

## THE COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF BRITISH BUSINESSMEN: A REVIEW OF SOME RESEARCH TRENDS\*

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*This paper reviews the existing literature on the collective biographical study of British businessmen. C. Erickson carried out a classic study with regard to the steel and hosiery industries in the period of 1850-1950 as early as 1959. Many other studies have since appeared, but they were largely in line with Erickson's work in terms of issue, unit of measurement and time span. Even the large collecting of data on British businessmen, which became available in the 1980s, have not led to a more comprehensive study testing, confirming or generalizing the Ericson's legacy.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The collective biography, or prosopography, attempts to identify common characteristics of a group of actors. When a group under consideration is small, emphasis is, through the case-study method, put on historical reality, which, though impressive, usually fails to deliver generalized implications because of the selectivity problem. On the other hand, when a group is large, efforts are made to construct an overall picture, which inevitably tends to be impressionistic or abstract though the population is selected and analysed more systematically and scientifically. It has been suggested that cooperation between the two approaches probably leads to fruitful cross-fertilization.<sup>1)</sup>

The present paper focuses on collective biographical studies concerning British businessmen, who were major actors not only in transforming Britain into the first industrial nation in the world from the mid-eighteenth century, but also, allegedly, in making the nation lag behind the later comers, the United States and Germany in particular, from the late nineteenth century.

The following chapter reviews the existing literature by beginning with E. Eri-

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<sup>1</sup> Stone(1971), pp. 71-72.

ckson's work of 1959; largely preferring the generalist approach, the subsequent studies explored large groups of population in order to find a number of characteristics which were mainly in line with those revealed by Erickson. More comprehensive data on British businessmen became available in the style of *Dictionary of Business Biography* and *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography* in the 1980s. The idea was that Erickson's legacy had been unsatisfactorily pervasive and therefore it needed to be confirmed in a broader context or replaced by new findings. However, fresh efforts remain to be seen and interest in the collective biographical study itself appears to be at stake.

The third chapter deals, in depth, with one of the main findings by the existing studies, namely the limited social origins of British businessmen. In particular, it is pointed out that the degree of the narrowness has been subject to the different classifications of social classes adopted by the different researchers. The final chapter concludes the preceding discussions.

## II. ERICKSON AND HER LEGACY

The classic collective biographical study of businessmen in Britain is C. Erickson's *British Industrialists - Steel and Hosiery, 1850-1950* published in 1959. While noting that the businessman had been a less interesting figure to the general public in Britain than in the US, Erickson observed that interest in the businessman revived in Britain in the 1950s as the public and the business world alike came to concern the important role played by management in the modern economy:

"The quality of management is being more generally considered as a factor of production along with the traditional land, labour and capital; as such is to be reckoned with in strategies for increasing productivity. Big firms, in particular, have probably been thinking more seriously about problems of management recruitment since the Second World War than ever before."<sup>2)</sup>

Erickson focused on two aspects: the extent to which business leaders are re-

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<sup>2</sup> Erickson(1959), p. xiv. Other publications in the 1950s include Copeman(1955, 1959), Barritt (1957) and Clements(1958). Separate interest in British businessmen arose also in the 1950s when D. Landes asserted that British businessmen's conservatism, in sharp contrast with their German counterparts' liveliness, probably contributed to the British economic decline from the late nineteenth century. Landes' argument of the British entrepreneurial failure soon triggered off a hot debate (see, for instance, Payne(1990) and Kim(1995)). Though independent in origin and future direction, the two bodies of interest have benefited from each other: some of the major findings of the collective biographical studies, the rigid social mobility in particular, appear to largely support the hypothesis of British businessmen's conservatism. For the nature and importance of the businessman in general, see Kim(1995), pp. 141-144.

cruited from several classes (namely the problem of social mobility or social origin); and the use made of the natural ability of able individuals. In order to evaluate them, Erickson adopted two units of measurement: the father's occupation for social mobility; and education and occupational career for the nurture of the natural ability.

