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The Economic Rehabilitation of the Samurai in the Early Meiji Period

HARRY D. HAROOTUNIAN

THE Meiji Restoration of 1868, unquestionably the most important event in modern Japanese history, brought in its wake social and economic changes of a revolutionary nature. With the overthrow of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, the subsequent abolition of the *han* system, the equalization of classes, and the establishment of a conscript army, the need for a hereditary military class ceased to exist. Certainly, the presence of a samurai class, numbering approximately 1,800,000, or 400,000 families, stranded in a society in process of divesting itself of all feudal fetters, constituted an acute problem. The continued existence of this vast army of unemployed retainers could have easily hamstrung all efforts to modernize. And it is hardly surprising that the new Meiji leaders realized at the inception of the new regime that if the work of the Restoration was to be completed successfully, it was necessary to work out a satisfactory settlement for the samurai class.

It is true that when the new government abolished the shogunal and *han* governments it did away with the special social, political, and economic privileges of the samurai. But it is also true that this destruction of the old order was accompanied by the Meiji government's assumption of responsibility toward the declassed samurai, a responsibility that was expressed in the government's efforts to find a place for members of the class in the new society. Throughout the 1870's and early 1880's, concern was shown in government circles for the plight of the samurai. Few if any governmental leaders were willing to commit the class to a permanent state of economic depression. Iwakura Tomomi, a member of the court nobility and one of the most eloquent spokesmen for samurai interests in the government, constantly warned his peers of the perils of the samurai problem and urged a speedy and satisfactory settlement. Aware of the special contribution the samurai had made to Japanese society, Iwakura considered the class too valuable to be left to the arbitrary uncertainties of economic deprivation.¹ "For the past 300 years," he declared, "the samurai have been the natural leaders in society; they have participated in governmental affairs and brought to it a polished purity and virtue. Because of the military and literary accomplishments of the class, they alone possess a character that is both noble and individualistic. It is for this reason that the 400,000 samurai of today are the most useful group in society. . . ."² Iwakura's words were not neglected. Since most members of the government were samurai, they needed little convincing of the special

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¹ *Iwakuraō jikkī*, ed. Tada Takamon (Tokyo, 1927) II, 545; see also Yoshikawa Hidezō, *Shizoku jusan no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1943), p. 244. Hereafter, this work will be cited as *SJK*.

² *Iwakuraō jikkī*, II, 547.

qualities of the class.³ Furthermore, many of the young leaders were impressed by the political implications of samurai economic discontent, for the weight of armed revolt was on them before they could consolidate the authority of the state. From 1873 to 1878, four samurai uprisings were directed at the overthrow of the new state. Even though the government successfully weathered these rebellions, the samurai opposition was not crushed. Rather, it assumed a different and more enduring form—a political movement which called for the establishment of representative institutions (*jiyū minken undō*).⁴

Since the problem of the samurai was at bottom economic, the government sought an economic solution. Instead of using artificial measures to relieve the plight of the samurai, the logical solution to the problem was found in the conditions attending the general expansion of the Japanese economy. Industrial and agricultural expansion would provide a place for both samurai investments and employment; at the same time, it would allow the class to be absorbed into the new society.⁵ "In trying to create employment for the samurai," Iwakura advised, "we must give first importance to the development of industry. . . . Let those samurai with ability be placed in charge of the new enterprises, those with physical strength be employed as workers, and within a few years production in different parts of the country will be sufficiently increased so that all samurai now idle will be useful producers."⁶ The samurai, in short, were to provide a pool of uncommitted manpower from which financiers, managers, and workers were to be recruited for the new Western-style industries.⁷ From 1868 to roughly 1889, the task of absorbing the samurai was the aim of a specific program known officially as *shizoku jusan*, the samurai rehabilitation policy.

Although *shizoku jusan* was essentially motivated by the need to find employment for ex-samurai, it was also hoped that it might serve the broader objective of economic development. In their many memorials and petitions concerning the problem of samurai, government leaders such as Iwakura, Ōkubo, and Kido indicated that a rehabilitation policy need not be limited to protecting former samurai, but could be considered as another technique by which the government would accumulate capital. In this sense, samurai rehabilitation was subordinated to the general program of the Meiji government, one which took the form of making Japan economically

³ For the views of government members, see Fukaya Hiroharu, *Kashizoku chitsuroku shobun no kenkyū* [*A Study of the Samurai Pension System*] (Tokyo, 1942), pp. 258–268; 279 ff.

