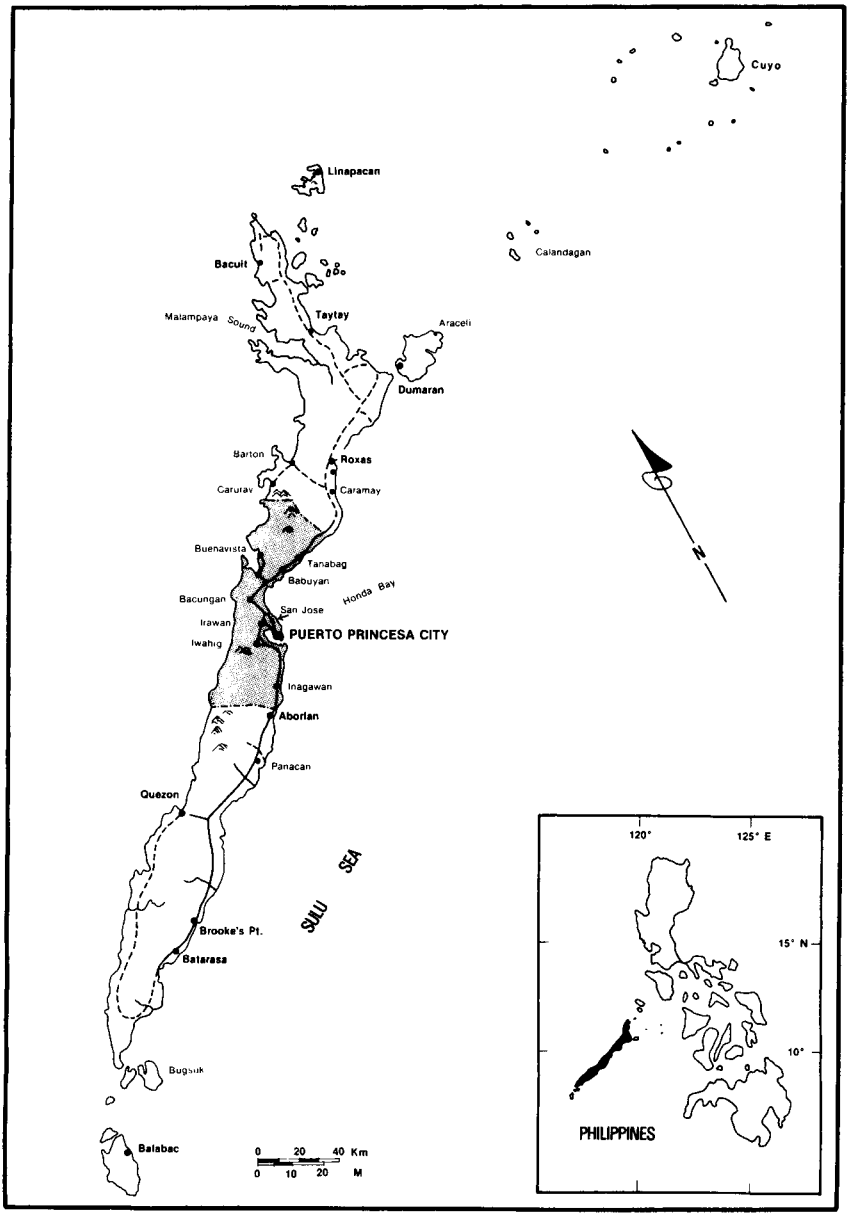
1
Introduction

This book records a dramatic and unique event in the lifetime of a single community: the emergence and institutionalization of social inequality. It concerns the settlement and growth of San Jose, a pioneer farming village located on the east coast of Palawan Island, the Philippines. San Jose is one of many such villages founded during the 1930s and 1940s by migrant swidden farmers from Cuyo Island, 300 kilometers distant (Map 1.1). First by sailboat and later by motor launch, these migrant "Cuyonons"[1] left an isolated and overpopulated homeland to seek a new life on a largely uninhabited but potentially prosperous island that shares with Mindanao the distinction of being the nation's last frontier. During their early years on Palawan, those migrants who settled in San Jose were preoccupied with shifting cultivation of upland rice and with clearing the virgin forest from their homesteads. Their lives were subsistence oriented in a culturally homogeneous social order that was only marginally linked to the market economy.