By means of social mobility, Erickson attempted to test an assumption that a broader social base for recruitment of managerial talents could lead to the better use of abilities latent in society. On the other hand, by means of the nurture of the natural ability, Erickson reexamined some commonly held beliefs that business leaders had less formal education than politicians; that the practical man was an ideal type of the businessman; and that the man who was destined to become the head of a business was usually given an all-round training within the business during his early career. To this cause, Erickson analysed industrialists in two industries: 524 steel manufacturers in the UK between 1865 and 1953; and 474 hosiery manufacturers in the Nottingham area between 1840 and 1950.<sup>3)</sup>

In the early 1970s T. R. Gourvish observed that the revival of interest in the businessman in Britain, which was detected by Erickson, had not been very strong:

“While American business historians have conducted a great deal of fruitful research into the organization and management of their industries, in Britain the study of industrial management and, in particular, the study of industrial managers has not progressed very far. Indeed, with the notable exception of Charlotte Erickson's pioneering work on steel and hosiery, there has been a general reluctance to subject business leadership to analysis.”<sup>4)</sup>

By then however, not a few studies of British businessmen became available. Among others, in the early 1960s E. E. Hagen conducted a pioneering, though rudimentary, investigation of a group of what he called innovators, the data about whom were based on T. S. Ashton's *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (1948). Hagen's main concern was to test the Weber thesis on the relationship between religion and business, but he also explored the social origins of the innovators on the basis of the father's income and occupation.<sup>5)</sup>

Collective biographical studies of British businessmen more frequently ap-

<sup>3</sup> Erickson(1959), pp. xv-xix.

<sup>4</sup> Gourvish(1973), p. 289. By comparison, interest in British businessmen relating to the entrepreneurial failure hypothesis had stimulated the pros and cons throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Kim (1995), pp. 136-138).

<sup>5</sup> Hagen(1962), pp. 294-309. For criticism on Hagen's analysis, see Payne(1974), p. 24; Crouzet (1985), pp. 52-53. Other publications in the 1960s include Clark(1966), Guttzman(1963), Hall and Amado-Fischgrund(1969), and Nichols(1969).

peared in the 1970s. In his master's dissertation relating to 104 businessmen in textiles and related industries in South Lancashire in the period 1820-1880, J. H. Fox analysed the social characteristics of the businessmen such as father's occupation, occupational career, education and religion.<sup>6)</sup> Likewise, Gourvish carried out an investigation of some 100 chief executive managers in 15 leading railway companies in the 1850-1922 period in order to signify their social origins, occupational career and social status.<sup>7)</sup> J. N. Bartlett conducted a similar investigation with regard to businessmen in the British carpet industry between 1861 and 1913: 143 businessmen in Kidderminster and Stourport; and 100 businessmen in the other areas of the UK.<sup>8)</sup>

Two other studies concerned wider parts of the British economy. P. Stanworth and A. Giddens attempted to sketch a collective portrait of social characteristics such as education and occupational career with regard to 270 businessmen - 147 in manufacturing sector, 27 in finance and 96 in the others - active in England and Wales between 1860 and 1960.<sup>9)</sup> On the other hand, K. Honeyman concentrated on three industries - cotton spinning, lace and lead mining. Honeyman's study was unique in two senses: first, it was one of the major studies to find comprehensive features of businessmen in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; second, Honeyman adopted only one unit of measurement, namely the businessman's previous occupation. Honeyman's selection of region, period and sample size varied among the three industries. In the cotton spinning industry the sample consists of 230 men in England and Wales in 1787; 46 in Oldham in 1811; and 68 in Bolton in 1811. In the lace industry the sample is 700 Nottingham businessmen in 1829, while in the lead mining industry Honeyman compiled a sample of 370 in Derbyshire during the eighteenth century.<sup>10)</sup>

However, despite a revival of interest in the prosopographical study of British businessmen in the 1960s and 1970s, Erickson's work remained unrivalled. Furthermore, as most studies were interested in individual industries, it had been felt that a more comprehensive study was needed. A subsequent major development was the proposal of the project of Dictionary of Business Biography (DBB) in 1979, in which L. Hannah pointed out that the main rationale for the project was the necessity to extend Erickson's work.<sup>11)</sup> A separate Dictionary of Scottish

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<sup>6)</sup> Fox(1970); part of the thesis appeared as Fox(1974).

<sup>7)</sup> Gourvish(1973).

<sup>8)</sup> Bartlett(1978), Ch. 10 'The Entrepreneurs'.

<sup>9)</sup> Stanworth and Giddens(1974b).

<sup>10)</sup> Honeyman(1977); this thesis was published as Honeyman(1982). Other Publications in the 1970s include Glennerster and Pryke(1973), Heller(1973), Whitley(1973), and Thomas(1978).

