

SOLDIER AND PEASANT IN JAPAN: THE ORIGINS OF CONSCRIPTION

E. HERBERT NORMAN

THE historical background of conscription in Japan goes far beyond the imported influences of Western political thought and military science. The fact that the first conscription law in Japan was enacted in 1872 (enforced in 1873), only four or five years after the political revolution of the Restoration, should draw the close attention of the student to the social foundation for such a reform which lies deeper than can be revealed by probing into the transmission and transplantation of foreign thought into Japan.¹

This conscription law was a far-reaching, almost revolutionary, act following as it did upon long years of feudalism in which the arm-bearing ruling class was rigidly defined and limited, while the oppressed and disarmed classes, chiefly the peasantry, were considered either unworthy or too unreliable to be trusted with arms. In fact so revolutionary was the idea of general conscription that its stoutest proponent, Omura Masujiro, was assassinated in 1869 while Vice-Minister of War by outraged reactionary *samurai* of his own clan. But of this, more later.

To discuss the historical background of conscription in Japan it is necessary first of all to set the question in its proper framework. The idea of conscription did not arise through any flaming demand for the *levée en masse*, that is, a people's army fighting in defense of a young and embattled revolutionary regime as in France during the Great Revolution.² Rather should its framework be seen in the long, complicated

¹ The Imperial mandate accompanying the Conscription Act of November 28, 1872 reads in part: "The military system of the West is thorough and detailed, for it is the result of the studies and tests of centuries. But the difference of government and geographical conditions warns us against indiscriminate adoption of the Western system." Gotaro Ogawa: *The Conscription System in Japan*, New York, 1921, p. 4.

² This reference to the *levée en masse* is not made to imply that the history of general conscription in Europe developed over night, full-grown, from this one act and without any previous history. But it was the basic precedent for the Conscription Act which on the advice of General Jourdan in 1798 became part of the Constitution, and for its later extension under Napoleon, which in turn was at once the cause and model for the military reforms in Germany in the days of Clausewitz, vom Stein, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. Thus the French *levée en masse* may be taken as the symbol and foundation of both the idea

and subtly shifting relationship between the peasantry and the ruling feudal class, whether lord (*daimyo*) or warrior (*samurai*). In this relationship one can see developing unevenly and incompletely the recognition by a small part of the feudal ruling class of the peasantry as a reservoir of manpower which could be tapped to meet the emergency growing from internal tension (league of clans against the Tokugawa hegemony and peasant revolt) and from the pressure of Western powers, particularly after the visit of Perry in 1853 and Poutiatin in the following year.³

The more astute feudal administrators had noted the undisciplined, half-blind but earth-shaking power of the peasantry as displayed in the continual *jacquerie* of the Tokugawa era. In the eyes of those observers the peasantry had proved over and over again its capacity to fight in its own defense, whether singly or in bands, or even in small armies, against unbearable feudal oppression. These clan bureaucrats, especially those with good historical memories, valued, even if grudgingly, the potentialities of the peasantry as soldiers and attempted, sometimes successfully, to harness the driving force of their anti-feudal resistance to the interests of the ruling class whether feudal before the Meiji Restoration, or ostensibly to the interest of the nation as a whole after the Restoration.

Accordingly, much of the following historical background for conscription in Japan will not only trace in very large outline the relations of the peasant to the warrior class, but will discuss the question of the *nohei*, that is of the peasant soldier or peasant-militia, a term which can-

and practise of general conscription in modern Europe. To anticipate the argument of this essay, one might generalize at the risk of over-simplification and say that while the origin of conscription in Europe was of revolutionary inspiration, in Japan it arose from a deliberate counter-revolutionary design, despite the motives of some of its advocates.

³ Contemporary Japanese scholars and officials were surprisingly well informed of such events as the defeat of China by Great Britain in the Opium War of 1840-41 and were quick to seize upon some of its lessons. Japanese interest in the military details of the war are reflected in the questions put to the head of the Dutch trading monopoly in Deshima; these questions relate to British tactics in China, the number of the troops, their naval complement, etc. Both questions and the Dutch answers to them appear in C. R. Boxer: *Jan Compagnie in Japan*, The Hague, 1936, Appendix 5. Chinese accounts of the war were in great demand in Japan and one of these entitled *I-fei-fan-ching-wen-chien-lu*, which is known in Japanese in an abbreviated form as *Bunkenroku*, was published in Japan in 1857 without the name of any author or editor. A Japanese scholar, Saito Chikudo, wrote and published in 1843 the *Ahen-shimatsu* (Circumstances Concerning the Opium War). I am indebted for these references to the interesting study of Dr. R. H. van Gulik entitled "Kakkaron: A Japanese Echo of the Opium War" in *Monumenta Serica*, Peking, Vol. 4, 1940, pp. 511-12.

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

not here be conveniently defined with precision as it meant different things to different writers of the Tokugawa period.

It would take us too far afield to trace the position of the peasantry and its relations to the warrior class from the days of the Taika Reform (645-650 A.D.) through the manorial (*shoen*) era which saw the beginning of feudalism and *pari passu*, the decline of the semi-independent peasantry, and finally to the complete subjugation of the peasant to the *daimyo-samurai* classes during Tokugawa feudalism.⁴ But it is necessary to point out that the husbandman (call him peasant or farmer) of pre-feudal or early feudal times was often an armed and sturdy yeoman, perhaps even a better fighter than a plowman, who banded together with his fellows to resist the encroachments of some land-hungry baron, or who donned a priestly garment and fought as a temple priest to defend or enlarge the enclaves of Buddhist secular power, or finally, perhaps, seeking to escape the perils of an anarchic and fluid society, commended himself to some powerful "protector."