⁴ It has been rightly observed by many Japanese historians that the beginnings and development of the so-called "popular rights movement" merely expressed a segment of samurai discontent, that *jiyū minken*, for the founders of the movement, actually meant *shizoku minken* (samurai rights). See Harry D. Harootunian, *The Samurai Class during the Early Years of the Meiji Period in Japan* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1957), pp. 97–114; Gotō Yasui, "Shizoku minken no rekishi teki hyomen" ("Historical analysis of shizoku minken"), *Jimbun gakuhō*, IV (1954), 139. Professor Gotō argues that in reality Itagaki Taisuke's espousal of liberal symbols was not much different than the rebel ideology of Saigō Takamori. For Professor Gotō, the movement for political democracy proved to be little more than another wing of the samurai opposition to oligarchical government (*hambatsu*).

⁵ Yoshikawa Hidezō, "Meiji seifu no shizoku jusan" ("The samurai rehabilitation policy of the Meiji government"), in *Meiji Ishin keizaishi kenkyū*, ed. by Honjo Eijirō (Tokyo, 1931), p. 584. Hereafter cited as MIKK.

⁶ Quoted in Thomas C. Smith, *Political Change and Industrial Development in Japan: Government Enterprise, 1868–1880*, (Stanford, 1955), p. 34. For a detailed analysis of Iwakura's views on *shizoku jusan*, see Yoshikawa, *SJK*, pp. 243–257.

⁷ For an explanation of how samurai represented an "exploitable social stratum" from which recruitment for change could be made, see my article, "The Progress of Japan and the Samurai Class," *Pacific Historical Review*, III (1959), 257–259.

independent and militarily powerful and best expressed in the popular slogans of the day, *fukoku kyōhei* (enrich the nation, strengthen the army)⁸ and *bussan banshoku* (increase production). Yet, the motivation underlying *shizoku jusan* and the aims which served to guide the program were two different things; while the motivation was unmistakably clear, the specific aims of the policy often appeared to be vague and ill-defined. The goals of samurai rehabilitation were uncertain because the policy was always considered as secondary to larger economic considerations. If the program was designed specifically to protect declassed samurai by finding employment for them, it failed to fulfill its foremost obligation, for it was neither successful in providing the samurai with a satisfactory financial settlement, nor did it create a lasting solution to their unemployment problems. Despite this fundamental failure of *shizoku jusan*, there is little doubt that the program had significance for the development of modern Japanese society. It certainly contributed to the process of capital accumulation, it stimulated the growth of an entrepreneurial class, and it provided a labor force upon which Japanese industry could be expanded.⁹

In December of 1871, after limited experimentation, the Meiji government took its first step in the formulation of a samurai rehabilitation program when it promulgated the so-called commercial law. The new law permitted the samurai and *kazoku* to take up any occupation they desired. While signaling the new freedom of employment and occupation now allowed the samurai, the commercial law also sanctioned occupations which for centuries had been prohibited. "Hereafter," the edict announced, "samurai and *kazoku*, besides holding governmental positions, may . . . perform duties in agriculture, industry, and commerce."¹⁰ With this pronouncement as a starting point, the Meiji government felt prepared to work out the details of a samurai rehabilitation program. As the program was envisaged, there were at least three major activities in which the government deliberately merged rehabilitation with economic policy: (1) the government encouraged samurai emigration to and the reclamation of new areas; (2) it established branches of the national bank as a safeguard for samurai investments; and (3) it set up the machinery for loaning rehabilitation money in order to provide samurai with the necessary funds to engage in agricultural, industrial, and commercial enterprises.¹¹

Emigration and Reclamation

The first important aspect of the rehabilitation program was in the government's efforts to induce samurai to emigrate and to reclaim land which hitherto had not been under cultivation. It was the hope of many Meiji leaders that this initial step would lay the foundations of a wider rehabilitation program to follow. The general aims of reclamation revealed how far Meiji officialdom would go to shape basic economic policy to meet the needs of samurai rehabilitation. The plan called for using

⁸ For the philosophic antecedents of this slogan and its relationship to modern Japanese nationalism, see Maruyama Masaō, *Kindai Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1954), pp. 343–346.

⁹ For the samurai contribution to modern Japanese society, especially those elements which have been molded by samurai thought and conduct, see Fukuchi Shigetaka, *Shizoku to shizoku ishiki* (Tokyo, 1956).

¹⁰ Nakayama Yasumasa, ed., *Shimibun shusei Meiji hennenshi* (Tokyo, 1935), I, 417. Hereafter cited as *SSMH*.

¹¹ Actually, there was another method which the government adopted to aid the samurai. At the outset of the Meiji period, grants of money were offered to samurai who were willing to surrender their family pensions. However, this method was abandoned at the time the government called for the voluntary commutation of pensions. Yoshikawa, *SJK*, pp. 149–157.

former samurai to clear waste lands, and once the land was reclaimed, the same samurai would take possession of it. The cleared land was to serve as a stimulus to new investment and enterprise. Meiji leaders were also confident that such a reclamation program would be in line with the sweeping changes of the day—the abolition of feudalism—for it would not only “return” the samurai to the land, but also “restore the traditional separation of peasant and soldier.”¹² Finally, the government assumed that since samurai were designated to join the ranks of agrarian cultivators, agricultural production would naturally increase.