<sup>11)</sup> "In... 1977, the SSRC [Social Science Research Council] Research Initiatives Division financed the attendance of a group of British economic historians [including D. C. Coleman, E. J. Hobsbawm, R. Floud, T. R. Gourvish and L. Hannah] at a conference of the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme

Business Biography(DSBB) project was also proposed at the same time.<sup>12)</sup> The projects were prompted partly by Erickson's complaint that the British businessman was not properly regarded in *Who's Who* or *Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>13)</sup>

While the DBB and DSBB projects were under way, other scholars also displayed interest in the biographical study of British businessmen in the 1980s. Above all, F. Crouzet conducted "the first nationally based survey of the social origins and career patterns of British industrialists [between 1750 and 1850]".<sup>14)</sup> Crouzet's sample numbers 316 men in three sectors: 124 men in textiles; 111 men in metals and engineering; and 81 men in the other manufacturing sectors including glass-making, chemicals and brewing.<sup>15)</sup> In a similar way, W. D. Rubinstein analysed 226 British businessmen in the manufacturing sector between 1900 and 1970 in order to delineate an overall feature of their education and social origins.<sup>16)</sup> On the other hand, J. Fidler's sociological analysis of 130 British business elites in the twentieth century examined their attitudes to class, status and power.<sup>17)</sup>

The DBB and DSBB projects had been completed in 1986 and in 1990 respectively. Despite some criticism, the dictionaries were praised as valuable reference sources for the business, social and economic history of Britain.<sup>18)</sup> The editors of the dictionaries themselves confidently claimed that the businessmen co-

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in Paris, which was concerned with the social origins, career patterns and policies of entrepreneurs in the second industrial revolution. There was general agreement on the need to widen the study of Charlotte Erickson... (on which British generalisations tend to depend) and to develop data on a wider sample of business leaders so that comparisons with the Continental European work could more easily be made." (Hannah(1979), p. 6). Hannah expressed a similar opinion four years later: "Charlotte Erickson's inquiry into British industrialists remains the classic account of their social and educational origins and career patterns between 1850 and 1950." (Hannah(1983), p. 1).

<sup>12)</sup> The DBB project had been carried out by the Business History Unit, London School of Economics, since 1980 and its results were published as Jeremy and Shaw(1984-1986). On the other hand, the DSBB project had been conducted by the Department of Economic History, Glasgow University, since 1980 and its first volume was published in 1986 and the second in 1990 (Slaven and Checkland (1986, 1990)). Regarding the necessity of a division of labour of the dictionaries, Hannah, the applicant for the DBB project, said: "The Business History Unit's lack of Scottish expertise and the physical distance of Scottish records (both of businesses and of wills, etc.) suggest that a separate Scottish study would be both sensible and economical." (Hannah(1979), p. 11).

<sup>13)</sup> Erickson(1959), p. xiii.

<sup>14)</sup> Howe(1986), p. 134.

<sup>15)</sup> See Crouzet(1985), Ch. 5 'Building up a Sample'.

<sup>16)</sup> Rubinstein(1986b).

<sup>17)</sup> Fidler(1981). Other publications in the 1980s include Useem and McCormack(1981).

<sup>18)</sup> Campbell(1990), pp. 11-12; Crouzet(1987), pp. 130-131; Davies(1990), p. 9; Gourvish(1991), pp. 199-200; Harvey and Jones(1990), pp. 9, 12-13; Kirby(1991), pp. 68-71; Mathias(1990), pp. 121-123; Matthews(1991), p. 188; Payne(1984), p. 302; Payne(1988), pp. 25, 59; Rubinstein(1988), pp. 250-253; Slaven(1984b), pp. 20-21; Yonekawa(1987), pp. 131-132.

vered were selected comprehensively enough to be largely representative of all British industries and that therefore the data in the dictionaries would provide the hard evidence for generalizations, among others, about the characteristics of British businessmen.<sup>19)</sup>

The dictionaries are collections of short biographies about individual businessmen, each biography being not a simple array of facts as in *Who's Who*, but an interpretative essay on a businessman's life "of the kind not easily subject to quantification".<sup>20)</sup> They were planned to function as reference sources, but the scholars involved in the projects attempted to make good use of the dictionaries in their own ways. When he applied for a research grant for the DBB project in 1979, Hannah devised a series of sets of questions because he believed that the final questions to be asked of the data should determine the initial mode of data collection and analysis. The questions raised by Hannah in relation to the project include the following:<sup>21)</sup>

1) How representative is C. Erickson's pioneering study of businessmen in the steel and hosiery industries of the British economy as a whole?

