

Research Note

One of the Basic Strategies for Reviving Japan: Creating More “Marginal Men”

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Summary

In the current sea of change, Japan seems have a lack of energy. It is high time that reformation and changes be made, but it is not an easy task.

After discussing the hypothesis that “marginal men” can be a source of innovation, this paper claims that “marginal men” are important as leaders of reform, as illustrated by Eiichi Shibusawa, Yukichi Fukuzawa, Magosaburo Ohara, Soichiro Ohara and Toshio Doko in Japanese history.

Keywords: *“marginal man”, skepticism about the existing social order and values, social improvement and reformation, philanthropy*

INTRODUCTION

It is a sea of change period just like the time when Japan had to face up to the modernization. Some people say that there is no significance of university education here in Japan. Some claim that social science and humanities are not so important compared to natural or computer sciences. I do believe, of course, that it is high time for reformation and that changes are indispensable. In these circumstances, I'd like to say that one of effective basic strategies is to focus on the effort of creating more “marginal men”.

“Marginal Man” Hypothesis

The marginal men hypothesis, put forward by Bert F. Hoselitz at Harvard University, argues that members of socially marginalized groups are suited to generating innovation because they are likely to be skeptical about the existing social order and values and therefore develop unique viewpoints.

So-called typical “Marginal Man” in Japan—Shibusawa & Fukuzawa

Eiichi Shibusawa (1840-1931)

In Japan, one notable figure who can be considered a marginal person in this sense is the industrialist Shibusawa Eiichi, who was the leading figure in the development of Japan's modern economy during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Shibusawa continued to stress the importance of both ethics and shrewdness in business, emphasizing equally “the analects of Confucius and the abacus.” What defines him as a marginal person is his ambiguous position in the social class system of his era. He was born into a family of farmers in Saitama on the outskirts of Tokyo, although his family was a rich one and not peasants. Due to his family's wealth, Shibusawa's social status was almost equivalent to that of a samurai. Armed with two sets of lenses, one giving a farmer's viewpoint and the other offering a quasi-samurai perspective, Shibusawa was able to see things clearly. This enabled him to identify what was needed to modernize Japan and to embark on

many business ventures that truly contributed to the modernization of Japan in business terms.

Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901)

Yukichi Fukuzawa, the founder of Keio University, wrote in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* that he felt as though he had lived two different lives or been given two different sets of body and soul. He added that he could therefore look at things from two different perspectives: one stemming from what he learned in the first half of his life in the social system under the Shogunate Tokugawa; the another from what he learned from the Western civilization introduced in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Fukuzawa was born during the late Edo period, and his first academic pursuit was Confucianism. He later studied Dutch and then English, through which he learned about Western civilization. He claimed that his vantage point, enriched with unprecedented vast amounts of knowledge never available to earlier generations, would allow him to capture the forthcoming age. Criticizing Confucianism, he said that its family lineage-based social system had stopped his father from being successful – born into a low-ranking samurai family, he remained a mere bookkeeper all his life, despite his high intelligence and abilities. Fukuzawa said Japan's family lineage-based social system was so wrong it had been the arch-enemy of his family. Having absorbed the two contrasting sets of values, from before and after the Meiji Restoration, he was able to identify the problems of the traditional system, express critical opinions and act as an advocate for social reform. In these ways, Fukuzawa was also a marginal person.

“Marginal man” definition

Shibusawa and Fukuzawa had gotten into an identity crisis or scrape, meeting various people and experiencing much more unusual matters compared to non-marginal people. Then, they had tried to overcome their circumstances, negative feelings and experiences.

Therefore, in this paper, a marginal man or person means someone who stands at a boundary between one society and another or between one social structure and another, who got into an identity crisis or scrape, meeting various people and

experiencing many more unusual matters compared to non-marginal people, and who tries to overcome their circumstances, negative feelings and experiences.

Creating More “Marginal Men”

Just like Shibusawa and Fukuzawa, other marginal men could be leaders for social reform. They do not belong to majority groups, are far away from vested special privileges, and have more chances to have unusual experiences. Therefore, I believe that they easily realize the needs for reforming systems and rules, and that they carry out action towards these ends.

Of course, I have no intention to deny the important roles of politicians and bureaucrats. I am just saying that marginal people can demonstrate strong leadership in so-called the “publicness from the bottom”. They could lead drastic reform for a better society to live in with some creative innovations and ideas.