The artificial and stilted praise of "Bushido," the glorification of the disinterested and generous warrior who protected the helpless (and, therefore, cruelly exploited) peasant, had not as yet created the myth of *samurai* philanthropy or of *samurai* superiority either as a fighter or as a man of feeling.

During the period of the great civil wars in the twelfth century between the rival houses of Minamoto and Taira, the position of the independent cultivator deteriorated. There was a sharp differentiation into a professional fighting class owing fealty to a lord on the one hand, and a purely agricultural, but not as yet wholly disarmed, subjugated class of cultivators on the other. As the peasants still possessed arms, and as there was as yet very little specialization in arms, the rusty halberd in strong plebian hands could well be a match for the tassled spear in more refined, aristocratic hands. The great peasant revolts (*tsuchi-ikki*) of the Muromachi period (1392-1490) showed that the peasants were far from being defenseless in the face of mounting feudal pressure.

These peasant revolts were also a portent to the feudal ruler pointing to the necessity of disarming the peasantry if his writ was to run in his own domain. He looked to his fighting men or *bushi* now as the exclu-

⁴ The term "peasant" is here used very loosely. In a careful historical study of peasant-*samurai* relations in Japanese history one would have to define the historical content of the word "peasant" for each period because obviously the peasant of the Taika era was in a quite different social category from the peasant of the Muromachi (1392-1496) or Tokugawa (1603-1867) eras.

sive instrument for the defense or expansion of his land, and for the suppression of peasant unrest. The most dramatic single act in enforcing this policy was Hideyoshi's Great Sword Hunt of 1587.⁵

In the words of a Japanese scholar describing the significance of Hideyoshi's policy, "These sturdy peasants who, taking their weapons, had actively stood forth with others on the field of battle, now became submissive and soft as we have already seen and the chief reason for this, beyond any doubt, was Hideyoshi's Swort Hunt."⁶ However, Hideyoshi merely enforced on a national scale what lesser lords had been practising since the great uprisings of the Muromachi period.⁷

IT WOULD now be appropriate to attempt an historical definition of the term *nohei*. In the Edo period (1603-1867), *nohei* had acquired a definite meaning which was colored by the Confucian ethics and special historiographical training of Tokugawa scholars. Such men as Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691), Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728), and Fujita Toko (1806-1855) referred with nostalgic feeling to pre-Shogunate times when soldier and peasant were identical; when, like Cincinnatus of old, the peasant-soldier at a time of crisis would lay down his hoe, take up his spear, and respond to the muster.

One of the most outspoken of these critics of Tokugawa rule was Rai Sanyo (1780-1832), who wrote eloquently of a time when there was no distinct warrior class; when Society like the State was not divided into military and civil—a time which knew not the authority or name of a military dictator (*shogun*) who exercised an usurped power which ought by prerogative and tradition to have remained vested in the Imperial person.⁸

⁵ The text of the actual decree of Hideyoshi in which he enforced the Sword Hunt, thereby depriving the peasantry of arms, appears in *Dai Nihon Komonjo* (Historical Documents of Japan) in the 11th of the House Documents (*Ie-wake Monjo*), the Kobayakawa Documents, Vol. I, p. 503.

⁶ Hanami Sakumi, in his essay entitled *Azuchi Momoyama Jidai No Nomin* (The Peasantry of the Azuchi Momoyama Period) in the volume *Nihon Nomin Shi* (The History of the Japanese Peasantry) published by the *Nihon Rekishi Chiri Gakkai* (Learned Society of Japanese History and Geography), Tokyo, 1925, p. 106.

⁷ In 1578 Shibata Katsuei (1530-1583) carried out a sword hunt in Echizen with the definite purpose of drawing the teeth of the peasants and so rendering them helpless before the demands of the feudal ruling class. For this reference see Nakamura Kichizo in his monograph entitled *Kinsei Shoki Noson no Mondai* (Agrarian Problems in the Early Modern Period), p. 46; this monograph appears in Vol. 4 of the Iwanami collection, *Nihon Rekishi* (History of Japan).

⁸ This long account of early Japanese society, when the Emperor was also

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

In the eyes of certain Tokugawa writers, then, the *samurai* class arose through the simple process of *nohei-bunri*, the separation or disunion of peasant and warrior, which came about quite naturally through the usurpations of a warrior-landlord class in the period of the Civil Wars of the Taira and Minamoto, although the historical significance of Hideyoshi's Sword Hunt is not sufficiently appraised by these writers who have more of the moralist or utopist than the historian in them. It is interesting to note that regardless of the precise historical explanation concerning the disarming of the peasant class, these Tokugawa writers all assumed that at one time the peasants were armed and that at a later time, dates being left vague, the peasants appear as a disarmed class, distinctly marked off from a dominant warrior class.

