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Source: *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), pp. 81-110

Published by: [Sophia University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25066351>

Accessed: 03/01/2014 23:25

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Local Officials and the Meiji Conscription Campaign

ROKUHARA HIROKO

THE creation of an effective military system was an imperative for the new Meiji government. Fearing threats from both the Western powers and discontented elements at home, the Meiji leaders set out to establish a strong military force under the direct control of the central government. As with other aspects of state-building, they took as a model the military systems of continental Europe, particularly France and Prussia, both of which depended on commoner soldiers for most of their armed force. On 1872.11.28, the government issued a proclamation in the name of the emperor declaring that military service was a national duty (Chōhei no Mikotonori 徴兵の詔). The proclamation was followed shortly thereafter, in January 1873, by promulgation of the Conscription Act (Chōheirei 徴兵令), which designated all men between the ages of seventeen and forty as theoretically liable for military service and specified the grounds under which a certain number of them were to be called up for active duty. These measures evoked hostile responses throughout the country, including armed uprisings and widespread draft evasion.¹ Yet, ultimately the conscription system survived these challenges and took firm root in Japanese society. Modified in various regards over the course of the following decades, it remained a central feature of the life of the nation until its abolition in 1945 as a consequence of defeat in World War II.

How was the initial resistance to conscription overcome and the system institutionalized? Most research up to now has emphasized the legal measures taken by the central government to tighten the loopholes in the system that in the early years facilitated evasion.² Relatively little attention has been given to the potential

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¹ On the history of draft evasion, see Kikuchi 1994.

² Matsushita Yoshio 松下芳男 and Fujita Tsuguo 藤田嗣雄 explain in detail the background of the early Meiji establishment of conscription. See Matsushita 1981; Fujita 1967. Other studies include Norman 1978; Ōe 1981; Ōhama 1978. For a recent, comprehensive study of the institutional history of the conscription system, see Katō 1996.

contribution of other groups and approaches. A notable exception is the work of Endō Yoshinobu 遠藤芳信, who has pointed out that from the early 1880s officials at the prefectural and local level engaged in various efforts to encourage the populace to accept conscription. In 1881, Endō notes, the Army Ministry proposed that a military affairs section (*heijika* 兵事課) be created within prefectural governments as a means of remedying the mismanagement of conscription by local officials. Along with such government offices, the prefectures also established advisory military affairs boards (*heijikai* 兵事会) that included officials from the country and lower levels as well as members of the prefectural military affairs sections. These military affairs boards promoted compliance with conscription by sponsoring local associations to reward conscripts for their services (*chōhei irō kai* 徴兵慰勞会, *chōhei irō gikai* 徴兵慰勞義会).³ Building on Endō's study, Arakawa Shōji 荒川章二 has explored the activities initiated by the military affairs board in Shizuoka prefecture, showing how the efforts of the board to support conscripts and their families ultimately contributed to the government's aim to mobilize soldiers for the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895.⁴

In their examination of the activities of local military affairs boards, both Endō and Arakawa have focused on the boards' role as obedient agents of the central government. Undoubtedly the figures who participated in these boards served the interests of the central government in various ways. Yet at the same time, their efforts to promote conscription reflected the complexity of their own position. Particularly the lowest echelon of officials, the *kochō* 戸長 (register chiefs) and the later town and village mayors (*chōchō* 町長, *sonchō* 村長),⁵ who came to take an active part in military affairs boards and support associations for conscripts, were caught between the demands of the government hierarchy above them and the interests of the people of the jurisdictions where they, too, resided. Created in 1871 as the bottom-level unit of administration, with supervisory authority usually over several traditional villages, *kochō* were in charge of household registers and related matters. One of the matters that fell under their jurisdiction was management of the initial stages of the conscription process. Responsible for seeing that the young men under their supervision responded as expected to the requirement to register as potential conscripts, the *kochō* had to confront the opposition of the local population and compel people to cooperate

³ Endō 1976. Such organizations were sometimes also termed “associations to encourage martial spirit” (*shōbu kai* 尚武会, *shōbu gikai* 尚武義会).

⁴ Arakawa 1992; Arakawa 2001, pp. 21–68.

⁵ The system of local administration was repeatedly revised between 1871 and 1889, when the so-called self-government system (*jichisei* 自治制) was established. There also was substantial local variation in how the new system of local administration was implemented. In principle the position of *kochō* was abolished in 1889 with the inauguration of the self-government system and the creation of the posts of town and village mayors. Even after 1889, however, some of the official and quasi-official sources used in this study continued to refer to local officials by the old terms. Below I will follow the usage of the sources cited. For information about the system of local administration, see Kikegawa 1955; Haraguchi 1972 and 1974; Ōshima 1977 and 1994; Yamanaka 1975, 1994, and 1999. For examples of variation in its implementation, see Haraguchi 1972; Waters 1983; Baxter 1994.

with a process that imposed hardships and brought virtually no benefits. Whether these local officials sympathized with the plight of the people of their jurisdiction or simply were concerned to preserve their position of prestige and authority, they of necessity had to find ways of making conscription seem more palatable. Keeping in mind this circumstance, below I will take a closer look at the background and nature of the local campaigns to promote conscription carried out between the 1870s and the early 1890s.

The New Military System

While the Meiji leaders were agreed that Japan needed a modern well-equipped army, they were divided into two groups about the proper manpower resources for it. One group held that service in the army should be reserved for members of the former samurai class, both because of their traditional expertise in military matters and as a means of providing the former samurai with financial support.⁶ Among those who held to this position was Major-General Kirino Toshiaki 桐野利秋, who some years later, in 1877, would command the Satsuma forces in their rebellion against the government. Others, however, led by Ōmura Masujirō 大村益次郎 and Yamagata Aritomo 山県有朋, argued that soldiers should be inducted from the entire population.⁷ As undersecretary of military affairs (*hyōbu taifu* 兵部大輔),⁸ Ōmura conceived plans for a mass army, and Yamagata saw through those plans following Ōmura's assassination by discontented samurai in 1869. Yamagata knew that a professional army made up of former samurai would be far more costly than a force composed largely of commoner conscripts. From his experience at the time of the Restoration with, on the one hand, the *kiheitai* 奇兵隊, the mixed militia of warriors and commoners created in Chōshū,⁹ and, on the other, the makeshift imperial army composed of warriors from different domains, Yamagata recognized other advantages of a commoner force as well. Commoners were easier to train as the members of a modern national mass army than were samurai, who tended to have a strong sense of domain rivalry and to be inflexible about learning new styles of military technique. In 1872, Yamagata submitted a proposal recommending adoption of a system of conscription and setting forth in detail plans for a new mass army, from the size of the projected force to the procedures for organizing and maintaining it.¹⁰ Accepting his proposal, the government embarked on the creation of a conscript army as set forth in the Conscription Act of 10 January 1873.

⁶ For the views of the anticonscription group, see Matsushita 1981, pp. 176–82, 191–92; Vlastos 1995, p. 221.

⁷ For the views of those favoring conscription, see Matsushita 1981, pp. 95–99; Yui 1989, pp. 440–41; Vlastos 1995, p. 222.

⁸ Established in 1869, the Department of Military Affairs (Hyōbushō 兵部省) was divided into the Army Ministry and the Navy Ministry in 1872.

⁹ Takasugi Shinsaku 高杉晋作 created the *kiheitai* in 1863, when Chōshū's attacks on foreign vessels in the straits of Shimonoseki led to conflict with Britain, France, Holland, and the United States. The term *kihei* was adopted in distinction to *seihei* 正兵, the regular force of the domain.

¹⁰ For Yamagata's proposal, see his "Shuitsu ni fuhei o ronzu" 主に賦兵を論ず, in *Guntai*,

Under the new military system established through the Conscription Act, all Japanese males between the ages of seventeen and forty were held to compose a potential national army (*kokumingun* 国民軍) ready to be called upon in case of need. The standing army (*jōbigun* 常備軍) was to be drawn from a smaller sector of this group: males between the ages of twenty and twenty-three who had been screened through a draft examination and then chosen by lot. The recruits served on active duty for three years, during which time they received a daily wage (3.3 *sen* as starting pay),¹¹ three meals a day, and uniforms. After finishing their three years of active duty, they were to serve a further four years in the reserves.¹² Between 1874 and 1893, the mean ratio of the number of men actually conscripted to the eligible population was approximately 5 percent, the lowest ratio being 2.4 percent in 1875 and the highest 7.9 percent in 1883.¹³

The proclamation by the Council of State (Dajōkan 太政官) declaring military service a national duty (Chōhei Kokuyu 徴兵告諭), issued on the same day as the emperor's edict on conscription, had emphasized that the principle of service in a national conscript army had been adopted in antiquity. Were it not for its abolition by subsequent regimes of warriors, "the idle and arrogant," it would have continued as the most appropriate form for fulfilling the duty of national defense.¹⁴ Conscription was thus presented as the symbol of a state where all people, not just a privileged class, were allowed and expected to participate in national affairs. But while the government tried in this way to convince the populace that they would benefit from the privilege of sharing, as one writer put it, "the joys and sorrows of the state" (*kokka no kyūseki* 国家の休戚),¹⁵ many reacted otherwise to the implementation of conscription.