Besides the two people I mentioned above, we can find other typical examples in history. Let me show you below.

Magosanuro Ohara (1880-1943)

How many of you here know Magosaburo Ohara? How about his son, Soichiro? Has anyone been to the city of Kurashiki in Okayama prefecture? One of the must-see sites in Kurashiki is the Ohara Museum, which was founded by Magosaburo Ohara.

Unlike Yukichi Fukuzawa and Shigenobu Okuma, the leaders and torchbearers of the generation who grew up in the Edo period, Magosaburo Ohara was born in 1880, a good number of years after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. He was part of a new young generation inspired by liberal intellectuals such as Soho Tokutomi, the historian, and journalist. Magosaburo's father, Koshiro, had been born into a family of Confucian scholars but was adopted by the Ohara family, who were landowners in Kurashiki. Koshiro and several other young leaders founded a spinning company, Kurashiki Bouseki, during the period when the Japanese government was promoting modernization and industrialization to compete with the Western powers. Magosaburo, the only son of the family, seems to

have grown up without career pressure from his parents. He was enrolled at Tokyo Senmon Gakko (which would later become Waseda University) but never took his education seriously and quit school.

Back in Kurashiki, Magosaburo eventually found a silver lining when he met Juji Ishii, a Protestant Christian and founder of Okayama Orphanage. Ishii was known for his dedication to social welfare, based on his Christian faith. Until the early 1930s, the story of his efforts featured in Japanese primary school textbooks for moral education, so he used to be well known among elderly people. In recent years, a movie about Ishii, in which he is played by the famous actor Ken Matsudaira, has been introduced in primary schools. Nowadays, young children know about Ishii.

In the aftermath of tragedies such as the Great Nohbi earthquake of 1891 and the great famines in the Tohoku region of northeast Japan between 1902 and 1910, Ishii traveled to disaster-stricken areas and saved orphans to be looked after at his orphanage in Okayama. He always wore tattered outfits, as he thought about the children before everything else. Magosaburo encountered Ishii in 1899 and was converted to Christianity. After being baptized and studying the Bible, he also began to feel the need to contribute to society. Although he gave extensive support to a variety of social welfare activities, Magosaburo did not like to be called a philanthropist. His major concern was running his businesses. He took over the cotton-spinning company from his father and strived to develop Kurashiki Bouseki, which is now called Kurabo Industries. He also created Kurashiki Kenshoku, the man-made silk textile company that is now the multinational corporation known as Kuraray.

OHARA MAGOSABURO’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY

Other businessmen of the period also used corporate profits for the betterment of society. Among them was Zenjiro Yasuda, the founder of Yasuda zaibatsu¹⁾, who donated Yasuda Hall to the University of Tokyo. Ohara’s contribution stood out, however. Hyoue Ohuchi, a Marxist economics professor at the University of Tokyo who later be-

came president of Hosei University, said, “Ohara was not remotely equivalent to other zaibatsu, like Sumitomo or Yasuda, in scale and wealth. In terms of contribution to the betterment of society, there was no one equal to Magosaburo.”²⁾

Magosaburo was a pioneer of what we now call philanthropist or mécénat, or the corporate patronage of arts, science and education. As well as the museum in Kurashiki, he founded three research institutes: the Ohara Institute for Social Research, the Ohara Institute for Agricultural Research, and the Kurashiki Institute for the Science of Labor. He also founded Kurabo Central Hospital (later renamed Kurashiki Central Hospital). After the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, when many commoners died without receiving any medical treatment. Magosaburo invested heavily to create a state-of-the-art hospital that would offer everyone, not only his employees, high-quality treatment on an equal basis. At Kurashiki Central Hospital, a strong emphasis was placed on patient-oriented services and treatment. Large hospitals in those days were either philanthropic institutions built and run by religious groups that only provided charitable treatment or academic university hospitals for medical education and advanced research. Magosaburo wanted to establish Asia’s top hospital in which the priority was given to providing the best possible service and treatment for patients.

All of the institutions founded by Magosaburo still exist today. Their owners may have changed or their organizational forms altered slightly, but the entities remain active.