Today, San Jose is a fully occupied community with numerous links to external socioeconomic systems. Its residents, responding to the market opportunities created by rapid postwar population growth in nearby Puerto Princesa City, specialize in the production of fruits, vegetables, and livestock for sale in the town marketplace. Favored by geographical location and a high level of return for their farm output, they enjoy rising incomes and standards of living. But no longer is San Jose a relatively homogeneous community. Occupational and intracultural diversity is growing, and there are today systematic differences between neighbors in wealth, prestige, and power.

On the surface, San Jose's experience with agricultural change seems ordinary enough. Regional economic growth created new economic opportunities; because these opportunities were ecologically and economically viable locally, farmers responded. The result was a predictable one: the commercialization of village economy and the expansion of cash incomes. Because some farmers



Map 1.1. Palawan

moved more quickly and more successfully than others to take advantage of the new opportunities, market participation also brought growing *differences* between farmers in incomes and standards of living. Again, it has become a commonplace that nowhere do farmers respond equally to the new economic opportunities brought by modernizing change. The case of San Jose seems but one among many.

But it is a case made striking by the conditions under which social inequality emerged and flourished. When social inequality grows in areas where farmers already differ in economic or political assets, we are not surprised; access to new technologies and new opportunities is frequently biased toward farmers possessing such assets. But San Jose's pioneer farmers did *not* differ significantly in economic and political assets, and access to basic resources and to the new opportunities themselves was broadly based. San Jose's farmers had, in short, "equal opportunity" – or at least their opportunities to participate in economic growth were as equal as one could expect any real-life group of farmers to have. That in these circumstances they did not equally succeed is a matter of considerable comparative interest and significance.

San Jose thus presents a strategic opportunity to study the causes of social inequality under conditions of agricultural growth and change. On one level, this book may, in fact, be seen as a case study of change in farming. More fundamentally, though, it is a book about change in *farmers*, or, more accurately, about change in some farmers but not in others, notwithstanding their common origins. For San Jose's farmers, or at least its entire senior generation, were all products of the same cultural milieu: the egalitarian, economically and socially isolated, subsistence-oriented Cuyo Island of the 1920s and 1930s. Out of this milieu came the migrant men and women who would found San Jose – men and women similar in age, education, occupation, and starting capital, and yet so variable in personality, attitude, and ability that their differing responses to modernizing change would revolutionize the frontier social order. This book is the story of these men and women – of their backgrounds, abilities, and aspirations; of their successes and failures on the frontier; and of the new village society they created in a modernizing world.

It is a story that poses, I believe, two fundamental explanatory problems for the social scientist. The first is to explain why men and women with such seemingly equal starting points responded so differently to the new economic opportunities brought by agricultural change. The second problem is to explain how the social

inequality that resulted in turn influences individuals' prospects for success or failure in life.

To answer the first question, we must look back in time to a previous generation's way of life in Cuyo and on the frontier to seek the possible causes that men and women, once relatively equal, become rich and poor – to seek, in other words, the *origins* of inequality. I will argue that in San Jose's frontier society, as in all human societies, there were differences among men in competence, personality, and motivation of such magnitude that, upon exposure to opportunities for economic growth, these differences rapidly gave rise to pronounced social inequality. In other words, the potential for social inequality is inherent in certain constitutional factors common to all societies, and only awaits those conditions that will allow it to progress. I will also argue, however, that such personal qualities as "competence" and "motivation" are not necessarily "innate." Diverse and ultimately fortuitous learning experiences during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood may explain why some men and women acquire these highly adaptive traits, and hence why they succeed where others do not.

The second explanatory problem, concerning the *consequences* of growing social inequality, will bring us from the experiences of the past to the circumstances of the present as the determinants of individual behavior. How does the emergent social order itself influence or determine the activities of men and women at increasingly disparate positions within it? How do the individual differences instituted by social inequality interact with, reinforce, or confound individual differences of a more personal nature? To answer such questions, I will argue that in a status-differentiated community, the entailments of high or low social standing color an individual's perceptions of the costs and rewards for different courses of action. Economic opportunities and limitations on the one hand, and patterns of interest and association on the other, vary across the status order to create a unique pattern of motivational pressures at each status level. Such pressures structure some common motives – a need to earn a living, a desire to earn prestige – into different specific directions, directions which lead individuals to maintain their already established status positions. Once institutionalized, social inequality is thus maintained and perpetuated under quite different conditions from those under which it originated.

