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CONTROVERSY ON THE *NOBLESSE COMMERÇANTE*

—A SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE—

By Kiyoji KISAKI*

This is a supplementary note to our article¹⁾ on the controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq on the *noblesse commerçante*. Using the material obtained after the printing of the previous paper, we shall discuss some problems which we failed to treat in the previous study, and at the same time we shall have to add some corrections. The emphasis will be placed on the background of the controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq, rather than on the controversy itself. Therefore, this is not so much an independent thesis as a mere enumeration of several problems about the relation between nobles and commerce.

I The *Loi de dérogeance*

First we shall explain the *loi de dérogeance*, which we referred little to in the previous paper due to the lack of space. Since the *loi de dérogeance* provides the ideological stage for the widespread controversy on the *noblesse commerçante* which began with Coyer and d'Arcq, an accurate comprehension of this background is indispensable for understanding of this controversy. In this respect the previous study was far from sufficient.

The origin of the *loi de dérogeance*, as mentioned previously, is obscure. Before this was established as a law, however, it had already existed as a social norm. It was a custom, an ethos. In other words, before nobles were legally prohibited from being engaged in commerce, they were not socially allowed to do so, nor would they think of trying it. Since the nobles engaging in commerce were unconceivable, a positive law prohibiting it was not necessary. It was not until 1540 that nobles were prohibited from being engaged in commerce by the stipulated law. In this year the *Édit d'Aumale* of François I applied the *loi de dérogeance* to the entire country. We say "applied to the entire country", because already in 1451 the *loi de dérogeance* had come into being in the duchy of Bretagne.²⁾

However, it does not necessarily follow that the mingling between nobles and merchants had not existed before that time, nor that the monarchs were always worried about the mingling. During his reign from 1461 to 1483, Louis XI, who is known as friend of commerce, not only bestowed titles of nobility on many merchants, but also allowed nobles to be engaged in commerce.³⁾ The Royal Ordinance of Louis XI says, "All lords, church

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1) Refer to this *Journal*, Vol. XLIX, no. 1-2 (April-Oct. 1979).

2) RICHARD, G., *Noblesse d'affaire au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1974, p. 29.

3) ZELLER, G., *Procès à reviser? Louis XI, la noblesse et la marchandise*, *Annales, E. S. G.*, 1-4 (1946).

men, nobles, our and lords' officials and judges under us, and in general all manners of men, in any status, quality and condition they may be, can and are allowed to be engaged in commerce by sea and land, and by inland water, without losing their titles of nobility, status, official positions, dignities and privileges."

Why, under these circumstances, did François I have the *loi de dérogeance* stipulated? We emphasized in our previous paper the importance of retaining nobles for military service. The reason is certainly justified in itself, but we may add another motive as to the new enactment. It is a request from the third status. In 1576, when the religious struggle in France almost reached the peak, the third status presented to the *États généraux* at Blois a petition requesting that "the noble and the common should remain within their own occupations." The request implies on one hand that the noble should be engaged only in military service but not in commercial activities, and on the other that the common should be engaged only in economic activities but not in military service. For an old saying goes, "Priests pray, nobles fight and people plough." Does the petition not indicate that the common detested their being engaged in military service as much as they detested the noble's being engaged in commerce? In fact, it was the age of universal enlargement of commerce and that of the progressive participation in wars by the common. It appears that their disposition expressed in 1576 had already influenced the *Édit d'Aumale* by François I in 1540. If so, it follows that the nation-wide application of the *loi de dérogeance* by François I was as well the expression of his intention to keep nobles for military service as that of the third status who detested the noble invading into commerce as much as the common being engaged in military service.

However, the existence of the policy of Louis XI aiming at uniting the noble with commerce, as well as the existence of the petition by the common requesting to separate them, reflect the changes in economic world under a rapid, world-wide revival of commercial activities following the discovery of the New World, and so they will foretell the invalidity of the *loi de dérogeance* of François I. Moreover, as was mentioned in our previous paper, François I himself sold the titles of nobility to many merchants in order to relieve his financial difficulties, while prohibiting the noble from commercial activities.

