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# CHANGES OF SOCIAL CLASSES DURING THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD<sup>1)</sup>

A CAUSE OF THE COLLAPSE OF THE FEUDAL SYSTEM  
OF THE TOKUGAWA RÉGIME

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## FOREWORD

The Tokugawa Period is noted for its centralised feudal system. Historians agree that the feudal state in our country reached its perfect form during that period. Feudal society in general has certain characteristics such as the strict relation of loyalty between master and servant, firm distinctions between different classes, the static positions of all social elements, and reverence for special privileges. These characteristics were fully developed in that period. In political relations, for instance, "strict adherence to the ancient laws," and "prevention of new rules" were regarded as the guiding principles of political conduct. Human actions were strictly circumscribed by the perfection of ceremonial rules and social status. Freedom of expression was not recognised, and nothing was more abhorred than open discussion of public affairs by men not in government service.

On the social side, there was a strict discrimination among the four classes of society. Each trade had its guild and no one was allowed to become a member unless he had first become an apprentice and after a certain period been allowed to become a full-fledged master artisan and to engage in his particular trade. In all other branches of human endeavours—learning, the martial arts, as well as light accomplishments—the old forms were strictly preserved; and any

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<sup>1)</sup> Abridged translation of an essay in *Economic Review* (經濟論叢) October 1927.

one who disregarded the rules of his school would be regarded as a renegade. The relations of master and servant existed, not only among lords and samurai, but also among employers and employees and among teachers and pupils. Thus, all society was feudal in nature.

The ranking of the social classes of the time was indicated by a popular expression "*shi-no-ko-sho*" which means "samurai-farmer-artisan-merchant," arranged in order of social status importance. Thus, the samurai occupied the highest rank, the farmer came next, followed by the artisan and tradesman. Of course, there were several other classes, for instance, the court nobility, the Shinto priests, Buddhist priests, scholars of the Chinese classics, and a body of social outcasts called "*eta*" or "*hinin*." But the classes of importance were those of samurai, farmers and commoners (including artisans and merchants).

In the beginning of the period, the preservation of the distinctions dividing these three main classes was regarded as one of the principal policies of the Feudal Government, and in fact the distinctions were so firmly maintained that it was impossible for those of one class to get into another class. Moreover, there were various class distinctions within a class itself which, also, were strictly maintained. However, with the lapse of time, it became impossible to keep up these distinctions, owing to the transformation which was brought about in the social and economic conditions of the country. In other words, each class gradually lost its inherent characteristics, which sometimes became possessed by another class; some of these characteristics were shifted from one class to another. It is the purpose of this article to point out the social and economic transformations which gave birth to such changes in the feudal system of the period.

## 2. THE EXISTENCE OF CLASS DISTINCTIONS

The samurai class was at the head of the four social classes and occupied a position which was totally different

from those of the farmers and the commoners. The samurai were regarded as the centre and pattern of society—so much so indeed that an insult even upon the lowest grades of the samurai by farmers and commoners was punishable by death. It seemed as though the farmers and commoners were allowed to exist only in return for their service in supplying the subsistence of the samurai class.

Class distinctions were strictly maintained even within the samurai class itself. The rank of each class from the Shogun to the lowest grade of samurai or "*chugen*" or "*ashigaru*" was fixed according to its standing. Daimyos were classified according to the ranking of their houses into the "*gosanke*" (the three families of Kishu, Owari, and Mito), the "*gokamon*" (the Matsudaira families of Echizen, Matsue, Tsuyama, etc.), the "*fudai*" (those who were the subordinates of the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate) and the "*tozama*" (those who were the subordinates of other feudal lords and who had been subjugated by the founder of the Tokugawa Government); and according to extent of territory into the following: the "*kokushu*" (those whose territories comprised more than one province) the "*jun-kokushu*" (those who possessed territories next in size to those of the "*kokushu*"), the "*joshu*" (who possessed castles of their own), and the "*yushu*" (who possessed military camps of their own). The direct retainers of the Tokugawa Government were classified into the "*hatamoto*" and the "*gokenin*"; the former was comprised of those who received a hereditary annual stipend under 10,000 koku of rice and who were above the rank of "*omemie*"; those direct retainers of the Government who were below the rank of "*omemie*" were grouped into the "*gokenin*." In each group, there was a great difference in official rank and social position between the "*fudai*" (hereditary retainers) and the "*okakae*" (temporary retainers). There were strict rules as regards the promotion of their official ranks, their seats in the Shogun's castle, the forms of their residences, their costumes, the arrangement of processions and implements