These explanatory goals determined the order and content of chapters. Chapter 2 describes the subjects of our study: San Jose's farming men and women, and the kind of community in which they live today. It explores the dimensions of social inequality as seen in

the life-styles of two men, one rich, the other poor, and shows how the sociocultural milieu of community life helps govern and shape their lives and behavior. In keeping with my premise that prestige seeking is a major imperative for human behavior, a special concern in Chapter 2 will be to explain the nature of San Jose's social status system and how the two men, and their neighbors, themselves perceive their positions within it.

Chapter 3 and 4 reconstruct the historical circumstances surrounding San Jose's settlement and growth. Because the behavior of San Jose's settlers was inevitably colored by cultural precedents inherited from the past, I first examine the economic and social milieu of prewar Cuyo Island that produced the senior generation of village farmers. Chapter 3 explains how generations of life in the economically closed and socially isolated Cuyo environment shaped their cultural values and objectives, and created, eventually, the selective pressures that would cause them to migrate. Also, and because some social and economic differentiation was present in pre-War Cuyo, Chapter 3 explains and defends my characterization of life there as basically egalitarian.

Chapter 4 concerns the growth of San Jose itself and the reactions and adaptations of the migrant men and women to a frontier incentive structure fundamentally different from the one they had known in Cuyo. It examines the direction and nature of agricultural development as realized in the experiences of eight migrant farmers, all self-made men; some conspicuous successes, others conspicuous failures.

Chapter 5 begins the argument itself. Comparing and evaluating the cases of pioneer success and failure, I stress that the origins of San Jose's inequality lay not in time of arrival, amount of starting capital, or other such factors, but rather were personalistic in nature. They lay, for the most part, in a level of motivation and in a kind of "on-the-job competence" that some men and women brought to the frontier and others did not. The presence or absence of such qualities in particular individuals, I will argue, is not readily explained by such conventional parameters as education or parental social standing. Idiosyncratic life experiences, unrelated to the aforementioned parameters, more directly account for the variation in question. The bulk of Chapter 5 then reviews a series of such life experiences and their consequences culled from the personal histories in Chapter 4 – birth order, geographical mobility, marriage partner – that appear to explain why some individuals, but not others, acquired the cognitive and noncognitive qualities contributing to success.

Following Chapter 5, I shift my focus from the characteristics of individual farmers to the system of social inequality itself and how it operates today to influence and determine behavior. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the wellsprings of stability, over the short term, in the distributions of income and social status.

At the heart of social inequality today lie differences among farmers in the ways they earn their livings, and Chapter 6 begins with the mosaic of interdependent production activities in the contemporary village economy: rice growing, gardening, arboriculture, livestock raising, day labor, and fishing. These activities are not equally important on each individual farm, but are instead combined in characteristic "production mixes" at each status level, each production mix with a characteristic pattern of time utilization and returns to labor. Chapter 6 shows how choice of production mix is both cause and effect of social status. On the one hand, variation among farms in production mix gives rise to the distributions of cash and subsistence incomes which underlie the status order. On the other hand, the distribution of incomes itself channels and constrains production, sales, and consumption choices in ways that tend to maintain social inequality.

Chapter 7 shows that how farmers earn personal prestige, no less than how they earn their livings, has a cause-and-effect relationship with social status. Broad social structural and social psychological imperatives, differing among status levels but everywhere associated with the leisure-time searches for peer approval and self-esteem, *also* channel behavior in ways that tend to maintain social inequality.

The evidence of Chapters 6 and 7 suggests a system of considerable tenacity in terms of its ability to maintain the existing distribution of advantage and disadvantage over the short term. But it does not show whether farmers necessarily pass their advantages and disadvantages on to their offspring. To answer this question, Chapter 8 focuses on the possible sociocultural processes whereby parents might transmit to their children their welfare positions and their life-styles. It shows that status-related differences in such areas as child-training practices and educational chances are in fact present and cause children of different parental social standing to embark upon systematically different life experiences – experiences that make it likely that existing inequalities will be perpetuated, within families, in the generation to come.