Two months after the proclamation of the Conscription Act, the residents of Kōnouchi 神内, a village in present-day Mie prefecture, took up bamboo spears and persuaded the people of neighboring villages to join them in protesting the new measure. In this case the *kochō* succeeded in calming the angry mob and

heishi, pp. 49–53. Kirino vehemently criticized Yamagata's proposal, saying "[he] is gathering peasants to form a useless band. What benefit will come from this?" (Matsushita 1981, p. 178). Kirino's antipathy to the idea of a mass conscript army led him to resign his post and ultimately to take up arms against the government in 1877. See Matsushita 1981, pp. 178–79; Ōe 1981, p. 55.

¹¹ The daily wage of a conscript started from 3.3 *sen*, increased to 4.2 *sen* when he became a private, and then was increased to 5 *sen* if he was promoted to private first class. A private thus made 1.278 yen a month. By comparison, the monthly salary of a second lieutenant (*shōi* 少尉), the lowest rank of officer, was 22 yen. On the wage scale of the army, see *Hōrei zensho* for 1873 (vol. 6:2, pp. 1040–44), 1876 (vol. 9:2, pp. 875–78); and 1880 (vol. 13:2, pp. 1336–39). The monthly salary of a Tokyo policeman was 4 yen in 1874 and 5 yen in 1881. *Nedanshi nenpyō*, p. 91.

¹² In 1883 the period of service in the reserves was extended to nine years.

¹³ This calculation is based on the table in Katō 1996, p. 20.

¹⁴ For Chōhei Kokuyu, see *Guntai, heishi*, vol. 4, pp. 67–69.

¹⁵ The phrase was used by a certain Kodomo Jirō 小供二郎 in an article contributed to *Naigai heiji shinbun* 内外兵事新聞 (1878.4.14). See Matsushita 1981, pp. 232–35.

averting a riot,¹⁶ but things did not go so smoothly in the Okayama area. There, the reference in the Chōhei Kokuyu to conscription as a “blood tax” (*ketsuzei* 血税) led to the spread of a rumor that a recruiter dressed in white was coming to draw the blood of men of conscription age. Agitated by the rumor, the villagers of Teiejiji 貞永寺 in Mimasaka 美作 demanded that the *kochō* hand over the recruiter, who, they believed, had taken shelter in the *kochō*'s house. Unconvinced by the *kochō*'s reassurances, the discontented villagers beat him up and marched to an adjacent village where they attacked the school and members of the ex-outcast community. Other villages in Mimasaka were soon caught up in the unrest. Unable to quell the violence with a local force of three hundred ex-samurai, the prefectural officials requested assistance from the Osaka garrison, which finally succeeded in subduing the mob. Almost twenty thousand people were charged with involvement in the riot, with the death penalty handed down to fifteen and sixty-four given prison sentences.¹⁷ Eleven other prefectures in western Japan also experienced anticonscription protests in which villagers armed with bamboo spears and rifles attacked *kochō* and other government officials and buildings that they associated with the new arbitrary rulers.

The government and leading newspapers criticized these violent responses to the conscription system as the foolish behavior of the ignorant.¹⁸ In their view such behavior was due to backwardness and should be remedied by educating people about the nature of conscription. But while the government was able to repress the anticonscription riots of 1873–1874 without much difficulty, other forms of resistance to the new system proved much harder to deal with. Some youths sought to evade the draft by running away or by claiming that the age recorded for them on the household register was erroneous. Many young men and their parents, however, simply tried to take advantage of the various opportunities to win exemption from the draft that were incorporated in the system itself.

The Conscription Act of 1873 allowed exemptions from military service to those who were ill, disabled, or below five *shaku* one *sun* in height (about 154.5 cm), to the head and potential head of a household, to those who had a brother already serving in the army, and to those convicted of a crime. The government further exempted officials, students enrolled in higher-level public schools,

¹⁶ The governor and the vice-governor of the prefecture believed that the uprising would have spread had the *kochō* not dealt with it properly and asked the Meiji government to permit them to honor him. The *kochō* received a reward of 2.5 yen for his “diligence and strenuous efforts” in preventing a possible disaster. On the Kōnouchi uprising, see *Meiji shonen nōmin sōjōroku*, pp. 276–77.

¹⁷ On the Mimasaka uprising, see *Meiji shonen nōmin sōjōroku*, pp. 339–70; *Meiji nyūsu jiten*, vol. 1, pp. 648–52.

¹⁸ See *Meiji nyūsu jiten*, vol. 1, pp. 477–78; 601–605; *Shizuoka-ken shi*, pp. 734–35. Leading papers, such as *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞, *Akebono* あけぼの (the predecessor of *Tōkyō akebono shinbun* 東京曙新聞), *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* 郵便報知新聞, and *Shizuoka shinbun* 静岡新聞, all took a progovernment position, describing the anticonscription riots as the work of an “ignorant mob,” a “stubborn mob,” “fools who cannot be cured by any medicine,” or “criminals against heaven and earth.”

medical schools, or military schools, and those studying abroad. One could also legally avoid the draft by paying the sizable sum of 270 yen for a substitute. While sending one's son to study abroad or paying 270 yen for a substitute was an option open only to the rich, others sought to escape conscription by acquiring the status of the head or potential head of a household through adoption by another family, taking over a house that had become extinct, or setting up a branch family. As a result of such provisions and strategies, large numbers of those technically eligible for the draft won exemption from military service. In 1876 the percentage of those exempted was 82 percent, and over the next several years it further increased to 82.9 percent in 1877, 88.8 percent in 1878, and 89.3 percent in 1879.¹⁹

The government took the situation seriously. In December 1876, Yamagata, now serving as army minister (*rikugunkyo* 陸軍卿), asked to have orders sent down to the prefectures to investigate more strictly requests for exemption and to instruct "thoroughly" the populace under their jurisdiction not to try to avoid military service.²⁰ In response, Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視, the minister of the right (*udaijin* 右大臣), issued orders to this effect to all prefectural offices in February 1877.²¹ Through successive revisions of the Conscription Act the government also sought to restrict the legal opportunities for evasion. In 1878, men of twenty years and younger were prohibited from establishing a branch family. The next year the government declared that an heir would be exempted only when the head of his family was fifty years or older. In 1883 the government stipulated that the household head had to be at least sixty years old. Penalties for evasion were also strengthened. In 1879, a new clause to the Conscription Act put people on notice that those who failed to register for the draft at the required age would be moved to the head of the list of those liable for induction. A further measure in 1883 specified that draft dodgers would be subject to imprisonment for up to one year and a fine of three to thirty yen.²² Eventually, in 1889, illness and disability were made the sole criteria for exemption.²³

The problems with the system also drew attention from various nongovernmental quarters. Newspapers reported stories of local officials who embezzled the substitute-fee paid by a villager,²⁴ or a cotton merchant in Kyoto who paid an enormous sum of money to secure exemption for his thirty-six employees.²⁵ Between August and September 1879, *Chōya shinbun* 朝野新聞 ran several articles on the draft issue, introducing the argument that it would be more effective and result in a better army to rely on volunteers rather than conscription.²⁶

¹⁹ "Rikugunshō daiyon nenpō," pp. 17–19.

²⁰ See "Chōhei ni kanshi kaku fukē e chūikata otasshi kore aritaki mune ukagai."

²¹ See "Chōhei kishi o fusegu kōtatsu."

²² Katō 1996, pp. 46, 90, 103.

²³ At this time, the government replaced the outright exemption of students from conscription with a system of deferral.

²⁴ *Meiji nyūsu jiten*, vol. 2, pp. 451–52.

²⁵ *Meiji nyūsu jiten*, vol. 2, p. 451.

²⁶ *Chōya shinbun* took up the draft issue on 9 August 1879, 24 September 1879, and 28 September 1879. See *Guntai, heishi*, pp. 132–39.

Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢沢吉 remarked cynically that the possibility of securing exemption through the manipulation of adoptive arrangements had led to an increase in “sons who do not know where their fathers live” or “who call themselves the heads of families but have no family members to feed.” As the founder of a private school, Fukuzawa also objected to the government’s exempting students of public schools from conscription, a privilege that was not extended to those enrolled in private schools. He did not reject the premise of conscription as such, regarding it as an effective means of inculcating a sense of responsibility to maintain national independence on the part of all Japanese, but he criticized the discriminatory situation in which the actual burden of military service ended up falling largely on the second and third sons of impoverished peasants.²⁷

Fukuzawa likewise acknowledged the very real disadvantages faced by those inducted. “While for the state conscription is an excellent and essential device,” he wrote, “it is nothing but hard toil for those conscripted.”