2) To what extent has the divorce of ownership from control occurred in family firms? Did old firms train their own family members for new skills such as accountancy or engineering, or did they recruit professionals from outside?

3) Can any patterns of the formation of attitudes of the public towards engineers be traced?

4) How have the changes in taxation policy affected the accumulation of wealth in business?

5) Are W. D. Rubinstein's works on the distribution of wealth between sectors backed up by the study of business leaders as a whole?<sup>22)</sup>

6) How do patterns of recruitment of leaders in the public sector differ from those in the private sector?

7) Are the generalizations that were made with regard to the period of the Industrial Revolution about the dominance of Quakers, Jews, foreigners and other minority groups among business leaders confirmed for the period after the Industrial Revolution as well?

8) How has the gentlemen and players syndrome affected British business career patterns?<sup>23)</sup>

9) Is there a Buddenbrooks effect?<sup>24)</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy and Shaw(1984-1986), vol. 1, pp. vii-viii; Slaven and Checkland(1986), vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah(1979), p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>22</sup> Rubinstein's studies of wealth published before 1979 include Rubinstein(1974a, 1974b, 1977a, 1977b); his publications in the 1980s include Rubinstein(1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1986a, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Coleman(1973).

<sup>24</sup> Mann(1956). This novel portrays the vicissitude of the Buddenbrook family, a Hanseatic mer-

10) How representative is the sample of business leaders in the sociological study by P. Stanworth and A. Giddens of the place of business leaders in British elites?<sup>25)</sup>

11) Have owners systematically diversified their share portfolios? Did this have an effect on the financing of overseas and domestic growth, as hypothesized by W. P. Kennedy?<sup>26)</sup>

The editors of DSBB also seem to have recognized similar questions before embarking on the project. In the end-of-grant report to ESRC in 1984, A. Slaven, one of the editors, identified some preliminary features of the businessmen in volume 1 of DSBB with regard to training and education, non-business activities, multiple directorships, the from-clogs-to-clogs thesis and wealth. Slaven summarized future research in relation to DSBB in three directions:<sup>27)</sup>

1) Sectoral studies: Many sectors and industries are substantially unresearched. The construction industry, the clothing trades, and the brick and pottery sectors, for example, remain largely untouched and would provide valuable areas of study.

2) Company studies: The data in DSBB could support detailed work of changes in structure and scale at the company level. Patterns of ownership and control could be a linked area of research.

3) Entrepreneurial research: The major development from DSBB will initially be the further analysis of Scottish businessmen through the preparation of data sheets. The data will support an in-depth analysis of social origins, training, industry-interchanges, patterns of religion, political involvement, and wealth creation and holding. This will require a re-designed project to concentrate on this as its main priority.

As yet however, the questions raised and the possible researches devised in relation to DBB or DSBB have not been fully answered or successfully tackled. Instead, some interim investigations of the businessmen included in the dictionaries have been carried out by their editors; some related projects are under way or planned.

A first interim analysis came at the time of the publication of the first volume of DBB in 1984, when D. J. Jeremy sketched an overall pattern of the characteristics of the 270 businessmen in the volume. He said: "This is but a partial pre-

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chant dynasty, over four generations. From this story sprang the Buddenbrooks Effect, namely "the weakening effect in the third generation of emphasis on outward appearances and premature senility" (Barker and Levy-Leboyer(1982), pp. 10-11).

<sup>25)</sup> Stanworth and Giddens(1974b). Cf. Rubinstein(1986b).

<sup>26)</sup> Kennedy(1976). His later publications on the same theme include Kennedy(1982b, 1987); see also works on portfolio behaviour including Kennedy(1982a), Kennedy and Britton(1983) and Britton (1983).

