

SOLDIER AND PEASANT IN JAPAN: THE ORIGINS OF CONSCRIPTION (PART II)

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This is the concluding part of Mr. Norman's article. The final paragraphs of Part I, which appeared in the March issue of PACIFIC AFFAIRS, described the Kiheitai of Choshu as a transitional type of peasant militia which, while revolutionary, was not purely an anti-feudal, emancipated band of peasants. With additional notes and appendices, both parts of the article are being published as a pamphlet by the International Secretariat of the I.P.R.

As TIME WENT on, the tendency to check the movement towards peasant emancipation resulted in clashes within the Kiheitai. As with Meiji policy, so the Kiheitai leaders controlled from above a popular movement, never allowing it to get out of hand and become a mass movement both propelled and led from below. Thus with time the Kiheitai leaders checked the anti-feudal trend of the rank and file. We read the following stern warning against the excessive spirit of independence which seemed to have been growing apace in the two years after the Kiheitai was formed, dating from November 1865: "Recently disobedient elements have been increasing; and when outside their military establishments, there are those who complain about military regulations, speaking all manner of slander and, indeed, stooping to shameless deeds. These people though loyal to the face are inwardly disobedient (*mensho fukuhi*) so that in the end secrets will be revealed and great agitation will arise among the populace; they will destroy the morals of the *samurai* and, having abandoned all shame, they will threaten women and children and so put the Kiheitai beyond all apology."³⁴

Such was the revolutionary appeal of the Kiheitai that we learn from the letter written by the Nagasaki *Bugyo* (City Magistrate) of a certain Naga Kotaro who temporarily had left the ranks of the Kiheitai to travel through the provinces of Bungo in Kyushu on a recruiting campaign for the Kiheitai. Wherever he went, so we are told, he left behind him a trail of riots and small uprisings against the local authorities.³⁵

³⁴ Entry in the *Kiheitai Nikki* cited under the date of Keio, 1st year, 11th month (probably in Vol. II).

³⁵ *Kaei Meiji Nenkan Roku* (Annals from the Kaei to the Meiji Eras, 1848-1868), Folio 16, p. 5 (b).

No wonder the leaders of the Kiheitai kept so careful a rein upon the powerful anti-feudal sentiments of their army! In fact the comparative ease with which the smaller armies of the anti-Bakufu league defeated the Tokugawa armies can be explained partly by assuming that the troops of the Imperial or Loyalist armies, as they were called, were more conscious of the political issues at stake than were the soldiers of the Tokugawa armies. Further, the Imperial armies were aided by numerous peasant uprisings directed against Bakufu forces which so paralyzed the latter, by compelling them to keep troops immobilized in remote far-flung parts of the country, that it was quite easy for the regular troops of the Imperial army to deal a death blow at the nerve centers of Tokugawa control in the central key areas. In a very real sense the peasant risings of the Tokugawa period, particularly as they became most frequent and violent in the last decade, played a noteworthy part in overthrowing the Bakufu. Thus the Restoration, to a large degree, can be justly called the harvest of peasant revolt. We have striking evidence of how the peasant armies, organized and led by the peasantry, that is to say, a purely anti-feudal type of *nohei*, cooperated with the anti-Bakufu armies in the overthrow of the Tokugawa regime. Perhaps the best example is that of Echigo province where an army of 60,000 armed peasants blocked the path of Lord Shibata in command of the Tokugawa forces in that region. Seeing the situation was hopeless, Shibata and his army went over to the Imperial side. "In this way, thanks to the peasants, Shibata and his army escaped [the odium of] being designated rebel and traitor."³⁶ Here we see revived, under new historical circumstances, a genuine anti-feudal peasant army reminding us somewhat of the independent peasant armies which we briefly described as they existed before the great Sword Hunt of Hideyoshi.

The rank and file of the anti-Bakufu armies were made up of the more politically active lower *samurai*, *ronin* (declassed *samurai*), outlaws, peasants, hunters, in short those bolder spirits who had experienced in the flesh or the spirit the wounds inflicted by a most diabolically oppressive feudal regime. Their hatred of the Bakufu rule and all it stood for, although expressed in high-flown phrases of loyalty to the throne, often tinged with xenophobia, nevertheless had behind it that spirit of social

³⁶ This reference comes from one of the old pre-Restoration newspapers, the *Naigai Shimbun*, No. 14, August, Keio, 4th year (1868), and it appears in *Meiji Bunka Zenshu* (Collection on Meiji Culture), Vol. 17, p. 512.

and political understanding which has made revolutionary armies so effective against troops fighting in defense of the old regime. The leaders of the Imperial army were well aware of this universal hatred for the Tokugawa rule, symbol of feudal reaction, a hatred which fired not only their own troops but the whole countryside.

