, and is not a Chinese character, but is one made in Japan.

However, its was used in China at one time, says the dictionary.

(*Comprehensive Chinese Dictionary* states: *do* 働, a Japanese letter, pronounced the same as *do* 動 [=move] by Chinese people.)

- With that, when and how did the term “*rodo* 労働” come to be used?

- Getting back to *Comprehensive Kanwa Dictionary*:

Originally, the accurate inscription of the character “*ro* 勞” is “勞” in which the crown part is a combination character of fire and roof to signify that flame burns roof [and the bottom part is a character for power/strength]; Thus, the meaning is, At an instance of such a calamitous event, one uses an enormous strength to prevent it.

- Accordingly, the character has turned into a meaning to “maximize one’s power”, and averted to such purports as to “strive”, “tire”, and “appreciate,” explains the dictionary.

- *ro-ai* , *ro-i* , *ro-eki*, *ro-ku*, *ro-shi*, *ro-shin*, *ro-ryoku*

- In words of Chinese origin, “*ro-do* 労働” means to move one’s body, work, disturb, upset.

- Compared to those, Japanese “*ro-do* 労働” means to work laboriously.

- Is it appropriate to think that, in modern era, an idiom of “*ro-do* 労働” came to be used as a translation of “labour,” and transpired to mean to “work with breaking one’s back”?
- Before modern age, “*ro-do* 労働” was mainly used, which was the word to mean almost the same as “to work [*hataraku*]”; Since it came to be inscribed as “*ro-do* 労働” in recent period, its meaning turned out to be rather limited.
- Therefore, a question, What is Japanese concept of labor? requires to be changed to, How have Japanese grasped the matter to work for the sake of daily life?
- For reference, “*shigoto* 仕事[job/work]” means to “do *koto* 事[affair]” and “*shi* 仕” is a phonetic equivalent, which means “things to do”, “things must be done.”

- The meaning of “breaking one’s back” in “labor 労働” leads to a negative image of reluctantly conducting something one wants to avoid preferably.
- Such an idea exists in our time too.

That is, labor is something unavoidable, and it’s desirable to increase time for leisure....so on.

- However, it was not that people had a negative image about working for a living from the outset.
- “Diligence” and “assiduity” mean to “toil at one’s work or study”, which can be found in such literary documents as *Sequel of Chronicles of Japan*.
- But in modern times, “diligence” and “diligent worker” developed into words that were used to provide an exclusively positive image.
- And then, these turn into an expression, “Japanese, diligent in labor.”

Attempt to Explain Diligence

● Is it to satisfy a “feeling of something missing”?

—Explanation by Economist Susumu Hidaka

● There can be no divergent opinions that the core of what caused the rapid growth to happen and succeed was diligence of the nation. The world always kept on moving in a flurry and at a bewildering pace. What exactly is a virtue of diligence? It may signify the absence of capability to enjoy life in a relaxed manner and at leisure. There are some ethnic groups who, albeit poor, are gifted with ability to enjoy life; Is it not a case that the absence of such capability, or being a defective ethnic group, was exactly what brought about the high growth of Japanese economy? It is most likely that, attributable to the traditional rarity of piety, people were plagued with feelings of something missing and of starvation, which propelled them toward diligence.

(Susumu Hidaka, *Topos of Japanese Economy*, Seidosha, 1987, p.230)

● “In order to gain an income one is constrained to do the designated job for the designated length of time. Off the mark one heads back home as the time comes, and enjoys hearth and home scarcely bearing the company affairs in mind. The way of being of such an employee may be natural in commodity economy, but in order to maintain this kind of attitude in Japanese companies, one must be gifted with extraordinary inner strength. Normally one changes into finding his reason for living in the company's work and devoting to its sake his passion and tension.”

(Susumu Hidaka, *Topos of Japanese Economy*, Seidosha, 1987, p.314)

● “In case the employee is just being coerced into cruel labor, the home can be a place of comfort for his soul, but the reality is different. To one who has found his reason for living in working at the company and proactively devoted his passion and tension, the home is merely a place for sleep. ...Should the home develop into something having more significance than that so as to stand in his way, then, it would be none but distraction to the satisfaction with his reason for living,” expands the exposition. This situation “brings forth lack of communication at home, or an education problem and employment issues over gender, and an issue pertaining to employees’ response that is closer to his company’s footing concerning pollution problems.”

(Susumu Hidaka, *Topos of Japanese Economy*, Seidosha, 1987, pp.316-319)

Master of Labor

- The whole premise of this explanation is that labor is something one should evade, and that life ought to be enjoyed by minimizing time spared for labor: Is this account persuasive?
- This appears to be interpretable of situations to certain extent in accordance with the meaning of “labor 労働” that became established as a translation word in modern era; then, what was a reason for such way of grasping the concept to be firmly fixed?
- Or else, as per the elucidation, in Japan that had long been an agrarian society, is it a case that people worked grudgingly under such concept on labor?

Characteristics of Factory Labor

- In the era from Meiji to Taisho, working in factories and mines was to take such a path of life as to nearly downgrade social assessment of oneself.
- Forced to slave like horses, laborers were obliged to live below the poverty line at the bottom of the pile; Although they contributed themselves to the development of society through productive activities, almost all of their glory was crowed upon business operators, and laborers could not receive equal rights or social appraisals.
- ... Around the time of the WWI, an objective raised by leaders of labor movements was for laborers to obtain an “approval of their character” from society through the cultivation by themselves and self-development. It was their compelling demand to be treated just like everyone else.
- The reason for this kind of response Japanese showed to the labor in factories was perhaps they became acutely aware of the fact that, with respect to “to work”, the labor in factories brought in a factor totally different from the past.