[A conscript] not only loses the pleasure of a happy home and a happy circle of friends but also has his freedom of action curbed by strict military rules. Should an emergency of state arise, he is expected to be the first to deal with it. Not a few conscripts may lose their lives paying a blood tax and leave their bones to bleach in the wilderness. Many jobs in the world involve a degree of danger, but among them the one where danger is most immediate and apparent is quite obviously that of the soldier.²⁸

As Fukuzawa pointed out, military service was hardly worth the small wage, free meals, and free uniforms that one got in return.

To alleviate such problems and encourage a more positive response to conscription, a number of people proposed collecting a conscription tax so as to increase the compensation offered those inducted. In 1878, a certain Kawamura Shōhei 河村正平 submitted a petition suggesting that the government use money gathered from those exempted from the draft to establish a fund to pay for vocational training for recruits who had finished their term of service.²⁹ A few years later, Fukuzawa, too, proposed that those exempted should pay a conscription tax (*heiekizei* 兵役税), the funds from which could be used to enlarge the compensation given the recruits.³⁰ In 1888, Manaka Naomichi 真中直道, a councilor of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, also expressed his support for a conscription tax. The present system, he pointed out, was irrational in that it troubled millions of people to obtain only twenty thousand conscripts a year. It would be better to recruit volunteers and pay for their wages and other expenses through a conscription tax.³¹

The Army Ministry rejected such proposals. In turning down Kawamura’s

²⁷ Fukuzawa 1884a. For Fukuzawa’s views on the conscription system, see also Fukuzawa 1884b and 1886.

²⁸ Fukuzawa 1884a, pp. 396–97.

²⁹ For a discussion of Kawamura’s petition, see Katō 1996, p. 108; Endō 1976, pp. 4–5.

³⁰ Fukuzawa 1884a.

³¹ Katō 1996, p. 125.

petition, army officials declared that it ran counter to the principle of conscription. The apparent unfairness of the unevenness of the burden that fell much more heavily on some than on others would be remedied over time in that the sons of present conscripts would be exempted in the future, while the sons of those now exempted would be inducted.³² The army was undoubtedly wary about the social costs of imposing an additional tax on the populace, but officials also were concerned not to undermine the argument that fulfilling the obligation of national defense was in fact an honor and privilege. As Katsura Tarō 桂太郎, then vice-minister of the Army Ministry, put it in 1887,

In our country, people are expected to undertake military service. So long as they serve in the army, they must follow imperial orders and defend our state. This duty is in itself the right (*kenri* 権利) of the people, and performing this duty is an honor they can achieve. Therefore, all men of our nation should keep in mind that, having come into this world, they should undertake military service. Martial spirit will thereby be aroused among the people and will become the foundation on which the army and the navy of our country should stand.³³

While the army resisted the idea of a conscription tax or offering additional forms of compensation to recruits, it was not oblivious to the plight of impoverished conscripts. The 1889 revision of the Conscription Act, which limited the causes for exemption from the draft to illness and disability, also allowed a man whose family would not be able to make a living without him to defer his service. And in their response to Kawamura Shōhei's petition, army officials commented that they would not be opposed to the establishment of a fund for vocational training for former recruits if it took the form of a private initiative (*jinmin watakushi no yakusoku to shite* 人民私の約束として).³⁴ Those who took the lead in this direction were ultimately local officials, the people who were immediately responsible for facilitating the process of recruitment.

Local Officials and Conscription

The new military system put a heavy burden on local public offices. The central government assigned management of the basic steps of the conscription process to civil administrators, particularly the *kochō*, the bottom unit of the local administrative apparatus. Subsequent to the establishment of the post of *kochō* in 1871, the jurisdiction, source of income, and method of selection of those who held the post were repeatedly revised in the 1870s and 1880s, but throughout their

³² Katō 1996, p. 108; Endō 1976, pp. 4–5.

³³ *Heiji shinpō* 18 (17 November 1890), p. 8. The article notes that Katsura had made these remarks three years earlier, on the occasion of the revision of the Conscription Act. It was not only army officials who took this position. The Freedom and Popular Rights leader Itagaki Taisuke 板垣退助 on the one hand expressed deep sympathy for conscripts, but on the other, he opposed the idea of a conscription tax. In 1913, for example, he asserted that a conscription tax would dampen the lofty spirit of “serving the country as a mere private soldier” (*ippeisotsu to narite kuni ni tsukusu* 一兵卒となりて国に尽くす). Ichinose 2001, p. 8.

³⁴ Katō 1996, p. 108; Endō 1976, pp. 4–5.

role in the conscription process remained constant. When the Conscription Act was promulgated in 1873, the government had just begun to collect data about the resources necessary to state-building, and the *kochō*'s office was the major repository of information about manpower. It was impractical for the Army Ministry to dispatch military officers to every single village or hamlet to identify and check the circumstances of those who had reached the age of conscription. The government thus entrusted this task to the *kochō*. Officials of the central government likely also looked to the *kochō* to educate the populace about the importance of conscription and to ensure the cooperation of those directly affected.

The conscription process in principle began with a household head notifying the *kochō* (from 1889 the town or village mayor) that his or her son had reached the age of seventeen. After checking the information, the *kochō* reported it through the next level of local office (initially the *ku* 区, district; after 1878, the county, *gun* 郡) to the prefectural government, which added the young man's name to the roster of the national army. Three years later the household head again notified the *kochō* that the young man in question had turned twenty, the age for active service. The *kochō* compared the notification against the roster of the national army to make sure that all who were supposed to submit such information had done so. He further checked the family circumstances of those whose names had been submitted to him against the exemption clauses of the Conscription Act, divided the twenty-year-olds into two groups—those to be listed as candidates for the standing army and those to be exempted—and submitted these lists via the prefectural government to the Army Ministry. On the day of the conscription examination, the *kochō* led the young men of his jurisdiction who were on the first list to the place where the examination was held. Those who passed the examination drew lots to decide which among them would be drafted for actual service; on occasion the *kochō* drew the lots on their behalf. The *kochō* was also supposed to accompany the draftees to the military post where they were inducted.

Their role in the conscription process put the *kochō* in a delicate position, caught between the demands of the government offices above them and the concerns of the people of their jurisdiction. The central government expected the local officials of the new administrative system to be less likely than the village headmen of the old regime, the *nanushi* 名主 or *shōya* 庄屋, to shelter the people of the area from orders descending from above. But in implementing unpopular directives from the central government, *kochō* did not find it easy to act unilaterally. If a *kochō* was indigenous to the area or if he gained his income from farming or operating a business in his jurisdiction, his own interests would be closely intertwined with those of the communities he administered.³⁵ Even if a *kochō* had no personal tie to his jurisdiction, he often faced difficulties in winning

³⁵ In many cases those who obtained the office of *kochō* were wealthy farmers of the area or those who had previously served as village officials under the Tokugawa regime. See Haraguchi 1972, pp. 240, 260–61; Ōshima 1994, pp. 82–85.

compliance with the conscription system, as violence directed against local officials in the Mimasaka and other uprisings graphically demonstrated.³⁶ Each tightening of the loopholes in the Conscription Act brought a new round of intimidation and harassment of local officials. In 1884, for example, *Jiyū shinbun* 自由新聞 reported that, following the 1883 revision, the villagers of Senshū Kishiwada 泉州岸和田 county in Osaka prefecture complained bitterly to the *kochō* about the more stringent conditions for exemption, and some of them even attempted to destroy his house. In Yamato 大和, in the same prefecture, villagers declared that they would exclude the *kochō* from “wedding ceremonies, memorial services, and all other social intercourse.” Frightened by this intimidation, the *kochō* of the area unanimously announced their resignations on grounds of illness. The county officials tried to persuade them to withdraw their resignations, but, as if prearranged, they responded that it would be impossible to continue to carry out the functions of the office.³⁷

Inevitably many *kochō* found it preferable to collude with the efforts of those under their jurisdiction to evade conscription. The Conscription Act declared that a *kochō* or district head (*kuchō* 区長) who affixed his seal to conscription documents containing false information should be charged with “the crime of carelessness” (*sorō no tsumi* 疎漏ノ罪).³⁸ And indeed the same *Jiyū shinbun* article that reported acts of intimidation against *kochō* regarding conscription in 1883 also noted that in Shiga and Kyoto prefectures *kochō* were taken into custody on suspicion of having manipulated the family registers.³⁹ In that *kochō* had substantial discretion in compiling both the family registers and the conscription rosters, presumably many others succumbed to pressure and adjusted these records in favor of those facing conscription. In 1878, *Naigai heiji shinbun* 内外兵事新聞, a newspaper that focused on military news, reported that a survey conducted by the army had found that numerous young men said to be below the required height were actually tall enough or that those exempted because of sickness were in fact healthy and perfectly fit for military service. The article laid the blame for the discrepancy on the misconduct of local officials.⁴⁰

As one remedy for such problems, in September 1881, Ōyama Iwao 大山巖, who two years earlier had succeeded Yamagata as army minister, recommended to Sanjō Sanetomi 三条実美, then chief councilor (*dajō daijin* 太政大臣), that the management of family registers should be transferred a level up, to that of the county.⁴¹ In addition, he proposed, county officials should report any corrections made in the family register to the prefectural government, and these corrections

³⁶ The prosecutors who undertook an inquiry of the Mimasaka uprising declared that the *kochō* who suffered the brunt of the villagers’ anger deserved deep sympathy because they had merely tried to do what they were supposed to. *Meiji shonen nōmin sōjōroku*, p. 342.