The command of the Imperial armies, as we have evidenced, exploited this anti-feudal sentiment of the country by methods of what we should today call political warfare. For instance, the "Pacifier and Commander-in-chief of the Tosando" posted placards in prominent places and distributed manifestos addressed to the peasants and traders in these villages, inviting them to appear before the local headquarters of the Imperial army and bring charges of tyranny and cruelty against the former Tokugawa administrators. They specifically appealed to the most impoverished, orphans, widows, and those who had been persecuted by the feudal authorities. All complaints were promised a careful and sympathetic hearing, and it was further stated that justice would be meted out to guilty officials.⁸⁷ The significance of this incident becomes clearer when we recall that the Tosando (Eastern Mountain Road or Circuit) embraced the provinces in the remotest corner of the main islands, far in the northeast, extending roughly from Yamashina in the south to the Straits of Tsugaru. It was in these northern confines that Tokugawa tyranny was the harshest, and also where the resistance of Tokugawa armies (mostly made up of *samurai* from the Aizu clan) was the fiercest.

THE HIGH HOPES of the Japanese people following the stormy days when they decisively expressed their detestation of feudal tyranny suffered cruel disillusion. The chiefs in the new Meiji Government who were the very same leaders of the anti-Bakufu armies of yesterday, mostly men from Satsuma and Choshu, hastily carried out reforms which were of primary importance in building a modern Japan, with an efficient army and navy and industries to support them: in short, a Japan which was girding up its loins to jostle its way into the fight for markets and colonies. To accomplish even a limited modernization, they carried out many reforms which were to the advantage of the common people; of this there can be no doubt. But speaking in large terms, the only possibility of a steadily rising standard of living, a broadening out of popular liberties (all of which would have directed Japa-

⁸⁷ *Kaei Meiji Nenkan Roku*, *op. cit.*, Folio 17, Part I, pp. 15 (a and b).

nese energies into channels other than those charted for her by the rulers of those days, channels which led to expansion, aggression, and wars) was resolutely blocked by the calculating Japanese Metternichs of the autocratic Meiji Government. As soon as the people of Japan could stand upright and breathe the intoxicating air of freedom, following the overthrow of the Bakufu, they were burdened with fresh exactions and taxes; their relative advance in terms of social and political freedom was soon drastically checked.

One striking example of this tendency on a local scale may be instructive. On the eve of the Restoration, the people of the Oki Islands (under Bakufu jurisdiction, administered by the Lord of Matsue, a hereditary vassal or *fudai daimyo*, of the Tokugawa family) rose in revolt, drove out the Tokugawa officials and established a primitive self-government with a popular assembly to hear complaints and deal out rough justice. In the words of the chronicle describing this event, "the rule of the Bakufu here came to an end" (*Bakusei koko no taeru*). They warmly greeted the army of the young Saionji (the late Prince Saionji Kimmochi), who was in command of Imperial troops engaged in fighting the Tokugawa army on the main island, opposite Oki. Despite this voluntary cooperation with the Imperial army by the Oki islanders, commissioners were sent out shortly after the Restoration by the central government, who were mostly the same hated Bakufu officials who had been driven out a short time ago; and they were accompanied by a strong corps of soldiers. After a sharp struggle, this attempt at a popular and autonomous rule was suppressed.³⁸ Here in a rather isolated community the breathing space between revolution and counter-revolution was telescoped into a few months. In Japan Proper the scene

³⁸ *Fukko-ki* (Records of the Meiji Restoration), copyrighted by the Tokyo Imperial University, Tokyo, 1929-31, Vol. 3, Section 60, pp. 536-540; Vol. 5, Section 85, pp. 380-415. The documents from which the sources for the Oki uprising are taken were written by officials of the Meiji Government or of the preceding feudal agents of Izumo; thus we do not have any document which explains the rising from the point of view of the people.

There is a shorter reference to this interesting revolt in *Meiji Shonen Sojo Roku* (A Record of Peasant Revolt in the Early Years of the Meiji Era), edited by Tsuchiya Takao and Ono Michio, Tokyo, 1931, pp. 429-435. The sources which the editors of this compilation use for this particular revolt are (1) Prefectural Histories, in this case *Shimane-ken Shi*, and (2) *Taisei Ruiten* or "Government Documents." In this account the *Taisei Ruiten* seems to be the more important source. I am indebted to Mr. R. Tsunoda of Columbia University for the reference to the *Fukko-ki* and for the bibliographical analysis of the sources to the *Meiji Shonen Sojo Roku*.

was more complicated. There were more advances in one section than in another, and a precise time-line delimiting the revolutionary from the counter-revolutionary era cannot easily be drawn. But in general the incident on the Oki Islands epitomizes the experiences of Japan in the years after the Restoration.