- In traditional societies, regardless of landowning farmers or craftspeople, the configuration of their labor was of no master.
- Dependent on natural conditions and constantly looking out for disaster strikes, a farmer had to handle crops' growing situations and farm works suiting to the weather in and out of season: But the judgment regarding in what order and when these work operations were to get done was up to his decision.
- **The master of labor was he himself.**
- Spending most of life's time of for living, farmers had to keep on working fraying their bodies, but those who made the decision on that were they themselves.

Thomas C. Smith, *Native Sources of Japanese: Industrialization, 1750-1920*

● In *Native Sources of Japanese: Industrialization, 1750-1920*, Thomas C. Smith, having studied descriptions in the “agricultural books” of Edo Period, made it clear that farmers were repeatedly educated about the job of farming on what to be done daily, monthly and yearly according to the plan. Those who made the plan were farmers themselves.

● “Without a preparation/artifice at the turn of the year, for what ought to be done during a year, one would come to the deadlock and undergo hardships at a specific month. Without due consideration/devise on must-dos for a month on its first day, everything would not be completed on the thirtieth. ... “

● Concept of a family and farm work’s intricacy as reasons for the above:

① “The plowland of ancestors who founded the family is a treasure and something left in one’s charge, which one should keep and pass on to his posterity.”

② Individual family’s farmland was small and scattered, none of which had the same condition, and it required a scheduled manpower placement and a device on work preparations to grow many kinds of crops suiting to each season.

Roka Tokutomi, “*Earthworm’s Nonsense*”

● Tokyo has made its inroads into this area. ... Factories’ buzzers not heard before have begun to surprise early-morning dreams these days. Villagers cannot stay in bed. Those who know this village of a decade ago are being surprised with air of people who have become strenuous about making a quid. Political-party riots and gambles used to be Santama’s specialties for a long time. These days people don’t die from election dust. When I moved in here, gambles were still carried on burning lamps in the wooded mountain beyond the fields. I often heard such rumors as so-and-so of an old family in the village diced himself into placing a mortgage on his entire land to Kangyo Bank, or, another so-and-so of a petty farming busted his dwelling land out. However, for these few years, the gambling has been blown off by wind, and persons referred to as sporting men have gone to Tokyo or settled down to a relatively proper way of living, and now all of the villagers work earnestly. That is partly due to the authorities’ raids coming down, but is **primarily because the difficulty of earning a livelihood has made its inroads into this area.**

In terms of the “master of labor,” day-to-day activities of craftsmen were just the same.

- Although leaning on orders of customers who regularly came to their shops and of old patrons, how to make ordered items was left to the discretion of craftsmen themselves.

- It is said that upon visiting a customer at home, a skilful plantsman, instead of getting on to his job right away, deceptively looked around garden trees leisurely pulling at his tobacco pipe; he was not goofing off on the job, but was thinking as to how to plow ahead with the work and how to prune trees in the garden so as to satisfy the customer.

- To plow ahead with the work based on the arrangements they themselves make; that was their work.

Report of an engineer **F. C. Verny** at Yokosuka shipbuilding yard in the early Meiji period

● “An absenteeism rate of Japanese mechanics reached 15.4% that is way higher than that at dockyards in France at 5% in average.”

(Konosuke Odaka, *World of Artisans/World of Factories*, Libroport, 1993, p.179)

Gen•nosuke Yokoyama, *Lower Echelon of Society in Japan*, (Iwanami paperback ed., 1985, p.216)

● A forging plant was compared with blacksmith shops found here and there in town, in which both produced the similar kind of products while their content, quality were entirely different. So, to improve efficiency of a plant, it was pointed out, hiring in high-caliber blacksmiths would have poor prospects, but rather, machinery mechanics should be trained as specialized factory hands to be clued up with skills best suited to plants.

Discipline of Given Time

To “do the designated job for the designated length of time”

Which constitutes diligence in the modern age, viewed from the employer’s standpoint.

● In factory labor, in accordance with a system of specialization and cooperation, workers are called on to do a set job for a set length of time. There is little room for wage-workers’ discretion in their jobs, and the masters of labor are managements, financiers .

● Like this, in losing self-initiative this way lies a characteristic of labor in modern times: Is this not the reason labor turned into a matter that should be evaded?

Record of an interview with Torakichi and Yoshio Ono who managed a small-scale workshop as sheet-metal craftsmen since their father's day

● “People of the past worked together with others, not for money; when one worked with someone else, he completed a job faster and made a better product, and was proud of such matters,” tell the interviewees, which clearly shows that their work prided itself on vying not money but skills. From such perspective, labor in factories “gives money in proportion to time spent there. If you work hard in daytime, you just get a salary of daytime. But if, idling your time away, you leave some work for the evening, then working overtime gives you 25% more,” indicating that performance at work is measured based on hours. And its result was something they were not satisfied with.

Record of Interview (sequel)

● You put all your energy into work and poop out. Tired, you rest from work. On the contrary, there are some people who fudge on duties idling their time away, but are never absent from work, and can get by with. Then, those irresponsible clock-watchers often receive absolutely more on paydays. You fall over yourself, or, no matter how much you produce at a given time, you lose. It boils down to a statistics tallied by checking the attendance record. As pay raises, etc. are determined based on that, those getting paid better are ones who disport themselves behind their superiors' back but do not take a leave of absence. There is nobody who gets on to it.

(Kiyoshi Mori, *Back-Street Factories*, 1981, pp.63-64)

● “Rather than picking up money, let’s do a better job. That’s the spirit typical of a master hand, isn’t it?”