Since most of the land earmarked for reclamation lay in the northeastern part of Honshu (*tōhoku*) and in Hokkaido, the government recognized the necessity of settling samurai-employees in these areas. What this meant in concrete terms was that samurai would have to be recruited from the various provinces and relocated on lands in northeastern Honshu and Hokkaido that had been designated as reclamation sites. However, before this could be carried out, it was necessary for the government to establish the appropriate administrative machinery. In December of 1869, the government, in order to unify the supervision of affairs relating to reclamation, set up a special Reclamation Office (*Kaikōn kyōku*) in the Home Ministry. A year later, in 1870, this Reclamation Office dispatched personnel to the provinces of Dewa, Shinano, and Echizen in order to investigate possible sites for reclamation in these areas. The work of investigating potential reclamation sites continued for three years, and in this time the government neither indicated how reclamation was to be conducted nor how it was to be specifically applied to samurai rehabilitation.

It was not until December 1873 that the government announced the first concrete arrangement for land reclamation. In that year, at approximately the same time the government called for the voluntary commutation of pensions, a plan was advanced to provide grants for the purchase of national waste lands (*kanrin kobūchi*). It was the intention of the Meiji government to sell all varieties of waste land at half the value of the market price. The hope must have been high that such a program would induce samurai to invest their funds safely in government sponsored reclamation enterprises. Because of the nature of reclamation projects, samurai were compelled to respond to the offer not as individuals but as groups organized as reclamation companies (*kaikōn kaisha*).¹³ Immediate samurai response to the new arrangement, at least until the commutation of all samurai pensions in 1876, was not very great, nor was it met by any great enthusiasm by those who participated in the program. Owing to timidity and fear or a reluctance to commit themselves to a new life of financial independence, only a modest number of samurai took up reclamation and agricultural cultivation.

After 1876, however, the government moved to expand its original reclamation program. Because of the acute necessity of finding a place for the samurai now that

¹² Yoshikawa, *SJK*, p. 115.

¹³ Reclamation also stimulated the growth of native industries. Many of the *kaikōn kaisha* were ultimately organized with the express purpose of using the reclaimed land for some sort of commercial enterprise. In spite of the limited nature of this development, a contemporary newspaper in 1874 reported enthusiastically one such success story in Ibaraki prefecture when a group of 433 samurai banded together and pooled their finances in order to establish a mulberry company. The newspaper article “. . . hoped that the example of this group would establish a pattern in promoting areas of individual industry throughout the country.” *SSMH*, I, 136. The *Tokuōkōsha* of Okayama prefecture was another such cooperative enterprise, established in 1875. For its statement of aims, see its charter in Okayama Ken, *Okayama kenji kiji* [*Political affairs of Okayama prefecture*], (Okayama, 1939–1942), IV, 499; III, 450 ff.

they no longer drew annual pensions, Ōkubo Toshimichi suggested the immediate establishment of a more powerful rehabilitation bureau. Closely modeled after the earlier example, this new agency was to investigate lands suitable for reclamation and also to provide ways by which the government could extend more aid to the dispossessed class. Two years later, on the heels of the Satsuma Rebellion, Ōkubo took another and more decisive step when he presented to the government councillor Sanjō Sanetomi a petition entitled "A Memorial Concerning Samurai Rehabilitation and General Industry" ("Ippan shokusan oyobi kashizoku jusan ni kan suru").¹⁴ In this petition, Ōkubo presented three major recommendations regarding the problem of samurai rehabilitation. Relying on earlier experiences in rehabilitation, he endorsed the continued search for potentially arable land and the continuation of government managed reclamation projects. Yet, he went on to recommend that the government make a special effort to recruit its labor force from among "sincere" samurai and equip these men with such necessities as houses, tools, living expenses, and food. Secondly, Ōkubo suggested that the government also consign these lands on loan to the samurai for an indefinite period of time. Finally, he expressed the hope that these reclamation projects would lead to the organization of an extensive public works program, such as the draining of marshes, the excavation of canals and channels, and the redirection of rivers and streams for purposes of irrigation.¹⁵ There is little doubt that the first two recommendations were prompted by the problem of samurai rehabilitation; and while the third suggested as its main objective the general expansion of Japanese industry, it is also clear that Ōkubo intended large scale public projects to serve the basic interests of *shizoku jusan*.¹⁶

If Ōkubo's petition pointed up the need for a more comprehensive rehabilitation program, his concern also proved to be symptomatic of government thinking in the years after 1876. From 1876 to 1884 the government launched a number of reclamation projects which recruited as labor vast numbers of ex-samurai.¹⁷ Although it may be open to question whether such projects, from the drainage of a lake to the clearing of a wooded patch on a mountain side, actually made available a significant amount of arable land, it should be clear that as a rehabilitative measure, reclamation not only gave a substantial number of former samurai temporary employment, it also provided them with land from which they could draw a livelihood. By 1884 over 34,000 acres of fallow land had been reclaimed throughout twenty-four prefectures; approximately 20,000 samurai had been enlisted for the operation.¹⁸

¹⁴ The full text of the memorial can be found in *Ōkubo Toshimichi bunsho*, ed. by Hayakawa Junzaburō, (Tokyo, 1927–29), IX, 40–52.