For this reason, in the years after the Restoration, we see bitter and often bloody revolts, mostly of peasants and villagers against the old burdens of feudal injustice which still lingered on, as well as against the new burdens of the Meiji Government, burdens which may have been justified in the eyes of the statesmen imposing them, but were certainly not so easily understood by the victims. In the standard collection of documents illustrating agrarian unrest in the early Meiji period, there are mentioned altogether 260 agrarian revolts and 14 uprisings in the larger towns; in the first ten years of Meiji rule the same source mentions 185 peasant revolts.³⁹

It is against this background of renewed social and political struggles against the policy of the Meiji Government to maintain some of the more invidious and less obvious, because more impersonalized, burdens of feudal exploitation that one must study the significance of the Conscription Acts both in 1872-3 and of the Revised Act in 1883.

In appraising the immediate purpose behind the Conscription Act of 1872-3, we must be careful to distinguish between the personal motives of its sponsors, which in some cases it would be idle to analyze now, and the compelling historical environment which urged its adoption upon the Meiji leaders, once they had started off along that path of development which they had chosen. To such military reformers as Omura Masujiro, Yamada Kengi, and Tani Takeki (better known as Tani Kanjo), all except the last of Choshu and thus men in whose memory the struggle against the Tokugawa forces of feudal reaction was very vivid, conscription meant, besides a general strengthening of Japan's defense against possible invasion, one of the surest measures guaranteeing the stability of the new regime against any attempts at a pro-feudal rebellion led by reactionary clan leaders. This view is undoubtedly

³⁹ Tsuchiya Takao and Ono Michio (Editors): *Meiji Shonen Nomin Sojo Roku* (A Record of Peasant Revolt in the early Years of the Meiji Era), Tokyo, 1931, Preface, p. 3. Another authority estimates the number of peasant revolts in the first ten years of the Meiji rule as numbering well over 190. Kokusho Iwao: *Meiji Shonen Hyakusho Ikki* (Peasant Revolts at the Beginning of the Meiji Era) in *Meiji Ishin Keizai Shi Kenkyu* (A Study of the Economic History of the Meiji Restoration), edited by Honjo Eijiro, Tokyo, 1930, p. 707.

present in the minds of at least two sponsors of conscription, namely Yamada Kengi and Tani Takeki. The latter, who distinguished himself by his defense of Kumamoto castle against the Satsuma rebels in 1877, complained on more than one occasion of the political attitude of some of the *samurai* whose loyalty to the new regime was suspect (that is, who harbored hopes of a return to some form of clan-federated feudalism) yet who were retained in local garrisons. His fears were only too well justified as later events showed. He remarked on the arrogance of these *samurai* elements who, if called in to aid the government to suppress a revolt, would only become more haughty and overbearing, feeling that their services were indispensable, whereas if they were purged from the garrison troops, their pride would be outraged and they would probably turn to assassinations and conspiracies against the government.

It was to meet the danger of local governors, often simply former lords of fiefs which had been turned into prefectures, arrogating to themselves military as well as civil power, that men like Tani agitated for a strong, centralized army. As Tani wrote at the time: "The Army belongs to the State; without an order from the Minister of War, one cannot order a single soldier to move. So we can see that the problem is serious. And what are the rights of the Governor? Whenever some unrest arises within his administrative sphere, the Governor recruits *samurai* and organizes troops from them and on his own accord makes a guard from them, although this results from his great fear, being but a civil official in a district; yet by this he recklessly violates the nation's prerogative; his domain, nominally a prefecture, seems to be rather a fief."⁴⁰

THIS YOUNG conscript army, drawn largely from the peasantry, was to receive its baptism of fire very early in its history. In the last desperate stand of the most intransigent feudal reactionaries, the *samurai* of Satsuma, reputed to be the most savage and reckless warriors of feudal Japan, fighting under the redoubtable Saigo Takamori, were decisively routed by the new recruits of the government army.

It is of interest to examine briefly the circumstances surrounding the Satsuma Rebellion both because it was the last and most desperate assault of pro-feudal reaction against the new regime, and because it provided the first test of the new conscript army. Saigo Takamori, the Bayard of the *samurai* of Satsuma, had played a dominant role in the

⁴⁰ *Tani Kanjo Iho* (Surviving Works of Tani Kanjo), Vol. II, p. 47.