One of the first Tokugawa writers to explain the phenomenon of a *samurai* or warrior class lording it over the rest of society and which had arisen through this simple act of *nohei-bunri*, is Kumazawa Banzan whose XIIth Chapter of his *Dai Gaku Wakumon* is entitled "Abolition of the Separate Soldier Classes." The first question in this chapter reads: "For a long time there have been two classes of subjects, the *samurai* (soldiers) and the farmers. Is it not possible to join them again into one class as in olden times?"⁹

These Tokugawa sociologists, often violating history in the interests of ethics and propaganda, idealized early Japanese society as it had existed before the rise of a professional warrior class. To them, the *nohei* was a kind of sturdy, independent yeoman who tilled his fields in peacetime and took up his arms to fight at the command of the central government in time of war. What appealed to the more practical of these Tokugawa writer-administrators was that such an army of independent yeomen would cost the Treasury very little since they obediently came forward with their own arms at the call of duty and returned to make a living off their fields when the year's campaigning was finished.

It will be seen that this Tokugawa view of the *nohei* has very little in common with that alternative definition which was adumbrated above, namely of peasants especially in Muromachi times (1393-1490) who were organized to fight against the feudal lords in their own interests.

Commander-in-Chief, and led his armies in the field, appears in the Preface to the *Hei-shi* (History of the Hei, i. e. Taira Clan) in Rai Sanyo's famous *Nihon Gaishi* (Unofficial History of Japan) Book I, Part I, Vol. I of the Kambun Shosho edition, Tokyo, 1929.

⁹ Galen M. Fisher: "Kumazawa Banzan: His Life and Ideas," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Second Series, Vol. 16, Tokyo, May 1938, p. 313.

Actually then there are two concepts of *nohei* which must be taken into account: one traditional and essentially feudal, deriving from the subjective and idealized views of Tokugawa times; the second historical, that is, based on an attempt to understand the actual processes in which a pre-feudal or early feudal peasantry secured arms and fought in self-defense against feudal encroachment and tyranny.

These two views at times may become confused. Neither of them can be used exclusively in understanding the *nohei* question at the end of the Tokugawa and in the early Meiji periods. It might be safe to generalize in the following way. Most late Tokugawa thinkers when they spoke of a *nohei* system hoped by introducing certain military reforms, and injecting, as it were, fresh blood into a badly diseased body, to strengthen the power of a feudalism which had become moribund.¹⁰ To them the *nohei* simply meant a feudal army greatly increased by the use of large numbers of peasants. This in itself of course was a radical departure from strict Tokugawa practice which eschewed the arming of peasants. Further, this army of peasants would definitely be used to fight under the orders of the old Tokugawa military bureaucracy—whether against foreign invasion or in suppressing internal unrest. This might be called the orthodox view of the *nohei*, and when we discuss the attitude and practice of the Tokugawa authorities in regard to the *nohei*, it is this view or modifications of it which we shall meet. On the other hand we must take note of the idea and experience of a peasant army as a genuine people's army, fighting in the interests of the oppressed classes, against the absolutism of the Tokugawa regime. But this democratic or anti-feudal concept of the *nohei* is rarely met in a pure form; it often has generous admixtures of the orthodox or conservative Tokugawa view, so that in disentangling the various ideas and uses of *nohei* we have a complex and interesting historical problem on our hands.

A FEW of the more far-sighted Tokugawa administrators advised the institution of a *nohei* system to meet the needs for an increased army in the face of growing foreign pressure and so particularly for a militia

¹⁰ One of the most original Tokugawa thinkers who in some ways came close to the ideas of the French Physiocrats in associating value with land, and so estimating agriculturalists above all other classes, was Sato Shinen. In the section entitled *Rikugun-bu* (military section) of his *Suito Hissaku* written in 1857, he proposes that many plebeian types be used to form the mass basis of a new, invigorated army. Listing 15 professions or sub-professions, which he considered suitable for active service, he specifically mentions and recommends, porters, grooms, herdsmen, wagoners, litter-bearers, day-laborers, couriers, hunt-

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

recruited from peasants to act as a coastal patrol.¹¹ The advocates of military reform were usually more interested in the technical rather than the social aspect of such reform, a preference which their position in the Tokugawa administrative hierarchy naturally tended to heighten. One of the best known of the advocates of military reform both technical (especially in artillery) and social in his experience with *nohei*, was Egawa Tarozaemon (1801-1855). He was a pupil of Sakuma Shozan (1811-1864) who paid with his life for his study of Western learning and military science.¹²

Egawa was also acquainted with the two greatest military reformers of his generation whom we shall meet later on: Takasugi Shinsaku and Omura Masujiro. He held the position under the Bakufu (The Tokugawa Government) of *daikan* (magistrate of an administrative unit) of the district of Nirayama which was a coastal area in the Izu Peninsula, not far from Edo. In 1849, in this capacity, he recommended in a memorial to the Bakufu the adoption of the *nohei* system. His memorial reads in part: "If one could select suitable persons from the administration (of the Bakufu) and in the neighborhood of Nirayama in Izu, and if one were to drill them not only in the science of artillery but in other military instruction taking advantage of the time they were not busy farming, then when an emergency arose, it would be possible and easy

ers, pole-bearers, gate-keepers and butchers,—all types of the lowest social category in feudal Japan, but men whose socially useful functions and physical toughness commended them to Sato. He advocated a thorough military training for them, with special barracks, parade-grounds, etc. for their use. *Nihon Keizai Taiten* (A Cyclopaedia of Japanese Political Economy) edited by Takimoto Seiichi, Tokyo, 1928, Vol. XVIII, pp. 653 *et seq.*

¹¹ In order to strengthen the coastal defences of Uraga, an anonymous writer of Choshu memorialized in 1853 as follows: "To use peasants as soldiers (as in the excellent administration of the ancient Empire) is a method of saving needless expense. Furthermore, it is reported that in Western nations soldiers are chosen from among the peasants and, after fulfilling their training in the military arts, become peasants again as before." Quoted in Oito Toshio: *Bakumatsu Heisei Kaikaku Shi* (A History of Military Reform at the End of the Bakufu). Tokyo, 1939, pp. 183-4.