³⁷ Haraguchi 1974, pp. 224–25.

³⁸ *Guntai, heishi*, vol. 4, p. 90.

³⁹ Haraguchi 1974, pp. 224–25.

⁴⁰ Matsushita 1981, pp. 232–33.

⁴¹ For Ōyama’s recommendation, see “Chōhei no gi ni tsuki kengi.”

should further be examined by the police. While the Council of State declined to take up the proposal, eventually, in 1886, the Home Ministry revised the law concerning family registers so as to give prefectural governments a greater supervisory role.⁴²

The central officials also found fault, though, with the performance of prefectural governments concerning conscription. Initially the Army Ministry had received many inquiries from prefectural officials who had difficulty understanding the conscription system. To reduce time-consuming correspondence with individual offices, in 1875 the ministry had compiled a manual giving a detailed explanation of each article of the Conscription Act.⁴³ Prefectural governments continued, nevertheless, to be ill-prepared to deal with conscription matters. Not until 1886 was the organization of prefectural governments rationalized, the duties and powers of different sections clearly specified, and objective means established for evaluating the administrative experience and ability of the staff.⁴⁴

Together with his proposal for revision of the family registry system, Ōyama also made several recommendations for structural reform of prefectural governments to improve the management of conscription. The prefectures, he complained, did not pay sufficient attention to conscription. Backing his argument with a list of the name of the section and the number and rank of officials in charge of conscription matters in each prefectural office, he indicated that no prefectural government had a section dealing exclusively with conscription; half of the officials responsible for conscription-related matters were assigned other responsibilities as well; most officials dealing with such matters were of low rank and thus had only limited authority. Comparing the situation to that concerning taxation, to which, he held, prefectural officials gave top priority, he argued that conscription was, in fact, the more crucial issue. It meant taking people's beloved sons from them and putting them in danger, while taxation only extracted a small part of their labor. As a solution to these problems, Ōyama proposed that a new section specializing in conscription be established within each prefectural office and that at least some of the staff of the section be drawn from people who had once served in the army.⁴⁵

A year later, in December 1882, Ōyama submitted another report noting the low ratio for 1880–1882 of men registered on the conscription roster compared to those potentially eligible. Compared to France, which, he pointed out, succeeded in registering 71.25 percent of the eligible population, in those years Japan enrolled only 13.9 percent, with the rate varying from a high of 37.7 percent in Miyagi prefecture to a low of 6.8 in Kōchi.⁴⁶ This second report was

⁴² Katō 1996, pp. 101–102.

⁴³ See “Chōheirei sankō gohanpu ainaritaki mune ukagai.”

⁴⁴ See Ōshima 1994, pp. 241–50; Yamanaka 1999, pp. 211–19.

⁴⁵ See “Kaku fukēn chōhei jimū tantō kanri tōkyū narabi jin'in hyō” and “Chōhei no gi ni tsuki kengi.”

⁴⁶ For Ōyama's petition of 1 December 1882, see “Fukēn chōhei hikaku hyō o aguru no hyō” and “Kaku fukēn chōhei hikaku hyō.”

presumably meant to reinforce Ōyama's earlier call for improving the management of conscription at the prefectural level.

Ironically, the data in this second report did not necessarily substantiate the claim that greater numbers of staff with more specialized responsibilities would improve the rate of recruitment. According to the table submitted together with the report, the prefectures that registered the highest percentage of the eligible population were Miyagi (37.7 percent), Aomori (32.2 percent), Iwate (30.3 percent), Yamagata (25.8 percent), Fukushima (25.5 percent), and Akita (23.5 percent). In these, according to Ōyama's report of the previous year, the number of prefectural staff working on conscription matters ranged from a high of seven (Iwate and Akita) to a low of one (Fukushima). By contrast, the prefectures with the lowest rates of enrollment did not necessarily have the fewest staff. Indeed Kōchi, at the bottom of list in terms of enrollment (6.8 percent), not only had thirteen staff members working on recruitment matters, they were released from other duties. The same was true of Kyoto, with a low rate of 7.4 percent, but nine staff members responsible solely for conscription.

Despite these discrepancies, the Council of State adopted Ōyama's recommendation. Shortly after Ōyama submitted his second report, the chief councilor, Sanjō Sanetomi, sent all the governors a copy of the table of the ratio of enrollment by prefecture and a notice admonishing them for failing to prevent evasion of conscription. The varying percentages of eligible men recorded on the conscription rosters could not be ignored, he declared, because such differences undermined the principle of conscription.⁴⁷ The following month, on 23 January 1883, the Council of State issued orders to all governors to establish a new military affairs section (*heijika*) within prefectural governments to deal with conscription and other military matters.⁴⁸ The same day the government also ordered all ministries and prefectural offices to set aside a certain number of positions for former noncommissioned officers who had served ten years or more with a good record but could no longer continue in active military service because of illness or an accident in the line of duty.⁴⁹ Such former officers were obvious candidates to supply the new military affairs sections with the professional knowledge and skills that Ōyama had decried as lacking among prefectural officials under the existing situation.

Prefectural Military Affairs Sections and Military Affairs Boards

Following the order of 23 January 1883 to establish military affairs sections within prefectural offices, the various prefectures moved to do so. In Tokyo, for

⁴⁷ See Sanjō 1882.

⁴⁸ *Meiji nyūsu jiten*, vol. 3, p. 700. Apart from conscription, the other military matter that was presumably foremost in the minds of the government leaders was the expansion of armaments. Six days before Ōyama made his second proposal, the emperor had summoned the governors and instructed them to make every effort to secure tax revenues to increase armaments. The expansion was necessary, according to Yamagata, to deal with the "unstable" conditions caused by anti-Japanese uprisings in Korea in July 1882. For the armament expansion policy, see Yoshida 1989.

⁴⁹ *Hōrei zensho* (1883), vol. 16:1, pp. 92–94.

instance, the chief of the general affairs section was put in charge of the new section, to which three officials of the fourth, fifth, and sixth rank were attached. Several staff members were also employed.⁵⁰ Prior to the creation of the new section, four officials of the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fifteenth rank had handled matters concerning conscription.⁵¹ The addition of the new section obviously led not only to an increase in the personnel concentrating on conscription but to an elevation in their rank.

Among the measures that the prefectural military affairs sections pursued to improve the management of conscription and related issues was the establishment of quasi-official consultative bodies to act as liaison and take the initiative in these areas at the grassroots level. Two sources of information help us to trace the establishment of these bodies and their activities. One is the official *Government Bulletin* (*Kanpō* 官報), which began publication in July 1883. Published daily by the central government, *Kanpō* reported ordinances of the Council of State, orders issued by each ministry, personnel changes in the ministries and other government offices, and other official notifications. All ministries, public schools, military officers and civil officials above a certain rank, and county heads were obliged to subscribe. One issue cost three *sen*.⁵²

Between 1883 and 1889, *Kanpō* carried quite frequent reports on the establishment of advisory military affairs boards in addition to the prefectural military affairs sections. Starting with one such notice in 1883, it included 6 reports in 1884, 16 in 1885, 98 in 1886, 97 in 1887, 108 in 1888, and 41 in 1889. By that time at least 41 out of 47 prefectures had established military affairs boards.⁵³ The boards went by various names, but with time, most prefectures adopted the same designation, military affairs board (*heijikai*);⁵⁴ likewise regional differences among the boards decreased, and they became similar in their organization, personnel, and activities. The timing of the reports and of the establishment of the boards and their standardization suggests that the information disseminated through *Kanpō* was instrumental in the spread of military affairs boards throughout the nation in the second half of the 1880s.

⁵⁰ *Meiji nyūsu jiten*, vol. 3, p. 700.

⁵¹ See “Kaku fuken chōhei jimu tantō kanri tōkyū narabi jin’in hyō.”

⁵² On the origin and function of *Kanpō*, see Suzuki 1996; Kondō 1978; *Kanpō hyakunen no ayumi*. From 1885.12.22, the Council of State was replaced by the newly established Cabinet system, and the office responsible for publishing *Kanpō* was put under the Cabinet.