war of the Restoration. After the Restoration, he was made Minister of War and, in recognition for his services, was, in 1874, given the rank of Marshal. But shortly afterwards, because of the government's failure to adopt a more aggressive attitude towards Korea, he resigned and returned to Kagoshima. In these years discontent among the *samurai* was mounting because of pension commutation, prohibition of sword wearing, and because of the feeling that their class no longer had a future as an independent class of privileged warriors. Saigo personified most perfectly these pro-feudal longings of the *samurai* class in general and of Satsuma *samurai* in particular. Shimazu Hisamitsu, the old Lord of Satsuma and Saigo's chief, was a die-hard conservative who had become disgruntled at the reforms and innovations of the times. Despite all attempts of the government to flatter and appease him, he finally left Tokyo for Satsuma in high dudgeon, after issuing a memorial with querulous complaints against such innovations as the adoption of the solar calendar, the wearing of Western clothes on state occasions, the employment of foreigners as special advisers, the approach of common soldiers close to the Emperor's person, permission to inter-marry with foreigners, religious toleration, the failure to appoint a fencing master for the Emperor, the adoption of foreign military drill, and so forth. But the reform of conscription rankled deep in the hearts of these two dour reactionaries. In the words of a chronicler on the Satsuma revolt: "Another measure which has been strongly advocated by Okubo, and recently enacted by the government, in opposition to the war party, was especially distasteful to Shimazu and Saigo and greatly influenced their conduct at this juncture. This measure was a conscription law making service in the army or navy obligatory on the adult males of all classes of the population . . . and to result eventually in the disarmament of all *samurai*."⁴¹

Thereafter Saigo lived in virtual retirement in his native Satsuma, teaching his "private schools" of *samurai* in which instruction was largely of a military nature. In Kagoshima alone there were 7,000 in these schools, with many branches in outlying centers. At the outbreak of the rebellion, the number of *samurai* enrolled in Saigo's schools was estimated at 20,000.

Satsuma at this time had an unusually high percentage of *samurai* in its population. The population of Satsuma was 812,327 of whom 204,143

⁴¹ A. H. Mounsey: *The Satsuma Rebellion: An Episode of Modern Japanese History*, London, 1879, pp. 60-61. (Italics mine, E. H. N.).

were of *samurai* class.⁴² Consequently, in the rebellion against the central government, the armies of Saigo were almost altogether made up of *samurai*, with members of his private schools acting as officers. We can do no better than to quote again the words of our chronicler in describing the psychology of these *samurai* and the reason why the raw armies of conscripts who faced them both outfought and outmanoeuvred them: "It was in their swords, however, that the Satsuma men placed the greatest reliance, feeling confident that that weapon in the hands of *samurai* would be more than a match for those of the *Heimin* [plebeians] who formed the chief part of the rank and file of the Imperial army . . . These same feelings of pride and exclusiveness also made them [the Satsuma *samurai*] blind to the fact that the *Heimin*, who had entered the army, were fast beginning to see that they and their class were most interested in the abolition of the *samurai*, and that this was an object worth fighting for."⁴³

Here we see on the one hand how the fatal preference for the sword, which was a terrible weapon for close-in fighting but hopeless against gun-fire, doomed the Satsuma *samurai* in the face of the infantry trained to use rifles and on the other why the government army, composed chiefly of commoners, fought so stubbornly against the *samurai*, whose pro-feudal ambitions they feared and detested.⁴⁴

As we shall see, the sequel to this revolt thoroughly justified the views of Yamagata and Okubo who considered a conscript army far more practical and effective than an elite professional army such as Saigo preferred, and which suffered defeat in the savage battles of Miyako-no-jo, Nobeoka, and Shiroyama in 1877.

No further armed insurrection to overthrow the government by the more reactionary elements was again attempted; henceforth the most aggressive militaristic elements of Japan preferred to work *within* the government to achieve and win their goal of aggression abroad and of a stifling, military reaction at home.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

⁴⁴ The rebels, of course, used some rifles, but they seem to have neglected this all-important aspect of fighting in their preparations for revolt. True, there was much hand-to-hand fighting, but here again the raw recruits stood up stubbornly against the terrible slashing of the two-handed swords. The total number of government troops in action was 65,000, of whom 6,400 were killed and 10,520 wounded. The total number of rebels under arms was 40,000, of whom slightly over 7,000 were killed and 11,000 were wounded. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