¹² Writing in 1858 a private letter to a pupil of his, Yanagawa Seigan, Sakuma Shozan shows his admiration of foreign military systems based on a widely recruited, well trained army. But Japan, he complained, was torn by the quarrels and intrigues of petty states or fiefs which jealously seek their own interests forgetting the welfare of the whole nation so that Japan is left inadequately armed and helplessly exposed to any invader who is well supplied with modern weapons. He is also thinking of the fate of China in this regard. See Miyamoto Chu: *Sakuma Shozan* (Biography of Sakuma Shozan) Tokyo, 1936, p. 302.

to take them to battle. It also would be of use in one section of administrative control, and such a group might be of help in serving the public during some emergency."¹³

In 1863 Egawa succeeded in creating on a small scale a *nohei* or peasant militia in his administrative district of Nirayama. He chose as the core of this *nohei* the sons of village *nanushi* or headmen. This was, of course, the most logical procedure since if any elements in the village could be regarded as probably literate and most likely loyal to the Bakufu they would be the families of the village headmen.

In this connection it should be mentioned, if only in passing, that the role of a country squirearchy, known as *goshi* (literally, country or rustic *samurai*), is very important in the understanding of Japanese feudal society. Although their origins and position differed widely in time and place, the *goshi* have been happily described by the historian Murdock, in a phrase borrowed from Lord Redesdale, as 'bonnet lairds.' They bridged the social gap between the cultivator and the sword-bearing *samurai* class since they were either independent cultivators or small scale landowners with permission to carry arms and use a surname (*myoji taito gomen*). Sometimes they were only rustic *samurai* who had never been gathered into the castle towns of the fief (as in Satsuma), or again they were members of defeated clans whose new lords did not wish to punish them too savagely, allowing them to retain their arms and work small holdings in remote parts of the fief (as in Tosa when the Yamanouchi family succeeded to the fief after the defeat of the older Chosokabe family which had espoused the losing side in the struggle between Ieyasu and Hideyori in 1614-15). In many fiefs in order to encourage the cultivation of new land the clan chiefs rewarded those who were willing to reclaim land under contract (*ukeoi*) by granting them the status of *goshi*. In this way wealthy peasants and even merchants entered the ranks of *goshi*, a process which might be described as the back door entry into the *samurai* class.¹⁴

These *goshi* who went to swell the ranks of lower officials were very active in village administration at the close of the Tokugawa era. They

¹³ Yada Shichitaro: *Bakumatsu no Ijin Egawa Ketsu-an* (The Great Figure at the Close of the Tokugawa Era—Egawa Ketsu-an), p. 75.

¹⁴ Officially the Bakufu frowned on the acquisition of the right to wear a sword and assume a surname through the virtual purchase of *goshi* status by such means as described above. But like so many of their prohibitions it was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. *Tokugawa Kinrei-ko* (Commentaries on Tokugawa Laws and Inderdicts, edited by Ministry of Justice) 1st folio of the Supplementary collection, p. 274.

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

were often the leaders of local militia and skirmishing troops who fought against the Bakufu armies in the war of the Restoration (1867-8).

Socially and historically the *goshi* of Satsuma were among the most interesting. These Satsuma *goshi* were very old, some of their families stemming back to Kamakura times (12th century). They were a strongly traditionalist type of country gentry, reminiscent of the Tudor Justices of the Peace in their combination of parochial pride, intense conservatism, and loyalty to their suzerain. These Satsuma *goshi* were numerous and scattered widely through even the remote and mountainous regions of the clan; they were renowned for their tough martial qualities and the Tokugawa authorities reputedly entertained a cordial dislike of them.¹⁵

These Satsuma *goshi* were landowners, who personally supervised the work of peasants who tilled the land for them so that they rarely put hand to hoe or plough, and were the gentry of village society. They were definitely of *samurai*, that is, sword-bearing status, but their coarse and rustic manners made them an object of raillery and contempt to the haughty castle-born *samurai*.¹⁶

These petty squires of Satsuma ruled the peasantry with a none too gentle hand. They were the channel through which the clan government enforced its decrees upon the rural population and they also acted as a sort of counter-espionage service against any prying agents who were sent from time to time into Satsuma by the Bakufu to gain detailed information about this powerful and hostile clan.

The *goshi* of Satsuma were the claws and teeth of the feudal authorities in the suppression of agrarian unrest. The tight rein which the *goshi* of this clan kept upon the peasantry through the *tojo* system (literally "separated from the castle," that is, a system of settling *samurai* on the countryside at a distance from the castle-town), was the reason why this clan rarely experienced a peasant revolt during the whole length of the Tokugawa period.¹⁷

It is only natural then that both the Tokugawa and clan authorities,

¹⁵ According to the Horeki census of the 6th year of Horeki (1756) there were 20,000 *goshi* in the Kagoshima clan. Ono Takeo: *Goshi Seido no Kenkyu* (A Study of the Goshi System), p. 78.

