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978-0-521-10497-5 - Who Shall Succeed?: Agricultural Development and Social Inequality on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

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This book records the emergence and institutionalization of social inequality in San Jose, a pioneer farming village located on Palawan Island in the Philippines. Early chapters reconstruct the historical circumstances surrounding San Jose's settlement and growth under conditions of relative equality of opportunity. The community's development is examined in detail through the experiences of eight migrant farmers, all self-made men – some conspicuous successes, others conspicuous failures.

Comparing and evaluating the causes of pioneers' successes and failures, Professor Eder stresses that the origins of inequality in San Jose depended less upon the individuals' time of arrival or amounts of starting capital or other such factors than it did upon personal differences. Social inequality, for the most part, had its basis 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.

Later chapters shift in focus from the characteristics of the individual farmers to the system of social inequality itself and how it operates today to influence and determine behavior at increasingly disparate positions within the community status order. An array of economic, social-structural, and attitudinal circumstances keep rich farmers rich and poor farmers poor, over the short run, and make it likely that the present generation of parents will transmit existing inequalities to their children.

Eder concludes by stressing the diversity of circumstances and the diversity of human motives and capabilities that can underlie the emergence of social inequality in developing communities. Bringing the contrasting perspectives of Marxism and capitalism to bear on the question of how the social orders of developing agricultural communities change over time, he finds considerable support in San Jose's experience 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.

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JAMES F. EDER

Arizona State University

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[More information](#)

---

*To my mother and father*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

<i>List of tables, figures, and maps</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
2 Rich man, poor man: life in a frontier farming community	8
3 The economic and social origins of the migrant farmers	30
4 Eight migrants	46
5 The origins of social inequality	72
6 The maintenance of social inequality: earning a living	99
7 The maintenance of social inequality: earning prestige	129
8 The perpetuation of social inequality?	153
9 Conclusion	178
<i>Appendixes</i>	
A The measurement of social status	208
B Costs and returns in agricultural production	217
C The distribution of wealth and income	233
<i>Notes</i>	244
<i>Bibliography</i>	253
<i>Index</i>	259

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10497-5 - Who Shall Succeed?: Agricultural Development and Social Inequality  
on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Tables, figures, and maps

### Tables

2.1	San Jose's balance of payments for 1971 (pesos)	<i>page</i> 12
2.2	Social status and per household property ownership (pesos)	20
2.3	Social status and per household income (pesos)	21
3.1	Population growth in the Palawan area	42
4.1	Forty-four San Jose homesteads	47
4.2	Eight San Jose migrants	49
5.1	Year of arrival and social status	74
5.2	Education and social status	77
5.3	Birth order and social status	82
5.4	Geographical mobility and social status	89
6.1	Social status and per household landholdings	102
6.2	Married persons with permanent off-farm employment	103
6.3	Returns to land and labor for agricultural production activities	104
6.4	Productive activities of seven farmers (man-days per year)	106
6.5	Time allocation by three farmers for four weeks (hours)	108
6.6	Average annual expenditure per household (pesos)	118
6.7	Components of per household production expenditure (pesos)	119
7.1	Components of per household consumption expenditure (pesos)	143
8.1	Infant mortality rates	154
8.2	Honor students and chronically truant students in the San Jose elementary school	160
8.3	Unmarried, semi-independent children aged 16 and over	166
8.4	Seventeen marriages during 1970–1972	171
8.5	Social status differences between husbands and their wives' brothers	172
8.6	Social status differences in pairs of parents and children	174
8.7	Status group membership of thirty-two children	175
A.1	Nine status classifications	209
A.2	Individual and mean status scores for San Jose households	210
A.3	Final status distribution	215

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10497-5 - Who Shall Succeed?: Agricultural Development and Social Inequality  
on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*List of tables, figures, and maps* ix

B.1	Swidden crops	219
B.2	Per farm returns and variable costs, rice swiddens	221
B.3	Labor productivity, rice swiddens (pesos)	222
B.4	Vegetable garden crops	223
B.5	Per farm returns and variable costs, vegetable gardens (pesos)	225
B.6	Labor productivity, gardening (pesos)	227
B.7	Tree crops	228
B.8	Per farm returns, variable costs, and labor productivity for tree crops (pesos)	229
B.9	Per farm returns, variable costs, and labor productivity for livestock (pesos)	231
C.1	Components of per household cash income (pesos)	239
C.2	Components of per household agricultural cash income (pesos)	240
C.3	Components of per household wages and salaries income (pesos)	240
C.4	Components of per household subsistence income (pesos)	241
C.5	Disposition of total per household agricultural output (pesos)	242

**Figures**

2.1	Wealth and social status	22
2.2	Income and social status	23
4.1	Number of settlers arriving in San Jose in successive five- year periods	48
7.1	Cliques in San Jose	133
8.1	Grade VI sociogram	163
A.1	Composite status distribution of 112 households	214
A.2	Figure A.1 drawn as a curve	214

