

The Influence of Elite Backgrounds on Pritzker Prize Recognition:

A Case Study of Asian Architects (1979–2025)

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Abstract- The architectural profession is often evaluated and celebrated through prestigious awards that recognize exceptional talent, innovation, and impact. Among these, the Pritzker Prize (PP) is widely regarded as the highest honor in the field. This study hypothesized that architects from the broader Asian region (BAR) who received the PP between 1979 and 2025 likely came from elite social backgrounds. A qualitative research methodology was used, with case studies serving as the central approach. Primary data was obtained from the official Pritzker Prize website, identifying 14 laureates from the BAR across 13 award cycles. To assess social background, the study drew on elitism theories and used two main criteria: Traditional Family Background (TFB) and Occupations of Parents (OOP). These were used to determine each architect's Social Position (SP), categorized into five classes: Governing Elite (GE), Political Class (PC), Upper Middle Class (UMC), Middle Class (MC), and Working Class (WC). Architects classified in the GE or PC groups were considered to have elite positions (EP). Additional insight was gathered from 27 autobiographies to verify and supplement the TFB and OOP data. Conducted in April 2025, the analysis found that only one architect came from a GE background and one from a PC background. Eight were from MC origins (including four from the UMC), and the remainder had WC backgrounds. One case was inconclusive. With only two of the 14 laureates identified as coming from elite backgrounds, the study does not support the initial hypothesis. Therefore, the findings suggest that the Pritzker Prize does not inherently reinforce elitism in architecture.

Keywords—Pritzker Prize, Asian Architects, Architectural Profession, Starchitects, Elite

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between elitism and architecture has long been recognized. Harwood, May, and Sherman (2011) document the historical connection between architects and elite patrons who commissioned their work, noting that access to architectural education and practice was historically restricted to privileged groups. This exclusivity mirrored broader societal structures, where artistic and intellectual professions were closely tied to wealth and status, allowing elites to shape cultural and physical landscapes through architecture (Kostof, 1977). Even as architectural education evolved, it remained primarily accessible to affluent groups until the modern era (Saint, 1983).

Slessor (2014) highlights that elitism persists in contemporary architecture, much like in other artistic disciplines. Ellin (1997) defines elitism in architecture as the profession's tendency to position architects as the ultimate arbiters of

quality in the built environment. This elitist framework has contributed to the rise of celebrated 'starchitects', a term used to describe highly influential and globally recognized architects. Parman (2018) estimates that starchitects comprise only about 0.1% of the profession, yet their work often garners both acclaim and criticism for reinforcing elitist ideals. Slessor (2014) further argues that the design choices made by starchitects, often marked by grandeur, innovation, and substantial budgets, tend to reinforce elitism within the field of architecture. Additionally, architectural practice and design frequently cater to elite social classes, shaping built environments that reflect the values and aesthetic preferences of privileged groups (rethinkingthefuture, n.d.). Scholars such as Barr and Skrbis (2008) and Tan (2021) explore the influence of elitism on architectural practices and nation-building projects in Singapore and Southeast Asia, offering insights into the relationship between socio-economic privilege and architectural influence in the broader Asian region (BAR).

Prestigious architectural awards play a significant role in sustaining the elite status and prominence of starchitects. Smith (2015) and Cheng (2017) examine how such accolades influence the careers and trajectories of architects on a global scale. The most prestigious among these is the PP, often referred to as the 'Nobel Prize of Architecture' (Britannica, 2024). Established in 1979, the PP aims to elevate public awareness of architecture, while recognizing the talent, vision, and commitment of outstanding architects worldwide (Pritzkerprize, 2024). Given this perspective, it is notable that many past PP laureates, such as Philip Johnson, Renzo Piano, and Louis Barragán, hail from elite socio-economic backgrounds. Their privileged status often granted them access to education, resources, and professional networks that have historically facilitated success in the architectural field (Saint, 1983). The recipients of this pioneering architectural award have been previously analyzed based on dominant civilizations (Wijetunge et al. 2025) and world system theory (WST) (Wijetunge et al. 2025). Despite these discussions, the role of elitism as a social position and its direct implications for architectural validation remain largely unexplored.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines Pritzker Prize-winning architects from the Asian region to assess their elite status. To define the geographical scope, the study adopts Yapp's (2014) classification, which includes the Middle East

as part of the traditional Asian landmass. This encompasses countries located at the intersection of Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean, as noted by Smith (2009). For the purpose of this research, this combined area is referred to as the broader Asian region (BAR).

The aim of this study is to investigate whether prestigious architectural awards, particularly the Pritzker Prize (PP), are predominantly awarded to architects from elite socio-economic backgrounds. To address this question, the research is guided by three primary objectives: first, to identify PP-winning architects from the Broader Asian Region (BAR) from the award's inception in 1979 through 2025; second, to apply elitism theory to determine the social position (SP) of each architect's family background, categorizing them into five groups: Governing Elite (GE), Political Class (PC), Upper Middle Class (UMC), Middle Class (MC), and Working Class (WC); and third, to evaluate whether these architects qualify as elite, specifically by belonging to the GE or PC categories. This study contributes to the broader discourse on elitism in architecture by critically analyzing the socio-economic origins of celebrated architects from Asia and assessing the role elite status may play in achieving professional recognition through prestigious awards.