Thus, from the beginning of its enactment, the *loi de dérogeance* was destined neither to be applied strictly nor to show its efficacy.⁴⁾ First, it was inevitable to make exceptions as to some kinds of industrial activities; glass and mining industries were excluded. Moreover, how could the nobles, who are essentially lords and landowners, be prohibited from managing vineyards and manufacturing and selling wine?⁵⁾ Second, regional exceptions had to be admitted. Nobles may be prohibited from engaging in commerce in such regions as are blessed with fertile land and flourishing agriculture; but in the region where the land are too barren for the noble to earn their living only by agriculture

4) The fact that most of the French nobles were not engaged in commerce till the Revolution does not provide an evidence to the effectiveness of the *loi de dérogeance*. Refer to our previous paper and the demonstration in the present.

5) Agriculture was not generally subject to this law but leased-land agriculture, i.e., capitalistic agricultural management was prohibited.

or where trade has historically prospered, strict prohibition of commerce by nobles would invite total destruction of the noble class itself. Therefore, as early as 1566, Charles IX could not but allow upon request from nobles in Marseille that the nobles in this district might be engaged in commerce. The reasons alleged for the permission are that the land of the southern France is too barren to assure them sufficient income and that to prohibit their commerce is to have this region trampled upon, to her great prejudice, by Italian merchants, who are at the same time nobles. In fact, many of nobles in the southern France came from the merchant class in Italy and therefore they were originally nothing but merchants.

In addition, in 1614, nobles in Normandie made the same request as nobles in Marseille had done earlier. "May it be allowed to the nobles to do great traffic and to equip ships to this effect, within a given period and under a given formality, without losing for it the status of being the noble. Hereupon the nation will become stronger and younger brothers will be employed." Improverishment of the noble had already been apparent. The request from the Norman nobles was granted.

Hereafter, the government encourages more and more actively the nobles to commerce. In reply to the requests from the *États généraux* and nobles, Louis XIII, helped by Richelieu, allowed the noble to be engaged in some commercial activities and bestowed the title of nobility on several merchants in shipbuilding, marine transport and wholesale business. Supported by Colbert, Louis XIV proceeded in the same direction. It is said that Louis XIV encouraged the nobles to commerce so as to divert their rebellious mood lingering from the War of Fronde. He also seems to have intended to compensate by this policy the weakening of French economy which had followed his notorious *Édit de Nantes*. The Charter of the East India Company which was re-established in 1664 specifies that French subjects may join the Company regardless of their qualities or conditions without losing their status or privileges. The most decisive and the most significant royal ordinance was issued five years later, in 1669. The ordinance first emphasized the importance of commerce and then criticized the public opinion which regarded commercial activity and the status of the noble to be antinomic. "Every noble can therefore, either by himself or through a mediator, organize a company and take part in merchant ships, their goods and merchandise, without by reason of birth being deprived of his title of nobility as long as however he is not at all engaged in retail business."

Since then, the king reconfirmed repeatedly the ordinance of 1669⁶⁾, which only shows how few were the nobles who actually carried on commerce. But, we should not forget that the *loi de dérogeance* was not led straight towards the relaxation. Conversely, due to the situation explained later, the law was not only sometimes reinforced but also newly granted titles were often revoked.

6) According to Richard, the royal ordinance which encouraged nobles in commerce was issued nineteen times; in 1462, 1566, 1627, 1629, 1634, 1661, 1664, 1669, 1681, 1686, 1701, 1706, 1717, 1719, 1724, 1727, 1757, 1765, and 1767. (RICHARD, G., *Un essai d'adaptation sociale à une nouvelle structure économique. La noblesse de France et les sociétés par actions à la fin du XVIII^e siècle*, R. H. E. S., 1962, No. 4, p. 484).