¹⁵ Azuma Tōsaku, *Meiji shakai seisakushi* (Tokyo, 1941), pp. 78–79.

¹⁶ This third suggestion was actually the substance of an earlier memorial entitled "Shokusan kigyō ni kan-suru kengisho" ("Petition relating to the encouragement of industrial production"), in *Ōkubo Toshimichi bunsho*, V, 561.

¹⁷ An example of one such project was the reclamation of Lake Inawashirō in Asaka district of Fukushima prefecture in northeastern Japan. The project was begun in 1879 after it was estimated by government surveyors that drainage of the lake would make accessible approximately 9,800 acres of arable land. Shortly after drainage of the lake began, the central government turned the administration of the project over to local authorities. In 1880, the prefecture offered a limited number of samurai families such things as expense funds, farm equipment, and land up to seven acres a family. Recruitment was not limited to samurai of the Fukushima area, for samurai of other locales were also enlisted. For a description of this project see Tsunoshita Tsuyoi, "Asaka kokuei kaikonsho ni okeru shizoku ijū" ("Samurai immigration to the national reclamation project in Asaka"), *Keizaishi kenkyū*, I (1941), 156–174.

¹⁸ Yoshikawa, *SJK*, pp. 115–126.

The second aspect of the reclamation program concerned the colonization of Hokkaido. Colonization of Japan's northernmost island was prompted both by the need to insure the defense of the nation's outermost frontier and by the search for more arable land.¹⁹ It is also true, however, that Meiji leaders were quick to see how well colonization could be merged with samurai rehabilitation. As early as April 1869, a governmental agency was established for the purpose of encouraging "protective emigration" to and the colonization of areas within the main islands. By August of the same year, a Colonization Bureau (*Kaitakushi*) was set up. Upon the establishment of the *Kaitakushi* the government also announced its desire "to colonize overseas lands and make them available . . . to the masses and the samurai."²⁰ Shortly after, the Colonization Bureau drafted a set of rules called the "Emigrants' Aid Regulations" which enumerated the various services that prospective emigrants could expect from the government.²¹

However, this zealous paternalism was soon abandoned when the scheme for emigration proved to be little more than an enormous dole for samurai seeking an easy solution to their financial problems. In order to discourage colonization from degenerating into pump-priming, the government in 1872 reduced the provisions it originally allowed to emigrants. The revision, needless to say, was designed to discourage individuals who had no real desire to emigrate and, at the same time, to appeal to large groups willing to commit themselves to a new kind of life on the frontier. The administrative direction of the program was also changed in the following years, being first placed under the jurisdiction of the prefectural governments and then later under the Hokkaido department whose function it was to integrate emigration with the general economic development of the island.

The government also recognized that the program of reclamation and cultivation would attract prospective colonists. A public notice issued in August 1869, in this connection, announced that emigrant-applicants were qualified to divide and possess land in Hokkaido after it had been reclaimed. By September of the same year, approximately 450 persons had responded to this offer and had gone to Hokkaido.²² Yet it was not until three years later that the government issued official rules, the Hokkaido Land Sale Regulations, which laid down the provisions for the acquisition of reclaimed land in the northern island. The ordinance served until 1886, at which time it was abrogated.

The program of emigration and reclamation, at least at its inception, was not limited to recruiting declassed samurai alone. But the Meiji leaders did expect the program, like reclamation plans within Honshu, to serve the specific goals of samurai rehabilitation as well as those which aimed at the general economic development of Hokkaido. Therefore, in 1875, the government, through the offices of the Colonization Bureau, extended the right of purchasing waste lands at half the market value to samurai willing to emigrate to Hokkaido. The plan, as it was realized, encouraged samurai to pool their resources as incorporated groups and to apply for the land on a

¹⁹ For the official statement vis a vis Hokkaido, see Matsushita Yoshiō, *Kindai Nihon gunjishi*, (Tokyo, 1944), pp. 190–208. This is a documentary history in which the original decrees relating to Hokkaido are reproduced.

²⁰ Quoted in Yoshikawa, *SJK*, p. 131.

²¹ According to the size of families, emigrants could expect in addition to land, some expense funds, utensils, tools, and food.