<sup>27)</sup> Slaven(1984a), pp. 8-9, 11-12.

view of an eventual, much larger and computer-assisted analysis which we hope to undertake."<sup>28)</sup> However, as Jeremy became more interested in religious backgrounds of the businessman,<sup>29)</sup> his hope for a larger analysis remained unrealized until 1989, when C. Shaw only conducted another interim investigation of DBB with regard to 114 businessmen in the distributive trade and 73 in the steel industry.<sup>30)</sup> It was also reported that Shaw, together with Gourvish, was working at the project of 'The genesis of business leaders, 1860-1980 - international comparisons', in which the British data would be based on DBB.<sup>31)</sup> On the other hand, Slaven produced several tentative analyses of DSBB.<sup>32)</sup>

Regarding future projects relating to DBB or DSBB, the editors of the dictionaries reported their plans of a computerized data bank (DBB) or a systematic analysis in a third volume (DSBB). However, a database about DBB, which was promised to be made available on the completion of the project (in 1986), has not been created, nor has the complementary volume to DSBB appeared.<sup>33)</sup> It was, however, reported that a computer-assisted analysis, as a part of a project relating to DBB, was under way as of 1989, although it is not clear whether a data bank itself was being created to eventually give, as proposed, scholars access to the bank, or just computer techniques were being used for a private and temporary purpose.<sup>34)</sup>

Aspects investigated and measuring rods adopted in the existing collective biographical studies of British businessmen are diverse, but they are largely in line with Erickson's in three senses. First, most of the studies focus mainly on Erickson's two issues, the first one in particular: the extent to which business leaders are recruited from several classes; and the use made of the natural ability of able individuals. Second, most adopt Erickson's unit of measurement for social mobility, namely the father's occupation, although some prefer the businessman's own occupation just before he becomes a member of management; some take both of the two kinds of occupations. And third, with exceptions such as Honeyman's and Crouzet's works, most of the other studies concern the late nine-

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<sup>28)</sup> Jeremy(1984), p. 22.

<sup>29)</sup> For instance, Jeremy(1982) (an analysis of a random sample of 300 businessmen in Jeremy and Shaw(1984-1986)); Jeremy(1988b, 1990a, 1990b).

<sup>30)</sup> Shaw(1989), p. 48; see also Shaw(1986) which was based on a random sample of 188 businessmen from the first four volumes of Jeremy and shaw(1984-1986).

<sup>31)</sup> The Business History Unit, "Annual Report, 1988-1989", pp. 13-14. It was reported that this project had been completed in 1991, but no details are available ("Annual Report, 1990-1991", p. 13).

<sup>32)</sup> Slaven(1989a, 1989b, 1990). On the other hand, Slaven and Checkland(1986, 1990), unlike Jeremy and Shaw(1984-1986), include introductory essays to the 19 industries covered, which suggests some findings on the businessmen in each industry; the conclusion section in volume 2 summarizes some findings on all the businessmen in the two volumes.

<sup>33)</sup> Jeremy and Shaw(1984b), vol. 1, pp. vii-viii; Slaven and Checkland(1986), vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>34)</sup> Shaw(1989), p. 48.

teenth and/or twentieth century as Erickson's work does.

### III. THE RIGID SOCIAL MOBILITY

One of the major features revealed by the collective biographical studies is that the social mobility of British businessmen in the period of the Industrial Revolution was not so high as has been suggested and this was also true of the period after that.

As early as 1928, P. Mantoux regarded the early manufacturing class as having been made up of very different elements, saying, "Like a newly discovered gold mine, the factory system attracted men from all over the country. Every man who owned some capital, however small, shopkeepers, carriers, innkeepers, all became cotton spinners..."<sup>35)</sup> Two decades later, Ashton expressed a similar view that men from every social class and from every corner of the country could easily become involved in business as inventors, contrivers or entrepreneurs.<sup>36)</sup> It had been therefore argued that early entrepreneurs were far from belonging to a single ideal type, creed or attitude and that it was difficult to make any valid generalizations about their social origins.<sup>37)</sup>

An initial correction to the traditional view came from Hagen, who found that entrepreneurs in the Industrial Revolution were not typically very poor men but men of moderate wealth.<sup>38)</sup> Honeyman gave a more concrete view that the cotton spinning industry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries clearly provided men of moderate means from classes I and II in her classification, not the small men from classes III and IV, with much better chances for the sizeable wealth already available to be increased.<sup>39)</sup> Honeyman emphasized the vital role of what she called internal capital in the early cotton industry, arguing that hereditary leaders in other branches of the textile industry constituted the majority of the entrepreneurs in the cotton industry.<sup>40)</sup>

Crouzet's study confirms Honeyman's view in the context of a wider part of the economy. Crouzet's conclusion is that neither the upper class nor the lower orders made a large contribution to the recruitment of industrialists; a large majority of industrialists sprang mainly from a middle class:<sup>41)</sup>

"Economic historians have not denied that [during the period of the Industrial

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<sup>35)</sup> Mantoux(1965), pp. 376-377.