In short, the *loi de dérogeance* was enacted by the king's intention to retain nobles for military service, together with the opposition of the third status to the invasion of the nobles into commerce and to the participation of the third status in warfare. From the time of its enactment, however, this law was doomed to failure, because it had nothing for its object but to intercept for a time being the inevitable process of the history. Therefore, the law permitted exceptions by region and by the kind of commercial activities, and oscillating between temporary reinforcement and moderation, finally came to be less strict. However, we should not be slow in adding that in general French nobles always disliked commercial activities. The nobles who were actually engaged in commercial activities, as is shown later, were very few in comparison with all the French nobles. We should not be misled by the existence of the petitions of big nobles who wished the royal permission for their commercial activities. They were really few. A large part of the big nobles and all the minor nobles still remained contemptuous of the commercial world. It was not because of the existence of the *loi de dérogeance* but because of the prevailing prejudice of the ethos that commerce was regarded as servile. Many royal ordinances issued during the period from the 17th to the 18th century with a view to encouraging commerce remained inefficacious. Indeed, the government piped unto the noble but they did not dance.

II Overseas Trade and Wholesale Trade

As was already mentioned, if commerce was allowed to nobles, it was usually limited to overseas trade and wholesale business excluding retail. In Bretagne, however, as was also mentioned already, nobles were engaged even in retail business with their titles made to "sleep". Why were only overseas and wholesale trade permitted in general? It is not easy to give a clear-cut answer, but we may say as follows.⁷⁾

First, overseas trade had not yet secured stable conditions and was of adventurous nature. It was not so much a commercial activity in today's sense as an adventure, a warfare, or a piracy. These facts are well-known and we need not explain in detail. Hence, overseas trade was regarded as not unworthy of the nobles as warriors.

Second, both wholesale and overseas trade are large scale transactions (the French words for wholesale business is *commerce en gros*, which is synonymous with large quantity transaction, while retail business is in French *commerce en détail*, which is synonymous with small quantity transaction). Therefore, those merchants who were engaged in such commerce did not have to touch their merchandise directly with their hands, and, sitting in the chair of his office, had only to command their men. This was not a kind of mean manual labor, but of administration and command, which was not very different from the task of statemen or military leaders, and which, therefore, was befitting to the noble.

What should be considered as the third reason is that managers of overseas or wholesale trade were not always confined to the chairs in their offices; they always had time

7) LÉVY-BRUHL, H., *La noblesse de France et le commerce à la fin de l'Ancien Régime*, *Revue d'Histoire moderne*, No. 8., 1933, p. 215; ADAMS, L., *Coyer and the Enlightenment* <Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Vol. CXXIII>, 1974, pp. 82-84.

free from work. This means that they could present themselves to the Court, and also that they even had time to be engaged in military service if necessary. If they carried on retail business, they could not leave their stores, without losing all or large part of their income. In short they would be nothing but merchants. Therefore, to allow nobles to be engaged in large scale commerce means to retain them as warriors and as courtiers while letting them enrich themselves through commercial activities. More than that. It means, through the possible enrichment of the noble in the time of their general decadence, to expect the improvement in the financial situation of the government by the increase in tax revenue.

On the other hand, however, it should be noted that to allow only overseas and wholesale business proved to be of little help to the relief of impoverished minor nobles. For, as d'Arcq truly pointed out, enormous capital was necessary for overseas or wholesale trade. How can we expect a noble whose income is not more than several thousand francs to build merchant ships? Nor was it necessary for big nobles who still enjoyed abundant income to expose themselves to the danger of disgracing their family names by entering the commercial world. To be sure, a few enlightened powerful nobles undertook commercial activity as intended by the government and they became even richer. But were there no problems there? In what follows, we shall examine this point.

III Nobles Who Became Merchants

The relation between nobles and merchants may be observed from two sides. Nobles may become merchants on the one hand, and merchants may become nobles on the other. In this section we shall take up the former side and in the next the latter.

First of all, how many nobles were engaged in commerce? It is easy to understand how difficult it is to give an accurate answer to it. For an example, we shall cite the estimation by Richard.⁸⁾ According to him, the number of the nobles who were engaged in commercial activities (including of course *industrial* activities) during the period from the middle of the 18th century to the Great Revolution was approximately one thousand. The number is very small, when compared with the total number of the nobles whatever estimation we may make of the latter.⁹⁾ The breakdown is shown in the table.