In 1902, with his own money, Magosaburo started the Kurashiki Sunday Seminars, which brought distinguished guest speakers to the city. These included Inazo Nitobe, the author of *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*, and Shigenobu Okuma, the founder of Waseda University. The aim was to provide local people with learning opportunities and narrow the knowledge gap between the Tokyo metropolitan area and the rural provinces. The series continued until 1914, covering a wide range of topics from education to international relations. It was well-received by the people of Kurashiki and Okayama prefecture, with each of the 76 seminars attracting between 1,200 and 3,000 people. Nobusuke Kishi, who served as prime minister of

Japan from 1957 to 1960, attended the seminars as a junior high school student in the prefecture.

The Art and Craft movement was another beneficiary of support from Magosaburo. For example, when Muneyoshi Yanagi founded the Craft Museum, which still exists in the Komaba district of Tokyo, Magosaburo understood Yanagi's aspirations and donated a large sum, surprising the recipient himself. While he supported infrastructure improvements in Kurashiki – including roads, a tunnel and a bridge – Magosaburo also helped individual artists and scholars who wanted to study abroad or needed to import costly books.

Yasuzo Shimizu, the founder of J. F. Oberlin University of Japan, was among those who received patronage from Magosaburo, who sponsored him to go to Oberlin College in Ohio, USA. As a school principal, Shimizu had worked hard in Beijing, China, to educate young Chinese children, in an era when most Japanese were interested only in exploiting the resources and possessions of the Chinese people. Magosaburo did not think that Shimizu belonged to this majority, seeing him as someone who could be trusted and admired. Magosaburo said: “Later generations should not brag about what their ancestors did. They have a duty to correct the mistakes of their ancestors.”³⁾

Magosaburo also had achievements as a successful businessman, expanding his area of operations to Osaka. His heart, though, always belonged to his hometown of Kurashiki, where he died in 1943, during the Second World War, at the age of 63.

Soichiro Ohara (1909-1968)

Although we can say that Magosaburo was more typical marginal man than his only son, Soichiro, the son had surely a direct effect from his father. Therefore, it might be all right we think of him as one of the marginal people.

Soichiro Ohara was born in Kurashiki in 1909 and followed in his father's footsteps to become a businessman. Throughout his life, he was known as a very earnest and serious man. In 1932, he joined his father's company, Kurashiki Kenshoku (Kuraray), after graduating from the University of Tokyo with a BA in economics. In 1939, he became a board member at Kurashiki Bouseki (Kurabo)

and president of Kurashiki Kenshoku. After World War II, the zaibatsu were dissolved and Soichiro chose to focus on managing Kurashiki Kenshoku. This decision reflected his commitment to innovation and the challenge of developing a new synthetic fiber called vinylon, which Kurashiki Kenshoku had been working on since before the war.

Soichiro's career differed from that of his father in several respects. For example, he wrote and published several books, while Magosaburo never became an author. Another difference was his experience of working as a government official, serving as Deputy Director of the Price Control Agency to administer price policies. His appointment followed a request by GHQ/SCAP⁴⁾ for the position to be filled by a trustworthy man with business experience, so that aid sent from the United States would not be diverted to the black market. The old boys network played an important role in finding the right person for the job and those involved in recruiting Soichiro included alumni from his high school.

Before his death in 1968 at the age of 58, Soichiro took up high-ranking positions at business organizations, including chairperson of the Kansai Association of Corporate Executives and managing director vice-chairman of the Japan Business Federation, commonly known as Keidanren. He also took over his father's philanthropic activities, serving as chairman or trustee at the institutions his father had founded, including Kurashiki Central Hospital, Ishii Memorial Aizen-en⁵⁾ and research institutes. He also followed in his father's footsteps by making contributions in the field of education, by helping to found Kyoto Notre Dame University.

Soichiro actively and candidly expressed his opinions on the nation's economic policies, emphasizing that Japan's post-war economic miracle could not be regarded as a success if only industries flourished and people were unable to share and enjoy the fruits of economic success. He argued that the government and bureaucracy, as well as business leaders, should pay more attention to benefits for consumers rather than focusing their attention only on industrial growth or profit. Thus, Soichiro was a pioneer of today's consumer-oriented economy.