carried during journeys, the order of processions when paying visits to the Shogun's castle, the nature of offerings to the Shogun, and that of grants made by the Shogun or other superiors. Appellations were also strictly fixed; the Shogun was called by the honorary title of "*uesama*," while his consort by the title of "*midaisama*." His concubines also had different appellations according to their respective rank. The forms of the documents issued by the Shogunate were also strictly determined; there were seven different ways of writing the word "*on*" (御) according to the rank or degree of relationship; there were the same number of ways of writing such honorary appellations as "*dono*" (殿) and "*sama*" (様). A strict regard for the exact values of all these distinctions was required. There were strict regulations as regards the manner of ceremonial greetings. Those having the rank of "*omemie*" or above could enter the main gate when paying a visit to the "*rochu*" (one of the high administrative officials of the Shogunate) and when they reached the "*genkan*" or the ante-chamber, an usher would come out and meet them. But those of the ranks below "*omemie*," had to go through a small side gate and must get to the ante-chamber and offer greetings instead of waiting for an usher to come out. Members of the former class could disregard one of the "*gosanke*" who might happen to pass on the way at the head of a procession; but those of the latter class had to squat as on his hunkers by the roadside soon as they saw the lances at the head of such procession, and if the door of the palanquin (in which the daimyo was seated) should happen to be left open, they had to bow their heads to the ground. Thus, within the samurai class itself there was an extreme amount of ceremony and discrimination at every turn.

Thus, the order of ranks was perfected, but it was devoid of real substance. Except in the early years of the Tokugawa Period, the relations of master and retainer were historical, based upon the facts of two or three generations before; and there was no real tie existing between the two

in later times. True, the formal relations of master and retainers were perfected because of the policy of the Feudal Government to maintain order in time of peace, through a military class; but the spiritual tie of the actual relationship of master and retainers became weaker and weaker in inverse proportion to the perfection of their exterior form.

Various class distinctions also existed among farmers. In the first place, there was a distinction between ordinary farmers and village officials such as the "*shoya*," the "*kumigashira*" and the "*hyakusho-dai*." In the case of the "*shoya*" (village headman), he was sometimes elected but ordinarily was a hereditary official, his family being of high official or social standing. Farmers who were pioneers or big landlords occupied a higher social position than ordinary farmers; while sad was the social position of tenants who were regarded as much inferior in social standing to regular farmers and who had to take their seats at the lowest end of the room at village meetings.

Among tradesmen and artisans there were strict distinctions between the "*oyakata*" (master), the "*shokunin*" (journeyman) and "*totei*" (apprentice). There was also a great difference between house owners and tenants, the right to take part in public affairs of districts being limited to the former. Thus, there were also various distinctions with the commoner class whose spirit was freer than those of any of the other classes; and these distinctions were strictly preserved.

In short, there existed strict distinctions within all classes particularly in the samurai class; farmers, tradesmen and artisans had rules, precedents and regulations of their own; all these proved hindrances to their activities at every turn. The outward forms of these regulations were perfected but their substance was void. In fact the perfection of their outward forms caused their real failure.

### 3. THE DECLINE OF CLASS DISTINCTIONS

In the very old days, there was no distinction between samurai and farmer. The samurai tilled the soil in time of peace, and took up arms when war prevailed. However, as the result of changes in the methods of warfare, the samurai forsook the country in which they had lived and went to live in castle-towns. They thereby ceased to be farmers and received annual grants of rice from their lord for their military service. Thus, the separation of samurai and farmer took place, and the former came to form a class of their own. After this, they no longer tilled the soil and became an unproductive or consumptive class.<sup>1)</sup> When they had secured the political right, they occupied the highest position in society, monopolised all rights, treated the farmers and commoners like slaves, and even enjoyed the right of slashing them with edged weapons like dogs whenever an act of insult was committed or thought to be committed by the inferior. But during the eras of Genroku, Bunka and Bunsei, these unproductive warriors experienced considerable difficulty in living because of their luxurious habits of life which were out of proportion to their incomes; and they could no longer exercise their special right of cutting down the people of the lower classes even when they were provoked by the latter. In the third year of the Bunkyu Era, the Feudal Government issued a warning to the samurai class stating that the Government would not enforce the law providing the ending of the family of a samurai who was killed by a commoner as the result of the former's attempt to slash the latter for some offensive act. (The basis of this law was that it was regarded as a gross dishonour for a samurai to be killed by a commoner in a private quarrel.) In agricultural districts also, the farmers after the middle of the period no longer obeyed the authorities unconditionally; on the