¹⁶ The Kagoshima clan regulations required that *goshi* must not appear drunk in the city of Kagoshima. They must pay special respect to the *samurai* and the castle-town and were not allowed to lead a horse through the city streets. (*Ibid.* p. 87).

¹⁷ Ono Takeo: *Nihon Heino Shiron* (An Historical Discussion of Soldier-Peasants in Japan), Tokyo, 1940, pp. 192-3.

in their discussions of the advisability of creating a *nohei* or peasant army should look to the village headmen or to this *goshi* class as the core around which to build such a military system.

In the various documents which are available¹⁸ concerning the discussion by Tokugawa authorities of the advantages or disadvantages in the *nohei* system, we see cropping up again and again a fear of entrusting arms to a sullen and often rebellious peasantry. Those who advocated the adoption of a *nohei* system in order to by-pass the danger which might arise from indiscriminate arming of peasants, chose to limit the *nohei* to these *goshi* or village gentry, or again to give them a predominant position of authority within the *nohei*.

It is impossible here to quote or even analyze the very considerable documentary material on the question of *nohei*. Suffice it to say that the advice of such Tokugawa reformers as Egawa Tarozaemon was rejected by the Bakufu. The Bakufu was torn between its desire on the one hand to increase its arms to meet the challenge to its supremacy growing from rival clans or foreign pressure and its fear on the other of increasing the hazards from agrarian unrest by arming the peasantry. Decaying feudalism gave support to two mutually conflicting theories, one advocating the adoption of a *nohei* system and the other opposed to it. A thorough-going adoption of a *nohei* system meant abandoning the whole elaborate class system of feudalism, while to reject all social and military reform would leave the Bakufu exposed to the greatly increased armies of the more enterprising clans and even to the danger of foreign attack. Terrified by the Scylla of social reform the Bakufu foundered upon the Charybdis of social stagnation.¹⁹

¹⁸ Perhaps the most interesting of these are a series of documents written by various high Tokugawa officials including *Ometsuke* or chiefs of the political and moral police, written in reply to queries from the Bakufu concerning the advisability of adopting a *nohei* system. These documents have been collected and partially printed by Oyama Shikitaro in *Bakumatsu Keizai Shi Kenkyu* (A Study of Economic History at the End of the Bakufu), published by the *Nihon Keizai Shi Kenkyu-jo* (The Japanese Economic History Research Institute at Kyoto), pp. 216-238.

¹⁹ A curious parallel in this attitude of reluctance on the part of feudal lords to create a peasant army, even for defense of the country, can be seen in the experience of Czarist Russia. During Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 guerilla forces sprang up in the countryside behind Napoleon's armies thereby contributing greatly to the final defeat of the French. However, in a careful study of this campaign it has been shown that in many instances the feudal lords in Russia feared the guerilla forces of their own peasants so much that they discouraged this spontaneous and voluntary militia and in extreme cases

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

Although the Bakufu rejected the idea of adopting a *nohei* system, we can see from references in local histories as well as in the memoirs of chroniclers of the time that many of the more advanced clans instituted this system in the years before the Restoration. For instance we read: "Before the Restoration, there was a gradual change in the general trend within the Empire and accordingly there appeared urgent military preparations both for internal and external purposes. The need frequently arose for each clan to increase the number of its soldiers and keenly feeling the insufficiency of the former clan soldiers, the clans organized troops by summoning the dependents of the regular soldiers, or by recruiting peasants and commoners, Shinto and Buddhist priests, and others. In order to maintain them they gave them stipends and every clan without exception did this."²⁰

Examples of the *nohei* in different clans are too numerous to be widely cited here but we shall refer briefly to a few of the more interesting examples. In the clan of Tosa a *Mimpei*, or People's Militia, was instituted in September 1854. The leading elements in this *Mimpei* were *ronin* (*samurai* who for any reason no longer owed fealty to a lord), village headmen, and *goshi*, while the rank and file were largely composed of peasants, sailors, and hunters; *chonin* (merchants) could only serve if they first became peasants. The chief function of this *Mimpei* was to guard the coasts of Tosa which were exposed on three sides to the sea. Consequently, they were recruited exclusively as a watch against foreign danger, and as the clan was friendly to the Tokugawa authorities until the eve of the Restoration, it was not aimed against the Bakufu as in the case of other *nohei*.²¹

An example of *nohei* organized by staunch Loyalists (i. e. anti-Bakufu leaders) who gained permission from the clan authorities to form such a peasant militia is found in the case of the Ashikaga clan in 1865. The leader of this group of anti-Bakufu militia was the patriot-artist Tazaki Soun, and the name of the corps was the *Seishintai* (literally, Band of

even suppressed them. See Eugene Tarlé: *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia*, New York, 1942, pp. 353-4.

²⁰ *Chitsuroku Shobun Enkaku Gaiyo* (An Outline History of the Settlement of Capitalized Pensions). This treatise appears in the *Meiji Zenki Zaisei Keizai Shiryo Shusei* (Collection of Historical Material on Finance and Economy in the Early Years of the Meiji Era), edited by Tsuchiya Takao and Ouchi Hyoei, Tokyo, 1931, Vol. 8, p. 296.

