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Masayoshi Son

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Introduction

Masayoshi Son stands as one of the most remarkable and influential figures in the contemporary world of technology, investment, and entrepreneurship. From humble beginnings in the rural outskirts of Tosu, Saga Prefecture, to the commanding heights of global finance and innovation, Son's journey is one of relentless ambition, resilience, and the pursuit of visions others often deem impossible. As the founder and CEO of SoftBank Group, his impact has been felt not only in Japan, but across continents, industries, and millions of lives.

Behind the iconic headlines and staggering numbers—billion-dollar deals, audacious investments, and headline-grabbing visions—lies the story of a boy who overcame prejudice and hardship. Born to Zainichi Korean parents in Japan, Son experienced social exclusion, economic struggle, and questions of identity from an early age. These formative experiences did not hold him back; rather, they drove him to think bigger, dig deeper, and pursue opportunity with unyielding determination. His early admiration for Den Fujita, and the fateful advice to embrace the world and technology, set Son on a path to California, where a world of possibilities began to open.

At Berkeley, Son's entrepreneurial spark blazed to life. He not only discovered computer science and economics, but also launched his first ventures—an electronic translator, a budding company in video games, and a deep sense of agency over his future. These formative years laid the groundwork for SoftBank's genesis and Son's approach to business: take risks, believe in the transformative potential of technology, and act with both speed and conviction.

SoftBank's story, under Son's leadership, is one of bold pivots and stakes in the ground—whether betting early on Yahoo! Japan and Alibaba, orchestrating seismic mergers such as Vodafone Japan and Sprint, or shaking the world of venture capital with the Vision Fund. Son's investments have created fortunes, transformed markets, and sometimes stumbled in the public eye. Yet, through milestones and missteps alike, his philosophy has consistently aimed for long-term value and happiness on a global scale.

This biography offers not merely a chronicle of deals and dollars, but a look into the heart and mind of Masayoshi Son. It explores his motivations, his drive to give back through philanthropy, his complex relationship with identity, and his unwavering belief in humanity's future through technology. As SoftBank enters new frontiers—AI, global infrastructure, and beyond—Son continues to push boundaries, with the same courage he summoned as a child overcoming adversity.

In these pages, readers will journey through the highs and lows, the lessons and legacies, of a man whose life and work reflect the power of audacity. Masayoshi Son's story is, ultimately, a testament to vision realized—and a window into what the next generation of entrepreneurs and dreamers might achieve.

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CHAPTER ONE: Origins in Tosu: The Yasumoto Family

Masayoshi Son, born Masayoshi Yasumoto, entered the world on August 11, 1957, in Tosu, a city nestled in Saga Prefecture, Japan. His birthplace was a world away from the gleaming high-rises of Tokyo or the bustling tech hubs of Silicon Valley, places he would later come to dominate. Tosu, a city with a rich agricultural heritage and a key railway junction, provided a quiet, unassuming backdrop to the earliest chapters of a life that would prove anything but.

The Yasumoto family, like many in their community, faced significant financial hardship. Son's lineage traced back to Zainichi Koreans, a term used for Koreans who immigrated to or were born in Japan, often facing systemic discrimination and socio-economic challenges. His grandfather, for instance, had to take up work as a miner after his arrival in Japan, a testament to the limited opportunities available to many Zainichi Koreans at the time. This wasn't a family history of inherited wealth or established businesses; it was a narrative forged in resilience and the relentless pursuit of opportunity against considerable odds.

His father, in a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit that would later define his son, initially raised pigs and chickens, a humble livelihood that provided basic sustenance for the family. This agricultural endeavor, while honest work, likely instilled in young Masayoshi an early understanding of the effort required to put food on the table and the precariousness of small-scale ventures. It was a hands-on education in the realities of making ends meet.

However, the family's fortunes eventually shifted, albeit through unconventional means. His father transitioned from animal husbandry to an illegal sake business. While the specifics of this venture remain somewhat shrouded in the family's private history, it ultimately brought a degree of success and financial stability that had previously eluded them. This period, marked by a departure from traditional livelihoods, likely exposed Son to the idea that success could be found by carving out one's own path, even if it meant operating outside conventional boundaries.

The home environment, while improving economically, was undoubtedly shaped by the family's Zainichi Korean heritage. In a society that often viewed Koreans with suspicion or outright prejudice, the Yasumoto family, like many others, chose to adopt Japanese names for daily life to navigate the social landscape. This decision, while a practical measure for survival and integration, carried with it an inherent tension—a conscious effort to pass as ethnically Japanese in public, while privately holding onto a distinct cultural identity.

Young Masayoshi, therefore, grew up with a dual awareness. On one hand, he was a Japanese schoolboy, blending in as best he could, using a Japanese surname, and conforming to the expectations of his peers and teachers. On the other, he was keenly aware of his Korean roots, a heritage that, despite the family's efforts to assimilate, occasionally made itself known through acts of bullying and discrimination from other children. These early experiences, though painful, served as a crucible, hardening his resolve and fostering a deep-seated determination to overcome obstacles.

The family's journey from financial hardship to relative stability, and the subtle dance between cultural assimilation and identity preservation, provided Masayoshi with a unique perspective. He witnessed firsthand the power of ingenuity in the face of adversity and the quiet strength required to navigate a society that wasn't always welcoming. These early lessons, absorbed through observation and personal experience, would unknowingly lay the groundwork for his future endeavors.

Tosu, with its relatively isolated existence from the major urban centers, offered a unique vantage point. It was a place where traditional values still held sway, but also a place where the stirrings of a new, technologically driven world were slowly beginning to be felt. For a bright, observant boy like Masayoshi, this environment, while outwardly modest, served as a canvas for his nascent curiosity and an incubator for his burgeoning ambition. The seeds of his future global empire were quietly sown in this small Japanese city, far from the spotlight.

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