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<sup>1)</sup> The Decay of the Samurai class (this Review Vol. II, No. 1, p. 39).

contrary, there were frequent insurrections and uprisings by tenant farmers; the authorities often had to submit to their demands, and thus the real power of the Government was openly questioned.

Both the Feudal Government and all the local clans suffered because of their extreme financial difficulties. Nearly all daimyo and samurai "had to bow before commoners in order to borrow money from them and managed to make both ends meet through the financial assistance rendered by the wealthy merchants of Edo, Kyoto, Osaka and other principal cities." The daimyo and samurai met the financial stringency for the time being through the extortion of taxes and loans from merchants. The "*Keizairoku Shu-i*" (經濟錄拾遺) says: "It was the facts of the eras of Kambun and Empo that Ryosuke Kumazawa declared that the total amount of the debts of all daimyo was one hundred times the total amount of money the whole country possessed. Now that seventy years have passed since that time, the amount must be a thousand times greater." The fact that the "*Chonin Kokenroku*" (町人考見録) treats of the Kyoto merchants who became bankrupt because of the loans they extended to daimyos and other samurai during a period of fifty or sixty years around the Genroku Era, indicates that daimyos depended on a loan policy even at a comparative early period of the Tokugawa Era. Loans to these lords were not easily redeemed; interest gave birth to interest, thereby adding to the amount of the principal; and, when the debtor's burden had become too unbearable, he asked for a long instalment plan for paying the money back, or for the cancellation of the interest. Some daimyo failed to pay back any part of his debts, and the creditor commoner financiers resorted to a boycott by way of retaliation, thereby not infrequently holding such daimyo in submission. Sometimes the finances of a clan might be controlled by a certain moneylender who loaned money to a daimyo with rice as security; an example may be cited of the Sendai Clan whose finances were controlled by a merchant in Osaka called Masuya. Even the Feudal Government



sought the financial aid of wealthy commoners. Thus, in matters of finance, the Shogunate and the daimyo did not possess any real power as the ruling class over commoners.

Nor was the economic distress limited to the Shogunate Government and the daimyo. There are many facts showing the extreme poverty of the samurai class in general after the middle of the Tokugawa Period.<sup>1)</sup> To cite few instances, military equipment such as swords and armour which were regarded as representing the spirit of the samurai were pawned and left unredeemed, thereby falling into the hands of strangers; many samurai had to take their ceremonial robes out of some pawn shop whenever they had to attend some public affair in the castle; and would return the robes to the pawn-shop upon their return from the castle. The facts indicate the nature of the extreme poverty to which the samurai were subjected. Many a samurai could not employ domestic servants because of poverty, and had to do the household work, and sometimes engaged in some side work at home. The great majority of samurai had to borrow money in various ways in order to meet their financial obligations for the time being. The "*Seji-hemmon-roku*" (世事見聞録) says: "Samurai borrowed money from the Government, from commoners and from nominal creditors of which were some high priests of imperial lineage; lost all their revenue in the payment of their debts; and often were unable to redeem their debts; they also borrowed great sums from moneylenders, about one-third or one-half of their revenues being ultimately transferred to the moneylenders at the time of the payment of the debts." The same source of information adds: "The samurai borrow money without considering the dire results of the transaction, even taking much pride in their ability to get such loans, forced no doubt by financial stringency; they would mortgage their residences, borrow money from blind commoners (who received special legal protection in the collection of debts), and got loans the