THEORITICAL FRAME WORK

A. Social Stratification Framework

Societies are typically organized into a hierarchy of social layers or strata. As Silva (1999) explains, even in modern societies that are founded on principles of equality, social stratification tends to emerge over time. Silva outlines two key perspectives on this process: the objective (tangible) and the subjective (intangible). These perspectives influence how societies assign individuals to higher or lower positions within the social hierarchy. Although objective and subjective factors often align in shaping social structure, this alignment is not always consistent. To examine the causes and consequences of social inequality, a range of theories on social stratification has been developed. Among the most influential are the works of Marx and Engels (2019), Weber (2013), and Pareto (1963). While Marx, Engels, and Weber focus largely on the mechanisms of stratification, Pareto's contributions are widely recognized as foundational to the theory of elitism.

B. Theories on Elitism

Over time, various theories have been developed to define elites in ways that are relevant to the 20th and 21st centuries. While historical ideas about physical and moral inequalities have influenced these theories, many are primarily grounded in the concept of economic class. Although a number of elitism theories reflect a strong class-based orientation, others offer a more democratic perspective. In a global context where democratic systems have become widely established, particularly since the 20th century, such democratic approaches are often viewed as more acceptable than undemocratic models, such as the Ruling Class, Power Elite, or Political Elite theories. On the other hand, theories that include intellectuals, managers, and bureaucrats often face criticism due to their dependence on historical assumptions and contested interpretations. These shortcomings are addressed effectively in the combined theories of Pareto

(1963) and Mosca (1939), especially through their conceptualizations of the Political Class (PC) and Governing Elite (GE), as discussed by Bottomore (1993). Notions of the Political Class (PC) and Governing Elite (GE)

The theories of Pareto and Mosca, as synthesized by Bottomore (1993), offer valuable frameworks for understanding social stratification in the 20th and 21st centuries. Although their approaches differ—Pareto focuses on psychological "residues," while Mosca incorporates both psychological and sociological dimensions—both theorists emphasize the central role of political power. Their classifications of the Political Class (PC), Governing Elite (GE), and Middle Class (MC) remain influential in contemporary discussions of elitism and governance (Bottomore, 1993; Wijetunge, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2011a, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b).

By integrating the perspectives of Pareto and Mosca, it can be argued that elites emerge in society either as members of a distinct political class or as functional groups. Bottomore (1993) refers to "functional elites" in modern industrial societies, including scientists, technologists, and managers, who contribute significantly to cultural and economic advancement. However, while these groups wield influence in their respective domains, they often lack direct access to political power. As Bottomore notes, such groups typically do not meet the classical definition of elites, as they function within the broader division of labor and differ widely in terms of their skills, roles, and impact.

Applying Mosca's concept of the Political Class (PC), Bottomore (1993) defines it as those who hold political power, exert influence, and participate in leadership struggles. This class includes both individuals in positions of authority and those who indirectly shape political decisions due to their proximity to power. The composition of the PC evolves over time, incorporating individuals from lower strata, particularly during revolutionary shifts when "counter-elites" challenge and sometimes replace the established elite. Mosca refers to this dynamic process as the "circulation of elites." Within the PC, a smaller subset known as the Governing Elite (GE) consists of those who exercise direct political power, including high-ranking government officials, military leaders, and influential economic figures.

The boundaries of the Political Class (PC) are fluid and may include a wide range of actors, such as political figures who are no longer in office, trade union leaders, business groups, and politically active intellectuals. Some aristocratic families also retain a place within the PC due to their lingering social and political influence (Wijetunge, 2012). Bottomore (1993) observes that individuals or groups lacking political alignment may be excluded from the Governing Elite (GE), even if they possess significant economic or cultural capital. As a result, the PC encompasses diverse factions that may interact through cooperation, competition, or conflict. Although the composition of the GE changes over time, Bottomore (1993) argues that the internal power structure of the elite tends to remain relatively stable. However, the need to preserve cohesion within elite groups often stands in tension with democratic ideals, since elite formations inherently establish boundaries that limit the upward mobility of lower social strata (Wijetunge, 2013a, 2013b, 2015).

According to Mosca (1939), elites maintain a connection with the broader population through a larger “sub-elite” group known as the Middle Class (MC), a category that holds particular relevance in modern societies. The MC serves as a recruitment pool for both the Political Class (PC) and the Governing Elite (GE), providing professionals and administrators who support governance functions (Wijetunge, 2011a, 2012). Within the MC, Bottomore (1993) distinguishes between “higher” strata, which includes professionals and managers, and “lower” strata, which consists of clerical or routine administrative workers. The upper segment of the MC is further identified as the Upper Middle Class (UMC) (Wijetunge, 2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b). The MC is also often regarded as the “intelligentsia,” contributing to societal stability through its moral values, intellectual output, and civic engagement (Mosca, 1939). Bottomore (1993) adds that the MC promotes economic development through its modern lifestyle and specialized skills, noting that it expanded significantly in both size and occupational diversity during the late 20th century.

Positioned below the MC, the Working Class (WC) is defined by Bottomore (1993) as consisting primarily of manual laborers employed in industries such as manufacturing and construction. Members of the WC typically have lower levels of education and economic security and are more vulnerable to economic fluctuations. The key distinction between the WC and the MC lies in the nature of their labor, with manual work serving as the defining feature of the WC. Although the WC constitutes the majority in many societies, it generally lacks significant political power, with its influence largely limited to participation in democratic processes or involvement in social movements (Bottomore, 1993).