But the government of the time was far more concerned with the problem of controlling the renewed anti-feudal agrarian revolts than it was with that presented by discontented *samurai* who dreamt of a return to the days when the military class was supreme and who, consequently, longed to plunge the country into military adventure (e.g., during the agitation for a campaign against Korea in 1871-2). The use of naked force to suppress agrarian unrest was not the happiest solution of the problem; it was the last resort which would be used, unflinchingly if necessary, only when other stratagems had failed. And one such stratagem was conscription; first of all, the creation of a unified mass army based on conscription with garrisons stationed at strategic cities and towns would make an uprising in the future much more hazardous, and, therefore, unlikely. Thus the mere *threat* of overwhelming force against any local uprising would naturally tend to discourage the resort to violence by the rebellious peasantry. But looking at it in another way, conscription meant gathering into garrisoned towns large numbers of young and impressionable peasants who, when segregated from their native villages and living under strict military discipline, would no longer be able to hear the complaints of old embittered peasants, nor would be likely to brood over local grievances, or worry over small but pressing problems of domestic economy. In these barracks many of the raw recruits would, especially in the first years of conscription, learn how to read; fresh opportunities for education was one of the by-products of conscription which the more liberal reformers honestly desired.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ We might quote a part of the famous memorial written in 1873 by Yamada Kengi which reveals his unusually liberal views on the question of the relation between the army and the state. He had just returned from a tour of Europe and showed a marked influence of French and Swiss liberal thought. There are indications that, unlike Yamagata Aritomo, he was anxious to keep the military powers subject to civilian control. It was his view that a nation's strength did not consist merely of the armaments piled up in the country but in the degree of education and enlightenment enjoyed by the people as a whole. His memorial reads in part: "However, when it comes to raising a conscript army, the essential thing is not just to put guns in the hands of soldiers, forming them in serried ranks in imitation of the appearance of a great army and then make them march into the face of the enemy; the root of the question is rather to surpass the enemy through the knowledge and understanding of the people as a whole. . . . Accordingly, the foundation for a strong army is not simply a matter of giving arms to soldiers but rather to provide an education for the people as a whole, without distinction between town and country, and to give the people throughout the whole nation knowledge and learning without discrimination of class or rank." *Yamada Kengi Kempaku-sho* (Memorial of Yamada Kengi) which has been reprinted in *Meiji Bunka Zenshu* (Collection of Meiji Culture), edited by Yoshino Sakuzo, Tokyo, 1930, Vol. 23, p. 17.

But the government would see to it that the influence which would mould the mind of the recruit would be "safe"; that the reading and instruction in the barracks would emphasize loyalty, unity of the country, the dangers of foreign ideas, particularly of all such seditious concepts as democracy, liberalism, universal suffrage and, later, socialism and internationalism. Gradually the minds of the conscripts would be turned to safe subjects—such as the need for Japanese expansion, Japan's mission in "freeing" Korea from the tyrannical grasp of China, and finally Japan's role in "liberating" Asia from Western domination. The dominant military figure of modern Japan, whose life spanned both the Meiji and Taisho eras, the man who was, more than any other single individual, the evil genius behind Japan's militarism and black reaction, Field Marshal Yamagata, openly stated that the purpose for the revision and extension of conscription in 1883, with the accompanying enormous increase in military and naval expenditure, was a preparation for war on the continent: "In the meantime the high-handed attitude of the Chinese towards Korea, which was antagonistic to the interests of Japan, showed our officers that a great war was to be expected sooner or later on the continent, and made them eager to acquire knowledge, for they were as yet quite unfitted for a continental war."⁴⁶

It was admitted that the army built up on the basis of the Conscription Act of 1872-3 was quite sufficient to meet the needs of maintaining internal order, whether to suppress agrarian unrest or pro-feudal rebellion. But after 1878, when the Satsuma revolt, the last armed stand of feudal reaction, was decisively put down, in the years following 1880 when the great peasant revolts fell off into small infrequent riots, and when there was no real fear of any foreign power attacking Japan, it was precisely at this time that the Japanese Government, prodded by Yamagata, initiated the far-reaching military increases mentioned above, which were definitely planned as a prerequisite for future expansion.⁴⁷ The historian of the conscription system in Japan quite frankly admits that, after the suppression of the Satsuma revolt, the expansion of the

⁴⁶ Yamagata Aritomo, in *Fifty Years of New Japan*, edited by Okuma Shigenobu, London, 1910, Vol. I, p. 208.

⁴⁷ The great increase in trained manpower provided by the Reform of 1882 as compared to that under the earlier act is shown in Izu Kimio and Matsushita Yoshio, *Nihon Gunji Hattatsu Shi* (History of Japanese Military Development), Tokyo, 1938, pp. 196-7.

Japanese army was designed for use abroad: "It is a fact worthy of note that the Satsuma Rebellion was a turning point in the history of the law. Previous to that event, the law had aimed at the maintenance of peace and order at home, but since that time it has always been the object of the law to prepare for emergencies on the continent. This policy of preparedness has ever since been supported by the increase of population at home."⁴⁸

Without understanding the full historical significance of conscription, many farmers, villagers, and townsmen seemed to have instinctively felt some of its implications, because its enforcement in 1873 soon provoked widespread opposition in the form of riots and even armed uprisings. For example, in the standard study of agrarian unrest in the early years of the Meiji period there are listed for the year 1873 twelve uprisings kindled by resentment against conscription, and a few more in the following year.⁴⁹ (One psychological reason for the frequency of peasant revolts in the early days of the Meiji era was the absence of any recognized channel either constitutional, since there were no representative institutions, or legalized, such as, for instance, trade unions or peasant unions through which complaints or petitions could be brought to the attention of the competent authorities.) The standard Japanese explanation of these uprisings is that the ignorant peasantry interpreted literally the metaphorical phrase "blood taxes" which was used in the text of the Conscription Act.⁵⁰ This misunderstanding must have occurred in many cases, but, to explain the widespread and bitter opposition which this act set off, we must look deeper.