In my final chapter, I recapitulate my findings and place my explanatory interests, the emergence and institutionalization of social inequality, on a broader stage. Comparing and joining individual

and circumstantial levels of analysis, I argue that a greater diversity of circumstances *and* a greater diversity of human motives and capabilities than is conventionally believed may underlie the emergence of social inequality in developing communities. While expanded market participation animated San Jose's experience with emergent social inequality, comparative evidence suggests that such participation is neither sufficient nor even necessary for social inequality to emerge in other settings. It follows that the kind of person who has "made it" in San Jose cannot be presumed to illustrate some sort of universal paradigm for socioeconomic achievement. For if the circumstances making differential socioeconomic success possible are variable, so too are the personal attributes conducive to such success. Thus despite their implicit claims to universality, popular American notions about men whose personal endowments are such that they could "succeed anywhere" must be construed as folk constructs of those characteristics appropriate only to success under conditions of industrial capitalism.

Turning to the institutionalization of inequality, I bring the contrasting perspectives of Marxism and capitalism to bear on the question of how the social orders of developing agricultural communities change over time. Whether and to what degree such communities actually realize the sort of class polarization envisioned by Marx, I argue, depends upon many variables, including the ease of obtaining subsistence, the direction of change in agricultural technology, and the availability of credit and off-farm employment. But if such a polarization has not yet occurred in San Jose, a review of conditions in the community's lower status group reveals considerable support for the Marxist view that third-world poverty is a child of development as well as of tradition. That the causes of *individual* poverty are so variable, however, suggests that the "models of man" that both Marxists and capitalists bring to their analyses are seriously incomplete.