II. ESTABLISHING CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING ELITISM

A. Defining Social Position (SP)

The hierarchical structure consisting of the Governing Elite (GE), Political Class (PC), Upper Middle Class (UMC), Middle Class (MC), and Working Class (WC), arranged in descending order of political influence, forms the basis of social stratification in the theory of the governing elite and political class. Bottomore (1993) conceptualizes these categories as Social Positions (SP), arguing that an individual's economic standing and socio-cultural heritage, referred to as Traditional Family Background (TFB), can significantly influence their SP by providing early advantages or disadvantages.

Similarly, Bourdieu (1984, 2011) and Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) assert that TFB is a strong determinant of SP, as it often reflects factors such as wealth, education, social networks, and parental occupation. Given this, assessing the TFBs of architects in case studies offers a meaningful framework for determining their SP within the hierarchical structure proposed by the governing elite and political class theory.

Additionally, Bourdieu (1984, 2011) and Giddens (1984) propose that occupation functions as a key indicator of SP, as it directly influences social status, income, and access to political power. They argue that high-status professions not

only offer financial stability but also provide individuals with access to prestigious social networks, thereby supporting upward social mobility. Weber (1946) further emphasizes the prestige associated with certain occupations, reinforcing the idea that occupational status plays a crucial role in shaping social hierarchy. Consequently, analyzing the Occupations of Parents (OOP) of architects in case studies serves as a complementary criterion for assessing SP within the framework of GE and PC theory.

Based on these perspectives, the study identifies two key criteria for determining SP:

a. Traditional Family Background (TFB)

b. Occupations of Parents (OOP)

While TFB provides insight into inherited socio-economic advantages, it is necessary to justify the inclusion of OOP as a secondary criterion. Architects in the case studies were born into their respective TFBs, yet historical records for many of these starchitects do not extend beyond their parents' generation. When documentation on TFB is limited, OOP serves as a logical and immediate alternative for determining SP, as parental occupation often reflects the social standing and resources available to shape an individual's early opportunities.

Therefore, where TFB data is unavailable, OOP serves as an effective substitute. The presence of sufficient information on at least one of these two criteria allows for a reliable classification of the SP into which each starchitect was born.

B. Idea of Elite Position

According to the theory of the political class and governing elite, if a case study architect's social position (SP) is classified as either Governing Elite (GE) or Political Class (PC), it can be argued that they originate from an elite traditional family background (TFB). In contrast, if their SP falls within the Upper Middle Class (UMC), Middle Class (MC), or Working Class (WC), their TFB is considered below the elite level, placing them in the non-elite category.

It is important to recognize that the primary, secondary, and tertiary education received by these architects is often closely linked to their TFB, as their parents' social and professional status likely influenced their access to higher education. Attending prestigious institutions, whether in their home countries or abroad, typically requires substantial financial resources, which were likely provided by their families. Furthermore, after completing their tertiary education, many architects secured competitive apprenticeships with well-known firms in Asia and the West. These early professional experiences enabled them to obtain high-profile commissions after establishing their own practices, either locally or internationally, which contributed to their eventual rise as starchitects.

While factors such as educational background, apprenticeship opportunities, and early career commissions are significant in shaping an architect's professional development, this study intentionally excludes them from the criteria used to assess elite status. Instead, the analysis focuses exclusively on traditional family background (TFB) and occupations of parents (OOP) as the primary indicators of social position.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Harwood, May, and Sherman (2015) explore the historical relationship between architects and elite patrons, tracing the development of the modern architectural profession from the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. They emphasize how elite patronage significantly contributed to the profession's growth in the 19th and 20th centuries, drawing on examples from various regions to support their claims. Their research asserts that architects have traditionally emerged from privileged backgrounds, with access to architectural education and professional practice largely restricted to individuals from elite social classes. Kostof (1977) further explains that this exclusivity reflected broader societal structures, in which artistic and intellectual professions remained closely tied to wealth and status, enabling elites to shape both the cultural and physical landscapes through architecture. Similarly, Saint (1983) notes that although architectural education gradually expanded over time, admission to these institutions remained largely limited to affluent groups until recent decades.

The ongoing presence of elitism in architecture and its reinforcement within the profession are examined by Slessor (2014) and Ellin (1997), both of whom offer critical perspectives on the issue. Ellin (1997) and Parman (2018), through various examples, introduce the concept of "starchitects" and argue that these high-profile figures contribute to maintaining architecture's elite image on a global scale. However, within the Asian context, scholarly exploration of elitism in architectural practice remains limited. While Wijetunge (2024a, 2024b) investigates this issue in more detail, broader academic discourse on how architecture reflects elite values is sparse. Similarly, *Rethinking the Future* (n.d.) highlights a general lack of literature on the subject. Although Barr and Skrbiš (2008) and Tan (2021) briefly examine the influence of elitism on architecture and nation-building in Singapore and Southeast Asia, their studies point to the wider impact of socio-economic privilege in shaping architectural authority across the region.

Additionally, Smith (2015) and Cheng (2017) examine the role of prestigious architectural awards in shaping the careers and trajectories of architects, drawing on global case studies. Their findings align with those of Gayantha (2023) and Britannica.com (2024), both of which identify the Pritzker Prize (PP) as the most prestigious award in architecture. Britannica.com offers a detailed rationale for this designation, while the official Pritzker Prize website (pritzkerprize.com) outlines the award's founding mission, emphasizing its commitment to promoting architectural excellence and cultivating globally recognized starchitects. Recipients of this prominent architectural honor have previously been analyzed through dominant civilizational frameworks (Wijetunge et al., 2025) and World-Systems Theory (WST) (Wijetunge et al., 2025).