Conscription with its three years of military service deprived the peasantry for an appreciable period of the strongest hands on the farms, and with no mechanization of agriculture such an absence would be acutely felt. Further, it prognosticated fresh tax burdens, and finally, as we have seen, it strengthened the repressive powers of the state.⁵¹

Even one of the early military leaders whose role we have already

⁴⁸ Gotaro Ogawa: *Conscription System in Japan*, New York, 1929, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Tsuchiya Takao and Ono Michio (Editors): *Meiji Shonen Nomin Sojo Roku*, *op. cit.*, Appendix 2: "Chronology of Peasant Revolts," pp. 660-662.

⁵⁰ See for instance Matsushita Yoshio: *Chohei-rei Seitei no Zengo* (The Time of the Establishment of the Conscription Act), Tokyo, 1932, pp. 136-40.

⁵¹ An interesting study of the various underlying motives behind these protests against conscription has been briefly outlined in Hirano Yoshitaro: *Nihon Shihon-shugi Shakai no Kiko* (The Mechanism of Japanese Capitalist Society), Tokyo, 1934, pp. 130-31.

mentioned, Tani Takeki, noted the fact that the new conscript army was used to suppress agrarian unrest and anti-feudal revolt. In describing this counter-revolutionary function of the Japanese army he wrote as follows: "Moreover, to our shame there is something which cannot be hidden even if we forcibly tried to gag the mouths of others; and that, as everyone knows, is that the army, created for the purpose of guarding the country against a foreign foe, slaughters the discontented populace of our country; this is truly a disgrace that can hardly be borne."⁵²

The incidence of conscription was inequitable, and the historical circumstances in which it was enacted were alarming to those who already feared the increasing autocracy of the government. The Act of 1872-3, besides providing the usual exemptions for physical and professional reasons, permitted a man to compound for exemption from enrolment by the payment of 270 yen, a sum far beyond the capacity of most commoners.⁵³ This inequitable incidence has been maintained in less obvious ways until more modern times, as can be seen in a passage from the same authority: "Hence, we may say that the present system of conscription enlists a comparatively greater number of soldiers out of the middle classes, and exempts a great number of the higher classes. Of course, this circumstance is due to differences of physique, but it is recognized implicitly by all that it is also due to the discretion of the examiners in the conscript examination."⁵⁴

Again, young men of well-to-do families with university education could by the "volunteer" system escape two years of training and at the same time be placed in a favorable position for promotion in case of active service.⁵⁵ It is, of course, well known that the senior officers in the army, especially during the Meiji period, came almost exclusively from the famous families of Choshu and, in the navy, from Satsuma.

⁵² *Tani Takeki Iken-sho* (The Opinions of Tani Takeki), written in 1887, reprinted in *Meiji Bunka Zenshu, op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 470. We also have the testimony of the German agricultural expert, Mayet, employed by the Japanese Government to give advice on agricultural insurance, who stated that in the years between 1876 and 1884 he personally knew of at least two or three occasions when garrison troops of the standing army were called out to suppress peasant insurrections. Paul Mayet's work on Japanese agricultural conditions appears in the Japanese translation *Nihon Nomin no Hihei oyobi sono Kyuji Saku* (The Poverty of the Japanese Peasantry and a Policy for its Remedy) published in *Nihon Sangyo Shiryo Takei* (Outline of Source Materials for History of Japanese Industry), Tokyo, 1926, Vol. 2, p. 397.

⁵³ Ogawa: *op. cit.*, p. 14. This provision appears in Article 12 of Clause 6 of the Act.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228. (Italics mine, E. H. N.)

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

IN EXAMINING the historical circumstances in which conscription was enforced, one should guard against the charge of reckless oversimplification by stating at once that Japanese society was, and still is, a most complex phenomenon, and that it contains what appear to be baffling inconsistencies and inner contradictions. At the time when the military bureaucrats of the early Meiji era were intent on instituting conscription, some of the more obtuse and noisy (hence less dangerous) reactionaries were agitating against it on the ground that the lower classes were unfit to bear arms.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Saigo Takamori, the most capable organizer of pro-feudal reaction, quite characteristically opposed general conscription, advocating instead a permanent standing army of élite professional soldiers. Yamagata, fresh from a study of Western military systems on his return from France in 1870, insisted on general conscription and was supported by the most astute leaders of the day, Okubo and Kido.⁵⁷

This digression is merely a warning against the assumption that every opponent of conscription was necessarily a stout champion of democracy and peace. Nevertheless, the more keen-sighted critics of autocracy and reaction saw in conscription, and particularly in its timing, a sinister augury of whither Japanese policy would lead in succeeding years. We have some indication of the politically unnecessary and, therefore, reactionary nature of the early creation of the Japanese conscript army in the words of Ueki Emori, one of the leaders of the left wing of the Liberal Party (Jiyuto), who wrote in 1879, "An army does not depend on guns and ships but primarily on the feeling of patriotism which is imbued with the true love of liberty."⁵⁸

A fact which must not be overlooked is that both the original law of 1872-3 and the revised law of 1883, which fixed the pattern of the conscription system for modern Japan, were decreed *before* the establishment of a constitution or of any representative institutions.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ For Saigo's plan for a professional army and Yamagata's opposition, see *Noson Mondai Jiten* (A Dictionary on the Agrarian Problem), edited under the supervision of Ono Takeo, Tokyo, 1934, under the subject entitled *Heino Itchi Ron* (The Argument for Unifying Soldier and Peasant), p. 421.