<sup>1)</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

interest on which had to be paid daily. When the loans were renewed at the end of every three months, the interest thereof greatly augmented the amount of the principal, and when the debtor paid money equivalent to ten or twenty per cent of the loan, in token of gratitude to the creditor, the latter's wasteful expenditure in collecting the money would amount to one half of the total." A written memorial presented by Saburoemon Inouye in July, the sixth year of the Kaei Era, points out the economic poverty of the *hatamoto*, and describes the manner in which they were placed in financial distress by moneylenders in the following words:

"The manner of loan contraction has become objectionable in recent years. When a loan certificate expressly bears the interest rate to be 1 *bu* ( $\frac{1}{4}$  *ryo*) for every 25 *ryo*, it in reality is 1 *bu* for every 20 *ryo* each month. Moreover, a fee of ten per cent is paid to the creditor as a token of gratitude, in addition to various presents which the debtor makes to the creditor. If a person borrows 100 *ryo*, he first pays a gratuity of ten *ryo*, the yearly interest is 15 *ryo*: pays the compound interest at the end of every four months when the certificate is renewed. Moreover, as dinners are given by the debtor to the creditor at the times of negotiation, the total yearly amount of expenses would be something like 30 *ryo*. Debtors realise that all this is outrageous, but unless they follow the custom they would not be able to secure loans. If a debtor is unable to repay his debts for some years, the total of the principal and interest will reach an enormous amount and his entire revenue would not cover it, so that his service to his master can no longer be continued." Sorai Ogiu spoke the truth when he said in the "*Ginroku*" (鈔録): "In these days the property of the samurai was absorbed by merchants."

These facts indeed disclosed the distressing condition of the samurai class whose outward high position in society was not accompanied by any real power. The samurai in fact had ceased to possess the real power of a ruling class. This state of affairs is referred to by the "*Chirizuka-dan*"

(塵塚談) in the following words: "Although in form the samurai govern and the commoners obey, in reality it seems to be an age when the commoners hold sway."

I shall next consider the farmer class. Viewed from an economic standpoint, the feudal system of that time was based upon land as the principal means of production, with the farmers as the only productive class which supported a specially privileged class known as samurai. This is the main reason why agriculture was placed above both trade and industry in ranking; agriculture was indispensable for to the existence of the samurai class. But after the middle of the Tokugawa Age, the farmers were subjected to an extreme economic difficulty; the population of rural districts moved to the cities; a crude method of birth control known as "*mabiki*" was resorted to, thereby preventing the natural increase of the rural population.<sup>1)</sup> Nor did all those who remained in the villages engage in farming; on the contrary, the change of vocations resulted in a scarcity of agricultural labour. This and other reasons naturally caused desolation to fields and furrows. The upshot of all this was that the farmers became no longer able to support the samurai class as they had done formerly, and in consequence the latter class no longer could depend on the farmers alone for its subsistence. True, the farmers had been a productive class; but viewed in the above light, it became incapable of sustaining the samurai class; and thus a great difficulty arose for the maintenance of the feudal system.

What was then the condition of the commoners? In the eyes of the Feudal Government, the commoners were quite different from both the samurai and the farmers, inasmuch as they had no ancestors who had performed some meritorious services; they did not produce foodstuffs for the benefit of the State like farmers; on the contrary, they engaged only

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<sup>1)</sup> Population problems in the Tokugawa Era (this Review, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 56).

in an unproductive pursuit with abacuses in their hands and living an easy life, thereby stimulating luxurious methods of life among the people. Profit-making enterprises at that time were regarded with utmost contempt, hence the tradesman was placed at the very bottom of all the social classes. "Tradesmen and artisans can be dispensed with.....Efforts must be made in order to increase even a single farmer, and to lessen the number of tradesmen as much as possible." Commerce and industry were regarded as insignificant enterprises, and special efforts were made in order to prevent the dissemination of the spirit of the commoners among the farmers. In short, the commoner class was regarded as unnecessary as a social element.