²² Yoshikawa, *SJK*, pp. 134–136.

collective basis. Such samurai companies as the *Kaishinsha* of Wakayama prefecture and the *Seikishinsha* of Hyogo were examples of this development. A similar response had been made by the samurai who committed themselves to reclamation projects within the main islands. After the Satsuma Rebellion, the government expanded its original efforts to encourage the colonization of the northern island. As a result, between 1882 and 1889, the government spent nearly ¥500,000 a year on development of which ¥150,000 was loaned specifically to samurai who chose to emigrate to Hokkaido. In the same years, approximately 2,000 samurai families were recruited for the new endeavor.²³

A crucial aspect of the government's program to develop Hokkaido was the creation of military colonies (*tondenhei*). The establishment of military colonies, based on a memorial drafted by the Minister of Colonization Kuroda Kiyotaka in 1873, was designed to enlist people who were able both to till the soil and defend Hokkaido in the event of an invasion.²⁴ Kuroda's memorial recommended that the military colonies consist of former samurai, since they were admirably suited by training and disposition, to fulfill at least one of the functions; in periods of peace, they would normally pursue agricultural and industrial enterprises, but in times of war, they would automatically be organized into army units, attached to a military command.²⁵ These samurai-colonists were to be generously supplied with arable land, houses, utensils, tools, farm equipment, and food for a period of three years. Samurai response to this offer, however, proved initially to be disappointing. Until the abolition of the Colonization Bureau in 1882, only 2,420 men and their families had been enlisted.²⁶ The program of *tondenhei* was temporarily suspended in 1882, but in 1884 it was placed under the Ministry of the Army and relaunched with a new vigor. From 1884 to 1889, this new drive recruited nearly 7,500 samurai.²⁷

The National Bank as a Rehabilitative Measure

When in 1876 the government called for the commutation of all samurai pensions,²⁸ it also acknowledged the necessity of investigating the means by which samurai bonds could be protected from the uncertainties attending the growth of an immature economy. Ōkuma Shigenobu, Finance Minister at the time, was fully aware of the fact that the bond settlement was not a lasting solution to the mounting financial problems that ex-samurai were facing. In his search for a long-term solution, he struck upon a plan whereby the government would establish a loan bureau from which samurai could obtain low-interest loans by mortgaging their bonds. While it was Ōkuma's hope to provide the samurai with sufficient capital to enable them to

²³ For a breakdown of figures relating to recruitment see *Shinsen Hokkaidōshi* (Tokyo, 1934), III, 859–860.

²⁴ Fujii Jintarō and Moriya Hidesuke, *Meiji jidai shi* (Tokyo, 1930), II, 664–665.

²⁵ Matsushita, *Kindai Nihon gunjishi*, pp. 190–91. To fulfill this objective, the government turned to the impoverished samurai of northeastern Japan. The official decree reads: "Samurai of Aomori, Miyagi, Saketa . . . and the old prefecture of Hakodate . . . will be recruited as *tondenhei*." It is more than probable that the government selected these areas not only for their geographic proximity to Hokkaido, but also because samurai from these northern *han* had fought with the Tokugawa during the Restoration wars of 1867.

²⁶ This figure is based on the reports in the *Hokkaidō shi* (Tokyo, 1918), XXII, 1–9.

²⁷ Yoshikawa, *SJK*, p. 146.

²⁸ Approximately 310,971 ex-samurai received, in exchange for their military pensions, public bonds amounting to ¥113,000,000. Tsuchiya Takao and Ouchi Hyōhei, ed., *Meiji zenki zaisei shiryō shusei* (Tokyo, 1932), IV, 121.

engage in business, the pitfalls of his scheme were obvious. Had the arrangement been enacted, the samurai would have been left with a sum of money which might easily have been lost. For Ōkuma's plan could neither prevent samurai from spending the money all at one time, nor could it protect them from losing the cash in one financial gamble. Because of the dangers of Ōkuma's recommendations, they were never adopted. Yet rejection by no means meant that Meiji statesmen failed to appreciate the pressing importance of protecting samurai bonds after 1876.