⁵⁸ Ueki Emori: *Minken Jiyu Ron* (Discussion of Democratic Liberty), quoted by Hani Goro, *Shin-bunka no Sozo* (The Creation of a New Culture), Part 4 of a series on Meiji Thought and Culture in the *Chuokoron*, April 1940, p. 354.

⁵⁹ It will be recalled that one of the bitterest struggles in English constitutional history, breaking out during the reign of Charles I, concerned the right of the Crown to maintain a standing army without Parliament's consent. Parliament won a decisive victory of far-reaching consequence.

conscript army created by the fiat of the Dajokan (Council of State) where the able but autocratic Meiji bureaucrats issued their decrees unimpeded by the representatives of an assembly or even by the code of a basic constitutional law, became a powerful political weapon in the hands of men who were far too cunning and far-sighted to dull it recklessly by constant or unnecessary use. Oi Kentaro, one of the few "fighting" democrats to appear in modern Japanese history, who was the most consistent leader of the left-liberal opposition to the Meiji Government, wrote a striking criticism of the political considerations of conscription in a chapter of his work *Jiyu Ryaku Ron* (A Brief Treatise on Liberty). The chapter in question boldly begins: "In regard to the conscription system, it is a fact that the wealthy constantly enjoy exemptions from it, but the poor are unable to take advantage of it [in the same way]."⁸⁰

These words make a fitting ending to any essay which describes some aspect of the transition from Tokugawa feudalism to modern Japan, for it reveals that the social change which accompanied the Restoration meant replacing the old feudal personal (and thus arbitrary) relationship between ruler and ruled by a cold, impersonal (and so uniform) cash nexus between the two. With the triumph of a money economy, the old class cleavages of a decadent feudalism were covered up but they still cut deep across modern Japanese society. The new industrialists of Japan restlessly began a search for markets and investment areas for their new industries and banks, and the militarists were more than willing to force their way into the Asiatic continent in search of markets and colonies. In this expansionist drive, the common Japanese man, himself an unfree agent enrolled in a conscript army, became an unwitting agent in riveting the shackles of slavery on other peoples. It is impossible to employ genuinely free men for enslaving others; and conversely, the most brutalized and shameless slaves make the most pitiless and effective despoilers of the liberties of others.

The modern Japanese army was not called into being through some peculiarly "Japanese" act of magic whereby local feudal loyalties were shifted and transmuted into a deeper loyalty to the central government. The sentiments of a genuine patriotism, the love of one's country, its culture, its struggles for freedom and progress, its language and arts and,

⁸⁰ This treatise of Oi Kentaro appears in the appendix to a biography on him, *Oi Kentaro Den* (A Biography of Oi Kentaro) by Hirano Yoshitaro, Tokyo, 1938. His critique of conscription appears on pages 447-49, and the above quotation on page 447.

in the case of Japan, particularly its physical form, are often expressed in a deep respect for a titular sovereign; but this had nothing to do with the creation of an army in Japan. The conscription system was established during the stormiest period of modern Japanese history, in the teeth of forceful opposition. Its timing and design evoked profound misgivings in the minds of the few democratic critics of the governing autocracy. One of the earliest societies of distinctly liberal nature which criticized the autocratic methods of the government and suggested the establishment of representative institutions was the *Risshisha* (Society of Free Thinkers), organized in Kochi prefecture (formerly the domain of the Tosa clan). This society was headed by the famous liberal leader, Itagaki Taisuke, and included in it almost all the important spokesmen within the liberal camp during the early Meiji era. In their memorial advocating the establishment of a representative assembly and presented to the Emperor in 1877, the following criticism of conscription is to be found. It is of sufficient interest to quote at some length.

“The fourth evil is that the military system will never be placed on a proper open footing, until the mode of recruiting the army is made to agree with the form of government. General conscription and poll-taxes are not matters with which a despotic government should meddle. They can only be imposed by limited forms of government. Reforms can be more readily enforced by despotism, yet our government, despotic as it is, cannot carry out and support measures of reform. . . . They, the people, hold themselves responsible for the defense of the country and are willing to shed their blood in its cause. This proves that they understand the meaning of self-government.