The continued peace in the feudal society of Japan, however, brought about many social changes. The samurai became accustomed to peace and luxury; they put away their arrows, allowed their lances to remain undusted; war was only an old tale; muscular strength became useless and was replaced by the power of money. While the commoner class increased its real power with the progress of time and unmistakably became a powerful social class, agricultural communities were greatly impoverished, the samurai class was placed in economic distress. Samurai had to bow before the commoners whose financial assistance enabled them to meet their economic needs. The "*Chonin-Bukuro*" (町人囊) says on this point: "In very old times the commoners occupied a position lower than that of the farmers. But in the course of time the whole country came to use gold and silver money and the commoner class became the possessor of the money and treasures of the whole country; the commoners then were often called into the presence of the nobility and in consequence seemed to be higher in dignity than the farmers." However, it must be noted that the commoner surpassed not only the farmers but the samurai as well in point of power. Gamo-o Kumpei is reported to have said: "The anger of the wealthy merchants of Osaka has the power of striking terror into the hearts of the daimyo." His

words truly indicate the real power of the commoners of that time. The commoner class which had once been regarded as unnecessary had become necessary even for the existence of the samurai class itself.

In the beginning, the samurai were regarded as the ruling class, the farmers as a productive class and the commoners as an unnecessary class; but after the middle of the Tokugawa Age their class characteristics underwent changes; the samurai class became impotent, the farmer class impoverished and the commoner class rose to social ascendancy.

#### 4. THE TRANSFORMATION OF CLASS DISTINCTIONS

As has been pointed out, the distinctions among different classes gradually became lost, and some of the members of one class were changed as if they were those of some other class; while some members smuggled themselves into class not originally theirs.

(a). The samurai became like commoners. The samurai of the old days regarded money-making as contemptible. During the Genroku Era a samurai did not hesitate to cut down his comrades because of insults received over some money matters. With the lapse of time the samurai fell into extreme poverty, and they would do nothing which did not bring them economic returns; when they bought provisions for their lord from commoners, they wrangled for commissions in various dishonest ways; they accepted every possible sort of bribe. Finally, the samurai insisted on loans when they hired retainers, and the amount of money possessed by a boy's parents became an important factor when adopting the son of a stranger as his heir by a samurai. Some daimyo encouraged their samurai to engage in domestic industries, the most general as well as the most successful being cotton spinning. The "*gunnai-ori*" of Kosu and the "*yonezawa-ori*" of Ushu were notable silk textile products. The Lord of the Kumamoto Clan encouraged the production of silk

textiles among the wives of his men, while Lord Shirakawa also encouraged the production of silk crêpe among the samurai in his own feud. These are notable historic incidents during the feudal period. This phenomenon together with the side works of samurai indicate that the unproductive samurai class attempted to engage in industrial production in order to adapt themselves to the changing economic condition of the country; they also show that the samurai could no longer make a living under the prevailing system of economy: and provide an example of the acquisition of the characteristics of commoners by samurai.

(b). Samurai join the commoner class. Not only did samurai acquire the characteristics of commoners, but also many of them actually joined the latter class, by giving up their status of samurai. According to the "*Edo-Machikata-Kakiage*" (江戸町方書上) compiled during the Bunsei Era, of 250 merchant families, about 48 families had ancestors who were either regular samurai, or *ronin-samurai* (masterless samurai) or *goshi* (special country-samurai). Again, the "*Chonin-Kokenroku*" (町人考見録) points out that the following commoners of Kyoto had their ancestries among samurai of one kind or another: Jian Ishikawa, Seiroku Takaya, Yuken Hirano, and Gondayu Miki. Of course some of their ancestors had ceased to enjoy the status of samurai long before they actually became commoners. However, it is undeniable that many of those noted, old commoner families had samurai ancestors.

(c). Commoners and farmers became samurai. The "*Buke-hatto*" (武家法度), promulgated in the seventh year of the Hoei Era (1710), says: "It is a contemporary custom to regard the amount of property as more important than blood relationship in fixing on one's heir." Thus the custom of adopting an other's son as heir with the object of economic gain prevailed even as early as the Genroku and Hoei Eras (1688-1710). Some samurai purposely put aside his eldest son from the heirship to his family property, and adopted the son of some other man with a large amount of property,