As a more durable measure, one designed to protect samurai bonds either from financial slumps or human frailties, the government in 1876 revised the National Bank Regulations of 1872. The reform now allowed samurai who possessed public bonds to exchange them at the National Bank for paper notes which, in turn, would be used to establish a branch system of the bank. In other words, negotiable bonds held by samurai were to be used as security for investment in the development of branch banks. The government hoped to realize two aims: expansion of bank facilities and protection of samurai bonds and investments. In less than two years after the reform, approximately 148 branches of the National Bank were established. The breakdown of shareholders in 1878 also revealed that only 4,730 commoners (*heimin*)²⁹ held ¥8,870,000 in stock, while 29,630 samurai and *kazoku* controlled ¥30,580,000 worth of bank stock, most of which had been raised by the exchange of bonds for bank notes.³⁰ By 1882 over seventy-five per cent of the stock in the banks was still in the hands of declassed samurai. Perhaps, the best evaluation of this program was made by Finance Minister Matsukata Masayoshi in 1883. In "A Memo Explaining the Way to Eliminate Bank Notes" addressed to the Dajōkan, Matsukata pointed up the extremely close relationship between the bank regulation reform and the expansion of samurai rehabilitation after 1876. He argued that if the regulations had not been revised, the future market value of the samurai bonds would have surely depreciated, that samurai would have been forced into a life of financial despair and aimless wandering, and the government would have failed to meet one of its most compelling obligations. "If the government remained as an onlooker to the plight of the samurai," he concluded, "it would have certainly meant that the government did not understand the relationship between peace and rebellion."³¹ In sum, Matsukata was confident that the establishment of bank branches had not only proved to be a preventive measure against rebellion, but also had contributed to the creation of a convertible currency.

The Loaning of Rehabilitation Capital

Many samurai were still far from realizing financial security. One contemporary source counted seven or eight samurai in every ten that had "fallen into poverty."³² Indeed, the problem of samurai poverty became a favorite subject of angry editorials

²⁹ The term used to denote commoner in the Meiji period is confusing. On more than one occasion low-ranking samurai (e.g. *ashigaru*, *sotsu*, *chūgen*, etc.) were officially merged with peasants and merchants, so that by 1878 it was difficult to determine what percentage of *heimin* originally had been commoners and what percentage were of samurai origin.

³⁰ Takahashi Kamekichi, *Meiji Taishō sangyō hattatsushi* (Tokyo, 1929), p. 108. Cf. Tsuchiya Takao and Okazaki Saburō, *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsushi gaisetsu* (Tokyo, 1938), p. 103.

³¹ Quoted in Yoshikawa, *SJK*, p. 161.

³² In the *Okayama kenchō shozō bunsho*, there are a number of reports which reveal the impoverished conditions of the samurai of Bizen *han*. These reports, made by the prefectural Inspection Bureau

in the nation's newspapers in the years following 1876. It was not uncommon to read editorials demanding that the problem of "samurai poverty be solved and greater attention be paid to the means by which they can be aided."³³ But despite the growing public awareness of and concern over the question of samurai poverty, it was obvious also that there were several good reasons for their poor financial position. For those who converted bonds into cash to invest in new companies, the uneasy economic conditions wrought by the financial vacillations of the late 1870's and early 1880's undermined the stability and security of their ventures.³⁴ Then, too, there were always those samurai who, on converting their bonds into cash, found it difficult to manage their money because it was given to them in one lump sum. The samurai were never noted for their skill in financial affairs, and many former warriors evidently were not able to shake off habits common to the class before the Restoration. Once they were forced to confront the problem of making their own way, it is little wonder that so many lost their funds through mismanagement and dissipation. A public record of 1884 noted in this connection that "samurai lost all money despite their financial resources . . . and this was due chiefly to their lack of experience in a new way of life."³⁵ However, it would be misleading to conclude that financial failure was caused solely by a congenital weakness or a lack of experience. In some cases, the failure of samurai to succeed financially was due to the nature of Meiji society itself. The availability of short-term business opportunities and permanent employment was seriously narrowed by the natural limits of the Japanese economy. There were just so many jobs to be done and enterprises to be started. As Iwakura put it: "For half the class . . . there are no jobs to be done, no skills to be practiced . . . and consequently these samurai are forced to wander about the country and carry on the best they can."³⁶

Meiji leaders, to be sure, were obliged to do more than merely insure the stability of samurai bonds. To meet the gnawing demands of samurai needs, the government worked out and launched what proved to be the most significant aspect of *shizoku jusan*—the loaning of rehabilitation capital in order to promote the expansion of industrial production. The idea of loaning capital for industrial purposes had its origins in suggestions made by Ōkubo and Iwakura, both of whom believed that the problem of samurai employment could be solved only through the expansion of industry.³⁷ Moreover, the use of samurai in the development of industry was easily

(*Junsatsushi*), were usually in the form of an official plea or petition. One such case of 1883 claimed that the bulk of samurai in Okayama "were pressed into unemployment or into menial jobs such as pulling rickshas, while others spent their time in hunger, idleness, and dissipation. . . ." Poverty, however, is difficult to measure by Meiji standards. It would seem that the most acceptable criterion was unemployment. Although there were many samurai who were unemployed, there were also many who were engaged in occupations which a decade earlier had been looked upon with disdain. Therefore, in describing poverty, the problem is in separating samurai who were actually unemployed from those who held "menial" jobs. See *SSMH*, IV, 70, 234; also, Yoshikawa Hidezō, "Meiji shonen shitsugyō mondai" ("The problem of unemployment in the early Meiji period"), *Keizaishi kenkyū*, 14, (1935), No. 2.