⁵³ The prefectures were Chiba, Shizuoka, and Fukuoka (1884); Iwate, Yamagata, Kanagawa, Gunma, Aichi, Yamanashi, Shiga, Fukui, Mie, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kōchi, Saga, and Miyazaki (1885); Miyagi, Fukushima, Saitama, Tochigi, Gifu, Kyoto, Shimane, Okayama, Tokushima, Nagasaki, and Kumamoto (1886); Aomori, Akita, Ibaraki, Niigata, Tottori, Ōita, and Kagoshima (1887); Hokkaido (1888); Nagano, Toyama, Ishikawa, and Nara (1889). The date when *Kanpō* reported the establishment of the board may not necessarily be the same as the date when it was actually created.

⁵⁴ For instance, Ehime and seven other prefectures adopted the name “advisory board of military affairs” (*heiji shimonkai* 兵事諮問会), Shizuoka and Chiba chose the designation “council on military affairs” (*heiji jimu kyōgikai* 兵事事務協議会), and Iwate and Fukui adopted the name “council on conscription affairs” (*chōhei jimukai* 徴兵事務会).

While the notices about the military affairs boards contained in *Kanpō* are largely official and formal in nature, we can gain additional glimpses of the activities of the boards from *Heiji shinpō* 兵事新報, a monthly journal inaugurated in 1890. The precise nature of the publisher, Heiji Shinpōsha 兵事新報社, is unclear, but the journal included notices from the army, the navy, and the Japanese Red Cross Society, information about military affairs in Japan and abroad, foreign military novels translated into Japanese, and articles from contributors on military issues.⁵⁵ Information found in it about the activities of the military affairs boards in the 1890s corroborates and amplifies that available in *Kanpō*.

The first military affairs board about which we have information is that of Ehime. On 17 July 1883, *Kanpō*, which had just been inaugurated that month, noted the formation of an advisory board of military affairs (*heiji shimonkai* 兵事諮問会) in that prefecture, presumably at the initiative of the new military affairs section in the Ehime Prefectural Office. The board had fifty-five members, consisting of the head and other staff members of the military affairs section, the viceheads of the various counties (*gunshoki* 郡書記), and representatives of the various *kochō* selected by the county heads. Under the chairmanship of the head of the military affairs section, the board was to discuss how to rationalize procedures for responding to military requisitions and was to formulate regulations specifying the actions to be taken by each official. During the six-day meeting of the board that began on 10 July, the board also decided that all military affairs arising at the county or *kochō* level should be submitted to the board for deliberation “even if they appear to be insignificant.” On 28 July *Kanpō* introduced the full text of the military requisition regulations formulated by the board.

A little over a year later, on 6 September 1884, *Kanpō* again reported a meeting of the Ehime board of military affairs “to devise means of unifying and facilitating the management of matters concerning conscription.” To this end, it was decided, the county viceheads and the *kochō* should first improve their understanding of their roles as conscription officials by learning the laws and regulations pertaining to conscription. The board discussed several other topics as well, including military requisitions, ways of encouraging applications to programs for training noncommissioned officers, the absconding of men listed on the roster of potential conscripts, and the establishment of two local organizations subordinate to the board.⁵⁶

For one type of organization, termed military affairs associations (*heiji kyōgi-kai* 兵事協議会), the prefecture was divided into three blocks. The members of the military affairs association of each of these blocks consisted of the county heads, viceheads, and *kochō* of the block; they were to “discuss everything involving military affairs” so as to improve the administration of conscription. The prefectural military affairs section was to be notified in advance of the asso-

⁵⁵ The name of the journal underwent several changes, becoming *Heiji* 兵事 in October 1891 and *Shin heiji* 新兵事 in 1893.

⁵⁶ *Kanpō*, 6 September 1884, p. 7.

ciation's meetings, and the chairman, who was to be chosen from among the county heads, was to report the minutes of its proceedings to the governor.⁵⁷ The other type of local organization, called military affairs committees (*heiji shūdankai* 兵事集談会), was smaller in scale. These committees were to operate under the leadership of the *kochō* or the assistant *kochō* (*fuku kochō* 副戸長), who was to choose five local figures, usually village notables, as board members. Whereas the military affairs associations were expected to address a broad range of matters, the military affairs committees were to discuss practical matters such as ways to provide compensation for active service and support for the war bereaved and conscripts' families, and how to nurture respect and admiration for soldiers and the army.⁵⁸

The information available from *Kanpō* indicates that, as a general principle, the military affairs boards of the various prefectures included the head of the military affairs section of the prefectural office, who served as chairman, the other staff members of the section, the county heads, and the county viceheads. We have few details as to how the boards actually operated, but an article in *Heiji shinpō* dated 6 June 1890 reports the regulations concerning the military affairs board of Shiga prefecture and the rules of its meeting, and we may assume that the situation was similar in other prefectures as well.

According to the *Heiji shinpō* article, in Shiga, the board met annually in the prefectural office, and the head of the military affairs section set the subject for discussion. The county officials were also expected to suggest topics for the agenda, with each submitting a list beforehand. From the lists, the chairman chose the actual subjects to be discussed, and in the meeting, the county officials whose topics had been selected were to explain them in detail to the rest of the board members. The meeting operated under majority rule, but, in case of a tie, the final decision lay with the chairman. To be carried out, the board's decisions had to be approved by the governor.⁵⁹ Obviously the head of the military affairs section had substantial power over the direction of the board, yet the county officials were allowed to exert considerable influence. The purpose behind the establishment of the military affairs boards was not solely to convey the ideas of the prefectural government to lower-level local offices, although that must have been one aim. The board operated in such a way as to encourage county officials to think actively about what they could do to promote conscription in their jurisdictions. They were expected not only to carry out orders faithfully but also to contribute constructively to the administration of conscription.

As happened in Ehime, after establishing military affairs boards, prefectures tended to seek ways of extending their activities to lower-level, more local groups. Between 1886 and 1888, at least twenty-seven prefectures established

⁵⁷ On the function and structure of the Ehime military affairs associations, see *Ehime-ken kisoku ruijū*, pp. 118–20.

⁵⁸ *Ehime-ken kisoku ruijū*, p. 120–21.

⁵⁹ On the structure and operation of the Shiga military affairs board, see *Heiji shinpō* 4 (7 June 1890), pp. 20–26.

military affairs boards at the county level.⁶⁰ A key aim was including the *kochō* in some fashion, as they played the largest and most crucial role in the conscription process. Most county-level military affairs boards incorporated *kochō* (after 1889, village and town mayors) as regular members and were chaired by the county head. An 1892 report in *Heiji* on the regulations of the military affairs board of Nishinari 西成 county in Osaka prefecture shows them to resemble those of the prefectural military affairs board in Shiga in many regards, with the chairman holding broad authority, decision by majority, and agendas assigned to all board members.⁶¹

The military affairs boards at both the prefectural and county levels dealt with a number of issues apart from conscription proper. One was the supervision of reservists. To ensure that the government would be able to call upon the reserves whenever they were needed, the military affairs boards had to make sure that the reservists maintained the skills and knowledge they had acquired while on active service. The daily behavior of reservists was also a matter of concern because they were the only soldiers that people normally encountered in daily life, and their actions therefore affected the public image of soldiers and the army. Measures to keep control of reservists varied. In Shimane, for instance, the military affairs board of Iishi 飯石 county discussed how to ensure that reservists would respond to a summons to return to active duty and decided to give them a handbook including all the relevant regulations.⁶² The military affairs board of Nogi 能義 county in the same prefecture agreed to post the names of all the reservists in each *kochō* office and thereby to encourage the entire community to identify who should respond to the call.⁶³ In Suki 周吉 county, also in Shimane, the military affairs board tried to raise the morale of reservists by giving them a position in the *kochō*'s office or a school.⁶⁴ In Saitama prefecture, the county-level military affairs boards decided that the *kochō* should summon reservists regularly, make them review what they had learned during active service, and teach them how to behave to gain the community's respect.⁶⁵ The military affairs board in Myōzai 名西 county of Tokushima prefecture decided to order the *kochō* to admonish reservists for loose behavior that would "stain soldiers' honor."⁶⁶ In Saga prefecture, the military affairs boards of four counties made a plan to orga-

⁶⁰ According to reports in *Kanpō* for these years, county-level boards were established in Aomori, Miyagi, Saitama, Kanagawa, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Yamanashi, Aichi, Shizuoka, Gifu, Fukui, Shiga, Osaka, Mie, Hyōgo, Hiroshima, Okayama, Ehime, Kōchi, Tokushima, Tottori, Shimane, Ōita, Kumamoto, Saga, Miyazaki, and Kagoshima.

⁶¹ On the military affairs board in Nishinari county, see *Heiji* 58 (9 January 1892), pp. 37–38.

⁶² *Kanpō*, 22 March 1888, p. 213.

⁶³ *Kanpō*, 9 April 1888, p. 62.

⁶⁴ *Kanpō*, 24 May 1887, p. 232.