and family inheritances were actually bought and sold. Nor was this limited to samurai's sons; on the contrary, commoners' and farmers' sons were also adopted as heirs of some samurai families. The "*Seji-kemmon-roku*" (世事見聞録) says: "Thus, the family inheritance of the hatamoto in reality was bought and sold; and in consequence, samurai adopted as their heirs the sons of some samurai who were engaged in the occupation of accountancy or of physicians and even of servants who were not of samurai rank. Thus the adoption of the sons of others was in vogue and all families lost much of their ancestral blood." During the reign of Shogun Yoshimune, the sale of the samurai's status was prohibited, but it continued to be carried on so that in the course of time it became an ordinary practice. The "*Seji-kemmon-roku*" (世事見聞録) on this point says: Those who bought the status of samurai were, sometimes, samurai of low rank, and sometimes sons of low-class commoners; relatives of moneylenders who were in the habit of charging outrageously high rates of interest; sons of the blind; those who had fled to Edo after committing some crime in their home towns; those who had offended their original daimyo or master; those excommunicated priests who had become laymen; sons of priests who had violated their religious vows; and even those who belonged to the class of "*eta*" or "*hinin*." Mr. Kobayashi's *History of the End of the Tokugawa Régime* (幕末史) says: Some of those who purchased the positions of such low-grade samurai as *yoriki* or *kachi* rose to the position of *hatamoto*, through their own endeavours, especially towards the end of the Tokugawa régime. An example may be found in the case of Suke-aki Kusu-Sadonokami, one of the very powerful samurai during the time when Tadakuni Mizumo held the office of "*rochu*"; Sadonokami was first in the province of Shinano, but through the purchase of the position of samurai, he rose to fame and power eventually occupying the office of "*kanjo-bugyo*." His son, Suketoshi, was also known as Sadonokami and was appointed to a high office in the city of Osaka. This was

true of all feudal clans where the positions of low-class samurai were freely bought and sold. A more recent example may be found in the case of the family of the late Prince Hirobumi Ito, one of the founders of Modern Japan, whose father, originally a farmer of good lineage, purchased the position of a samurai called Ito in the castle-town of Hagi, the capital of Choshu Province.

According to the report made by Saburoemon Inouye in June, the sixth year of Kaei (1853), the money-value of the positions of samurai during the last years of the Tokugawa Era was as follows: 50 *ryo* per every 100 *koku* of annual revenue of rice for the adoption of a son while a samurai is in his normal condition; anywhere between 70 *ryo* and 100 *ryo* for the adoption of a son in urgency. According to the report made by another person, Motoshichiro Yamamoto, in July of the same year, the price for the adoption of a son in urgency or for an inheritance in urgency, was 100 *ryo* for every 100 *koku* of rice revenue and 1,000 *ryo* for every 1,000 *koku* of rice revenue.

Thus, the sale and purchase of the position of samurai among all classes of men—samurai, *rōnin*, farmers, and commoners—having property as the central factor, have resulted in the loss of the samurai blood in the samurai families through the mingling of the blood of commoners.

(d). Farmers turn into commoners. The policy of the government authorities of that time was to keep rural districts intact from the influence of cities and maintain a similar independence between farmers and commoners. However, farm families near cities were influenced by urban life; some of the farmers held the life of city people as their life's goal: others were hired by commoners or became tradesmen in cities; some married into city families; while some of those who remained in the village ceased to be farmers and engaged in small trade. The "*Keiseidan*" (經世談) says: "Farmers wished to become commoners, and in offering their daughters and sons in marriage would prefer commoners to those of their own class vocation. Some of them



would give up all their family inheritance in favour of their younger brothers in order to live in a prosperous city or port; while those who remained on the farm for their whole life would imitate the commoners in the matters of hair-dressing and of Kimono-designs, and of other phases of the luxurious life of commoners." In consequence, there were many people in agricultural villages who did not exclusively engage in farming. The report made by Ro-Tozan, of the Sendai Clan during the Horeki Era, says: "Of 100 farmers, about 50 entrust the work of farming to their wives and children, and themselves engage in trade and industry. The remaining 50 engage both in cultivation and other trades. There is not a single farmer who is exclusively engaged in farming." His report should not be regarded as exceptional, but as having universal reference to all other parts as well. While there is no doubt that the number of the commoners who were originally farmers was not small, the "Edo-Machikata-Kakiage" mentions 19 such commoners. I am of the opinion that the real number was much greater than that. It is said that many of the merchants of Edo came from the two provinces of Goshu and Ise. Some of them must have been farmers before they came to Edo.