<sup>36)</sup> Ashton(1977), p. 13.

<sup>37)</sup> Mathias(1957), p. 32; Mathias(1969), p. 156.

<sup>38)</sup> Hagen(1962), p. 300.

<sup>39)</sup> Honeyman(1982), pp. 94-95, 97. For her classification of social classes, see appendix.

<sup>40)</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>41)</sup> Crouzet(1985), pp. 50-51, 68, 85, 99. For his classification of social classes, see appendix.

Revolution] a number of self-made industrialists rose from poverty to great wealth, but they maintain that such spectacular success was atypical and exceptional, while a large majority of industrialists came from rather well-to-do families, which could supply them with some capital to start in business and which also had useful networks of connections in their communities; they sprang mainly from a 'middle class' of small landowners, substantial farmers, merchants, and merchant manufacturers, and not from the working class."<sup>42)</sup>

A limited degree of social mobility of British businessmen has been also identified with regard to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Erickson found that high proportions of steel manufacturers' fathers (more than 70%) and, to a less degree, of hosiery manufacturers' (more than 50%) were included in her social class I between 1850 and 1950.<sup>43)</sup> Erickson observed some differences between the patterns relating to the recruitment of the two groups of industrialists: 1) the steel industry attracted as its leaders a higher proportion of men from the upper range of the social scale than did the hosiery industry; 2) the hosiery industry underwent fluctuations more markedly in its social recruitment pattern than did the steel industry; 3) after 1918 both industries recruited larger proportions of leaders from among the children of clerical and manual workers; 4) family influence in recruitment of leaders was consistently much stronger in hosiery than in steel; and 5) recruitment of businessmen's sons to management in hosiery did not fall off in the twentieth century so markedly as in steel.<sup>44)</sup>

Likewise, Gourvish found that the chief executive managers in the railway industry came predominantly from upper-middle and upper class, rarely creating 'rags-to-riches' stories; in his view, the bureaucratic business structure of the industry made personal advantages of class and education remain of vital importance.<sup>45)</sup> Jeremy's analysis of 270 businessmen in DBB gave further evidence of a low degree of upward mobility or the increasing recruitment of business leaders from a relatively narrow and privileged educational sector. He argued that this closed recruitment mechanism probably neglected a sizeable proportion of society's reservoir of latent talents.<sup>46)</sup> Shaw also drew a similar conclusion with regard to 114 businessmen in the distributive trade, where, though there existed greater opportunities for men with humble backgrounds, the clear majority of the successful businessmen had comparatively privileged backgrounds.<sup>47)</sup>

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<sup>42)</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 50-51. In his note to this statement, Crouzet says: "This is a simplified, but, I hope, not unfair summary of the views put forward in most textbooks." (*ibid.*, p. 171).

<sup>43)</sup> Erickson(1959), p. 231, table 90; p. 12, table 2; p. 93, table 34. For her classification of social classes, see appendix.

<sup>44)</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>45)</sup> Gourvish(1973), p. 315; see also pp. 293-297.

<sup>46)</sup> Jeremy(1984), pp. 9, 11.

<sup>47)</sup> Shaw(1989), p. 51.

Although it has been generally agreed that the social mobility of British businessmen was not high not only in the period of the Industrial Revolution but also thereafter, a consensus has not yet been achieved about how rigid the social mobility was. The reason is that the measuring rod for social mobility, namely occupation or social status, is defined or classified in various ways.