Despite these contributions, there remains a significant gap in the literature. Few studies have specifically analyzed Asian starchitects who have received prestigious awards, and the relationship between elitism and architectural recognition remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is a central objective of the present study.

The broader Asian region considered in this research is based on the geographical classifications proposed by Yapp (1996) and Smith (2009). According to these sources, countries such as Japan and China, as well as the Middle Eastern region, which are home to the architects examined in this study, are recognized as key components of the broader Asian region.

Theories of social stratification proposed by Marx and Engels (2019), Weber (2013), and Pareto (1963) provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Silva (2005) synthesizes these perspectives into a two-fold framework for assessing elitism. Bottomore (1993), in his analysis of elitism theories based on the work of Pareto (1968) and Mosca (1939), argues that the theory of the governing elite and political class—which centers on access to political power—is the most effective for understanding elite structures. His preference for this theory stems from its compatibility with democratic principles and its historical relevance. The extensive research conducted by Wijetunge (2007, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b) on elite architecture further supports the application of this theory to analyze the social and elite positions of the architects featured in this study.

To establish a framework for evaluating the social positions of the case study architects, the study draws on insights from Bottomore (1993), Bourdieu (1984, 2011), Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992), Giddens (1984), and Weber (1946). Bottomore, Bourdieu, Erikson, and Goldthorpe argue that traditional family background is a primary determinant of social position, which supports its use as the first criterion in this research. At the same time, Bourdieu, Giddens, and Weber emphasize the significance of occupational status in shaping social position, justifying the use of parental occupation as a secondary criterion. These theorists remain among the most widely cited in the field of social stratification studies.

The decision to use traditional family background and occupations of parents as primary indicators of social position is further supported by multiple academic sources. Fei (1992), Elman (2000), and Bai (2002) examine the socio-political structures of 19th- and 20th-century East Asia, emphasizing the importance of family background in shaping access to professional opportunities. Tam (2014) explores traditional occupational roles assigned to women in Asia, while Pipes (2017) notes that upper-class Asian women were often encouraged to pursue the arts as a leisure activity rather than a career, reinforcing the influence of family on career trajectories. Robbins (2019) and Miller (2013) show that high-level managerial roles may exist without conferring direct political authority, suggesting that economic success does not necessarily translate into political power. Similarly, Hughes (2002) argues that while business ownership may elevate social status, it does so only under specific socio-political conditions.

Incorporating these perspectives, this study positions traditional family background and occupations of parents as central variables for determining the social positions of the selected starchitects. This framework offers a structured approach to evaluating the extent to which elite backgrounds

may influence the likelihood of receiving prestigious architectural awards such as the Pritzker Prize.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted from April 1–10, 2025, at the home institution in Oklahoma, USA. A qualitative methodology was employed, utilizing a mono-method approach with case studies as the primary research strategy. A total of 14 architects, recognized as starchitects and originating from the broader Asian region (BAR), who received the PP between its inception in 1979 and the present (spanning 13 award cycles), were selected as case studies. The most relevant theory of elitism, the governing elite and political class theory, was identified through a review of existing literature on elitism. This theory emphasizes the role of political influence in establishing a social hierarchy, which is structured in descending order as follows: governing elite (GE), political class (PC), upper middle class (UMC), middle class (MC), and working class (WC). Additional theoretical frameworks were consulted to develop two key criteria: traditional family background (TFB) and occupations of parents (OOP), which were then applied to the case studies to assess social position.

As a desk-based study, data collection was conducted using existing literature. The official Pritzker Prize website (pritzkerprize.com), a credible and authoritative source, served as the primary reference for identifying the 12 award cycles and 13 starchitects from the Broader Asian Region (BAR) who received the PP between 1979 and 2024. This source also provided essential information related to each architect's traditional family background (TFB) and occupations of parents (OOP). To address potential gaps in the primary source, at least two additional autobiographical publications were consulted for each case study, resulting in a total of 26 sources. This approach also enabled data triangulation to strengthen the reliability of findings. Furthermore, ten theoretical publications were reviewed to support and justify the social position (SP) classifications assigned to the architects, where necessary.

The analysis was carried out using tables. Each case study's social position (SP) was first assessed based on the established hierarchy defined by the applied theory: governing elite (GE), political class (PC), upper middle class (UMC), middle class (MC), and working class (WC), in descending order. When information on traditional family background (TFB) was unavailable, the occupation of parents (OOP) was used as an alternative criterion for classification. After determining the SP, a secondary evaluation was conducted to establish whether each architect came from an elite or non-elite background. Architects categorized under GE or PC were classified as elite, while all others were considered non-elite. These analyses formed the basis for the study's conclusions.

V. CASE STUDIES

Out of the 49 Pritzker Prize laureates, fourteen architects from the Broader Asian Region (BAR) who received the award between 1979 and 2025, across 13 award cycles, serve as the case studies for this research. Their selection follows the

chronological order of the years in which they received the prize. Leoh Ming Pei (I. M. Pei)

1. Kenzō Tange
2. Fumihiko Maki
3. Tadao Ando
4. Zaha Hadid
5. Ryue Nishizawa and Kazuyo Sejima (joint winners)
6. Wang Shu
7. Toyo Ito
8. Shigeru Ban
9. B. V. Doshi
10. Arata Isozaki
11. Riken Yamamoto
12. Lui Jiakun

Tables 1–14 present the 14 case studies across 13 award cycles. The only joint winners, Ryue Nishizawa and Kazuyo Sejima, are examined separately in Table 6 and Table 7, as they are treated as distinct case studies.