(e). The transformation of the commoners into samurai. I have already mentioned the fact that commoners overwhelmed the samurai through their financial power. The following practices placed commoners practically on the same level as the samurai: "Some samurai would ask the financial assistance of the farmers in their fiefs as well as of the commoners. Such farmers and commoners often made financial plans on behalf of samurai. The samurai's rewards for commoners and farmers were given in accordance with the amounts of loans or contributions. They were also given official costumes and annual grants of rice; received permission to carry swords and to bear surnames; they were also granted the status of samurai." (*Seji-kemmonroku* 世事見聞録).

The "*kakeya*" of Osaka and the "*fudasashi*" of Edo were the financial organs for large and small clans in these

days. Daimyo gave annual stipends of rice to those "*kakeya*" and accorded them the same treatment as was given to the principal retainer of a daimyo. A notable example is found in the person of Zen-emon Kônoike who acted as "*kakeya*" for the five clans of Kaga, Hiroshima, Awa, Okayama, and Yanagawa, and whose total annual stipends of rice amounted to 10,000 koku. Even a branch of the Kônoike family received an annual stipend of no small amount. Because of such huge revenues, wealthy commoners like Zen-emon Kônoike, Gohei Hiranoya, and Gohei Tennôjiya, lived like real daimyo. This is an example of the transformation of commoners into samurai.

(f). Commoners became landlords. On the other hand, it was a matter of common observation that the financial power of commoners extended into agricultural villages and their social status was greatly increased by virtue of their becoming landlords. Their financial power was best manifested at the time of the concentration of lands or the development of uncultivated lands. The financial power of commoners was one great factor in the development of uncultivated lands in these days. The development of new rice fields at Fukano undertaken by the Branch Temple of the Hongwanji at Namba, Osaka, in April, the second year of the Hoei Era (1705), was participated in by many commoners of Osaka; and by the second year of the Kyoho Era (1723), the northern half of the fields had become the possession of the Kônoike family and the southern half, that of the Hirano family. The rice fields of Masanari, Owari Province, cultivated in the sixth year of the Bunsei Era (1823), later fell into the hands of some wealthy commoners of Nagoya. All these facts indicate that commoners came to possess the status of farmer, in addition to their being commoners, although they did not actually engage in farming. The manifesto issued by Heihachiro Oshio in part says: "The wealthy commoners of Osaka in recent years have been exploiting daimyo by putting them under vast pecuniary obligations, and thereby getting an enormous amount of money and

annual stipends of rice. They have been living like princes. Despite their being commoners, they would be appointed *karo* or *yonin* by daimyo. They possess fields and newly cultivated lands of their own, and are living in a very luxurious manner."

In short, the commoners through the power of their money smuggled themselves into the samurai class; receiving the same treatment as samurai; enjoying the status of farmers. A man was samurai one day and commoner the next. It was an era of sweeping changes.

### CONCLUSION

I have endeavoured to point out the fact that the social classes of the Tokugawa Age were neither fixed nor unchangeable throughout the whole period, but that their nature underwent a transformation with the flux of time; and that confusion was brought about in the distinctions among different social classes. Now what does this transformation signify? In the first place, the feudal system of that time was a social system in which a privileged class called "samurai" dominated the rest of the social classes as a ruling class and the samurai were supported in their economic life by the farmers. Gradually, however, there arose trade and industry existing side by side with farming (which had been regarded as the only means of production). Money came to be extensively used, cities developed and the commoner class made its emergence. These phenomena unmistakably indicate the coming into prominence of commercial capital and of the money economy which replaced land economy. As the result of this change, the samurai became unable to maintain their economic life; the farmers also became unable to support the samurai as before. Both the samurai and farmer bowed before the economic power of the commoner. They depended on the latter for capital; transformed themselves into commoners, or smuggled themselves into the commoner class.

On the other hand, the commoner class came to possess the real power in feudal society, dominated the samurai class and extended its grasp over agricultural communities. In other words, each social class gradually lost its old characteristics as the result of economic changes; members of a high class degraded to a class below theirs, while those of the lower grades climbed up into the class above them; thereby giving rise to much confusion in social distinctions. Inasmuch as the maintenance of class distinctions was an indispensable characteristic of the feudal system, this confusion inevitably shook the very foundation on which the system was based. The final overthrow of the feudal system in this period was very natural and to be expected in view of the facts I have pointed out.

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