8) RICHARD, G., *Noblesse d'Afrique au XVIII^e siècle (op. cit.)*, p. 267. According to Mousnier, the number of nobles engaged in commerce was 79 in Nantes, 56 in Lyon, 47 in Bordeaux, 13 in Toulouse and so on; new nobles accounted for 80% of the total number of noble merchants, and the very small part of the remaining 20% accounted for nobles of distinguished family in its true sense, the rest being the sons of new nobles. In other words, very few nobles from ancient families were engaged in commerce. (MOUSNIER, R., *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue*, t. I, Paris 1974, p. 155). When compared with the figure cited by Richard, the figure Mousnier estimated seems to be the number of noble-merchants excluding ship-owners.

9) The estimated number of French nobles before the Revolution differs greatly among the estimators since the previous century. An incredible difference exists between two works published as late as 1973. Bluche's estimation is 17,000 families or 120,000 persons, while Meyer's is from 300,000 to 350,000 persons. (BLUCHE, F., *La vie quotidienne de la noblesse française au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1973, p. 12; MEYER, J., *Noblesse et pouvoirs dans l'Europe d'Ancien Régime*, Paris 1973, p. 30). Mousnier adopts a classical figure of 400,000 (MOUSNIER, R., *op. cit.*, p. 121).

Négociants armateurs	282	
Nantes		105
Rouen		55
Saint-Malo		32
Bordeaux		31
La Rochelle		17
Marseille		11
Morlaix		10
Le Havre		9
Autres régions		12
Négociants divers	128	
Lyon		56
Toulouse		13
Bretagne		environ 50
Propriétaires ou maîtres de forge	453	
Consessionnaires de Mines de charbon	87	
Industriels divers	87	
Textile		40
Papetrie		19
Total	1,019	

According to Richard, the number, though it is small in itself, is significant to French industry before the Revolution. But, our concern rests not so much on industrial, quantitative analysis of the merchant-nobles as on institutional and social difficulties which they encountered when they entered into commerce.

What privileges were meant when the clause said that nobles "may be engaged in commerce without losing their titles and privileges?" The privileges of the noble were various from substantial ones to merely honorary. What is signified here in particular is the privilege of tax exemption, especially *taille* exemption. To be registered in the list of *taillables* means to have become practically equal to the common, which is one of the greatest disgraces to the noble. But the decision made by the government as to what commercial activities should be forbidden by the *loi de dérogeance* often lacked consistency and so nobody knew whether or not a specific kind of commercial activity would become the object of the law. Therefore, those whose commercial activity is on the borderline were always under great apprehensions. Moreover, small nobles with little bit of capital were neither able to participate in overseas trade nor wholesale business which required a large amount of capital, and they could not therefore help carrying on a kind of commerce which bordered on retail business. Since such kind of activity was most likely to incur the destruction of the status of nobility, it was quite natural that minor nobles should rather prefer doing nothing.

The humiliation which a noble had to be subject to when it was found that he had

been engaged in retail business is illustrated in the affair of the Duke of La Force.¹⁰⁾ He opened a store in Paris in another name and sold such goods as Chinese spices, chinawares, screens, distilled liquors and so on. When accused by the food guild of Paris, and the fact brought to light, the public insulted the Duke of La Force in various ways. Funny songs were sung, caricatures drawn, and he was despised as a pharmacist. Even children are said to have followed after his coach and jeered at him. His colleagues also turned the back to him and his brothers changed their names. The *Parlement* of Paris examined the affair and the court also intervened. Through frantic efforts of his family the Duke finally escaped being punished legally, but he had to suffer from unbearable humiliation for a long time. The disgrace which the Duke of La Force sustained in Paris seems to be unfair and unreasonable since at that time in another part of France some nobles were carrying on retail business, having their titles "sleep". It was surely unfair and unreasonable, but we must take it into consideration that in those days there was almost no notion of the national law which was to be applied equally throughout the country and that Bretagne was still thought to be a special region.

