The "Salaryman" Samurai: Japan's Medieval Warrior and the "Birth" of the Early Modern World

Although this term engenders many images, all too often they are constructs or fictions. Analysis of the Warring States era (roughly 1477-1603) kashindan or “retainer corps of the daimyo” will be used as a lens through which to clarify the nature of these figures. “Non-warriors,” such as merchants and magistrates, formed a large percentage of this organ of warlord governance, and those warriors who were members were predominantly of low-rank. Furthermore, many retainers were salaried, thereby suggesting complications in the use of the feudal paradigm when examining medieval Japan. In particular, an examination of the “hybrid” retainers reveals the limitations of the term “warrior” when discussing premodern Japan. This talk will conclude by chronicling the process by which the retainer corps was created and the parallels this system of vassal management shared with the ie (household) and the jôkamachi (castle town). In so doing, this exploration of medieval retainers demonstrates that social characteristics generally depicted as arising in the early modern period, such as urbanization and the “separation of warrior from farmer” (heinô bunri), had already begun to emerge. However, the differing statuses of members within the warrior “class” and the complicated variations in their occupations suggest that a more nuanced examination of the transition from the medieval to the early modern age—and the “warriors” who helped shepherd the process—will be informative.

Jeff Y. KURASHIGE (Ph.D., Harvard University, 2011) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Business and Commerce at Keio University. Prior to assuming this permanent post, he taught at Kyushu University in their Graduate School of Humanities. His research focuses on the economic and social history of the sixteenth century, but his interests also span into the field of modern finance due to his prior career as an investment banker. Currently he is converting a number of chapters from his dissertation Serving Your Master: The Kashindan Retainer Corps and the Socio-Economic Transformation of Warring States Japan into article form.

All are welcome // Monday 29 January 2018 // 5-7pm

Rooms 8/9
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA
For further information contact Freddie Semple
Japanese Studies Admin Assistant: fs468@cam.ac.uk

The Japanese Studies Group gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation towards this seminar series.