OHARA SOICHIRO AND EAST ASIA

In East Asia, I believe the most noteworthy of Soichiro's efforts was his hard work to export vinylon-manufacturing plants to China. This was in the 1950s, before the restoration of bilateral diplomatic relations. During the war, Kuraray had suffered labor shortages, leading to a plant-explosion accident, but after overcoming such adversities the company successfully developed its own technology to commercialize vinylon. At the time, this kind of purely domestic technological development was rare in Japan.

In 1958, delegates of the Chinese chemical industry visited Kuraray's vinylon plant and asked the company to build such plants in China. Kuraray's China project did not take shape easily, however. In the late 1950s, there was worldwide antagonism between capitalism and communism. The influence of conservative lawmakers had to be overcome, both in Japan and the United States, as well as the power of Japanese bureaucrats.

Soichiro not only tried to gain support from political heavyweights such as former prime minister Shigeru Yoshida, a close associate, but also approached his opponents directly. At a Japan-U.S. civilian conference of non-government leaders, for example, he made an appeal to civilian leaders on the other side with close ties to the U.S. government. Soichiro was confident that American leaders who were sensible and pragmatic would understand his project. The Japanese government, which had been anxious about the U.S. reaction, eventually gave the green light.

What was the drive behind Soichiro's earnest quest to build vinylon plants in China against all odds? His efforts are commonly understood as an act of redemption for what his country had done to the Chinese people. Explaining his motives, he said:

"Is it not a righteous thing to feel obliged to redeem the sinful acts committed in the past by our ancestors and do something for those who are trying to leave behind their grudges? I for one think we should do something. That is why I am pursuing the project. For one thing, I want it to be of some help to people in China, who are in need of textiles, even if it provides only minimal assistance. For an-

other, I hope this will be an act that offers some redemption for what Japan has done in the past to the Chinese people, who suffered physical and psychological devastation during the war from Japan's invasion. There are no other motives for me to try to build a vinylon plant in China."⁶⁾

Fairness and justice are the two virtues Soichiro regarded highly. He did not support the idea that business owners should care only about their own success in the market, but tried to look at things and people from a broader and more global point of view.

Let me tell a story that shows how Soichiro's principles permeated his company. I heard from a gentleman with Chinese citizenship who joined Kuraray in 1968. A third- or fourth-generation Chinese in Japan, he was a graduate of a prestigious high school (Hibiya High School) and the nation's top university (the University of Tokyo). An alumnus of the university asked if he would be interested in joining his bank. Although the Chinese gentlemen said yes, the offer was quickly cancelled because of his Chinese origins and citizenship. Things like this still happened at that time and I can imagine his disappointment, especially as he had been approached with the job offer in the first place and had not applied for the position.

Next, thanks to a professor at the University of Tokyo and some people who knew Soichiro Ohara, a job interview was arranged for the gentleman at Kuraray. Soichiro did not discriminate against him because of his ethnic background. At the interview, he just wanted to know if the gentleman would be committed to the company. "What would you do if you faced a conflict of interest between China and Kuraray?" Soichiro asked. "As an employee of Kuraray, I would work for the company's best interests," the gentleman replied. Satisfied by his commitment, Soichiro asked no more questions. Perhaps surprisingly, the gentleman's parents and relatives were also able to join Kuraray. The gentleman himself worked for the company for a long time without experiencing any discrimination.

Magosaburo and Soichiro shared a forward-looking vision that allowed them to regard other countries of Asia as equal partners of Japan. They treated their fellow Asians fairly and without prejudice.

Toshio Doko (1896-1988)

Here I shortly⁷⁾ show you one more marginal person, Toshio Doko, who was from Okayama Prefecture, too, and got scholarship from Magosaburo Ohara for studying at Tokyo Higher Technical School (which would later become Tokyo Institute of Technology).

Doko was born in 1896 in Okayama City and made an earnest endeavor to cultivate his career. After graduating from university, he worked until nearly 90 years old, as an engineer at the Tokyo Ishikawajima Shipyard, a business administrator at Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries and Toshiba Corporation, and as chairman of the Keidanren, the Federation of Economic Organizations.

In 1981, he was asked to be a chairman of the Prime Minister's advisory council on administrative reform. It was the most famous, hard and challenging task Doko was engaged in. Doko led the reform with strong leadership, since he had been seriously worried about the Japan's future, especially concerning the state's finance. The council worked hard and submitted a recommendation to make several private companies of the state-run Japan National Railways.