⁶⁵ The Saitama counties in which the military affairs boards took up the issue of the supervision of reservists included Iruma 入間 and Koma 高麗 (*Kanpō*, 24 April 1888, p. 228); Hiki 比企 and Yokomi 横見 (*Kanpō*, 19 June 1888, p. 190); Kodama 児玉, Kami 賀美, and Naka 那珂 (*Kanpō*, 30 August 1888, p. 323); Minami-Saitama 南埼玉, Kita-Saitama 北埼玉, Ōsato 大里, Kita-Adachi 北足立, and Niiza 新座 (*Kanpō*, 29 December 1888, p. 322).

⁶⁶ *Kanpō*, 7 July 1888, p. 65.

nize reservist associations so as to make it easier to keep control of the reservists in their counties.⁶⁷

Above all, however, the boards took the management of conscription as their primary concern. *Kanpō* reports them as focusing on “the procedures for managing the administration of conscription” or “the procedure for dealing with military affairs” and as discussing ways to “standardize and facilitate the management” of conscription or “make procedures clear and uniform.”⁶⁸ In Miyazaki, Gifu, and Aomori, the military affairs boards each made their own rules for handling conscription affairs, presumably with the intention of giving the county heads and the *kochō* precise instructions how to deal with the various practical matters they confronted in enforcing the Conscription Act.⁶⁹ Some boards decided to educate *kochō* to make them “real” conscription officials. In eight prefectures military affairs boards held a study meeting for *kochō* to learn about the system of conscription, their roles in it, and the meaning of technical terms.⁷⁰ The military affairs board of Watarai 度会 county in Mie prefecture, for instance, gave all *kochō* an oral examination on the procedures concerning the draft. The *kochō* were supposed to comment on the answers of their fellows before receiving additional comments from the county head.⁷¹

The military affairs boards also made various efforts to promote popular understanding of the importance of conscription and to elevate the image of recruits. One method was to impress its significance upon children. The prefectural board in Shimane, for example, discussed how to inculcate a martial spirit among children, the future sustaining force for conscription, and reached the conclusion that the school curriculum should include lectures on the Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors (Gunjin Chokuyu 軍人勅諭).⁷² In Mino county in the same prefecture, the military affairs board decided that whenever new conscripts were inducted or recruits returned home upon completion of their term of service, the school children of the area should gather to express their reverence to them. The board also introduced a kind of infantry drill into the school curriculum, with reservists expected to serve as instructors.⁷³ The Kyoto military affairs board resolved to invite conscripts to the opening ceremony at the beginning of the

⁶⁷ *Kanpō*, 4 May 1889, p. 45.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, *Kanpō*, 17 July 1883, p. 6 (Ehime); *Kanpō*, 26 August 1884, p. 5 (Gifu); *Kanpō*, 6 September 1884, p. 7 (Ehime); *Kanpō*, 16 September 1884, p. 5 (Chiba); *Kanpō*, 24 September 1884, p. 7 (Shizuoka); *Kanpō*, 28 September 1886, p. 284 (Kanagawa); *Kanpō*, 8 March 1888, p. 77 (Tottori); *Kanpō*, 7 July 1888, p. 65 (Kanagawa); *Kanpō*, 26 December 1888, p. 277 (Aomori).

⁶⁹ *Kanpō*, 14 April 1885, p. 8 (Miyazaki); *Kanpō*, 21 April 1887, p. 207 (Gifu); and *Kanpō*, 24 April 1887, pp. 228–29 (Aomori).

⁷⁰ These were Ehime (*Kanpō*, 6 September 1884, p. 7); Gifu (*Kanpō*, 18 June 1887, p. 205); Mie (*Kanpō*, 7 July 1888, p. 65); Hiroshima (*Kanpō*, 10 July 1888, p. 88); Shimane (*Kanpō*, 19 July 1888, p. 182); Hyōgo (*Kanpō*, 5 November 1888, p. 28); Aomori (*Kanpō*, 26 December 1888, p. 277); and Fukui (*Kanpō*, 4 May 1889, p. 45).

⁷¹ *Kanpō*, 7 July 1888, p. 65.

⁷² *Kanpō*, 17 February 1887, p. 160; *Kanpō*, 22 March 1887, p. 206.

⁷³ *Kanpō*, 26 August 1886, p. 264.

school year, hold receptions to send off new inductees and congratulate them upon their return, and provide memorial services for the war dead.⁷⁴ In Nishimuro 西牟婁 county, Wakayama prefecture, conscripts were promised “seats at the head table” at village events so long as they served in the first and second reserves.⁷⁵ The boards of Nishikamo 西加茂 county in Aichi and Minamimuro 南牟婁 county in Mie declared that “the head table” should be reserved for conscripts throughout their lives.⁷⁶ The military affairs board of Kamakura 鎌倉 county, Kanagawa prefecture, organized a reception for recruits and their families where the county head emphasized that military service was a national obligation whose fulfillment would bestow great honor upon those serving.⁷⁷

The Quest for Positive Incentives

While military affairs boards saw such hortatory activities as one way to promote compliance with the Conscription Act, they also recognized that exhortation alone was not sufficient. Realistically, more material incentives were also needed. Prior to the creation of the prefectural military affairs sections and the military affairs boards, some local officials already had taken steps in that direction. This was particularly true in Kyushu, the theater of the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, in which a large number of the inexperienced conscripts in the government forces had been injured or died. The devastating consequences of the war must have made recruitment even more difficult in the Kyushu region, and this perhaps led local officials to try to find positive means for encouraging conscription.⁷⁸

In December 1879, the village assembly of Yoshiki 吉木, Onga 遠賀 county, Fukuoka prefecture, formulated a plan for providing recruits and their families with financial relief from a fund to be raised within the village. All households and male villagers from seventeen to forty years old were to pay five *sen* respectively.⁷⁹ A year later, Yasukōchi Sōjirō 安河内莊二郎, a *kochō* in the northern part of the adjacent county of Kasuya 粕屋 in the same prefecture, came up with a similar arrangement.⁸⁰ In January 1881 he organized a society made up of his fellow *kochō* overseeing Kasuya county’s thirty-four villages together with volunteers (*yūshisha* 有志者), presumably other officials and well-to-do members of the same villages. At a second meeting of the society, held in July 1881, Yasu-

⁷⁴ *Kanpō*, 15 June 1886, p. 150.

⁷⁵ *Kanpō*, 9 July 1888, p. 75.

⁷⁶ *Kanpō*, 19 May 1886, p. 197 (Aichi); *Kanpō*, 8 December 1886, p. 86 (Mie).

⁷⁷ *Kanpō*, 27 December 1888, p. 290. In this case the county head also offered another incentive for the recruits to behave well by telling them about a conscript who had been released before his term of service was up because of his satisfactory performance.

⁷⁸ In 1891, *Heiji* mentioned the activities to support conscripts formulated in the Kyushu region in the late 1870s and early 1880s, suggesting that they grew out of the need to repair the enormous damage experienced by local conscripts in the Satsuma Rebellion. See *Heiji* 15, 21 November 1891, p. 28.

⁷⁹ Kaizuma 1884, pp. 25–28.

⁸⁰ For activities in support of conscripts from the northern part of Kasuya county, see Kaizuma 1884, pp. 35–46.

kōchi proposed a relief plan for jobless conscripts who had returned from active service whereby the communities from which they came would provide financial support to alleviate the misery of these men, who were, he held, true patriots deserving the highest praise. One member of the society expressed skepticism, stating that the government should be responsible for acknowledging active service since it was the government that needed and therefore implemented the conscription system.

Despite this reservation, Yasukōchi's proposal was ultimately adopted. One who was exempted from military service was to pay one yen and those who paid land taxes were also to contribute some money depending on the amount of the tax. Village leaders were to collect the money, and it was to be deposited with people chosen by representatives of the thirty-four villages. The society would decide on the amount to be given to each conscript. The relief plan for conscripts initially proved difficult to put into practice. In the view of Yasukōchi, the problem lay with the indifference of some village leaders to the gravity of the conscription issue. Quite likely, however, the real cause was the villagers' reluctance to bear the new expense. Yasukōchi asked the county head to pressure the village leaders into collecting the money and finally saw the plan translated into action.

Following the example of their neighbors to the north, the forty-eight villages of the southern part of Kasuya county also introduced a relief plan in December 1882 in which pooled funds were to be used to pay each conscript who had completed his term of service thirty yen. The plan was to be implemented for five years only, however, since the assembly of the federated villages assumed that the government would introduce compensatory measures in the near future.⁸¹ In formulating their relief plan, the Kasuya villager leaders bluntly acknowledged the dilemma they faced in trying to enroll the young men of the community for the draft. As one member of the assembly of federated villages put it,

Those who undertake the three-year service mostly come from poor families. The rich, or those who have a little property, can readily take advantage of the provisions for being exempted from service. The poor can hardly find such means to evade it, however, so many of them finally cannot but undertake active service. Fundamentally, conscription is repaying an obligation to the state in the form of a blood tax. No one should seek to evade it. But even after completing active service and returning to their villages, conscripts are obligated to take part [in the reserves] for several years more, and therefore they cannot easily acquire the skills useful for making a living. In extreme cases, some conscripts end up homeless. We will express our deep sympathy for these conscripts, our fellow countrymen.⁸²

His point coincided with that made a couple of years later by Fukuzawa, who

⁸¹ On the relief operation for conscripts in the southern part of Kasuya county, see Kaizuma 1884, pp. 46–49.