KEY 01

Social Position (SP) Assessment	Abbreviation & Corresponding Color
Governing Elite	GE
Political Class	PC
Middle Class	MC
Upper Middle Class	UMC
Working Class	WC
Inconclusive	IC

KEY 02

Elite Assessment	Corresponding Color
Elite	
None-elite	
Inconclusive	

The above keys (Key 01 and 02) apply to Tables 1-14


Table 01	Year of PP: 1983	
Case Study No: 01	Name: Leoh Ming Pei (I. M. Pei)	
Cycle No: 05	Year of Birth: 1917	
	Birthplace: Guangzhou, China Nationality: Chinese American	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Pei's family ancestry traces back to the Ming dynasty. Originally from Anhui, China, the family made its wealth in medicinal herbs and later joined the ranks of the scholar-gentry (Stockman, 2013). The transition from trade to scholar-gentry occurred over several centuries, with the family's rise to prominence is particularly noted during the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). By the late 19 th to early 20 th centuries, the Pei family had established themselves in the scholar-gentry class (Pei, 2000). Hence, the family lived in the upper echelons of society due to their ancestors' success (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Stockman, 2013).		
Justification: In 19 th and early 20 th century China, the scholarly-gentry class was considered elite due to their significant social, political and cultural influence (Fei, 1992). They wielded significant political power by holding important administrative positions. They influenced local governance and policymaking throughout the imperial period, particularly during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties (Elman, 2000). On the other hand, mostly elite families carry recorded family histories known as 'zupu' in China (Bai, 2002). Since the Peis have such records, it places them in the elite class.		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: PC		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Tsuyee Pei, was a successful banker at the Bank of China, and subsequently managed its head office in Shanghai (Stockman, 2013)		
Mother: Ying Pei, was a housewife (Pei, 2000).		
Justification: In 19 th and early 20 th century modern China, to become a banker managing a prestigious institution such as the Bank of China, one would typically have needed to come from an elite background with substantial political influence (Bai, 2002). In the early 20 th century, it was customary for wives in many Asian cultures to take on the role of homemakers, while men were seen as providers. This expectation was prevalent across various Asian societies, including China, Japan, and Korea, where women's responsibilities largely centered on domestic duties and child-rearing (Zhu, 2017).		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		PC
Social Position Assessment		PC
Elite Assessment		Elite

Table 02	Year of PP: 1987	
Cases Study No: 02	Name: Kenzō Tange	
Cycle No: 09	Year of Birth: 1913	
	Birth Place: Osaka, Japan Nationality: Japanese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Tange family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Schittich, 2007).		
Justification: In 19 th and early 20 th century China, the scholarly-gentry class was considered elite due to their significant social, political and cultural influence (Fei, 1992). They wielded significant political power by holding important administrative positions. They influenced local governance and policy-making throughout the imperial period, particularly during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties (Elman, 2000). On the other hand, mostly elite families carry recorded family histories known as 'zupu' in China (Bai, 2002). Since the Peis have such records, it places them in the elite class.		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background:-		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Tange Tetsuro, had some involvement in China during his career. As a carpenter, Tange Tetsuro worked on various projects, including those in China (Schittich, 2007; Lin, 2010)		
Mother: Kikue Tange, was a housewife (Schittich, 2007; Lin, 2010).		

Justification: The father working as a carpenter tells us that he was engaged in a manual labor profession. In relation to the mother, in the early 20 th century, it was customary for wives in many Asian cultures to take on the role of homemakers, while men were seen as providers. This expectation was prevalent across various Asian societies, where women's responsibilities largely centered on domestic duties and child-rearing (Zhu, 2017). Hence, the father's profession of manual labor along with the mother's role as a homemaker places the family within the WC. After all, Bottomore (1993) confirms that the traditional WC is largely about engaging in manual labor occupations.	
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents	WC
Social Position Assessment	WC
Elite Assessment	Non-Elite


Table 03	Year of PP: 1993	
Case Study No: 03	Name: Fumihiko Maki	
Cycle No: 16	Year of Birth: 1928	
	Birth Place: Tokyo, Japan Nationality: Japanese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Information on Yamamoto's family background is limited in public records.		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: -		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Name or profession is not publicly available.		
Mother: Name or profession is not publicly available.		
Justification: Without sufficient evidence, the class background remains inconclusive.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		-
Social Position Assessment		Inconclusive
Elite Assessment		Inconclusive


Table 04	Year of PP: 1995	
Case Study No: 04	Name: Tadao Ando	
Cycle No: 18	Year of Birth: 1941	
	Birth Place: Osaka, Japan Nationality: Japanese	
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Ando family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024, Pare, 2000).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: -		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Ando Yoshio was a self-employed carpenter (Yashiro, 2001).		
Mother: Ando Katsu, Worked as a seamstress. Her role in the family involved managing household responsibilities and contributing to the family's modest income through her work in sewing and tailoring (Pare, 2000)		
Justification: Both the father and mother engaging in manual labor professions tell us that the family had modest WC backgrounds. After all, Bottomore (1993) confirms that the traditional WC is largely about engaging in manual labor occupations.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		WC
Social Position Assessment		WC
Elite Assessment		Non-elite