**Maps**

1.1	Palawan	2
2.1	Puerto Princesa City and environs	9



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10497-5 - Who Shall Succeed?: Agricultural Development and Social Inequality  
on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

During the 1930s and 1940s, a number of men and women left the overpopulated island of Cuyo in the Philippines to homestead a hitherto unpopulated region on the island of Palawan. Poor, uneducated, and of humble birth, these migrants soon differentiated themselves into haves and have-nots. Moreover, once this differentiation developed, it stabilized, and it is now being transmitted to a second and third generation of Cuyonons on Palawan. This book analyzes the origins of social inequality in terms of particular individuals, in a particular time and place, and the conditions under which it is maintained. Few topics have a more perennial concern for social scientists, philosophers, and men of practical affairs. Hence this study, although focused on a small community in the Philippines, illuminates larger problems: Why *do* developing communities embark upon trajectories of growing social inequality, and where do such trajectories ultimately lead? Must they necessarily terminate, as Marx envisioned, in a class polarization between the privileged few and the impoverished many, or can the “benefits of development” be more broadly shared?

I first went to the Philippines in 1965, a Peace Corps volunteer assigned to teach biology at Palawan National High School in Puerto Princesa City. Later I moved to a rural community, remote but otherwise not unlike San Jose, the community on which this book is based. Here I taught adult Tagalog literacy and the rudiments of vegetable gardening, working as an activist with people and problems that would later interest me as a scholar. For, like so many of my Peace Corps colleagues in the Philippines and elsewhere, I acquired at this time an enduring interest in other cultures, an interest that brought me, in 1968, to graduate school at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

I never visited San Jose during my first visit to Palawan, but I did learn of its reputation in Puerto Princesa as a successfully developing and relatively well-to-do migrant Cuyonon village. On that basis, I selected it as the site for my dissertation research when I

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on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

returned to the Philippines in 1970, supported by a National Institutes of Mental Health Research Training Grant. The problems of central concern in this book, however, were not those that I took to the field. Instead, I arrived in San Jose with a loosely structured plan to study “economic development and social change,” a plan vague in goals but with a hidden asset: a heavy emphasis on the collection of quantitative economic data. For, as I collected this data, a persistent problem kept surfacing – why were some individual migrants doing well on the frontier, whereas others were not? When I discovered that my neighbors shared my puzzlement, I knew I had found my field problem.

An often-heard local view, that “people are not all after the same things in life,” came to greatly influence the course of my research. To be sure, in my own view of the world, people, after a fashion, *are* all after the same thing in life. Fundamental to human nature, I believe, is a desire to earn prestige. Such an image of man has been widely employed by social scientists, but nowhere has it been stated more eloquently than by Rousseau, who spoke of that “universal desire for reputation, honors, and advancement, which inflames us all.” But, once set in motion by a common desire for prestige, people soon head off in many separate directions. Even within a single community, I would discover, social stratum and subculture powerfully influence prestige-seeking goals and behaviors – and in ways that provide an important key to unraveling the origins and maintenance of social inequality.

I stayed in San Jose for twenty months. Initially, I spoke Tagalog, but this is the language of outsiders, not of locals. I shifted to Cuyonon as rapidly as possible and, after about four months, employed it exclusively for interviewing. A few younger people, however, genuinely fluent in Tagalog or English, preferred to converse with me in these languages throughout my stay.

My fieldwork covered a broad range of San Jose’s economic and social affairs. Early in my stay, I completed a social anthropological census of the entire community and studied how local residents themselves perceived social inequality. Interviewing separately nine persons from different positions within the community, I asked each to rank, in groups, all community households according to their “social standing.” Analysis of the results of these interviews yielded a threefold status classification (see Appendix A). This classification, the major dimensions of which are introduced in Chapter 2, was a starting point for subsequent fieldwork and informs the analysis throughout the book.

In particular, as Appendixes B and C explain, I studied inten-

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978-0-521-10497-5 - Who Shall Succeed?: Agricultural Development and Social Inequality  
on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xiii

sively for one year the affairs of a stratified sample of thirty-seven households, one-third of the community, drawn from this local status distribution. If I thought a topic might be connected with social inequality, I asked about it: amount and source of income, patterns of expenditure, landownership, quality of housing, indebtedness, cropping patterns, contact with mass media, political participation, previous occupational and geographical mobility, aspirations for children – these were my chief concerns during the first twelve months of my fieldwork. The generalizations made in Chapters 2, 6, and 7 concerning levels of agricultural production, per household wealth, and annual income and expenditures are derived from the results of this inquiry.