⁸² Kaizuma 1884, p. 49.

mentioned the Kasuya program in his *Zenkoku chōheiron* 全国徴兵論 of 1884 as a potential model for a nationwide system of support for conscripts.⁸³ In the same period the military affairs sections and boards newly established throughout the country came to similar conclusions. To “remedy people’s inclination to try to avoid military service and encourage them to want to perform their national duty,” or to “make military service commonly and widely accepted in the future,”⁸⁴ they tried to find ways to ameliorate the economic problems suffered by conscripts and their families and to improve the general image of military service.

By the early 1890s, thirty-nine prefectures had developed mechanisms for providing recruits or reservists with some form of economic support. One method of assistance was to compensate the conscript’s family for his lost labor by providing help with farm work or money to pay for a hired hand. The village of Ideta 出田 in Kumamoto prefecture, for instance, decided that all households should offer labor assistance to the families of recruits or pay eight *sen*. The arrangement included the stipulation “To help the conscript’s household save money, you should refrain from accepting any meals provided at the conscript’s home.”⁸⁵ Rice or unpolished rice was also a popular relief item. Nishimuro county in Wakayama prefecture specified that the conscript’s household should be exempted from the payment of local taxes, which were to be allocated to the remaining households of the village.⁸⁶

Some areas focused on means of assisting reservists or those summoned for the conscription examination to fulfill their obligations. In Ehime prefecture, for example, the military affairs board of Kamiukena 上浮穴 county decided to provide reservists with a travel allowance to reach the place of assembly when they were summoned for practice. The prefectural military affairs board added to this a further sum to cover the reservists’ “lunch.”⁸⁷ Military affairs boards in Shizuoka, Ōita, Mie, Shimane, and Hiroshima also offered reservists an allowance for travel, lunch, or accommodation.⁸⁸ The military affairs board of Shimane gave allowances to potential recruits who lived in remote areas far from where the draft examination would take place.⁸⁹ Draft examinees in Gunma, Yamagata, Kanagawa, and Aomori prefectures also received money designated to cover travel or accommodation expenses.⁹⁰

⁸³ Fukuzawa 1884a, p. 400.

⁸⁴ *Kanpō*, 18 April 1887, p. 172; *Kanpō*, 1 September 1886, p. 6.

⁸⁵ *Kanpō*, 15 July 1884, p. 8.

⁸⁶ *Kanpō*, 9 July 1888, p. 75.

⁸⁷ *Kanpō*, 28 May 1886, p. 297; *Kanpō*, 21 August 1886, p. 211.

⁸⁸ See *Kanpō*, 22 September 1886, p. 235 (Shizuoka); *Kanpō*, 5 May 1887, p. 44 (Ōita); *Kanpō*, 19 May 1887, p. 180 (Mie); *Kanpō*, 21 January 1887, p. 180 (Shimane); and *Kanpō*, 24 March 1887, p. 234 (Hiroshima).

⁸⁹ *Kanpō*, 22 March 1887, p. 206.

⁹⁰ See *Kanpō*, 26 January 1888, p. 241 (Gunma); *Kanpō*, 25 May 1887, p. 241 (Yamagata); *Kanpō*, 24 March 1888, p. 232 (Kanagawa); and *Kanpō*, 25 May 1887, p. 241 (Aomori).

One popular means of assistance was to give conscripts a bonus (*hōshōkin* 報償金 or *irōkin* 慰勞金) if they completed active service successfully. Typically the size of the bonus varied according to the conscripts' performance in the army. A conscript who had been awarded a certificate of diligence, or was promoted to the rank of noncommissioned officer, or volunteered for another term of active service could expect a large reward, while those who had been reprimanded for an infringement of the rules, or contracted a social disease during their service, or returned home before their term expired received reduced rewards or were excluded.⁹¹ In this way the bonuses served an educational as well as charitable purpose.

Local Leaders and Support Groups

Those who took the lead in organizing such activities were typically local support groups established at the initiative or with the encouragement of the prefectural military affairs section or prefectural- or county-level military affairs boards.⁹² In 1885, for instance, the head of the military affairs section in the Aichi Prefectural Office formulated a plan for setting up an association for granting bonuses to conscripts (*chōhei irō kai*). Those who took the leading role in the association, established the following year, were the county head, the county viceheads, and the *kochō* of Aichi county.⁹³ To raise the funds for the bonuses, the association levied contributions on three groups: all residents, divided into units of ten households each, those who had been exempted from active service, and well-to-do members of the community identified as "special volunteers" (*tokubetsu yūshisha* 特別有志者). The same year, the military affairs board in Shiga organized a similar association (*shōbu gikai*) made up of all youths in the prefecture between the ages of seventeen and twenty. These were required to pay a membership fee of six *sen* every month.⁹⁴ In Saitama the military affairs board created support associations at the county level consisting of all the

⁹¹ Between 1885 and 1889 groups in fifteen prefectures developed mechanisms for offering compensation of this sort: Aichi, Shiga, Saitama, Niigata, Osaka, Nara, Kanagawa, Chiba, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Wakayama, and Tottori. For detailed examples, see, for Aichi, *Aichi-ken Aichi-gun chōhei irō kai daiikai hōkoku*, pp. 6–7; and, for Shiga, *Heiji shinpō* 4 (7 June 1890), pp. 15–17.

⁹² Notices in *Kanpō* indicate that military affairs boards were involved in the creation of support systems in Aomori, Akita, Miyagi, Yamagata, Fukushima, Saitama, Kanagawa, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Fukui, Kyoto, Shiga, Okayama, Tottori, Ehime, Kōchi, Ōita, and Saga. In Aichi, the support plan was set up at the suggestion of the military affairs section. The military affairs section appears to have initiated the support program in Nagano, Ishikawa, Wakayama, and Kagoshima as well. In Iwate, Chiba, Gunma, Tokyo, Niigata, Mie, Nara, Osaka, Hyōgo, Hiroshima, Shimane, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, and Miyazaki the local governing body or local elites took the lead.

⁹³ On the *chōhei irō kai* of Aichi county, Aichi prefecture, see *Aichi-ken Aichi-gun chōhei irō kai daiikkai hōkoku*.

⁹⁴ For Shiga's *shōbu gikai* see *Kanpō*, 9 December 1886, pp. 96–97; *Heiji shinpō* 3 (31 May 1890), pp. 19–21; *Heiji shinpō* 4 (7 June 1890), pp. 13–17; *Heiji* 84 (9 July 1892), pp. 38–40; *Heiji* 87 (30 July 1892), pp. 37–39; *Heiji* 88 (6 August 1892), pp. 38–40.

households in the county. The fees were set according to the economic condition of the county.⁹⁵

Between 1885 and 1889, twelve other prefectures apart from Aichi, Shiga, and Saitama formed organizations to raise support funds of a similar nature.⁹⁶ Although these organizations differed in various specifics, in their general orientation they were much alike. They were established by members of the military affairs board, who invited people to join the organization, collected money, and handled the necessary clerical details. The organizers did this work without pay, and, moreover, themselves made substantial donations to the compensation fund. As their first line of support the organizers turned to local leaders and well-to-do members of the community. In Saitama, for example, the county-level support organizations had branch offices in each village, where, under the direction of the *kochō*, the leading members of the village carried out the specified activities.⁹⁷ The involvement of such people was essential, not only because of their influence over the community, but because their financial resources were crucial to sustaining the operation.

Collecting donations for the compensation fund undoubtedly entailed a variety of difficulties. Almost all households were asked to contribute, and the money collected as a “membership fee” or “donation” was in effect a “tax.” For those already suffering from the consequences of the deflation policy of the 1880s, this tax was an additional burden. In most cases, the rules of the support associations noted that those seeking donations should take into account the financial circumstances of each household. They also stated, however, that “if someone says he cannot contribute, the *kochō* should carefully examine the reason, and the village assembly should discuss how to deal with him,”⁹⁸ or “if someone cannot contribute, his relatives or the entire community should contribute in his place.”⁹⁹ The target figure was usually assigned the village as a whole, which meant that if one household did not pay, its neighbors were responsible for covering the difference. To overcome resentment against the support operation, local officials had to set a “good example” for others by donating substantial sums themselves. In Shiga, Aomori, and Kumamoto, local officials donated by deduction from their monthly pay.¹⁰⁰ Local benefactors who made special contributions received recognition in the form of “a letter of appreciation,” or “a silver cup,” or “newspaper articles applauding their good intention.”¹⁰¹ They also had

⁹⁵ *Kanpō*, 1 May 1886, p. 5. For the rules and mode of operation of these support associations, see, for instance, those for Minami-Saitama county (*Kanpō*, 11 January 1887, p. 72).