Table 05	Year of PP: 2004	
Case Study No: 05	Name: Zaha Hadid	
	Year of Birth: 1950	
	Birth Place: Baghdad, Iraq	
Cycle No: 27	Nationality: Iraqi-British	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: The Hadid family line, particularly on Zaha Hadid's paternal side, traces back several generations in Iraq. The Hadid family has deep roots in Baghdad, where they were known for their prominence in business and society. While detailed historical records of the family's lineage are not extensively documented, the family has been influential in the region for at least a century or more (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Winter, 2017).		
Justification: The prominence in business and society places the family at least within the PC.		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: PC		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Muhammad al-Hajj Husayn Hadid was a wealthy industrialist and a well-respected figure in the Iraqi business community, particularly in the import-export sector. Originating from Mosul, he co-founded the left-liberal al-Ahali group in 1932 (a significant political organization). He was also the co-founder of the National Democratic Party in Iraq, and once served as the minister of finance (Hadid, 2009; Tentler-Krylov 2020).		
Mother: Wajihah al-Sabunji was an artist from Mosul, and also a member of the Iraqi artistic and intellectual circles. (Hadid, 2009; Tentler-Krylov 2020).		
Justification: The fact that the father once served as a minister of a modern democratically-elected government itself is testament to the political power the family would have wielded. The direct access to political power and the economic benefits that usually accompanies it places the family well within the GE. On the other hand, it is generally true that in many Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, historically, women from elite families were more likely to be encouraged to engage in the arts, often as a hobby rather than a profession. This tendency was influenced by social norms that emphasized the arts as a refined pursuit for elite women, while professional careers were less accessible to them due to societal constraints (Pipes, 2017). This confirms that the mother had to at least hail from the PC, to allow her union with Muhammad al-Hajj Husayn Hadid who also belonged to the same before his political involvements placed the family within the GE.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		GE
Social Position Assessment		GE
Elite Assessment		Elite

Table 06	Year of PP: 2010	
Case Study No: 06	Name: Ryue Nishizawa	
	Year of Birth: 1966	
	Birth Place: Yokohama, Japan	
Cycle No: 33	Nationality: Japanese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Nishizawa family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Fujita, n.d.).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background:-		
Father: Nishizawa Shuichi, was an architect who ran a modest architectural firm (Fujita, n.d.); Isokääntä, 2023)		
Mother: Nishizawa Yasuko, was a schoolteacher. (Fujita, n.d.); Isokääntä, 2023)		
Justification: The father's position as the proprietor of a modest architectural firm and mother's role as a school teacher place the family within the MC. After all, Bottomore (1993) confirms that the traditional MC is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations.		

Criterion assessment on Professions of parents	MC
Social Position Assessment	MC
Elite Assessment	Non-elite


Table 06	Year of PP: 2010	
Case Study No: 06	Name: Ryue Nishizawa	
	Year of Birth: 1966	
	Birth Place: Yokohama, Japan	
Cycle No: 33	Nationality: Japanese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Nishizawa family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Fujita, n.d.).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background :-		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Nishizawa Shuichi, was an architect who ran a modest architectural firm (Fujita, n.d.); Isokääntä, 2023)		
Mother: Nishizawa Yasuko, was a schoolteacher. (Fujita, n.d.); Isokääntä, 2023)		
Justification: The father's position as the proprietor of a modest architectural firm and mother's role as a school teacher place the family within the MC. After all, Bottomore (1993) confirms that the traditional MC is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		MC
Social Position Assessment		MC
Elite Assessment		Non-elite


Table 07	Year of PP: 2010 (joint-winner)	
Case Study No: 07	Name: Kzuyo Sejima	
	Year of Birth: 1956	
	Birth Place: Matsu, Shimane Prefecture, Japan	
Cycle No: 33	Nationality: Japanese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Recorded History: Beyond her parents, the Sejima family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (Sejima 2015).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background:-		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Sejima Masamichi was a carpenter, and his profession involved working with traditional Japanese woodworking (Sejima, 2015)		
Mother: Sejima Yoko, worked as a housewife. (Sejima, 2015; Hays 2016)		
Justification: The father working as a carpenter tells us that he was engaged in a manual labor profession. In relation to the mother, in the early 20th century, it was customary for wives in many Asian cultures to take on the role of homemakers, while men were seen as providers. This expectation was prevalent across various Asian societies, where women's responsibilities largely centered on domestic duties and child-rearing (Zhu, 2017).The fathers position as a worker dispensing manual labor, and mother's role as a house wife place the family within the WC. After all, Bottomore (1993) confirms that the traditional WC is largely about engaging in manual labor occupations.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		MC
Social Position Assessment		MC
Elite Assessment		Non-elite


Table 8	Year of PP: 2012 Name: Wang Shu Year of Birth: 1963 Birth Place: Xinjiang Uyghur Nationality: Chinese	
Case Study No: 08 Cycle No: 35		
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Shu family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely-recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Lee, 2015; Zhang, 2018).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background:-		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: According to certain accounts, Wang Yamin was a musician and an amateur carpenter which was taken up more as a hobby. (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Lee, 2015; Zhang, 2018).		
Mother: Liu Xia Was a teacher and school librarian in Beijing (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Lee, 2015; Zhang, 2018).		
Justification: The fact that both parents were engaged in non-manual occupations – his father as a musician and his mother as a school teacher/librarian – suggests that the family was of MC. After all, Bottomore (1993) confirms that the traditional MC is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents	MC	
Social Position Assessment	MC	
Elite Assessment	Non-elite	