Inevitably, however, as I returned repeatedly to my sample households, I turned up new leads. I began to see my initial ideas about the causes and consequences of social inequality in a new and brighter light. For some topics, I realized that I needed greater detail than I was then obtaining from my survey, but to pursue these topics with all thirty-seven households would have been unwieldy and excessively time consuming. At these junctures, I selected smaller, strategic samples of households, but again always representing each status level. Such samples were used to study the returns to labor in agricultural production, time allocation patterns, values and attitudes, and the life histories discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

For other topics, I encountered the opposite problem. My sample proved too small to provide adequate data for generalization about particular conditions or behaviors. On these occasions, I arbitrarily expanded this sample with additional households and then sought them out for the needed information. These expanded samples were used to obtain the data discussed in Chapter 8 concerning the relationship between social status and infant mortality rates and the manner of separation of mature but unmarried offspring from parental households.

I was not able to pursue as systematically all the topics that interested me. But good preparation can help offset lack of time. I spent only half a day, for example, in the community elementary school, but my questions about academic performance and sociometric friendship choices were well rewarded, as Chapter 8 testifies. Again, although I did do my own marketing there, I spent only two days formally studying trade in the Puerto Princesa Public Market. But with fifteen of my former high-school students lending a hand, I was able to interview all produce sellers and a large fraction of the buyers.

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James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Other topics, although important, were impossible to study in greater detail because they involved uncommon events and behaviors. Some social events, for example, were unique – only one good scandal broke out while I was there – and others occurred infrequently. But I eventually attended numerous weddings, funerals, political caucuses, and village meetings, and, unique or not, I saw in each an opportunity to collect some potentially valuable quantitative data. How much did the wedding feast cost? Which kin did and did not attend the funeral? Does social status influence seat selection at village meetings? How many people sold their votes on election eve? Later I took my tentative answers to such questions to my best informants, both for their reactions to my analysis and for their own insights about the events in question.

If these seem ambitious tasks, several congenial circumstances facilitated fieldwork. First, I was able to employ a full-time research assistant, a Cuyonon from the village of my Peace Corps experience. Second, after we settled in San Jose, my wife, herself a Cuyonon, discovered that she had numerous kinsmen there. This discovery, completely unanticipated, meant that we found ourselves living among myriad second and third cousins and distant “uncles,” “aunts,” “nephews,” and “nieces” with whom we soon developed close ties. Many anthropologists are routinely extended kin terms by the people among whom they live and are brought into kinshiplike relationships with them. We were extended kin terms, or more often (being relatively young), we extended them to others, because we were in fact kin.

Our status as relative insiders facilitated inquiry, in a society that is quite open anyway, into many subjects that would be figuratively or literally taboo in many other societies. Inquiries about income and expenditures were not met with blank stares or evasion but with apparently genuine efforts to reconstruct the desired figures or, on occasion, offers to record the pertinent data in notebooks. Again, questions about the covert exchanges of cash and goods so essential to election-time politics were not brushed aside but were met with honest efforts to provide the desired data and to explain how the system works.

I returned to Santa Barbara in 1972 and completed my dissertation in 1974. This book is an extensive and carefully considered revision of that dissertation. It incorporates the principal arguments of the dissertation itself and, critically, the results of an additional year of fieldwork in San Jose (1976–7), supported by a Ford Foundation Southeast Asia Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. During that year I began the present revision in earnest. I followed up new

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978-0-521-10497-5 - Who Shall Succeed?: Agricultural Development and Social Inequality on a Philippine Frontier

James F. Eder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*Preface*

xv

ideas and strengthened old ones, weeding out, in the process, old arguments that no longer seemed satisfactory. I also made a memorable, three-week trip to Cuyo Island, the isolated homeland of San Jose's senior generation of farmers, to gather the material for Chapter 3. I would like to thank the National Institutes of Mental Health and the Ford Foundation for their financial support for this study.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to the people of San Jose, and it is truly a collective one. But I must separately thank Tay Martin and Nay Binay, Manong Pikto and Manang Micing, and Manong Jaime and Manang Maasi. They helped make the three years I lived in San Jose the most rewarding of my life.

Many persons have contributed toward making this book a reality. The members of my doctoral committee, D. E. Brown, Charles Erasmus, and Thomas Harding, not only saw my dissertation through its several drafts but exerted a lasting influence on the direction my anthropological thinking would take. Later, some of my own graduate students provided an invaluable critical audience as I developed the structure and argument of the book itself. In particular, I want to thank Michelle Behr, George Ford, Gerrie Karman, Ed Liebow, and Chris MacCrate. Special thanks are also due John Aguilar, George Appell, Philomena Bell, David Brokensha, Robert Cowell, George Dalton, Virginia DeVries, Carlos Fernandez, James Greenberg, Emilio Moran, Juana Paz, Fred Plog, Walfrido Ponce de Leon, Carolina San Juan, Randy Schultz, Thayer Scudder, Barbara Stark, Lyle Steadman, Ester Timbancaya, and Aram Yengoyan – all of whom, for one reason or another, deserve some of the credit for this book.

Finally, I must separately acknowledge my very personal debts to Ben Pagayona and Tita Bandiola, who assisted me in ways they themselves know best.

J. F. E.