⁹⁶ *Shōbu kai* were also established in Niigata, Osaka, and Nara. Kanagawa, Chiba, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Wakayama, and Tottori organized associations described as *chōhei irō kai* or *chōhei irō gikai*.

⁹⁷ *Kanpō*, 11 January 1887, p. 72.

⁹⁸ *Heiji* 51 (21 November 1891), pp. 28–30.

⁹⁹ *Heiji* 57 (2 January 1892), p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ See *Kanpō*, 9 December 1886, p. 97 (Shiga); *Kanpō*, 2 March 1888, p. 17 (Aomori); *Heiji* 51 (21 November 1891), pp. 28–30 (Kumamoto).

¹⁰¹ See *Heiji shinpō* 4 (7 June 1890), p. 13; *Heiji* 58 (9 January 1892), p. 39.

the gratification of playing a central role in the ceremonies held to honor the recruits upon their return from service and award them the bonuses.

The detailed record of the first award ceremony organized by the support association of Aichi county in October 1887 provides a concrete example how these various elements of the Meiji conscription campaign came together.¹⁰² The members of the support association, consisting of the county head, the viceheads, other staff members of the county office, and fourteen representative *kochō*, made all the necessary arrangements, from collecting the funds for the bonuses to decorating the hall of Honnonji 本遠寺 temple in Atsuta Tanaka-chō 熱田田中町, where the ceremony was held. For the bonuses, they gathered one hundred yen from “special volunteers,” most of whom were their fellow county officials and *kochō*. The county head, Takagi Ensei 高木延世, personally donated five yen.

Thirty-five men had been inducted in 1884, but only thirteen were invited to the 1887 ceremony. The remainder were excluded on grounds that they had been subject to disciplinary action or had returned before the expiration of their term of service. For the ceremony, the temple hall was decorated with flowers, and the national flag was hoisted at the entrance. A framed copy of the Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors hung at the front of the hall. The ceremony began at one o'clock in the afternoon when the organizers, in formal dress, took their appointed seats. Besides the members of the support association and the thirteen conscripts, those attending included the conscripts' parents, two military officers, two county officials, the local police head, the school principal, fifty-two people from the *kochō* offices, and 131 specially invited guests. Reporters from three local newspapers also attended.

The ceremony proper consisted of music and speeches, with the high point being the reading of the conscripts' names and Takagi's award to each of a testimonial and a bonus ranging from ten to four yen. Following the bestowal of the awards, Captain Shirai Mitsugu 白井巳胤, the chief officer for military affairs in Aichi county, made a speech in which he expressed gratitude to Takagi and the other members of the support association for arranging the ceremony and elaborated on the proper character of a soldier. Following this speech, a conscript with the rank of corporal who had received a bonus of five yen responded on behalf of his fellow conscripts:

Needless to say, military service is a national obligation of great importance, and all men in our nation should live up to this obligation. If, however, a man is unfortunately too short or too weak to undertake military service, he will be unable to fulfill his duty. We, our humble selves, are fortunately tall, stout, and in robust health, so we could undertake military service, fulfilling our duty, although it is but a small part of our entire obligation to the nation. There is no pleasure so great as that which comes from having performed such a duty.

Declaring that the kind intentions of the support association left him choked with

¹⁰² See *Aichi-ken Aichi-gun chōhei irō kai daiikkai hōkoku*.

tears of gratitude, the conscript pledged his determination to continue to strive to do his duty.

The ceremony concluded with further speeches from some of the organizers and donees. One of the speakers, a *kochō* who was also a member of the support association, noted that most of the young men he had encountered previously had been timid, thinking only about how to escape military service, while those inducted had often behaved like “rude bumpkins” and had disgraced the soldiery’s reputation. He was sure that henceforth, however, the residents of the county, knowing there were distinguished conscripts of the sort honored that day, would have a new image of military service.

Looking to the Future

For those directly involved, the incentives formulated in the course of the Meiji conscription campaign had various positive consequences. For the military affairs sections, they served as ways to promote the conscription system itself. County officials and *kochō* struggling to implement the system at the grassroots level undoubtedly hoped that the promise of financial aid would ease their task. Villagers may have disliked the burden of having to contribute to support funds, yet they knew their sons might be the next to be inducted and hence receive support. The campaign thus succeeded for the simple reason that it promised benefits both to those who initiated it and those to whom it applied.

The Army Ministry, however, showed a certain ambivalence about the nature of the incentives promoted by local officials. In December 1893, Katsura Tarō, then head of the Third Army Division, based in Nagoya, was invited to the opening ceremony of the support association of Nukata 額田 county, Aichi prefecture. In his speech he praised the members of the association for the “noble spirit” that had encouraged them to create such an association and declared that he was convinced that their example would encourage people to stand up for the nation. But he also commented that people should be expected to undertake military service willingly, “without such an expensive operation.”¹⁰³ Contrary to Katsura’s expectation, however, conscription ceremonies came to be performed in an ever grander manner, with more people invited and more money spent. In most towns and villages it became a regular annual event for the residents all to gather, with flags and banners in their hands, to send new conscripts off to the army or welcome back those who had completed their tour of duty. In April 1900, Katsura, then army minister, remarked at a conference for prefectural governors organized by the Home Ministry that someday such treatment would become hospitable only on the surface; those offering it would tire of what they had been doing and the recipients would not be grateful at all.¹⁰⁴ In the same way the army continued to resist the idea of a more far-reaching national system of compensation for recruits.

¹⁰³ For Katsura’s speech, see Endō 1976, pp. 11–12.

¹⁰⁴ Endō 1976, p. 15.

Japan's wars against China and Russia and her participation in World War I, which resulted in heavy casualties, brought increased calls for a national system of compensation. Following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, the government enacted a law providing consolation grants to those who had suffered casualties and their families.¹⁰⁵ Decrying the insufficiency of such arrangements, various groups continued to campaign for additional measures. In 1914, 130 people and three members of the Seiyūkai 政友会 from the city of Takasaki 高崎 in Gunma prefecture submitted a petition to the Diet in which, reviving the arguments of Kawamura Shōhei, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Manaka Naomichi, they proposed that the government should levy a tax on those exempted from conscription and use the resulting funds to raise the daily wages of conscripts and provide compensation to those who had finished their term of service.¹⁰⁶ The Ministry of Finance also formulated plans for a conscription tax and, in December 1915, sounded out the views of the Army Ministry regarding it.¹⁰⁷ The Army Ministry, however, rejected the idea, declaring that a conscription tax would be contrary to the principles of the system of conscription. Subsequently the Diet discussed the introduction of a conscription tax on several occasions, but always met with resistance from the Army Ministry, which insisted that the reward for active service should not be money but the honor associated with service. Only in 1917, as the consequence of vigorous civil movements, was the Relief Act for Soldiers and Sailors (Gunji Kyūgohō 軍事救護法) at length promulgated.¹⁰⁸ This extended the possibility of relief not just to those who had suffered casualties, but also to families unable to sustain themselves economically because of the conscription of a family member.¹⁰⁹

Two years later, in 1919, Yamagata Aritomo contributed an article to a volume on Meiji political history. In it he discussed the two important institutions, conscription and local administration, in whose formulation he had played an instrumental role. Looking back upon the early days of conscription, Yamagata wrote,

Sons of peasants, artisans, and merchants never understood that the duty of military service was nothing but the right of national defense. It was hard to remedy their cowardice and poltroonery immediately. Many of them were not ready to join the army. Therefore conscripting these people was arduous work. Today, you will hardly imagine how difficult it was.¹¹⁰

Yamagata's retrospective tone suggests that, by the time he wrote, the major obstacles to instituting the new military system had been overcome. In part this was due to the 1889 revision of the Conscription Act, which strictly limited the

¹⁰⁵ See Ishiwaki 1994.

¹⁰⁶ Katō 1996, pp. 181–82.

¹⁰⁷ Katō 1996, pp. 182–85.

¹⁰⁸ See Kaneda 1996. On the debates regarding the introduction of a conscription tax and other national compensation for conscripts in prewar Japan, see also Ichinose 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2001; Gunji 1995 and 1997; Oguri 1999.

¹⁰⁹ For the Gunji Kyūgohō, see *Taishō nenkan hōrei zensho*, vol. 6:1, pp. 1–4.

¹¹⁰ Yamagata 1919, p. 394.

criteria for exemption. Yet, it may also be said that growing popular acceptance of conscription owed much to the efforts by local military affairs boards to find practical and flexible ways of ameliorating what the army termed the “principle of conscription,” even while promoting compliance with the system.

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