Erickson adopted the father's occupation as the pivotal factor according to which industrialists were divided into social classes, because she believed that it was "clearly the most important and complete key afforded by the data".<sup>48)</sup> Erickson borrowed J. Barent's four social-status categories with minor changes after considering the following: first, the comparability, with a minimum of rearrangement, with a maximum of other classifications; second, the nature and limitations of the data obtained from the sources; third, the desirability of keeping the classes descriptive of the type of work done, and of allowing for, at least, a rough division into social classes; and fourth, the consistency over long period of classes.<sup>49)</sup>

In the same vein, after recognizing that no occupational classifications were satisfactorily applicable to her study, Honeyman admitted Erickson's classification as the second best one because she believed that a more detailed classification would hinder a long-term comparison.<sup>50)</sup> Concerning the choice of occupation as an indicator of social status, Honeyman also shared Erickson's view on the availability of data:

"Though social status involves many factors, occupation is a unit of measurement that can be determined by systematic means because occupation is a more or less objective and relatively easily obtainable datum... with any degree of consistency in the period under consideration."<sup>51)</sup>

By comparison, some scholars attempted to devise their own particular classifications of occupations as they felt that Erickson's classification was too broad to be the satisfactory rationale for the assessment of social mobility. Thus, Gourvish preferred a five-class classification, while Shaw grouped occupations into seven categories. On the other hand, Crouzet devised what he called a natural and empirical classification consisting of 23 occupation groups. He then regrouped the 23 groups first into seven large units from an economic viewpoint and then

<sup>48)</sup> Erickson(1959), p. 10.

<sup>49)</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 11, 230-232; Berent(1954), p. 322. Berent devised a fourfold version of Moser and Hall's sevenfold classification, which was prepared in order to distinguish occupations by social prestige (Moser and Hall(1954), pp. 30-31). Erickson in turn made some minor changes in the entries of Berent's classification (see appendix).

<sup>50)</sup> Honeyman(1982), p. 15; see also Honeyman(1977); pp. 469-474. A similar classification is also found in Perkin(1986), pp. 20-21, table 1 (see appendix).

<sup>51)</sup> Honeyman(1982), p. 19, note 14.

into four units from a social viewpoint, which turns out similar to Erickson's or Honeyman's classification (see appendix).

Whichever classification is devised, some difficulties seem to inevitably occur.<sup>52)</sup> Above all, occupational descriptions or labels, such as gentleman, yeoman, farmer and engineer, can be vague or ambiguous. Second especially in relation to the early period of industrialization, men with means were frequently involved in various undertakings, and this could make it difficult to classify them into definite categories. Third, in case occupations are based on self-description of entrepreneurs, the vagueness of some conventional descriptions could be a problem. And fourth, in addition to these operational difficulties, a subjective bias can affect. For instance, Honeyman preferred a classification weighted towards the lower end of occupations in order to test a specific hypothesis, namely "the importance of the role of small or modest men".<sup>53)</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Aspects of British businessmen - such as social origins, career patterns, education, religion and social status - have been, though to various degrees, revealed by the existing collective biographical studies. One of the major findings is that businessmen came mainly from the wealthy and privileged segment of the society not only in the period of the Industrial Revolution but also in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though the different classifications of occupations resulted in different degrees of the rigid mobility.

However, many other important aspects of British businessmen, such as those detected by Hannah in relation to the DBB project, remain in the future. In particular, more comprehensive studies utilizing the data collected by the DBB and DSBB projects should be followed in order to test, confirm or generalize the Erickson's observations. Also, analyses of groups with smaller population, preferably with regard to individual companies, which seem to be more easily conducted, must probably constitute, as Stone pointed out, another important dimension in the collective study of British businessmen in that they could add concrete reality to the general trends of social characteristics hitherto suggested.<sup>54)</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Honeyman(1982), pp. 15-16; Crouzet(1985), pp. 62-63.

<sup>53</sup> Honeyman(1982), p. 17. Honeyman justifies herself, saying, "This, however, has methodological significance, and can be justified on the grounds that it provides a clear, though perhaps exaggerated, indication of the role of men of small means."

<sup>54</sup> For instance, see Kim(1994) which deals with 22 members of the Coats family over four generations involved in the management of J. & P. Coats, the cotton thread manufacturers.

## APPENDIX

**[Table 1]** Classifications of social classes adopted by major researchers

social class	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Moser and Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Berent	0	0	0	0			
Erickson	0	0	0	0			
Gourvish	0	0	0	0	0		
Honeyman	0	0	0	0			
Crouzet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0			
Perkin	0	0	0				
Shaw	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Table 2.