At the same time, however, we should read, in the humiliation that the Duke sustained, the hatred from the third status directed towards the merchant-nobles. To be engaged in commerce "without losing the privileges of the noble" means to be engaged in commerce "without paying the tax imposed on the common." It was a matter of course that the third status were opposed to the situation. To their eyes it appeared quite unfair that a noble should suddenly step into commercial activities fostered and monopolized by them over many generations but that he should neither pay the tax imposed on them nor take the specific position for which they were responsible. If the noble had their privileges, the third status had also their own privileges, which were to be respected by all. In fact, after the petition by the common presented to the *États généraux* of Blois in 1576, the third status continued to oppose to the *noblesse commerçante*. It would therefore be neither reasonable nor fair not to impose on the noble the same tax as imposed on the common if the *loi de dérogeance* should be made invalid so as to make the noble be engaged in commerce. However, to impose the same taxes on the noble as on the common was to deny the greatest of all the privileges that the former enjoyed, and it would appear to the noble to be a denial of the noble class itself. Indeed it was not an illusion. Effectual abolition of the *loi de dérogeance* presupposed the abolition of the tax exemption privilege, which meant practically the abolition of the status of the noble; in short it presupposed the French Revolution.

A compromising solution was of course possible theoretically. In 1757 a noble named Trobiane made claim to the Board of Trade. His complaint was that, because of the fact that he was engaged in commerce, he was unduly liable for the burdens which were imposed upon the common, such as enrollment, billet, militia service, tax collection, poll tax and so on. In reply to his complaint the Board of Trade said that two sorts of burdens should be distinguished: the first ones were imposed upon the common and so

10) Refer to the following. CARRÉ, H., *La noblesse de France et l'opinion publique au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1920, pp. 137-140.

were not imposed on merchant-nobles; the second were imposed on commerce and so were equally imposed both on common merchants and merchant-nobles. This replay is shrewd but it was in practice impossible to define logically clearly which burdens were imposed on merchants and which on commerce.

Another inconvenience to merchant-nobles was the provision concerning the treatment of property acquired through commerce. In some regions such property, when inherited, was treated as common property, but not noble property. In the case of noble property the eldest son inherited two-thirds of the total, while in the case of common property it was equally divided among the sons. This system was to bring about a significant consequence in that, where there were many children, the amount of property inherited by the eldest son was not big enough to maintain him high as the head of the family.

Thus, in addition to the difficulty in capital supply and the prejudice toward commercial activity, the apprehension arisen from the obscurity of the borderline between wholesale and retail business, the opposition of the third status, and inconveniences in tax laws and inheritance laws, all these could not help preventing nobles from entering the commercial world.

Therefore, it was only the enlightened nobles in cities who could and in fact did apply themselves contentedly to overseas trade or wholesale business. The more they knew about the situation in Britain, the less they were possessed by the prejudice against commerce and the more they proceeded in the direction envisaged by Coyer. However, as is mentioned repeatedly, they were few and they were not necessarily willing to distinguish their family names in the commercial world. Such feeling of the nobles was to develop joint-stock corporations that assured anonymity, which is not our theme.¹¹⁾

Finally it should be noted that commercial activity by nobles was not necessarily advantageous to French industry as long as they placed importance on the ethos peculiar to the noble class. In other words, nobles did not betake themselves to commerce because they wanted to make commerce their "last home" but because they wanted to acquire a means to "live nobly."¹²⁾ They did not intend to be naturalised in the commercial world. This attitude was quite different from the ethos of modern capitalists who have for his unique aim accumulation itself. To the merchant-nobles the commercial world was a temporary lodging from which they were to go back as soon as possible to their ancient chateaux.

IV Merchants Who Became Nobles

We treat now the problem of the transformation of merchants into nobles, which is reverse to the transformation of nobles into merchants discussed in the preceding section. Here again existed various inconveniences.

It is almost beyond doubt that most of the merchants dreamed of acquiring the status

11) Richard studies this problem. RICHARD, G., *op. cit.*

12) "Vivre noblement" means to live on land rent or on annuity and not by labor.

of nobility. However, this did not necessarily assure the success of the plan to reconstruct French economy by taking advantage of their wish. In this point Montesquieu was clearly too naive and optimistic and so was Coyer.