You can say Doko was a marginal person. The father of Doko was not a leader, and the father needed his son's help in selling rice. Doko failed several times in entrance exams, and needed scholarship to study at university. Doko is also a typical example that a marginal person could be a creative leader and lead reform and changes very eagerly.

CONCLUSION

In Japan, industrialists and entrepreneurs were among the non-government figures who demonstrated strong leadership during the era of modernization and the transition to capitalism⁸⁾.

Today we live in a society of capitalism, in which private companies play a major role, compared with the medieval age, when feudal lords and the bureaucrats who served them were major powers in the society. Private companies are defined by their vision and philosophy, which have been shaped by their founders and management. Therefore, companies' vision and philosophy are vital components

of our society. This is why I have a strong interest in business leaders like Magosaburo Ohara, Soichiro Ohara, and Toshio Doko. They were marginal people who dedicated themselves to making Japan a better place to live.

Some people may say it is hard to expect the appearance of such leaders today. Some people may consider that philanthropy carried out with hope for a better place to live is based on religions like Christianity. They might be true in some points, and of course, it is impossible to force people here in Japan towards Christianity or the charity spirit.

Then, don't we have any chance for the appearance today of figures like Magosaburo Ohara, Soichiro Ohara, and Toshio Doko, who exerted themselves very much in social improvement, reform and philanthropy? The response is No. We cannot force a religion, but instead of that, we can make show examples from history and spread their ideas. This way could be an excellent substitute for the role of the religion. In addition to this way, we should recognize the importance of the marginal man, and make every effort to bring up and support marginal people. Excellent elite people play and important role in society, of course, but it is also vital to put more emphasis on bringing up more marginal people while admitting diversity, individuality, and the so-called non-elite who made so many efforts after failures.

I believe that one of effective strategies for reformation, changes and reviving Japan is to focus on the effort with creating more "marginal men".

NOTES

- 1) Zaibatsu were a form of conglomerate.
- 2) Hyoue Ouchi, "Takai Yama—Jinbutsu Album" Iwanami Shoten, 1963, pp. 213, 227-8.
- 3) Soichiro Ohara, "Zuiso Zenshu" Vol. 1, (Fukutake Shoten, 1981), pp. 101-102.
- 4) General Headquarters, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers.
- 5) Formerly a branch of Okayama Orphanage; now a provider of medical care, daycare, nursing and elderly care.
- 6) Soichiro Ohara, "Zuiso Zenshu". Vol. 4, (Fukutake Shoten, 1981), pp. 175-6.

- 7) On Doko's ideas on human resources and forth, refer to the following article. Kaneda, Reiko. (2016). *Toshio DOKO and Contemporary Japan; Focusing on the Ideas on Human Resources and the Business Management*, INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, Graduate School of International Studies, J.F. Oberlin University.
- 8) In the trajectories of Japan, and Korea and China toward modernization from the late 19th century, the decisive factor that led them to different paths was the difference in the respective educational maturity levels of their citizens.

In Korea and China, the prominent Confucian scholars had strong ties with authority, but the great majority of ordinary citizens were left illiterate. In other words, a vast disparity existed between the learned few and a majority of ordinary citizens in the society.

In Japan, which enjoyed more than 200 years of peace under the Shogunate Tokugawa, samurai warriors no longer had to fight on the battlefield. Instead, to make the best use of their education and knowledge, samurai created small private schools called *terakoya*, where the

children of ordinary citizens were taught basic reading, writing and use of the abacus for arithmetic.

By the end of the Edo period (1603-1868), there were 1,500 *terakoya* in Edo (now called Tokyo) alone and the literacy rate in Japan at that time was over 80 percent. This was an extraordinarily high figure, as only about 20 percent of commoners in industrial cities in Victorian Britain were able to go to school.

After the Meiji Restoration (1867-1868), the high intellectual maturity level of Japan's citizens meant that the country was able to modernize rapidly. In China and Korea, meanwhile, social disparities remained fixed, preventing people from being educated, and the intellectual maturity of citizens remained low. In my opinion, this is the major reason Korea and China failed to achieve successful modernization at the same time as Japan.

Considering such differences in my mind, I have been mainly focusing on industrialists and entrepreneurs, who were regarded as non-government figures in Japan.

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