²¹ A detailed account of the organization and history of the Tosa *Mimpei* from which the above summary was taken is to be found in an article by Hirao Michio: "Kochi-han no Mimpei Seido" (The *Mimpei* System of the Kochi Clan) in *Tosa Shidan* (Historical Discourses on Tosa), No. 35, pp. 79-85.

the Whole-hearted). According to the account in his biography, he was the actual commander of the corps although nominally it was under clan jurisdiction. It took part in the fighting against the Tokugawa forces before the Restoration and distinguished itself in the battle of Kamata.²²

In the clan of Kii a certain Tsuda Mataro, beginning in 1863, trained men of all classes in the use of Western arms. In the same year members of this corps took part in the anti-Bakufu uprising at Gojo in Yamato led by the court noble Nakayama Tadamitsu. This was one of the first local uprisings in which anti-Bakufu slogans were openly used by the rebels who called themselves the Tenchugumi ("Heaven's Avengers").²³

In the same clan, shortly after the Restoration, a German soldier, Sergeant Karl Köppen, was hired to give military instruction in the latest Western style; he succeeded in training a corps of 5,000 men, giving this clan, in the years before conscription, quite a high reputation for military training.²⁴

Our last and most interesting example of clan *nohei* is the case of the Kiheitai of Choshu. As the Bakufu entered its last decade of rule, the men of Choshu, most aggressive and hostile to the Bakufu of all clans, were engaged in intrigues, plots, and violent *émeutes* directed against the Bakufu. The leaders in the anti-Bakufu movement were *ronin*, and the lower *samurai*, restless and impoverished men whose feverish activity in Kyoto culminated in the bloody street fighting of 1865, after which the Bakufu secured an Imperial decree outlawing them from the capital

²² Fujii Jintaro: *Ishin Zengo no Nohei* (The Nohei of the Time of the Restoration) in the volume *Nihon Heisei Shi* (The History of the Japanese Military System), published by the *Nihon Rekishi Chiri Gakkai* (Learned Society of Japanese History and Geography), Tokyo, 1939, pp. 234-235.

²³ This uprising led by lower classes of *samurai* and a court noble (*hugo*), and financially backed by some local merchants with the actual fighting done by *samurai*, *ronin* and free-lance peasants, was a small scale rehearsal, as it were, of the Meiji Restoration in which the same classes, in almost the same order of importance, overthrew the Tokugawa rule. See Ogimachi Kito: *Meiji Ishin no Senku-sha, Tenchugumi Nakayama Tadamitsu* (A Precursor of the Meiji Restoration, Nakayama Tadamitsu of the Tenchugumi), Tokyo, 1935, pp. 189-206; 291-297. On the anti-Bakufu songs and slogans of the Tenchugumi see Kajiya Nobuhei: *Bakumatsu Kinno Tenchugumi Resshi Senshi* (Loyalists at the End of the Tokugawa Era; A War Memoir of the Tenchugumi Patriots), p. 216.

²⁴ Karl Köppen. See article entitled *Wakayama ni okeru Karl Köppen* (Karl Köppen in Wakayama) by Shigehisa Atsutaro in the journal *Meiji Bunka Kenkyu* (A Study of Meiji Culture) No. 6, November 1935, pp. 53-65. There is a brief reference to Karl Köppen and his stay in Wakayama in J. J. Rein: *Japan: Travels and Researches Undertaken at the Cost of the Prussian Government*, English translation, London, 1884, p. 512.

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

and compelling their lord to retire in disgrace, and to live for a year or more under voluntary house arrest.

Before this, however, there had been brewing within Choshu itself a crisis in clan politics between a radical party of younger *samurai* and the dominant clique of older clan bureaucrats. These conservative clan councillors, more compromising in their policy towards the Bakufu, were purged in a *coup de main* in which several of them were assassinated, and the radical party of younger officials then dominated the clan government. The elder lord of Choshu, Mori Motonori, realizing that the growing intransigence of his clan would soon draw down upon it the armed wrath of the Bakufu, decided to entrust the reorganization of his army to the younger more daring and imaginative *samurai*. To this end he summoned the brilliant strategist Takasugi Shinsaku, then only 25 years of age. This Choshu *samurai* had studied under Japanese masters of Dutch learning at Edo, had acquired a considerable knowledge of gunnery and Western military science. Like other younger Choshu *samurai*, he was a violent partisan of the Sonno Joi movement (literally, "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarian." It was under this slogan that the anti-Tokugawa movement outmanoeuvred and finally overthrew the Bakufu.) Takasugi's interview with his lord took place on June 6, 1863 and he secured virtually a free hand from Mori in order to reform the clan army. His views as recorded in one of the clan histories were very radical; he did not hide his contempt for the *samurai* of his day. His actual words were: "The stipendiary *samurai* have become soft and indolent through years of peace and idleness. Their martial prowess has been dulled, and to re-invigorate an army one must recruit volunteers with spirit, courage and skill regardless of their class, whether they be *samurai*, peasant or artisan."²⁵

His views on the decay of the *samurai* spirit are expressed even more colorfully in words attributed to him in another history of Choshu. "It was Takasugi's opinion that the *bushi* (i.e. *samurai*) who in former times received hereditary stipends, are no use in battle since they are craven-hearted (*koshi-nuke*). The proper way to organize an army is to recruit fresh soldiers who are brave and strong whether they be peasant or *chonin* (commoner or merchant) if they are only of a bold spirit and a sturdy body, they can be recruited and formed into an army."²⁶

²⁵ Nohara Yusaburo: *Bo-cho Ishin Hiroku* (A Secret Chronicle of Choshu at the Time of the Restoration), Tokyo, 1937, p. 460.