³³ *Sanyō shimpo* (*Sanyō News*), September 18, 1880.

³⁴ Azuma, *Meiji seisakushi*, pp. 23–36. See also the more detailed account by Hachinoki Sawazenji, "Seinan sengo no infurēshon" ("The Inflation after the Satsuma Rebellion"), *Keizaishi kenkyū*, 22 (1933), No. 3.

³⁵ Quoted in Yoshikawa, *MIKK*, p. 604.

³⁶ *Iwakurakō jikkō*, III, 650.

³⁷ For the opinions of Ōkubo and Iwakura on industrialization and samurai employment, see Azuma, *Meiji seisakushi*, pp. 48–57, 62–89.

rationalized by those who believed that the former warriors were better fitted than either peasant or merchant to assume the responsibilities of Western-type industrialization because they were not burdened by traditional business techniques and methods.³⁸

After 1876, and especially after the Satsuma Rebellion, the loaning of rehabilitation capital proved to be the government's major method of dealing with the samurai problem. Certainly, financial aid had been given to the samurai before the abolition of pensions, but this activity was limited to the local level and consisted of grants (*kafu*) not loans (*kashitsuke*). The program to loan "official capital" to declassed samurai was inaugurated in March 1879 and continued until March 1890. The loans it provided bore various names at different times: *kigyō kikin* (promotion of business fund) from March 1879 to December 1882, *kangyō itakukin* (encouragement of industrial capital held in trust) from December 1882 to June 1885, and *kangyō shihonkin* (encouragement of capital fund) from June 1885 to March 1890. Although there may have been some overlapping in the implementation of these three types of loans, there was little or no difference between them, for each category merely represented a certain stage in the overall program.

Originally, Ōkubo Toshimichi had suggested in 1878 that the government should raise money for industrial expansion by collecting the domestic debts owed to it.³⁹ Though he intended this revenue to be used first for industrial expansion, the experience of the rebellion in Satsuma prompted him to expand his original recommendation to include *shizoku jusan*. While in granting these loans the government considered any industry patterned after Western practice a respectable risk, certain qualifications had to be met. In general, (1) capital loans would be made to declassed samurai of various prefectures and cities who petitioned for the industrial loans; (2) capital loans would be granted to persons who demonstrated sufficient initiative to engage in industry and commerce; and (3) capital loans would be given to applicants bent on emigrating to Hokkaido.⁴⁰

According to the contemporary "Roster of Rehabilitation Loans" (*Jusan kin kashitsuke-ryō*), the program of loans embraced a wide variety of companies and businesses. The most common loans, for example, were made to promote shipbuilding, school construction, the establishment of cement works, pottery shops, lacquerware factories, fertilizer concerns, saltworks, and home industries of all types. However, the program also encouraged the construction of harbors, canals, railways, coal mines, and textile establishments; and soon lesser enterprises such as tea factories, sugar plants, fisheries, and match-works also passed under official patronage.⁴¹

³⁸ Takahashi, *Meiji Taishō sangyō hattatsushi*, p. 103. Professor Takahashi has suggested that former samurai were far better equipped for Western-type enterprises than the traditional merchant. He feels that the merchant was hindered, at all turns, because of his commitment to traditional methods of business practice and organization. Yet Takahashi is also aware of the fact that many samurai who tried their hand at a Western-type enterprise failed miserably. Nonetheless, there is abundant evidence to support his original contention. In this connection, one contemporary chronicle bore witness to a woeful, but typical story when it reported the following: "There were many samurai who took up the life of the merchant (*chōnin*); many opened up curio shops, while others established restaurants, *sakēya*, tea rooms, fish markets, and the like. But these same men, either because of negligent partners or lack of experience, were not able to make sufficient gains with which to live . . . and lost their investments. Soon thereafter . . . many of these shops began to close." *SSMH*, VI, 70.

³⁹ Ōkubo Toshimichi *bunsho*, V, 561.

⁴⁰ Yosmkawa, *SJK*, pp. 174–175.

⁴¹ See the chart in Yoshikawa, *SJK*, pp. 190–193.

The rehabilitation loans were generally made directly through the individual prefectural and city administrations. In most cases, the loans were not made to individual entrepreneurs, but to associations, usually composed of samurai and commoners of the former *han*. In the eleven years in which such loans were granted, over 450 samurai associations were formed specifically to recruit government aid in order to start some sort of enterprise. Quite naturally, these associations varied in size and scope, ranging from a handful of men to an entire clan. Owing to earlier experiences the industrial loans were designed not to rehabilitate idle and unemployed samurai individually, but rather to relieve great numbers of hard-pressed and jobless samurai. Again, according to the "Roster of Rehabilitation Loans," the samurai associations in little more than a decade enlisted roughly 100,100 men, or about twenty-three per cent of the entire class.⁴² It might also be added that the program, while in effect, made available approximately ¥5,255,590 in loans for industrial and rehabilitative purposes.