“But under a despotic rule the case is a very different one. The rulers possess absolute power while the people are in a condition very grievous to be borne. Whatever little money they may possess is wrung from them by taxation. Worse than that, they may be called upon at any time to give their blood. Surely such treatment of its people by a government cannot be pleasing in the eyes of the Gods who govern all. The people under this absolute rule have no responsible existence. The government does what it likes, and enlists troops on the plea of necessary defense of the Emperor. The system of general conscription can never work well unless it accords with the form of government.

“Let us show how the military system at present in force was first brought about. After the Restoration the military and civil duties of the *samurai* were abolished, and a proclamation was issued to the effect that

the *samurai* and *heimin* should unite in forming an army for the defense of the nation. Regulations were published relative to the enlistment of young men throughout the country regardless of class, for the formation of regular forces. Now we do not hold that this system is bad, but we maintain that it is not suited to the present time or, in other words, to the present form of government. Since the above regulations were enforced, large barracks have been built, officers dressed out in showy uniforms, the troops furnished with arms of the latest improved pattern, and everything done in splendid form. Yet we see on the occasion of a rebellion breaking out in Kiushiu, the Imperial army finds itself very hard pressed in the engagements in Higo. Not only the whole of the regular army and reserves have to be sent down, but, finding they cannot suppress the insurrection, police forces are armed and despatched to the seat of war, together with large numbers of *samurai* of various ken. Now, police were not intended to be used as soldiers in the field."⁶¹

The record of such democratic critics of the governing autocracy deserves to establish them as infinitely more patriotic than the ruling military bureaucrats like Yamagata and his present disciples who firmly set Japan's feet upon the path of unprovoked aggression, which is leading ultimately to its humiliation and defeat.

It is quite apparent that the Japanese peasant of the early Meiji period, so far from being enthusiastic about sending his son into the army, strenuously objected to it; and, in the upshot, his instincts are seen to have been sounder and saner than the wisdom of those leaders who forced conscription upon the country. The common people of Japan never asked to be conscribed; they were simply compelled to enroll in the new conscript army under officers who were mostly men descended from the *samurai* or *daimyo* who had for generations despised and debased the lower classes of the country.

IT HAS ALREADY been pointed out ⁶² that, unlike the origins of conscription in Europe which were of a democratic and revolutionary nature, and historically justified—in France at least—by the fact that it was required as the only means of national survival, in Japan conscription was autocratic in the manner of its establishment and counter-revolutionary in its design and effect. It was introduced without the slightest

⁶¹ From *Japanese Government Documents* edited by W. W. McLaren: *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, First Series, Vol. XLII, Part I, May 1914, pp. 467-68.

⁶² See footnote 2 in Part I of this article, March 1943.

regard for public opinion and without there being any pressing necessity for it in terms of national defense against any likely aggression. (This is particularly true of the time when the revised Act of 1883 was decreed.)

The spirit of black reaction which motivated the chief architect of conscription, Yamagata Aritomo, can be seen in his *Gunjin Kunkai* (Admonition to Soldiers), written in 1878, which became the handbook and guide of the army on its attitude to politics and the state. In it, Yamagata forbids soldiers to join political associations with democratic or liberal tendencies and sternly warns against "giving free rein to idle chatter about the people's rights under the guise of discussing current affairs."⁶³ This has been the prevailing spirit in the Japanese army down to this day when military leaders, while rigorously proscribing all politics of the left, encourage fascist and chauvinist influences within the army, condoning political assassinations by fascist-minded soldiers. So far from not mixing in politics, as admonished in one of the Meiji Emperor's rescripts, the Japanese army has been the spearhead of fascism in Japan, and by its manifold political and propagandist activities has virtually obviated the need for a single fascist party as in Germany or Italy.

Once the leaders of the Meiji Government had blocked the road toward further democratization of Japanese society and economy and had set their faces resolutely toward the path leading to reaction at home and aggression abroad, the trend toward more militarization in every aspect of Japanese life was irrevocably determined. In the past half century the Japanese war machine weighed more painfully upon the soldiers and spirits of the Japanese people, while its threat to neighboring peoples became more terrifying. It has now reached the stage where the only solution is its decisive and total defeat, thereby freeing Asia once and for all from the recurring nightmare of Japanese aggression. This great act of liberation will at the same time remove an enormous incubus from the backs of the Japanese people themselves. The Japanese were unable to secure their own liberty at the fateful hour of the overthrow of feudalism. The time of their liberation will have to be postponed until the forces of the democratic nations can defeat the Japanese army and then, in addition to the primary task of freeing Asia from Japanese conquest, help the Japanese people themselves to secure that liberty and freedom which they have so far been too misguided and weak to accomplish unaided. *Ottawa, January 1943*

⁶³ Yamagata Aritomo: *Gunjin Kunkai*, reprinted in *Meiji Bunka Zenshu*, op. cit., Vol. 23, pp. 97-102, especially p. 100.