**[Table 2]** Details of social classes adopted by major researchersMoser and Hall(1954, p. 31)

- I. professional and high administrative
- II. managerial and executive
- III. inspectional, supervisory and other non-manual (higher grade)
- IV. inspectional, supervisory and other non-manual (lower grade)
- V. skilled manual and routine grades of non-manual
- VI. semi-skilled manual
- VII. unskilled manual

Berent(1954, p. 322)

- I. higher grades of non-manual workers (Moser and Hall's I & II)
- II. lower grades of non-manual workers (III & IV)
- III. skilled manual workers (V)
- IV. semi- and unskilled manual workers (VI & VII)

Erickson(1959, p. 11)

- I. the aristocracy and gentry, larger farmers and landowners, all businessmen except retail traders, professional people
- II. independent skilled craftsmen, retail traders, clerical workers of all types
- III. dependent skilled craftsmen
- IV. semi- or unskilled workers, and small landholder

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Gourvish(1973, p. 294)

- I. landed gentry, major professions
  - II. major businessmen, senior management
  - III. small businessmen, middle management
  - IV. retail traders, higher supervisors
  - V. skilled manual workers
- 

Honeyman(1982, p. 15)

- I.
    - i) member of aristocracy and gentry
    - ii) large landowner or large farmer
    - iii) large businessman (merchant - London, textile, silk, coal, cloth, liquor, etc. ; manufacturer - silk, lead/iron, paper, brewing, etc. ; and miller)
    - iv) professional people (land agent, architect, banker, Excise Officer, lawyer, etc.)
  - II.
    - i) independent skilled craftsman
    - ii) manufacturer (calico, fustian, hosiery, muslin, shalloon, wool, check, hot, counterpane, pottery, cotton, quilting, etc.)
    - iii) bleacher, dyer, fuller, calico printer, etc.
    - iv) retail trader (textile mercer and draper, linen draper, ironmonger, chapman, flour wholesaler, innkeeper, etc.)
    - v) yeoman including grazier
  - III.
    - i) dependent skilled craftsman (framework knitter, joiner, machine maker/mechanic, millwright, weaver, shoemaker, currier, etc.)
    - ii) small landowner including husbandman
  - IV.
    - i) semi- or unskilled worker (warehouseman/employee, handloom weaver, etc.)
    - ii) agricultural labourer
- 

Crouzet(1985, pp. 146, 148)

## 〈 Economic Viewpoint 〉

- I. upper class - i) landowner (peer, gentry); ii) officer in the Army or Navy
- II. non-business (or professional) middle class - doctor, lawyer, clergyman of Established Church, surveyor, civil engineer, land agent, and architect
- III. merchants and traders (including banker & capitalist, draper or other larger retailer, and (1) shopkeeper or other small businessman)

- IV. manufacturers and industrialists (including (2) manager, clerk, foreman or other non-manual employee, and independent craftsman)
- V. the land and mining - i) yeoman (farmer & manufacturer, or tenant farmer) or other cultivator; ii) coalmaster, quarrymaster, mine-adventurer
- VI. working class - skilled or unskilled workman, poor, servant
- VII. various (including artist, employee of government, non-Conformist minister, teacher)

< Social Viewpoint >

- I. upper class (I of economic viewpoint)
- II. middle class (II; III except (1); and IV except (2))
- III. lower middle class (V; (1) of III; (2) of IV; and VII)
- IV. working class (VI)

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Perkin(1986, pp. 20-21)

- I. aristocracy - sovereign, peer, bishop, baronet, knight, esquire, gentleman, fundholder, etc.
- II. middle ranks -
  - i) agriculture (freeholder, farmer)
  - ii) industry and commerce (merchant, manufacturer, warehouseman, ship-builder, shipowner, surveyor, engineer, tailor, shopkeeper, shopman, inn-keeper, clerk)
  - iii) profession (civil, naval, army & half-pay officer, lawyer, clergyman, Dissenting clergyman, artist, scientist, educationalist, the theatrical, lunatic keeper)
- III. lower orders - artisan, hawker, peddler, man in mine or canal, seaman (common, naval), soldier, labourer, lunatic debtor, pensioner, pauper, cottager, vagrant

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Shaw(1989, p. 50)

- I. industrialist (partner, owner, director, senior manager)
  - II. landowner, farmer
  - III. professional (doctor, lawyer, clergyman, teacher, consultant engineer)
  - IV. banker, merchant, retailer (owner or senior manager of a department store or retail chain), other non-manufacturing businessman (retailer, ship master)
  - V. clerk, foreman
  - VI. independent craftsman, small retailer
  - VII. craftsman employed by others, labourer
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