Conclusion

The samurai problem, as it unfolded in the early years of the Meiji period, was clearly an economic one and was recognized as such by most Meiji leaders. Their solution of this problem, *shizoku jusan*, revealed in all its detail the profound economic dislocation of the declassed samurai. Yet it should not be assumed that the expansion of the Meiji economy and the subsequent rehabilitation program were ironclad guarantees for the continued financial security of the class. Relief of former samurai, it is well to recall, was but one of the major goals of the *shizoku jusan*. Any evaluation of the program must be based on this fact. Samurai rehabilitation, as a successful alternative to unemployment and poverty, fell short of its mark, for it often failed to provide the samurai with a permanent solution to his financial difficulties. The reasons for this failure were many. In reclamation projects, for example, there were no doubt many samurai who did not really intend "to break soil," but hired people to cultivate the land after reclaiming was completed. Others intended merely to sell their plots once the land was cleared; while there were always those who abandoned the whole adventure as a total loss since they were clearly unable to endure the rigorous demands of agricultural life. Another element of the class responded sincerely to reclamation with the hope of pursuing a bucolic life but failed simply from lack of experience.⁴³ In business, commerce, and industry many samurai failed for similar reasons, while others were the victims of an immature economy in which only long-term investments had a chance to succeed. And, of course, the very nature of the class and its traditional outlook inhibited its successful adaptation to the new society. The fact that samurai were totally unequipped and unaccustomed to the demands of agriculture, commerce, or industry accounts in considerable measure for their failure to bridge the gap between two conflicting ways of life.⁴⁴ Not-

⁴² This figure corresponds very closely to my own estimate which is based on the complete tables in Yoshikawa, *SJK*, pp. 553–567.

⁴³ Such was the case in Okayama prefecture when the reclamation of Kojima Bay enlisted 144 former samurai, none of whom by 1876 had made a satisfactory living from the allotted lands. Inoue Keishū, *Kojimawan kaikōnsho* [*A history of the reclamation of Kojima Bay*], (Okayama, 1921), pp. 21–22.

⁴⁴ This does not refer to individual members of the class who did make a satisfactory adjustment to the changes of the day and went on to become entrepreneurs, policemen, teachers, bureaucrats, etc. Harootunian, "Japan and the Samurai Class," *PHR*, pp. 260–263.

withstanding such reasons, it is more than probable that the large number of samurai businesses and endeavors which did fail were the result of inherent weaknesses in the program itself.

The more permanent result of the Meiji government's rehabilitation policy was a by-product of it. *Shizoku jusan* touched broadly upon all major spheres of the Meiji economy. Therefore, there is a real relationship between the program and the general growth and development of the Japanese economy during the transitional years following the Restoration. In agriculture, the program opened up thousands of acres of useful grazing and farm lands and gave employment to over 20,000 samurai. Rehabilitation stimulated commerce by the creation of a network of branches of the National Bank. As for industry and business, government loans clearly encouraged many to try their hands in Western-type enterprises. At both national and prefectural levels, there was a virtual mushrooming of samurai businesses in the years between 1876 and 1889, ranging from small companies (*kaisha*) to large corporations (*kabushiki kaisha*), and employing thousands of former retainers as managers and laborers.⁴⁵ Finally, the government's efforts contributed much to the settlement and development of Japan's northernmost frontier, Hokkaido.

That the program accomplished what the government intended is dubious. Yet, by erasing the dangers of class rebellion and relocating a large social group with no apparent function in an industrialized society, the Meiji government did realize a measure of success. Although Meiji statesmen did not provide the class with a satisfactory financial settlement, the program did allow sufficient time and suitable means for the adjustment of the samurai to the new age. By the late 1880's, the threat of class discontent had been removed, and the government could allow the program of rehabilitation to lapse. A new generation, far removed from the harsh realities and insecurities of the transitional years, was rapidly replacing the first generation of Restoration samurai.

⁴⁵ Some writers assert that one third of the laborers, or about 100,000, in the first two decades of the Meiji era were ex-samurai. But there is neither sufficient data nor adequate techniques with which to measure the precise number of samurai in the Meiji labor force. Indeed, it is even difficult to differentiate salaried laborers from those who had investments in the company in which they were employed, managers from workers, etc. See Yoshikawa, *SJK*, p. 541; Horie Yasuzō, *Nihon shihonshugi no seiritsu* (Tokyo and Kyoto, 1949), pp. 188–189; and Okōchi Kazuo, *Reimeiki no Nihon rodō undō* (Tokyo, 1954), pp. 19–24.