First of all, it should be noted that there were two separate ways to become nobles. The first is the case where the status of the noble is bestowed as a reward to the success of commercial activity itself, while the other is the case where official posts accompanied with the status of the noble are purchased with the money obtained through commercial activity. The former way was just what Montesquieu had in mind. But, real situation was contrary to what he wished. Very few were given the titles of nobility owing to their success in commercial activity,¹³⁾ and in most cases merchants tried to become noble through purchasing official posts. As a result, enriched merchants rushed to the post which seemed fitting to them, thus raising the price of such a post extremely high. This happened partly because merchants naturally chose the easiest way to become noble, and partly because they wanted to keep secure their newly acquired status of the noble by occupying an official post. For the status of these new nobles was not necessarily secure.

It goes without saying that the noble class itself was not a single homogeneous group but was divided into many small strata mainly depending on the difference in birth. Carré classified the nobles into eight groups ranging from pureblood nobles to nobles "of womb" (males born from a noble woman married to a common person and judged as noble by the king,) and he explains that those groups are again divided further into subgroups.¹⁴⁾ The lower the stratum one belonged to was, and the less old his title was, the less secure his status was. Mainly for financial reason, the *réformation* of the nobles was often undertaken in the 17th century. Unless, at every *réformation*, new nobles, not to mention false ones, could prove themselves noble and pay a certain amount of money, they could not stay in their status. Under these circumstances what the safest life style of a new noble was can easily be imagined: to have a legal proof for being a noble, to assume such an official post as was accompanied with the title of the noble, to secure a complete divorce from what made others remember his former occupation and to "live nobly," i.e., to live on the income from annuity such as land rent....

The consequence of the above is of great significance. First, it means leakage of successful merchants, precious, experienced talents, from commercial activity. Second, it also means leakage of wealth from the commercial world. The wealth that should have been accumulated and reinvested in economic activity was used for purchasing land or securities. In addition, from the viewpoint of the state finance, it caused decrease in government revenue, for ennoblement meant tax exemption. The richer one was, the less he paid. In order to evade this, already in 1701 the government had to declare that the nobles who had acquired the title of the noble might continue commercial activity without being deprived of the status. However, such an action does not seem to have been

13) Richard estimated the number at 24 in Bretagne, 19 in Bordeaux, 12 in Rouen, 3 respectively in Le Havre and in Marseille, and so on. (RICHARD, G., *op. cit.* p. 67).

14) CARRÉ, H., *op. cit.* p. 4.

of any effect.

Thus, ironically enough, ennoblement of merchants, that is, a means to promote national commercial activity, resulted in fact in impeding it. In order to cope with the situation, other policies were sought, this time, to make it difficult for merchants to become noble. Séras, who participated in the controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq, proposed; first, to ennoble the entire wholesale business; second, to make it a requirement of the ennoblement to have been merchant over four succeeding generations; third, to make it another requirement to continue commerce after the ennoblement.¹⁵⁾ The first proposal lacked real basis owing to the distinction of wholesale business from retail, the second would only result in making it still more difficult for merchants to become noble and the third failed to be an excellent plan as long as the public opinion regarded commercial activity as unbecoming to nobles. At any rate, these proposals were not put into practice.

V Before and After the Controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq

In the previous paper we dealt exclusively with the controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq and listed the titles of about twenty writings which appeared immediately after the controversy, with little reference to the situation around the controversy. This may be misleading, for the controversy on whether or not nobles should be engaged in commerce continued from the middle of the 17th century to the Great Revolution. The controversy from 1756 to 1759 was not the only one even if it was the biggest as well as the most noteworthy.

Criticism against idle nobles had already appeared in many literary works in the middle of the 17th century but it was not until the end of that century that the criticism assumed economic nature accompanied with proposals to unite nobles and merchants. Among the predecessors of the controversy on *noblesse commerçante* between Coyer and d'Arcq, Madame Hecht cited about ten authors who belonged to Coyer's side, such as Vauban, Fénelon, Voltaire, Castel de Saint-Pierre, Dutot and so on.¹⁶⁾ On the other hand, Montesquieu and Marquis de Lassay were of course predecessors of d'Arcq.