²⁶ *Tadamasa-Ko Kinno Jiseki* (Historical Memoirs of the Loyalist Lord Tadamasa) as narrated by Nakahara Kunhei and recorded by Iuchi Taro, Tokyo, 1909, Vol. I, pp. 280-281.

With his lord's permission, Takasugi at once set on foot the creation of a band of troops called the Kiheitai (literally, "surprise troops") who were allowed to enlist regardless of social status. But again it is more instructive to let the documents themselves reveal to us the revolutionary nature of this army. In his first order of the day, Takasugi set forth his plans for the Kiheitai. He stated that volunteers would be accepted only if they were brave and had initiative and without regard as to whether they were rear-vassals (*bashin*) or clan *samurai*. In accord with the saying that even the most humble person cannot be deprived of his ambition, there would be no discrimination against persons of lowly origin. The only qualifications were skill, daring, and obedience to the commander who would punish and reward each man according to his merits. Both Japanese and Western arms would be used in fighting but special opportunity for acquiring familiarity with Western arms would be given.²⁷ An historical analogy that comes to mind both in the sobriety and the strict discipline of the leader, together with his daring experiments in military matters, is Cromwell. Takasugi's words quoted above are almost an echo of Cromwell's: "I had rather have a plain russet coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows, than that which you call 'a gentleman' and is nothing else."²⁸

AND NOW we come to the most crucial question of the *nohei* at the end of the Tokugawa era: the question whether the soldier-peasants should remain serfs bound both to the land and the lord while serving as a peasant militia (that is to say, as unfree agents acting under the orders and in the interests of the feudal government) or whether they should be emancipated peasants freely joining volunteer armies which were struggling against feudalism.

Most of the examples are of the former, that is the unfree type. The Kiheitai of Choshu was not a pure, anti-feudal, emancipated band of peasants but a mixture of free and unfree, of merchant, *ronin* and *shoya* (village headmen). Yet it is an interesting transitional type, containing in it the seeds of the armies of the early Meiji era, when all four classes were regarded as equal in status and when the government army recruited from all classes routed the old *samurai* armies of feudal reaction, particularly in the suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877.

The *nohei* system of the late Tokugawa was a very complex phenome-

²⁷ *Bo-cho Ishin Hiroku*, cited pp. 462-463.

²⁸ Thomas Carlyle: *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, edited by Lomas, Vol. I, p. 154.

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

non. As far as we know, nowhere was it made up purely of unfree serfs nor on the other hand of completely emancipated peasants. The *nohei* system of the late Tokugawa presents various mixtures—troops consisting mostly of *goshi*, *nanushi* or *shoya*, *ronin* and wealthier peasants, with perhaps a sprinkling of unfree peasants; others with these same elements but with the proportions changed; others again like the Kiheitai with strong *ronin* elements in the leadership of commoners, well-to-do peasants and run-away peasants.²⁹

The historical significance of the *nohei* system as it appeared in all its complexity at the end of the Tokugawa period goes far beyond the mere giving of arms to peasants for the purpose of training them as troops to supplement the Tokugawa or clan armies. It was a problem which cut to the very root of a feudalism that had been obstructing every avenue of advance whether in the political, social, or cultural field. Thus a new military system called for a new social organization. The keen minds of the age, notably Takasugi Shinsaku, Omura Masujiro, and their companions of Choshu saw the need for drastic changes in the cultural and social life of the nation if lasting reform in the military system was to be effected. What then, is the special interest to us of the Choshu Kiheitai, aside from its role in the struggle against the Bakufu? It is precisely in its mixture of free and unfree elements—and the fact that it welcomed to a certain extent run-away, that is to say, self-emancipated peasants.

This does not imply that the lord and councillors of Choshu issued some dramatic decree of peasant emancipation. It means rather that Choshu, like all feudal Japan, had experienced the whirlwind violence of peasant revolt and so with considerable skill these young Choshu leaders tried to canalize the power of peasant insurrection, diverting it from its narrow class economic motivation to the broader channel of political struggle against the feudal hegemony of the Tokugawa. We have conveniently at hand documents which illustrate this policy of Choshu, so similar in many ways to early Meiji policy, namely winning the allegiance of the *ronin* and peasantry in order to utilize them against their common foe, the Bakufu, which represented the heart of feudal reaction, exploiting the peasant more efficiently even than the other clans, and thwarting the talents and ambitions of *samurai* in the great "outside" clans such as Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa and Hizen. Let us now turn to our basic source, the *Kiheitai Nikki*, which is a collection of the

²⁹ Tokugawa feudalism strictly forbade peasants to migrate from village to village or from countryside to city.

diaries, journals, and other documents written by Kiheitai leaders. Instructions issued in connection with the Kiheitai, dated the 9th day of the 12th month of Bunkyu 3rd year (1863) read as follows: "As for peasants and *chonin*, those who leave behind them a substitute (heir) to farm or pursue business are given permission to enter the ranks of the Kiheitai if they wish. Those peasants who have fled, or those *chonin* who have let their house go to ruin are strictly ordered to return home. But those who have been in the army and are skilled in sharpshooting and are courageous will receive further instructions after first being examined."³⁰