Table 09	Year of PP: 2013 Name: Toyo Ito Year of Birth: 1941 Birth Place: Keijo, S. Korea Nationality: Japanese	
Case Study No: 09 Cycle No: 36		
Source: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Ito's paternal grandfather was also a businessman (a lumberjack dealer) (pritzkerprize.com, 2024). Apart from this fact, the Ito family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (Ito, 1995).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of enough evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: -		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Toyo Ito Sr. was a businessman in the textile industry, specifically dealing with the production and distribution of fabrics (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Fong, 2012; Ito, 1995).		
Justification: The father's role as the proprietor of a small-scale business, and mother also following suit is suggestive of the family's entrepreneurial spirit. The ability of such ventures to elevate social status is confirmed by		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents	UMC	
Social Position Assessment	UMC	
Elite Assessment	None-elite	


Table 10	Year of PP: 2014 Name: Shigeru Ban Year of Birth: 1957 Birth Place: Tokyo Nationality: Japanese	
Case Study No: 10 Cycle No: 37		
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Ban family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Ban, 2014).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background:-		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Ban Shigeru was as a wealthy businessman, and also a business executive at Toyota (Ban, 2014)		
Mother: Ban Kyoko was a celebrated women's clothing designer involved in haute couture (high-end, custom-made fashion industry involves the creation of exclusive, hand-crafted clothing made to fit individual clients perfectly. Examples are Chanel, Dior, and Givenchy etc.) (Ban, 2014)		
Justification: The father's position was at the executive level, whereas the mother's involvement was as a reputed designer in an industry catering to the elite. Robbins (2019) and Miller, 2013) both confirm that such upper managerial levels are quite possible without direct political influence. Being in non-manual occupations and at the same time occupying managerial and free-lancer levels of it confirm that they represented the upper level of the MC stratum which is the UMC. After all, the traditional MC is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations (Bottomore, 1993).		
Criterion assessment on professions of parents	UMC	
Social Position Assessment	UMC	
Elite Assessment	Non-elite	


Table 11	Year of PP: 2018 Name: B. V. Doshi Year of Birth: 1927 Birth Place: Pune, India Nationality: Indian	
Case Study No: 11 Cycle No: 41		
Source: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Apart from his father inheriting two modest businesses from his predecessors, the Doshi family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Doshi, 1991).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: -		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Vikram Lal Doshi was a businessman in the textile industry (a textile merchant) and also engaged in the family furniture business. Both the successful businesses were inherited, and he was responsible for their considerable expansion (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Doshi, 1991; Hathaway, 2004).		
Mother: Ayesha Doshi helped manage the family businesses, and also played a role as a social worker (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Doshi, 1991, Hathaway, 2004).		
Justification: The father's position as an owner of multiple small-scale businesses has its implications on elevating social class above the MC (Hughes, 2002). The mother had multiple roles as the manager of family businesses, and also as a social worker. The traditional MC is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations (Bottomore, 1993). Given the circumstances of the Doshi family, it can be argued that they were of UMC.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents	UMC	
Social Position Assessment	UMC	
Elite Assessment	None-elite	


Table 12	Year of PP: 2019	
Case Study No: 12	Name: Arata Isozaki	
Cycle No: 42	Year of Birth: 1931	
	Birth Place: Ōita, Japan	
	Nationality: Japanese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Ban family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Ban, 2014).		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background:-		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Isozaki Iwao was a small-time contractor in the building industry, and a small business holder who ran a successful transport company (Jodidio, 2015; Arata, 1989)		
Mother: Isozaki Fumi was a home-maker (Jodidio, 2015; Arata, 1989)		
Justification: The father's position was as an owner of multiple small-scale businesses. The ability of such ventures to elevate social status is confirmed by (Hughes, 2002). The traditional MC on the other hand, is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations (Bottomore, 1993). Consequently, it could be argued that the family was of UMC.		
Criterion assessment on professions of parents		UMC
Social Position Assessment		UMC
Elite Assessment		Non-elite



Table 13	Year of PP: 2024	
Case Study No: 13	Name: Riken Yamamoto	
Cycle No: 47	Year of Birth: 1945	
	Birth Place: Beijing, China	
	Nationality: Japanese	
Source: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Information on Yamamoto's family background is limited in public records.		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: -		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Name is not publicly available. Was an engineer (part of the occupying Japanese work force in China) (wyso.org, 2024, Yamamoto, 2012).		
Mother: Name is not publicly available. Homemaker and later small pharmacy owner (wyso.org, 2024, Yamamoto, 2012).		
The father's role as an engineer and mother's as a small business owner suggest the family's placement in the modest, MC. Notably, Bottomore (1993) asserts that the traditional middle class (MC) predominantly consists of individuals engaged in non-manual labor occupations.		
Criterion assessment on Professions of parents		UMC
Social Position Assessment		UMC
Elite Assessment		None-elite

Table 14	Year of PP: 2025	
Case Study No: 14	Name: Lui Jiakun	
Cycle No: 48	Year of Birth: 1956	
	Birth Place: Chengdu, China	
	Nationality: Chinese	
Sources: pritzkerprize.com (2024)		
Criteria 01: Traditional family background		
Recorded History: Beyond his parents, the Ban family history does not carry evidence of any prominence in society, or feature any widely recognized figures (pritzkerprize.com; Park, 2019)		
Justification: Owing to the lack of evidence, need to rely on (b).		
Criterion assessment on traditional family background: -		
Criteria 02: Professions of parents		
Father: Name and profession is not publicly available.		
Mother: Name not publicly available. Profession was an internist at a local hospital in Chengdu (pritzkerprize.com, 2024).		
Justification: The only evidence available points to the fact that most of his immediate family members were physicians (pritzkerprize.com, 2024; Park, 2019). The traditional MC is largely about engaging in non-manual labor occupations (Bottomore, 1993). Consequently, it could be argued that the family was of MC descent.		
Criterion assessment on professions of parents		MC
Social Position Assessment		MC
Elite Assessment		Non-elite

VI. SUMMERY

In summary, this research demonstrates that architects from the BAR who won the PP between 1983 and 2025 did not solely originate from elite backgrounds. Contrary to common assumptions, a notable number of these laureates rose from non-elite circumstances, gaining prominence as starchitects through their professional achievements and impact on the discipline. Table 15 below illustrates this pattern clearly.