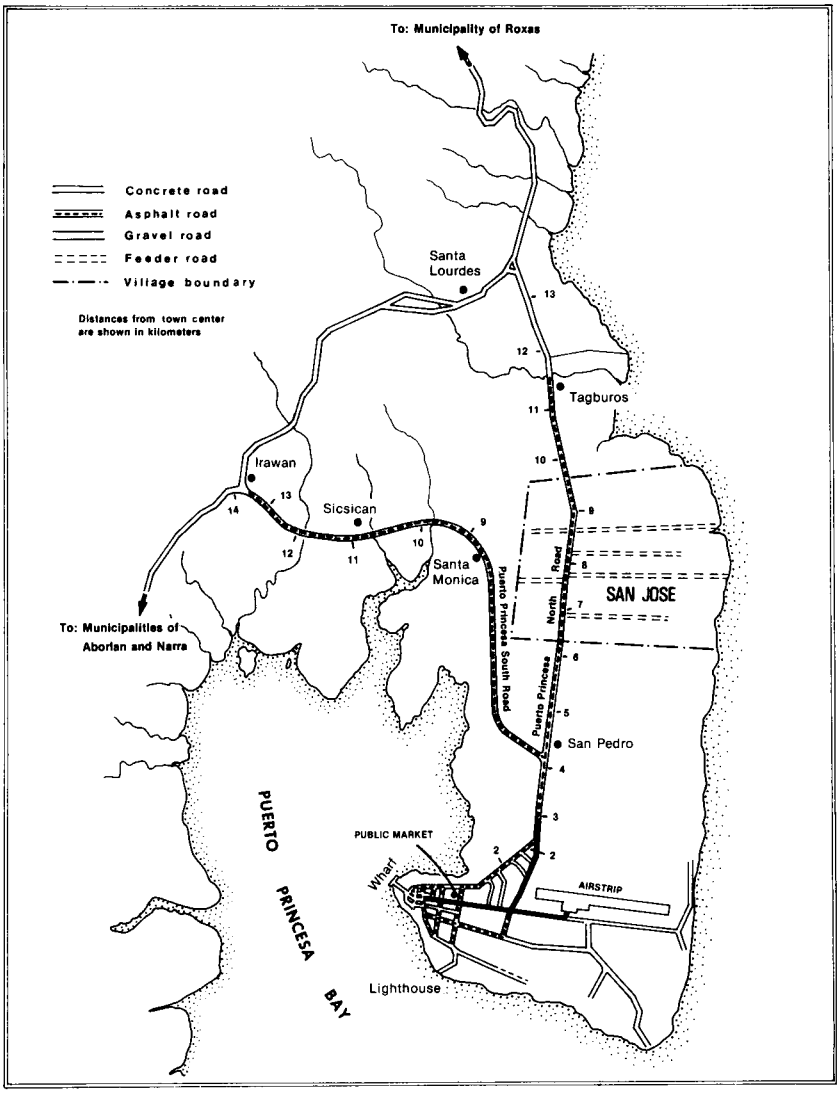
2

Rich man, poor man: life in a frontier farming community

San Jose lies 8 kilometers away from Puerto Princesa, the economic and political center of Palawan Province (see Map 2.1). Rectangular in shape and covering 758 hectares of unirrigated flatland, it has a population of 112 households, with a total of 763 people. The national road running north from Puerto Princesa transects the community and at 1-kilometer intervals sends feeder roads off in opposite directions. On the east side, these roads end in the mangrove swamps that buffer San Jose from its only natural boundary, the ocean. On its remaining three sides San Jose borders neighboring communities. Along the highway travel buses bound for distant northern communities and the numerous jitneys and tricycles (motorcycles equipped with sidecars) that handle local traffic to and from town.

Seen from the air, San Jose is unimpressive. The landscape is a patchwork of scrubby regrowth and coconut, banana, and fruit tree orchards. Only the community school and church stand out as prominent structures. Barely visible are three stores and two rice mills, the only other nonresidential buildings in the village. Scattered here and there are tin-roofed houses and well-kept vegetable gardens, the only indications from afar that San Jose is progressive, developing, and, by rural Philippine standards, a relatively well-to-do community.

Nor does such an aerial view provide much indication of the recentness of San Jose's development. What is today San Jose was a virtually unbroken expanse of virgin forest during the early 1930s. A Japanese logging company had removed most of the commercially valuable hardwoods and still operated a sawmill near what is now the center of the community. Here and there were the scattered clearings of a few indigenous Tagbanuas. Some soon left the area for the greater isolation of the foothills; a few remained behind, and their descendants are still present. Earlier migrants to Palawan had already begun to clear and settle the land closer to Puerto Princesa before interest in the San Jose area developed.



Map 2.1. Puerto Princesa City and environs

Some migrants, too, had also already settled in more distant areas, on land that they considered to be more desirable. Thus, San Jose never attracted Ilocano or Visayan migrants, whose lowland rice traditions led them further afield to seek suitable homesteads. Tagburos, San Jose's parent village and somewhat further away from town, has several all year streams and was settled by migrant Vi-

sayan farmers as early as 1910. But San Jose itself awaited the arrival of farmers who found congenial an upland, rainfed agriculture.

Only after 1930 did such farmers begin to trickle in. The three decades that followed spanned the major period of San Jose's growth and settlement. Not until 1948 did it gain formal autonomy as a separate community, then with a population of about forty households. Vacant land for homesteading was exhausted several years later, but births and continuing in-migration subsequently swelled the population to its present total. Subdivision, for sale or inheritance, of many of the original homesteads allowed most of these later arrivals to obtain at least some land. Excluding land owned by nonresidents,[1] San Jose remains today a community of smallholders. The mean amount of land owned per resident household is 3.2 hectares, and 70 percent of households own at least 1 hectare. Only twenty-six households, 23 percent of the total, own no land at all.

The years following the exhaustion of free land in San Jose also saw the emergence of a commercialized agriculture. The growth of a nearby market center, the development of a regional infrastructure, and the introduction of a new agricultural technology combined to create opportunities for market participation that had not existed in Cuyo. Rapid postwar population growth in Puerto Princesa, culminating with its conversion in 1970 from a municipality to a chartered city, brought growing demand for fresh farm produce among urban consumers, many of them well-paid businessmen and white-collar workers. From a population of 716 in 1918, the *poblacion* (town center) alone grew to 2,332 in 1939, to 3,326 in 1948, to 7,551 in 1960, and to 12,278 in 1970 (Census 1970). Meanwhile, during the 1950s, the national government converted the highway connecting San Jose to the town center to all-weather status. The town itself erected a new public marketplace and, in San Jose, constructed a grid of feeder roads to connect the more remote farms with the highway. The late 1950s and early 1960s also brought improved seeds, fertilizer and pesticide use, and new cultural practices to gardening.

These changes led San Jose's farmers to allocate greater amounts of land and labor to agriculture and to expand cash incomes. Sometime during the 1950s, the pattern of farm production shifted, at least on the more prosperous farms, from one in which more than half of farm output was retained for home consumption to one in which more than half was sold. In recent years, San Jose has become a major supplier of fresh food to the town center. Each morning, twenty to thirty women leave the village bringing baskets and bundles of fruits, vegetables, chickens, and eggs to sell wholesale