Choshu was perhaps the most intransigently anti-Bakufu clan; its Kiheitai not unexpectedly was anti-feudal insofar as it recognized the need of freeing peasants from the feudal yoke and utilizing their released energies in the anti-Bakufu struggle. Thus the Kiheitai represents a kind of peasant revolt controlled *from above* and directed against the Bakufu; history has recorded how formidable a weapon was this small but intrepid army. A contemporary chronicler writing as a Bakufu partisan admits the strength of this army. "The rebels of Bocho (i.e. Choshu) are truly most skilled in the use of Western arms; from reports received it seems scarcely credible (literally, "human") the way they advance and retreat along mountains and precipices; indeed theirs is a formidable power. But when the allied clans (i.e. the Bakufu and its allies) attack, they use old-fashioned types of gun, notably the match-lock (*hinawaju*). In this way from the very start the rebels gain the advantage and the attacking side shows its weakness and for this reason the Bakufu infantry must ever be going to the aid of the allied troops."³¹

Although the rank and file of the Kiheitai were comparatively raw troops in years of service compared to the Tokugawa armies, they constantly outfought the Tokugawa soldiers, displaying far greater skill particularly in their use of Western arms. We might cite a Western journalist, then living in Japan, on the superiority of these Choshu troops. "One circumstance that always appears to me worthy of notice with regard to Satsuma and Choshu is, that both of them practically acknowledged the superiority of foreign appliances in war, by obtaining rifles and

³⁰ *Kiheitai Nikki* (Kiheitai Diaries), edited by the *Nihon Shiseki Kyokai* (Society of Japanese Historical Works), entry for the 9th day of the 12th month of the 3rd year of Bunkyu (probably Vol. II).

³¹ *Hyo-in Renjo Mampitsu* (Random Notes Written on Trips from Castle to Castle in the Year Hyo-in, i.e. 1866), edited by the *Nihon Shiseki Kyokai*, Vol. I, p. 149.

Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription

ammunition, and largely arming their men with them, adopting, at the same time as far as they could, foreign drill and discipline. But in the fight with Choshu that was about to take place, many of the *samurai* (i.e., of the Tokugawa Army) to whom rifles were offered, refused to use them, or to undergo the new drill, preferring to trust to the old bows and arrows, the trusty sword, and the tactics of Old Japan.³²

More than this, the Kiheitai was led by men of the highest talent, certainly among the best brains in the country. One was Takasugi Shin-saku, already mentioned, who died at the age of twenty-eight from consumption on the eve of the Restoration (1867). But there was an even more imaginative spirit whose tastes and interests were far broader than those of the fanatical, more provincial Takasugi. Omura Masujiro deserves perhaps more than any other one man the title of founder of the modern Japanese Army. He studied Dutch under the famous scholar Obata Koan, knew and admired von Siebold, acted as guardian and teacher of the latter's daughter, Ine. He studied English from an American in Shinagawa. He read widely in science, including medicine, economics, and foreign studies; in 1864 he translated from the Dutch a work on strategy written from the standpoint of German military theory which was then under the spell of Napoleonic influence. It is thus of some interest that in the final campaign against the Bakufu, the Kiheitai under Omura and his companions made use of contemporary European military strategy. A man of strong character, Omura had come to entertain such disgust at the cramped military system of feudalism that a story is told of his refusing to talk to a close companion at arms who offended him by wearing his long *samurai* sword during a conference. Omura might well be startled were he alive today to see the fashion now current in the Japanese army where it is a common sight to see an officer trundling about with a long cumbersome *samurai* sword at his side. However, Omura was as advanced in his historical perception and imagination compared with present Japanese military leaders as Clausewitz was in advance of the Nazi generals. With his ideas of sweeping social reforms as a prerequisite for a national army, and particularly with his plan for general conscription which struck at the very citadel of *samurai* privilege, Omura roused the fierce resentment of the clan reactionaries. He was assassinated in 1869 when, as Vice-Minister of War, he had begun to enforce the first steps towards the goal of general conscription, and the modernization of the Japanese army, leaving behind

³² John R. Black: *Young Japan*, London, 1880, Vol. I, p. 318.

him a group of disciples such as Yamagata Aritomo, Yamada Kengi and Kido Koin, who lived on to complete his work.³³

We can say then that the Kiheitai was to a certain extent both revolutionary and anti-Bakufu. But on the other hand, its leaders, with the possible exception of Omura, for the most part did not look beyond the feudal order of society. They were primarily strategists and patriots, absorbed in the struggle to overthrow the Bakufu; they were not social reformers interested in peasant emancipation. Thus their feudal viewpoint led them to put the brakes upon the free unrestricted movement of run-away peasants into the Kiheitai—a movement which threatened the feudal basis of Choshu as well as of the Bakufu.

³³ There are quite a few biographies of Omura. A recent one from which the above is taken, and which though popular in form gives quite a few clues as to Omura's political views is by Tanaka Chugoro, entitled *Kinsei Gunsei Soshi-sha, Omura Masujiro* (The Creator of the Modern Military System, Omura Masujiro). For our more restricted purpose, namely, Omura's ideas on conscription, the most authoritative reference perhaps is the chapter on that subject in Matsushita Kimio's *Chohei-rei Seitei no Zengo* (The Time of the Establishment of the Conscription Act), Tokyo, 1932, pp. 31-47.

Note: Mr. Norman's article will be concluded in the next issue of **PACIFIC AFFAIRS**. With additional notes and appendices it will also be published as a pamphlet by the International Secretariat of the I.P.R.