We have already listed about twenty treatises which followed the controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq, but it may safely be said that the economic literatures which appeared after the controversy are all under its influence whether explicitly or not. *L'Ami des hommes* by Mirabeau contains a refutation against Coyer's proposition¹⁷⁾ and *l'Impôt* by Quesnay¹⁸⁾ has a short section subheaded as "*Noblesse Commerçante*."¹⁹⁾ Besides these,

15) [SÉRAS, P.], *Le commerce ennobli*, Bruxelles 1756, pp. 28-41.

16) HECHT, J., Un problème de population active au XVIII^e siècle, en France; la querelle de la noblesse commerçante, *Population*, 19-2 (avril-mai 1964), pp. 272-276.

17) MIRABEAU, V. R., *L'Ami des hommes ou traité de la population*, Avignon 1756 [1757], II partie, p. 4.

18) QUESNAY, F., *Impôt*, 1757, dans *Quesnay et la Physiocratie*, Paris 1958, t. II, pp. 607.

19) In the note 30 in our previous paper we mentioned that Quesnay approved of the *noblesse commerçante*. Although this expression may not be wrong, it needs some explanation. Quesnay comprehended the situation adequately in explaining that minor nobles, who above all needed commerce, were too poor to be engaged in wholesale business and had no choice but be engaged in small commerce, which they

we could observe in many economic or political writings echos of this controversy.²⁰⁾

Then, what influence could the controversy between Coyer and d'Arcq exert on the actual policies? Indeed, a clear-cut answer can not be given to it, as is often the case with such problems. It is almost certain, however, that the questionnaire issued in 1757 by the Board of Trade was inspired by Coyer, at least by Coyer-d'Arcq controversy. As Lévy-Bruhl discusses this survey in detail,²¹⁾ we shall write a few lines about it, taking advantage of him.

In 1757, in the climax of this controversy, the Board of Trade prepared a bill to the effect that nobles should be encouraged in commerce and Moreau de Sechelles, General Controller of Finances, sent the bill to each *Parlement*, Council and Governor, requesting them to submit their views on it. Only the *Parlement* of Paris and the Governors of Metz and Lyon failed to respond. Out of 47 responses, 38 approved of the bill or were favorable to it, while the remaining nine responses were either in opposition or reserved. Among those who disapproved the bill were the *Parlements* of Pau and Grenoble, Governors of Poitiers and Alsace and Lieutenant of Police of Paris, and the reason for their disapproval was more or less the same as that of d'Arcq—incompatibility of the spirit of nobility with that of commerce.

The high rate of 81 percent shown by the supporters in this questionnaire appears to be contrary to the impression given by those writings surrounding Coyer and d'Arcq. In the latter case, d'Arcq's supporters were more in number than Coyer's. Probably, this contradiction was born partly because the supporters of d'Arcq, defenders in this controversy, had all the more to make desperate counterattack, and partly because those who responded to this questionnaire were all administrators. Many of them had apparently been baptised by a new current of ideas and, different from the public opinion, embraced a view similar to that of the central government. In fact, in spite of a large number of approvals on the part of administrators the bill was miscarried, which proved how strong the opposing public opinion was. Especially the notorious Paris guilds, *six corps*, expressed naturally an opposing view to this proposal in fear of their privileges being invaded. Needless to say, other opposing powers were the nobles' despise to commerce and disgust at being reduced equal to the common.

Consequently, in order to enable nobles to be engaged in commerce, it was necessary to dissolve the guilds as Turgot would undertake some twenty years later, to establish the system of economic freedom, and on the other hand it was essential to deny the privileges

thought to be shameful. Quesnay also thought it undesirable that nobles squeeze themselves into large cities which were already crowded with retail merchants. Therefore, he proposed that nobles had better be engaged not in cities but in rural districts in the "transaction of grain, livestock, wool, fodder and wine." Thus, Quesnay's view is regarded fundamentally as favorable to the *noblesse commerçante*. He simply expressed disapproval of the *noblesse commerçante* in cities because there were already too many merchants, and showed a little concession to the ethos of nobles who despised commerce. Therefore, Madame Hechet has gone too far in saying that Mirabeau and Quesnay were "both hostile to the *noblesse commerçante*." (art. cit. p. 277). Her discussion which follows seems to understand Quesnay's view correctly and so the above expression of her looks odd.