Table 15 : Elite assessment of PP laureates		Year of PP	Winning Cycle	Social Position Assessment	Elite Assessment
Case Study No.	Name of Architect				
01	I. M. Pei	1983	05	PC	Elite
02	Kenzo Tange	1987	09	WC	Non-elite
03	Fumihiko Maki	1993	16	Inconclusive	Inconclusive
04	Tadao Ando	1995	18	WC	Non-elite
05	Zaha Hadid	2004	27	GE	Elite
06	Ryue Nishizawa	2010	33	MC	Non-elite
07	Kzuyo Sejima	2010	33	WC	Non-elite
08	Wang Shu	2012	35	MC	Non-elite
09	Shigeru Ban	2014	37	UMC	Non-elite
10	Toyo Ito	2013	36	UMC	Non-elite
11	B. V. Doshi	2018	41	UMC	Non-elite
12	Arata Isozaki	2019	42	UMC	Non-elite
13	Riken Yamamoto	2024	47	MC	Non-elite
14	Lui Jiakun	2025	48	MC	Non-elite

Chart 1 and Chart 2 further elaborate on the percentages of social position and elite background respectively, among these PP laureates

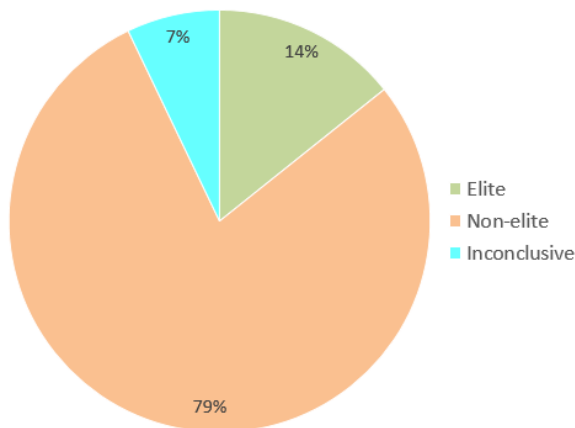


Chart 1

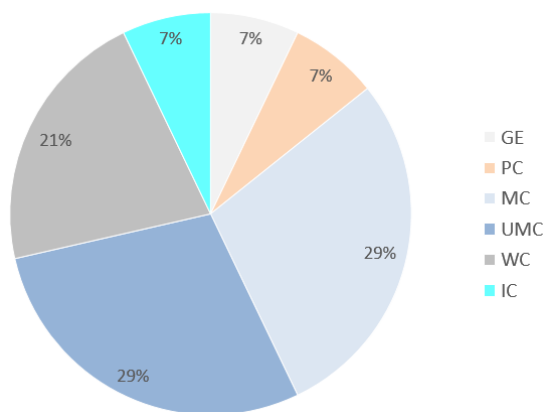


Chart 2

VII. CONCLUSIONS

This study yields several key conclusions. Historically, the field of architecture has depended on elite patronage, often producing works that reflect and reinforce elite interests. Architects themselves have traditionally emerged from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, and the profession has maintained an elite intellectual status in relation to the built environment. In contemporary practice, this elite positioning is sustained globally through prestigious recognitions such as the Pritzker Prize (PP). Recipients of the PP frequently attain the status of "starchitects," forming a highly influential subgroup within the profession that enjoys elevated recognition and exclusive opportunities.

The research effectively achieved its objectives. First, it identified 14 architects from the Broader Asian Region (BAR) who were awarded the PP across 13 of the 48 total award cycles. Second, it examined the social positions (SP) of these 14 architects. Of these, one was from a Governing Elite (GE) background (7%), and another from the Political Class (PC) (7%). Four architects (29%) were from Upper Middle Class

(UMC) backgrounds, and another four (29%) from the Middle Class (MC). When grouped together, UMC and MC represented 58% of the sample. Three architects (21%) were classified as Working Class (WC), while the SP and elite position (EP) of one laureate (7%) could not be determined. This distribution indicates a substantial representation of individuals from sub-elite, middle-class origins. The third objective confirmed that only two laureates (14%) came from elite backgrounds (GE and PC), while the majority (79%) did not. One case remained inconclusive (7%).

As a result, the study's original hypothesis that the PP predominantly rewards architects from elite backgrounds is not supported. The findings suggest that the PP does not clearly perpetuate elitism within the architectural profession, diverging from the initial assumption that such accolades are closely tied to elite socio-economic affiliations.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges certain limitations. It does not explore the educational backgrounds of the laureates, such as their attendance at prestigious institutions. Additionally, it does not consider their apprenticeships or the geographic contexts in which they trained and launched their careers before achieving starchitect status. While these elements were deliberately excluded, they offer valuable avenues for future research.

Finally, the observation that a majority of BAR PP laureates are Japanese (9 out of 14), along with the increasingly shorter intervals between BAR recipients compared to those from other regions, highlights the need for further investigation into the cultural, institutional, and geopolitical factors that may contribute to these patterns.

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