20) HECHT, J., art. cit., p. 278, note 3.

21) LÉVY-BRUHL, H., art. cit., pp. 226-272.

of the noble, which was what they would never accept. For the denial of these privileges meant the denial of the *Ancien Régime* itself.²²⁾

VI Coyer's Position in the History of Economic Ideas

We remain unable to present an overall evaluation of the position of Coyer in the history of economic ideas. However, as we kept silent on this problem in our previous paper, we shall add a few words on it.

We have so far dealt with Coyer as an economist but he should rather be called a miscellaneous writer on current events. His works directly relating to the economic problems are no more than four: *Chinki*, *Naru*, *Noblesse Commercante* and *Développement et Défense*. What is more, the first two are novels. In his recent study Adams lists nearly 40 works as Coyer's, among which are found novels, histories, social criticisms, education, philosophy, literary criticism, travels, essay on England, etc.²³⁾ These works are generally witty and ironical and seem to have been widely welcomed by readers. Above all, *Plan d'éducation nationale* (1770) seems to occupy a certain place among the discussions on education which were developed before the French Revolution.

However, we are now concerned with the position of Coyer as an economic philosopher or as a social philosopher. In our previous paper we avoided using such terms as mercantilist or Physiocrate, because we thought that such terms would be an obstacle, not an aid, to understand an economist in the 18th century France who had been almost unknown to Japan. In addition, the study on the history of economic thought of France lags extremely behind in this country, and it appears that even the various aspects of the French mercantilism has not yet been fully uncovered.

It is only too natural that some scholars should be inclined to count Coyer as one of the mercantilists when they read the title of his work *Noblesse Commercante* and get acquainted with his admiration of overseas commerce. In fact, Depitre judged in that way and regarded d'Arcq and his followers rather as physiocrats.²⁴⁾ At the same time, however, it is in order to secure the fund for managing land that Coyer attaches

22) We should have discussed another problem: that of the army. Since the essential occupation of nobles is military service, it is indispensable in discussing the *noblesse commerciale* to refer to the military service. D'Arcq's interest was rather in the military service than in the commerce. However, at present the author of this paper is not competent enough to refer to the army of the 18th century France. He simply explains that the position of officer which a son of an ordinary noble was used to assume required too much expense for less wealthy nobles to bear; that for this reason in 1734 a number of officers retired; that on the other hand the number of officers from bourgeoisie increased; that they were not naturally on good terms with those from noble families; and that in 1780 measures were taken to prevent commons from becoming officers.

23) ADAMS, L., *op. cit.*, bibliography. In our previous paper, we mentioned that Coyer wrote nearly 30 books. But it should be corrected.

24) DEPITRE, E., *Le système et la querelle de la noblesse commerciale* (1756-1759), *R.H.E.S.* 6^e année, 1913, t. II, p. 162. At least it is wrong to consider d'Arcq as a physiocrate. It is sufficient to see d'Arcq's opposition to the increase of wealth. One can not become a physiocrate simply by emphasizing agriculture.

great importance to industrial activity of nobles. Indeed, Coyer seems to have conceived a plan of national economic growth based on agricultural development. Judging from this point of view, it may be possible to regard him as a physiocrate, and so did Adams.²⁵⁾

In short, the result will not be fruitful if we presuppose an absolute opposition between mercantilism and Physiocracy and discuss which side Coyer belongs to. What should be done at the present is to compare Coyer's economic ideas point by point with those of other contemporary economists. The work will require still longer time.²⁶⁾

25) ADAMS, L., *op. cit.*, p. 72.

26) It is also necessary to take his political thought into account. His bestseller *Bagatelles morales* is no more than witty social criticism, but at least his two essays on "the ancient word of *patrie*" and on "the nature of the people" are serious political criticism, where he attacks despotism, emphasizes the equality of men, and in short demands the rehabilitation of the *patrie* and the people, and thus approaches to the opposition groups.